

NAMIKA NAKAI

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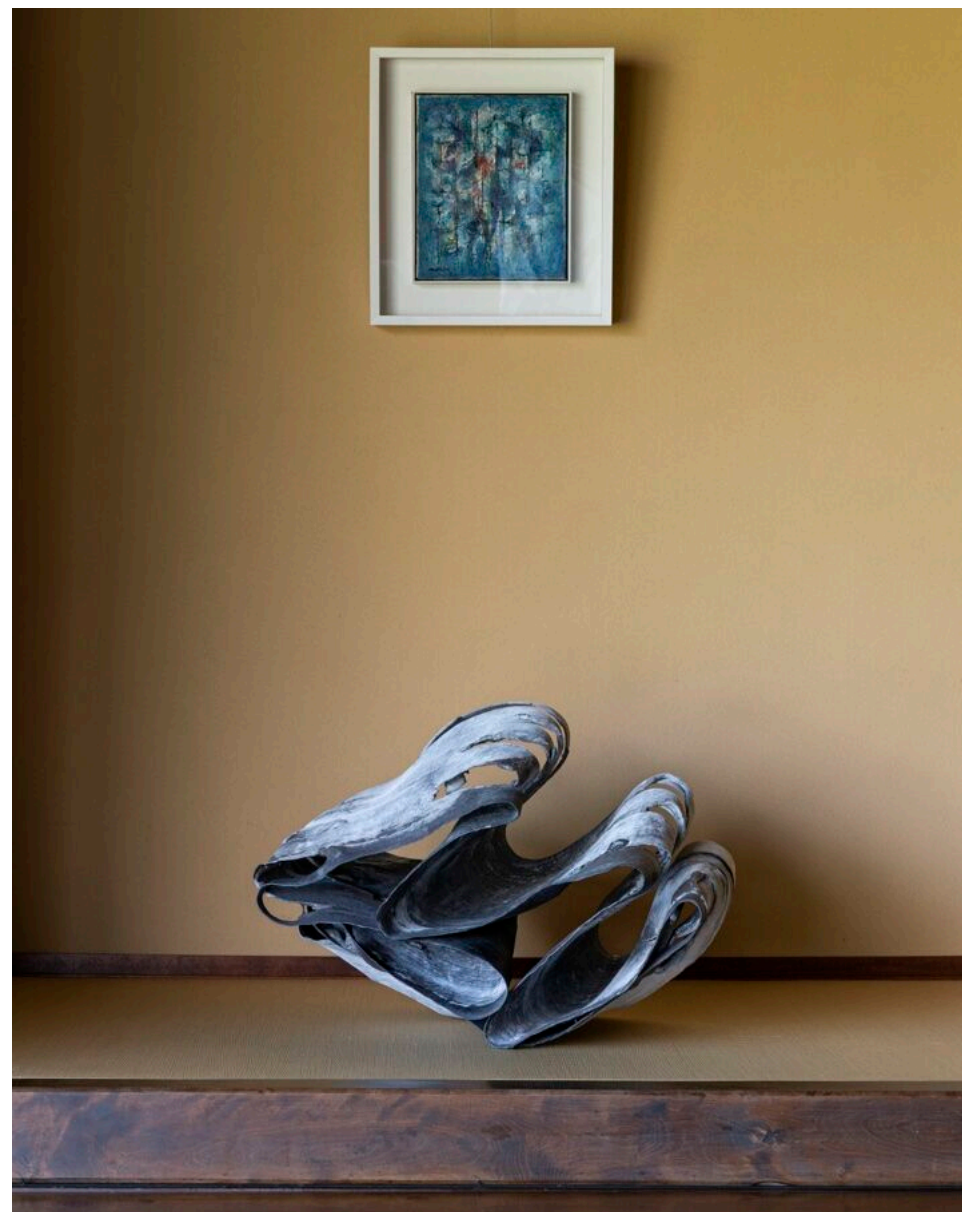
Amidst the diversification of ceramic expressions, I have been investigating the question of what constitutes the essence of ceramics. Many techniques in ceramics are underpinned by methodologies developed within the context of industrial efficiency and the stability of mass production. However, contemporary ceramic techniques used in sculptural works need not necessarily adhere to these industrially-derived practices. It is my contention that, by diverging from these conventions, one can more closely approach the intrinsic nature of ceramics. Accordingly, I focus on materials and seek to explore the essence of ceramics through the "reinterpretation of ceramic materials," developing works by questioning their traditional uses. This involves decoupling the materials employed in ceramic production from their typical applications and attempting to deconstruct and reconstruct their conceptual frameworks.

From 2019 to 2023, my works primarily utilized clay and glaze, interpreting phenomena such as cracking, melting, and warping—typically viewed as defects in industrial ceramics—as fundamental qualities of the medium. Additionally, since 2023, I have been reinterpreting metals by exploring novel approaches that diverge from their conventional use in generating chromatic effects.

