

What Remains

Kenji Gomi

Solo Show

VOLTA

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Hall 4.U, Congress Center, Messeplatz 21



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Kenji Gomi in his studio, Kasama, Ibaraki, Japan

Born in Chino, a city famous for its archaeological excavations of ancient pottery, Kenji Gomi grew up surrounded by his grandfather's collection of Jōmon-era artefacts. One of the oldest memories of his childhood is the room where the collection was displayed.

At the time, however, his dream was to become a professional basketball player — a path interrupted by injury. One day, browsing books, he came across one on ceramics and felt immediately drawn to it. He decided to learn pottery. For Kenji, things are sometimes simply meant to happen, and he now feels it was his destiny to become a ceramist.

In 2001 he graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo, and later moved to Okinawa, the southern island of Japan, where he studied *Tsuboya-yaki* — an ancient ceramic-making technique closely associated with the iconic *jiishigami*, the funerary urn of the Ryūkyū tradition. He established his independent practice in 2004, and since 2015 has taught at the Kasama College of Ceramic Art in Ibaraki Prefecture, where he also lives and works.

Kenji Gomi's ceramic works examine the true nature of ceramic itself, and reveal the artist's interest in the legacy left by the Jōmon potteries and the unearthed relics discovered in Chino, Nagano Prefecture. These relics attracted him because, holding them, one feels the essence of the people who created them more than ten thousand years ago. His influences extend beyond the Jōmon period: he also draws from the talismanic *dogū* figurines — small, enigmatic prehistoric clay figures — and from the postwar *Sōdeisha* movement, which from the late 1940s freed Japanese ceramics from purely functional traditions and opened the medium to sculptural abstraction.

Kenji's moulding technique, although not fundamentally different from the one used by the ancient potters, aims at creating art that combines uniqueness and universality. He works exclusively by hand, using the labour-intensive *himozukuri* coiling method — the same technique used by Jōmon makers — to build curvaceous, weighty forms without size restrictions. Each sculpture grows ring by ring, the rhythm of the hand inscribed into the surface.



Huta-Mono — covered vessel from the studio, shown with kiln cone for scale

The power of ceramics, for Kenji, lies in the fact that there are very few changes in the appearance of the work over time: ceramics survive their creators in their original shape. It is the strength of this medium to record, and to deliver memories. The unique organic curving shapes of his sculptures, with their mysterious texture, captivate the viewer's attention and convey a feeling of serenity — what critics have described as a quiet, weighty, almost Brucknerian spirituality.

As a reminiscence of those primitive potteries, Kenji has renounced the use of artificial glazes entirely, letting the mineral oxides of the clay react with the firing process.

He encases his pieces in rice husks and fires them up to five times. This process, called *carbonisation*, balances deep, smoky black hues with the clay's natural, earthy tones.

Fire, for Kenji, is a partner in the work, not a final step.



View of Kenji Gomi Studio, Kasama JP

About the exhibition

What Remains

What Remains brings together a body of recent sculptures from Kenji Gomi's *Sai Do Ki* series — a Japanese term that may be loosely translated as “coloured earthen vessels” — together with a *Huta-Mono* covered vessel. The title is both a question and a quiet statement: what survives a maker, a culture, a gesture?

For Kenji, ceramic is the medium par excellence of transmission. Ancient pots from his native Chino still carry the imprint of hands that worked the clay more than ten millennia ago.



Surface detail — the residue of fire on unglazed clay

“In making any work, my main guiding principle is to make something to fire out of clay. The firing process itself lies at the core of the creation.”

- Kenji Gomi

The forms in this exhibition stand in that lineage, asking what we leave behind, and how. Each piece is hand-built by coiling, then dried, fired, and re-fired up to five times. With every firing, the surface deepens; the rice-husk carbonisation produces gradations of black, grey, and ash that read almost like geology, like sedimented time. There are no glazes — only the minerals already present in the clay, drawn out by the heat.

