

ELEMENTAL FORCE:

*New Works by Ken Matsuzaki*



PUCKER GALLERY | BOSTON

Ken Matsuzaki participated in a five-year apprentice program with me, and studied under my supervision, before going on his own to continue his studies and work.

It has been thirty years since and his work is now becoming appreciated. He is one of the upcoming potters in Japan.

In the last ten years, he has designed and built his own wood firing kiln and has been developing his work in the old Yakishima Shino Oribe style, a style in which there are many masters. His intent to master this style and his renewed interest in the Momoyama period, has allowed him a space to think independently and develop his own interpretation.

In the Oribe exhibition last year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Matsuzaki's work was well received.

Tatsuzo Shimaoka  
February 2004

All works are stoneware.

Natural Ash Glaze Rectangular Vase  
10 x 10 x 4"  
MK125



## ELEMENTAL FORCE:

### *New Works by Ken Matsuzaki*

At the very end of the main street in Mashiko there is a three-way junction. To the right is the road to Kasama, a neighbouring town also known for its potters and pottery tradition. To the left is the Mashiko Town Hall and the bus stop for the early (very early!) morning Tokyo bus. Straight on is a quiet country lane that climbs slowly along the side of a wooded hill. From the road one can see large and elegant thatched houses nestling amongst the trees. Near to the road an archway through one of these buildings beckons you into the compound, once the home and work place of Hamada Shoji and now the Mashiko reference museum. A short way further along the road is the pottery of Shimaoka Tatsuzo and then, as if to complete the apprentice 'family tree' comes the home of Matsuzaki Ken.

I have been trying to think of a single word that describes the work of Mat-

suzaki Ken. His lineage is as straightforward as the road that takes you to his home—from Hamada Shoji via Shimaoka Tatsuzo. Yet his pots display, at first sight at least, little that is obvious in the way of direct influence from either of his illustrious ceramic forbearers. In recent years Matsuzaki has trodden his own path, forged his own style—he has done what Bernard Leach said we must do when quoting Blake and that is to '*drive our wagons over the bones of the dead*'—to find one's own way. Oh, yes and the word I would use to define his current work—I have decided—is *Elemental*. Of the elements, close to nature—on the edge but always in control. As one looks at these magnificent works it is always apparent that a geological or metrological analogy springs to mind—wet rocks (MK125), quartz strata within granite (MK140), lava (MK130), the wind, a snow fall (MK134), lichen, a rock pool

Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container  
6 1/2 x 8 x 6 1/2"  
MK130



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen  
Shino Sake Bottle  
5 3/4 x 4 x 3 1/2"  
MK134



Natural Ash Glaze  
Yohen Box  
5 x 8 x 4 1/2"  
MK167



(MK167)—all are present and more.

There are paradoxes evident in this work that I recognise from the concerns I have in making my own pots. There is an underlying structure to Matsuzaki's pots that form the skeleton onto which he hangs the delicious but far more random effects of the fire. (MK114) I have often tried to relate to students that a pot should have 'bones'—a structure that underpins the skin or outer surface. This dictum is never more true than when the pot is submitted to extremes of fire and vapour. In recent times, it has been the fashion in the west and particularly in the USA, to throw 'loosely' in apparent and mistaken imitation of the perceived Eastern and predominately Japanese style. The combination of 'loose' throwing and the effects of the Anagama often result in pots that have no structure at all—flabby is the word

that comes to mind! Flabby is most definitely *not* a word one would use to describe Matsuzaki's pieces. Perhaps his hand building coiled techniques for many of the larger jars and square bottles (MK122, MK125) encourage a certain 'sharpness' in the form that the wheel would not impart. Whatever the



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Cup  
4 1/4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK140

