

*July 30 – October 3, 2021*

# We Do Not Work Alone

Steven Brekelmans, Roy Caussy,  
John Charnetski, Kybor Dancer,  
Walter Dexter, Kay Dodd,  
Marty Gross/Mingei Film Archive,  
Hamada Shōji, Gordon Hutchens,  
Charmian Johnson, Kawai Kanjirō,  
Sam Kwan, Maria Martinez and  
Santana Martinez, Kate Metten,  
Wayne Ngan, Lari Robson,  
Akira Musho Tomita, Hiro Urakami,  
Laura Wee Láy Láy, and Gari Whelon

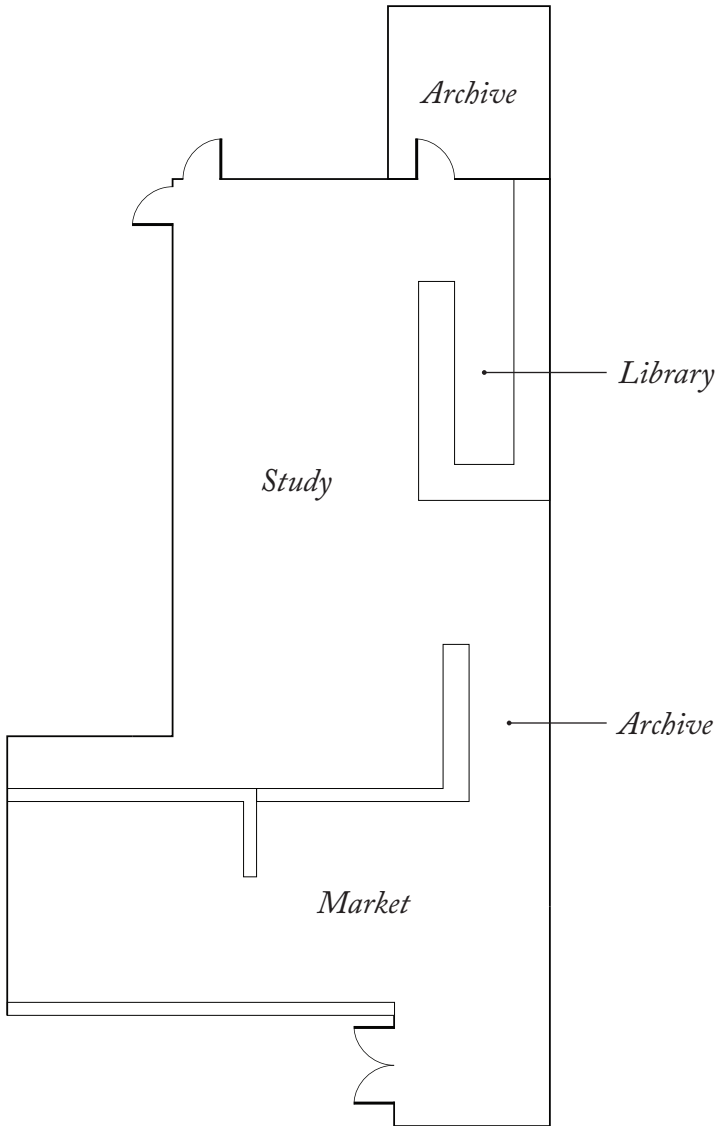


# *Introduction*

*We Do Not Work Alone* activates Nanaimo Art Gallery's collection of more than sixty-five ceramic works from BC through encounters with contemporary artists, craftspeople, and other cultural practitioners in an exhibition in three parts: The Archive, The Study, and The Library. The Archive features works by influential 20<sup>th</sup> century potters Kawai Kanjirō, Hamada Shōji, Maria and Santana Martinez, with films by Marty Gross/Mingei Film Archive. The Study, in the central part of the gallery, features new installations by artists Steven Brekelmans, Roy Caussy, Kate Metten, and Laura Wee Láy Láy. The Library is an interactive display of the Gallery's ceramic's collection.

The title comes from the writings of Japanese potter Kawai Kanjirō (1890–1966) who, along with fellow potter Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) and art critic Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961), founded the Mingei movement, which championed everyday folk crafts made by generations of unknown artisans. For Kawai “we do not work alone” refers to a potter’s collaboration with the elements, and with previous generations of artists. This exhibition both celebrates and flips this perspective, considering pots themselves as social objects that come to life through relationships with users and viewers.

