

Flashback – Perspective – Goals

Discovering Japan at the Baltic Sea The Pottery of Jan Kollwitz

Nestled near the coast of the Baltic Sea in northern Germany stands an old beautiful house marked by a simple sign in the yard that reads: Jan Kollwitz – Japanese Pottery. Visitors rarely stumble upon this small village of Cismar except to explore the historic monastery standing adjacent to the old house. Approaching the monastery, it's hard to miss this unique sign with Japanese writing. Often tempted by curiosity, a few travelers will pause to find out exactly what the sign says, and as they look with more detail, several strange objects appear in the background. Settled between the towering trees and thick shrubberies of the yard rest several enormous shimmering clay pots that seem to come from a different time and place.

Though these majestic pots don't naturally belong in a small northern German village, the Japanese sign helps visitors realize that perhaps Jan Kollwitz, the owner of this historic home with the peculiar sign, might actually make such Japanese style pots himself. An even keener eye would realize that the artist also follows a strict traditional Japanese model. More often than not, content with the discovery of a small town artist, the curious traveler will then shrug his shoulders and continue onto his exploration of the monastery. However, others are not so easily satisfied and they decide to follow the directions of the next sign inviting visitors to ring the bell of the old house.

Moments later, as the old wooden door swings open, the visitor is greeted and welcomed inside by a very clearly German man. However, he has an aura of Asian kindness unfamiliar to the visitor that immediately triggers a sense of trust and hospitality. Entering the house means entering a different world far away from Cismar and Schleswig-Holstein. As sunbeams illuminate the ground floor gallery, the visitor realizes he has traveled through some sort of imperceptible portal placing him thousands of miles to the east onto the Japanese island of Honshû. When rain begins to fall gently outside, it suddenly does not appear to come from the Atlantic; instead, it seems similar to that of a Japanese summer – as natural as the humming concert of cicadas after a rainstorm or the effortless movement of wind within an ikebana bowl.

Along the walls of the gallery stand low cabinets with paper-covered doors topped with traditional rice-straw mats – upon which lay an assortment of pottery engaged in deep silent conversations. Most of them range in colors similar to the enormous vases found in the yard. With a more critical look, green and blue hardened glass drops can be identified – some lying still and modest while others dance with expression.

At first the pots are unfamiliar, but they somehow hold an intrinsically natural presence – as though they belong in the realm of nature rather than art. This undeniable omnipresence often triggers numerous questions from the visitor, and Jan Kollwitz, the man who formed and burned these masterpieces, suggests sitting down – at which point he offers tea and then unreservedly engages in conversation about his work. Glancing into the gallery full of handmade vases, bowls and pots and listening to the explanations of the craftsman, the visitor realizes he secretly hoped this situation would happen. Far in the back of his mind, blurred pictures of mysterious cultures once found in Japan begin to form.

Outside, the wind pushes the clouds like those that rain down upon the hills of the Ryohaku-sanchi Mountains. Later, when the sun sets, the pots start glowing from the inside, as though they store a mysterious energy hidden in the darkness of an ancient time.

History

Engaging with Japanese ceramics means it is unavoidable to explore chanoyu – usually (and inaccurately) called *tea ceremony*. During the chanoyu, pulverized tea and hot water are mixed using a bamboo brush in a bowl until the mixture develops a thick consistency. The bowl, the chawan, is as large as two hands brought together. This kind of tea preparation originates from China and started to spread among Japanese Zen monasteries in the late 12th century CE. Buddhist monks enjoyed the tea for its energizing effect because it allowed for deeper concentration during long meditation hours. From the early 14th century CE onward, during the reign of Ashikaga-Shogune who had a strong sense for art, tea ceremonies held by tea masters became an integral part of social events within royal and upper class homes. During these events it was also common that members of the upper class would show their newly acquired art pieces, which were usually chosen by the tea master himself. During the 15th and 16th centuries CE, the ritualized tea ceremony was defined by Murata Juko (1422/23-1502 CE), Takeno Joo (1502-1555 CE) and most significantly Sen no Rikyu (1521-91 CE). Their interpretation turned away from that of the upper class tradition that included dance, singing and culinary specialties. All three reformists were deeply influenced by the spirit and practice of Zen Buddhism and carried chanoyu into the space between daily routine, philosophic practice, religious ritual and performance art, where most Zen disciplines take place.

An old Japanese master, however, would reject this containment of chanoyu, and would only break his silence in order to educate by way of Rikyu:

“Chanoyu: that means,
as one must be aware of,
only to cook water,
to prepare tea
and to drink it.”

The final establishment of the tea ceremony as a Japanese national tradition occurred in conjunction with the union of the empire after over 100 years of civil war. It was especially promoted by the dominating generals Oda Nobunaga (1534-82 CE), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98 CE) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616 CE). However, the practice of the tea ceremony did not prevent them from fighting mercilessly – killing their rivals and developing deadly mentalities. All three generals had tea masters, who held very influential, but also very treacherous positions as cultural advisors, event organizers and caretakers for the generals’ personal items. The most important person of the tea masters was Sen no Rikyu. A tradesman by nature, he first worked for Oda Nobunagas until Oda was killed. He then worked as a teacher and advisor for Toyotomi Hidedyoshi and became the most influential authority of his time. He performed the dangerous balancing act between art, business and politics with his life – just like many other important masters of his time. There are different speculations as to why Hideyoshi finally forced his once greatest trustee to commit *seppuku*, the ritualized and thus at least honorable suicide. At the time, important political and staff decisions were made during tea ceremonies, and oftentimes they were held immediately before a big battle as a last act of self-control before their likely deaths.

During meetings between Daimyo and Samurai members, an important focus was not only placed on the valuable green tea powder, but also on the utensils and ceramic art works used for the preparation of the tea. These were not only used for practical reasons, but also to establish the appropriate atmosphere for the ceremony. However, during the reorientation of the tea ceremony, the masters Juko, Joo and finally Rikyu fundamentally changed the criteria for these ceramics as well as the perception toward them. The ceramics were meant to trigger a sense of internalization rather than showing glorification or pompousness. Fine porcelain and high-gloss wares fell out of use, while simple utensils, mainly from China and Korea, were embraced. Even though these were mostly plain products for daily usage, they were oftentimes several hundred years old and shipped across the unpredictable Japanese sea, and thus quite expensive. The increase in popularity of chanoyu also led to an increase in the demand for tea ceramics, which could hardly be met by antiquity traders. While focusing on the collection of Chinese ceramics from the Tang and Song Dynasty, Juko and Joo started to take simple farmers’ ceramics from domestic provinces into consideration and declared them as

objet trouvé. By doing so, they moved toward the new ideal of beauty, in which the ceramics were idealized for their moderation and simplicity. Sen no Rikyu was the first person to address potters directly in order to develop different ceramic types, forms and glazes on the basis of these new aesthetic views in chanoyu. Most significant is Rikyu's collaboration with Chojiro (d. 1589 CE), a potter and tile burner probably of Chinese descent, who invented the raku glaze under Rikyu (probably also with Hideyoshi's lively participation). Despite the scant historical evidence, the almost mythical encounter of Rikyu and Chojiro has outstanding importance for the reinvention of Japanese ceramics. Through Rikyu's inspired influence, the ceramics started to reflect the spirit of the 'tea's way'. In addition to the pots used solely for the preparation of the tea (i.e. the bowl (chawan), tea box (chaire), cold water pot (mizusashi), used water pot (kensui), lid tray (futaoki)), many other forms were needed (i.e. vases and bowls for flower arrangements (hanaire, hanaike), sake flasks and cups (tokkuri; guinomi), plates, bowls for several uses including the kaiseki-menu and the dessert sweets, ceramics for the storage and burning of incense sticks (kogo, koro), and ceramics simply made as artwork on the side (tokonoma)). For the latter category, antiquities were still preferred.

Rikyu's influence was not only limited to the development of new pots or his technological innovations, but he also helped to broaden the usage of pots away from their traditional meaning. By doing so, he systematically chose simple domestic ceramics, which were allegedly unprogressive in style and function, and changed the perception toward them. This paradigm shift ultimately led to a fundamental change in Japanese culture, in which ceramics became one of the most important art forms.

