



A Room with Six Floating Pots and Message Bottles
Kazunori Hamana and Yoichi Umetsu

Saturday, December 4, 2021 - Saturday, February 19, 2022

Sokyo Annex

SSS Building 3F, 357 Ichinofunairi-cho, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-0924 JAPAN

Tuesday – Saturday 1:00 pm – 6:30pm



Press Release

Sokyo Gallery is proud to present *A Room with Six Floating Pots and Message Bottles*, a collaborative exhibition by Kazunori Hamana and Yoichi Umetsu. There is little evident overlap in the works of Hamana and Umetsu. Rather, the connection might be described in terms of their attitudes and positions. The collaboration began with Hamana providing work, and Umetsu then preparing a situation in which the artworks themselves could engage in a dialogue — but not an “installation” or “curation” per se, which would have added external context.

In contemporary art today, “art” and “craft” are often described as being in a process of eroding boundaries, generating ambiguities, and nurturing affinities. Exhibitions proclaim “diversity” and “cross-border” creation, but is it too much to say that most such framings are just superficial marketing to expedite more work to art markets? *A Room with Six Floating Pots and Message Bottles* is not an exploration of essentialism, nor an attempt to self-orient via paeans to tradition or innovation. Rather, it is an attempt to create an environment for listening to resonances between eco-systems and codes of value shared by two creators, Kazunori Hamana and Yoichi Umetsu. The exhibition is not contemporary art, or craft, but rather “creation” in a broad sense, and “trust relationships”.

Hamana studied in the United States. First he ran a sneaker shop, then a restaurant. For a time he was a fisherman, then he created his own anchovy brand, then farmed the land. He describes the common thread binding each of these seemingly random undertakings as “a longing, since childhood, to live in nature, and remain self-sufficient”. He imagined a pottery that didn't yet exist, so he studied, and practiced, until he could produce it. He lives and works in Isumi city, a beach town in the Bōsō Peninsula, southeast of Tokyo. Each phase of his life, and each pot from his kiln, is created from the same instincts. Hamana's success is in retaining a near self-sufficient autonomy, with nature always central, free of distractions such as markets or trends. Hamana is passionate about things which can stand the test of time. He bought an early 19th century Japanese home, and other old abandoned traditional buildings. He has been stripping their modern renovations and returning them to their traditional forms, resuscitating them as spaces for different aspects of his production. He says he eventually hopes to have enough spaces to invite other artists to use them too. Hamana has always pursued his personal interests. This increasingly includes giving back to the local community. Hamana's new challenge is to rethink “community” in a broad sense of the word.

Umetsu debuted with a series of self-portraits, reflecting artworks from early modern Japanese



yōga (or Western-style) paintings such as Raphaël Collin's *Floréal* and Seiki Kuroda's *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment*. Through these works Umetsu posed a critique of indigenous Japanese expression vs. global art norms, echoing Noriaki Kitazawa's *From Temple of the Eye - Notes on the Reception of Fine Art* (1989) and Noi Sawaragi's *Japan, Modernity, and Art* (1998). Literate and prolific, Umetsu's practice extends from spontaneous subconscious and dream-state drawings, to video self-portrait nudes, to ceramics and others, all while running the non-profit Parplume Gallery and Preparatory School, and being active as an art critic and curator -- an incredible range and volume of activity for one human being. This exhibition introduces recent work including improvisational ceramics which, at the same time, serves as a critique of the post-war avant-garde ceramist group Soudeisha (1948-1998). His investigations of characteristic Japanese glazes suggest a hint of Mingei, but always in his own distinctive language. In this exhibition, he is presenting the *Message Bottles* series of ready-made glass bottles in ceramic, as well as ceramic slabs co-produced with Otsuka Ohmi Ceramics Co., Ltd., and a large drawing. For this exhibition he modified the gallery floor, walls, and its fixtures. Just as Van Gogh once invited Gauguin to the Yellow House, here Umetsu invites Hamana into a liminal space generated about their work.

As stated in the beginning, this exhibition presents two artists with completely different origins and paths, who developed an interest in each other's practices. Hamana says he watches Parplume TV, a YouTube channel Umetsu runs. Umetsu describes Hamana's works as "Not technique driven. Rather; apparently rustic and simple, but with compelling depth." Both create their own DIY environments and communities. In that sense, we can call each "pioneers" producing in long timeframes.

