

Matsubayashi Hosai XVI and Trevor Shimizu

November 14, 2020 -
January 23, 2021

Nonaka-Hill is pleased to present a two-artist exhibition, Matsubayashi Hosai XVI and Trevor Shimizu. The exhibition brings tea ceremony ceramics produced by Matsubayashi at his Asahi-yaki (Asahi Pottery) kiln in Uji, Kyoto, Japan together with landscape and nature paintings by Shimizu, produced recently in Dobbs Ferry, New York. This symbiotic pairing derives from the notion that a Japanese tea ceremony might ideally be conducted in a tea house, ideally located in a garden or with a view onto a landscape.

Matsubayashi Hosai XVI

Born Yusuke Matsubayashi (Matsubayashi Hosai XVI) in 1980, the artist succeeded his father in 2016 to become the 16th generation to lead Asahi Pottery. In a name-changing ceremony, he took the honorary name of Hosai, assuming responsibility for the family and endurance of their kiln's legacy. He has subsequently, consciously adapted his persona to embody "*Hosai*", a merger which he says is becoming comfortable. At the Asahi studios, it has been customary for grandfather to teach the grandchildren about clay, perhaps assuring a two-generation transferal of techniques and sensibilities. Similarly, the family's clay holdings are often stored across generations, drawn from the Uji region and fermented in their storehouse for up to 100 years. Mixed with waters from the Uji River, Asahi Pottery's clays are characteristically smooth texture and even color. Generations of Matsubayashi artisans have worked within this lineage, and each has a chance to make their mark with personal expression. While his work is notable for its modern appearance, Matsubayashi XVI continues to evolve the Asahi kiln's signature *Kase* glaze effect which imparts the appearance of deer or fawn fur onto cha-wan (teabowls). The six *Kase* cha-wan examples on view use pale yellow or red clays to show the spotted glaze with nuanced effect. Another distinctive glaze developed by Matsubayashi XVI called *Geppaku* ("*moon white*") appears on water-containers and cha-wan. *Geppaku* glaze is light blue in color, opaque and gesturally applied to reveal a syrupy consistency, overlapping with other gestural marks in lacquer, gold or platinum. The artist also exhibits bowls and vases with matte finished slipware, revealing layers of color. In each of these works, the refined clays of Asahi Pottery are revealed under the special glazes, in keeping with the aesthetic ethos of *kirei-sabi**, the appreciation of beautiful things.

Trevor Shimizu

American artist, Trevor Shimizu, often presents his own likeness through his work in video, photography, paintings, drawings and writings. Shimizu looks upon all the roles that life brings him- sports enthusiast, bass player, film extra, freelance photographer, Instagrammer, friend, boyfriend, husband, father and recently, landscape painter and embraces humor to investigate the images, ideas and experiences of masculinity that

Matsubayashi Hosai XVI and Trevor Shimizu

exist in Western culture, occasionally alluding to what his Asian roots mean, or don't mean. While the landscape works on view may seem to be a surprising departure from the autobiographical works for which he has become known, the self-aware artist has surely thoroughly considered the way that these works fit into his overall story. Having recently moved to Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson River, this chapter might be called, "Artist has second child, moves out of the city, starts painting landscapes".

Born in Santa Rosa, California in 1978, Trevor Shimizu's youth and college years were in idyllic Northern California. After moving to New York, a job at the art-video distributor Electronic Arts Intermix exposed Shimizu to a vanguard of artists working in video and shaped his artistic ambitions, but perhaps it's always been his destiny to become a romantic painter. Shimizu credits Vincent van Gogh for inspiring him to become a painter. Not only did his grandparents have a dog called van Gogh, but the two artists share the same birthdate and the same personality type, "Type Four (The Individualist)" according to the 1970s Enneagram Personality analysis. Another Impressionist, Pierre Bonnard, made still other deep impressions on Shimizu. MoMA's 1998 Bonnard exhibition put Shimizu off from painting for a while, wherein he focused productively on other media, only to come back to painting later. It is Bonnard's statement "I have all of my subjects at hand." which appears to have effected Shimizu fundamentally as he has produced works of extraordinary (though often comic) domestic and psychological intimacy.

