

## **KANJIRO KAWAI – (1890 – 1966)**

Japanese ceramist Kanjiro Kawai is most closely associated with the Mingei movement which, together with Bernard Leach, Shôji Hamada, and Sôetsu Yanagi, he helped found. The movement celebrated the “unknown craftsman” and emphasized traditional folk crafts, cultures, and values. Trained technically in ceramics, Kawai considered himself a scientist as well as a potter, and his mastery of glazes grew out of a scientist’s interest in experimentation as much as a potter’s desire for a particular color or effect. Consistent with the Mingei system of beliefs, he worked in the master/apprenticeship model in which students worked alongside the master, learning not on the techniques of their craft but also the cultural values, and equally consistent Kawai did not accept any of the honors offered him for his work. A prolific potter, Kawai was also skilled in other arts, among them woodworking, calligraphy, poetry and writing, and sculpture. His home and workshop in Kyoto have been restored and is now a museum showcasing his life and work.

### **ARTIST’S STATEMENT – KANJIRO KAWAI**

“When you become so absorbed in your work that beauty flows naturally, then your work truly becomes a work of art. Everything that is, is not. Everything is, yet at the same time, nothing is. I myself am the emptiest of all.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Uchida, Yoshiko, and Kanjiro Kawai. *We Do Not Work Alone: the Thoughts of Kanjiro Kawai*. Kyoto, Japan: Kawai Kanjiro’s House, 1973.

### **RESUME – KANJIRO KAWAI**

1890	Born, Yasugi City, Shimane Prefecture, Japan
1914	Graduated, Tokyo Higher Polytechnical School Kyoto Research Institute for Ceramics, Kyoto, Japan
1920	Started “Kawai Factory”, Kyoto, Japan
1928	Folk Craft Pavilion, Tokyo, Japan; designed by Yanagi, Hamada and Kawai
1936	Founded Mingei Kan (Japanese Craft Society) with Shôji Hamada and Dr. Sôetsu Yanagi, Tokyo, Japan
1937	Grand Prize, Paris International Exhibition
1966	Died, Kyoto, Japan

### **BIOGRAPHY – KANJIRO KAWAI**

Kanjiro Kawai first became interested in pottery as a child, watching a neighbor make pots in his spare time, and by the time he was a teenager, he knew he wanted to make pottery his life's work. He entered Tokyo Technical High School, a school primarily noted for engineering students, and studied ceramics, spending a great deal of time experimenting with glazes and studying the glazing and pottery techniques of ancient China. "He did countless experiments on glaze and loved to imagine 'cause and effect,'" his daughter, Suyako said,<sup>1</sup> (it is said as many as 10,000 glaze tests were made) and he always considered himself a scientist in addition to his other careers. For a time he worked at the Kyoto Municipal Institute of Ceramics, but soon felt he was spending too much time on theory and not enough on working. He settled in Kyoto, where he built a climbing eight-chambered kiln, "norigama" and began giving exhibitions and producing work based on the ancient art of China and Korea that he had studied.

During his time at the Tokyo Technical School, he became acquainted with both Shôji Hamada and Bernard Leach, acquaintances that would change the direction of his art. Kawai, together with Hamada, Leach and Sôetsu Yanagi, founded the Mingei movement, a movement that celebrated the traditional folk crafts and emphasized traditional values and culture. Blending the traditions of Asian pottery with those of British traditional pottery like slipware, the movement elevated what Leach called the "unknown craftsman" whose work emphasized instincts over skills. In keeping with their philosophy, these artists followed the system of apprenticeship in which students worked alongside their master teacher, learning not only the technical skills of pottery but also reverence for the connection between life and work, thus passing the traditions of a culture from one generation to the next. Further in keeping with this philosophy, Kawai, like many of the others, did not sign his pots; embraced an unpretentious and simple lifestyle; and although his work was exhibited and recognized internationally, he refused to accept the honors offered him, including the highly prestigious designation of Living National Treasure.

Kawai's pots are often asymmetrical and utilize a variety of techniques for decoration including slip-trailing, wax resist, and white slip. His mastery of glazing, however, is one of the most noted features, particularly the red copper glazes, among his favorites, as well as the deep brown iron glaze and a striking cobalt blue. He was a prolific potter, often working alone late into the night. Although he worked in the traditional style, he tried to incorporate modern processes of pottery making with his traditional designs.

Kanjiro Kawai was a man of many arts. In addition to his prominence as a ceramicist, he was a calligrapher, poet, writer and sculptor. He was also fascinated by the works of the modern and technical world, such as the transistor radio and modern construction techniques, with these contemporary objects often providing inspiration for his pottery. In addition, he collected the works of many craftspeople throughout Asia, supporting the continuation of the folk art tradition and incorporating those traditions into his own.

Kawai's work is included in the collection of the Folk Art Museum of Tokyo. Since his death in 1966, the house and workshop of Kanjiro Kawai in Kyoto have been preserved as a museum and contain displays of his pottery, sculpture and woodcarvings.

1. <http://www.kyopro.kufs.ac.jp/dp/dp01.nsf/ecfa8fdd6a53a7fc4925700e00303ed8/41c02bb2b4630781492571be001a3617!OpenDocument>

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## **GALLERY REPRESENTATION – KANJIRO KAWAI**

Secondary market

## **WEB SITES – KANJIRO KAWAI**

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<http://www.ceramics-aberystwyth.com/kanjiro-kawai.html>

Brief discussion of Kawai.

<http://www.janm.org/exhibitions/noguchi/bio.php>

“Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988)” with paragraphs on artists working in the same genre including Kawai

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