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CERAMIC EXCHANGES BETWEEN NEW ZEALAND AND JAPAN: JAMES GREIG (1936–1986)

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Abstract

James Greig (1936–1986), an eminent New Zealand potter, died in the morning of his major exhibition in Kyoto Japan, gained unique access to the Japanese ceramic world in the 1980s. Greig received the Japan Foundation Fellowship to write a book on Kawai Kanjirō (1890–1966) during 1982/3 and became a NZ cultural ambassador to Japan in 1985. (Pearce 2008) Greig's engagement with Japanese pottery allowed him to steer his success as a ceramic artist exploring the power of concepts writing. This article will illustrate how Greig's successful penetration into the Japanese market juxtaposes institutional support and spirituality as vehicles for cross-cultural relations. This essay combines methods from archival research and oral history, fieldwork, text and visual analysis, as well as insight from my own creative practice in ceramics, to understand what guided Greig in his destined encounter with Japan through Kawai. The first part will illustrate Greig's creative biography along personal and public milestones, leading up to his interest in Kawai. Second, I explore Kawai's artworld in order to establish the historical features that contributed to Kawai's visibility. My aim is to identify patterns of cross-cultural exchanges resonating with the aesthetic philosophy explored in Greig's manuscripts along the lines of growth, polarity and void, as 'plasticity' in cultural diplomacy.

Introduction

In a recent volume on cultural diplomacy, the editors suggest a nuanced appreciation of the interconnectedness of the cultural sphere in support of, or supported by, foreign policies:

Despite the significant role of culture in a nation's presentation to the overseas public, scholarly attention has hitherto overwhelmingly focused on the political or economic dimension of soft power. [...] there has recently been increasing academic recognition of the important role of culture in the success of soft power strategies (...)

(Beattie 2019: 2).

Throughout the 1970s, Japan demonstrated successful economic growth and welcomed the world as a host with a newly-gained universalist cultural confidence. The Expo 70 in Osaka was the zenith of the cultural exchanges between New

Zealand and Japan, ceramics providing symbolic representations. Numerous ceramic exchanges between New Zealand and Japan were illustrated by Dianne and Peter Beatson's *The Crane and the Kotuku*, Bruce Martin's *The Heron Migrates*, Elliott and Skinner's *ConeTenDown*, Chitham's *Crafting Aotearoa*, along with *New Zealand Potters* journals. Vic Evans' critical analysis of the life of Nelson potters in the 1960s also shows Japanese influence. (Beatson & Beatson 1994; Chitham, 2019; Elliott & Skinner 2009; Evans 2007; Martin 2013)¹ New Zealand pottery pieces displayed at the Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan symbolized the close ties between the two nations. (Chitham 2019 : 213–17, 74) Roy Cowan (1918-2006) presented a large-scale ceramic mural, depicting a large map of New Zealand and Japan.²

The interest in Japanese pottery started in 1947 when Ray Chapman-Taylor visited Japan and brought back a collection of Japanese pots after having read the narrative of a British potter embracing Japan's folkcraft movement (Bernard Leach's *A*



Figure 1: *Mural for the Expo 70 in Osaka*, by Roy Cowan. Dominion Post Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library. Reference: EP/1969/4846.

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- 1 Mirek Smíšek, the first NZ studio potter, stayed in Kyoto with his family in 1961 for six months. He spent most of his time at the Industrial Arts and Textile University Faculty of Industrial Arts, where he was given free use of all the facilities. He was encouraged to rebuild one of their kilns into a drip feed oil burner for salt glazing, which was new to Japan as an exchange of knowledge. (*NZ Potter* vol. 4-2 1961: 40)
 - 2 This mural is now permanently installed in Suita library in Osaka as a token of friendship.

Potter's Book). By the end of the 1960s, Japan had become part of New Zealand potters' circles through individual engagement in ceramic exchanges: Terence Barrow, Doreen Blumhardt, Helen Mason, Mirek Smíšek, Len Castle, and Margaret Milne. (Beatson and Beatson 1994: 14-31) Among these, Greig was the first to aspire to writing a book on a Japanese potter in New Zealand, exemplifying a different dimension in artistic pursuits and the exploration of cultural exchange.

Greig's engagement with Japan presents a case study of cross-cultural communication through contemplation and 'touch of clay' as a non-utilitarian model of inclusivity in the face of economic and social challenges, as well as opportunities. As Greig put it, the proposed book on Japanese potter Kawai Kanjirō, which was one of his objectives in Japan, represents a series of questions that sensitize us to the self-transformative powers of cultural alterity. He was a trailblazer who created a spiritual path, reshaping channels of 'soft power.'

Fire in my hand,
A cold ball of fire,
Fire which has changed its shape
Hidden in the clay
... pottery
(Kawai Kanjirō, trans. Yoshiko Uchida, 1953)

James Greig (1936–1986), a New Zealand potter

James Greig (1936–1986) was born in Taranaki and moved to Featherston where his father, John (Jack) Alexander Greig (1909–1994) worked as a guard at the Japanese POW camp.³ Greig remembers the Japanese prisoners' eagerness to meet him over the fence on the occasion of visiting his father. This first Japanese encounter was symbolic to his future relationship with Japan.⁴ (Coates 1987: 53 '14: 40–14: 52)

Greig was studying architecture at the Auckland University when he first saw pots made by Len Castle (1924–2011) and became Castle's student between 1959–1961 (Greig 1982a). Castle's ceramics, glazed with the vivid colours of volcanic mountains, must have provided the freedom from the sculptural forms taught at architecture school in New Zealand at the time. Castle, with a background of teaching science at a secondary school, demonstrated superior glazing technique. Castle was influenced by the idea of originality argued by Bernard Leach (1887–1979). Leach emphasized that 'pottery has its own language' to communicate in public and praised *Mingei* (Japan

3 Jack Greig left a manuscript and oral history interviews on his empathic interactions with Japanese prisoners at Featherstone, mentioning high quality craft skills and disciplines. He also mentions the later association with James Greig and Japanese embassy. (Greig 2001)

4 Peter Coates, an artist and the former head of art unit of TVNZ; produced *Spark of Life* (1987) as an homage to Greig's death in 1986. His material and oral historical interview are an important source for this research, including letters regarding the project and instructions of this autobiographical film.



