

## ARTTALK



*Vasque*, 2011, stoneware and porcelain,  
by Yoshimi Futamura.



Torn vessel-like sculpture, 2009, stoneware and porcelain,  
by Machiko Ogawa.



Smoke-infused sculpture, 2009, white clay and terra-cotta,  
by Setsuko Nagasawa.

## The Female Glaze

For centuries, women in Japan were not even permitted to touch a kiln, lest their "impurity" taint whatever was baking. Yet in the past decade, women clay artists have come to outnumber men in Japan's art schools, and the next generation of master ceramists is shaping up to be disproportionately female.

To understand this profound shift in Japanese art and culture, one must look not only to Kyoto and Tokyo but also to Paris and Limoges, France. That's the idea behind "The French Connection," opening June 7 at **Joan B. Mirviss** gallery in New York. The exhibition presents the work of five Japanese women ceramists whose careers and artistic output have been shaped by their unique relationships to France.

"Rather than buck the system within Japan, these women looked for an external means of educating themselves and accessing a ladder to professional opportunities that Japan didn't offer," says Mirviss.

At 71, **Setsuko Nagasawa** is the elder of the group, and she continues to experiment with bold geometric forms and ombré colorations—traces of the smoke she infuses into the clay. Nagasawa studied in Kyoto with the influential porcelain artist **Kenkichi Tomimoto** and worked with American ceramicist **Paul Soldner** before settling in Paris. "In many ways she paved a path for the other women," Mirviss says. "She's a true expat."

The vessel-like forms of **Machiko Ogawa** also evade national identity. The Sapporo-born artist combines dazzling glaze finishes with rough-hewn surfaces, a hybrid approach inspired by her training in Tokyo and Paris and her years spent living in the French-speaking African nation of Burkina Faso. **Chieko Katsumata**, who maintains residences in both Japan and France, creates colorful stoneware that resembles the juicy fruits of another planet. "It's very biomorphic," Mirviss says, "with erotic undertones, maybe even overtones."

The natural world is also reflected in the root- and wave-inspired forms of Nagoya-born **Yoshimi Futamura**, who has resided in Paris since the late 1980s. The youngest of the five and the best known in her native country is 43-year-old **Yasuko Sakurai**, whose signature perforated vessels call to mind immaculate wasp's nests. Born in Kyoto, she credits her training in Limoges with igniting her passion for porcelain. "France has, in fact, created the artist I am today," says Sakurai.

On the gallery walls will be the work of **Toko Shinoda**. The 99-year-old grand dame of contemporary Japanese art found her formative inspiration in New York, where she lived briefly in the mid-1950s before returning to Japan with calligraphic brushstrokes emboldened by Abstract Expressionism. Says the show's organizer, **Allison Tolman**, who selected eight paintings and ten lithographs by Shinoda, "She has remained faithful to the centuries-old tool—the brush."

—Stephanie Murg