

AM BASSADOR'S MESSAGE

Japan Creative Centre (JCC) and the Embassy of Japan in Singapore have long enjoyed an active and significant relationship with Singapore's master potter Dr Iskandar Jalil. We have had the pleasure of presenting exhibitions by Dr Iskandar since 2013, as well as displays and programmes featuring pottery from his students, protégés and fellow ceramists. Needless to say, it is our delight that this exhibition – Dr Iskandar Jalil: PARADOX, 2018 – has been organised in conjunction with the 45th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Partnership, and Singapore being ASEAN Chair for this year.

It is particularly apt that JCC is featuring Dr Iskandar's practice on this commemorative occasion, as he is a master-artist who has engaged with, and contributed to, the pottery traditions and practices of Southeast Asia and Asia as a whole, including Japan. In particular, Dr Iskandar has made notes and sketches of various pottery methods and kiln types in the region, and was instrumental in building the Singa kiln in Cambodia.

This exhibition continues to develop the ways in which we have been working with Dr Iskandar. The gallery spaces of JCC showcase more than 60 ceramic works, which he has specially developed for this project. These pieces were formed and fired at the Temasek Potters' studio – a ceramics facility and collective that Dr Iskandar founded in 2010, and that is still going from strength to strength.

As with the past exhibitions of Dr Iskandar which JCC has hosted, this one features the signature pottery vessels which he is celebrated for. Dr Iskandar also surprises us with many works that look sculptural and unconventional, and show how he continues to enliven the language of ceramics. His practice has always been deeply anchored in his cultural roots, but his reach is international.

We are grateful that Dr Iskandar Jalil continues to share his knowledge, experience and art with us, in his own unique ways, at Japan Creative Centre.

H.E. Jun Yamazaki

Ambassador of Japan to Singapore

ISKANDAR JALIL : PARADOX

An Introduction by Lindy Poh

The paradox - an apparent contradiction that conceals a deeper truth – recurs and persists in Dr Iskandar Jalil’s philosophy and process. Seemingly absurd or perplexing propositions such as finding ‘beauty in the imperfect’, ‘power in the small’ and ‘freedom in discipline’ abound in Iskandar’s works and writings on ceramics. It was perhaps inevitable that the concept of the ‘paradox’ was invoked in this exhibition to distil the long and complex practice of Singapore’s Master Potter.

Paradox presents an extraordinary range of wheel-thrown and hand-built pieces, all produced at the kiln facility of Temasek Potters - a collective founded by Iskandar in 2010. The exhibition assembles familiar forms as well as more sculptural and evocative works that push the parameters of functional pottery. *Paradox* also marks the first time that the Master Potter’s daughter Elena Iskandar is involved in conceiving and developing an exhibition of her father’s works. In the process, Elena proposes three broad frameworks as possible ways to view Iskandar’s works; her writing, deft and intuitive, illuminates aspects of the Master Potter’s practice, suggesting that his ‘philosophy’ extends beyond pottery aesthetics and is, in fact, located in a way of life and way of being.

Perfect Flaws

The exhibition features the elemental forms of pottery that have been imbibed and endlessly reinterpreted by Iskandar for over 6 decades. The pitcher, flagon, jug, flask, vase, beaker, bottle, pot, tea-pot, cup and bowl emerge with a diversity of glazes and stylistic approaches. In addressing functional vessels, Iskandar has famously cautioned against disparaging the humble *cawan* (Malay for ‘cup’), deeming it one of the most challenging forms to master, along with the deceptively simple tea-pot.

Indeed, the certainties of form and function in these everyday utilitarian articles demand a certain technical proficiency from their maker to serve their purpose of storing, pouring liquids or other practical uses. In this regard, the functional vessels in *Paradox* demonstrate the superb control and technical prowess attained by the

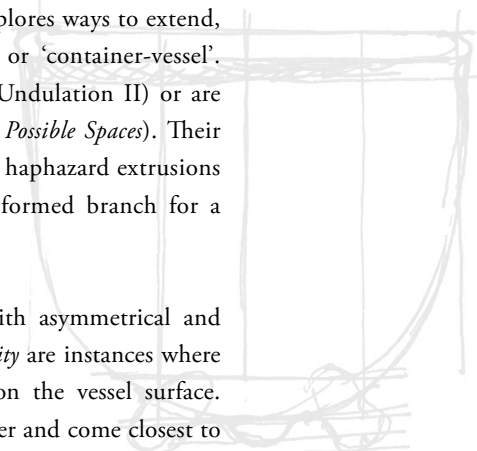


Master Potter since throwing his first pot at the Teachers’ Training College in 1960. And beyond such competencies are the rich, textured glazes and nuanced detailing that imbue the utilitarian container with the poetic qualities that have become characteristic of an ‘Iskandar Jalil vessel’.

Set against the equanimity of such vessels are pieces that exude a different kind of energy. Elena Iskandar describes such pieces as *asymmetrical* - manifesting an ‘unbalanced’ state and ‘randomness of things’. She points out the paradoxical nature of these works – where beauty and harmony are located in the less-than-perfect or the flawed. In such eccentric pieces, Iskandar explores ways to extend, disrupt and re-imagine the essential form of the utsuwa or ‘container-vessel’. Upright vessels are allowed to sag and slump (such as in *Undulation II*) or are enjoined and configured at a permanent tilt (in *Prickly, & Possible Spaces*). Their idiosyncrasies are heightened by Iskandar adding seemingly haphazard extrusions and ‘outgrowths’ or elements such as a marvellously malformed branch for a handle (in *Unhinged*).

There are a considerable number of pieces in *Paradox* with asymmetrical and sculptural qualities. *Listening to the Waves* and *Thought vs Reality* are instances where Iskandar engages bold ‘clay relief’ (raised surface) work on the vessel surface. Other pieces dispense with the vestiges of the vessel altogether and come closest to being pure sculpture. In these, Iskandar evokes recognisable shapes derived from the natural world. With just economical ‘components’ of clay and wood, Iskandar conjures the head of a kudu with twisted horns (in *Antelope*) or a hefty cluster of tropical cannonball fruit (in *Cannonball Fruits*) fired in the deep colour-hues of cast-iron artillery cannon balls.

Iskandar’s irrepressible humour is also discernible when he alludes to children’s playing blocks in *Back to Basics* and the twisting mechanism of Rubik’s cubes in *We Turn the Cube and It Twists Us*. In this latter work and in *Queue and Wait*, Iskandar abandons the anatomy of the pot. Instead he plays with abstracted geometric forms; these take on a lively animated quality, as if echoing playful human personality and behaviour.