Woodfired pots by Nanaimo's Tozan Society may be purchased from The Market table in the lobby, complementing the exhibition and extending the conversation around the roles of handmade pots, back into visitors' everyday lives.



# *The Archive*

*IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE MANY ROOTS, YOU MUST HAVE ONE TRUNK, THEN JUST SUN AND RAIN IS QUITE ENOUGH. —HAMADA SHŌJI*

The potters featured in this section (Kawai Kanjirō, Hamada Shōji, and Maria Martinez) were significant influences on many of the potters in Nanaimo Art Gallery's collection. They were also connected with each other at a time when international communication involved handwritten correspondence and travel.

Hamada Shōji from Mashiko, Japan and Maria Martinez met in 1952 when Hamada, along with British potter Bernard Leach and Japanese critic Yanagi Sōetsu, traveled to New Mexico. They arrived at Martinez's community of San Ildefonso Pueblo just in time to find Martinez pulling her stunning glossy black pots from a pile of ash after a firing. Shortly thereafter Martinez was able to observe Hamada throwing at a demonstration in the international craft museum in Santa Fe.

Martinez' work resonated so deeply with Hamada that he developed a motif, loosely inspired by the work he saw at the time of their visit, that he used for the rest of his working life. Hamada's cup, showcased here, features this design, which he also used to decorate vases, bowls and sake bottles. Hamada's vase is decorated with finger wipe impressions in a high iron tenmoku glaze that were inspired by finger wipes Hamada observed on

Korean pottery. Kawai Kanjirō's bottle is also inspired by Korean and Chinese forms.

Hamada, seen by many as the most significant potter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, drew from influences gleaned from around the world. He valued all interactions with global makers of craft and kept highly detailed sketchbooks of pots and other folk crafts. Translated through his body, life experiences, and the materials available to him, Hamada's influences became something shared, yet uniquely his. Hamada was a significant inspiration to many of the potters in the gallery's collection, yet he, himself, drew from a wide range of sources. Hamada's legacy highlights how extensively forms migrate and transform through the hands and minds of makers.

The Martinez family also mined tradition in their work. Inspired by archeological discoveries of black-on-black shards in the Pajarito Plateau region, they revived black-on-black pottery practices. The plate made by Maria and her daughter-in-law Santana Martinez that is featured in *We Do Not Work Alone* is decorated with a feather design. This motif was developed by Maria's husband Julian after he saw a photo of a Mimbres bowl from around 1000 CE with a similar pattern.

While Hamada shaped his influences into a unified vision, like the Martinez family, he did not work alone. In Marty Gross's film *Hamada Shōji*, 1970, we see Hamada working with his son Hamada

Shinsaku and an entire community of craftspeople to create the stunning works that bear his name. In our video screening room, Gross' celebrated 1976 film *Potters At Work*, which was filmed in the Japanese pottery villages of Onda and Koishibara, focuses on community collaboration, celebrating process over outcome.

While far removed from a pottery village, Kawai Kanjirō also worked with his community. He mentored and collaborated with family members, and operated a large multiple chamber noborigama climbing kiln, not dissimilar to the one operated by Nanaimo's Tozan Society, behind his house in the heart of Kyoto City. With the thousands of pots necessary to fill the kiln and the days it took to get the kiln to temperature, Kawai operated his Noborigama like a co-op with about 20 other local potters firing it alongside him.

While all of these potters worked in collaboration, drawing from influences across time and space, from a western individualist perspective they are often seen as solo masters. They did not work alone; each of them had a profound influence on generations of potters, including many of those represented in the Nanaimo Art Gallery collection.

# *The Library*

ANY WORK OF ART BELONGS TO EVERYONE, BECAUSE IT IS WHATEVER EACH PERSON SEES IN IT. —KAWAI KANJIRŌ

Museum collections are often compared to graveyards. Divorced from context and out of sight, artworks can lose the vitality that made them compelling in the first place. This critique is especially relevant to ceramic vessels. When they enter the care of a museum or art gallery, they are usually stripped of their original purposes. Vases are devoid of flowers, teapots remain dry, cups avoid lips, casserole dishes are never heated, and jars only contain air.