Figure 2: *Japanese POW Camp in Featherston*, Jack Greig, *Spark of Life* 1987 (14:02-06). Film directed by Peter Coates.

Folkcraft) philosophy in *A Potter's Book*. (Leach 1940: xxv) Castle's teaching with its focus on artistic uniqueness was essential to the building of Greig's creative identity at the early stages of his pottery education. (Coates 2019)

The Japanese *Mingei* (Japanese Folkcraft) movement was initiated in the 1920s by Japanese philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961), along with Bernard Leach, Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) and Kawai Kanjirō. Historical research by Brian Moeran, Kim Brandt and Kikuchi Yūko have extensively addressed the complexities and contradictions of *Mingei* against the backdrop of Japan's modernization, industrialization and imperial expansion. However, it had a strong connection with the foundation of New Zealand studio pottery during the mid-1960 to mid-1970s, and arguably became representative of Japanese clay aesthetics.

One of its key philosophical pillars was 'the beauty found in functionality' (用の美, *yō-no-bi*). This can be appreciated in the vitality of ordinary domestic ware in earlier times and later – the enhancement of the spirituality of Japanese tea-culture after the 1950s. 'Crafting brings joy in life,' Kawai stated in one of his many poems written in Japanese. (Kawai 1968) Kawai converted his house in Kyoto to a workplace with an enormous kiln in the backyard (currently this house remains as a museum named Kawai Kanjirō's House). The Kawai Kanjirō's House, as well as the *Mingei-kan* (Japan Folk Crafts Museum) in Tokyo, are like sites of pilgrimage for New Zealand potters when visiting Japan, including Greig in 1978. Visitors to Kawai Kanjirō's House are able to gain an evanescent sense of 'cosmic world' of Kawai's pottery and poetry in the living room. Although neither Kawai Kanjirō, nor the founder of *Mingei* movement, Yanagi Sōetsu, ever set foot in New Zealand, New Zealand potters who visited Japan realised the importance of these key people.

Greig first visited Kawai Kanjirō's House in Kyoto as part of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand's Senior Travel Award in 1977–78. This attests to the importance of institutional support in the growth of his interest. Established in 1963, the QEII's mission was to develop artists' professionalism, foster appreciation of the arts and public education. Japanese crafts-art found a favourable role within this institutional effort in developing New Zealand's internationalising cultural self-awareness (Oka 1979). Greig was sent to learn about global craft movements and



Figure 3: Kawai Kanjirō's House (河井寛次郎記念館) 2016. Photograph by author.

visited Japan, Korea, Nepal, Mexico, UK and Thailand where he studied Yao, Akha, Meo, Lisu and Karen Hill tribe crafts.⁵ Castle, along with five other potters, was sponsored to visit famous pottery sites in Japan, Korea and China as New Zealand's cultural ambassadors in 1974. (Castle 2008: 228) Castle trailblazed the case for potters to collaborate as cultural ambassadors for the New Zealand government. Greig followed his path.

At the same time, ceramics were themselves one of the first cultural ambassadors as portable and transferrable items. For centuries, they were circulated over vast geographical areas. The Japanese government supported traditional pottery, amongst other arts, through guaranteeing an annual income of 2 million yen for skilled traditional artists, under the 'Living National Treasure' (人間国宝, *ningen kokuhō*) or 'important intangible cultural treasures' accreditation, established in 1955 by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Hamada and Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886–1963) were the first to receive this status.⁶ Kawai was nominated as a 'Living National Treasure' at around the same time as Hamada. However, Kawai refused the honour. (Sagi 2016: 288) Kawai, like Hamada, also refused to sign his pieces. In so doing, he may have been displaying his 'earnest admir[ation] for old unsigned crafts' (Yanagi, 224).⁷ By

5 In Japan, Greig visited museums and potters in Kyoto, Tokyo, Bizen and Mashiko. In 1974, he visited New Mexico, USA and saw Indian Pueblo Pottery (Greig's CV). In 1972, the Mexican Pottery Collection (representing a time span beginning at 1500 B.C. to the present) toured New Zealand, which may have inspired Greig to apply QEII to study Pueblo Pottery. (Potter 1973: 22-23)

6 The original advocates of *Mingei* movement, Hamada Shōji and Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886–1963) received the first 'Living National Treasure' (人間国宝, *ningen kokuhō*) accreditation from the government, at the same time as the establishment of the Japan Craft Association (Nihon Kōgei Kyokai) in 1955. <https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkazai/shokai/mukei/>

7 Yanagi's *The Unknown Craftsman*, adapted by Leach in English (Yanagi, originally printed 1972) discussed the beauty in the bowl of Yi dynasty as utmost beauty. He stated the need for anonymous '*Mingei*' potters to achieve 'the golden age of craft' as a utopian 'abandonment of the self' and quoted 'one finally finds real self-affirmation in the abandonment of self.' (Yanagi, 223)

declining the official designation as a Living National Treasure, Kawai may have wanted to express his confidence as an artist echoing his words '[M]y work itself is my best signature.' (Yanagi 1989: 224) The tension between political support and creative activities, is what actually makes Kawai stand out. This gesture of Kawai as an artist-potter may have attracted Greig's eye in contrast to other potters.

During his visit to the museum, Greig may have recognized common bonds of modesty and determination in the eyes of Kawai, as shown in the photograph. Kawai's original artwork, free from the round wheel forms, mixing both Japanese and foreign techniques with colourful decorations, had captured Greig's interest in hand-building. Kawai was famous for his earlier (1920s) perfect realization of Korean glaze technique. However, his works after the Second World War changed completely to display a provocative boldness. His works incorporated English 'slip' techniques and Chinese colours of '*Tang Sancai*,' whereas his usage of iron oxide glaze for the red colours expressed solemn personal strength. Greig was motivated to return to Japan, applying for a year-long grant to write a book on Kawai in 1982–1983 for his 'Japan Foundation Fellowship', a scheme established in 1972 to assist international cultural exchange in promotion of Japanese culture.



Figure 4: Kawai Kanjirō circa 1950. Photograph by Shigeru Tamura. Courtesy of Kawai Kanjirō's House.