Umetsu's solo show, *Pollinator*, currently on view at the Watarium Museum of Contemporary Art, is a reference to Umetsu's stance of artists as vehicles for initiating pollination. This exhibition is like a pollination from the *Pollinator* exhibition, the seeds converting the venue itself into art, in both spatial and spiritual senses. Let's see how the pollen dances between Hamana, Umetsu, and ourselves.

Lucky us! Such opportunities are rarely found, not just in art, but in the present day.

Pots were one of the first tools created by humans in ancient times. They were used to carry or store food and water, as well as to cook food over a fire. Now, in the 21st century, the role played by these pots has been replaced by uniform and easy-to-use industrial products made from



plastic, glass, and metal. In this way, our daily lives have become more convenient, but is this synonymous with living a convenient life? This skepticism is expressed in the form of the objects I create, which are oversized pots that are not suited to storing things. Are pots really a tool of the past, and if so, does that make them unnecessary? What is really necessary or unnecessary for us as human beings in the first place? Let's think about that together, while gazing at the world's most useless-looking pots. I am also looking forward to witnessing the chemistry between my pots and the work of Yoichi Umetsu, who has also begun to create ceramic works that seem to have no use.

Kazunori Hamana

Kazunori Hamana was born in 1969 in Osaka, Japan. He is currently based in Isumi, Chiba, Japan. After graduated from an agricultural high school in 1988, he studied in San Diego, California, U.S.A.. After returning to Japan, he ran a sneaker store and restaurant in Tokyo. Currently, he grows rice naturally, produces and sells anchovy sauce, and makes pottery.

His main solo exhibitions include *Kazunori Hamana in collaboration with Yukiko Kuroda*, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A. (2021); Pierre Marie Giraud, Brussels, Belgium (2020); Curator's Cube, Tokyo, Japan (2018 and 2020); Blue Mountain School, London, UK (2019); *Vessels and Sea-Drift*, Hidari Zingaro, Tokyo, Japan (2014), and more.

His recent group exhibitions include *White*, Sokyō Annex, Kyoto, Japan (2021); *Kazunori Hamana, Ooido Shoujyou*, Blum and Poe, Tokyo, Japan (2021); *Mingei Now*, Sokyō Gallery, Kyoto, Japan (2019); *Kazunori Hamana, Yuji Ueda, Otani Workshop*, curated by Takashi Murakami, Blum and Poe, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A. (2015), and more.

Yoichi Umetsu was born in 1982 in Yamagata, Japan. Yoichi Umetsu was born 1982 in Yamagata prefecture, Japan. He is a contemporary artist, and the head of the Parplume collective. He has a strong interest in the origins of modern art painting in Japan, and is sharply critical of the education provided at art college preparatory schools and the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Umetsu is active in a range of fields including creating video works that record paintings such as self-portraits and performance art; planning and curating exhibitions; writing opinion pieces and essays; and heading up the Parplume School that champions production and semi-collaborative living arrangements.

His main solo exhibitions include *Heisei Mood*, Sokyō Gallery, Kyoto, Japan (2021); *APMoA Project, ARCH vol.20 Yoichi Umetsu - floating pollen, with museum collections*, Exhibition room 6, Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya, Aichi, Japan (2017); *From Lamb to Mutton*, ARATANIURANO, NADiff Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (2015); *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment – A*,



ARATANIURANO, Tokyo, Japan (2014), and more.

His recent group exhibitions include *Approaches to Painting – reprise*, \sqrt{K} Contemporary, Tokyo, Japan (2021); *Bubbles/ Debris: Art of the Heisei Period 1989 - 2019*, Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art, Kyoto, Japan (2021); *Full-frontal- naked circulator*, curated by Yoichi Umetsu, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Main Store 6F, Tokyo, Japan (2020); *Weavers of Worlds - A Century of Flux in Japanese Modern/ Contemporary Art-*, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan (2019); *Go for Love Girl! - Parplume University and Design Image of Yoichi Umetsu*, Curated by Yoichi Umetsu, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan (2017), and more.

Currently his solo exhibition *Yoichi Umetsu / Polinator* is being held at The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan.

We would be very grateful if you could kindly consider this new innovative exhibition in your publication.

If you have any questions, please contact the following:

Press

Kumiko Motobayashi

motobayashi@gallery-sokyo.jp

info@gallery-sokyo.jp

Sokyo Gallery

381-2 Motomachi, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0089 Japan

www.gallery-sokyo.jp