As opposed to Korea and China where pottery forms and techniques continuously advanced since Neolithic times, Japanese ceramics remained in an almost archaic state between the middle Jomon Era (3000 BCE) until the 16th century CE. With regard to the technical niveau and the aesthetics, the pieces that originate from more archaic times were almost better than those made starting in 1000 CE onward in the so-called "six old kilns" production area (Bizen, Echizen, Shigaraki, Tanba, Tokoname and Seto). Whereas potters from Seto already experimented with glazing to imitate Chinese pottery, others used mainly rustic stoneware clay with an ash-whiffed glazing for the production of their ceramics. Seemingly primitive pots such as storage pots, ceramic buckets and rice bowls (yamachawan: 'Teabowl of the mountain') particularly moved into the center of attention. With their rough surfaces and glazing merely from ash-whiffing, they have an inherent beauty and reflect an expressionist ideal that marked the entirety of tea ceramics up to the present day. Furthermore, these objects embody the concepts of *wabi* and *sabi*, which were essential for the redefinition of Japanese aesthetics during the Momoyama era (1573 – 1603 CE). Both terms are oftentimes used simultaneously, as they basically describe two aspects of the same principle. The term *wabi* refers to the "aesthetic representation of a mood, in which one prefers to be alone rather than in company, prefers nature to culture, appreciates the irregular to the regular, prefers imperfect to perfect and asymmetry to symmetry". The term *sabi* describes the same meaning, however does not refer to a mood or atmosphere, but rather is solidified through looking at a tangible object. Something becomes *sabi* mainly through traces of usage and minor mistakes. *Sabi* is a softened bamboo spoon or a pot with a diminutive crack filled with a fluid or a visible reparation. *Wabi-sabi* represents traces of transcendence as expressive qualities - beautiful characteristics inherently coming from the inside rather than creating a blindingly bright surface.

During the ten years of struggle between Hideyoshi and his free-spirited yet ambitious tea master Sen no Rikyu, the new aesthetic guidelines of Japanese ceramics took their final turn. These two highly educated individuals brought together the right aspects in the right moments in order to create something new. For a short period of time, it even seemed possible that their views and reorientation of the tradition could outlive the common need to name and list art objects to use them as stocks or for acquiring prestige. Rikyu's vision of the always sovereign 'tea person' is manifested in a short poem that discusses the meaning of the objects to be utilized:

"Is it present? good, / is there none? then not; / if we act with how it is, then it is the true tea art"

This radical view on the matter, where every moment's transience and incomprehensibility is

cherished, was not enforceable over time. For Rikyu's successor Furuta Oribe (1544-1615 CE), self-restriction and unobtrusiveness were already secondary virtues. As a part of the newly enthroned Tokugawa Shogun warrior caste and as a proponent of a forced 'modernism', Oribe was willing to let the need for representation of his hierarchical status influence chanoyu. However, he also did not hold back on drastic action to set guidelines for new developments that challenged rigid tradition. One example of this was his destruction of perfectly intact and widely worshiped *ido* and *song* bowls in order to have them extravagantly repaired using gold lacquer. His eccentricity was part of the reason for the future overregulation of *chanoyu* and other traditional Japanese crafts. The pots he designed later on marked the beginning of the Oribe style (characterized by deformed, archaic and expressive paintings), and are some of the most powerful pieces of the Momoyama era.

During this short epoch (about 30 years), inspired and innovative tea masters advanced ceramic craftsmanship. Almost all forms and techniques that are still practiced today originate from this time period. However, especially due to Rikyu's radical demands, there has been an everlasting unsolvable dilemma: the remarkable characteristics of the pots, originating from simple tools and the act of wabi-sabi, were created without the intent of making art, and they owed their natural beauty to the purposelessness and lack of intention from their creator. Thus, they are also remarkable examples for the exclusion of the self in Zen. However, the intense and overdetailed taste of the tea masters, which manifests itself in the rejection of any intentionally set finesse, was the result of well-developed thought processes. Therefore, anyone who wanted to or had to follow these aesthetic rules was in a conundrum. This applied to all art forms and Rikyu himself wrote it down as follows:

“To intend that you don't want intend is still an intention. / However, my dear, it applies that intention shall not be intended intentionally.”

Craftsmanship from Zen

The increase in industrial mass production of objects and goods used in daily life helped fulfill the demand for ever-changing design trends, but it also created a gap in the role of traditional craftsmanship in 19th century Europe and Japan. Prior to this change, daily life objects were primarily handcrafted – varying in design and quality, depending on the workshop and region of origin. However, once mass industrial production of daily objects began, there were only two possible paths for the further development of the traditional craft. First, artistic crafts were developed that were primarily superfluous in function merely providing a sentimental or atmospheric value either based on folkloric traditions or on the unique vision of the craftsman. Second, luxury goods were developed that tailored to the individual demands of the customer and they were only produced in limited editions. Though both paths developed from different consumer demands, the objects created still embody the intrinsic natural presence found in the work of earlier craftsmen.

Since the mid – 19th century, parallel to the industrialization of production, there have been several approaches to develop new economic and aesthetic concepts for contemporary craftsmanship. First, in England, William Morris had his arts and crafts movement, followed by the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil in continental Europe, the Vienna workshops and the German Crafts Association. The influence of Japanese arts and crafts on the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil primarily developed because of the 1878 World Exhibition in Paris, and thus also greatly influenced modern arts. Even the grand artists' movements such as the Russian Suprematism, de Styl from the Netherlands and the German Bauhaus searched for ways to reconcile craftsmanship with industrialized production – somehow attempting to find harmony between bulk goods, aesthetics and quality.

In Japan, the encounter between the English potter Bernard Leach, who was born in Hong Kong, his fellow potters Hamada Shoji and Kawai Kanjiro and the art theoretician Yanagi Soetsu led to the formation of the Mingei movement. Since the 1920s, Yanagi had accumulated an extensive collection of East Asian 'public art' (art for and by the simple people) and his essays were the theoretical basis for the movement. His vision built upon Rikyu's approaches and assumed that craftsmanship in its

original form could mostly be found in simple public art, where objects were made in accordance to regional traditions and personal needs. He also argued that an object's value should be determined by its purpose rather than individual preferences or fashionable refinements. In the center of Yanagi's vision was the craftsman as a 'noble savage' – making things solely based on a natural sense of beauty inherently found in centuries of tradition. By neglecting individual aesthetic beliefs and embracing historically affirmed principles, the craftsman would be able to create something of the highest value. Yanagi believed that the increasing individualism in the realm of art was misguided; according to him only a fraction of individuals were able to make objects outside the realm of tradition that would be of similar quality. On the other hand, he knew that in times where the pursuit of personal style and expression was seen as the highest form of art, any attempt of individuals to follow traditional principles would unavoidably cause some re-positioning of their natural aesthetic and they would thus fall out of their implicitness. The efforts of craftsmen who shared his beliefs, however, had the primary task to practice traditional forms and techniques to conserve them for future generations living in a 'better' era.

In the recent past there has been an increasingly critical contention of Yanagi, particularly of his philosophy and personality. However, the development of Japanese arts and crafts in the 20th century would have been fundamentally different without him and his updating of the aesthetic program of the Momoyama time. Starting in the 1940s and through Leach's "A Potter's Book", Yanagi's thoughts were distributed among European and American potters. Thus, many trends within Western ceramics are indirectly based on the values and innovations of ancient Japanese practice.

In the meantime, the dilemma of the *self inflicted non-intention* described by Rikyu resurfaced through the period of industrialization. While Rikyu saw objects crafted by unknown potters without personal or artistic ambitions as the only authentic and true ceramics, through these ideals he disabled any chance of a 'naive' and heritage-driven craftsmanship. With the onset of industrialization, goods for daily life could be manufactured at low prices and reproduced indefinitely. Therefore, the craftsmen who continued to make the effort of producing such objects by hand suddenly had to justify such extra work. The triumph of industrial production forced craftsmanship into an identity crisis, similar to what photography had done to painting. Consequently, just as with photography, modernization required a fresh start that called for a re-evaluation of the ceramic art form.

The significant influence that traditional Japanese arts and craftsmanship had on the West correlates with the formulation of the wabi-sabi aesthetic over 400 years ago. With the neglect of outward perfection manifested through polished and dazzling surfaces, this movement influenced important aesthetic approaches for the post-industrial revolution. At the same time, the introduction of Buddhism and Zen in Western culture influenced the predominantly result-oriented aesthetic that had been present in Europe since ancient times. At least in some branches of modern art grew a greater appreciation for the process of creating an object and finding hints of the artist's personal style that make the object unique. The purpose of making art was not only to make objects that were appealing to the eye, but rather to also identify a purpose for the *self* within the process; in other words, the path to creating art began to fulfill existential pursuits, and this phenomenon became apparent in the outcome of the journey (the pot).