Greig commented explicitly on Kawai's influence on the direction of his work:

I discovered a Japanese potter, Kawai Kanjirō, his work embodied essentially similar concerns about life and form which I'd been struggling at the time to work through my work. And this was a very significant discovery for me and surprising and has led to my later connection with Japan developing in the way it has. (Coates 1987 4.46–5.05, Interview of Greig in the film)

Greig's dedication to Kawai was a risky challenge, pausing his production against a growing demand in 'good handleability pots.' This started in the 1970s in response to the stringent trade restrictions on foreign goods. Unlike the earlier potters in the 1950s, few potters were concerned with philosophy. The gap (or a distinction) between contemporary potters and artists in New Zealand is controversial. I interviewed several potters as oral history. A 'potter,' 'ceramic artist' or 'ceramicist' is not the same as 'artist,' according to New Zealand potters I have interviewed. It reveals the fact that 'potters' often disassociated themselves from 'artists.' Greig attempted to cross the boundaries. Greig struggled to situate himself outside of potter/artist binary.



Figure 5: James Greig, circa 1977, New Zealand. Photograph by John Daley. © Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (F.012345/4) (<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/1344023>).

He probably projected his quest onto Kawai's 'excess' as deviation from *Mingei* traditionalism. Greig showed his interests in the possibility of Kawai's 'excess' as a pathway to transformation, which he translated later into the concept of his exhibition called *Transformation*. (Greig 1982: 20)

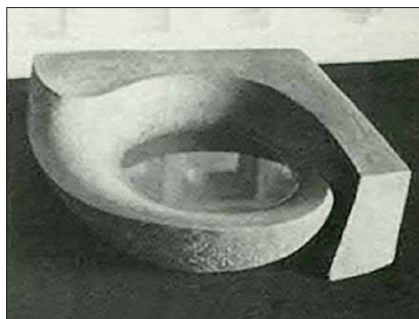


Figure 6: Greig's work at Tokyo's Green Gallery, October 1983 (Witten 1984, *NZ Potter* vol. 26 no.1: 30)

Greig found a niche subject, 'Kawai Kanjirō,' which contributed to the forging of an identity in his artwork. An episode about a pot of Kawai's presented the curator and ethnologist at the Dominion Museum, to Mr. Terrence Barrow (1923-2001), by the Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda on his official visit to New Zealand in 1963 shows that Greig's identification of Kawai was not entirely intuitive.⁸ Kawai himself never came to New Zealand; however, his nephew, Kawai Takeichi, did. He was the first Japanese potter to visit New Zealand in 1964 following Bernard Leach in 1962 after the relaxation of private international travel in Japan.

Greig's project funded by the Japan Foundation was built on an idea of cultural comparison. Greig justified the selection of his research subject as 'a good bridge of East and West,' while also demonstrating the originality of his approach as introducing a 'Western viewpoint' to Kawai's work. (Greig 1982d: 5) Greig dramatized the challenge as his 'spiritual journey' and showed awareness of the connection between art and the political economy from the perspective of ceramics. (Greig 1982d: 12) Greig was highly perceptive of, and receptive to, Japanese cultural expressions and forms. During his stay in Japan, Greig absorbed new skills, working with the great

8 The Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda mentioned: 'although I had seen a good collection of pots by Hamada Shōji, the Kyoto potter Kawai Kanjirō was not well represented,' and further added that he happened to have a sample of Kawai's most recent work in his hotel that he intended to present to the collection which he did in the next day via the embassy staff. (Barrow, *NZ Potter* v6 n2 1963: 70-74) The story behind how the Prime Minister received Kawai's pot is unknown; however, this episode shows Kawai's high-quality potter status.



Figure 7: Vase, circa 1960, Japan, by Kawai Kanjirō. Gift of Prime Minister Ikeda, 1963. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. © Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (CG000213). (<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/52073>)

masters like the Living National Treasure Fujiwara Kei and his son Yū, who visited New Zealand in 1980, at *Bizen*, Okayama, to learn the techniques of reduction firing by controlling the oxygen air flow to create natural patterns (Witten 1984). These firing techniques produced unintentional fired patterns and imperfection, called ‘scenery’ (景色, *keshiki*) which was highly valued in Japan. (Greig 1984)

Greig’s later sculptural works show this technique, with some iron oxide, the red glaze, which are often used in *Bizen* ware (備前焼, *bizen yaki*). Greig also visited *Mashiko*, near the *Kanto* region, Hamada’s home ground, which showed the strongest influence on New Zealand stoneware domestic pots. *Mashiko*, a tourist spot created around Hamada’s ‘Living National Treasure’ status, shows little of the artistic identity which Greig sought. Greig sensed the challenge of uniformity in studio pottery as ‘[E]verywhere in Japan has a danger of falling into formalism... we find masses of mediocre genre works of little depth... [P]ots embody a philosophy that creates a unifying purpose.’ (Greig 1984: 28-29 *NZ Potter*, Vol 26, No2) Greig discerned questions about Japanese spirituality caught in an ambiguous state between commodification and traditionalism through Kawai’s art. This spirituality, however, found access to the formal channels of cultural diplomacy.

At the end of his term in Kyoto, he approached the New Zealand Embassy to organise his exhibition in Tokyo. Sir Maarten Wevers, who was second secretary at

the New Zealand Embassy in Japan and knew Greig by name through his journalist brother, helped to introduce Greig to Shigenori Itoh (1919-2008) of Green Gallery. Greig was the first foreign ceramic artist to exhibit at such a prestigious venue and made a case for cultural diplomacy between these two nations. (Ansell 1983). The bond between Greig and Itoh continued until Greig's death, with art providing them with a common language (Itoh, Ono and Moroyama 2018 : 27).⁹

Greig's Motivation

Greig was motivated to promote his concept of being a philosophical potter by incorporating his interpretation of Kawai's artwork. Upon his return from Japan in 1982, Greig organized a major exhibition *Transformation* at the Wellington City Art Gallery (April 29th May 23rd, 1982). His exhibition retraced the history of his 12 years' of association with ceramics with a detailed catalogue of 52 pages. Greig framed this exhibition with an analysis of Kawai through comparisons with the German philosopher J.W. von Goethe and Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (Greig 1982f: 2, 7). Greig's work appeared to have absorbed some of Kawai's later style of nonconformist, even eccentric forms. A total of 112 pieces included his representative 'Emblem,' 'Solid & Void,' and 'Transformation' which resonated with Kawai's abstract sense of life.¹⁰ Here Greig essentially presented his own creative biography through a reinterpretation of Kawai's insights on the experience of metamorphosis.