Beyond Borders

In Elena's frameworks, she examines travel as a catalyst and impetus for Iskandar's practice, compelling his vigorous explorations of new clays, glazes and constructions. While some pieces cheekily allude to Iskandar's dramatic travel adventures (*Paraglide; ...My Foot!*) others are meditations on or recollections of specific locations.

Waterway Leading to the Mermaid depicts the water passage to the iconic Little Mermaid sculpture in Copenhagen, Denmark, a site of memories for Iskandar. Interestingly, a trip to Copenhagen some 24 years earlier had compelled him to write the following haiku:

*I come
Feel attached to this world
Where I come to die*

- Iskandar Jalil, Copenhagen 1993

Other works are evocative of the peculiarities of architecture and atmosphere in certain places. *Windows of Thun*, through a patterned placement of 'clay relief' pieces, captures the visual rhythm of the medieval town windows and architecture of Thun in Switzerland. In a similar structure, *View from Manazuru* suggests an aerial view of the harbour from the mountainous area of Manazuru in Japan, through an organic clustering of 'clay relief' pieces.

Elena in her writings underscores the special relationship her father has with Japan. A number of pieces have specific Japanese references including *Tsubaki* (*Camelia*), *Samurai* and *Autumn in Kyoto*. Other 'autumn-inspired' pieces (*Autumn Teapot*, *Autumn Bowl*) feature vivid tangerine and red hues, capturing the mood and sensations of *momiji-gari* (Japanese for 'viewing the maple'); and *Autumn Butterfly* with its rippled wood handle and clay 'pillars' is evocative of the fluttering of wings and Japanese *torii* gate that marks the crossing from the secular to the sacred realm. These pieces recall the autumn of 1972 when Iskandar first arrived

in Tajimi, Japan to begin his ceramics training under a Colombo Plan Scholarship. The experience was to have enduring effects on Iskandar's life and practice.

Several works in *Paradox* call attention to Iskandar's travels through the Southeast Asian region and his interactions with folk and village communities, observing them in daily rituals as well as craft creations. The form of *Small Bucket* was derived from rustic buckets with their tall, upright handles lowered into stone wells to draw water; *Washing Board* pays homage to the clothes wash board with its distinctive corrugated ridges still used in many regional communities. Interestingly, in some works, Iskandar integrates his training in both fields of textiles and ceramics – clay is made to fold, roll and flap like fabric (in *Kain Samping*) or to suggest the weft and warp of tapestry (in *Tapestry*).

Same Difference

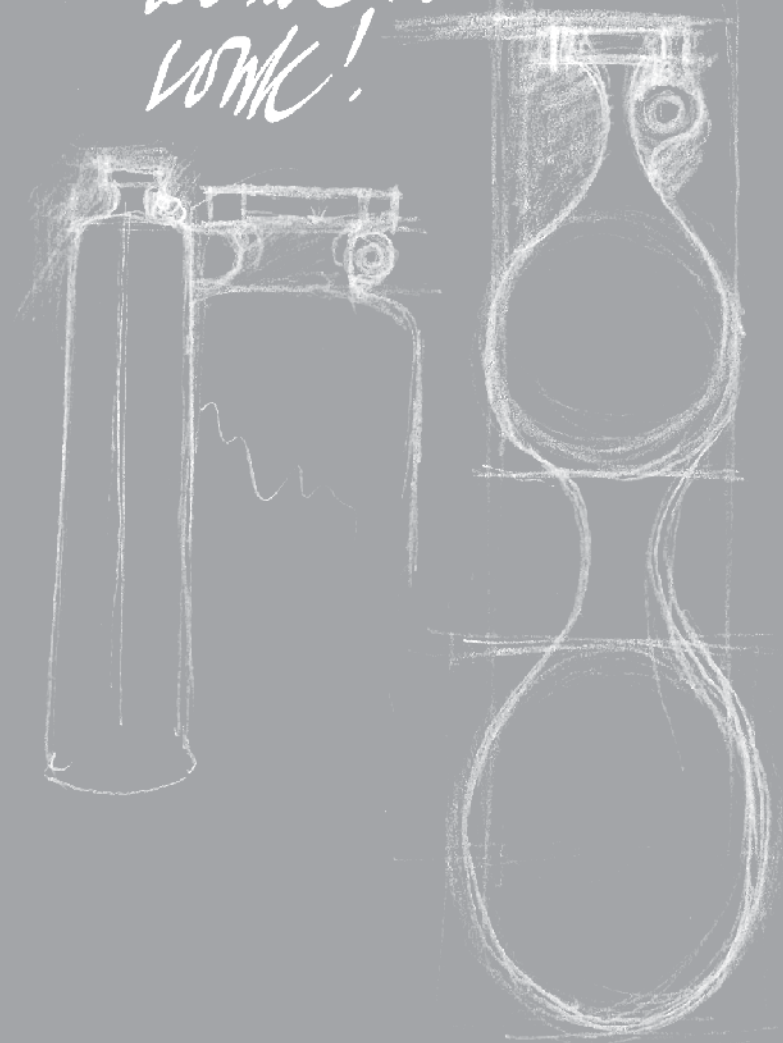
Perhaps the most stirring segments in the exhibition encompass works that were produced in pairs, prompting Elena Iskandar to view these within the frameworks of her father's relationships and exchanges with others, including her mother (herself a Colombo Plan Scholar (Domestic Science)). The rhythms of domestic banter and affection, the tug and pull of dialogues and conversations and the spectre of mortality, once thought too sensitive to refer to, are brought to the fore.

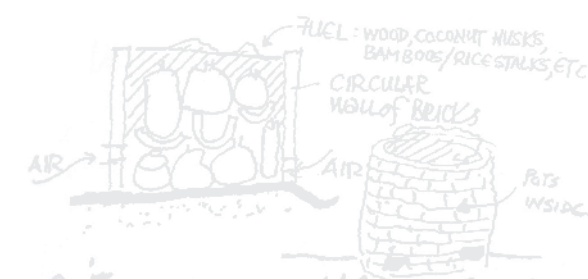
Elena's scrutiny, marked by a disarming honesty and humour, reveals and humanizes the Master Potter in an unprecedented manner. Her writings, delivered with clarity and expressiveness, should be noted not for 'autobiographical appeal' or for offering that rare glimpse into the potter's private life; her vivid observations are crucial reminders that a potter's philosophies and preoccupations are not contained within the walls of a potter's studio but reverberate through all aspects of his life and are in fact, inseparable from life itself.



* How Poetry is to be
UNDERSTOOD OR
APPROACHED

* Do not think too much,
let the heart do the
work!





Quite a common kiln for bricks, pottery wares. Saw this kiln in Sangalla near UBUD, BALI.

