

## **SHOJI HAMADA – (1894 – 1978)**

Widely recognized as one of the most influential potters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shoji Hamada began his formal instruction in Japan and then spent three formative years working with Bernard Leach at his pottery in Cornwall. The friendship and professional relationship between the two men was to continue for the rest of their lives, and the revival of the traditional pottery of both England and Japan, and their resulting influence on each other, was a defining moment in the history of ceramic art. Hamada was instrumental in developing the *Mingei* movement, the return to the essentials of art which rely on local materials and inspiration flowing from within the potter to his hands. Along with the return to art essentials is the return to lifestyle essentials – producing those things you need and living simply with the earth. The pottery Hamada founded in Mashiko and his personal life were the embodiment of this philosophy. Those who witnessed the quiet, unassuming potter at work were as struck by his serenity and his oneness with his work as they were by the stunning pieces which he produced. Although Hamada did not seek fame, he was well-recognized in his lifetime, being named a “Living National Treasure” by the Japanese Government as well as receiving honorary doctorates and other awards, and the major museums count his pieces as important parts of their collections.

### **ARTIST’S STATEMENT – SHOJI HAMADA**

“Create,’ that word – so often we use it. People use the words ‘to create’ very readily, but I don’t like to use them very often. The things that I do, my wares, are not made but born.

If you can’t give birth to the thing then you can’t call it creation. But that is so difficult.

...For instance, compare dwarf trees in the garden and trees on the hill. If it’s a dwarf tree, when the weather gets a little bit bad you bring it in the house. If it gets dry you give it water. You trim the branch for the tree or you make it grow in the way you want, or lengthen the branches or not, as you want. A traditional potter is like a dwarf tree. In the case of the tree you have to be careful about the weather, the condition damp or dry; the garden tree is only half a tree, the other half depends on the care you give it.

A tree in the mountains grows by itself. I should like to become such a tree.

...Why is the mountain tree good? The roots are most hardy, the trunk is the finest, the leaves and branches will grow well even if you leave them alone...

Water is underground, running anywhere, anytime, and people must get this pure water. Usually people receive the water from the branch of a river, but there is this underground spring that anyone can probe if he would. The water that is easily available to you is the stream, but the underground water is the spring.

...Go one step more, say that spring water becomes your blood. If one comes to that point I think you feel you can do anything.

...I used to think great art or great things came from the root of a tree, but as I got older I thought no, from the branches, then later I thought from the twigs and the leaves, the tips of the tree, but now I know it’s from the heart.”

...You must have done a very great deal before you are worthy to speak about it.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Susan Peterson. *Shoji Hamada, a Potter's Way & Work*. New York: Wetherhill, 1974: 189-192.

### **RESUME – SHOJI HAMADA**

1894	Born, Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan
1913-1916	Tokyo Technical College, Ceramics Department
1916-1920	Kyoto Municipal Ceramic Laboratory
1920-1924	Joined Bernard Leach at the St. Ives Pottery, Cornwall, England
1924	Married Kazue Kimura
1924	Established a pottery, Mashiko, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan
1926	Founder of Japanese Craft Society (Mingei-kai.)
1952-1953	Culture tour through the United States and Europe
1955	Named Living National Treasure
1964	Japanese Medal of Honour with Purple Ribbon
1967	Honorary Doctorate, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
1968	Okinawa Times Prize
1969	Honorary Citizenship to Mashiko
1973	Honorary Doctorate, King's College, London
1973-1977	President, Japan Folk Crafts Museum
1974	Established Mashiko Reference Collection in Mashiko
1976	Cultural Prize Award, Kawasaki, Japan
1978	Died, Mashiko, Japan

### **BIOGRAPHY – SHOJI HAMADA**

Born in Kawasaki (Kanagawa prefecture) Japan in 1894, Shoji Hamada showed an interest in art from an early age. When he was still quite young he went with an older relative who was

studying at the Tokyo School of Fine Art and was drawn to the students and their work. In his teens he submitted woodcuts to periodicals and also was receiving prizes for his art at school. He was attracted first to painting but soon decided to follow ceramics instead, believing that a pot would always be useful, even a poor pot, but a poor painting would have to be discarded. It is a practical philosophy that was to remain a part of his work for the rest of his life.