Greig did not publish the book on Kawai. However, this exhibition and his catalogue demonstrated the conceptual importance of Kawai for Greig's artistic identity with an accent on his expertise on Japan. An introduction by Michael Volkerling (1948-2014), the director of the QEII Arts Council, framed the initiative within official cross-cultural exchange (Greig 1982b, Volkerling 1986). Greig was selected as New Zealand's 'cultural ambassador'¹¹ to Japan in 1985 and he received a congratulatory message from the Prime Minister of New Zealand, David Lange, for his second exhibition at the Green Gallery in Japan (Lange, 1985). This sparked a synergy between his ambition to

9 In 2004, Mr. & Mrs. Itoh moved to New Zealand and opened the third gallery in Waiheke island, and acted as significant advocate of NZ-Japan ceramic exchange. Even after Mr Itoh's death, his advocacy will never be forgotten with the ceramic donation to the War Memorial Museum in Auckland. (https://www.auckland.nz.emb-japan.go.jp/culture/events_list/greengallery_collection_e.html)

10 The catalogue *Transformation* depicts small to large pieces, unusual forms outside the trend of New Zealand pottery of wood fired plates and cups. It contained geometric lines and wave-like and cloud-like curves. (*Transformation – James Greig Exhibition*, ed. City Gallery Wellington, 1982. https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations_catalogue.pdf)

11 Greig was one of the 40 cultural ambassadors and 23 honorary cultural ambassadors overseas under the New Zealand Sports and Recreation Department scheme in December 1984, according to the *Evening Post* dated March 10th 1985. According to the Creative NZ website, 'the term cultural ambassador is used often associated with youth within a limited timeframe (i.e. Ka Hao Te Rangatahi – Youth Ambassador Leadership Programme,) it connotes depoliticized activities of an idealistic nature' (Evening Post 1986).

act as a bridge based on art between New Zealand and Japan. He emphasized his belief in ‘art as a means of peaceful international communication and universal language’ (Greig 1984). Greig was proactive in communicating with the media and his reputation attracted corporate sponsors.¹² (Fahey, 1985). A public image as ‘cultural ambassador’ suited him. In this role, he was able to validate the role of Japan as creatively forging new cultural frontiers. He emphasized his expertise in matters pertaining to Japan as an opportunity to portray his exploration of its culture at a ‘deeper level.’ Greig combined New Zealand’s economic interests with his art. In an interview in 1985, Greig stated:

Japanese connoisseurs readily experience the underlying artistic values in a poetic way, on a deeper level than just stylistic or aesthetic appreciation. Japanese look to prospective partners or customers in long-term relationships. They prefer to build relationships with companies that have community status and cultural dimensions, long term viability, and who demonstrate commitment to long-standing association with Japan...that the Japanese see arts and culture as a component of international relationships is demonstrated by their own massive use of arts to promote: by Japanese corporations in the same way. (Greig’s interview; Fahey 1985: 3)

The credentials from ‘leading art authorities’ in Japan, such as Hasebe Mitsuhiro, the chief curator of the Crafts National Museum of Modern Art, also saliently promoted Greig’s ‘major breakthrough.’ (Thomas 1985) Umehara Takeshi (1925-2019), a



Figure 8: (left) Greig in *Spark of Life*, 1987 New Zealand. Film directed by Peter Coates.



Figure 9: (right) *Spiralling Form Vase*, circa 1980 by James Greig. Courtesy of Art+Object.

¹² Greig made a proposal for a demonstration at the Commonwealth Arts Festival in 1982, with his detailed biography. His letters were type written. Greg Fahey, Artist Administration handled press release for him may have helped his administrative work. James Greig, ‘Craft Demonstration Proposal at the Commonwealth Arts Festival 1982.’ Greig’s 1985 exhibition was sponsored by Borthwicks, Japan Lines, QEII Council, Japan Foundation. His ballooning activity was sponsored by Bernia.

leading Japanese philosopher, spoke about how Greig's work evoked the image of *Jōmon* in the film *Spark of Life* directed by Coates.¹³ (Coates 1987; Umehara 1994)

Greig was noted as a pioneer in New Zealand, achieving an intrinsic artistic language of cross-cultural sensibility between New Zealand and Japan. Greig carved out an 'artistic space' within, yet exceeding, diplomatic investment to bridge the two nations in trades.

Kawai Kanjirō (1890–1966), a Japanese potter

Kawai was born in the Meiji period (1868–1912) as the second son of a carpenter family from Shimane prefecture, where Izumo Shrine, the core of Japanese Shintō religion is located. He surprised fellow students with this choice of going to the Tokyo Kōto Kōgyo Gakkō (a vocational school) in 1910 at the expense of moving onto the top career-oriented Tokyo University. Kawai's artistic style and 'cosmic world' displayed exuberance for Greig's special gaze. Itaya Hazan (1872–1963), the teacher of Kawai at the Tokyo Kōto Kōgyo Gakkō, studied under Okakura Kakuzō (1863–1913), a Japanese art historian at the Tokyo Art School, who popularized tea culture internationally. (Okakura 1964, original publication 1906). Kawai's life-long attachment to tea culture, a source of 'social prestige' in modern Japan, may have been passed from Okakura via Itaya (Brandt 2007: 12). The reinvigoration of tea culture in modern Japan is closely related to the conceptualization of *Mingei*. The English 'translator' of *Mingei*, Bernard Leach, was so inspired by a traditional Raku *chawan* (tea bowl) at a tea ceremony in 1911 that he decided to become a potter (Leach 1940: 28).¹⁴

The interest in traditional Japanese aesthetics was embedded in Japan's industrialization, and crafts education promoted modern design *zuan* (図案) for mass production (Inaga 2016: 284). Tokyo Kōto Kogyo Gakkō (Tokyo Higher Polytechnical School) was one core institutions to promote modern skills. Kawai was unique in his aim to be an 'artist' potter in contrast to the majority of other students who aspired to work in ceramic factories and participate in industrialization. To understand the importance of the influence on Greig of Kawai's art space, I will now situate Kawai within the traditional and modern world of ceramics in Japanese history.