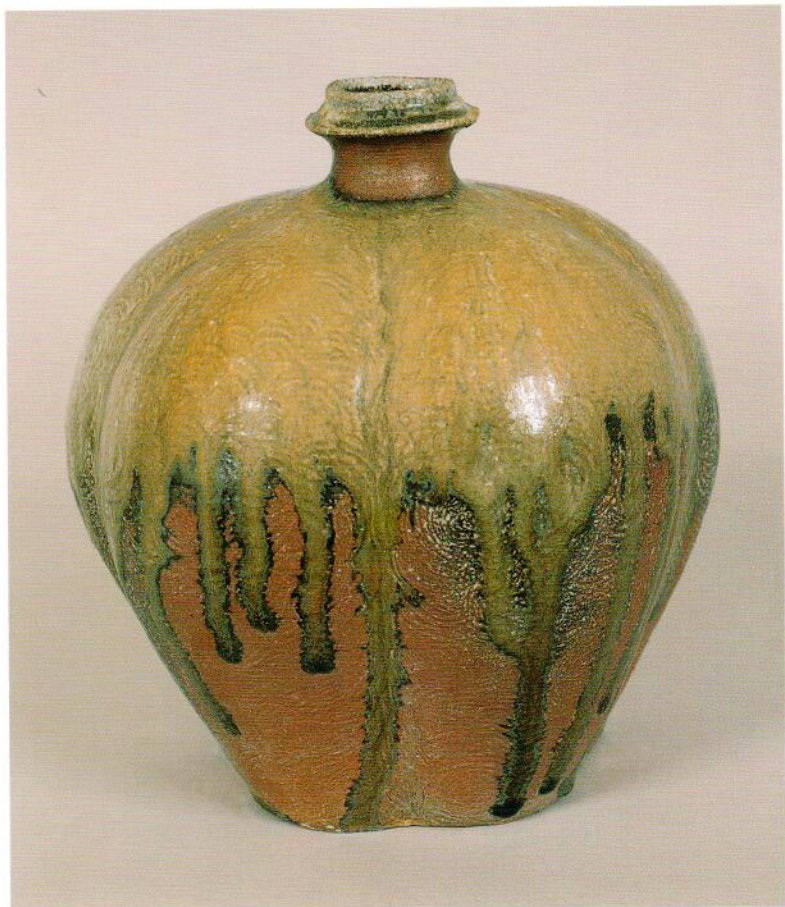
reason, there is a tautness to the forms that provides the perfect counterpoise to the flame etched and ash drenched surfaces, which creates a sense of skin or canvas being stretched across an invisible, but still evident, framework underneath.

Matsuzaki has form and structure tutored into his soul. Hamada Shoji knew and understood form and its relationship to surface and pattern like no other potter. Shimaoka-san, Matsuzaki's master, makes pots that are extremely ordered—his forms tailored exactly to provide the canvas for often-complex patterns. It is the fire and the manipulation of flame and ash, which marks out Matsuzaki's pieces from those of his masters.

Matsuzaki's kiln is not huge, neither is it multi-chambered like many of the kilns in Mashiko. A single, domed chamber is flanked on either side by



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 7  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
 MK114



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
 9  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 8 x 8"  
 MK148

two large fireboxes. Each firebox is big enough to house a significant number of pots between the fire and the central chamber. These are the ashed pots, the 'Yohen' fired pots (Yohen means literally to change by fire and flame) (MK148) and this is where Matsuzaki plays his kiln like a musician plays his instrument. At the height of the firing, with the aid of a long metal rod, Matsuzaki will push pots over and roll them in the white-hot ashes. He will bury them in ash only to uncover them later to develop the colours with exposure to oxygen sucked in by the long chimney. It is in this chamber that the maelstrom, which is the shimmering white heat of a seven-day firing, has such dramatic effect upon the carefully chosen clay bodies. The combination of extreme heat, flying ash, vapour and the reducing effects of charcoal create the sometimes soft, sometimes etched

and sometimes encrusted surfaces that form the backdrop to the emerald green glass, formed from the ash, that trickles water-like down the sides of his bottle.