Hamada began his formal instruction at the Tokyo Industrial College (now the Tokyo Institute of Technology) where he enrolled in the ceramics program; following his graduation he began working at the Ceramic Testing Institute in Kyoto. Pottery and prints by Bernard Leach were being shown in Japan at this time, and Hamada was impressed by the work. When Leach came to Tokyo in 1919 for a show, Hamada had a chance to meet him, and a friendship began that was to last a lifetime. A year later Leach invited Hamada to come to England to help him in his pottery in Cornwall. Hamada already had two very good offers of positions but chose instead to work with Leach. Both artists were passionate about recreating what they considered the highest standards of ceramic art, the beautifully glazed stoneware of the Sung Dynasty and English slipware. During the next several years Hamada oversaw the building of a noborigama (climbing) kiln, the first of its kind in the West, and also experimented with lead-glazed slipware. Hamada had his first one-man exhibition in London in 1923; over the years he was to return periodically to show his work there.

Besides Leach, Hamada was both inspired and influenced by other artists he met during his years in England. These individuals led very basic lives, growing their own food and making most of their own furniture and clothing. Hamada returned to Japan in 1923, determined to follow the example of those artists. Hamada settled first in Okinawa where he joined a potting community and also married and started a family. In 1931 he moved to Mashiko, north of Tokyo, where he set up a pottery. Mashiko had been a pottery center for many years and Hamada, an outsider with an urban education, was not received well. Eventually a local potter took him on as an apprentice, Hamada became an important member of the community, and he remained there for the rest of his life. For the next 50 years the pottery produced handmade, functional vessels. In line with tradition, Hamada employed apprentices who worked in his style, turning out a large number of pieces which were thrown, decorated, glazed and finished in a wood-fired kiln in firings that lasted several days working around the clock. Hamada's own pots were boxed separately while the others were sold as being from the workshop. Hamada did not sign his work, however, believing that the potter's personality alone would identify the pot.

In line with his beliefs, Hamada was instrumental in developing what would be called the *Mingei* movement, derived in part from the works of Soetsu Yanagi, author of *The Unknown Craftsman*. *Mingei* literally translates as "folk art" and reflected the belief of its founders that "real art" was often made by the anonymous craftsmen, people who were not consciously trying to make "art," while the contemporary artist was often trying too hard to make "art" and thus not succeeding. The answer, according to this philosophy, lay in letting go of the idea of making "art" and instead using local materials and traditional techniques, working naturally and allowing the piece to come from within – returning in art, as in their living style, to the basics. Hamada followed these precepts, making thrown, molded, and hand-built wares using the local clays and such easily available natural materials as salt and cinder to make his glazes. The work was mainly utilitarian, in line with the *Mingei* beliefs, the shapes simple and strong finished with ash or iron glazes and brushed on abstract designs. The goal was to blend the new with the old, keeping the traditions of Japan while expanding their reach. Out of this movement came the Japanese Folkcraft Association which Hamada helped found in 1926.

The *Mingei* movement can perhaps best be understood from this passage from *A Potter in Japan*, Bernard Leach's memoir of the two years (1952-1954) he spent in Japan with Hamada and others. "He has built up his establishment from a humble start; it consists of several acres on a slope coming down through bamboos, cryptomerias, garden land and trees to the edge of the paddies. Everyone seems to share a spirit of content and mutuality, there is no Western excitability...Hamada works alone in the main house... [sitting] cross-legged on [a low platform into which the wheel is sunk]...The freedom and ease with which he does this is a marvel. But the more one watches, the more one realizes that it is the result of a balance in Hamada himself. Clear and quiet conceptual thought proceeding spontaneously into equally clarified, articulated actions."<sup>1</sup>

Hamada traveled widely, taking with him the precepts of the *Mingei* movement and studying and learning from the folk art traditions of other cultures. In 1952-1953 he made an extensive trip to Europe and the United States teaching, lecturing, and demonstrating. Throughout the tour the free exchange of ideas and information invigorated the ceramic communities. Even on this tour Hamada remained an unassuming potter, quietly demonstrating rather than talking, allowing his work and his example to speak for him.