Thus, ceramics began to receive value that goes beyond the common criteria for art, where artworks are classified as good or bad, pretty or ugly. These contrasts, which were predominantly introduced to secure the interpretational sovereignty and supremacy of the educated elites, were supposed to form chasms for deeper insight and artistic experiences within modern art, similar to those from archaic cultures and prehistoric times. In the center of this vision, which would break down the bourgeois' concept of art, was the demand for a mythological/ spiritual tradition from the Far East. In principal, this called for a regeneration of the old dream to recover the unified *being and consciousness* that was lost in an ancient time. This loss is described differently among different cultures, though the reason is always similar: it is the self definition; that is the self distinction of mankind, "I", through which he sets himself in contrast to the world and falls out of the interrelation with reality. Beyond that point, he does not live in reality, but experiences himself in opposition to it, or at best as a fraction of it. The separation from anything that is outside his Self corresponds with his internal fragmentation. In

Semitic monotheism, both aspects can be found in the story of the sin and the subsequent expulsion from paradise; because Adam and Eve taste the prohibited fruit, they are able to distinguish good and bad and have to carry and conduct this ability permanently. At the same time, they see each other as “naked” and are ashamed, which means that their original identity with themselves is shattered. In the process of making art, which partially became a quasi-religious act, there is hope that such an infinite division between conflicting identities might be overcome. In complicated terms, in order to overcome such a conflict, the original yet transformed and therefore new insight of an artist, which now is not an insight anymore, would have to be repealed. This is because the difference between insight and non-insight, recognizing and recognized, never existed in the mythical reading anyways.

This exact story is also told by Yanagi Soetsu in his *Myth of the Nameless Chinese and Korean Potters*, for whom there is only a bowl that comes into being and not an object that is made. During the process, eyes and hands, clay and pottery wheel, glazing, water and fire are part of an unintended and therefore truly original and complete organic intertwined realm. Nothing amasses in the sense of a plausible autonomy that aims at having a specific effect on the spectators. Everything is as it is and therefore coerces us, living in times of separation and division (of spirit and body), to find the deepest appreciation for these objects.

Zen is one of the approaches meant to reform this spiritual self-infliction by rediscovering the original unity of the self and self-recognition. Though it was first practiced in the spiritual center of monasteries in China and Korea, its methodology was already applied universally across all realms, especially in the realm of arts, including martial arts. There are a variety of books in Europe and America, which branch from Eugen Herrigel’s small book about Japanese archery, carrying a reference to Zen in their names: “Zen in the arts”... “...a motorcycle to wait”, “...to be a mother”. This not only shows the popularity of East Asian mindsets, but also reveals the deep desire of many Westerners to look at themselves and what they are doing from a distance, through a different mindset, to rediscover the completeness of their lives. However, such appreciation of perfection arising from a spontaneous moment neglects rigorous discipline and regulation of any procedure, including the crafting of pottery. In this sense, craftsmanship to Zen means to work with absolute awareness of the mind for years and to perfect the techniques. Finally, awareness and technique merge coincidentally at a random point in time, which cannot be intended, and allow a genuine moment for the craftsman. Then, in the intermediate zone of doing and not doing, the hands will form an object from unintended non-intention.

More than any other craft, Japanese ceramics is marked by this methodology. This is perhaps due to the synergy of the elements (earth, water, air and fire) during the production process or due to the close relation of such principles with the tea ceremony, where masters not only demanded that their own methods as well as the utensils they used be marked by the modesty of Zen. Perhaps the outstanding appreciation of ceramics present in East Asia for millennia also correlates with its ability to give sense to the central idea of Buddhism. Every usage of a pot allows the possibility to identify the universal foundation of being. In the heart of Sutra, which formulates the essence of Buddhism, it says:

“The physical body is Empty, Empty is also any Form; Appearance is not different from Emptiness, Emptiness is not different from Appearance; what a Form is, is empty, what empty is, is the Form.”

If one tries to formulate an image from this chain of thoughts, ceramic objects appear in front of the inner eye: ceramics are reformed emptiness. And who knows? Maybe the nameless author who wrote the Sutra more than 2,000 years ago sought to escape from a thunderstorm in the workshop of an also nameless potter without a sense for art. After drinking some tea, his view attached itself to the fist-sized, gray lump of clay that the master just put on his potter’s wheel. With wet hands he gave an initial movement to an inherently still beginning. With the scent of wet clay mixing with the coming rain, strikes of lightning gently illuminating the walls and muted thunder filling the air, the patriarch witnessed how under the potter’s eyes and hands the wheel started turning, leading to the axis through which the world has its origin. From the core, an object rises and encloses the emptiness of the room, though the room remains empty. In this very moment, the potter entered the rotation of the world, in

which eye becomes hand and eye and hand are lost. Neither the potter's nor the witnesses' face show movement, but how would it? There was neither the one, nor the other.

From Echizen to Cismar

Jan Kollwitz first began his ceramic studies as an apprentice to the potter Horst Kerstan in Kandern, Germany. For many years, Kerstan himself was in touch with Japanese colleagues and employed some of their techniques. In 1977 he even experimented with the Anagama kiln, which is the archaic type of kiln for firing Japanese ceramics used since the Middle Ages and known for its characteristic glazing of the ceramic from flying ash. However, staying loyal to his character, Kerstan stuck to the German tradition of craftsmanship. His young apprentice, on the other hand, wanted to go beyond being only partially inspired by Japanese craftsmanship; therefore, having completed his apprenticeship in 1986, Jan decided to make the journey to Japan in order to more intimately learn and understand the spirit and techniques of Japanese ceramics and to thereby incorporate the Japanese way of craftsmanship into his life.

After studying Japanese, Jan went to Tokyo to begin his search for a master who was not only willing to take an apprentice, but who would also teach a Western man the very foundation of Japanese tradition and art. To this day many highly educated Japanese people consider it impossible for a Westerner to overcome such a great cultural divide. However, though it took many months and the help of many intermediaries, references and contacts, Jan finally found Nakamura Yutaka, a master-craftsman from Echizen who had mastered the traditional forms and objects as well as their production processes. He also witnessed the excavations of historic workshops in his home region and worked on his own vision of sculptural ceramics that included Western art. In a sense, through his work he was able to balance on the cultural and national margin similar to the one Horst Kerstan adopted. After many careful and calculated encounters and due to Jan Kollwitz's persistence, Nakamura agreed to take him on as a personal student.

The relationship between master and student in Japan is just like the artistic practice – permeated by Buddhist theory. Taking someone on as a student does not only involve the teaching of technical skills, but also, even more poignant, is the acceptance of a somewhat spiritual companionship involving a lifelong and alternating engagement. The teaching method is holistic and includes measures that are disconcerting or even humbling – at least from a European / American point of view. For example, the authority of the Master is essentially indisputable. The student can neither question methodologies nor doubt any of his decisions. One has the knowledge while the other seeks it. These are fundamentally different “aggregate phases” of mankind where there is no middle ground. Both individuals have to follow the behavioral codes they are assigned with, even if they conflict with their individual needs or with what they perceive as just and unjust. The Master is similar to an abbot in a Zen monastery—equipped with a thorough power to give orders that students must unconditionally follow. This obedience does not end after working hours or at the workshop's door. It includes every aspect of the student's life: leisure time, lifestyle habits or any other efforts of the student to obtain knowledge.

In Western countries, this form of teaching is commonly known as “dark pedagogy”. The way an art form has developed over the centuries is inherent in a master's every move, independent of personal characteristics or teaching methods. Consequently, the teaching method must be characterized by observation and imitation rather than through lectures and the consideration of a student's personal moods and preferences. Naturally, the central and most important component of learning is relentless practice. Just as a word loses its meaning and sounds empty after a hundred repetitions, the making of bowl after bowl and vase after vase at some point also becomes free from anything but the process of making it. The relentless repetition detaches any egotism and personal intention from the craftsman. Only when the student accepts the infinite repetition, forgets that he once had to accept this, follows the unquestionable tradition and abolishes his ambitions to make something extraordinary, will he create the foundation upon which he can actually succeed.

