

GUILD GALLERY

ROMAN AND WILLIAMS GUILD GALLERY
PRESENTS
AKIKO HIRAI: CONTAINER AND CONTENT

NOVEMBER 11, 2021–JANUARY 21, 2022
321 CANAL STREET, NEW YORK, NY

Guild Gallery is pleased to present our inaugural exhibition of works by artist Akiko Hirai, *Container and Content*, opening November 12, 2021 at 321 Canal Street, New York. Hirai's work has previously been shown at the Yale Center for British Art and throughout the United Kingdom. This exhibition marks the first major exhibition of Hirai's work in New York and in the United States.

Hirai uses expressive and experimental techniques to create unique contemporary ceramics which honor imperfection, chance, and nature. Her formation of the clay, use of ash, and the marks gathered during the firing process combine to create her signature works. Through her experiments with natural materials, she has developed her own tools of alkalization, firing, and glazing, and uses the acidity and minerals in the soil where the wood for the ash is grown to create defining effect on the surface of her works.

Container and Content further explores Hirai's use of innovative techniques and ideas by incorporating specific ash created from wood sourced on Long Island. As the ash is particular to this place, it acts as a kind of abstract representation, creating a dialogue between her Japanese roots, her current home of England, and New York, where the ash originated, and the pieces are now exhibited.

Hirai's *Moon Jars*, which take their name from traditional Korean moon jar vases, expand our concept of beauty by presenting protruding jagged edges, imperfections, cracking, dusting, and uneven glazing. These works express Hirai's unique vision of strength and grace that celebrates age and use. She intentionally recreates "history and experiences" by formulating chemical reactions between the glaze and ash that push the boundaries between completion and collapse. These imperfections are evidence of the unstable and unpredictable nature of clay and fire itself.

Hirai's *Poppy Pod Vases* are created using a unique blend of Raku clay. Once dried, she uses her fingers to achieve the perfect balance between rough and refined, creating a vessel that exudes warmth and invites touch. The dust of ash on porcelain gives the



final breath of earth and fire, resulting in a unique object that is both natural and historical in its use of materials and technique.

Born in Shizuoka, Japan, Hirai received her Ceramics degree from the University of Westminster in London in 2001, and a second degree from Central Saint Martins in 2003. She initially studied cognitive psychology in Japan and worked at a shelter for the houseless upon first arriving in London. This experience led her to explore the therapeutic and expressive effects of ceramics.