CIRCULAR OPEN-ENDED BRICK WALL KILN.

I saw a similar kiln near MUMBAI, INDIA.

Perfect Flaws

My father just turned 78. He's dealt with cancer, problematic knees, pneumonia, shivering hands and failing eyesight.

Life is imperfect and unpredictable. He readily accepts that. His pieces reflect that. There are of course his basic bread and butter pieces, his signature 'IJ Blue' glaze, his teapots and Jawi script vessels that are perfectly symmetrical and popular.

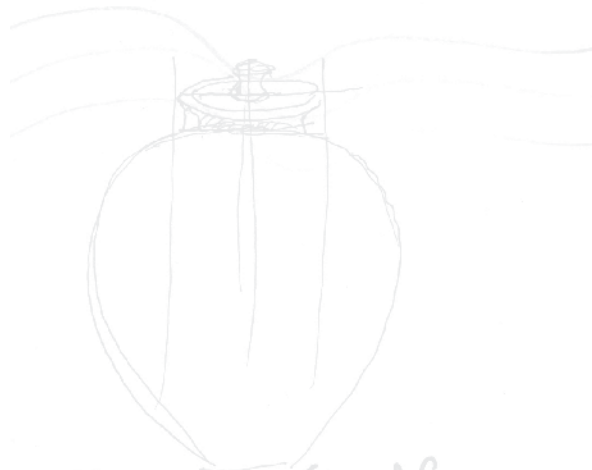
But then there are pieces that do not subscribe to the idea of perfection and symmetry. His sculptural pieces use asymmetry and austerity to achieve surprise and delight through the unbalanced and randomness of things. There is a sense of harmony by not being perfect.

It's like he's telling us yes, life throws all the hard curveballs but enjoy the delicate beauty of the game with all its ups and down...





- * PENYEONG
(for roasting coffee bean)
- * COBEK for making
sambal but lower in
height



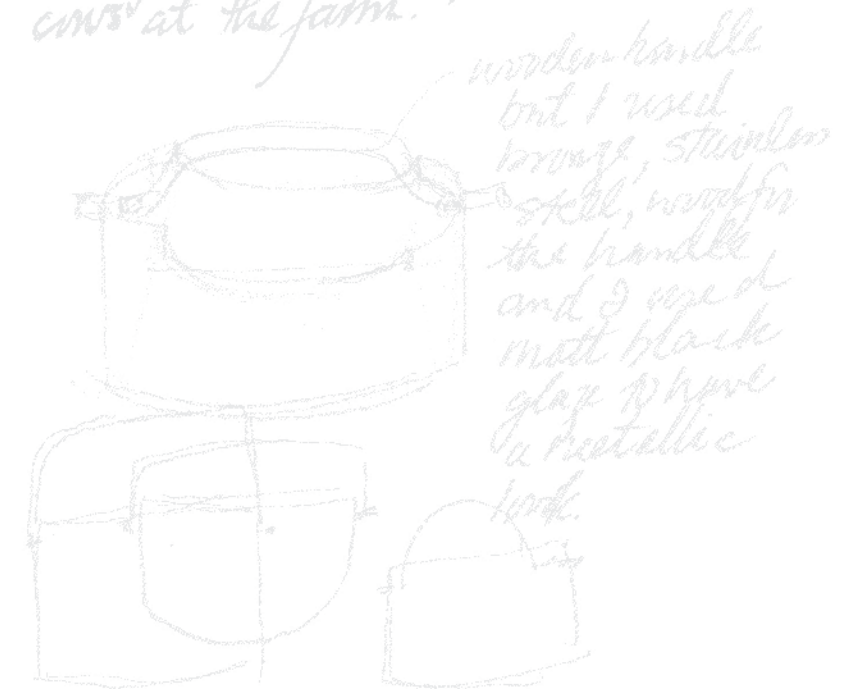
KEMBERASAN (vessel for
storing Rice) Beras = Rice.



Washing Board



One of them is Petka Paikari, who was kind, too kind, to spend time with us. I love his bottles, brick wall murals, slab murals and his earthy approach to his works. He is 70. The other is a plump lady in her 70's doing a similar bucket in clay and metal. Her work was inspired during her early days milking cows at the farm.



Photography

"abu" eating in a bowl.
"shortie" sleeping in large bowl

Ben
mosquitoes
Kachuk

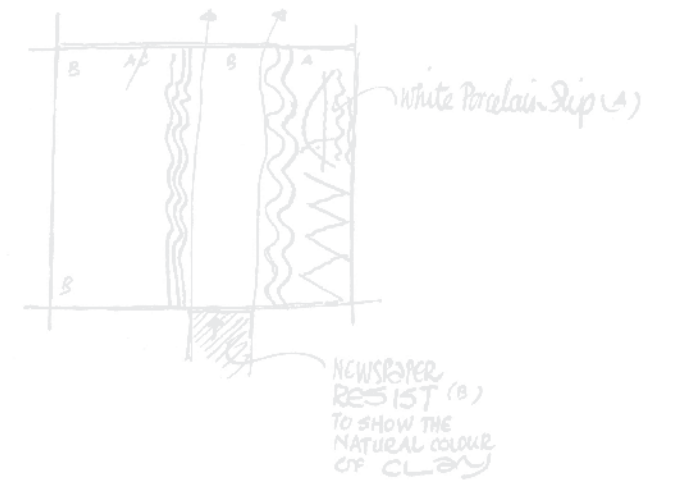
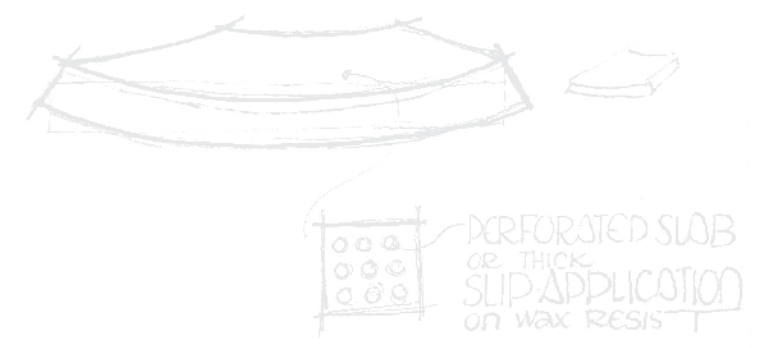


8 CATS
TERMITES

I am not alone when I am
alone in the workshop.
There's Ben the Rat popping
in and out at odd times.
There's Ashly the cat who
did followed by many
other stray-cats. Now there's
about 8 cats to accompany
me when I am alone, all
fat cause I am charitable.
I donated quite a big
amount of blood to the
mosquitoes, lucky no dengue
so far. Then there's the
Kachuk who scurried
all over the workshop when
I sprayed Bygon. I am
never alone!



