

THE DELICATE TOUCH

Maker: Hitomi Hosono

Hitomi Hosono draws on her Japanese heritage and the best of English ceramic tradition to create her exquisite porcelain pieces

FEATURE **DOMINIQUE CORLETT**
PHOTOGRAPHS **KASIA FISZER**

THIS PAGE Hitomi in her London studio at work on a large porcelain vessel, which she is patiently lining with leaf sprigs. On the shelves behind are forms thrown on her potter's wheel, which when finished will be completely covered with delicate flower petals and leaves **FACING PAGE** The vessel's interior, showing porcelain leaf sprigs that Hitomi moulded, then finished by fine carving

Seeing Hitomi Hosono's beautiful sculptural porcelain, so delicate and restrained, detailed with the intricate patterns of leaves and flowers and coloured with the soft hues of coral reefs, it's not surprising to learn that ceramics are in the artist's DNA.

Hitomi grew up in Gifu Prefecture, Japan, an area with a rich pottery tradition. Her uncle was a potter and she recalls that at secondary school 'everybody was making something out of clay'. But it wasn't until she came to England in 2007 to study at the Royal College of Art, and spent a few weeks on placement at the Wedgwood factory, that she discovered the technique that is the basis of her current work. It is work that is winning her many admirers: she received the Best in British Craftsmanship award at Decorex 2014 and next month a company that's the doyen of English interior design, Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler, will show her latest work at its London showroom. Her pieces are also in the collections of the British Museum and the V&A.

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?

My ceramics experience is rooted in both Japanese and European traditions. Before

arriving in the UK, I studied Kutani Pottery in Kanazawa city in Japan as well as ceramics product design in Copenhagen, Denmark.

WHY PORCELAIN?

I just love the feeling; smooth, gentle, soft but chilled, like petals in the early morning. I can freely make organic forms with it. Also, it is a magical material: as I work with it, more ideas come – it guides me to develop the initial idea in my head into something more unexpected.

HOW DID YOUR VESSELS COME ABOUT?

My technique was initially inspired by Wedgwood's Jasperware, pioneered by Josiah Wedgwood more than 200 years ago, in which thin ceramic reliefs or 'sprigs' are applied as surface decoration to a piece. Five years ago, I wanted to make innovative pieces featuring the sprigging technique, but I wanted to move away from using sprigs solely as ornament, and to attempt to work them in a new and sculptural way.

Through experimentation, I eventually found a technique to make the raw sprigs more flexible, which enabled me to cover the entire surface of a shape with them and also to construct objects solely out of many layers of sprigs. ➤



TALK US THROUGH YOUR MAKING PROCESS

For my sculptural pieces, I press-mould hundreds of leaf sprigs in porcelain then patiently carve in the finer details. I apply the porcelain leaves in layers on to a form that I have previously thrown on a potter's wheel. Each piece takes around four weeks to make. I apply the leaves so densely that the underlying shape is entirely hidden, like the multitude of green leaves that obscure the branches of a tree. In another strand of my work, I apply delicately moulded and carved leaf and flower sprigs onto small ceramic boxes, enveloping the practical shapes in these natural forms, giving them a highly sensuous feel. After high firing, I often gild the insides of these boxes to add to their precious quality.

WHERE DOES YOUR INSPIRATION COME FROM?

I design leaf and flower sprigs by studying botanical forms, which I then adapt. I analyse plant forms by looking, touching and drawing. I am drawn to the intricacy of plants, examining how the veins of a leaf branch out and how its edges are shaped. I am always keen to find the essence of what makes leaves and flowers beautiful.

I developed the coloured pieces last year for the Jerwood Makers Open. I used to use only white porcelain as it was perfect for showing the detail of my pieces, but I had a friend from Tobago and wanted to try something inspired by the island's brilliant colours and ocean creatures. I experimented with colours; in the beginning they came out horrible but I hit on a technique for graduating from white to orange, where I mix porcelain powder with different percentages of colour. I was really happy with the result.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK?

I use the natural beauty of plants to create ceramic objects with sensitively refined details.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

I'd like to study more beautiful shapes in the natural world and transfer the infinite and complex beauty of the plant forms into my ceramics.

* Prices for Hitomi Hosono's pieces range from £1,500 to £16,000. Her work is available from Adrian Sassoon, London. 020 7581 9888; adriansassoon.com



To see our
film of Hitomi
at work go to
homesand
antiques.com



FROM FAR LEFT

A bowl in progress; Hitomi applies leaf motifs to the inside of the vessel with slip; a selection of her carving tools BELOW

Press-moulded leaf sprigs ready to apply to a bowl BOTTOM Three of Hitomi's latest pieces: *Black Leaves Tower* stands at 32cm high and is on sale at £7,000; *Camellia and Chrysanthemum Box*, with gold leaf interior, 15cm high, costs £2,400; and *Large Pink Cherry Blossom Bowl*, 19.5cm tall, costs £7,600

WHERE TO SEE HITOMI'S WORK

✦ **Brook Street: An Artist's Eye** at Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler, 39 Brook Street, London, W1K 4JE. 6th-27th October. 020 7493 2231; sibylcofax.com

✦ **PAD London Art and Design**, Berkeley Square, London, W1. 14th-18th October. pad-fairs.com

✦ **The Salon Art and Design**, Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue, New York. 12th-16th November. thesalonny.com