My research and production processes spanned from 2016 to 2024, conducted in various significant ceramic centers in Japan. These included Tajimi City in Gifu Prefecture, a major site of Mino ware and the Japanese ceramic industry; Shigaraki Town in Shiga Prefecture, recognized as one of the Six Ancient Kilns; and Ishikawa Prefecture, renowned for its vibrant craft culture and production of Kutani ware.

Solo exhibition At Space Ohara, Gifu, Japan 2021

Nakai creates works by hand-building with commonly used clay and glazes, making the delicate textures emerge through firing. Her fragile yet robust pieces, precariously defying gravity as if drawing in space, are rooted in the primal allure of ceramics while simultaneously embodying a contemporary essence. This combination gives her work a powerful appeal that resonates widely with her generation. (Space Ohara, 2021)





Solo exhibition at Space Ohara, Japan, in 2021



Solo exhibition at Space Ohara, Japan, in 2021

Solo exhibition “Float” At TARO NASU, Tokyo, Japan 2023

Nakai is known for her unique technique of forming thinly stretched clay by hand and rolling it into ribbons. She says that she is interested in the generative process of ceramics as a phenomenon, and her works seem to attempt new creation through destruction, trying to express the passage of time reversibly from traces. Taking advantage of the fact that the melting point of glaze is lower than that of clay, she incorporates the glaze, which melts during the firing process, as one of the layers that form the work. Just as the stratum tells the story of the Earth’s formation process, her works visualize the time of creation of a form, so to speak, as a form of memory. In this exhibition, she attempted to incorporate color into her work through the manipulation of glazes. The blue and vermilion colors are not the result of coloring, but of chemical changes in the glaze. The mineral-like colors have a rough but delicate expression, and together with the organic shapes, create a dignified and beautiful tension in the space.(TARO NASU, 2022) (<https://www.taronasugallery.com/en/exhibitions/namika-nakai%e3%80%8cfloat%e3%80%8d/>)

“When I first started making ceramics, I remember how interesting it was to see the many expressions of pottery. Among them, I thought it was beautiful to see the works distorted and changed by heat when they came out of the kiln, which I thought was typical of ceramics. When I wanted to make use of this to create works of art, I began to think about the relationship between glaze and clay. Glazes are generally used for color variation and textural effects, and for water resistance in certain applications, but I reinterpreted them as ceramic materials with different melting points, and thought that their use in modeling would cause distortion and cracking. This attempt to “reinterpret ceramic materials” is the premise of my work.

For this exhibition, I reinterpreted and created new “metals” based on my previous works. The first piece is “cobalt”. The clay, to which more metal than usual has been added as if the metal had been given plasticity, is piled up thin, with leaving finger marks and fingerprints. The metal not only affects the color, but also the melting point of the clay itself, which in turn is affected by heat. Unlike the black and scarlet colors of carbonizing and firing, the unnaturally wild blue color is given form organically by the hand, the clay, and the heat. Like the coexistence of strength and delicacy, the coexistence of solidity as a material and the uncertainty of pottery is interesting.” (Namika Nakai, 2022)

