



This page, clockwise from top left: sprig moulds from the Wedgwood archive; two 'Touka' vases, decorated with chrysanthemums, in different stages of completion; Hitomi Hosono holds the 'Shōka' vase; this photograph shows the ornamentation process; the 'Haruka' bowl; the 'Kasumi' vase features 1,150 individually applied daisies. Opposite: a pink 'Shunko' box is joined by three smaller 'Sansai' objects – 'Wakaba', 'Kayuu' and 'Koharu'



BUDDING FUTURE

As part of its unprecedented artist-in-residence programme, Wedgwood collaborated with Hitomi Hosono to create a range of limited-edition jasper pieces inspired by nature. With their delicate flowers and ferns, they herald an exciting new creative chapter in the firm's history. Photography: Simon Upton

The sculptor Hitomi Hosono seems a natural choice for Wedgwood's first-ever artist in residence. Born in 1978 she grew up in Gifu Prefecture – 'the Stoke-on-Trent of Japan', as she has called it – an area that once produced much of the country's pottery, from sake flasks and tea sets to pipes and vases. Her grandfather worked in the trade and she remembers her childhood as being filled with tiles and ceramics. It's little wonder she went on to work in clay; today she's known for her ethereal pieces that draw heavily upon the living world, which she covers with carpets of flowers or verdant leaves, each painstakingly applied by hand.

Now, she has produced a range of limited-edition jasper items for the historic brand, working closely alongside Wedgwood's artisans to create such graceful pieces as her 'Kasumi' vase, encrusted with 1,150 individually applied daisies. This decorative process alone takes two days. It's quite an operation but, Hosono says, 'the craftsmen were so open to new ideas... They always found a solution and a way forward.'

The pieces celebrate a marriage of Hosono's contemporary ideas with Wedgwood's unparalleled knowledge. Many of them have been made using sprigs – separately moulded designs applied in low relief. The method was notably used on Josiah Wedgwood's 1790 jasper replica of the Portland Vase, a take on which forms the centrepiece of the new collection and will be on show at Hosono's dealer, Adrian Sassoon's, stand at Masterpiece this summer. 'Shōka' retains the traditional shape of the original, but Hosono, with her irrepressible love of nature, has replaced the figures with curling cream ferns. She's

also adapted Wedgwood's unmistakable blue colouring, backing the fronds with soft vernal turquoise.

Hosono found the moulds for the ferns while digging around in Wedgwood's archive. 'The shapes are so deeply rooted in the brand's history,' she says, which is something she's proud of. But instead of intertwining them among the figures, she's given plants the starring role, placing them to look as if they're sprawling up, untrammelled, from the base. 'Traditionally, the Wedgwood Portland Vase would have been neatly wrapped around with a classical Greek story, but I love the sense of the ferns invading,' she explains.

It's not the first time Hosono has worked with Wedgwood, which in its 259-year history has always been dedicated to innovation and expertise. She was an intern with the company at its historic headquarters in Stoke-on-Trent in 2008, where she first started exploring the brand's archive of sprig designs. Working in jasper, a material developed by Josiah Wedgwood in the 1770s, however, has proved challenging, because of issues with fragility. The skills of the company's trained craftsmen, therefore, have been invaluable. The resulting pieces are, unsurprisingly, exquisite, representing a new chapter in the brand's history. As Hosono herself has commented: 'Wedgwood isn't just concerned with the flat surface or the moment, it cares about the up and down and what comes next' ■ *Masterpiece is at South Grounds, The Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3 (masterpiecefair.com), 28 June-4 July. Adrian Sassoon. Ring 020 7581 9888, or visit adriansassoon.com. Wedgwood. Ring 01782 282651, or visit wedgwood.co.uk*