

In present-day Japan, Kitaōji Rosanjin's name is so well known that it is even known to many who have no interest in the art of pottery. In fact, in some cases people's interests are more piqued by tales of Rosanjin's attention to and obsessiveness about all matters related to food, including tableware from his time at the high-end restaurant where he serves as head chef, or to his attitude about life, which was rooted in a unique aesthetic, than by Rosanjin as a potter. This phenomenon may arise in part because his initial motivation for learning pottery was wanting to make tableware to serve people meals on, or because stance toward creating was somewhat different from the type of potter that Japanese people tend to like whose entire existence is centered on pottery. It is interesting to note that for many years, these were also the reasons that Rosanjin's pottery was treated with suspicion by professional potters, who drew a line between themselves and Rosanjin. Needless to say, the fact that he continues to attract many enthusiasts even a half century after his death makes it clear his pottery was never something to be underestimated like that. At the foundation of Rosanjin's art were the natural talents for calligraphy and seal-engraving he had. His was able to apply his perfect control of the brush and chisel to pottery-making, and even make use of those skills in painting, an art that he yearned to master from a young age. At the same time, he met influential people who would become his patrons around Japan while he was trying to make a career for himself in calligraphy and seal-engraving, and the artworks he saw and art lectures he heard became fertile soil for nurturing his other artistic abilities. These factors came together to build up his talents in a diverse array of artistic pursuits, including pottery, lacquering, calligraphy, seal-engraving, painting, and culinary arts. Hence, to discuss Rosanjin's artworks in more detail, we should first touch upon his upbringing and life.

Kitaōji Rosanjin was born on March 23, 1883, the second son of Kitaōji Seisō, who was from a hereditary line of priests at Kamigamo Shrine in Kyoto, and his wife Tome. His given name was Fusajirō (to avoid confusion below we shall just use the name Rosanjin). In 1871, soon after the Meiji Restoration (1868), the hereditary system of Shinto priests was abolished, leaving the family without rank or status and reducing the Kitaōji family to poverty. Rosanjin's father died before his birth, and as soon as he was born, he was put out to be raised by a foster family. Having been moved around to different foster families multiple times, his early childhood was one of misery. At the age of six he was adopted by Fukuda Takezō, a woodblock carver, and his wife Fusa. At the Fukuda home Rosanjin would steam rice and help prepare meals for his adoptive parents, who took great pleasure in food. It was here that he learned that people enjoy it when you serve tasty food to them. After graduating from a four-year primary school, he became a live-in apprentice at a pharmacy called Chizaka Wayakuya. While he was apprenticing there he saw a painting by Takeuchi Seihō, a painter of *nihonga*, and was deeply moved. He began to harbor the desire to study *nihonga* under Seihō. At the age of 13 he ran

away from his employer's house and returned to his family's home. Due to economic circumstances, however, he was not permitted to study painting and instead helped his family make block copies, which are like templates for woodblock printing. Unable to give up his dream of learning *nihonga*, to get as much money as he could to buy painting materials, he entered calligraphy competitions called *ichijigaki* that were popular in Kyoto at the time and sponsored by shrines and shops. He began to earn top prizes. Realizing his talent, Rosanjin decided to make a career of calligraphy. He earned and saved money by also working on Western-style painted signs, which had started to become more common then. Upon hearing news that his birth mother was living in Tokyo, he went to Tokyo, in 1903, to study calligraphy in earnest.

Rosanjin called on Kusakabe Meikaku and Iwaya Ichiroku, who were generally considered masters at the time, but he had doubts about their philosophies of calligraphy and did not end up studying in any depth under them. The following November, however, Rosanjin submitted his rendering of *reisho*-style *Thousand Character Classic* (a primer text for Chinese characters) in the calligraphy category at the 36th Japan Arts Exhibition, which earned him an "Honorable Mention, First Class, Second Chair" award. His work was purchased by Kōken Tanaka, then Minister of the Imperial Household. It was a good start as a calligrapher, but it was not enough to make a living. He became a live-in apprentice to Okamoto Katei (grandfather of Tarō Okamoto), a talented block copy maker. Rosanjin gradually became skilled enough to rival his master, and set out on his own, receiving from Katei the name Ōtei. Rosanjin, who had wanted to go to China to continue his training in calligraphy, ended up leaving his wife and child to accompany his mother Tome on her trip to Korea in 1909. After parting with her in Korea, through an acquaintance he found work at the printing bureau at the Office of the then Governor-General of Korea. He lived there for three years.

