



NATURAL SELECTION

RANDY JOHNSTON WORKS OF BEAUTY AND UTILITY

Pucker Gallery | Boston



OVAL FORM
Red kaolin slip with natural ash, black and red stripe
4.5 x 19 x 11"
RJ763

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By Andrew L. Maske

Working as a potter for decades in the farm country of Wisconsin, Randy Johnston has had plenty of exposure to the varied faces of nature. Deep snow in the winter, heat in the summer—the vagaries of weather and its accompanying challenges are tempered by the joy of seeing the trees, flowers, birds, and animals that vary with each season. The materials and tools he uses change with the season as well; temperature and humidity affect the throwing, drying, and trimming of clay pieces as well as the

firing of his woodburning kilns. Nevertheless, years of experience have tempered the difficulty of adjusting to adverse environmental factors, and Johnston and his wife Jan Mckeachie-Johnston, also an outstanding potter, have developed a harmonic relationship with the rural setting in which they live. Moreover, the natural surroundings of the Wisconsin countryside inform many of the textures and forms each achieves.

This group of vessels reflects approaches that Randy Johnston has developed and refined

ALL WORKS ARE STONEWARE.

over the past ten to twenty years. Outwardly, many of the forms and formats do not seem to have changed radically, but a closer look reveals that Johnston's focus has sharpened and that his skills have reached an even higher level than in his earlier works. Nature does not appear in clearly identifiable motifs, but rather in gestural daubs, strokes, and lines that echo, almost subconsciously, shapes that we commonly encounter in the natural world.

Johnston's facility with such patterns is most vividly expressed in his *yunomi* tea cups. The Japanese word *yunomi* combines the characters for hot water (*yu*) and drink (*nomu/nomi*), but the custom of drinking steeped green tea (versus the whipped powdered tea, *matcha*) from such cups became popular only with the development of tea exports from Japan in the late nineteenth century. In the first half of the twentieth century, cups for drinking steeped green tea (*sencha* or *bancha*) were typically of porcelain, and only after World War II did individualistic stoneware *yunomi* such as we know today become widely produced.

Randy Johnston's *yunomi* combine decorative techniques familiar from Japanese traditional wares with a sense of flair reflecting his years of experience. The cups are compelling and unique, yet also warm and inviting. He tends to use *nuka ash* glaze and several formulations of *shino* glaze on his *yunomi*, with decorative patterns added in iron brown brushwork or resist. His signature red iron slip is also in evidence. An unusual traditional Japanese technique that Johnston has recently incorporated is the use of thumbprints to create a motif or repeating pattern. Jars and bowls using such decoration are known to have been made at the *Karatsu* kilns of southwestern Japan in the early 1600s.

Another vessel type featured prominently in this selection is the teabowl. Originally used for preparing and drinking whisked *matcha*, teabowls have become an internationally

recognized and revered ceramic form. Johnston mostly eschews representative decoration on his teabowls, preferring striking abstract effects that communicate with the viewer in a visceral manner. He likes to use thick *shino* glazes for these pieces, sometimes firing them in his *anagama* kiln, surrendering the final appearance of his bowls to the vagaries of the flame. Although they could be used for tea or other purposes, the sculptural qualities and color contrasts of the teabowls in this group make them compelling display pieces on their own.

The other major group of pieces in this offering are flower vases. Typically, Johnston's vases complement, rather than compete with, the flowers and plants they are made to hold. Nevertheless, they embrace a number of original forms that subtly evince classical modes based on the human body. Notable among them are his Figure vases, which flare toward the bottom in a manner reminiscent of a person's hips. Many of his vases and other expressive forms display a green copper glaze that has become one of Johnston's signatures in recent years. The mottled nature of this glaze gives the sense of an ancient bronze patina, lending an air of antiquity to the items it envelops. Furthermore, the pieces on which Johnston uses it often have the feel of artifacts or found objects, remnants of faraway cultures whose members were more in touch with nature and the spiritual realm than we are today.

The ongoing pandemic has caused people around the world to reevaluate what is most important to them. The loss experienced by so many verifies that life, love, and shared humanity are far more precious than mere material goods and that the search for beauty is in harmony with the search for meaning. The greatest art is that which reminds us of the essential nature of these things. This selection of ceramics by Randy Johnston reaffirms the unchanging value of beauty in our rapidly evolving world.



LARGE VASE
Copper glaze
19.25 x 14 x 14.5"
RJ767



SQUARE PLATTER
Nuka glaze over iron slip with brushwork
3.5 x 14.25 x 14.5"
RJ761



YUNOMI
Coarse shino iron slip iron brushwork
4 x 3.75 x 3.75"
RJ748



YUNOMI
Coarse shino over iron slip iron brushwork
4 x 3.75 x 4"
RJ747



TEA BOWL
Coarse shino layers with iron slip
brush decoration and natural ash
3.25 x 4.5 x 4.5"
RJ733



TEA BOWL
Coarse shino layers with iron slip
brush decoration and natural ash
3 x 4 x 4.5"
RJ732



DOUBLE SPOON FORM
Nuka glaze with iron slip and brushwork
3.5 x 14 x 11.5"
RJ766



OVAL FIGURE VASE
Copper glaze
14 x 8.5 x 3.25"
RJ759



ROUND BOWL WITH SPLIT RIM DETAIL
Copper green
4 x 16 x 16"
RJ756



SCULPTURAL PLATTER
Copper glaze
5 x 22.5 x 22.75"
RJ768



OVAL PLATTER
Nuka glaze over iron slip and wax resist brushwork
4.75 x 19 x 10.5"
RJ753