One of the reasons why the six old kilns in Japan are still held in high esteem is because they represent an ancient and intertwining heritage of different realms of craftsmanship. The kilns are closely connected to the origin of Japanese ceramic knowledge and thus closer to the simplicity and authenticity of the art form. Every person who dedicates himself to this craft helps to verify its authenticity while fostering new knowledge. Therefore, such a rich accumulation of Japanese ceramic knowledge could not have been developed by only one artistic or engineering master, but rather from the continuous contribution of craftsmen.

Echizen was an old center for such traditional ceramic knowledge. During the Middle Ages, Echizen played no role in the development of tea ceramics since it was a production center for simple ceramics used in daily life. Due to industrialization in the 19th century, Echizen lost its central role in the production of these goods. In fact, after World War II there was only one master left who had the knowledge required to construct large but thin walled ceramics for wood fired kilns. However, starting in the 1960s, governmentally funded excavations of traditional workshops brought about a rebirth of Echizen's traditional ceramics. In the following years, many young potters settled there (though this boom was relatively modest in comparison to Bizen, Shigaraki or Mashiko where potters of the Mingei-movement had their center).

In a sense, the marginal significance of Echizen reflected Jan Kollwitz's intention to pursue the traditional way of craftsmanship. He was aware that this required him to abandon his Self rather than satisfying his wish for inner fulfillment. He did not aim to use Japanese techniques and aesthetics to mark his own postmodern and syncretistic style, but rather to learn exactly (not more, but also not less) a specific kind of ceramic tradition developed in Japan for centuries. During Jan's two years of training, Nakamura Yutaka only considered a handful of his pieces to be made well enough for firing in the kiln. Those considered unworthy were disintegrated and recycled. As discussed before, there was no possibility to appeal against the Master's decision or to convince him of a special quality of a specific piece that originally might not have been seen.

During this apprenticeship, Jan accumulated a foundational knowledge of traditional Echizen forms including yamachawan, ancient storage vessels (tsubo), flacons for cosmetics (ohaguro), as well as buckets (oke). Even after the Momoyama era, potters from Echizen did not incorporate pots required for tea ceremonies in their repertoire, but continued to make simple ceramics for daily life in rural communities. Therefore, for different vases, cold water storage pots, sake flasks and cups, Jan was inspired by examples originating from the expressive Iga and Bizen traditions starting in the 14th century. Jan took a multitude of measurements of historic ceramics, and while keeping the original designs, he also carefully developed them further.

Over the past twenty years, Jan has added new forms by adapting them to the needs of European households. However, they are so strongly influenced by traditional Japanese ceramics that it is almost impossible to identify them as new developments. Continuous development by a master is an integral part of the traditional approach. Without this, there would be a solidification of the tradition, which contradicts with the appreciation of the present moment inherent in Zen. Moreover, such solidification of the tradition would contradict with the individual aspiration of a master to add some of his Self into the sphere of traditional knowledge that lies beyond space and time.

Usually it takes twelve years for an apprentice to master the Japanese discipline that lies between art and craftsmanship. Jan Kollwitz however, who actually followed the old Japanese tradition with a more stringent attitude than many of his other colleagues, patiently took many more years in order to finally make the central piece of the tea ceremony, the chawan. He tried thousands of times to create his own interpretation of the yamachawan and the yunomi (the smaller and bigger tea cups) before he attempted to make smaller and glazed tea bowls for traveling. While doing so, he always kept in mind the old warning that when a potter who is too young fires the chawan, it is likely to turn out superficial and influenced by a desire to make art—thereby taking away its genuineness. In 2009, Jan Kollwitz finally gave shape to the concept of emptiness central to chanoyu and tea ceremonies in general, when he fired the chawan for the first time.

Just as the bowl is the centerpiece of the tea ceremony, the kiln is the centerpiece of the potter's workshop. It is the place where all elements come together and where experience and master craftsmanship will always be negatively and positively challenged by the unforeseeable. Unlike modern gas and electric kilns, wood-fired kilns have very individual characteristics. A good kiln builder will never follow or reproduce a standardized plan, but will consider the environment in which the kiln will be placed as well as the potter's personal character and needs.

In 1988, just after his return from Japan, Jan was able to convince the greatly experienced and famous kiln builder Watanabe Tatsuo to build a wood-fired Anagama kiln for his newly acquired workshop in Cismar. This was also thanks to his friendship with Yamada Kazu, student of Tokuro Kato, and one of the most important potters of his generation.

The Anagama is an archaic type of kiln with earlier models dating back to pre-historic times. Today it still exemplifies the elemental, destructive and creative force of fire. During the four days and nights of the firing one can realize that man and material are brought to their limits. Every three minutes, first beach wood and later pinewood feed this alchemistic primeval process. It is not sufficient to perfectly time a moment and throw in an exact number of logs. There is a constant control of the kiln's every utterance and a need for a flexible and adaptive reaction of the potter to changing conditions. Outside temperature, wind, humidity and atmospheric pressure all play a role, just like the properties of the dried wood, the permeability of the grid, and the solid deposits that accumulate in the kiln over time. According to Watanabe Tatsuo, the kiln he built for Jan Kollwitz is 'difficult', which means that it will produce great pieces, but also requires a lot of attention and precision during the firing. A lack of concentration could therefore lead to the complete destruction of all pieces, which for Jan Kollwitz would mean that the production for an entire year would be lost. However, during the firing, the atmosphere is not marked by fear, but respectful confidence.

From a European perspective the hardness of Japanese apprenticeships may be incomprehensible; however, if someone decides to embark on such a journey, they will finally learn the balance between technical skills, humble confidence and serene faith. The potter relies on the spirit within this balance to produce truly great ceramics. In Cismar, just as in Japan, it is customary to place small bowls with rice, salt and schnapps on top of the kiln to please the spirit that lives within. This may seem strange on a first glance; however, he who has sat in front of a humming kiln and experienced its lively warmth, listened to the rhythm of oxidation and reduction, its breathing in and breathing out and who has seen the white heat inside, the flames that are flickering through vents and cracks and the vibrating air on its surface, knows without a doubt that the kiln's spirit is present and working. During this time, the spirit takes the role of the master with all ambivalence and unpredictability that this position inherits. The potter, independent of the experience he acquired over the years or decades, then takes over the position of the student again. His task is to listen and observe and serve the developing ceramics by reacting in accordance of what is heard and seen. With every firing the potter subjugates himself to an existential exercise, where it becomes clear that the way of Japanese ceramics does not only involve creating nice and practical goods. Instead, the craftsmanship of Japanese ceramics is a lifelong exercise where one learns to accustom with the environment and to be harmonious with the world. Ultimately through his craft an artist should be able to find a balance with uncontrollable forces and should have the ability to capture and let go of individual moments. Ceramics developed through this lifelong journey radiate a very strong message to the silent observers handling them—that everything is actually very simple.

A Conversation with Jan Kollwitz

CP: You started your apprenticeship as a potter in 1983 in Germany with the master Horst Kerstan, who was in active exchange with Japanese potters and probably the first German to ever build and fire an Anagama kiln in Germany. Was your decision to become Horst Kerstan's student inspired by pottery or Japanese culture?

JK: I grew up among ceramics by Jan Bontjes van Beek, whose widow was a close friend of my mother's. After various upheavals, when I had to decide with which task I would like to fill my life, I remembered these pots and got the strong impulse to go in a similar direction.

CP: This means that the Japanese trend that was inspired by the spiritual wave in the early eighties did not influence your decision?

JK: No. I never encountered Japan prior to finding Japanese ceramics in Horst Kerstan's workshop. However, I also felt drawn to the Japanese inspired pots of Kerstan himself.

CP: Were there ceramics of Japanese colleagues in Kerstan's workshop, which served him and his students as inspirational pieces?

JK: Horst Kerstan owned a small collection of original pieces, which he showed us to emphasize specific aspects. On the one side, I understood the transition area between pot and sculpture that marks Japanese ceramics; on the other side, the original pieces inherited a mystery that I felt drawn to. I soon realized that I wanted to make exactly that type of ceramics.

CP: Japanese craftsmanship differs from European craftsmanship mostly because it has a spiritual basis. Did you intuitively feel this and was this reflected in conversations in the workshop?