If his Yohen fired bottles are reminiscent of granite wetted by a spring shower, then his Shino pieces surely reflect the cosmos, the stars, the Milky Way on a black night, the swirling, complex view of a black hole in those amazing photographs we have all seen in *National Geographic*. In a relatively recent development, Matsuzaki decided to try and fire Shino glazes in the Yohen kiln. For some time Shino has been fired in his gas kiln—a complex and extremely long firing (10 days!) resulting in colours ranging from snow white with a buttery orange underlayer (MK168) to deep pinks and purples, which are the result of iron under the glaze. In Japan decisions to step out-

side the traditional ways are not taken lightly. But, after more than seven years of deliberation the decision to seek an individual style in Shino from a kiln built for its Yohen qualities was made. Matsuzaki himself explains:

*For a long time I have wanted to challenge myself and to fire Shino ware in my climbing kiln fired with wood. My kiln has a very special form. The chamber has large fire mouths on both right and left sides so that wood can be fed into the kiln from either side...I have dreamed of making Shino pottery in the first chamber of this kiln for a long time.*

Adapting the knowledge and experience from his gas fired Shino, Matsuzaki has successfully mastered the vagaries of the wood fire to produce Shino of amazing quality. Glazes at first so simple, just pure Feldspar, are trans-

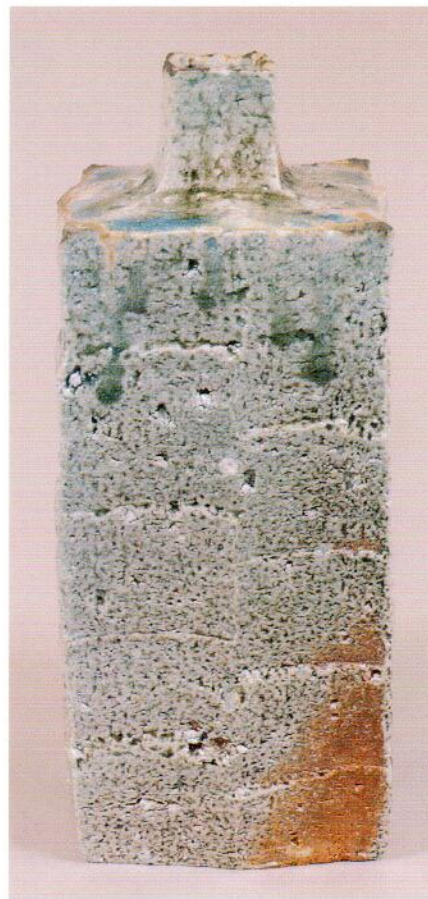


**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Vase**  
10  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 5 x 3  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
MK168

**Kohiki Cup**  
3  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 3 x 3"  
MK122



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup**  
2 x 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 2  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
MK120



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Rectangular Vase**  
10 x 4 x 4"  
MK154

formed into sumptuous glass, sometimes snowy white and sometimes with intense colour and depth.

The long firing uses two and a half thousand bundles of wood—each bundle costing the equivalent of two dollars. However, the length and therefore the expense of the firing is crucial. Without this extreme and arduous time scale, the Feldspars would lack the softness, that alabaster like surface, he requires. There would not be time for the movement to take place or the colours to develop to the same richness. This firing is as near to geological action as one can get—thousands of years of heat and pressure encapsulated in a seven day firing.

Just last week I spent the day with Ken at his home. We sat and talked about pots while drinking green tea. We exchanged information as potters always do. After lunch, for which we

were joined by Shimaoka-san, we spent time in the workshop and discussed his tools, the wide, curved



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container**  
8 x 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 7  $\frac{1}{4}$ "  
MK159

wood chisel with which he so deftly cuts the surface of his bottles (MK154), the wooden paddles carved with various textures used to enliven the clay's surface (MK159) and the impressive kiln and the pattern of firing. Surrounded by his work, some finished and some still being worked upon, here is a man who has absorbed influences that might have daunted a lesser potter, a man who is now completely secure and confident in his own way. His pots have that indefinable quality that transcends the ordinary. Matsuzaki's unswerving and tenacious commitment to his craft, to every aspect of the making process, is extraordinary and it is little wonder that his pots exude quality in every possible way.