Cannonball Fruits



DECORATIVE
PLASTER



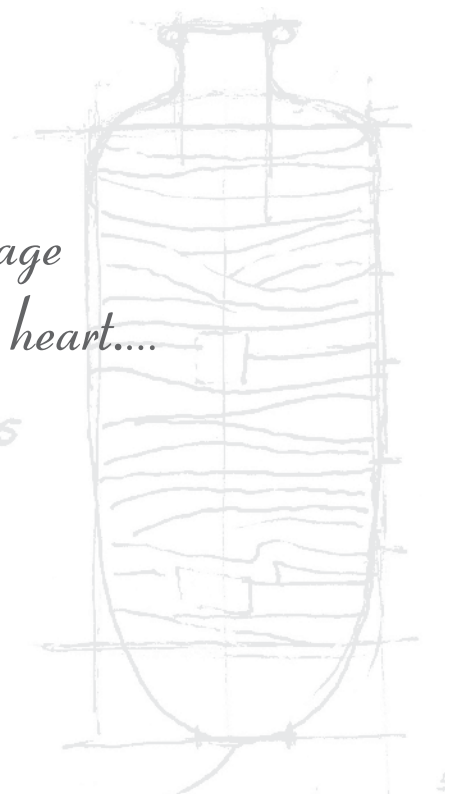
Tapestry



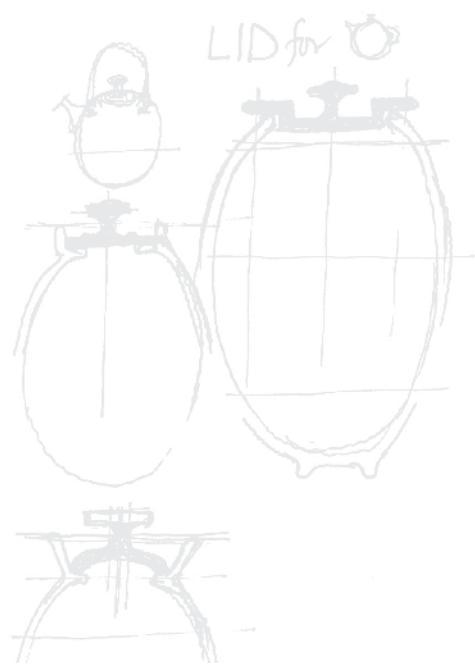
*Clay is the silent language
of my heart....*



SLABS



COIL

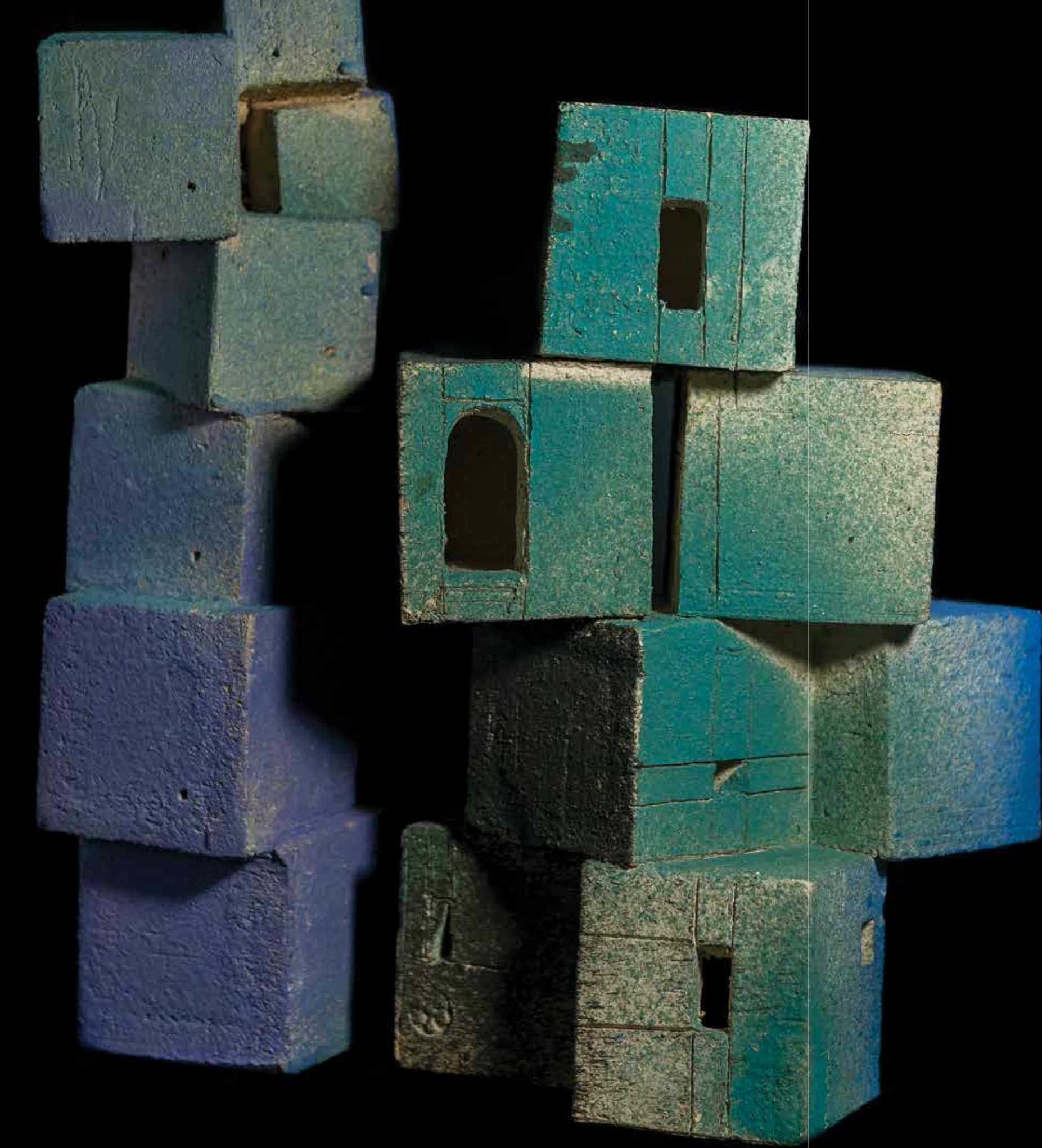


Listening to the Waves









We Turn The Cube and It Twists Us

White Clay with
Black Slip and
do a sgraffito.

use of porcelain clay.