During this time, he travelled around Korea, and even visited China, studying calligraphy eagerly from ancient stone monuments and seal engravings. In Shanghai, on his return journey, he met Wu Changshi, who was immensely popular as a master of calligraphy and seal-engraving. Rosanjin returned to Japan deeply impressed by him. After arriving back in Japan, he opened up a shop for calligraphy again and seal-engraving in Tokyo's Kyobashi area, where, as part of his business, he made his own styles of calligraphy based on those that he had studied in Korea and China. Little by little, his patrons came to include wealthy businessmen and industrialists. Among them were Toyokichi Kawaji and Genshichi Shibata of Nagahama, Shiga Prefecture, Seibei Naiki of Kyoto, Bokuryō Kubota of Sabae, Fukui Prefecture, and Hosono Entai of Kanazawa. Staying with them enabled Rosanjin to sharpen his appreciation of antique art and hear lectures on art, and he strove to educate himself and build character. It was also around this time that his eyes were again opened by new sensibilities toward cuisine and tableware. On an introduction by Hosono Entai, Rosanjin stayed for a time at the Kaga Yamashiro hot springs on the outskirts of Kanazawa, where he engraved numerous signs for hotels and such. Due to this connection, he began spending time at Suda Seika's kiln, where

he tried making pottery. Through Entai, Rosanjin made the acquaintance of Takichi Ōta, proprietor of the luxury *ryōtei* restaurant Yamanoo in Kanazawa, from whom he learned about cuisine, which would become a major asset to Rosanjin later. This period from 1913 to 1916 was a high point in terms of his engraved-calligraphy signs. For example, 417.0 cm-wide *Gofuku* (or “Drapery”) sign in Nagahama and the 181.8 cm-wide *Yuzu Miso* (fermented bean paste flavored with the *Citrus junos* fruit) sign in Kyoto are masterpieces.

After this, Rosanjin returned again to Kyobashi, and with his friend Takeshiro Nakamura opened an antique art appraisal and sale shop called Taigadō Art Store. Rosanjin began treating guests with meals. The deliciousness of the food, plus the fact that it was served on antique works of art from the store, were often talked about. In addition to antique sales, Rosanjin started the members-only Bishoku Kurabu (or “Gourmet Food Club”) with the store as a meeting place. Taigadō Art Store later burned down in the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. He attempted to regroup the club at the Hana-no-Chaya teahouse inside Shiba Park, but members wanted a calmer place to meet, so to accommodate their wishes, he renovated a facility called Hoshigaoka Saryō (also known as Hoshigaoka Charyō) that was on the grounds of Hie Shrine in Akasaka’s Sannodai area and turned it into a members-only *ryōtei* restaurant of the same name in 1925. Rosanjin and Takeshiro Nakamura co-ran the restaurant as partners, with Nakamura as the head manager and Rosanjin as adviser and head chef. The next stage in Rosanjin’s professional life would be at Hoshigaoka Saryō. Much of what we imagine now when we think about his life are inspired by anecdotes from this restaurant.

Rosanjin was placed in a position not unlike the general operations manager of the restaurant, solely responsible for creating the dining atmosphere, instructing the cooks, and selecting and arranging for tableware and other implements. To prepare the enormous volume of tableware used at Hoshigaoka Saryō, a year after it was opened, he leased a roughly 7,000 *tsubo* (2.314 hectare) plot of land in Kita-Kamakura on which he built a house and a kiln. He gathered talented potters to the kiln and, under his instruction, began producing pottery. When his kiln ran into difficulties because their water source was not as plentiful as they had hoped, it was Iwaji Shioda, president of Tone Boring Co., who dug until he found a water vein and rescued them from the crisis. Unlike the *ryōtei* cuisine up to that point, which tended toward an emphasis on its trappings, they were trying to serve food that brought out the natural flavors of select ingredients and did not conform to the formalities of the genre that people could enjoy in an environment that has been thought out down to the smallest of details. The main style of serving was for the female waitstaff to portion out to guests from lavish and gorgeously-arranged preparations from large, beautiful dishes. They did not make the waitresses pour drinks for their guests. The focus was on enjoying refined conversation. It is difficult to make simple comparisons to present-day dining experiences, but it might be like being able to enjoy the finest in dining for around ¥50,000 (€400) at lunch and ¥100,000 (€800) at dinner in today’s money, which at the time was an incredibly high price. Prominent figures in political and financial circles rushed to

become members. In fact, membership in Hoshigaoka Saryō became a symbol of status among them. In 1935 they eventually opened a Hoshigaoka Saryō restaurant in Osaka. Rosanjin was at this point at the height of his success. But his outrageous behavior and laxness in money matters in the management of the restaurants grew more and more egregious, to the point that the staff pushed back. This led to his dismissal from the restaurants by head manager Nakamura in 1936. In the 11 years since its establishment, Rosanjin introduced revolutions to the Japanese culinary culture of the time and became a well-known figure as head chef of Hoshigaoka Saryō, but he was forced to leave the very shrine to food that he himself had built. Rosanjin was 53 years old. The only parts of the business left to him were the residence and kiln in Kita-Kamakura and the related pottery work.