— Phil Rogers  
February 3, 2004  
Rhayader, Wales



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
8 x 11 x 11"  
MK116



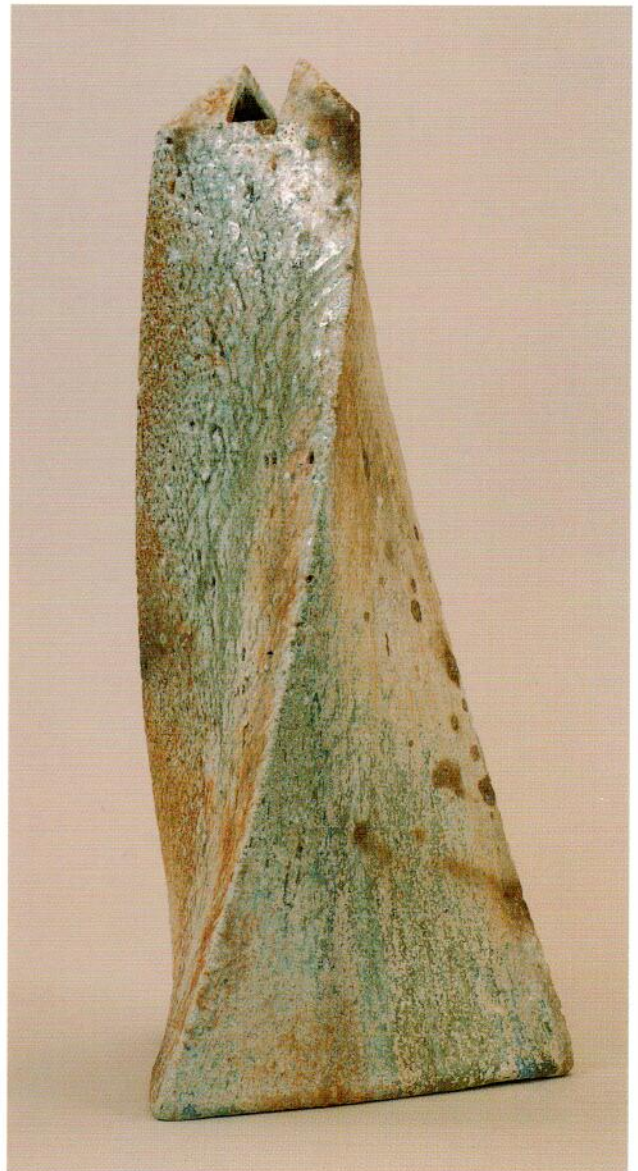
Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
16 1/2 x 8 x 4"  
MK113



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
14 1/2 x 7 x 4"  
MK146



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
14 1/2 x 8 x 6"  
MK145



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
14 x 6 x 6"  
MK115

Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
11 x 6 x 6"  
MK149



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
12 x 9 1/2 x 9 1/2"  
MK123



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
8 1/2 x 9 x 9"  
MK144



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
12 x 7 1/2 x 7 1/2"  
MK124



**Shino Sake Bottle**  
6 x 3 x 3"  
MK187



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Sake Bottle**  
6 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/3"  
MK185



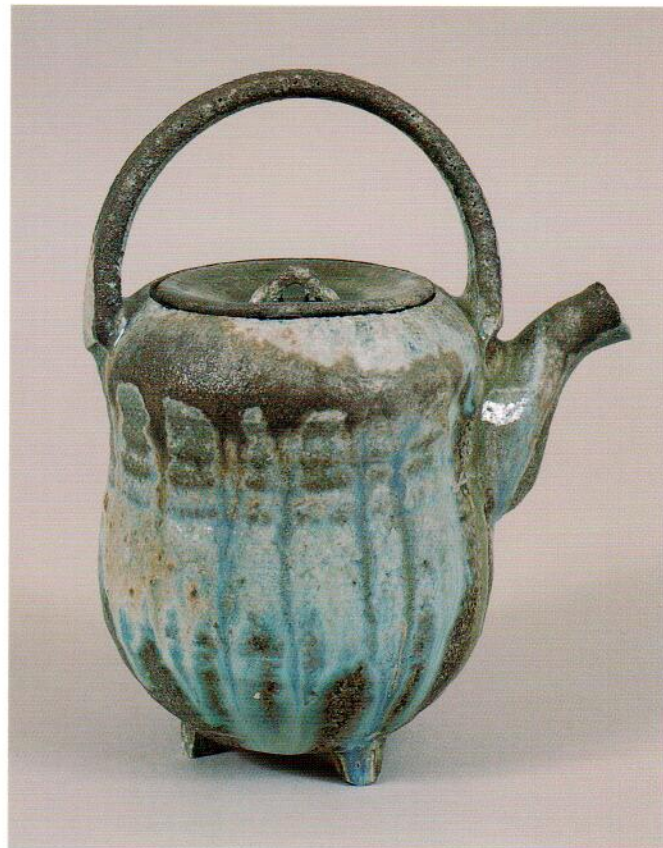
**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
10 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4"  
MK127