In *We Do Not Work Alone*, however, ceramics that have been donated to Nanaimo Art Gallery's collection are presented in an interactive "Library" where pots can be held, vases contain flowers, and tea is occasionally served. Pottery librarians from wide-ranging perspectives are on hand to share and discuss works by BC potters: John Charnetski, Kybor Dancer, Walter Dexter, Kay Dodd, Gordon Hutchens, Charmian Johnson, Sam Kwan, Wayne Ngan, Lari Robson, Akira Musho Tomita, Hiro Urakami, Laura Wee Láy Láy, and Gari Whelon. These pots do not work alone; they come to life if activated through use and discussion. Conversations between visitors, artworks, and pot librarians can bring new perspectives to light. If you would like to look closely at any of the pottery in Nanaimo Art Gallery's collection, please speak to a pot librarian.

Works featured in the Library section of the exhibition were donated by the estate of Diane Carr, John Charnetski, the estate of Charlie and Francis Christopherson, Anne and Murray Tolmie, and the Burnaby Art Gallery.



# *The Study*

WE HAVE TO FOLLOW THE THINGS THEMSELVES, FOR THEIR MEANINGS ARE INSCRIBED IN THEIR FORMS, THEIR USES, THEIR TRAJECTORIES.  
—ARJUN APPADURAI

This section features four contemporary artists whose works were developed in conversation with Nanaimo Art Gallery's ceramics collection. Through their dynamic approaches to ceramics, the artists complicate ideas of use and expand traditional understandings of the potential roles of pots in both galleries and homes.

*Steven Breklelmans'* works examine craftsmanship and value through the labour of play. As he says of his contribution to *We Do Not Work Alone*:

While I have created two new works for the show, they both are a response, perhaps not to specific pots in the Nanaimo Art Gallery collection, but instead to the potters themselves. And maybe more than that: the talent, skill, dedication and practice of those makers, and their distinct aesthetics from a specific time and place.

The four photographs titled *Throwing Castoffs* show the remains of collapsed pots, trimmed edges, and parts too thick or too thin, stacked up into new temporary forms that become their own unfired ceramic sculptures. The repetition of forms, warped and

compressed as they slump, foreground the process of making, and highlight the consequence of overextending the material possibilities of clay itself. I wanted to document the effort of reaching to make a form, and its failure, but also to reflect on sculptural qualities of ceramics outside of the realm of functional ware, of which the collection contains so much.

The group of fired stoneware vessels that are wrapped with cardboard and sit on stacks of wood and other found materials are titled *The Tallest Vessels*. The basic ceramic cylinders are thrown to the limit of my skill, strength and physical ability to fire. But I have chosen to add artificially to their bodies, trying to get beyond those limits, and striving for greater height. They are painted in monochrome, a technique I have used before in an effort to bring the disparate materials into a single unified object.

*Roy Caussy's* installation for *We Do Not Work Alone* features brightly coloured cast porcelain beer cans positioned atop a makeshift funerary pyre, which includes a beer case full of firewood. Many cultures use pyres to ceremoniously lay their dead to rest. For the last two years, Caussy has been working with the form of the pyre to point towards possibilities of cultural change. Within this series he has been examining twentieth century cultural norms of fatherhood and baby boomers. Dominant cultures formed in the twentieth century still inform how we live, even though, in many ways, we have moved beyond them. From outdated symbols of

masculinity to cultural inequality, it is difficult for people to change social practices that are outdated and harmful.

In pottery traditions fire has not only been essential to the process of vitrifying clay so that it can be used, it has also symbolically tied the potter to the elements. When Kawai Kanjirō said “we do not work alone” he was referring to this human relationship to the earth, air, fire, and water needed to make ceramic vessels. Caussy's work *Lucky Charms, aka: An Endless Land, A New World*, also refers to humanity's relationship to nature, but from a contemporary perspective. While the origin of the work is still from the earth, he works with highly processed and chemically refined porcelain, 3D prints his production moulds, and fires in an electric kiln. As he says, like the convenience of a microwave dinner, “this is as close to the elements as humanity gets these days.”

It might seem unusual to make beer cans out of refined porcelain, but Caussy doesn't see them as misaligned. He points out that while porcelain was once highly coveted and linked to the upper classes, today you can purchase a porcelain dinnerware set at Walmart for less than the cost of a case of beer. Porcelain has been associated with cleanliness and purity, but are we not past the myths associating white with pure? Like classical Greek sculptures that were colourfully painted upon their conception, later to be celebrated in their whiteness as refined cultural objects, this exaltation of purity is European culture fantasizing about itself.

