

Kondô Yutaka

Joan B. Mirviss

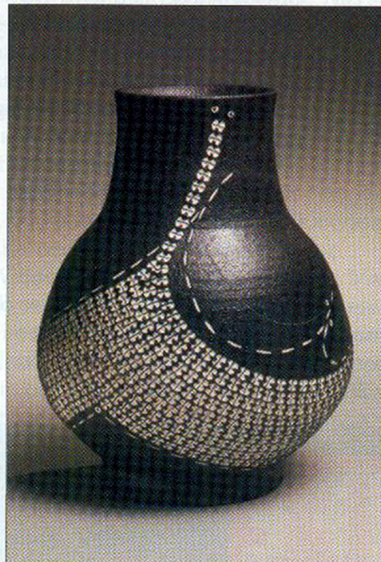
The long history of the Kondô clan has the elements of a grand saga—a samurai's defense of the imperial court, the subsequent gift of a central piece of Kyoto real estate, and an eventual fall from grace—but, just as significantly, the family's story over the last century mirrors the evolution of the great artistic tradition of Japanese ceramics.

Born in 1902, a generation after the samurai class was disbanded, Kondô Yûzô took advantage of the family estate's location in the heart of Kyoto's renowned pottery district and learned the craft, eventually studying with Tomimoto Kenkichi, among the country's greatest porcelain painters. Yûzô developed his own technique, specializing in a graceful interpretation of traditional Japanese nature themes using Chinese-

style blue-and-white glaze, eventually earning the title of Living National Treasure. His eldest son, Yutaka, who was expected to follow his father's path, completed graduate degrees in ceramics before embarking on a peripatetic career that kept him teaching, mostly overseas, and pioneering the development of sculptural, nonfunctional ceramics.

Yutaka committed suicide in 1983 and Yûzô died in 1985, after which Yutaka's younger brother, Hiroshi, and Hiroshi's son, Takahiro, took up the family trade.

This show, drawn from the extended family's private collections, featured some full-bodied vases with Yûzô's



Kondô Yutaka, *Black vase with white dotted designs*, 1982, stoneware with slip glaze, 12¼" x 9½".

Joan B. Mirviss.

stunning bamboo and pomegranate designs. But the focus here was on the contribution of Yutaka, who, despite having been overshadowed by his father at home, is a key figure in contemporary ceramics, having taught the Japanese style around the world and brought foreign techniques back to Japan. Among his 14 works here was a set of stunning vessels from the '70s that elaborate on a Korean tradition of hand-stamped, slip-glazed stoneware. From the third generation, Takahiro made works especially for the show, purposefully integrating his grandfather's cobalt-blue glaze and his uncle's fluid abstract line with the angular, geometric forms that are the hallmarks of his own contemporary style.

—Eric Bryant