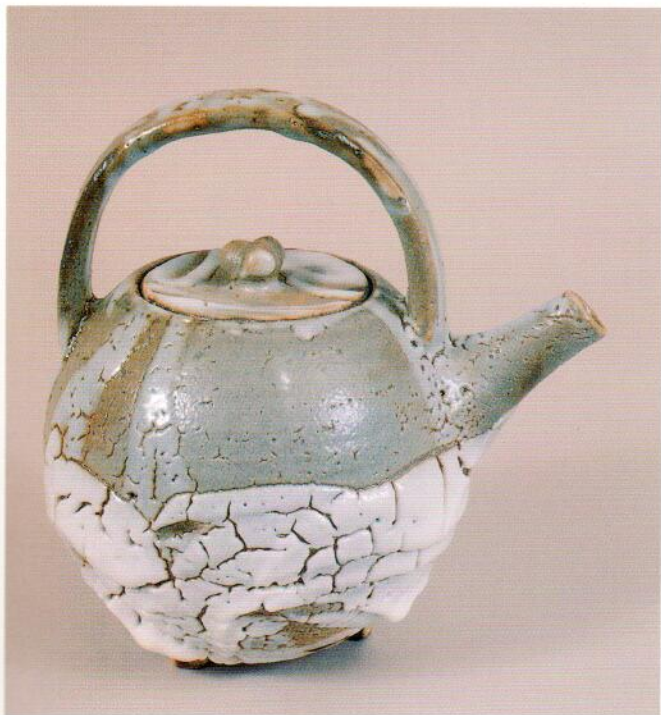
**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Vase**  
9 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"  
MK172



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Teapot  
13 x 10 x 5 1/2"  
MK164



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Teapot  
9 x 7 x 5"  
MK165



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Teapot  
8 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 6"  
MK176



Oribe Bowl  
3 x 9 1/2 x 9 1/2"  
MK133



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
12 x 9 1/2 x 2 3/4"  
MK141



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
11 x 9 x 2 1/2"  
MK142



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
11 1/2 x 10 x 3"  
MK143



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container  
10 1/2 x 10 x 8"  
MK163



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Teoke Vase  
9 x 7 x 4 1/2"  
MK156



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Teoke Vase  
10 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 7"  
MK155



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container  
 7 1/2 x 9 1/4 x 7"  
 MK160



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container  
 7 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 6 1/2"  
 MK158



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container  
 8 x 8 x 5 1/2"  
 MK161



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Water Container  
 7 1/4 x 7 1/2 x 7"  
 MK162



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
 10 1/2 x 10 x 4"  
 MK150



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
 11 x 8 x 3"  
 MK147



**Natural Ash Glaze Incense Burner**  
 7 1/2 x 5 x 3"  
 MK132



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
 8 1/4 x 7 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
 MK151



Oribe Rectangular Vase  
 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
 MK177



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Rectangular Vase  
 9  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 4  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
 MK171



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Rectangular Vase  
 11 x 4  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 4  $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
 MK153



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Rectangular Vase  
 8  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 4  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 3"  
 MK152





Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
10 x 3 x 3"  
MK157



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Vase  
10 x 6 x 4 1/2"  
MK169



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
10 x 5 x 5"  
MK126



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Vase  
9 1/2 x 4 x 3"  
MK170