Rather than covering white porcelain in pigmented glaze, Caussy indelibly pigments the body of the clay itself in a bright colour palette, painting flowers and other patterns associated with spring in clay on the insides of his moulds. Encouraging a seasonal shift, Caussy's work mirrors 21<sup>st</sup> century relationships with the elements, and sets the Western association of whiteness and purity on the pyre.

*Kate Metten* is an interdisciplinary artist who explores the languages and histories of abstraction. Metten also works as a production potter, and for *We Do Not Work Alone* she employs her skills as a craftsperson to create kinetic sculpture situated at the intersection of painting and ceramics. Her work nods to the folkcraft traditions that were embraced by many of the potters in our collection, while reflecting on the industrial forms and materials that surround us every day.

Her works consider how ceramic objects can carry traces of their origins as useful things into the gallery. Rather than situated on tables or plinths, these works are hung on walls to engage in a painterly vocabulary, but they can also be handled and allude to functions not usually associated with ceramics. As she states "Kinetic ceramic sculpture functions like a game for the viewer to engage with, and inverts the general assumption that ceramics' only function is to serve food". Metten is also interested in the physical connection between light and the optic nerve, and has created

some glazes using Neodymium rare earth metals that change colour under different light sources.

While researching for this project she was able to spend time with each of the pots in Nanaimo Art Gallery's collection. This direct connection is reflected through references in form and the use of some naturally sourced clays in her glazes to honour the legacy of "back to the land" BC potters. Her use of chains, hinges, and machine parts, on the other hand, speaks to an understanding of use that is rooted in post-industrial society. This series also celebrates the value of human labour and responds to some of the adversity Metten has experienced supporting herself as a production potter. The physical demands of repetitive labour have been taking their toll on Metten and one of her works addresses this by referencing pressure points on the human body.

As Metten summarizes, "This series fetishizes the handmade and speaks to the reality of being a potter today while addressing contemporary concerns in painting and sculpture."

*Laura Wee Láy Láy* is an artist who has been working with clay for over fifty years. Her work is featured in both the Library, as part of the gallery's permanent collection, and in the Study. Her stunning and resonant forms are in dialogue with global contemporary ceramics while deeply connected to the land, the elements, and her Sto:lo and Kwakwaka'wakw communities. When Wee Láy

Láq began working with ceramics in the 1970s, dialogue around pottery was steeped in the folk craft traditions of Hamada Shōji and Bernard Leach. Wee Láy Láq was also deeply invested in Indigenous pottery practises, and during her studies she began a research and a letter writing campaign to connect with Indigenous pottery communities around the world. At this time she heard of the San Ildefonso Pueblo pottery of Maria Martinez and Blue Corn. While Martinez was to become a key influence for Wee Láy Láq, Blue Corn became a mentor and lifelong friend, and Wee Láy Láq was later adopted into Blue Corn's family. Through these connections Wee Láy Láq has strong ties to the San Ildefonso Pueblo, but her pots do not fit into any one tradition. In addition to her strong ties to international and local ceramics practices, she has deep connections to the land and language of her Sto:lo community. After graduating from Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr University) Wee Láy Láq embarked on a three year mentorship in Northwest Coast design and carving with Kwakwaka'wakw Hereditary Chief Tony Hunt.

Wee Láy Láq works slowly, coming to know her materials and letting the clay speak through her hand building process, and yet she has made well over 800 works. Using Canadian glacial clay, she builds her pots with large bands rather than the more traditional coils, a technique taught to her by Kybor Dancer (then Fred Owen), which allows her to make monumental and incredibly well balanced forms. Her works are not glazed, but rather burnished

with a smooth stone that causes the clay particles to “lie down” and reflect light. She fires her works in a brick sawdust kiln, setting up the conditions for flame and carbon to lead the decoration. Results can vary from a soft white to a deep black, with stunning patterns reminiscent of animals or landscapes emerging on the surface. Wee Láy Láy selects clay bodies and alters firings to reflect changing seasonal conditions, but these firings push clay to extremes and many pots do not survive.

The majority of the works chosen for this installation are from Wee Láy Láy's personal collection of pots that cracked during their firings. They may be considered imperfect studies from a conventional point of view, but Wee Láy Láy sees these as her most important works, as they were born out of adversity and pushed to the threshold of possibilities. This is the first time that many of these pots have been on public display. From simple and elegant spherical Olla forms, to elaborate and organically shaped vessels inspired by her landscape, botanical knowledge, and relationship with the earth, Wee Láy Láy's works command careful attention.