In the 16th century, Sen-no-Rikyū (千利休 1522–1591), a tea-master to the military unifiers of the country, established Japanese minimalist aesthetics of Zen Buddhism in the tea ceremony '*chano-yu*' (Sen 2003: 10). He emphasized the qualities of '*wabi-sabi*' ('侘寂' austere refinement and imperfection) and '*mu-sakui*' ('無作為' unintentionality). Rikyū's tea room was the quintessence of a space of peaceful

13 Umehara Takeshi was the core member of the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies established in 1987 with a mission to devote interdisciplinary and comprehensive research on Japanese culture from an international perspective.

14 A traditional Raku '*chawan*' tea bowl was made in the so-called, '*tezukune*' (手捏ね) method. This requires a few days to form by curving with traditional aesthetic details. This was against the trend of machine modernization that enabled only a few minutes for production of a tea bowl.

meditation against the turbulence of the age. Rikyū's motto '*ichigo-ichie*' (一期一会) treasure each encounter) focuses on treasuring each encounter. This is symbolized by the time shared between the host and guests of the tea room. The tea room served as a place to appreciate art in proximity to politics. Rikyū cultivated a special gaze for the austere refinement of '*Raku-chawan*' (楽茶盃) tea-bowl) by potter Raku Chōjiro (?–1589) with its black glaze fired at low temperature (Raku 2013: 7). The imperfect surface appreciated as 'scenery' (景色, *keshiki*) or a crack mended by lacquer with gold decoration as '*kintsugi*' (金継ぎ) to preserve the unique piece were among the most striking innovations in the appreciation of pottery in a poetic way.

Preserving tradition by lineage is the foundation of the Japanese ceramic world. For example, the Raku lineage has continued to make tea-bowls since 1574 according to the one-heir policy (一子相伝, *isshisōden*), continues to 16th generation. Zen Buddhist ideas, embodied in the tea ceremony, such as beauty created by 'other power' or 'external forces' or '*tariki-no-bi*' (他力の美), naturalness '*jinen-honi*' 自然法爾, 'emptiness' or '*ma*' 間, have deeply permeated Japanese ceramic aesthetics. The adaptive application of Buddhist ideas into the conceptualisation of *Mingei* traverses a convoluted route to reflect Kawai's interest in Zen Buddhism. This is achieved by reading Zen Dialogues (公案 the *Kōan*), which was part of his interpretation of creativity. (Kawai Kanjirō's House 2014: 88).

Kawai grew up in the Meiji period during the frenzy of the Western industrial revolution. The collapse of feudalism triggered the organization of the new commercial law and financial system based on Western ideas. The government-owned core industries, such as shipping, steel and silk, were privatized to create the foundation of *zaibatsu* capital plutocrats (e.g. Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo). Among these new wealthy merchant families, some men became eminent art collectors, called *sukisha* (数奇者), who enjoyed tea culture aesthetics which was a symbol of wealth and pride in their traditional heritage. Kawai's ceramics may have attracted these new-rich merchants as a re-discovered 'modern' Japanese art tradition (Kanashima 2019: 87). 'The *Mingei* movement in the early 1930s gained momentum as certain key collectors and artists sought to achieve greater influence for their ideas by joining with new constituencies, including local elites and the representatives of government agencies' (Brandt 2007: 5).

The Japanese word for art, '*bijutsu*' (美術) is an imported concept of fine art. The term (literally "beautiful techniques") first appeared in Japan when the Meiji government prepared for the World Expo in the late 19th century as a major diplomatic initiative. The Japanese eyed ceramics such as *Arita*-ware as potential trade commodities. Philippe Burty (1830–1890), a French art critic, coined the term 'Japonisme' to express the emergence of a Western gaze on Japanese art (Imai 2016:

592–93).¹⁵ This imported Western idea of ‘fine arts’ provoked a reconceptualization of Japan’s traditional aesthetics. The flamboyant porcelain of *Arita* and *Imari* became a priority based on Western taste. The artisanal lineages of Japanese tradition from the 16th century were usually excluded from mainstream art historiography. Amidst the new reconfiguration of modern art praised by the West, the prestige of Japanese traditional art was placed in a complicated position.

Japanese military industrialization enhanced the country’s rapid economic growth and imperial expansion. The establishment of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923) facilitated the visit of Bernard Leach in 1909 (Wilkinson 1996: 11). Kawai’s ceramic work around that period focused on perfect ‘imitation’ of Chinese and Korean masterpieces for high-end markets. One day in 1912, Kawai visited an exhibition which included one of Leach’s pots. Impressed by Leach’s originality, Kawai purchased Leach’s pot and met him for the first time. Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) was studying at the same school as Kawai and introduced him to Yanagi who later established the *Mingei* (Japan Folkcraft) movement in 1926. Kawai, Hamada, Leach and Yanagi became life-long collaborators through the *Mingei* movement. These encounters illustrate a destiny that led to Greig’s discovery of Kawai.



Figure 10: From left, Yanagi Sōetsu , Kawai Kanjirō, Bernard Leach, Hamada Shōji, circa 1950, Japan, (Shikama 2019). Courtesy of Kawai Kanjirō’s House. (<https://discoverjapan-web.com/article/12413>)

15 Britain created a Japanese section in South Kensington Museum in the mid-1800s. The Japanese participation in the International Exhibition ‘*Exposition Universelle*’ in Paris first occurred in 1867 and the Japan’s government officially displayed a Japanese Garden in Vienna World’s Fair in 1873. In 1893, Japan participated in Chicago World’s Columbian Expo, by building a Japanese pavilion ‘Ho-ō-den’ (鳳凰殿 Phoenix hall) which demonstrated minute craftsmanship. (Yamada 2010) <https://www.ndl.go.jp/exposition/e/s1/1873-2.html>

Kawai's Success

One of the driving factors of Kawai's success were his social networks. The fellow members of the *Mingei* movement, Hamada, Leach, and Yanagi, were sources of exuberance for him. Greig observes: 'Hamada – big robust person – full of life – was in some ways relevant for Hamada to be a champion practitioner of *Mingei*' (Greig 1982d: 12). Like Rikyū's ruling class patrons in the 16th century, Kawai had a number of eminent supporters. Yamaoka Sentarō, a corporate advisor at the Kuhara mining conglomerate, was one of them. He supported the purchase of the Shokeiyō kiln in Kyoto, which became Kawai's working residence in 1920 (Kanashima 2019: 87). Another significant supporter was Kawakatsu Ken'ichi (1892–1979), a marketing general manager and later the general manager of the Takashimaya Department Store Group.

