

Though unremarkable in themselves, the objects were organized by Vo into unsettling juxtapositions that conjured subtly dissident alternative histories. Only on close inspection, for example, did viewers notice that *Lot 20. Two Kennedy Administration Cabinet Room Chairs* (2013) had been brutally disassembled: the chairs' bare wooden frames stood in separate corners, while the leather, muslin, twine, and nails were distributed elsewhere, piled on the floor or slung on the wall like carcasses of human flesh. *Lot 11. Vietnam Photo Album, 1962* (2013) seemed like an innocent memento—but its inscription disclosed that it was gifted to McNamara “with the compliment of the Armed Forces of Vietnam.”

—Emily Nathan

## 'Seven Sages of Ceramics'

Joan B. Mirviss

The work of seven of Japan's finest modern ceramists was on artful display here. Tea bowls, plates, and sculptural objects were nestled in quiet nooks or perched on hand-hewn wooden pedestals. This lovely show focused on pieces from the mid-20th century by craftsmen who are not well known outside of Japan.

As embodied in their ceramics, the philosophies of these artisans could not be more different. Kitaōji Rosanjin (1883–1959) created Modernist functional tableware, which he used at his exclusive eating club in Tokyo. His leaf-

shaped, silver-glazed platter with colored dots (1958) suggests a painter's palette, and a dish of glazed stoneware—half moss-green, half white with blue dashes (1960s)—calls to mind Matisse. Kitaōji intended both pieces to be usable objects. Likewise, his near-contemporary Kawakita Handeishi (1878–1963) famously said he made his charming tea

bowls “in order to drink tea.” In contrast, the younger Arakawa Toyozō (1894–1985) sculpted vessels for visual appeal that he never intended for use. In fact, some of his tea bowls have cracks in their bases, rendering them unusable.

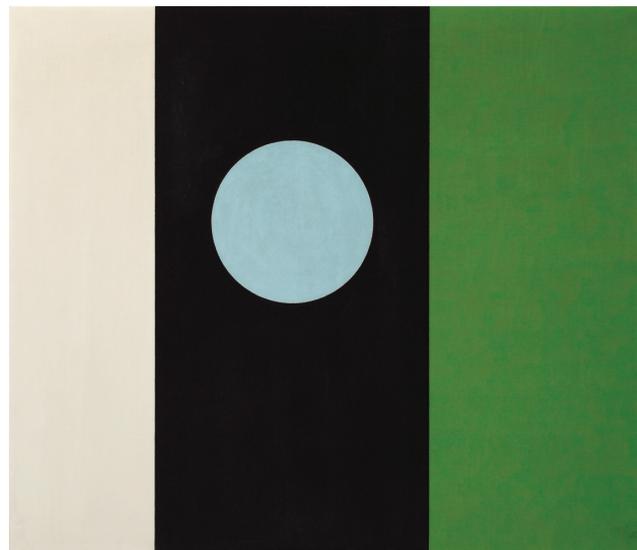
A sea change took place after World War II, when a new generation of ceramists moved more decisively toward sculpture. A barrel-shaped stoneware piece with two cylindrical mouths (1956) by Yagi Kazuo (1918–79) conjures a creature from another planet, while his ceramic self-portrait (ca. 1940–50s), made with wormlike clumps of clay, speaks of mortality. Most striking of all were the bold works of Kamoda Shōji (1933–1983), functional vessels for those who insist on it, but mostly sculptural meditations on the nature of the Earth and of clay.

—Mona Molarsky

## John McLaughlin

Van Doren Waxter

This serene exhibition featured five reductive oil paintings on Masonite made between 1947 and 1974 by pioneering California abstractionist John McLaughlin. After a period of living in Japan, the self-taught artist began painting



John McLaughlin, *Untitled*, 1951, oil on Masonite, 23 3/4" x 27 1/4". Van Doren Waxter.

in 1938. Working far from the East Coast Abstract Expressionist turmoil, McLaughlin was inspired by the Asian ideal of artworks as objects facilitating contemplation. His radically stripped-down, transcendent geometric works were crucial to the artistic development of later California artists including Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, and Robert Ryman.

The show's earliest painting, from 1947, hung alone in the entry gallery—an opaque white biomorphic shape floating diagonally against a pale olive ground, covered by transparent red and gold rectangles. Pigment is thinly applied, allowing the canvas to show through, and the thin horizontal bars that preoccupied McLaughlin for years have already appeared in this work.

The four other paintings, two in black and white and two in color, each hung on their own wall in the second-floor parlor room. Overlapping shapes and contrasting textures have disappeared in the two works painted in 1951, replaced by simple hard-edged forms delineated in tenderly applied opaque oil paint. In one, a syncopated series of horizontal bars of varying width seem to push against one another, set off by a hovering circle in the upper left corner. In the other, an ivory stripe on the left and a green strip on the right seem to squeeze the black stripe between them, pushing forward a central pale blue disk.

By the time he created the show's final paintings, two years before he died, McLaughlin had abandoned spatial and



Kamoda Shōji, *Undulating rounded gray and beige colored-clay vessel with raised floor*, 1972, two-colored clay inlaid vessel with glazed interior, 5" x 8" x 8 1/4". Joan B. Mirviss.