Venue design : Mandai Architects

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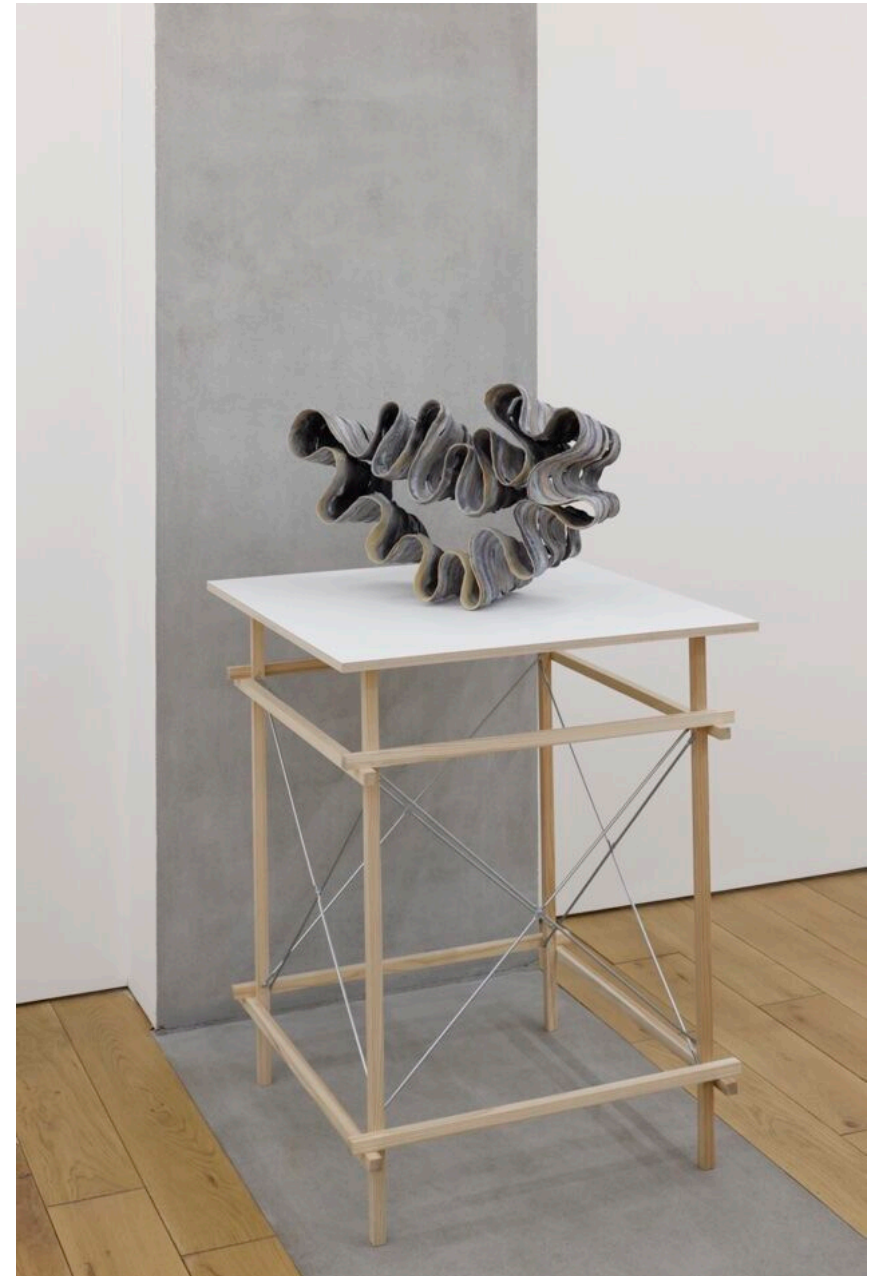
Solo exhibition "Float" at TARO NASU, Tokyo, JP, in 2023



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Solo exhibition "Float" at TARO NASU, Japan, in 2023

**Solo exhibition
At THE BRIDGE, OSAKA, Japan
2023**





Solo exhibition at THE BRIDGE, Osaka,JP



Solo exhibition at THE BRIDGE, Osaka,JP



HAIL, W18 D22 H15 (cm), 2024



RE MUKURO, W17 D22 H11 (cm), 2024



SLEET, W68 D39 H58(cm),2023. Award-Winning Works of the Ceramic Synergy Awards

KASAMA CERAMIC AWARD 2021

The comments from the Judges

Masahiro Karasawa

(Director of the National Museum of Craft)

“It makes you wonder, is this really made of clay?” “How is it shaped?” “What kind of firing technique was used?” These are the voices of the audience that seem to be audible. Clay is indeed a vast and profound material. By surrendering to fire, it transforms, creating various forms and expressions. Glazes, too, are similar to clay. They can both complement the body and become the body itself. This work embodies the interaction between these two materials and the artist. It incorporates the artist’s discoveries and surprises gleaned from the materials, filled with ingenuity that guides them to the final piece. What is important is not “accidental creation,” but the shaping of the artist’s intentions. All these elements are incorporated, making this work captivating.

Beautiful "Events" Triggered by Her and the Material

Mari Hanazato

(Curator of the Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum)

THE WINDOW OF ARTS, May 2022, New Artist Directory 2022, page 88

“ayakatte” is a series by the artist Nakai Namika who explores the theme of “reinterpreting ceramic materials” to evoke new expressions from clay and glazes. It serves as a record of the “events” that occur between her and the materials. This series features deformed circular forms, characterized by their thin construction relative to their size, combining both dynamism and precariousness. The shapes are constructed by alternately layering clay (in this case, porcelain clay) and glaze, anticipating scenarios where the glaze might melt out before the clay during firing. The dark gray, unsettling tones from the carbon absorbed during the carbonization firing amplify the drama of the work’s evolution. The impact that startles and creates tension in viewers is also a form of beauty. She discovers this beauty without being constrained by the conventional rules of ceramics. We look forward to seeing more of her bold and splendid challenges in the future.



MUKURO, W48 D48 H40 (cm), 2020



RE AYAKARU, W57 D50 H50 (cm), 2022



AYAKATTE, W60 D40 H52 (cm), 2021. Selected work for the 5th Triennale of Kogei in Kanazawa Craft



NAKARE, W51 D53 H54 (cm), 2022