Shimizu's characteristically pure and crisp white canvases are, in fact, pre-gessoed and factory direct. His brushstrokes, which sit in stark contrast to the unmodified ground onto which they are painted, have been described as rakish, but here, they create a unity of form. Shimizu's paintings, in general, always reveal the speed and clarity of his gesture, drawing a playful comparison to Japanese ink on paper calligraphy traditions such as *Hitsuzendō* ("way of Zen through brush") and to *Kirei-sabi*, an appreciation of idealized beauty, Zen solitude and a sense of loneliness. In fact, these landscapes, water and willows are painted from the artist's memories in grand-enough scale to feel experiential. While he does not appear in these works, nor does he impart any personal meaning with cleaver painting titles, the artist does make his presence known with his enormous signature, scrawled across the bottom of the paintings. Shimizu is at once self-questioning and self-amused, self-aggrandizing and through his art, self-immortalizing.

Matsubayashi Hosai XVI and Trevor Shimizu

TEA CEREMONY

Matsubayashi Hosai XVI's work, seen here in the United States, exists far outside of the context into which it was born, that of Chanoyu, the Tea Ceremony. This history is nuanced, and any attempt to essentialize and capture its essence is difficult and almost impossible, but here is a short description which leads to Asahi Pottery:

The ancient Silk Road meandered from The Mediterranean Sea, across Asia and into Japan through the port of Osaka, with the last leg of the route ending in Nara. Eighth Century products, production techniques, social customs and religions (Buddhism and Confucianism, significantly) arrived from outside of Japan making Nara a vibrant city where foreign influences were assimilated into the ranks of Japanese society. Nara became Japan's first capital (710-794 AD) before it moved to nearby Kyoto (794 AD-1868 AD). The area is nowadays generally considered to be the cradle of Japanese civilization, in the middle of which lies the region of Uji which has produced Japan's premium green teas for centuries, and where Asahi Pottery has operated since 1600.

One imported Chinese custom, a tea connoisseurship game called *Doucha*, was transformed around the 1300s into the Japanese game called *Tocha*. Contestants would taste a number of different cups of tea to guess which region each cup of tea originated from. Prizes from these contests included silks, weapons, gold and jewelry. Such tea drinking activity became a forum for high-ranking members of society to gather, socialize and caffeinate, often becoming rowdy. One influential founder of Japan's disciplined tea ceremony, Murata Juko, is said to have frequented *Tocha* gatherings, seeking caffeine to stay awake for his studies.

Studying Zen under the renowned master, Ikkyu (1394 AD – 1481 AD), Murata Juko (b 1421 AD) was encouraged to realize the Buddhist path that exists within *Chanoyu* (the Tea Ceremony). Juko was the first to assign the words *hie* and *kare* (chill and withered) as descriptors of the tea ceremony in his famous letter *Kokoro No Fumi* ('Text of the Heart' or 'Letter on Heart's Mastery'). Alluding to the aesthetic orientation of Zen Buddhism and encouraging the appreciation for Japanese native wares alongside their Chinese and Korean counterparts which were commonly collected and used, these ideas of *hie* and *kare* slowly transformed into concepts of *wabi*, which have made their way into the Western vernacular, as appreciation of a beauty that is imperfect, incomplete, and impermanent.

Matsubayashi Hosai XVI and Trevor Shimizu

Two generations after Juko, Kobori Enshu (1579 AD-1647 AD), a famous tea practitioner, situated aesthetic appreciation of the tea object under *kirei-sabi**, which, inspired by Juko's famous letter, focuses on a sense of elegance and purity in the selection of utensils and objects used in the tea ceremony. In addition to a focus on the tea room, garden, and scroll, Enshu designated seven kilns as the preferred producers of such Japanese produced 'meibutsu' (famed utensils). Asahi kiln, run by the Matsubayashi family, was one of these seven Enshu chosen kilns. From this legacy, Hosai Matsubayashi XVI's family-owned pottery studio was established and continues to this day.

THE SHOW

For early influential tea practitioners, Tea Ceremony offered an alternate space, a place of safety, relaxation, and comradery, one that became more aligned with the way of the inner life than the ostentatious display of wealth. In cultivating this inner life and appreciation, Enshu cared deeply about what one looked upon when looking out from within.

Alluding to such a contemplative natural atmosphere (and counterbalancing the gallery's view onto a Los Angeles mini-mall parking lot), Shimizu's large-scale paintings have been sequentially installed to fill the gallery's perimeter walls, attempting to assemble an ad-hoc panorama alluding to Monet's Water Lily paintings, which themselves bear relationship to Japan and are exquisitely temporal.

Special thanks to Amy Poncher for her collaboration on this text.