While Hamada did not seek fame, he was nevertheless well-recognized in his lifetime. In 1955 he was named "Living National Treasure" by the Japanese government, an honor that is equivalent to a lifetime National Endowment of the Arts grant. The government chooses artists who embody the national traditions and who in turn pass on to the next generation the techniques and knowledge of these traditional arts and crafts. In addition to being a founder of the Japanese Folkcraft Society, he was an honored member of the Society of Japanese Painters and the Council for the Protection of Cultural Properties of Japan. He was awarded the Japanese Medal of Honour with Purple Ribbon in 1964; an honorary doctorate in Fine Arts from Michigan State University in 1967; the Okinawa Times Prize in 1968; and an honorary citizenship to Mashiko in 1969; honorary doctorate, Kings College, London; and the Cultural Prize Award in Kawasaki in 1976. His work is included in the collections of the major museums and is highly prized by collectors.

Shoji Hamada died in 1978 in Mashiko, Japan, but his legacy as one of the most important potters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continues. Not only in his native Japan, but throughout the world the influence of the man and his art are reflected. The visit of Leach and Hamada to the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, MT, in 1952 was deemed by Garth Clark to be "...particularly far-reaching." Watching Hamada at the wheel, Rudy Autio stated that "Shoji Hamada, more than any other person, gave me an insight into what clay was about."<sup>2</sup> Peter Voukos, who kicked the wheel for Hamada as he worked remembered, "I was right there, and had my head down with his, and he'd tell me to kick faster or slower, so I was just watching his hands....How often do you get close to a living legend like he was?"<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the definitive words are those of Susan Peterson, noted ceramic artist and scholar, who was a close friend of Hamada and whose book, *Shoji Hamada, a Potter's Way and Work* is a classic in the field: "If a single man could be named as most responsible for giving new life and impetus to the techniques of the traditional potter, it would be Shoji Hamada."<sup>4</sup>

1. Bernard Leach. *A Potter in Japan, 1952-1954*. London: Faber and Faber, 1960.

2. Rudy Autio. Video Interview. *Revolutions of the Wheel: the Great Move West*, vo. 2. Los Angeles: Queens Row, 1998.

3. Peter Voulkos. Quoted in: Chere Jiusto and Rick Newby. "A Beautiful Spirit." *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 51 (Summer 2001.)
4. Susan Peterson. Quoted in: "Shoji Hamada: Japanese Pottery at its Best."  
<http://mll.kenyon.edu/~japanese02/J28f99/foleyme/>

## **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – SHOJI HAMADA**

### Books and Catalogs

Andreson, Laura, Shoji Hamada, et al. *From the Fire, Three Exhibitions in Clay*. Palo Alto, CA: Palo Alto Cultural Center, 1993.

Birks, Tony, Cornelia Wingfield Digby, and Peter Kinnear. *Bernard Leach, Hamada & Their Circle*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1990.

Clark, Garth. *A Century of Ceramics in the United States, 1878-1978*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Potter's Art*. London: Phaidon, 1995

Hamada, Shoji. *Hamada Shoji Ten*. Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Works in Shoji Hamada, 1921-1969*. Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Publishing Company, 1969.

Hamada, Shoji, and Bernard Leach. *The Quiet Eye: Pottery of Shoji Hamada & Bernard Leach*. Monterey, CA: Monterey Peninsula Museum. of Art, 1990

Hamada, Shoji, Timothy Wilcox, and Yuko Kikuchi. *Shoji Hamada: Master Potter*. London: Lund Humphries Publishers in association with Ditchling Museum: 1998.