JK: Mr. Kerstan talked a lot about the Japanese customs and workshop structures, about Zen Buddhism and craftsmanship. I soon started to read books about Zen. The different view on art and the world in general immediately appealed to me.

CP: When you decided to go to Japan, did you have a tangible idea about the education structures? For example, the very different relationship between student and teacher?

JK: When the time with Horst Kerstan slowly came to an end, I had a vague idea about how learning and teaching in Japan could be like. The Master's role was also clear to me and somehow also appealing. Moreover, I knew that I wanted to work with an Anagama kiln in the future, which required a lot of additional training. Since Mr. Kerstan could not hire me permanently after my training and because Anagama kilns are rare in Germany, I knew that my only chance was to go to Japan.

CP: How did you know that this plan could work?

JK: I once met a couple that traveled for quite some time through Japan in order to explore Japanese ceramics. They told me that in order to have a chance to be initiated into the relatively closed off world of traditional Japanese craftsmanship, I would have to learn Japanese. However, the few courses that were offered in Germany at the time were all booked so I bought a course for self studying. Simultaneously I applied for a visa and planned the journey with the trans-Siberian railroad because flying appeared to be too cheap and easy. It took me fourteen days by train and ferry until I arrived in Yokohama.

CP: Did you have any sort of contact there?

JK: There was a gallery owner in Berlin, Marion Suhr, whose brother Karsten imported and exported Japanese and European arts and crafts. Their parents lived in Yokohama and had a good network within the cultural scene in Japan. Among others, they knew a potter in Mashiko, from whom they bought pots in the past. Soon after my arrival, Karsten Suhr took me to Mashiko. However, the potter had recently taken a student and there was also an electric kiln in the workshop. Since I had decided that I wanted to learn about the Anagama kiln, I was secretly glad that my help was not needed.

CP: Also, Mashiko is known more for its glazing than for impressive wood-fired ceramics.

JK: Which is why I drove to Bizen. Even though I did not have any contact there, I simply went through the small potter's shops and looked for pieces that appealed to me. I then asked the shop owners if it was possible to visit the Master. This turned out to be a very unusual approach. Nevertheless, I ended up in the workshop of Kaneshige Michiaki. Mr. Kaneshige had an American student for many years and was therefore familiar with the helplessness of foreigners. He called his student to come over and had him explain to me in English that it was impossible to find a master if I just went to their homes and introduced myself.

CP: But what was your alternative without contacts?

JK: Mr. Kaneshige suggested that if I was interested in a specific workshop he would formally set up the contact. However, this never happened, because I received a phone call from family Suhr, whose friend Mrs. Amikura knew someone who knew someone that was setting up an exhibition with Yutaka Nakamura from Echizen. Mrs. Amikura was a gallery director from Tokyo and had told my story to many of her friends, and one of them knew about a potter looking for a student and also happened to have an Anagama kiln.

CP: Did you know any of Yutaka Nakamura's work?

JK: I did not even know the name, and furthermore it appeared a little strange to me that other people were finding me a teacher. However, Mr. Suhr let me know that it would be very embarrassing for him if I didn't go to meet Mrs. Amikura's friend. So we drove for an hour and a half and met up with them. At the beginning of the visit we had tea and there was a lot of fast conversation, of which I understood every third word and could only grasp half of the conversation. The topics varied and I had no idea how all of it would serve my wish. After two hours the gallery owner went into his office and brought back an artistically tied up wooden box. He placed the package in front of him, loosened the cord, folded the paper away and lifted the wooden lid. With both hands he took out an object that was covered by cloth and ritually presented a ceramic by Yutaka Nakamura. It was clearly made in an Anagama kiln and I was electrified by its enormous power. After everyone had a close look it went back into the box and was taken out of the room again. More tea was served and then we said goodbye. In the car I asked Mr. Suhr how this would now benefit my need to find a master. Mr. Suhr sucked in air through his teeth and said that one now has to wait two, better three days. Then he would call the gallery owner and explain that I was overwhelmed and deeply moved by Mr. Nakamura's ceramic and that it was my greatest wish to meet the Master himself. If everything went well it would then take another couple of days until Mr. Nakamura would set up an appointment. One week later I was on a train to Echizen.

CP: How was the first encounter?

JK: When Mr. Nakamura saw me for the first time he had to laugh, and I had to laugh. For me there was no doubt that he was my master. It was somehow 'studentship' at first sight.

CP: But it took a while to convince him of this?

JK: We started off with having a conversation in Japanese. However, my language skills were not sufficient at all, so Mr. Nakamura called a friend who spoke English and could translate for us. Mr. Nakamura explained that there was a shared workshop in the village where I could rent one of the spaces and do my work. He would come once a week and correct my work. I then summoned all of my strength and told him that this was an incredibly generous offer; however, if there was the possibility of being personally instructed by Mr. Nakamura, it would be my greatest desire to be at the Master's side and observe and study all his doings while helping him as much as possible. As a response to my proposal, Mr. Nakamura was laughing and I knew that I passed the first test. At the end of our conversation, he asked for two weeks of time to think about the situation because taking a student would be a great transition for him and his work. After ten days Mr. Nakamura called and

explained that he could not take me as a student because my Japanese was not good enough and that it would not make sense if I could not understand him.

CP: But you didn't just accept the "No"?

JK: In the meantime, I had visited a "Swiss-Japanese" potter couple, Regina and Shunichi Maekawa, who had a small studio apartment in Tokyo, which they offered me for the next four weeks. Here I went through my Japanese course once more and went to Mr. Nakamura again.

CP: ...who was very impressed by your discipline and the resulting increase of your language skills?

JK: Well, ultimately the word "dog-food" gave the impulse. Mr. Nakamura explained to me that he now had to go and buy "Inu no esa". I remembered this word and answered, "of course the dog likes to be fed well", which Mr. Nakamura answered by smiling and saying that indeed my Japanese was much better already. However, he continued, there were more problems. In order to get a residence visa I needed a bailsman. He would not be able to do this and he also didn't know anybody who could.

CP: It appears as though he was not unhappy that the Japanese residence and visa law offered a great excuse to not take you as a student.

JK: Somehow all this trouble was a multi-layered examination on both sides. Fortunately I was not aware in what a highly delicate situation I would bring a bailsman, who would not only be liable with his private capital, but also with his reputation, which in Japan is much more important. After a long-lasting back and forth communication and written pledges from my father to the bailsman in Japan, I found a professor for German history in Kobe, who agreed to vouch for me. With this great news I drove to Mr. Nakamura.

CP: And how did he react?

JK: He said that he had to prepare a big exhibition at the moment and during this time did not want to be disturbed in his workshop. I had to wait another three weeks.

CP: Did you have to start all over when you became his student, or did he accept that you already had some of the skills?

JK: I showed Mr. Nakamura some of my former pieces. However, when I showed up to his workshop he realized that in Germany I didn't learn how to prepare clay. There is a special kneading technique called Kikumomi that allows the clay to have an optimal mix – no more air within the mass causes a parallel orientation of the clay particles, which leads to better plasticity characteristics. For the first four weeks all I did was knead clay from dusk to dawn. The blocks were about 16 pounds each. In the meantime, it was July, and 90° F in the shade and 100% humidity. Once in a while Mr. Nakamura had me cut the clay blocks in the middle and showed me how they still had air holes in them and explained that I did not master my task yet. Oftentimes he said, "Please have a break"; however, I realized that this did not mean to sit down and relax, but it was meant to make me work because I wanted to work.

CP: In Western countries the apprentice would have brought in a doctor's note after a couple of days that prohibited the kneading because of back problems.

JK: Nothing in this apprenticeship was comparable to Germany. But I came to Japan to learn a different approach. It would have been very stupid to immediately complain. I also saw the air holes in the clay and knew that I hadn't learned yet.

CP: Did you mostly learn such easy procedures or did Mr. Nakamura also give you specific knowledge?

JK: I was always allowed to pause my work and observe him and look at what he was doing, even if I was supposed to do something else. He also sat down for half days to show me how to carve wooden

tools. This resulted in my feeling obligated in helping him out as much as possible in order to make up for his 'lost' time. However, my abilities to do so were quite limited, so I ended up getting him cigarettes and switching the tires of his car.

CP: Were there other jobs of this kind that related more to what you knew from other workshops?

