

Make

HAUSER & WIRTH
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Press Release

Vital Clay

Make Hauser & Wirth Somerset
2 December 2023 - 18 February 2024
Opening Reception: Saturday 2 December 2023, 10 am – 4 pm

Featuring Akiko Hirai and Dan Kelly



‘Working with clay involves all the senses to some degree: the smell of the earth; the sound made by the ring of a high fired piece; and the sense perhaps forgotten by the majority today, and conspicuous from its absence from our culture – the tactile response.’ —Dan Kelly

‘Vital Clay’ celebrates the work of acclaimed ceramicists Akiko Hirai and Dan Kelly, whose practice reveals a physicality of form and fluidity of surface texture, with the intervention of the maker’s hand tempered by the wilfulness of the clay and the alchemy of the kiln. For both artists, vessels act as containers for historical reference and conceptual enquiry. Through the language of clay, they embrace the elements of shape and form with a vigour and originality of vision.

At the heart of Hirai’s practice is the investigation of the moon jar, as she reimagines the traditional Korean form through skilful material manipulation. Hirai continually pushes the boundaries of her material, her jars occupying the liminal space between completion and collapse, which she refers to as ‘the condition of progress, something ambiguous, unsettled and imaginative.’ Studies in balance through imperfection, the texturally rich surface of her jars appear to erupt with movement. For Hirai, everyday experiences and emotions filter into the unconscious mind and are traced across the surface of her vessels. Capturing moments in time, these static forms become inhabitants of human interaction. Her swollen, pregnant poppy pod forms—thrown on the wheel and sculpted by hand—are marked, cracked and pitted, their surface fragility accentuated by the coating of ash on porcelain.

Over many years, Dan Kelly has pared down his forms and simplified the finished surface working mainly with a monochrome palette, allowing a clarity of form. For this exhibition, Kelly will present works that demonstrate an assured material knowledge and intuitive engagement with his medium. His wheel-thrown stoneware pots are manipulated by cutting and reshaping by hand. His works have been influenced by the city environment of London, traces of the human and the manmade, urban architecture, graffiti, road markings and signage.

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Further inspiration is derived from European and Far Eastern traditional pots, Japanese Bizen and Tamba wares. Working on the wheel encourages an improvisational approach, retaining the soft clay qualities of the freshly thrown form and adding active marks and contrasting details.



About the Makers

Akiko Hirai

Akiko Hirai's vessel forms focus on the interconnectedness between maker, the object and the viewer. Hirai's Moon Jars push her material to its limits, with the originality of her process evidence of the unstable and unpredictable nature of clay and fire itself. Inspired by the Moon Jars of Korea which embrace cracks, stains, and chips from years of use, Hirai intentionally references the human condition through the making of her vessels with the shifting outcome of colour, the scarred and disrupted surface, and scale and generosity of form as unpredictable as the vagaries of life experience. Her Poppy Pod vessels are thrown on a wheel using a unique blend of Raku clay. Once dried, the subtle intervention of the maker's hand achieves the final finish, the dust of ash on porcelain the last trace of earth and fire.

London-based Akiko Hirai was born in Shizuoka, Japan where she studied cognitive psychology at Aichi Gakuin University, Japan. After moving to the UK, she studied ceramics at the University of Westminster and Central St. Martins. Hirai's work is included in permanent collections at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK; Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield, UK; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK; and the Keramik Museum, Westerwald, Germany. Internationally exhibited, her work featured in the exhibition 'Things of Beauty Growing' at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, USA (2017), which travelled to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK (2018); 'Pioneering Women' at Oxford Ceramics Gallery, Oxford, UK (2021); 'Modern Made: Modern & Post War Art, Design & Studio Ceramics' at Mall Galleries, London, UK (2022); 'On foot: An exhibition curated by Jonathan Anderson' at Offer Waterman, London, UK (2023). Hirai was shortlisted for the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize in 2019.

Dan Kelly

For Dan Kelly, throwing on the wheel is a source of endless possibility. Through the intervention of the potter's hand surface indentations, slashes and folds form the hallmarks of Kelly's practice. Gestural decoration and textural finish, together with the originality of the thrown form, suggest a sensuality and profound sense of the human. The minimalist decoration of dark metallic oxide brushstrokes adorns most of Kelly's pieces, while his white porcelain pots are left virtually untouched with only dark glazed interiors. The rich surface depth of Kelly's grey-black palette results from the layering of oxides and re-firing, achieving subtle, satin-like exteriors.

Dan Kelly grew up in London, UK, and trained at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, London, UK, where English studio potter Colin Pearson was an initial influence, encouraging him to develop his throwing technique. Following this, Kelly continued his post graduate studies at the Royal College of Art, London, UK, where he graduated in 1979. Afterwards, he received support from the Crafts Council with a grant to help with establishing

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his workshop and studio. Throughout his career he has taught at several institutions and held various technician posts until he became Artist in Residence at Christ's Hospital School in 1988, where he went on to teach. He now holds teaching positions on several degree courses at the City Lit Institute, London, UK. In 2007, he received the Queensbury Hunt Award at Ceramics Art London and was longlisted for the Brookfield Award at Collect Art Fair in 2022. Kelly was most recently a finalist for the British Ceramics Biennial Award 2023. His work has been widely exhibited, with recent shows including 'Explore', Contemporary Ceramics, London, UK (2016); '50 Years in the Making', Bedford Boys School, Bedford, UK (2019); 'Vessel', Galerie Metzger, Germany (2019); and Collect Art Fair, London, UK (2022 and 2023). Kelly's work is also featured in private and public collections, such as The Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland; The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland OH; Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands; Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK; and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.



About Make Hauser & Wirth

Make Hauser & Wirth is a dedicated space for contemporary making and the crafted object, committed to showcasing some of the world's best emerging and established artist-makers. Make is a natural extension of the wider Hauser & Wirth gallery ethos, embracing art, craft, gardens, food and architecture. Since launching in 2018 in Somerset, UK, Make has presented work by over eighty artist-makers and provided valuable insights into material-led processes and the rich narratives of their practices. In addition to presentations in London and Zurich, Make continues its international programme in Southampton, NY.

Works exhibited by Make embrace material truth, provenance, sustainability and the value of emotional engagement with the handmade. In addition to a varied exhibition program, Make has hosted practical workshops, discussions and studio visits to expand learning and engagement with makers and global craft organisations.

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Make opening hours:

Wednesday – Sunday
10 am – 4 pm

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Akiko Hirai, The Moon Jar II, 2022
Photo: Dave Watts

Dan Kelly, Vessel, 2022. Photo: Dan Kelly

Akiko Hirai, Poppy Pod Plain, 2022
Photo: Gian Paul Lozza

Akiko Hirai, Portrait, 2022

Photo: Catharine Garcia

Dan Kelly, Portrait, 2018

Photo: Georgia Stoneman

Dan Kelly, DEUCE VESSEL 1, 2022

Photo: Sarah Hogan