# *The Market*

POTTERY IS TEAMWORK THROUGHOUT THE AGES. —GUTTE ERIKSON

Situated in the lobby, a table of wood fired pottery by members of the Tozan Society complements the exhibition. The Tozan Society is a local organization that stewards a five chamber noborigama kiln and a wood fired train kiln in Cedar BC. Operating a large wood fired kiln requires a great deal of teamwork. These works were made by potters from this region, in collaboration with the elements and with each other. By purchasing these beautiful pots you are supporting local makers, and bringing a part of the exhibition into your everyday life.



# Biographies

*Steven Brekelmans* was born in Vancouver, attended the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design and graduated from the University of Victoria's MFA program. Working across a variety of mediums, he has exhibited his work both locally and internationally at the Kamloops Art Gallery, Or Gallery, CSA Space, UNIT/PITT Projects, Western Front, The Museum of Longing and Failure (Norway), The Western Bridge (Seattle), and Soi Fischer Projects (Toronto).

*Roy Caussy* received his BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (2006), and his MFA from the University of Lethbridge (2015). Caussy's practice is an outcome of his cultural experiences of growing up as a first-generation Canadian, as well as his family's diaspora and migrations. His research interests include the emergence of a youth demographic after WWII, and circumventing academic tropes by employing more personal and heuristic means. Caussy has exhibited across Canada, including solo shows at Stride Gallery (2019), the Art Gallery of Alberta (2020), and has received grants from various funding bodies, including The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, The BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council. Most recently, Caussy spent four months of the pandemic living with his mom in Hamilton, where every Sunday he learned to cook meals that both he and his mom grew up eating. Caussy is currently based in Halifax, NS, where he maintains his studio practice.

*Kate Metten* is a Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist whose material investigations into oil painting and ceramics deal primarily

with the language of abstraction. Working at the intersection of those two histories allows a flexibility to address painterly concerns with clay, research into colour theory, visual perception, and still life, while also reflecting on Modernist philosophies of Bauhaus, the unmaking of craft and material hierarchies. She is deeply concerned with phenomenology and the physicality of form. Metten has exhibited nationally and internationally, at venues such as the Katherine E. Nash Gallery (Minnesota), Emily Carr University of Art and Design (Vancouver), and Will Aballe Art Projects (Vancouver). She is a recipient of the Thelma Ruck Keen Memorial Award for Ceramics, and completed a formal apprenticeship with ceramicist Gailan Ngan.

*Laura Wee Láy Láy* currently lives in Chilliwack, British Columbia, her father's ancestral homeland. She attended Douglas College from 1970–1973 and majored in Fine Arts. In 1973 she was accepted into the second year Ceramic program at the Vancouver School of Art, where she graduated with Honours in Ceramics in 1977. From 1979–1981 she studied Northwest Coast design and carving with Hereditary Chief Tony Hunt in Victoria, British Columbia. Laura is a significant Canadian ceramic artist, and her original works have been exhibited locally, nationally, and internationally since the late 1970s. Her work is represented in numerous museums and private and corporate collections. Laura has taught hand-building and primitive-firing workshops for colleges, universities, and art centres in Canada, the United States, China, Australia, and Italy.

*Mingei Film Archive Project* is an endeavor by award winning filmmaker *Marty Gross* to restore and enhance rare and unedited film footage documenting the life of British artist-craftsman Bernard Leach and the origins of the Mingei (Folk Craft) Movement in Japan. Marty Gross is a consulting producer for companies based in North America, Europe and Asia, with focus on Japanese art, film, theatre and crafts. His company, Marty Gross Film Productions, Inc. (founded in 1975), manages one of the most comprehensive websites devoted to films on Japanese cultural and historical subjects.

