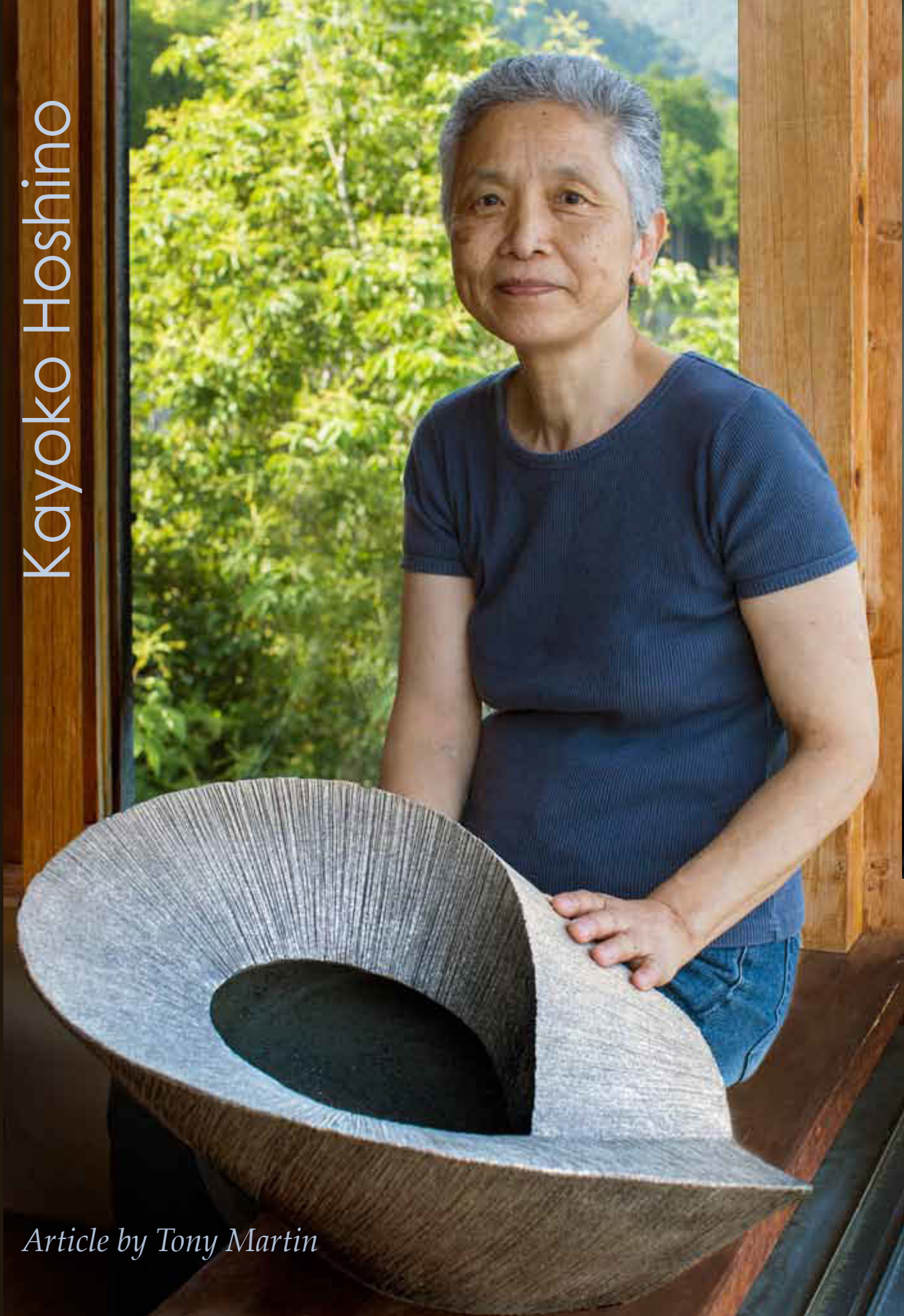
Kayoko Hoshino



Article by Tony Martin



Kayako Hoshino's studio is a simple, almost austere, combination of timber and concrete. She sits quietly on a wooden stool by her workbench on which stands the subject of our interview – the piece she loved so much that she kept it for herself. As cameras and recording equipment are checked and rechecked she waits patiently, enveloped in an ineffable sense of calm. She is quiet, elegant and gracious. Her studio, where our interview will take place, is flooded with light from encircling windows, with views that spill out across the great expanse of Lake Biwa before sweeping over brilliant green rice fields and upward to steeply forested mountains. It is a beautiful setting.

Over a just completed lunch at a local restaurant I have heard the story of how one of the most dynamic ceramics partnerships of our generation came into existence. While studying history at university Kayoko met her future husband Satoru Hoshino, an economics student. With youthful enthusiasm they decided they wanted a career path in which both could share. At this early stage in their relationship, however, there was no indication of a ceramic future.[1] In fact neither was particularly interested in ceramics. That was until Satoru walked into an exhibition of Yagi Kazuo, the founder of the Sodiesha movement in Japan. [2]

Satoru was incredibly excited. Kayoko, on the other hand, recalls that she still had no particular interest or knowledge of ceramics but thought it just might possibly be a viable idea for a couple who wanted to work together. They applied for admission to a ceramics training school but were



both refused. Eventually, courtesy of the local employment office, they got jobs as trainee potters with a ceramics studio in Kyoto.[3]

It was, however, to be a long and difficult process for the young Kayoko. For a number of years she did menial jobs around the pottery – packing and hand building flowerpots. Soon they had established their own studio but Kayoko then found herself balancing the added pressures of motherhood with production pottery, a job that had now expanded to taking designs developed by her husband, making the moulds and then producing the work.[4]

Everything changed, however, in 1986 when a landslide destroyed their pottery and badly damaged their home. Kayoko's memories of the aftermath are revealing. She recalls the terrifyingly swift destruction as the flood swept through both studio and home. Moments later, however, when she realised her family was safe she was overcome with a feeling of "lightness and clarity"[5]. Everything around her had been destroyed but in that moment her "heart became relaxed and lightened"[6]. It was, she said, as if she had been able to "put down some heavy baggage"[7].

