

CHAWAN - Tea Bowls

Celebration for the Night of the Harvest Moon

While traditionally said to fall on the 15th day of the eighth month, the Japanese Moon-Viewing Festival, *Jugoya*, is held in alignment with the lunar calendar, so the actual date can vary. This year, the festival will take place on September 8. The full moon on this night is considered the most magnificent of the year, shining high in the autumn sky. Its beauty is marveled today as it has been for centuries. Numerous poems have been written praising its beauty, and offerings are made to it in gratitude for the harvest. Ippodo New York will present a selection of tea bowls by 16 contemporary Japanese potters, ranging from young artists to master craftsmen, creating a wonderful feeling of harmony.

The appreciation of tea bowls is quite unique and differs from that of other art-crafts. During the tea ceremony, the bowl is raised in both hands and touched to the lips, its weight transmitted through the hands, its texture on the lip, and the color of the green tea inside all providing sensory pleasure to the guests. Even the shape of the *kodai*, as the foot of the bowl is known, is highly regarded, with people unraveling narratives in its form. Texture is experienced through the distortions of the clay; the glaze can be enjoyed throughout the entire 360 degrees of the form, and the transformations resulting from use become a source of appreciation. Each small bowl represents a culmination of Japanese aesthetics.

The Japanese tea ceremony, particularly the *wabi-cha* style perfected by Sen-no-Rikyu (1522-91), was developed during the Azuchi Momoyama period (1573-1603) and spread widely among the samurai class. The guest entrance to the tea ceremony room is extremely small and low, forcing the guests to enter on their knees - the idea being to oblige the samurai to leave his sword outside, thereby making all who enter equal. A samurai valued his sword as highly as his life, so to part with it in order to partake in a bowl of tea must have created a heightened atmosphere we can only conjecture upon today. The small, rustic tea room must have offered a unique form of freedom. The tea ceremony expresses an unparalleled refinement, combining Zen Buddhism with the Way of the Samurai. In the beginning, its practice was restricted to the feudal lords and high-ranking samurai, but gradually spread to the rich merchant class during the mid-Edo period (18th century). Sublimated to a deep spiritual level in both society and the realm of art-crafts, its utensils, particularly the tea bowls, have cultural and historic importance. In the past, there have even been occasions when a single tea bowl was considered more important than territory.

There are various traditional styles of tea bowl that have been transmitted to the present, with *Raku*, *Ido*, *Hagi*, *Karatsu* and *Shino* still being created today. All Japanese potters, whoever they may be, strive to create a perfect tea bowl in their respective careers. This is probably due to the fact that the simple tea bowl contains a sense of great presence and infinite power. They can be described as being microcosms or expressions of the great maternal spirit. The tea master devotes all his energies to a single bowl of tea to make it a unique encounter, allowing the guest to appreciate the experience through all five senses. Unlike an artwork that is only appreciated visually, it embodies organic joy, contemplation, tranquility, and living beauty. It represents the essence of entertainment and the true nature of human happiness that has remained unchanged throughout history. A tea bowl always plays an important role in the ultimate communication that joins people together, giving rise to an endless power of imagination.

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