The Japanese department store was an important point of dissemination to Japanese urban middle-class households as new art collectors in the 1920s (Oh, 2019). Since Kawai's first exhibition at the Takashimaya department store in 1921, Kawakatsu became Kawai's life-time promoter and organized numerous exhibitions at the store. Kawakatsu collected Kawai's pots himself, one of which he submitted to the Paris Expo in 1937 without telling Kawai. The pot subsequently won the 'grand-prix.' The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake triggered great social uncertainty, but Kawai continued to attract enthusiastic philanthropists. Financial supporters included Yamamoto Tamesaburō (1893–1966), the first president of Asahi Beer and founder of Ōyamazaki Sansō Museum in Kyoto and Ōhara Magosaburō (1880–1943), the founder of Kuraray chemical conglomerate from Kurashiki, Okayama. Yamamoto supported Kawai over his life-time and his museum, Ōyamazaki Sanso Museum in Kyoto, continues to exhibit Kawai's art. Ōhara proposed to build a *Nihon Mingei-Kan* (Japan Folk Crafts Museum) in Tokyo in 1930, and later proposed the second *Mingei-Kan* in Kurashiki in 1948. The motives of these philanthropists need further investigation. However, Kawai's encounter with these eminent philanthropists in the political and economic background was indispensable to his career (Kanashima 2019: 89).

Kawai's philosophy was appreciated by people around him. His philosophy seemed to be based on the concept of 'other power' (*tariki* 他力) in Buddhism, so as to find fulfilment within predetermined life destiny. Due to Japan's economic and political turmoil in the early 20th century, Kawai's 'preaching' about life and beauty comforted people. Kawai's writing shows stories based on Buddhist influence, creating a visual metaphor of house-roofs as hand palms pressed together as a Buddhist prayer, emphasising life's impermanence (Kawai 1968: 135). Umesao Tadao (1920–2010), a Japanese anthropologist, described Kawai's art as spiritualistic animistic art (Kawai Kanjirō Museum 2014: 12). Sagi Tamae, Kawai's grand-daughter and art historian, claims that Kawai's art may represent the cosmic world within the Mandala matrix, the ideal form of universe in Buddhism (Kawai Kanjirō's House 2014: 4). Kawai's aesthetic was impractical to the point of incomprehensibility. Kawai and Len Castle, Greig's mentor, were both charismatic and attractive people, possessing the similar epitome of personality which mixed philosophy with creativity.



Figure 11: Kawai Kanjirō's House 2016, Japan. Photographs by author.

In the alcove of Kawai's house in Kyoto, a scroll with a line from the Confucius Analects, '樂在其中' ('happiness within' or 'find pleasure in it') is displayed like a scroll in an alcove of the tea room. This writing was a gift from Yanagi. The poem reflects Kawai's aesthetic ideals and his work ethics resonating with the content of the original:

子曰：飯疏食，飲水，曲肱而枕之，樂亦在其中矣。不義而富且貴，於我如浮雲。

In eating coarse rice and in drinking water, in using one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as the passing of clouds. (Lunyu 7:16, D.C. Lau (trans.) 1998: 93)

Kawai's philosophy created a welcoming space without any boundaries for guests. He was respected and welcomed his guests with the same heartfelt hospitality one is expected to perform at the traditional tea ceremony. Kawai's preaching on the virtues of life attracted diverse guests including academics during the Japanese turmoil of the Second World War (Kawai 2009: 34-35).¹⁶ Greig noted that Kawai's visitors included people from various religions, business leaders and intellectual and

16 Kawai's leading supporters were Kuroita Katsumi (1874–1946), a Japanese historian from the University of Tokyo, Naitō Torajiro or Naitō Konan (1866–1934), a Japanese historian and Sinologist, the founder of the Kyoto School of historiography, Iwasaki Koyata (1879–1945) from Mitsubishi Zaibatsu, Hosokawa Moritatsu (1883–1970) from the House of Peers, Iwai Taketoshi, the Kyoto branch manager from Mainichi Newspaper. (Kaneshima 2019: 87)



Figure 12: Kawai with the supporters of the Mingei Movement: (L to R) Kawai Kanjirō, Kawakatsu Kenkichi (Takashimaya Department Store), unknown, Munakata Shikō, Yamamoto Tamesaburō, unknown, Yanagi Sōetsu, Iwai Taketoshi (Mainichi Newspaper), unknown. Circa 1930. Courtesy of Kawai Kanjirō's House. (<https://discoverjapan-web.com/article/12413>)

he observed, '[W]e listened to his [Kawai's] word which was like water from a clear fresh spring' (Greig 1982d: 52).

Kawai also mentored younger potters. Kawai Takeichi (1908–1989), his nephew, was his student from 1927 till 1954 (Sagi 2016: 279; Chappel 1964: 2). Greig must have sensed Kawai's generous welcome as a version of Rikyū's words 'treasure each encounter' (一期一会) in Kawai's house.

Kawai welcomed a number of foreign visitors although he did not travel to the US and Europe unlike Hamada or Yanagi. The interior of his house was not a typical Japanese Kyoto house. Its European atmosphere may show the influence from Yanagi, his *Mingei* colleague. Yanagi visited the Nordiska Museet (the Nordic Museum) in 1921, which he described to Leach as 'the biggest museum of peasant arts in the world.' This became the model for the *Mingei-kan* (Japanese Folk Crafts Museum) established in 1936 and perhaps also influenced Kawai's interior design (Kikuchi 2004: 70–71). Kawai constantly hosted foreign guests and apprentices: his nephew Kawai Takeichi, Son Toshou 孫斗昌 from Korea in 1934, Leach in 1935, and Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999) who was invited by the Japanese government to teach design for the Western market in 1940. (Sagi 2016: 280–83)

Kawai received finance in 1937 to renovate his entire house. He incorporated the smart use of Danish hand-craft furniture suitable for the age, introduced by Leach, Hamada and Yanagi (Yanagi 1989: 96). Kawai's furniture featured 'functional beauty,' fit for a mini-*Mingei* museum. Kawai's elaborate interior representation can be compared to the modern projections of the refined simplicity of a tea house. Okakura

wrote, 'the tea room is the result of profound artistic forethought, and the details have been worked out with care perhaps even greater than that expended on the building of the richest palaces and temples' (Okakura 1964: 31–32, originally published 1906).

