

JOSÉ PARLÁ AND THE BIZEN POTTERY TRADITION

José Parlá is a painter with fantastic exploratory techniques. His improvisational spirit has blazed a spectacular path of sensual abstraction mixed with traditional art and historical interests. Reading through Seeing is being exhibited at the Ooi Botos Gallery in Hong Kong from 14 May to 11 July 2009. This colourful exhibition of works and the contrast of his Bizen Clay Ceramics are significant gestures that draw on assorted artists from art history and on José's travels.

Rey Parlá: How were you introduced to working with Bizen Yaki ceramics?

JP: During 2002 I was in Japan having my first solo exhibition in Tokyo titled: Personal Alphabet. My friends, Eda and Tanushi from Balance Co., sponsored my show at the Yamaha gallery and they invited me to their hometown of Okayama. There they introduced me to Hajime Kimura from the Ichiyou Gama Bizen family. They had explained to me that the Bizen Yaki ceramics had something similar in their textures and colours to that of my paintings. I became very interested in the concept of experimenting with a new medium I had not worked with before, and in an artistic tradition with such a long respected history in Japan I could collaborate with.

RP: With no background or formal training in clay making, how did you come to work in clay?

JP: Hajime Kimura was the first to introduce me to working with clay. He showed me the tools to use and taught me about the traditions of Bizen ceramics, which were important to me in the process of respecting the original culture of Bizen and the surface of such a beautiful craft.

RP: What do handmade ceramics make you feel and think about in this ultra-modern world of the 21st Century?

JP: The handmade touch of the ceramics makes me feel connected to nature. The clay is earth so when working with it I feel the temperature of the clay; I can feel that it is alive. In this modern world with new inventions coming out everyday, I find it extremely important to advance with technology, but it just as important to stay connected to all kinds of cultural roots around the planet.

RP: Do you feel making pottery is a collaboration between nature and man?

JP: Yes, I do feel it's a collaboration with nature and man. First you are mixing the earth to become clay. You shape and mould it and finally it's ready for engraving. The final touch comes from the wood burning fire, which does what it will with no control from man. This is the part that is divine, and all you can do is pray.

RP: Do the themes and materials of your Bizen clays reflect the landscape where they were made; what are they about?

JP: Many people have seen different things in these clays so it's really up to the viewer. What are they about? I like to write names of

friends, as in the piece titled: Writers of Miami. Sometimes I write lists of places I've travelled to as a 'Timeline of Events'; a Parlá autobiography in many ways. For this exhibition I made three Bizen clay ceramics with the theme of the show Reading through Seeing: Feeling of Abstraction, Realistic Interpretation, and Anything Specific, which is about feeling like you are between reality, feeling abstract. Then Reading through Seeing Feeling, is about feeling with intuition, rather than reading something as a narrative; Sounds Movements and Swings, I made while listening to early Jamaican Ska music.

RP: Are you more interested in the activity of the making or in the end result?

JP: Both the activity of the making and the end result are amazing! While I work on anything I like to document the making so as to study myself or how the painting or ceramic is being made. A lot of what I

do comes out fast and naturally. There is a difference with painting and making ceramics. In a painting you can see and feel that little by little you are in control of the end result and soon you arrive by simply looking and you are sure it's done. With Bizen Yaki, you finish only one part of it. Then the fire finishes the result at the end. It

is pleasing to my eyes to be surprised after waiting weeks to see the ceramics come out of the oven. Hajime and I always feel nervous that something may come out broken, but so far we've had good luck.

RP: For the viewer that sees the completed show of these clay works, how are you thinking that the person will respond? Are you interested in the response?

JP: When I am making these pieces I hope that the viewer can compare my style of modern script language to ancient archeological tablets found in excavation grounds. These are like time capsules themselves for the future generations to see and interpret.

RP: In what way has your location affected the art that you make?

JP: In my life I have moved around a lot. Dislocation is a big theme in my works. This is the most important factor or inspiration for my art.

RP: Do you practice any art forms that are not visual art? How does that affect what you create as a visual artist?

JP: I love to dance. Having a personal rhythm is part of how I can move around my works with my own touch.





03.



04.



05.

ICHIYOU GAMA

Bizen Pottery - Roku-Sei (Six Families)

Bizen ware is a type of Japanese pottery most identifiable by its iron-like hardness, reddish brown color, absence of glaze, and markings resulting from wood burning kiln fires. During the Edo Period, six families were chosen and supported by the Ikeda Clan of Bizen. The Kimura Family is one of those families. Ichiyou Kimura is the second son of Choujurou Yukei Kimura, 13th generation ceramist in the Kimura Tradition. The six families are the Mori, Kaneshige, Kimura, Ohan, Hayami, and Terami families. It's interesting to note that the first three are still potting families.

01. Detail of Bizen clay plate before being fired.
© José Parlá, All Rights Reserved

02. José Parlá and Hajime Kimura.
© José Parlá, All Rights Reserved

03. Ichiyou Gama Kiln, Bizen Japan
Photo by Kiyoshi Nishioka
© Kiyoshi Nishioka, All Rights Reserved

04. Improvisation Experiment, Parlá Kimura.
© José Parlá, All Rights Reserved

05. Feeling of Abstraction, Realistic Interpretation, Anything Specific.
© José Parlá, All Rights Reserved.