Jars hold a special place in the world of ceramics and are the workhorses of any ceramic collection. Their function as vessels can be utilized in infinite ways: they hold water, seeds, teas, ashes, mud, or nearly anything one can imagine. According to Nihon Shoki, the second oldest book on Japanese history, tsubo, or jar, was originally tsubu, a word originating from the term for flower bud, tsubomi. One can see the bell shape of the unopened flower bud in the upright form of the jar, both holding a similar potential for beauty and subtlety. The Ainu people propose another etymology, in which tsubo descends from tsupu, meaning room, space, or womb. This too is appropriate, as jars make space to hold what’s precious much like a woman’s womb. For Asia Week 2018, Dai Ichi Arts has prepared 40 outstanding jars for your pleasure, created by various artists meditating on the idea of the jar.

A playful standout in the group comes from talented MATSUDA Yuriko 松田百合子 (1943-). She has built this jar with her typical zest for color and pattern, as bold hues abut cheerful polka-dots and frilled flowers. Her dedication to pattern reveals an interest in Chinese Ming porcelain, Japanese Kutani ware, and the art of French painted Henri Matisse. Close looking reveals that this jar has been patched together from individual pieces of clay, a legacy of her early schooling in ceramics. During her time in art school in the 1960s, women were forbidden to learn the art of wheel throwing and kept from using the wood fire kilns. Yet Matsuda turned this disadvantage into a unique personal style. She pieces her works together, building them up like sculptural works, and continues to use an electric kiln. This jar is finished with brilliant gold handles in thick decorative scrolls. Its traditional shape provides a space for the artist’s brilliant experimentation.

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The artist's imagination soars to the next level in a jar by KAWABATA Kentaro (1976- ). This rotund vessel brings to mind a plump belly or rounded balloon. The mouth of this jar is filled with imaginative bits and doodles in matte gold and jewel tones, and the precious connotations of these flights of fancy recall a golden crown or an exotic crustacean. Such a unique jar calls for an exquisite tropical flower, whose bright color would perfectly complement the understated cream of the body of the jar while also complementing the sumptuous decoration.

KATO Tsubusa (1962- ) works exclusively in white porcelain clay and is known for his gorgeous celadon glaze. Here, he surprises his fans with a rich cobalt on white. He brings the same airy, delicate quality to this deeper blue that he has cultivated in celadon, but this jar evokes not the crisp blue of winter sunlight but the meditative depths of midnight. The jar maintains his signature organic form—he delights in imperfections and irregularities—rising up to a thin edge around a wide opening. The delicacy of this jar would be perfectly complemented by an artful arrangement of flowers.

KIM Hono's take on the jar is nothing less than revolutionary. His color is enigmatic and his skill is highly unusual, resulting in a vessel that both surprises and delights. His jars are built from large strips of clay, almost like wide lasagna noodles. These are molded and creased into his desired form, usually a nod to traditional shapes but with playful deviations from the expected. His tender color is enigmatic, but the wide mouth allows for a generous and spacious feel. This perfectly balanced work truly epitomizes the jar form, bringing together the beauty of earth and art.