Beyond Borders

Throughout the years, many have travelled with my father to various parts of the world, more so to Japan. He gets to give them an introduction to 'his' Japan. It was easy in his earlier years, planning, getting sponsors, organising and travelling with everyone.

Now, the rigorous nature of travelling takes a toll on him. There's a constant reminder that though his mind may be sharp, his frail and delicate body is at total odds. His eyes reflect the frustration he suffers when he wants to do so much but that Mother Nature has other plans for him.

There is a Japanese expression '*ichi-go Ichi-e*', meaning to realise the importance of the moment and to treasure what the encounter has to offer.



Windows of Thun (Switzerland)

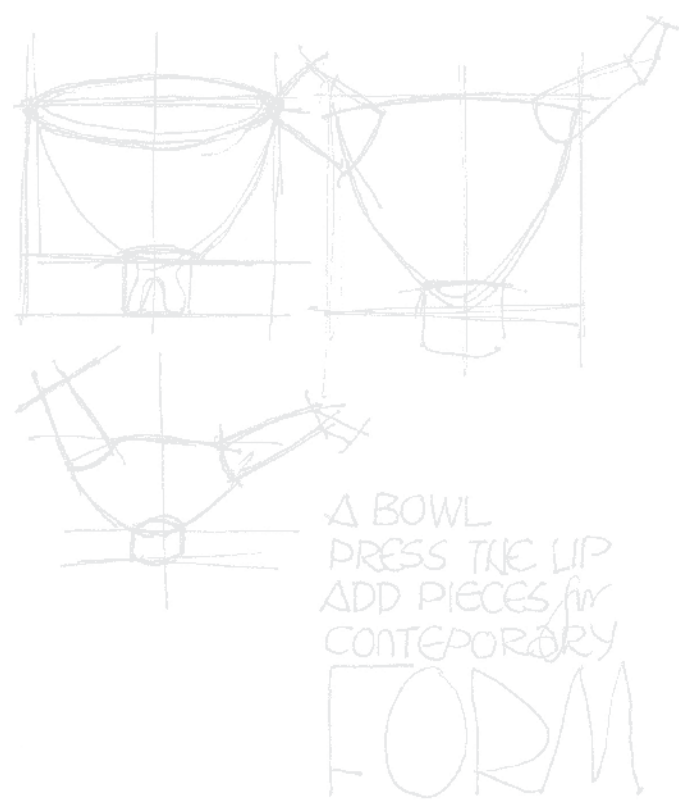


His travel pieces reflect how, even with the struggles, he still finds joy in travelling. He is able to '*ichi-go ichi-e*' and capture the essence of his travels and express it through his pieces. His travel pieces invite you to join him in his journey and get a glimpse of the joys and tribulations he experiences while travelling.

He nearly collapsed while hiking in Zermatt, he tripped and fell while in Copenhagen, he was nearly blown away during the typhoon season in Japan. He would constantly explain to us how he needed to use his knee guard and a certain ointment because his knees were constantly in pain. But despite all these tribulations, ask him where to next, with a twinkle in his eye, he would readily say, anywhere!

His pieces constantly inspire him to embark on another adventure despite it all.



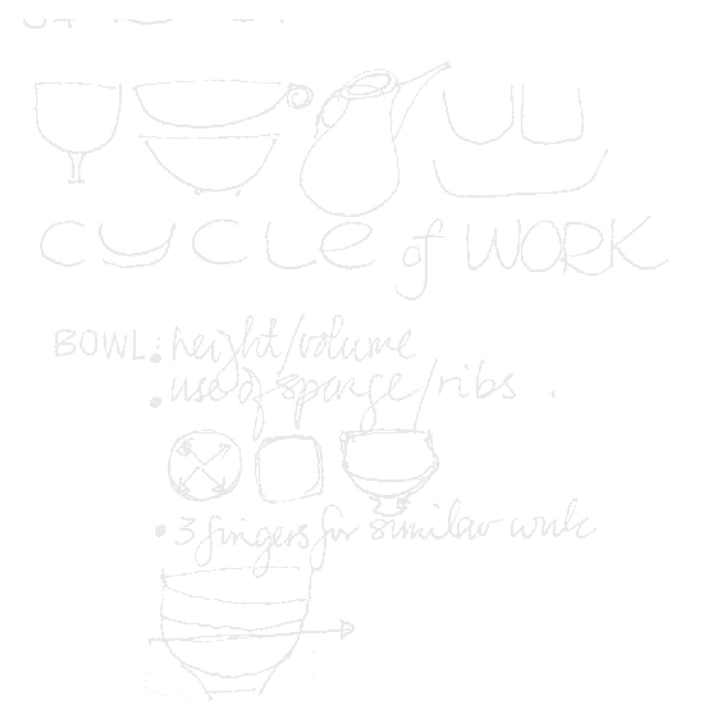


The View from Manazuru (Yokohama)