The people that helped out Rosanjin in this difficult time were his patrons from when he was travelling from place to place as a calligrapher and the customers of Hoshigaoka Saryō who were enamored of his extraordinary talent. Most notable among them was the president of Wakamoto Pharmaceutical Co. and his wife, who had a grand mansion in Setagaya. Figuring that they could use ceramics by Rosanjin as gifts that could be received upon redeeming their “Wakamoto Wife” gift certificates, they put in large orders of ceramics to him, which revived his kiln and enabled him to start a proper career as a potter. Over time, many Rosanjin admirers, such as Iwaji Shioda, president of Tone Boring Co., came to order pottery from him for use in their homes or as gifts, and as a result the kiln flourished. Exhibitions of his works, including paintings, were frequently held, and sales of his products were good. The people around Rosanjin rallied around him in various ways. There were *ryōtei* restaurants in Tokyo and Nagoya that put in large orders for his tableware. Some of them even requested his advice on customer service. In 1942, in the middle of World War II, the kiln was temporarily closed, but during this period Rosanjin worked in lacquerware with lacquer craftsmen in the Kanazawa and Nagoya regions while maintaining an official post at Tone Boring. Hoshigaoka Saryō was burned down in an air raid in 1945. Ultimately, Hosono Entai mediated a settlement between the partners. Rosanjin was left with the residence and kiln in Kita-Kamakura, as well as half of the antique art.

The year after the war’s end, Rosanjin, who was by now 63 years old, opened a direct sales outlet in Ginza called Kado-Kado Bibo. The sign outside read, “Kado-Kado Bibo Specialty Shop of ‘Rosanjin,’ Greatest Artist in Japan.” Rosanjin’s post-war career became an international one. His art captured the hearts of Westerners. Many of his admirers visited his kiln in Kita-Kamakura. It was around this time that he wrote in a letter to Iwaji Shioda, “The free lifestyles of Americans resonate with me.” He became close friends with Isamu Noguchi. Together they visited Kaneshige Tōyō’s kiln in Okayama, where Rosanjin made Bizen ware pieces. He had Noguchi and his wife Yoshiko Yamaguchi stay in the kiln house in Kita-Kamakura. He privately published a magazine called *Doppo*, which included a partial English translation. He also produced murals with pottery fragments for the lacquer panels of the dining and smoking compartments on the Andrew Dillon, a Panamanian-

registered cargo and passenger vessel. At the age of 71, on an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation, Rosanjin spent two and a half months travelling in the U.S. and Europe, where he gave exhibitions and lectures. He donated all of the works that he had brought to art museums and universities. On this trip he met with figures such as Picasso and Chagall, and visited the Louvre. Of course, this trip was not without often told anecdotes, such as Rosanjin putting wasabi and soy sauce on the duck he was served at La Tour d'Argent. Even though he was travelling by invitation, he refused to accept money for the trip as he felt it shameful to do so, but this in fact later placed great financial strain on him. Upon returning to Japan he created a great many works to gain income and held exhibitions one after another. In 1959 he announced that going forward he would do calligraphy, and in October held a "Rosanjin Calligraphic Arts Exhibition" at the Kyoto Art Club. This proved to be his last exhibition. He passed away on December 21 of that year as a result of cirrhosis caused by a liver fluke infection. He was 76 years old.

As we have seen, Rosanjin lived a unique and very eventful life, one full of ups and downs. At many periods in that life he used his extraordinary talent to produce art that attracted and fascinated people.

In this exhibition, we are showing select works from the former collection of Iwaji Shioda, then-president of Tone Boring Co., who was able to drill into a water vein and supply water to Rosanjin's kiln in Kita-Kamakura, and from there became close with him. Collected over the course of their lifelong friendship, many of these works are things that Shioda used regularly in the home. Shioda had many hobbies, and with his wife he enjoyed the tea ceremony. For this reason, many of the items in the collection are tea ware and utensils, of which just a small portion will be on display at the exhibition. It is often said that people understand what makes Rosanjin's works so special once they actually use them, and we believe that these works are good examples of that.