

Exhibition: *Raku: The Cosmos in a Tea Bowl*

On View: March 29–June 7, 2015

Location: Pavilion for Japanese Art



Image captions on page 3

(Los Angeles—February 23, 2015) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Raku: The Cosmos in a Tea Bowl*. This exhibition comprises nearly 100 masterpieces with examples from all 15 generations and the subsequent generation of the Raku family, whose celebrated legacy continues to influence global ceramics. More than half of the ceramic objects in the exhibition are tea bowls. Other works include incense containers and burners, food utensils, water jars, and other objects used in the Japanese tea ceremony. Three Registered works are featured in the exhibition. One tea bowl by Raku I (Chōjirō) and one tea bowl by Raku III (Dōnyū) are each Registered Important Cultural Properties. Another tea bowl by Hon'ami Koetsu, an artist and potter outside the Raku family who achieved great fame for his works, is designated an Important Art Object. Special permission from the Japanese Government's Ministry of Culture was required to include these Registered works in this exhibition.

"*Raku: The Cosmos in a Tea Bowl* is the first of its kind ever held in the United States, and LACMA is the only U.S. venue to host the exhibition," said Robert T. Singer, curator and head of Japanese Art at LACMA. "Mr. Raku XV has said that he cannot conceive of another overseas exhibition in the future that would include such important works as tea bowls by Raku I, II, and III, in addition to the three Registered objects in this exhibition."

Following its display at LACMA, *Raku: The Cosmos in a Tea Bowl* travels to Russia where it will be on view at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (July 11–September 6, 2015) and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (September 22–November 15, 2015).

About Raku

In the West, the term *raku* refers to a quick, low-fire technique for making ceramics that is often used to teach beginners. This technique traces back to a Japanese family of potters or, more specifically, to the originator of the technique, Raku I (Chōjirō), who lived in the 1500s. Since then, for over 400 years a single person named Raku has represented each of the 15 generations as a Raku Master. Today Raku XV is the head of the Raku lineage, and his adult son represents the next generation.

A traditional Japanese Raku tea bowl is a low-fire ceramic that is hand formed (not on a wheel), glazed with thin layers of color, and fired quickly in a single-chamber open kiln heated with chunks of extremely hot coal. During the firing, the scorching hot ceramic is removed from the kiln with tongs. The clay used to make traditional Japanese Raku ware is sandy and porous—a special formulation able to tolerate this quick cooling without fracturing. Stores of this special clay are made and laid away by each Raku Master for exclusive use by his great-grandchild, three generations in the future. Today Raku XV uses clay put aside for him by his great-grandfather, Raku XIII.

The special clay and methods of forming and firing produce effects and colors that make Raku wares highly prized by tea practitioners. Since their first use in 16th-century tea ceremonies, tea bowls by Raku masters have been given the greatest respect. The tea bowl is the central object in the Japanese tea ceremony, and for 15 generations Raku have produced tea bowls for each generation of tea ceremony teachers and their followers.

Raku begins at the lower level of the Pavilion for Japanese Art and ascends through the pavilion in loose chronological order, representing ceramics produced by each of the 15 generations plus the next generation of Raku potters. Works by the two active Raku potters (representing the 15th and subsequent generations of the family) will be shown in the Juda Gallery.

Public Programs

In conjunction with the exhibition, a series of tea-ceremony demonstrations offer visitors an opportunity to view how tea is prepared by a tea master. Visitors are treated to a tasting of tea used in traditional Japanese tea ceremonies. This series will take place each weekend for the duration of the exhibition. Please check lacma.org for further details.

Sunday, May 24

Tea Ceremony

1 pm

Free, tickets required

Japanese tea master Daisosho Sen Genshitsu from the Urasenke school of tea provides commentary as a tea ceremony is conducted onstage.

Credit

This exhibition was co-organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Raku Museum and the Japan Foundation. Air transportation was provided by Japan Airlines.

Image Captions

(Left) Chōjirō (Raku I), Japan, died 1589, *Shallow Bowl with Melon Design*, 16th century, Raku ware; glazed ceramic, 2 3/8 x 13 x 13 in. (6.0 x 33.0 x 33.0 cm), Tokyo National Museum, TNM Image Archives

(Center) Seinyū (Raku XIII), Japan, 1887–1944, *Tea Bowl named 'Yachiyo,'* 20th century, Black Raku ware; glazed ceramic, 2 7/8 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4 in. (7.3 x 12.0 x 12.0 cm), Raku Museum, Photo: Masayuki Miyahara

(Right) Sōnyū (Raku V), Japan, 1664–1716, *Incense Burner in the Form of an Owl*, 17th–18th century, Red Raku ware; glazed ceramic, 5 5/16 x 4 3/4 in. (13.5 x 12.0 cm), Raku Museum, Photo: Takashi Hatakeyama

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