YUNOMI
Nuka glaze over iron slip with iron brushwork
and Nezumi blue gray
4 x 3.75 x 3.5"
RJ725



YUNOMI
Nuka glaze over iron slip with iron brushwork
and Nezumi blue gray
4.25 x 3.5 x 3.5"
RJ723



LARGE VASE
Nuka glaze over iron slip with prints
13 x 11.5 x 11"
RJ751



LARGE ORIBE SHAPED FORM
Nuka glaze with impressed rope pattern
4 x 14.75 x 12.5"
RJ762



SQUARED PLATTER
Copper green glaze
3.75 x 17.25 x 17"
RJ755



DOUBLE SPOON FORM
Copper glaze
4.5 x 21.5 x 11.75"
RJ754



OVAL FIGURE VASE
Nuka glaze with iron marks
13.75 x 8.5 x 3.5"
RJ760



SQUARED TAPERED VASE
Nuka glaze with iron prints
13.5 x 4.75 x 4.75"
RJ765



SQUARED VASE
Crackle shino glaze with natural ash over iron slip
9 x 6.5 x 6.25"
RJ752



AFRICAN-INSPIRED SPOON FORM WITH STRIPES
Natural ash glaze
6 x 22.5 x 8.25"
RJ769



YUNOMI
Crackle shino glaze with iron brush decoration
4.25 x 3.75 x 3.75"
RJ740



YUNOMI
Shino glaze layers with iron decoration over iron slip
4 x 3 x 3"
RJ728



SMALL IKEBANA VASE
Copper glaze
5 x 9 x 2"
RJ736



DOUBLE SPOON FORM
Copper glaze
2.25 x 9 x 8.5"
RJ735



YUNOMI
Coarse shino layers over iron slip with brush decoration
4.5 x 4 x 4"
RJ742



YUNOMI
Layers of coarse shino glaze, iron slip, and brushwork
4 x 3.75 x 3.75"
RJ708



YUNOMI
Coarse shino glaze layers with iron brushwork
4.25 x 3.75 x 4"
RJ718



OVAL VASE
Copper glaze
7 x 6.5 x 4.5"
RJ738



YUNOMI
Crackle shino over iron slip brushwork
4 x 3.75 x 3.75"
RJ746



YUNOMI
Coarse shino glaze layers with iron slip and
iron thumbprints
4.25 x 3.75 x 3.75"
RJ739



YUNOMI
Shino layers with iron brushwork
4 x 4 x 4"
RJ744



TEA BOWL
Crackle shino and natural ash glazes with
brush decoration
3 x 4.5 x 4.5"
RJ730



TEA BOWL
Layers of shino glaze over iron slip, anagama fired
3.5 x 4.75 x 4.5"
RJ710



TEA BOWL
Layers of shino glaze with natural ash, anagama fired
3.5 x 4.75 x 5"
RJ709



FIGURE VASE
Copper glaze
8 x 5 x 2.5"
RJ737



TEA BOWL
Shino and natural ash glazes with iron slip
3 x 4.5 x 4.75"
RJ731



TEA BOWL
Red shino with iron slip, anagama fired
3.25 x 4.75 x 4.5"
RJ711



SQUARED VASE
Nuka glaze with impressed hand prints
15.5 x 6.5 x 6.5"
RJ764



NARROW SQUARED VASE
Kaolin red slip with natural ash and black stripes
12.75 x 4.5 x 4.25"
RJ758



VASE WITH LOBES
Kaolin red slip with natural ash
14 x 10 x 10"
RJ757

Randy Johnston is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Bush Foundation Artist Fellowship, two Visual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Distinguished Teaching Award in American Arts from the James Renwick Society of the Smithsonian. He received his MFA from Southern Illinois University and a BFA in Studio Arts from



the University of Minnesota where he studied with Warren MacKenzie. He also studied in Japan at the pottery studio of Shimaoka Tatsuzo, who was a student of Shoji Hamada. Johnston has presented hundreds of lectures and guest artist presentations worldwide and is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics. He has work in numerous international museums and private collections.

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PUCKER GALLERY
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GALLERY HOURS:
 Monday through Saturday
 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM
 Sunday 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM

We are open to all and taking the necessary precautions for visitor and staff safety. We welcome appointments to maximize visitor experience.

Pucker Gallery is a member of the Boston Art Dealers Association and the New England Appraisers Association.

CREDITS:
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4 December 2021 through 9 January 2022

PUBLIC OPENING RECEPTION:

Saturday 4 December 2021
 3 PM to 6 PM
 The artist will be present.

ONLINE EVENTS:

Please visit www.puckergallery.com for a list of virtual gatherings and events accompanying *Natural Selection*.



YUNOMI
 Coarse shino layers over iron slip
 with brush decoration
 4.25 x 3.75 x 3.75"
 RJ741



YUNOMI
 Shino layers with iron brush stripes
 4.25 x 4 x 3.75"
 RJ745



YUNOMI
 Dry nuka glaze with iron decoration
 over iron slip
 4.25 x 4 x 3.75"
 RJ715



YUNOMI
 Shino layers with iron brushwork
 4.25 x 3.75 x 4"
 RJ749



YUNOMI
 Crackle shino layers with iron
 thumbprints
 4.25 x 4 x 4"
 RJ743



YUNOMI
 Crackle shino over iron slip with
 brushwork
 4.25 x 4 x 4"
 RJ750

Cover:
 LARGE PLATTER
 Anagama fired with natural ash
 6 x 22 x 22.5"
 RJ770

Please visit www.puckergallery.com to view current and past exhibition catalogues and subscribe to the *Pot of the Week* email list.