Kenji's vocabulary is restrained but vital. Bulbous bases settle into the ground; smaller volumes rest on larger ones as if held in an embrace; surfaces breathe. Some pieces evoke the body, others suggest stones or seeds. All of them invite touch — and reward slow looking.

Kenji Gomi 五味 謙二

Born 1978 in Nagano, Japan. Lives and works in Kasama, Ibaraki.
Teaches at the Kasama College of Ceramic Art, Ibaraki Prefecture.

Education

- 2004 Ceramic studies, Okinawa, Japan
- 2001 Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

Solo Exhibitions

- 2023** Chino City Museum of Art, Nagano Prefecture, Japan
Pragmata Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Built to Last, Takashimaya Nihombashi Art Gallery X, Tokyo, Japan
- 2020** Space Ohara, Gifu, Japan
- 2016** Kakiden Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2015** 8/ Art Gallery, Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2014** Takashimaya Nihonbashi, Tokyo, Japan (also '17)
Meguro Tougeikan, Mie, Japan
- 2012** Gallery Suki, Aichi, Japan (also '14, '19)
- 2008** Torin-Syunyoh, Gifu, Japan
- 2006** Savoir Vivre, Tokyo, Japan (also '07, '08, '09, '10, '11, '12, '13, '18)
- 2005** Gallery Bouga-tei, Nagano, Japan (also '07, '09, '13)

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2023** *Togei in the Progressive Form*, Tomo Museum, Tokyo, Japan
The 8th Flying Birds, Ippodo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2022** *Asia Now*, Art Fair, Paris, France
- 2021** AIFA Gallery, Verbier, Switzerland
- 2019** *Clay and Abstraction: When Memories Become Form*, Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art, Tochigi, Japan
- 2018** *New Forms, New Voices: Japanese Ceramics from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*, New Orleans Museum of Art, USA
- 2012** *Life & Art — Feel Ceramics*, Higashi-Hiroshima City Museum, Hiroshima, Japan
7th Paramita Ceramic Art Grand Prize Exhibition, Paramita Museum, Mie, Japan
18th MOA Mokichi Okada Award, MOA Museum of Art, Atami, Shizuoka, Japan
- 2011** *Contemporary Ceramics in Token — Thinking New Generation*, Aichi Prefectural Ceramic Museum, Aichi, Japan

Awards

- 2021** 31st Takashimaya Art Award
- 2019** Grand Prize & Katsuranomiya Trophy, 25th Japan Ceramic Art Exhibition
- 2014** Grand Prize, 10th International Ceramic Competition Mino
TOKI Oribe Grand Prize, 7th Contemporary Tea Ceremony Exhibition
- 2013** Excellence Award, 5th Kikuchi Biennale
- 2011** Second Prize & Japan Ceramic Art Exhibition Award, 21st Japan Ceramic Art Exhibition
Encouragement Award, 4th Kikuchi Biennale
- 2008** Special Jury Award, 7th Mashiko Ceramic Art Exhibition

Public Collections

- Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
- Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum, Ibaraki, Japan
- Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art, Tochigi, Japan

Exhibited Works

Kenji Gomi

Sai Do Ki

Ceramic

29 x 28 x 29 cm

2024



CHF 2'600

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
38 x 24 x 30 cm
2023



CHF 3'200

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
83 x 26 x 25 cm
2024



CHF 5'200

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
80 x 50 x 26 cm
2023



CHF 8'000

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
33 x 30 x 30 cm
2024



CHF 2'600

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
34 x 27 x 33 cm
2024



CHF 2'600

Kenji Gomi
Huta-Mono
Ceramic
25 cm
2024



CHF 1'300

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
44 x 30 x 28 cm
2023



CHF 3'200

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
58 x 30 x 28 cm
2023



CHF 3'900

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
57 x 17 x 20 cm
2021



CHF 2'600

Kenji Gomi
Sai Do Ki
Ceramic
50 x 38 x 40 cm
2022



CHF 4'500

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