Hamada, Shoji, and Yanagi Muneyoshi. *Shoji Hamada*. Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Publishing Company, 1966.

*A Hundred Pots by Shoji Hamada*. Washington, DC: The Phillips Collection, 1963.

Leach, Bernard. *Exhibition of Pottery by Shoji Hamada*. London: Paterson's Gallery, 1929.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Hamada, Potter*. New York: Kodansha America, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Six Masters of the Modern Age*. New York: Babcock Galleries, 1995.

Longnecker, Martha, Shoji Hamada, et al. *Mingei of Japan: the Legacy of the Founders*. San Diego: Mingei International Museum, 2006.

Lynn, Martha Drexler. *Clay Today: Contemporary Ceramists and Their Work*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990.

Maske, Andrew. *Mingei Pottery*. Boston: Pucker Gallery, 2004.

- Peterson, Susan. *The Craft and Art of Clay*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shoji Hamada: a Potter's Way and Work*. Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 1974.
- Retrospective Exhibition of Shoji Hamada*. Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1977.
- Shoji Hamada, 1894-1978 and Bernard Leach, 1887-1979*. Hamilton, NZ: The Museum, 1980.
- Yanagi, Muneyoshi. *Pottery Exhibition Shoji Hamada*. Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Publishing Company, 1961.
- Yanagi, Muneyoshi, and Bernard Leach. *The Unknown Craftsman: a Japanese Insight into Beauty*. Tokyo, Palo Alto, CA: Kodansha International, 1972.

### Periodicals

- Conant, Ellen P. "Leach, Hamada, Yanagi: Myth and Reality." *Studio Potter* 21 (December 1992): 6-9.
- Cortazzi, Hugh. "The Ohara Museum of Art at Kurashiki." *Arts of Asia* 17 (September/October 1987): 69-79.
- Davis, Harry C. "Handcraft Pottery – Whence and Whither." *Ceramic Review* no. 93 (May/June 1985): 10-17.
- Finch, Arthur Theodore. "Craftsmanship of Shoji Hamada." *Parnassus* 2 (April 1930): 32-33.
- Gormley, Lisa. "National Treasure." *Ceramic Review* no. 181 (January/February 2000): 40-41.
- Hughes, Edward. "Clear Spring Water." *Ceramic Review* no. 171 (May/June 1998): 28-30.
- Ingamells, J.A.S. "Stoneware at York." *Museums Journal* 59 (September 1959): 122-125.
- "Japan's Two Most Noted Living Potters, Kawai and Hamada, Exhibit at Yamanaka's." *Art Digest* 14 (January 15 1940): 9.
- Lehman, Dick. "Embracing an Odd Paradox." *Ceramics Monthly* 47 no. 4 (April 1999): 116+.
- Leach, Janet. "Shoji Hamada." *Ceramic Review* no. 101 (September/October 1986): 26-27.
- Lewis, David. "Leach and Hamada." *Studio* 144 (October 1952): 114-117.
- "Obituary." *Ceramics Monthly* 26 (February 1978): 59-61.
- "Obituary." *Craft Horizons* 38 (February 1978): 44.
- "Outstanding Artist-Potters." *Studio International* 173 (January 1967): 39.

Oyama, Victoria. "Hamada Shoji on Making Teabowls." *Ceramics Technical* no. 26 (2008): 33-36.

Pearce, Nick. "A Potter in His Own Right." *Crafts (London, England)* no. 151 (March/April 1998): 38-41.

Peterson, Susan. "Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada: Fifty Years of Memories." *Studio Potter* 27 no. 2 (June 1999): 6-8.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Hamada." *Craft Horizons* 34 (December 1974): 52-53.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Reflections on Hamada." *Studio Potter* 10 (December 1981): 67-86.

"Pottery of Mr. Shoji Hamada." *Spectator* 130 (May 26 1923): 886.