The Japanese environment and values were forced to radically adapt, culminating in Japan's 'total war' (総力戦, *sōryokusen*) effort to reverse Western hegemony. During the wartime 'lockdown,' when all resources were mobilized towards the military effort, Kawai was left with little means for kiln firing. In 1944, Kawai received financial support from his business friends and paid all his house loans, which allowed him to stop firing for the next four years (Sagi 2016: 284). He then turned to 'writing,' which was atypical for a potter, to explore answers for a new perspective on art and creativity. Kawai wrote a diary with ink and brush during these four years, that lead to his book publication after the war. Kawai's aberrant expression of art, including his poetic writings, unintentionally embedded a political message, whether to deny or to accept the social circumstances. Jacques Rancière, a French philosopher, argues that 'the politics of art is not a struggle for power, but for a configuration of a specific space, a conflict over the existence of that space' (Rancière 2009: 24). A distant co-existence of art and politics are evident in Kawai's career. Kawai had been aloof from political power but closely connected with his financial supporters who were often associated with politics.

With the end of the war in 1945, Japanese social values, beliefs, and myths, adapted to a new era of recovery. Against this economic and political backdrop of the postwar recovery, Kawai's writings, in particular, reveal his thoughts on the era through the prism of polarity. He wrote, 'a machine is an extension of hands,' which implied that people should accept mechanization. Further, his comment, 'it is normal for a leaf to be eaten by insects' suggested that Japan should accept its loss as an



Figure 13: Fish with a splashed three-color glaze, Kawai Kanjirō. Circa 1960s. Courtesy of Robert Yellin Yakimono Gallery. <http://www.e-yakimono.net/html/kawai-Kanjirō-jt.html>

organic reality. (Kawai, 1975, 2006) Kawai proposed accepting life's continuity by 'other power' (*ta-riki* 他力) as 'non-duality' (*juni* 不二), a Buddhist term, which shows a way to come to terms with the historical rupture of Japan's defeat in the war. His artwork around that period illustrates an inexplicable state of mind and resulted in his pieces, a mix of the traditional Japanese techniques with Asian and English techniques in uniquely dynamic forms. Kawai's interaction with Leach revived after the end of the war, in 1953. Kawai's pots show an acceptance of the new era with a contradictory trust in recovery. The techniques applied in his pots were with three colors of *Tang Sancai* from China, with an English 'slip' decoration with a Japanese brush onto sculptural forms. Greig was particularly attracted by this phase of Kawai's creativity.

Greig's Manuscript on Kawai

Greig left four hand-written manuscripts on Kawai, a record of his spiritual journey towards the 'East.' His aesthetic search is evident throughout his manuscripts with several key terms emerging. Greig's interpretation of Kawai and Japanese aesthetics was built on the philosophical duality between East and West with numerous comparisons. His inscribed differences from Christianity to Buddhism seemingly walking in the footsteps of Orientalist ideas of essentialization of the East and West. At the same time, he compared Japanese philosophy to European Romanticism, suggesting there is a common ground that would undermine the cultural dichotomy (Greig 1982f). As recorded in his notes, Greig found Kawai's 'deep feeling for overcoming duality' bearing a mystic, 'prophetic' dimension, exuberant in 'mana' (Greig 1982d: 2, 37, 52, 56).¹⁷

Greig entitled his project 'Prophetic Potter.' He intended to include a discussion on the *Mingei* archetype,¹⁸ the aestheticism, and the religious foundations which bridged views ranging from *Shingon* Buddhism (which he understood as being one of Kawai's sources) to European Romanticism. The 'prophetic' aspects, which Greig was attempting to conceptualize through a combined biographical, art historical and cross-cultural analysis, are expressed in two main ways. One is Kawai's spiritual dimension in the evolution of his work fulfilling *Mingei* archetypes and the other is the silent struggle accompanying his artistic quest. Regarding the archetypes identified in Kawai's work, it can be deduced that for Greig, this was primarily associated with 'growth' or 'life force,' and stylistically manifested in exuberance and excess.

He was also attempting to follow closely how the concept of growth, or the perception that the ceramic piece may be 'alive' with plasticity. Clay is modelled on

17 Mana of philosophy – revealed. Visitors by religions, leaders and intellectuals. 'we listened to his word which was like water from a clear fresh spring'. (Greig 1982 MS-Papers-6521-2 Kawai 1: 52)

18 Greig compared Kawai's work spirit with 'archetype' by noting 'Kawai is a perfect example – to archetype through moral wind,' 'direct influence, but open to same universal source of archetypes' symbolizing exuberance (Greig 1982d: 2, 31, 39).

processes of metamorphoses and shifting dichotomies (contraction of dual structures). In the void enclosed in ceramic piece, he attempted to show how the essential notion of a spatial enclosure ('negative space') inherent in the making of clay containers may be perceived through exposure to the 'outer space,' to use Greig's term. Greig photographed every artwork piece of Kawai and wrote separate notes – analyzing its technique and decoration – formulating the metamorphosis of Kawai (Greig, 1982d). Greig incorporated this idea into his series of 'Solid & Void' (Greig 1982f: 20). Greig seemed to seek a balance between form and decoration, which would destabilize the preconceived ideas of 'surface and volume.'

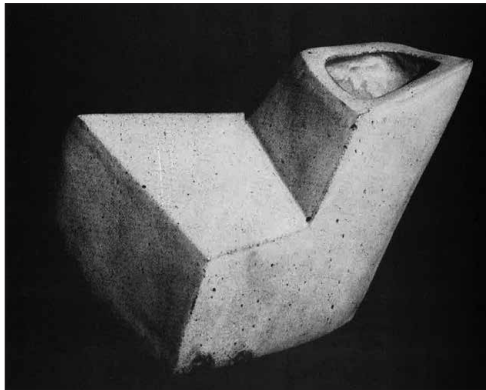


Figure 14: *Solid & Void* by James Greig: *Transformations*, Exhibition Publication, 1982: 26. Wellington City Art Gallery. Courtesy of Rhondda Greig. (https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations_catalogue.pdf)