JK: Well even with those I'm not sure if he actually perceived them as helpful. Mr. Nakamura worked well into the night and then would just leave everything the way it was and came back the next day. Therefore, in the mornings I cleaned his tools and organized them because this is a traditional task of the student. Still I always felt like he did not really like that.

CP: Which he could have just said.

JK: After he decided to be my Sensei (the teacher), he just had to deal with his student cleaning and organizing his space, whether he liked it or not.

CP: How did you proceed after mastering the clay kneading?

JK: My first task was to make teacups. I thought, "Great, I'm good at that". He gave me one of his cups and asked me to copy it, which worked quite well. Mr. Nakamura observed me and was silent. Finally he said, "Yes. This is how you could do it as well". Then he explained to me that I came all this long way and that it was my wish to be his student, he suggests that I make the cups the way he does.

CP: Was your self-reflection wrong or did you just have different criteria as to how a pot must look like?

JK: In Germany I learned how to make a cup so that it looks good on the outside. In Japan, the aesthetic ideal is inversely formed: A cup has to look nice especially on the inside. If one looks inside, it should be as though one looks into a deep well or the feeling of a church bell's reverberation. It took two months until I was able to use the different and new tools and techniques to make cups of similar size. I made these cups and waited for Mr. Nakamura to show a sign of appreciation or valuation, which he did not give.

CP: However, he also didn't explain what you were doing wrong?

JK: In a traditional apprenticeship one would have left the student entirely alone with his questions – just like a Zen student with his "Koan". The Master would have waited until the student got to the point of either figuring it out – even if it took a year and 1,000 cups – or until he would have resigned and left the workshop. Mr. Nakamura was too impatient to do so, and thus one day he told me to take one of his cups and one of my cups and asked me if I recognized any differences. So, I took my cup, turned it around and around and realized that somehow his cup came toward me. It was a very pleasant feeling to take this cup up and move it toward my face. When Mr. Nakamura realized that I understood the difference he explained the reason for my feelings: "In the moment when we want to take the cup, our subconscious estimates the weight of the cup and tells our muscles how much force they'll have to set free. Now there are three possibilities: Either the cup is exactly as heavy as our subconscious estimated (which is the case for cups made industrially) or the cup is heavier than expected, which means you must really love the cup to continuously use it because life already presents us with enough heavy challenges and picking up a cup should not be an extra burden. Or, the cup is just a little bit lighter than expected, which makes it appear as though it comes toward us and presents us with less of a burden. This is the feeling a cup should transmit when it is lifted."

CP: That makes sense. However, since the estimation of the weight happens subconsciously, one has to outsmart the conscious.

JK: Exactly. My cups were perfectly symmetrical and were all equally as thick, just how I learned in Germany. Mr. Nakamura saved some of the weight at specific places of the cup. However, this place

must be invisible otherwise the effect that made Mr. Nakamura's cups special would not have occurred. But it was also not irrelevant where this space was. If the wrong place is chosen for the weight reduction one would feel it when moving the cup in the hands; for example when washing them. I had to figure out myself where the right place for the weight reduction would be. Finally I was working on these cups for nine months. Then Mr. Nakamura told me that it made no sense for me to continue making cups. I was in shock. Then he asked me if I knew the word "Funiki"? "It means atmosphere," I responded. "Exactly," he said. He explained that the atmosphere of my cups was very different from his. I had a very distinctive handwriting, which might be of use later when I wanted to make a living of my work. However, for him it was of no use because he couldn't sell the cups I made as "Nakamura cups".

CP: And what happened to all the cups you made?

JK: I think he must have recycled them on Sundays when I had my day off.

CP: This was not only fifty or one hundred.

JK: It must have been several thousand.

CP: Was there a moment of despair when you realized all of that? Something like, "How dare he treat my work like that? Who is he to determine that he is right and I was wrong?"

JK: Maybe I already knew how to handle my feelings in a Japanese fashion, or it is just not part of my natural character. I was never angry or mad about what he did. It was rather that I was sad to not be able to please him.

CP: How did Horst Kerstan handle the things his students produced?

JK: In Mr. Kerstan's workshop we were trained until we were able to produce the next product. At the beginning it was teacups or rice bowls and later little vases. Generally anything the students made was sold. If it was a little crooked or dented, it was sold as a "student's cup" and really bad things just got a thick glazing.

CP: This is a very different approach indeed. However it fits to the general lack of respect that many craftsmen have for their craft.

JK: Which is why it was impossible for me to understand that Mr. Nakamura just got rid of all the things I made. I'm sure there would have been salespeople that would have sold the things without having them carry Mr. Nakamura's sign. The fact that he had the discipline to reject the potential income has been a very poignant experience for me.

CP: I can imagine that these frustrating experiences must have caused, let's say, emotional turmoil. What was the release for those emotions, if not anger?

JK: One of Mr. Nakamura's favorite methods for relieving any sort of emotional struggles was weeding. During my time there I weeded his entire property multiple times. There were no more weeds left when I was done. One time, when I enthusiastically went back to work, he looked at me with his weeding face. When I explained that around the house and the driveway there were practically no weeds left, he smiled and said, "Have a look behind the kiln, I'm sure you'll find something there".

CP: This sounds more like an extra trigger for causing a burst of anger.

JK: Even if I was likely to explode, I respected Mr. Nakamura too much to do so. And after a while I got used to the procedure: First one plucks the weeds with an inner anger that shouts, "I did not come to Japan to weed". After a while the anger dissolves slowly and finally one reaches a state in which all you do is weed. Whenever I reached this state he would call me back inside and made me work on

vases. It took years for me to realize that the point of all of this was not the weeding at all. It was all about taking out any emotions of the work.

CP: In Western countries it is a common cliché that artists let their emotions guide them. What you describe is an entirely different approach. You have to forget any positive or negative emotions before you start. Did Mr. Nakamura ever explain his teaching methods to you?

JK: One of the reasons why the Japanese apprenticeship takes so much longer than the Germany one is due to the approach of letting the student figure everything out himself. You are not told to do this or that first, but you are shown how for example a cup should be made and then the student is left alone to get acquainted with techniques and material. At some point he understands the specific techniques or the inner framework of specific forms. And when he finds this out himself he will never forget it again. For the basic apprenticeship in Japan, it takes about seven years, and one assumes that it will take about twelve years until the art has a specific authenticity.

CP: After the cups, were you sent on a month-long journey again to do other forms?

JK: After the cup phase Mr. Nakamura changed the teaching method. He said I understood something essential during that phase and in my life as a potter it would be of great value for my approach to make other pots. Now he wanted to teach me the most important elements of other forms – technical aspects and design elements – so I had knowledge that I could take home with me. The apprenticeship ended after two years when he told me that I knew enough to teach myself the rest.

CP: How many times did you help firing the Anagama kiln during that time?

JK: I think I participated in seven firings.

CP: Is that enough to fire a kiln like that on your own?

JK: At the end of the time with Mr. Nakamura I developed a friendship with Kazu Yamada, who invited me to participate in one of the firings of his kiln.

CP: Teacher-student relationships are marked by a certain exclusivity? Did this not result in conflicts?

JK: Indeed. Mr. Nakamura told me at the beginning that I was not allowed to be in touch with other potters in the village during my time with him.

CP: That sounds even stricter than I expected.

JK: This must be related to the fact that a personal student does not only get initiated to technical knowledge and becomes a secret carrier, but is also taken into the master's family like a son. I think one wants to prevent that a frustrated student sits in a neighbor's workshop and complains about the master and his family and reveals any secrets or private information.

CP: How was it possible to be in touch with Kazu Yamada under such circumstances?

JK: My partner at the time, who came with me to Japan, worked as a Waldorf teacher. She gave a lecture in the province's capital Fukui, which Kazu Yamada's wife visited because she was interested in Rudolf Steiner. There the two women started talking and we were invited to dinner at Yamada's house. Of course Mr. Nakamura was very upset about this, and it took me two days to get the permission to go.

CP: Under the precondition that there would not be conversation about ceramics?

JK: Mr. Nakamura explained that I was stepping on very thin ice by accepting Mr. Yamada's invitation.

CP: Did you know any of Kazu Yamada's work before you went to Japan?

JK: I knew and admired works by Tokuro Kato, one of the most influential Japanese potters of the 20th century. He was not only famous for his works, but also because of his archaeological and technological research.

CP: Kazu Yamada was basically Tokuro Kato's last personal student.