*Hamada Shōji* was one of the most influential potters of the 20th century and a key figure in the mingei movement. Born in 1894, Hamada graduated from Tokyo Technical College in 1916 and went to work at the Kyoto Ceramics Research Institute. During the years from 1919 to 1923, Hamada travelled extensively to learn about diverse ceramic and folk craft traditions, and built a climbing kiln in England at St Ives with Bernard Leach (1887–1979). In 1952, Hamada travelled with Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1961) and Bernard Leach throughout the United States to give ceramic demonstrations and workshops. Hamada's work was influenced by a wide variety of folk ceramics including English medieval pottery, Okinawan stoneware, and Korean pottery. Hamada's great respect for artisan crafts led him to draw as much as possible from folk traditions. After receiving the Tochigi Prefecture Culture Award and Minister of Education Award for Art, Hamada was designated

a Living National Treasure in 1955. Thereafter, he was appointed Director of the Japan Folk Art Museum and awarded the Okinawa Times Award and Order of Culture from the Emperor before his death in 1978. Hamada's influence on potters around the world is incalculable, and the village of Mashiko has become synonymous with Japanese folk ceramics.

*Kawai Kanjirō* was a Kyoto-based potter and key figure in the mingei and studio pottery movements. Born in 1890, he was a long-time friend of Hamada Shōji, Yanagi Soetsu, and Bernard Leach, with whom he co-founded the Japan Folk Art Association in 1926. Kawai graduated from the Tokyo Higher Polytechnical School in 1914 and worked briefly at the Kyoto Research Institute for Ceramics. He is widely regarded as a master of glazes, especially of warm red copper (shinsha or yuriko—one of his trademark colors), rich brown iron (tetsu-yu), chrome and cobalt (gosu). His pots come in many asymmetrical shapes and show expressionistic techniques such as tsutsugaki (slip-trailed decoration), ronuki (wax-resist) or hakeme (white slip). Kawai refused all official honours, including the designation of 'Living National Treasure.' Like his lifelong friend Hamada, Kawai never signed his work but said, "My work itself is my best signature." Kawai died in 1966.

*Maria Martinez* was a potter of Tewa heritage from the San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico who was world-renowned for her black-on-black pottery. Born in 1884, she learned to make pots

as a child from her aunt, Tia Nicolasa, and became known as a potter among her peers. After seeing excavated 17<sup>th</sup> century black pottery shards in 1908, Martinez worked through trial and error to revive the technique. She found that smothering a cool fire with dried cow manure trapped the smoke, and that by using a special type of paint on top of a burnished surface, in combination with trapping the smoke and the low temperature of the fire resulted in turning a red-clay-pot black. She often collaborated with family members to paint and design her pots, including her husband Julian Martinez, and later, her son Popovi Da and daughter-in-law Santana Martinez. Maria Martinez received honorary doctorates from the University of Colorado and New Mexico State University before her death in 1980.

*John Charnetski* is a Canadian artist living in Nanaimo, working primarily with raku and stoneware fountains. He taught visual arts at Malaspina University College (now Vancouver Island University) from 1970–94, during which time he founded the Madrona Exposition Centre, now known as Nanaimo Art Gallery.

*Kybor Dancer (Fred Owen)* was a BC-based potter who taught ceramics at Douglas College for many years. Laura Wee Láy Láy credits him with teaching her the flat strap technique in the early 1970s, which she uses for most of her works. Dancer also maintained an active drawing practise, and exhibited his drawings alongside ceramic works at Grunt Gallery in 1988.

*Walter Dexter* was a Canadian potter and instructor. Born in Calgary in 1931, he attended the ceramics program at Alberta College of Art, studying under Luke Lindoe before moving on to the Swedish School of Arts and Crafts in 1954. Throughout his career, he managed Medalta Potteries in Medicine Hat, taught at Kootenay School of Art (1968–74) and Emily Carr College of Art Outreach Program (1979–83), and continually sold work out of his studio. Dexter was based in Metchosin from the 1970s until his death in 2015. He was the recipient of the 1992 Saidye Bronfman Award for Excellence in Craft.

*Kay (Katherine) Dodd* was born in Fuzhou, China and moved to Victoria, BC at an early age. In the 1960s, she moved to Quebec, apprenticed in ceramics and set up ceramics workshops for children with disabilities at the MacKay Centre in Montreal. She returned to BC in the 1970s and taught workshops at community colleges and showed in various group and solo exhibitions. She worked primarily with high-temperature porcelain and stoneware and low-temperature sawdust firing.

*Gordon Hutchens* is a Denman Island-based potter working with raku, salt glazed stoneware, crystalline glazed porcelain, and reduction fired earthenware. Born in Chicago, he received his BFA in ceramics from the University of Illinois, and has exhibited extensively in Canada, the USA, and Japan. He is currently the instructor of North Island College's Professional Potter program and recipient of the 2019 BC Creative Achievement Award of Distinction. Denman

Island has been his home for nearly 50 years and he is a major supporter of arts on the Island, as a mentor, exhibition and pottery tour coordinator, and host to dozens of BC potters who come to use his Anagama kiln each year.