Shino Sake Bottle  
5 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"  
MK188



Oribe Sake Bottle  
5 x 3 x 3"  
MK190



Oribe Sake Bottle  
6 x 3 x 3"  
MK189



Shino Sake Bottle  
7 x 3 x 3"  
MK186



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Sake Bottle  
6 1/2 x 3 x 3"  
MK184



**Tetsu Shino Vase**  
8 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"  
MK175



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Vase**  
10 1/4 x 5 x 3 3/4"  
MK173



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Vase**  
8 x 4 x 3 1/2"  
MK174



**Yohen Kiseto Vase**  
8 x 4 x 4"  
MK178

**Oribe Incense Burner**  
 5 1/4 x 4 x 2 1/4"  
 MK180



**Natural Ash Glaze Incense Burner**  
 6 1/2 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4"  
 MK131



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Chaire**  
 3 1/2 x 2 3/4 x 2 3/4"  
 MK118



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Chaire**  
 3 3/4 x 3 x 3"  
 MK117



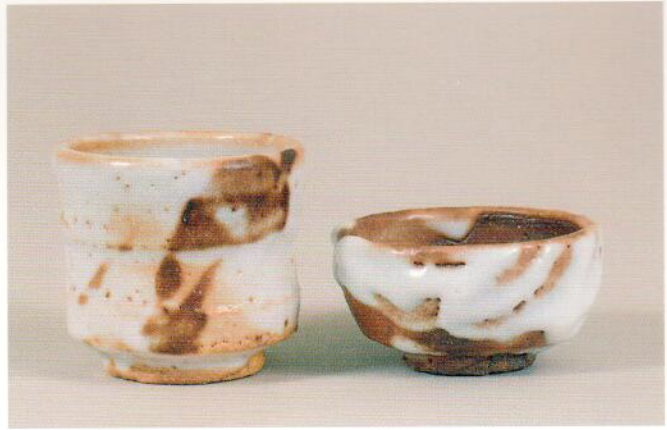
**Oribe Sake Cup**  
 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"  
 MK196

**Hakeme Oribe Sake Cup**  
 2 x 3 x 3"  
 MK197



**Oribe Cup**  
3 1/2 x 3 x 3"  
MK203

**Oribe Cup**  
4 x 3 x 3"  
MK204



**Shino Sake Cup**  
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"  
MK194

**Shino Sake Cup**  
1 1/2 x 3 x 3"  
MK195



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup**  
3 1/2 x 3 x 3"  
MK202

**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup**  
4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK201



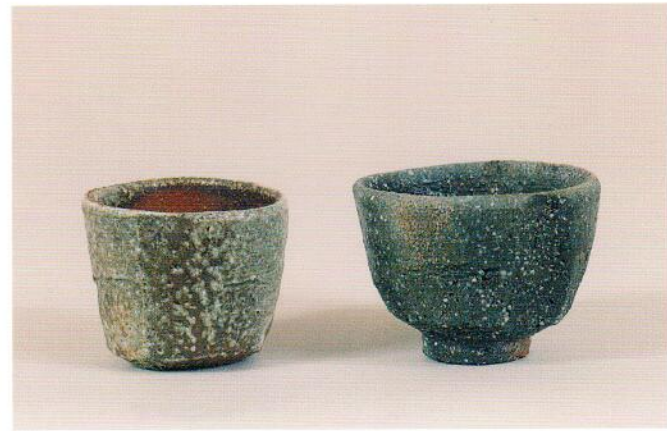
**Kiseto Sake Cup**  
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"  
MK198

**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Sake Cup**  
2 x 3 x 3"  
MK192



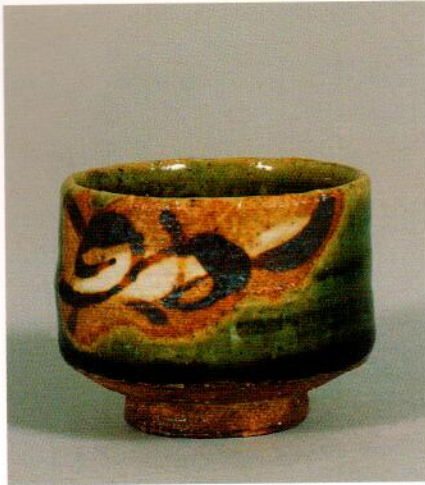
**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup**  
4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK199