During the next several years, as the family slowly recovered from the disaster, Kayoko recalls a growing strength and sense of purpose. She was not a deep thinking person, she says modestly, she just did what was needed to keep the family together.[8] By the early 1990s this emerging self belief and resilience culminated in her entering a number of national ceramics competitions resulting in winning the Grand Prix at the Ashi Modern Craft Exhibition in 1997.[9] A part of the prize was a major solo exhibition at a large department store. She threw herself into the preparation for this exhibition with great enthusiasm – and some trepidation. Convinced that she needed to exhibit an entirely new body of work Kayoko experimented with multiple new techniques. It was to be a turning point in the way she interacted with clay.

The solution to Kayoko's quest for a new direction was born from the beauty fleetingly revealed in the most mundane and repetitive of ceramic processes – kneading clay. Most potters the world over have, at some time, paused momentarily to appreciate the soft, complex curves and the dramatic angles formed as a lump of clay is repeatedly wedged and cut in preparation for the potters wheel. Kayoko, however, not only recognised that moment of serendipity – she performed one of the most important, and often most difficult, steps in the creative process: she stopped, and in doing so captured and preserved that transient moment of potential.



She uses a clay body for her work that is a mixture of white clay and a red, high iron clay, which must be kneaded together.[10] It is during this process that Kayoko is constantly on the lookout. "Sometimes in the moment when I am kneading I notice that the shape is beautiful, with lovely movement."[11] It is the act of recognition, that profoundly Japanese moment of clarity where movement and stillness meet. That point of recognition is the start of a meticulous creative process that involves slicing the clay with wire, carefully hollowing out the piece before the painstaking application of a beautifully striated texture. The work that flows from her discovery is breathtaking.

Her pieces are the embodiment of *shizen* – "without pretense, without artifice, not forced and yet . . . intentional rather than accidental."[12] Elegant, intimate simplicity coexists comfortably with richly complex cultural allusions. Her work evokes intriguing contradictions – at once reminiscent of hard, fractured granite while at the same time possessing a haunting serenity that whispers of distant temple bells and the waft of sandalwood and cinnamon. Glimpses of the jagged ruggedness of the North American Rocky Mountains (a major influence on Kayoko's ceramics)[13] mingle seamlessly with the mysterious Zen tranquillity of a Japanese rock garden.

But why has she chosen the piece that sits on the table between us as her favourite? Like nearly all her work it is made from the heavily reduced speckled grey stoneware that she has used over many years. Her favourite piece also shares a perfectly aligned striated texture with the majority of her earlier work. This piece, however, represents a significant departure from her previous technique. Even though it is based on a much smaller piece that she had developed using her normal technique, her favourite piece is constructed entirely of coils with no reliance on the serendipitous moment during the kneading process. Its creation was planned and purposeful, resulting in a seductive combination of graceful curves that meet to form flowing lines that encompass and define the piece with a simple elegance. Even the emptiness within, revealing a softly shadowed interior, is as eloquent as the sweeping planes by which it is contained. With its beautiful intersecting curves it seems to soar with the effortless grace of a bird in flight. It is ceramic poetry.

Kayoko moves around her favourite piece, tracing the elegant form with her fingers. It is obvious that it still has the power to move her deeply. She loves its curves, she explains. She loves it because it is beautiful from both in front and from behind, she loves that it constantly changes and surprises as you move around it. Even though her work is now sold in some of the great art galleries across the globe she says that this particular piece will never leave her home.[14]

When we started the interview Kayoko told me that she only spoke in simple words – and that, as a result, our interview would be short.[15] As I



watch her speak with such animation about her favourite piece I realise that it is not only through words that Kayoko Hoshino communicates so effectively. Rather it is her art that reveals much of what drives this remarkable woman. It is her art that expresses most clearly her passion for the deeply valued connection that exists between the Japanese people and the natural world. It is her art that speaks with such surprising eloquence of what motivates and inspires this strong, elegant and gracious Japanese ceramist. Her ceramic creations are, in essence, intimate and revealing self-portraits, offering personal insights into this wonderful artist.







As our interview ends I ask her if she is motivated by the importance of leaving a legacy for future generations. She smiles, shaking her head. "My only wish" she says gently, "is to give some movement to your heart for a moment of time."[16] In this she has most certainly succeeded.

Endnotes

1- 8. Kayoko Hoshino. Recorded Interview. 27 July 2014.

9. Mirviss.com, 2015. *Hoshino Kayoko* - Joan B Mirviss Ltd. Accessed July 17 2015. http://www.mirviss.com/artworks/hoshino-kayoko/.

10, 11. Kayoko Hoshino. Recorded Interview. 27 July 2014.

12. Martin, Roger L, and Karen Christensen. 2013. *Rotman On Design*. Toronto [Ont.]: Rotman-UTP Publishing.

13- 16. Kayoko Hoshino. Recorded Interview. 27 July 2014.

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