JK: In Europe you would probably say "Masters student". When Kazu Yamada finished his apprenticeship Tokuro Kato once came to visit his first exhibition. He liked Kazu's works and invited him to come and fire Shino with him. Shortly after that, the young Kazu traveled to the famous Master, who exchanged works with Picasso and Miro. Tokuro Kato gave him a lot of advice and revealed some of his secrets to him. Finally, he was also accepted by Kato's family as the person who would continue Kato's work most genuinely.

CP: So you, the Nakamura student, once sat together with Yamada and you talked about Tokuro Kato, which was actually prohibited. What was next?

JK: At some point it just so happened that there was a German delegation visiting Echizen. Among the visitors was also a potter from Bochum. Kazu Yamada was kind of obligated to take a tour with this potter and show him exceptional workshops in central Japan. Because the Germans did not speak any Japanese and Kazu himself was too lazy to do the tour in English, Mrs. Yamada had the idea to borrow me from Mr. Nakamura as a translator. Since the entire thing was very official he could not really say no.

CP: For you this was the chance of a lifetime to see all these workshops and be with one of the most famous potters.

JK: It was also really amazing because during the trip Kazu Yamada seemed to find me trustworthy.

CP: Why was that important for you?

JK: Well, I can really only reconstruct this from my memory. At the time, I had no idea what was going on and it took years to fully understand the story. The background was like this: During his entire life, Tokuro Kato was researching the cultural and historic roots of his work. This did not only involve Japanese philosophy, paintings and literature, but also European art history. He saw everything in a global context. As a result, he decided to give the Japanese tradition of wood-fired kilns to Europe, as a sort of cultural impulse. Several reasons led him to decide that Germany was the right place to do so. However, during his lifetime this was not possible anymore. Kazu Yamada, the student and carrier of his tradition, must have seen an actual possibility to follow through with his master's plan.

CP: What you're saying is that his interest in you was not only a sympathy thing, but you were chosen for the realization of an obligation that was part of Tokuro Kato's "spiritual" inheritance?

JK: At least this must have been a determining factor for Kazu Yamada's engagement. He and his wife must have decided to have a closer look at this Jan-San...

CP: ...because he might have been chosen by the cosmic framework of "Dharma", to realize Tokuro Kato's plans?...

JK: Something like that. The trip was then kind of a try-out for me. Thereafter I was regularly invited to the Yamadas' home, even though the Nakamuras' did not like that at all. Two or three months before the end of my apprenticeship the Yamadas asked me what I planned to do when I went back to Germany. I explained that I wanted to have my own woodshop and an Anagama kiln. Kazu explained in all friendship that he would not believe that I would be able to actually build a kiln. I agreed with him; however, I also explained that there was just no other option for me to get an Anagama kiln.

Taking a deep breath, he said that there was an old kiln builder, Mr. Watanabe, who built his kiln, his father's kiln and Tokuro Kato's kiln. Maybe it would be possible to invite him to Germany to build a kiln there.

CP: That sounds like you actually impressed Kazu during your trip.

JK: First of all, I was shocked thinking, "Who on earth is going to pay for this?" My savings were all gone, but I also figured that it was hugely impolite to say that it would not be possible to accept a kiln by Mr Watanabe simply because I did not have the money. So I decided to give a very unspecific, very Japanese answer and said: "Yes, if that was possible ... well that would be...just very...". Apparently this was the right answer because the Yamadas immediately started negotiations with Mr. Watanabe. Mr. Watanabe was 70 years old and was looking forward to finally settling down. However, Kazu was able to sell him the concept of building a kiln in Germany as the final climax of his career. Mr. Watanabe liked the thought and agreed to come to Germany.

CP: Did Mr. Nakamura know any of this?

JK: No, this was all secret including the fact that I planned to fire the Kazu's kiln so that I would know how to fire an Iga kiln before having Watanabe build one for me. Without giving a reason, I asked Mr. Nakamura if I could leave two weeks early so that Kazu's firing would happen while I was no longer Nakamura's student. However, the Yamadas said that it was imperative to ask Nakamura, who promptly responded that he had planned an exhibition for me, which is why it was impossible for me to leave early. The Yamadas said that I would have to accept that, but I could always stop by early in the morning and late at night. Somehow, I spent hours at the kiln and was stunned. I was impressed by every aspect of this kiln: its power as well as the ability to regulate it.

CP: And then you went back to Germany with the promise of having a kiln builder from Japan to come and build an Anagama for you?

JK: That was in the autumn of 1987. The Yamadas said I should look for a place in Germany where the kiln could be built. They agreed with Watanabe that he would accompany them to Germany in the next summer to build the kiln for Jan-San.

CP: It takes a lot of mutual trust to shoulder all of these investments and fulfill the preconditions.

JK: I had no doubt that I could count on the Yamadas' word. However, it was very difficult to find a property on which the kiln would be built. For a while I searched in the Black Forest area and at the Bodensee, and then decided to go north to Schleswig-Holstein where the houses were much cheaper. Then I found the former pastor's home, which was ideal because of its proximity to the monastery and the connections to the regional museums.

CP: And in the following summer Mr. Watanabe and the Yamada family knocked on your door?

JK: In July 1988, the Yamadas arrived with their two sons, eight and ten years old at the time, Mr. Watanabe, and Shimakawa-San, an art student who sometimes helped in Yamada's workshop. In Cismar everything was prepared for the construction of the kiln. We discussed over the phone what stones and mortar I would have to buy and I found the right stone in the area and bought all the necessary materials.

CP: Do place and potter matter for the construction of such a kiln? Is it built from the dialogue between potter and kiln builder, or is there a standard model?

JK: Every kiln is built for one potter. One time I heard Watanabe asking Kazu what kind of kiln he should build for me – a difficult or an easy one. Without pause Kazu replied, "A difficult one!" That shocked me.

CP: Did you know what they meant by "difficult kiln"? I'm sure it has nothing to do with harassing

you, but with such a model you just achieve other results.

JK: If a kiln builder thinks a potter is led by his emotions or is merely a simpleton, he will build a forgiving kiln, which prevents steep temperature increases that cause the bursting of the pots if the potter is not careful. These kilns exert their power slowly and are therefore gentle on the pots and thus they also won't produce spectacular colors and shapes. However, the kiln builder can also adjust the openings for air inflow and outflow, the chimney and other things in a way that the kiln will develop a tremendous potential. At the same time the risk to destroy the products by making mistakes is much higher.

CP: How did Mr. Watanabe actually build your kiln?

JK: He walked up and down the place where the kiln would be situated and put the stones in the sand. This is how he designed the foundations of the kiln. Then he looked at it for a while and mumbled around, thought about everything, made it a little smaller, had another look and finally put up his finger and nodded. He found the basic outline for the kiln. For the actual construction he was in Cismar for about four weeks.

CP: What did you do during that time?

JK: I mixed mortar, carried stones, split stones – everything that Shimakawa-San was doing. Mr. Watanabe had constructed the difficult things and Kazu the simple ones.

CP: Then the kiln was done and just standing there.

JK: Mr. Watanabe signed the kiln and three days later he was back on a plane to Japan. The Yamadas stayed for another three weeks. We traveled through Germany and looked at clay pits to look for clay that would suit the kiln. We took samples, which Kazu took with him to Japan and investigated for their suitability in his own kiln. Three months later he called me and said, "Number this and that seems to be perfectly suited." Therefore I bought the clay from the pit the respective sample was from and started preparing it in the old Japanese tradition.

CP: This was the working cycle for your very first firing?

JK: Kazu told me to burn the kiln prior to the first frost to about 800-900 ° C in order for the mortar and stones to be really dry. This was a very special experience because I fired the kiln alone for the very first time

CP: How does the cycle that ends in the firing of the kiln look like?

JK: The working cycle is about seven months: For the first four weeks I prepare the wood. Every couple years I buy a truckload of trees, mostly pine. The trees have to be cut with the chainsaw and then stored. After the firing, when there is space under the roof that sits overtop of the kiln, the space is filled up with chopped wood. This takes about four weeks and then the next four weeks are for the preparation of the clay.

CP: You value this preparation work much higher than it is commonly done in Germany. What exactly do you do?

