

To Speak All the Languages

Observing the features of her face in the mirror, Lina Meruane asks herself: “How many faces are in a face?” Beyond physical similarities, our bodies replicate forms and movements from the past. How many tactile forms of knowledge remain imprinted in the lifelines of our hands? How many of them are erased or forgotten as time passes? On the topography of our skin, a language takes shape. In our hands we hold a digital composition made of fragments of many hands scattered across time and geography.

Between April and June of 2025, the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park became the space that brought together the living traditions of artists from three countries: Japan, Myanmar, and Mexico. Surrounded by mountains, this center welcomes ceramic specialists each year so they can explore and expand the possibilities of the medium. In that context, and far from their home cities, Teruri Yamawaki (Hirosaki, Japan, 1989), Soe Yu Nwe (Lashio, Myanmar, 1989), and Francisco Muñoz (Tlaxcala, Mexico, 1986) embraced the strangeness of a different environment to learn how to create new systems of familiarity. Moved by contemplation to create their own abstractions of the outside world, the three artists discovered a shared understanding centered on the ritual and presence involved in ceramic work. Through mastery of technique, knowledge of the local clay, and the physicality required for firing in the Anagama kiln, which must be fed for three days straight, Yamawaki, Nwe, and Muñoz faced a shared process of material, bodily, and spiritual transformation.

Guided by questions of origin and destiny, Teruri Yamawaki conceives her pieces as “containers of the soul,” animist forms inspired by the *kamis* that, hand molded, open like breathing cavities that house the spirit of intangible presences. In dialogue with her, Soe Yu Nwe turns ceramics into a field of negotiation between tradition and dissent, hybridizing Burmese folklore, Buddhist symbols, serpents, and fragmented bodies in figures that embody processes of rebirth and identity. For his part, Francisco Muñoz abstracts the architecture of Shinto temples into sculptures supported by complex internal structures, where the cleanliness of form and the reduction of elements allow him to assimilate the foreign through his hands and find, in the limit, a principle for inner expansion.

Through the dislocation of symbolic and ritual elements, the works created during this residency propose new material interpretations of spiritual origin and destiny. As Umberto Eco wrote in his most famous novel, by “making his city from cities and his language from languages,” each artist materializes a detachment from what is known to face the soil of another place, like someone arriving in an unfamiliar city. Ceramic practice forces one to always look with strangeness, to confront the uncertainty of the material, the technique, and the environment in the different places where one works. It is to speak all languages, and none at the same time. In this space, ceramics suggest a form of ritual translation that does not erase the symbols or traditions of its origin but rather detaches itself from the symbolic and historical impositions of the past to continue reinterpreting itself in the present and in the future.

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