Notably, Greig was aspiring to create a book that has 'grown' out of Kawai's artwork. Even though Greig may not have had a reading knowledge of Japanese, it is important to point out the existence of Kawai's philosophical writings (essays and poetic prose) alongside his artworks. Greig created his version of Kawai in cultural transfer like translating a foreign language as an experience of struggle at the limits of understanding. Greig noted Kawai's reluctance to speak directly of the message in his work (Greig 1982d: 54), yet he also discerned through his biographical project that words constitute another dimension of the potter's universe. Greig was visualizing his book as a 'living work,' which in terms of format could be achieved not through statements and prescriptions, but through 'questions' dynamically immersing the readers (Greig 1982e: 41). There appears to be an overarching question within Greig's project, suggesting the profundity of his quest as a New Zealander, attempting to achieve a 'Western viewpoint' on Kawai. This overarching question also addresses the role of destiny in Greig's link to Japan from the POW camp to Kawai's world. His responsiveness to Buddhist ideas of transcending polarity combined with his celebration of the secular dimension of lived practice and experience: 'We are born out of the cosmos.' (Greig 1982d: 47) Greig seemed to be on the cusp of crossing a boundary within his homage to Kawai.

New Zealand celebrated counterculture in the 1970s and many were attracted to the eastern religions (or spiritualism) despite a general conservative attitude on religion. Greig apparently understood the contexts of *Shingon* and Zen Buddhist thought as touchstones to the uncharted terrain of humanistic universality and unity. This could be interpreted as the esoteric version of his advocacy for ‘art as a significant vehicle for international understanding.’¹⁹ His responsiveness to the ‘other power’ of Buddhism’s idea of non-self was also a form of struggle rather than resignation. Greig refers to Kawai’s life as a Buddhist ‘treatise,’ which he ‘struggles to translate.’ (Greig 1982e: 42) The struggle, of which Greig speaks in this passage, overlaps with his entire project and, one could argue, accessing a core of cultural translation (exchange) as a struggle at a deep and poetic level. With the same approach, as he assesses Kawai’s struggle ‘away from the *Mingei* tradition’, Greig visualizes Kawai as ‘[struggling] forward in unknown waters’ (Greig 1982c: 31). Greig’s entire project, one could argue, signifies the struggle of cultural translation to access a type of transcendence, submerged in the ‘unknown waters’ of the cultural ‘other’ beyond history and ideology. It is appropriate to say that the two artists’ struggles merged in Greig’s project. The poem of Zen master Shūhō Myōchō (aka. Daitō Kokushi 1282–1338 大燈国師), inspired both Greig and Kawai, shares with us a glimpse of a ‘living road,’ a vast terrain in which the transformative forces of life and growth ‘reroot’ cultural identities and practices. Greig, known as a certified balloonist, offers a view from the sky, which poignantly substantiates the two initial lines he noted on his manuscript. (Greig 1982d: 33).²⁰

Having once penetrated the cloud barrier [kan],
The living world opens out north [East] [South] [and] [West].
In the evening resting, in the morning roaming, neither host nor guest.
At every step the pure wind rises. (Greig 1982d: 33)²¹

Greig’s Endeavour with Plasticity and Void

Greig’s cross-cultural encounter could be developed into a cognitive metaphor of the pottery process. Pottery starts by the digging of clay. The work requires strength, similar to Greig’s laborious efforts to absorb Kawai’s Zen Buddhist philosophy. Forming clay is done by hands, the direct touch of clay’s plasticity. This core of pottery making requires skill to find the right balance of plasticity to form a shape without losing too much moisture. Building a new relationship also requires plasticity

19 Greig quoted in Evening Post article interview by Sue Thomas. ‘Japanese companies are closely involved in supporting cultural events and expect other companies to have similar values.’ ‘Art forges better link between NZ and Japan,’ *Evening Post* (New Zealand), 1985.

20 Greig explained his artwork no. 24 & 25 Land Form bowl at the *Transformation* exhibition as ‘a feeling of the undulating and uplifting of the earth, experienced while floating above it in a hot air balloon – an experience of freedom and balanced opposites which I was fortunate enough to have’ (Greig, 1982f: 14). https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations_catalogue.pdf

21 His notes obviously reflect the poem of Daitō Kokushi, the founder of Daitōkuji (Poem by Daitō Kokushi, cited by Dumoulin, Heinrich 1988: 186). <https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/daito-kokushi.html>



Figure 15: Plasticity model. ©2020, Kumiko Jacolin.

to accept difference, to find the right balance, a negotiation on the limit between two cultures and a displacement from a familiar to a foreign culture. Greig's interpretation stretched like the plasticity of clay through the shapes of his idea moulded by the 'other power.' Plasticity received and reshaped Greig's sentient thought without direct access to Kawai's literature.

The next process is patient drying of the pottery. This tedious step is similar to the patience needed for cultural encounters. Greig's year-long stay in Japan to study Kawai was like an endurance-test: like the clay, could he tolerate the necessary investment of time? Likewise in pottery, we fire twice, first at a lower temperature (700–900C) as a bisque. Most unsuitable forms will explode at around 200–300C and only a durable pot will be preserved for the final stage. Greig passed this one-year test and succeeded in exhibiting his artwork. He formed a precious friendship with Japan after a year.

In Catherine Malabou's analysis of the psyche, plasticity pre-empts the gap, the trace of struggle or trauma, by receiving, giving and even annihilating form (Malabou 2009: 44). Malabou's phrase 'the permanence of form' evokes Greig's comments on the irreversibility of the fired object; however, this irreversibility can be also understood as plastic in the sense of destroying form. This pottery process accounts for a certain plasticity essential to approaching cross-cultural relations. Greig idealised clay as a living form transforming from amorphous to an irreversibly congealed shape, all the while retaining the 'spark of life' (the title of his autobiographical film). Greig's quest for the relationship between 'life and form' was empowered by the 'visual and invisible' concept of clay. The 'living work,' which Greig strived to conceptualize



Figure 16: *Sentient Souls*, 2020. Ceramics with kintsugi (joinery with lacquer and gold), ©2020, Kumiko Jacolin. Photograph by Colin McDiarmid.

in his illustrated biography of Kawai seamlessly metamorphosized into an engaged questioning of Greig's own life and legacy. The intercultural dimension in pottery exchanges between New Zealand and Japan did not only fill a void in cultural resources, amidst the political or economic dimension of soft power, but encouraged the preservation of a 'void' (or a negativity) as an enabling polarity.

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Bibliographical Note

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