JK: In Germany clay is usually ground, sieved and dried industrially. It then is packed in sealed plastic bags and distributed as a wet and production ready mass or as powder. Getting the mining site to deliver the clay to me in a non-processed way was quite a hustle; however, it was necessary because with industrially refined clay the production of Shigaraki- or Iga-ceramics is not possible. Only when the minerals and small particles are allowed to keep their natural state can the ceramics unfold their true vividness. I receive the clay in big chunks, which I fill in paper bags for the drying. When the clay is dry I smash it with a hammer and then dissolve it in water. The clay sludge is then sieved with a different mesh-sized sieve, which allows a separation of the clay to produce e.g. rice bowls with finer

clay or vases from more coarse clay. The water then evaporates until the clay has the right saturation level for the production. I make seven different kinds of clay that are each for different places in the kiln. Finally the actual production of the ceramics starts.

CP: The different production phases are carried out strictly one after another. Theoretically, one could imagine that you chop wood or sift clay in the mornings and then make bowls or pots in the afternoon...Simply to have some diversification of your activities.

JK: The different phases and steps require different kinds of concentration. I have to approach every activity differently. Even the production processes are sub-divided: First I take four weeks to build the big Tsubos, while also building smaller vases that require a similar technique. When the built ceramics are done I start working on the potter's wheel and start with rice bowls. It takes about three months until I have enough pots to fire the kiln twice.

CP: Which is needed so you can choose the best works prior to the firing?

JK: Exactly. I pay special attention to the bigger pieces and take time to decide which ones will go into the kiln. Some pots will stay several years in my workshop until I decide whether they will be fired or recycled.

CP: The arrangement of the pots in the kiln is much more complicated than one could imagine. It is basically a three-dimensional puzzle with incalculable variables that are very important for the result.

JK: Well, firstly I have to really use the limited space in the most efficient way, because I fire the kiln only once or twice a year. To do so, I build shelves from fire-resistant stones and plates. I then try to arrange the ceramics in a way that every individual pot will get its specific optimal colors and patterns. Color and characteristics are not given to the pots by a glazing, but by the melting of the mineral substances inherent to the wood that the kiln is fired with. By choosing the specific place for a pot in the kiln, the potter can greatly influence how flames and flying ash will affect the pots. Additionally the potter uses the arrangement of the pots to determine how the hot air flow will develop turbulences in the kiln, which affect the course of the flying ash. By placing the pots in front of each other, you can, for example, create shadowing effects. There is a variety of possibilities to influence the kiln and the outcome of the firing.

CP: However there remains the great share of the incalculable?

JK: Yes.

CP:...which depends basically on what?

JK: There are many factors involved: The clay is always a little different. The wood has different properties when it is dried, where some chops have a higher moisture content than others, and different shares of sap. Another important factor is the humidity of the environment. The higher the level of humidity, the stronger the colors will be. The wind is important, and the waxing or waning of the moon is also recognizable on the pots later. The individual factors occur in different interactions with each other and are not mutually exclusive.

CP: What are the most dangerous situations that would lead to the partial or complete destruction of the products?

JK: A fast rise in temperature causes the pots to rip. I can offer those pieces as objects; however this is not my intention. If the aimed temperatures are not reached, the pots will be porous and won't keep water inside. Finally, if the temperature is too high, the pots will develop bubbles and then collapse and melt.

CK: Did anything like that ever happen?

JK: At the very first firing the plates from which I built the shelves had a construction failure and when we reached 900° – 1100° C, everything collapsed and after two days and we had a huge pile of broken pottery. Kazu Yamada decided that we would still finish the firing to have some specimens of the firing.

CP: What did it look like when everything was cool?

JK: Some really impressive pieces. Kazu said that sometimes one gets incredible pieces from these catastrophes.

CP: How do you experience these four and a half days during the firing of the kiln?

JK: Exactly four days.

CP: Which is actually rather short for an Anagama kiln, right?

JK: The specific quality of the Iga-pieces comes from the very fast and powerful firing. There are Anagamas that are fired in two days. They work differently from Bizen kilns, which are fired for several days between 1200° C and 1250° C degrees, hoping that the pots will be waterproof at some point, which can take weeks.

CP: Can you describe any of the inner states of mind that you go through during the firing?

JK: Basically, every firing is a process that I start and accompany, but something that I don't have control over it. To start such a big fire also means to be in danger. You unleash an elemental force that is incredibly powerful. I get some of the required confidence from doing everything as I learned it in Japan. It is very important to stay wide-awake and keep a sharp mind and a level and awareness that cause full physical exhaustion. Similarly one has to make sure not to be carried away by either euphoric emotions or depressing phases. One should always fully trust the kiln and be prepared to handle any situation calmly. On the one hand you can't force anything, on the other hand it is important to be readily available to use all senses to develop a feeling for the processes that are happening inside the kiln. Ideally one behaves in a way that does not disturb the ongoing processes.

CP: Are you concerned about specific pieces that you really care about?

JK: When I close the kiln it is always a sort of goodbye. In the very moment I realize that a third of the pieces will break during the firing. The pieces that come out of the kiln gained a lot of independence from me and have so much character that I sometimes can't believe that I actually made them.

CP: The ceramics you make are oftentimes pots for the tea ceremony. What importance does the interaction of the tea ceremony and Zen have for your work?

JK: In Kerstan's workshop the books of Daisetz T. Suzuki were exchanged among the students. During the 20th century he made the concept of Zen available for Western readers. There was a vivid but rather intellectual interest for these topics. As opposed to the common acceptance of the practice in Japan, there was a lot of exchange and talk about it here in Germany. Mr. Nakamura, for example, never talked about the influence Zen had on his live and work. However the world of tea ceremonies, specifically the theoretical framework, oftentimes influenced his work. The tea masters of the 16th century demanded that the pots they used support the process of inner self-reflection – the very purpose for which the tea ceremony was held. The ceramics had to be unpretentious and could not impress by outward expressionist glow or costly materials. At the same time, they had to express emptiness so that they would reflect the inner state of the participants of the tea ceremony.

CP: If I get it right, the characteristics can't really be fathomed and their true existence is only recognizable by a highly trained observer.

JK: When Mr. Nakamura explained to me that the most important part of a pot is its appearance I was

shocked. I thought it was difficult enough to produce a pot that fulfilled the regular requirements and had no idea how to equip a pot with a specific appearance. When he realized my helplessness, he smiled and said he would tell me these things, even if I did not understand them yet. He told me to remember them without understanding them. At a later point in time I would remember and understand...

CP: Finally it always ends in the 'end of the self control'?

JK: When making tea ceramics, the greatest enemy is the good will. The second largest enemy is the wish to do something amazing. The more I am able to take myself, my ego, my emotions out of the work, the more the room is left empty.

CP: You did not only practice "Zen in the art of making a cup", but also practiced "Zazen" – sitting.

JK: When I decided to make this kind of pottery, I also decided to understand its roots.

CP: Did your work change through practicing Zazen?

JK: Well I firstly realized that the Zen-praxis has hardly anything to do with the theories. I was confronted with my thoughts and emotions in a completely different way. At some point I was able to put down all my feelings, emotions and attachments. As a result I was able to experience that I exist beyond my thoughts and feelings. This experience influenced my work tremendously. Most importantly I was more confident in letting the unknown and uncontrollable become reality in my pots. Furthermore, Zazen helps me reach a certain neutrality that is necessary to make tea ceramics.

CP: For twenty years you have been making Japanese ceramics. Just two years ago you started making chawan, the central piece of tea ceramics. Why did you wait so long?

JK: When I started making ceramics the tea-bowl impressed me the most. Then I saw Mr. Kerstan make tea bowls in the Japanese fashion, which were then bought by older ladies who put little plants into them. This taught me to be really careful when it came to tea bowls. In Japan I got an impression about the complex requirements of tea bowls. I listened to stories by Kazu Yamada, who drove to Tokuro Kato in order to receive the criticism that brought him closer to mastering this piece. I then thought about where I would go to receive this kind of criticism because Cismar is simply too far away from Japan.

CP: Were there also traditional reasons to wait that long?

JK: In Japan it is customary that a potter must reach the age of fifty to be mature enough to make tea bowls. It is assumed that a young spirit and the concept of inner self-reflection do not go well together. When you're young, you have the desire to establish your presence in the world. For a good tea bowl you have to sit back and take yourself out of the equation. After I made rice bowls for many years I recently started making bowls that can actually be used for tea ceremonies. These are all small steps on a long journey; however, I am slowly beginning to feel calm and aware enough to start it.