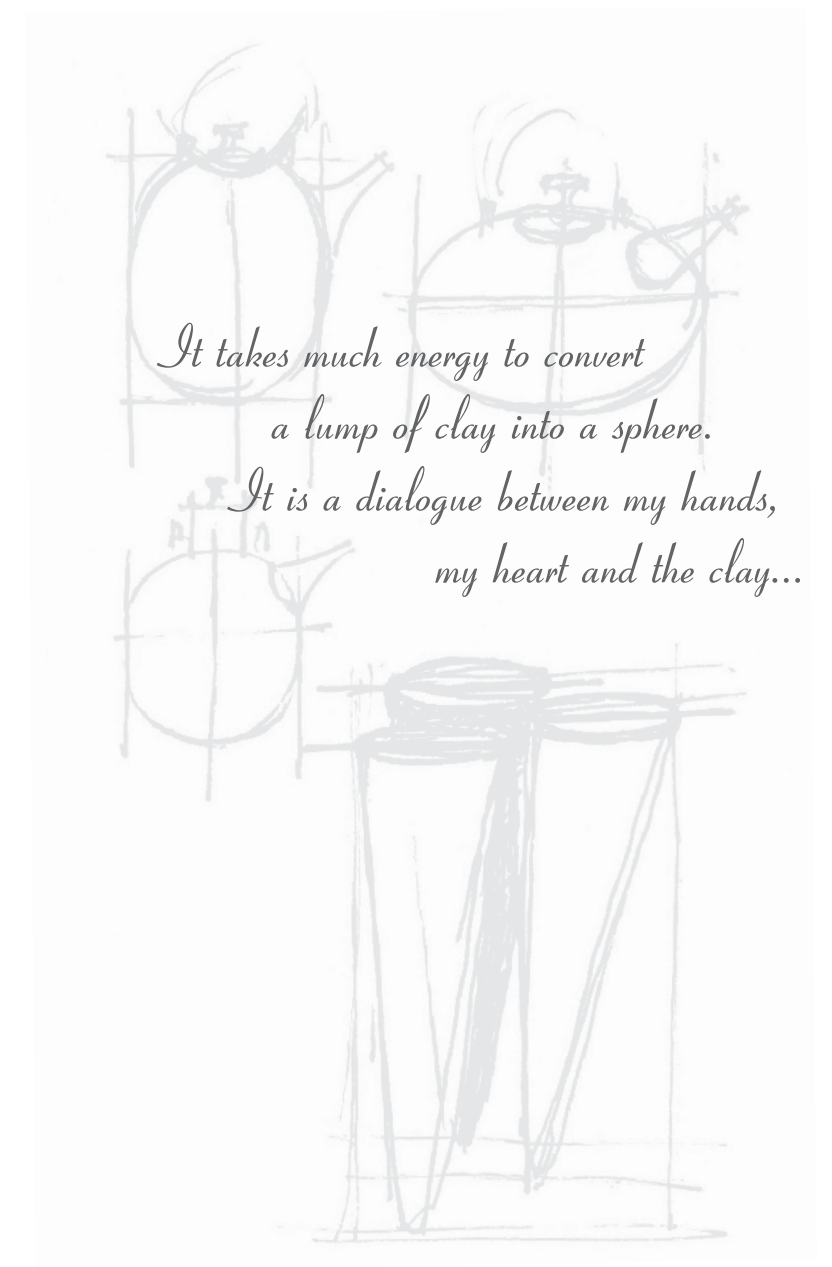




I know who built a kiln
 with the CO (RF) meter,
 and is 100% successful in
 kiln firing. He fired his kiln
 to only 1300°C in 9 hours!
 9 hours only and twice the
 size of any other gas kiln.
 He built a kiln and lives a
 private and quiet life. I should
 do like him. This town FRISKAS
 is a must for potters to be.
 But you need to arrive very
 early or stay overnight!
 It is approx. 85 km from
 Helsinki!







*It takes much energy to convert
a lump of clay into a sphere.
It is a dialogue between my hands,
my heart and the clay...*

Same Difference

The Couple

The paired pieces are same yet different.

Masculine and feminine.

Balanced.

Rough and smooth.

They always look like they are in a conversation.

I always think about my mother and father's relationship whenever I look at the paired pieces.

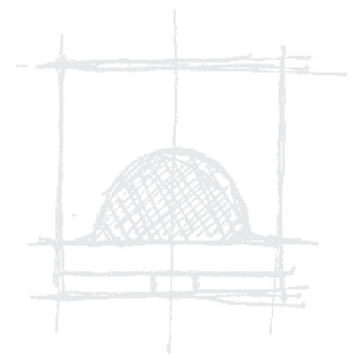
It has all the above-mentioned traits.

My mother might look frail and delicate but in my father's early pottery years, my mother held the fort back home, making sure the household and the children were in order.

She was strong and hardworking.

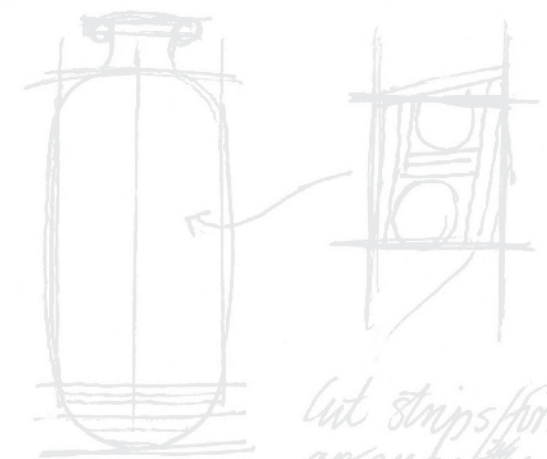
My father might be stern and critical, his word was the law in the household. But there were many a times where he was a softie, taking my mother on tours or just even buying lunch for her so she is not hungry. They may not always agree but they are always 'conversing' with each other.

Their relationship, like any other relationship is a delicate balance of give and take, of acceptance and forgiveness, and like his pieces, strong and tough and can withstand whatever life throws at it.



Feminine, Masculine





*cut strips forms and
arrange them into a
design and insert the
cutting into the form.*



Queue and wait

The Conversation

My father is loud, boisterous and loves a good conversation. He can strike up a conversation with anyone and it can end in a lively debate with an invitation to tea at home.

With students, he's stern and firm, giving 'lectures' on what they did wrong. With guests who come to him for advice, he is delicately gentle and sensitive, particularly when it pertains to illnesses and charity.

With friends, he is kind with his 'reprimands' when advising them on how to live a better life. With clients, he is unapologetic and firm when he finds them too demanding.

With loved ones, he is firm but gentle when giving advice. With all these in mind, the paired pieces reflect perfectly, the different kinds of conversations he has had throughout his life.

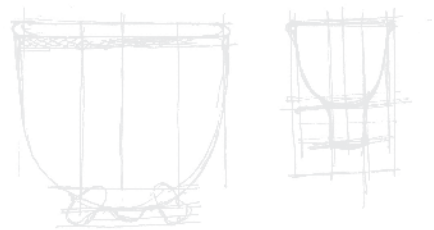
They are of all different shapes and sizes, of different textures and surfaces, but it's always a pair, always an endless conversation.

