

The exhibition *Shibui* features a selection of ceramics from the MJM&AG Permanent Collection by Canadian and Japanese artists Jack Sures, Shoji Hamada, Rob Froese and Randy Woolsey. Each of the artists represented have been inspired or informed by Japanese ceramics and aesthetics in their practices. Drawing parallels to the works and motivating concepts found in Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson's exhibition, *Wholeness*, the works presented in *Shibui* speak to a similar prioritizing of simplicity of form and appreciation of minimalism, in ultimate deference to the natural world.

Shibui is a term that is central to the understanding and function of Japanese aesthetics and cultural values, a concept that intangibly encompasses the ideals of minimalism in the form of lived experience, a recognition of moments spent in the presence of or as witness to objects that truly embody forms of *'unobtrusive beauty'*.¹ The application of this concept can be viewed in the practices of many ceramic artists, but perhaps none more acutely than those who seek to create works that stand in opposition to premeditated creation, rather allowing their works to be led by an intuition that prioritizes understated refinement.

Japanese ceramics provide an example of the *Shibui* design aesthetic. Objects and artwork that embody this aesthetic can be both irregular or symmetrical in form, unrestricted by the confines/ dictates of colour, finish, or texture. The importance lies in an objects ability to relate to the feelings often provoked by nature, as objects that are capable of mirroring the limitless potential for beauty and balance found within it. Yanagi Soetsu (1889 -1961), philosopher and founder of the Japanese folk craft movement refers to *Shibui* as a refined taste, an understanding we arrive at over time. He stated:²

"The world abounds with different aspects of beauty. The lovely, the powerful, the gay, the smart—all belong to the beautiful. Each person, according to his disposition and environment, will feel a special affinity to one or another aspect. But when his taste grows more refined, he will necessarily arrive at a beauty which is Shibui. Many a term serves to denote the secret of beauty, but this is the final word."

The collection displayed in this exhibition features works from remarkable and influential ceramic artists, many of whom display aspects, both in the methods they employ in their processes of production, as well as in their resulting artistic output, that allude to the perceived Japanese aesthetic concept of *Shibui*. It is a collection that speaks to the rich history and wide-reaching impacts that traditional Japanese ceramic-making techniques has had on both the individual artist and on ceramics globally, displaying works from artists of international renown who have dedicated their practices to exploring, honouring and advancing the potential of clay as medium.

*"My love of clay as an expressive material, with its innate ability to create any and all other materials, its ability to reinvent itself every time it is touched, has endowed my life with a richness and completeness that few people seem to achieve in their lifetimes."*³

Jack Sures

Jack Sures (1934-2018) was born in Brandon, Manitoba, and grew up in Melita and Winnipeg. He completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Manitoba in 1957, and his masters degree in Painting and Printmaking from Michigan State University in 1959. In 1965, Sures moved to Regina to set up the Ceramics and Printmaking program at the University of Saskatchewan's Regina Campus. Sures also worked and studied in Japan, France and Grenada while he continued to teach until his retirement in 1998. Sures was a major figure in ceramics, in Canada and internationally, both as an artist and an educator. He received many honours and awards throughout his career, including the Lieutenant Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award from the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the General Governor's Award for the Visual Arts, a national recognition for his longstanding and long-reaching legacy in the contemporary ceramic art world. Sures died in Regina on May 12, 2018.⁴

Rob Froese was born in 1963 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan into an artistic family. Froese grew up in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan and later went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Saskatchewan (1987), his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Ceramics from the University of Regina (1994) and his MFA in Craft Media from the Alberta University of the Arts. After his undergraduate studies and during subsequent travels, Froese developed an interest in Japan, moving there in 1995. He taught English classes while quickly becoming involved in the Japanese ceramic community, establishing his own studio and beginning to exhibit within the country. Over nine years, Froese had twenty exhibitions of his work in Japan. Froese's years in Japan and collaborations with Japanese potters have had a profound influence on his work, particularly in his understandings of colour and texture.⁵ Froese teaches as a sessional instructor at the Alberta University of the Arts and is currently living in Saskatoon, SK.

Japanese ceramicist, **Shoji Hamada** (1894-1978), was considered to be one of the most influential potters of the 20th century, and an important member of the mingei folk-art movement. His simple designs convey an elegant beauty, focused on utility as much as aesthetic. He was trained in pottery at Tokyo Technical College, and later went on to work at the Kyoto Ceramics Research Institute. Notably, his studio only used locally sourced clay and made glazing brushes from the hair of neighborhood dogs. In 1955, the Japanese Minister of Culture declared him a "Living National Treasure."⁶ The artist died on January 5, 1978 in Mashiko, Japan. Hamada's influence on potters around the world is incalculable, and the village of Mashiko, his home, has since become synonymous with Japanese folk ceramics.⁷

Randy Woolsey (b. 1944, Regina, SK) lives and works in Kasama, Japan. After studying at the University of SK, he apprenticed at Tsukamoto Pottery in Mashiko, Japan in 1968. Woolsey continued living in Japan, operating his own studio in Kasama from 1969-1975. He was one of the first of ten individual potters (now about 400) working in this traditional pottery town. Woolsey returned to SK and operated a pottery studio in Cupar (Ruddell), SK from 1975-1989, later returning to Kasama in 1989 to continue making pottery. His traditional Japanese pottery has been included in many exhibitions in Japan. Saskatoon's Sturdy-Stone Centre features a large scale mural by Randy Woolsey and Greg Hardy, composed of five thousand tiles.⁸

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¹ Wikipedia, *Shibui*, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shibui>, accessed June 21, 2021.

² Yanagi Soetsu, Donna Canning, *Shibui*, Unique Japan, <https://new.uniquejapan.com/ikebana/shibui/>, accessed June 9, 2021.

³ Reference accessed from the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba teacher's guide, <https://agsm.ca/sites/default/files/brochures/Teacher%27s%20Resource%20-%20Jack%20Sures.pdf>, accessed June 21, 2021. Original reference from Diane Wolfe, *Jack Sures: Scratching the Surface* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2011).

⁴ Russell Bingham, *Jack Sures*, 2018, The Canadian Encyclopedia, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/jack-sures>, accessed June 13, 2021.

⁵ Saskatchewan Network for Art Collections, *Rob Froese*, <http://www.sknac.ca/index.php?page=ArtistDetail&id=342>, accessed June 13, 2021.

⁶ Artnet, *Shoji Hamada*, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/shoji-hamada/>, accessed June 13, 2021.

⁷ Pucker Gallery, *Shoji Hamada*: Biography, <https://www.puckergallery.com/shoji-hamada-1>, accessed June 8, 2021.

⁸ Excerpt from Susan Whitney's appraisal of Randy Woosley works, SK Arts Permanent Collection, August 8, 2007.