*Charmian Johnson* was a Canadian artist and potter based in Vancouver, BC. Born in 1939, she taught elementary and secondary school before studying ceramics at UBC's Faculty of Education with Leach apprentices Glen Lewis and Michael Henry. In 1978, she spent several months with Bernard Leach at the Leach pottery in St. Ives, after which she spent two years in Tangiers, Morocco, studying with the Amazigh potter Malem Ahmed Cherkaoui. She maintained a prolific drawing practise throughout her career, and continued to make and sell pots at her home studio in Mount Pleasant until her death in 2020. Her pottery and works on paper have been included in numerous group and solo exhibitions across Canada, including the National Gallery of Canada, Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Vancouver Art Gallery, Morris & Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Burnaby Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Glenbow Museum, and the Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa.

*Sam Kwan* is a BC-based potter. He attended the Vancouver School of Art in the 1970s, studying ceramics under Leach-influenced potters such as Robert Weghsteen, Reg Dixon, Tam Irving, John Reeve, and Hiro Urakami. For several years he shared a studio, "Old Bridge Street Pottery," on Granville Island with Reeve and Ron Vallis.

Kwan was central to the ceramics program at Capilano University for over twenty years, and many of his past students credit him with creating a uniquely communal and interactive learning environment, for instance by building a salt kiln with his students on campus.

*Wayne Ngan* is widely recognized as one of Canada's most significant ceramic artists. Ngan was born in 1937 in Guangdong, China, and immigrated to Canada in 1952. He studied ceramics at the Vancouver School of Art, graduating with honours before moving to Hornby Island where he lived and worked the rest of his life. In addition to a family home, he built a raku kiln, a gas-fired kiln, an oil-and-wood kiln for salt glazing, and eventually a Sung Dynasty-style wood-fired kiln on his property. Ngan exhibited throughout his career at such venues as the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, The Potter's Wheel, House of Ceramics, Vancouver Art Gallery, the Shawnigan Summer School of Art, the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Hanart Galleries in Hong Kong and Taipei, the National History Museum, and the Canadian Craft Museum. Ngan is the recipient of the Saidye Bronfman Award (1983) and the BC Creative Achievement Award of Distinction (2013). Ngan passed away at his Hornby Island home in 2020.

*Lari Robson* was a BC-based potter. Born in 1942, he studied pottery at the Vancouver School of Art and went on to do mentorships with potters Wayne Ngan and Heinz Laffin on Hornby Island. He lived on Salt Spring Island, BC for almost forty years, and worked out of the



same small studio he built in 1976. Until his death in 2012, he sold his work almost exclusively at the local Saturday market held on the island. A neighbour once said, “Everybody called him the potter’s potter. He was devoted to the idea that everyone should be able to afford nice pots.”

*Akira Musbo Tomita* is a Vancouver-based potter. He believes that genuine pottery is made by yaki, which is when things happen during firing in the kiln. He writes: “When clay is fired and the glaze fuses to the body, a new form is born. During this firing process, of perhaps one hundred pieces, all seemingly uniform, there is the possibility of one hundred individual pieces—varying in many ways. This variation is significant, for the smallest difference makes the pot—gives the piece its life or death.”

*Hiro Urakami* is a Vancouver-based potter and gallerist. Born in 1941, he attended both Osaka School of Art and Vancouver School of Art. He owned and operated the House of Ceramics (1971–78), which many BC potters remember as a vibrant gathering place and source of their ceramics appreciation. Urakami also taught at Vancouver School of Art, UBC, and Douglas College, and has been an active member of the Potters Guild of BC for many years. He often works with electric-fired porcelain, stating: “I can romanticize the ritual of digging my own clay and operating a wood-fired kiln, but I would rather be true to myself, taking advantage of the many modern conveniences that bring such satisfying results.”

*Gari Whelon* was a Nanaimo based potter who focused on wood firing. He was highly involved in the Tozan Society. He served on the Board of Directors for the Tozan and spent many hours building the Tozan kiln in its two locations, including its present site at Tamagawa University. His love of pottery has taken him to Japan and he cultivated relationships with potters all over the world before his death in 2012.

# *What is progress?*

This exhibition is supported by  
the Coast Bastion Hotel

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