Arriving Departures

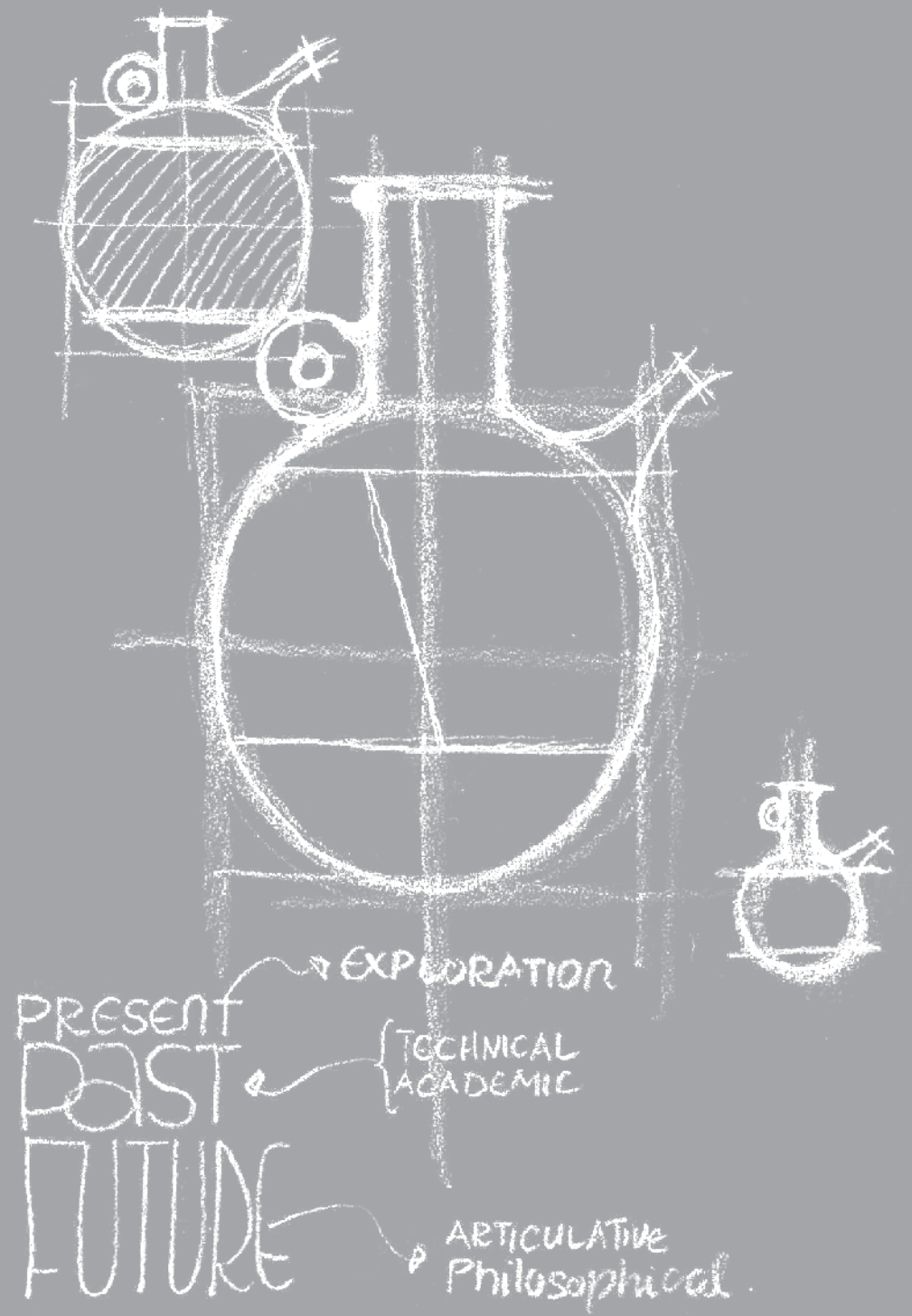
The discussion of life and death has always
been a constant conversation starter,
more so now than ever, whenever you have
a chat with my father.

He is at this stage of life where he is deeply
impacted by the passing of friends, peers
and family members and questions his own
state of being. Every time he receives news of
another passing, he would give me a call and
tell me that his time is near and to look after
the family well. I often sigh with resignation
whenever he talks about this.

Unhinged and Natured softened,
Gentle grows fills me with a sense of dread,
desolation and isolation. They are not
traditionally pretty to look at but they feel
raw and real.



Unhinged



DR ISKANDAR JALIL

1940, Singapore

Dr Iskandar Jalil (b. 5 January 1940) was conferred an honorary doctorate, awarded as Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) by the Nanyang Technological University in July 2016. This followed the conferment of the Meritorious Service Medal in the Singapore National Day Awards [2015] and *Order of the Rising Sun - Gold Rays with Rosette* [2015] by the Japanese government.

Celebrated as Singapore's Master Potter and a leading educator in ceramics art, Dr Iskandar received the nation's highest cultural award, the Cultural Medallion in 1988 and numerous cultural accolades. He was awarded two Colombo Plan Scholarships, for the study of textile weaving and spinning in India [1966] and ceramics engineering in Japan [1972]. His works are characteristically simple but robust, with highly tactile and rich surfaces.

He is commended as a committed educator whose teaching profession has spanned over four decades. His early career began by teaching mathematics, science and sports before specialising in ceramic art. The schools he taught at included Jalan Daud Primary School, Siglap, Dunman and Telok Kurau and Victoria Secondary schools. He also taught at Geylang Vocational Institute (now Northlight School) and had a long tenure at Baharuddin Vocational Institute (BVI) [1969-1990]. He continued to teach after BVI's merger with Temasek Polytechnic Design School, retiring in 1999.

Dr Iskandar has held multiple art advisory and educational positions including at the National Arts Council. He had been an external examiner for MARA Institute of Technology, Malaysia and Curtin University, Australia and was instrumental in the founding of the St. Patrick's Art Centre (later Lasalle College of the Arts) in the 1980s. He also taught at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and National University of Singapore (NUS) Extra-Mural Studies Department.

He has donated his vessels for numerous charity causes and has undertaken extensive volunteer work for community centres, the Association of Paraplegics and with Mercy Relief (in setting up kilns in Cambodia). He also carries out private 'sponsorships' for students in the arts. He has shaped pottery collectives at the Malay Heritage Centre and Jalan Bahar Clay Studios and continues to mentor and helm the Temasek Potters (TP) at the TP pottery studio.

AWARDS & APPOINTMENTS

2016	Honorary Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
2015	Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, Japan Meritorious Service Medal (National Day Awards), Singapore
2014	Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation Award, Japan
2012	The Public Service Star (BBM) Award, (National Day Awards), Singapore
2002	Achiever of The Year Award (Macdonald / Berita Harian), Singapore
1997	Pingat APAD, awarded by Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya, Singapore
1994	Fellow, Centre of the Arts, National University of Singapore, Singapore
1992-2006	Member of Advisory Panel, National Arts Council, Singapore
1988	Cultural Medallion (Visual Arts), Singapore
1977	Special Award, National Day Art Exhibition, Singapore

EDUCATION & TRAINING

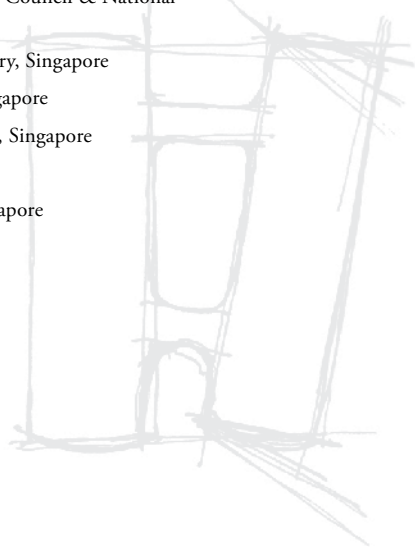
1972	Colombo Plan Scholarship in Ceramics Engineering, Japan
1968	Pottery for Schools, Teachers' Training College, Singapore
1966	Colombo Plan Scholarship, Textile Weaving and Spinning, India
1959-62	Teacher's Training College, Singapore