Richman, Robert. "Leach Pottery at St. Ives." *Craft Horizons* 10 no. 3 (1950): 24-28.

"Shoji Hamada." *Interiors (New York, N.Y.)* 121 (November 1961): 16.

"Some Modern Potters." *Artwork* 5 no. 19 (1929): 191-193.

Tashiro, Makoto. "Remembrance of Shoji Hamada." *Ceramics Monthly* 32 (October 1984): 24.

Uchida, Yoshiko. "Folk Art of Japan." *Craft Horizons* 15 (September 1955): 22-25.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Hamada." *Craft Horizons* 16 (July 1956): 22-23.

Untracht, Oppi. "Enduring Art of Hamada." *Craft Horizons* 21 (November 1961): 18-19.

### Video and Other Media

Casson, Michael, and Michael Cardew. "Craft of the Potter." Skokie, IL: Films, Inc, 1983, 1976. VHS

Casson, Michael, David Hargreaves, et al. "Talking About Pots." Chicago IL: Films, Inc., 1983, 1976. VHS

Cowan, Tom, Malcolm Otton, et al. "Fingers and Clay." Australia: Commonwealth Film Unit, 1967. Film

Hamada, Shoji. "Hamada; Several Demonstrations by Japan's Famous Ceramist." Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Television Center, 1967. VHS

Hamada, Shoji, and Ivan McMeekin. "Shoji Hamada; a Demonstration by Shoji Hamada." Sydney: Audio-Visual Unit, U.N.S.W., 1974. VHS

Leach, Bernard, and Shoji Hamada. "Art of the Potter." New York: Phoenix Films, 1972. VHS

"Mashiko Village Pottery, Japan, 1937 Pottery-Making in Japan." [S.l.]: s.n., 1990, 1937. VHS

Newman, Edwin. "The Art of the Potter." New York: Phoenix Films & Video, 1990-1991?. VHS

Peterson, Susan. "Shoji Hamada; a Potter's Way and Work." New York: Weatherhill, 1996. VHS

"The Potters' Society of Australia Presents...Shoji Hamada." Kensington, N.S.W.: University of New South Wales. Audio Visual Unit, 1981, 1989. VHS

"Revolutions of the Wheel: The Emergence of Clay Art." Directed and edited by Scott Sterling. Queens Row, 1997. VHS

"Shoji Hamada." Kensington, N.S.W.: University of New South Wales. Audio Visual Unit, 1974, 1965. VHS

## ***GALLERY REPRESENTATION – SHOJI HAMADA***

Garth Clark Gallery, 24 West 57 Street, Suite 305, New York, NY 10019

Pucker Gallery, 171 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116

## ***WEB SITES – SHOJI HAMADA***

<http://www.garthclark.com/Artist-Detail.cfm?ArtistsID=125>

Garth Clark Gallery web site location for Hamada

[http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/searchimages/images/item\\_3362.htm](http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/searchimages/images/item_3362.htm)

Sketch of Shoji Hamada done by Ralph Bacerra in 1963

<http://www.veybridgepottery.co.uk/hamada.shtml>

Photographs, information, and quotes for Hamada

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouAp\\_rknhaw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouAp_rknhaw)

Link to video of Hamada making a bowl

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwFtg8mBW3s>

Link to video of Hamada working in his pottery2/J28f99/foleyme/

<http://iriyamayaki.com/Mingei.html>

Article on Mingei

<http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/html/hamada-shouji.html>

Brief article and photos of Hamada

<http://www.puckergallery.com/hamada.html>

Pucker Gallery site with information on Hamada

<http://mll.kenyon.edu/~japanese02/J28f99/foleyme/>

Article: "Shoji Hamada: Japanese Pottery at its Best."

<http://archives.zinester.com/51563/134497.html>

“Signing Pots: Three Views.” Discusses the practice of signing pots and Hamada’s refusal to do so

September 2008