**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup**  
4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK200

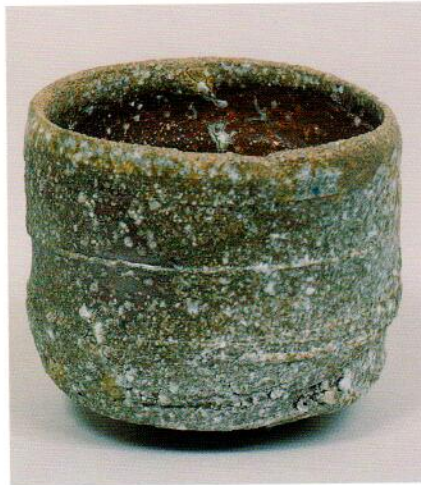


**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Sake Cup**  
2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"  
MK193

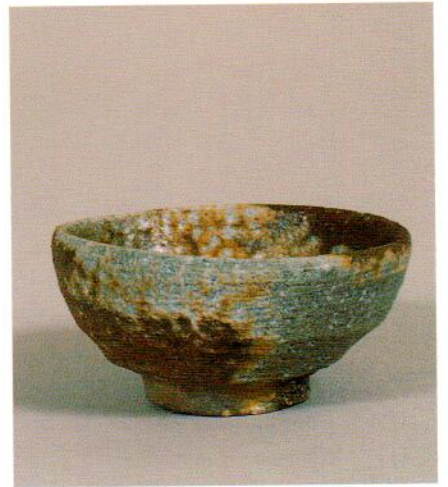
**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Sake Cup**  
2 x 3 x 3"  
MK191



**Oribe Sake Cup**  
2 1/4 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/4"  
MK135



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Teabowl**  
4 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"  
MK181



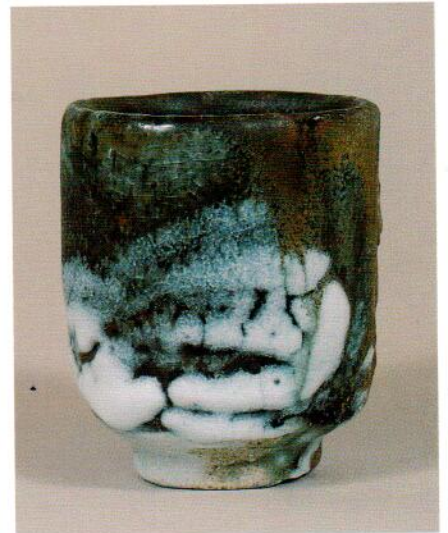
**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Sake Cup**  
1 1/2 x 3 x 3"  
MK136



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Cup**  
4 1/4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK139



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Cup**  
4 1/4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK137



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Cup**  
4 1/4 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"  
MK138



**Oribe Teabowl**  
3 x 5 x 5"  
MK183



**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Teabowl**  
3 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2"  
MK182

# KEN MATSUZAKI

## *A Biography*



Natural Ash Glaze Sake Bottle  
6 x 3 x 3"  
MK119



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup  
3 3/4 x 3 x 3"  
MK121



Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Incense Burner  
8 1/4 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2"  
MK166

- 1950 Born in Tokyo, Japan, the third son of Nihonga Painter, Matsuzaki Shuki
- 1972 Graduated from Tamagawa University, School of Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan, Ceramic Art major  
Began a pottery apprenticeship with Tatsuzo Shimaoka, Mashiko (Tochigi Prefecture), Japan
- 1977 Built a kiln and established a workshop in Mashiko, Japan, where he presently lives
- 1980 Received the Kokugakai Arts Association Nojima Award
- 1982 Became an associate member of the Kokugakai Arts Association
- 1984 Received the Associate Members Award from Kokugakai Arts Association, Prize of Excellence
- 1986 Became a full member of the Kokugakai Arts Association
- 1993 Modern Japanese Ceramics Exhibition, Elysium Art, New York, NY
- 1995 Group Exhibition, Gallery Dai Ichi Arts, New York, NY  
*Six Master Potters of the Modern Age*, Babcock Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 Rufford Gallery, Nottinghamshire, England
- 2002 *Tradition Today*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2003 *Turning Point, Oribe and the Arts of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
- 2004 *Elemental Force*, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA

### EXHIBITIONS IN JAPAN

- Fukuya Department Store, Hiroshima
- Hankyu Department Store, Osaka
- Keio Department Store, Tokyo
- Takashimaya Department Store, Yokohama
- Group exhibitions with Tatsuzo Shimaoka
- Matsuzaki Family Exhibitions with  
father and two brothers (Painting, Ceramics, Lacquer Ware)

### PERMANENT COLLECTIONS



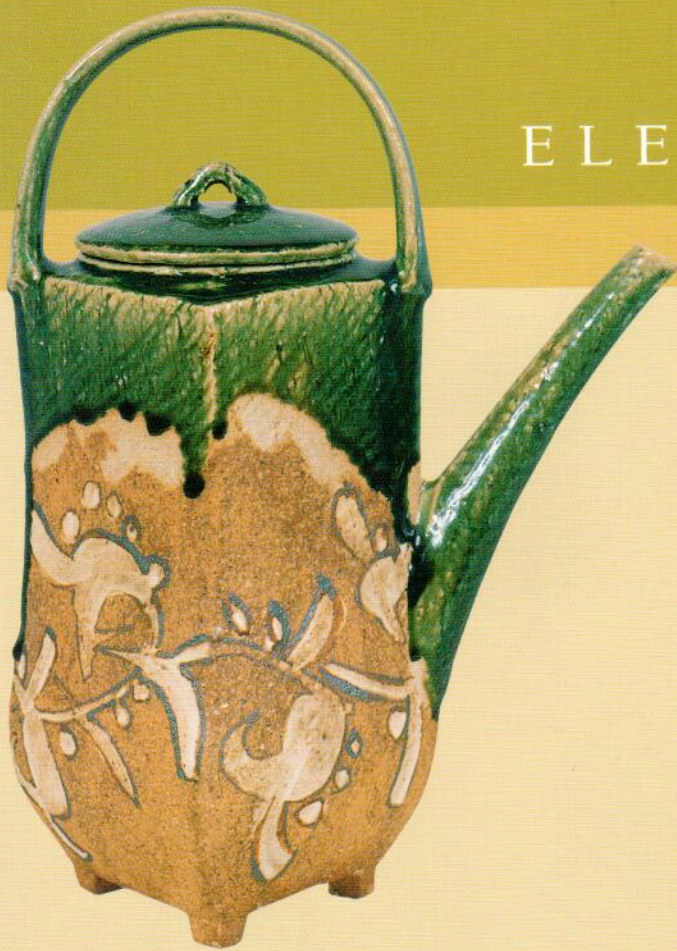
Cleveland  
Museum of Art,  
Cleveland, OH



Peabody Essex  
Museum, Salem, MA



Sackler Museum  
of Art, Harvard  
University,  
Cambridge, MA



# ELEMENTAL FORCE:

## *New Works by Ken Matsuzaki*

DATES: 12 June to 6 July 2004

OPENING RECEPTION: 12 June 2004, 3 to 6 PM

The public is invited to attend.

The artist will be present.

CREDITS: Design: Leslie Feagley  
Editors: Jeanne Gressler and Destiny McDonald  
Photography: Max Coniglio

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**BACK COVER:**  
**Narumi Oribe Teapot**  
12 1/2 x 9 x 5 1/2"  
MK179

**FRONT COVER:**  
**Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase**  
18 1/4 x 16 x 16"  
MK112

*This exhibition is presented under the Honorary Patronage of the Consul General of Japan in Boston, Masuo Nishibayashi.*

*In conjunction with the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Japan Society, Boston.*

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