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016	Dr Iskandar Jalil: A Master Potter's Philosophy & Process, The Art Gallery, National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore
2015	In Pursuit of the Ethical Pot, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore
2012	Images of My Pottery Travels, MICA ARTrium, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
2007	Material, Message, Metaphor, MICA ARTrium, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore Reshaping Asia, The 4th World Ceramic Biennale, Incheon Ceramic Centre, Korea
2005	For Cambodia, Raffles Le Royal, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
2004	New Zealand Festival of Arts, Wellington, New Zealand
2001	Potter's Life, Potter's Thoughts, MITA ARTrium, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
1995	My Dialogue With Clay, Takashimaya Gallery, Singapore
1992	Ceramics, Bon Belta, Miyazaki Prefecture, Japan
1990	The Potter's Journey, National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
1984	Raw, Pliable and Earthy, Alpha Gallery, Singapore

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018	Ceramic Expressions (2nd Ed), Japan Creative Centre, Mulan Gallery, Singapore Singapore Stories, Mulan Gallery, Singapore
2017	Ceramic Expressions, Japan Creative Centre, Mulan Gallery, Singapore
2016	The Cultural Medallion & Visual Arts 1979-2015, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Singapore
2015	Balance in Imperfection, with the Temasek Potters, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore Tribute to Local Clay, A Pottery Exhibition, Maya Gallery, Singapore
2013	Iskandar Jalil - A Lifelong Passion for his Craft and his Teaching, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore Encore!, Maya Gallery, Singapore JBCS Gallery Official Opening, Dragon Kiln, Singapore Shakkei. A Pottery Exhibition, Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore
2012	Tribute.sg, Esplanade: Theatres on the Bay, Singapore The 6th Ngee Ann 3D Art Exhibition, Ngee Ann Cultural Centre, Singapore
2007	Fourth World Ceramics Biennale, Incheon, Gwangju and Yeosu, Korea
2006	Dragon Kiln, Jalan Bahar, Singapore Ceramics: Beyond Borders, Singapore National Library Board, Singapore Ceramitivity, National University of Singapore, Singapore
2005	Seven Masters, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore A Different Light: Works from Selected Collections, Drama Centre, Singapore
2004	Material Matters : Inaugural Exhibition, The Arts House at Old Parliament, Singapore Crossroads, Making of New Identities, National University of Singapore, Singapore
2002	Discovery Phase, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
1999	City/Community: Singapore Art Today, National Arts Council & National Heritage Board Ceramitivity, National University of Singapore, Singapore Shifting Paradigms: Handmade, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore Feature 5, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
1997	Singapore Art '97, Invited Section, SICEC, National Arts Council & National Heritage Board
1996	Down to Earth (Works of Seven Potters), Art Focus Gallery, Singapore
1994	Contrasts (with Ng Eng Teng), Takashimaya Gallery, Singapore Gane & Bengé Meet Iskandar Jalil, Art-2, The Substation, Singapore
1993	Hong Kong Festival of Arts, Hong Kong Art in Asia, Singapore Art Fair, World Trade Centre, Singapore
1991	Pottery, Miyazaki, Kyushu, Japan Clay Pieces, National Museum, Singapore Singapore Pottery, National Stockholm Gallery, Sweden
1990	Infinity, Westin Stamford Hotel, Singapore

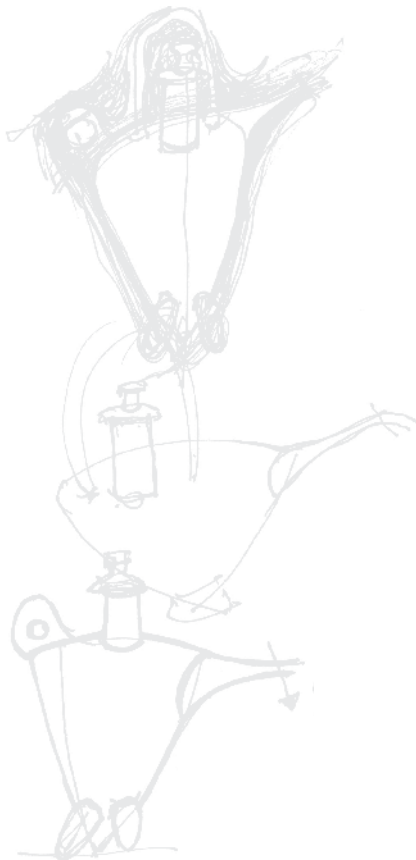


SELECTED COMMISSIONS & PROJECTS

2009	Wall Mural, Embassy of Singapore in Vientiane, Laos
2004	Marina Barrage, Public Utilities Board, Singapore
2003	Wall Mural, National Trade Union Congress, Singapore
2002	Wall Mural, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore
1995	The Straits Times 150th Year (Singapore Press Holdings), Singapore
1994	Corporate Gifts for Keppel Shipyard, Singapore Pan United Corporation, Singapore
1992	Clock Tower, Miyazaki Prefecture, Japan Special gifts for International Design Forum Speakers, Design Centre, Singapore Special gifts, Sotheby's Singapore, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore
1990	Changi International Airport Terminal 2, Singapore
1988	Mural, Tanjong Pagar SMRT station, Singapore

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Former President Wee Kim Wee, Singapore
Former President George Bush, United States of America
Lee Kuan Yew (Minister Mentor), Singapore
CapitaLand, Singapore
Changi Airport Group (CAG), Singapore
Economic Development Board, Singapore
Governor of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Keppel Shipyard, Singapore
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) & various Embassies, Singapore
Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS)
National Heritage Board, Singapore
National Museum, Stockholm, Sweden
National Museum, Singapore
Raffles Country Club, Singapore
Sultan of Brunei Collection, Brunei Darussalam
Trade Development Board, Singapore



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Japan Creative Centre, Embassy of Japan with Dr Iskandar Jalil jointly convey their appreciation to Guest of Honour, Ms Jane Ittogi, sponsors and supporters, the artist's family, Mulan Gallery and friends, students, volunteers and the project team that made this catalogue and exhibition possible.

GUEST OF HONOUR

Ms Jane Ittogi
Former Chairman, Singapore Art Museum

EDITORIAL

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Elena Iskandar
Lindy Poh

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Japan Creative Centre (JCC)

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