

Toshiko Takaezu went to art school at the University of Hawaii and arrived in the States in 1951 on the heels of Pearl Harbor, the interment of Japanese Americans, and the calamity of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At Cranbrook Academy of Art she studied with Maija Grotell (1899-1973) who had come from the Bauhaus in Germany. In the following decade, she became known for her closed forms which she achieved by the simple yet radical act of closing the mouth of the vessel. Takaezu and other ceramic artists of the 1950s and 1960s, were instrumental in exploring clay as a medium for art beyond its conventional utilitarian purpose. Early on Takaezu established her position in a male dominated field where Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) and John Mason on the West Coast were already doing enormous experimental work in clay. In spite of the physical demands of this heavy and temperamental material, Toshiko Takaezu manipulated masses of clay on the potter's wheel and quietly pursued her own evolution as an artist. From 1955 to 1964 Takaezu went on to teach at the Cleveland Institute of Art, and from 1967 to 1992 at Princeton University.

Takaezu's closed vessels possess a fascinating contrast between their rounded, cylindrical shapes and the intense color and kinetic brush strokes of her glazes. Her artworks become three-dimensional canvases on which color erupts, blends, and disappears, only to reappear in a different form on the other side of the vessel. When asked what it is for, she has been known to say, *the most important part of the piece is the black air space that you can't see*. On the inside wall of the empty volume are written secret words or phrases. One would have to break the piece to find out what it says. When the closed forms are moved they make a lovely sound as the artist has intentionally left little pieces of clay inside to rattle about.

Toshiko Takaezu is truly an established figure in the world of fine art and her work is included in the collections of some of the world's finest museums: The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, Japan, and the Bangkok National Museum in Thailand. Along with these honors, she has also been named a Living Treasure of Hawaii.

Kean University is honored to present the work of Toshiko Takaezu and extremely grateful that she has generously loaned thirteen works from her personal collection. We also want to thank Margaret O'Reilly, Kean alumna and curator at the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton, for her efforts to secure the loan of twenty-one pieces from the permanent collection for this show. The works in this exhibition represent a fantastic cross section of artwork spanning a magnificent career over five decades. No doubt, the influence of Toshiko Takaezu's art will continue to inspire generations of artists to come.

Neil Tetkowski
Director of University Galleries