

BLUM

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Yuji Ueda Joins BLUM

BLUM Los Angeles

March 16–May 4, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, March 16, 5–7pm

Los Angeles, CA, March 6, 2024—BLUM is pleased to announce the representation of Shigaraki-based artist Yuji Ueda, on the occasion of his second solo exhibition with the gallery and his debut presentation in Los Angeles.

Hailing from Shigaraki—a region historically and widely renowned for an entrenched legacy of highly skilled ceramists—Ueda deploys, innovates upon, and pushes back against the traditional clay forms and processes that he grew up around. Creating large vessels that appear deceptively suspended in the act of exploding, crumpling, or melting, the artist plays with themes of strength and vulnerability. With colors that seem to crackle and pop, Ueda invents a new vernacular in the ceramic medium.

The Shigaraki tradition of ceramic making as we currently conceive of it can be charted back to the eighth century with the production of extravagant tiles for the Shigaraki Palace. Since the late 1300s, Shigaraki pottery has been popular for use during tea ceremonies among tea masters and cultural tastemakers. In Japan's Edo period, from 1603 to 1868, Shigaraki's ceramic vessels were used as containers to pack freshly picked tea leaves. Ueda himself grew up on a tea farm in the Asamiya area of Shigaraki. As such, many of the works in this exhibition convey Ueda's own regional history and personal origins, making reference to these early tea vessels.

The naturally occurring compounds the artist uses to create his signature effects—the dynamic, eruptive motions of his forms and glazes—have been utilized in Shigaraki-made ceramics for generations. Feldspar, found in the region's soil, is what creates the dripping effect in the glaze while the resin found in the region's red pine allows for a precise temperature when burned for firing. It can take three to six months for Ueda to harvest, from the local area, the amount of firewood required for a single firing. Once the artist's seven-hundred-year-old kiln is started, he will attend to it for as much as seventy-two hours straight, adding firewood every ten minutes.

While Ueda has extensive knowledge of and utilizes the aforementioned traditional practices, he also amplifies them to the point of subversion. With a clay-building process that creates an explosion-like effect in the glaze that pours out of each work's final structure, the artist's vessels are carefully frozen in the moment of their own combustion so as to undercut the Platonic function found at the core of the ceramic medium's craft-based origin. The artist has implemented new techniques that he has developed through his own experimentation. For his recent assemblage works, Ueda pours melted copper into a large bowl of stones to create the metal portion of the sculpture. The final shape reflects the negative space amongst the stones and immortalizes the process of its own making.

Ueda captures the ineffable beauty contained within the imperfect. Utilizing traditional materials to catalyze otherworldly chemical effects within his inventive works, the artist composes transportive objects that would be right at home in settings both prehistoric and futuristic. Heightening the legacy that he has inherited, Ueda bridges the worlds of art and design, maintaining and expanding the discipline's process while investigating and going beyond the bounds of its functionality.

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Yuji Ueda (b. 1975, Shigaraki, Shiga Prefecture, Japan) comes from a family of award-winning tea farmers in the Shiga Prefecture town of Shigaraki. His work was presented in a two-part group exhibition curated by Takashi Murakami at Blum & Poe Los Angeles and New York in 2015, and a solo exhibition at Blum & Poe Tokyo in 2023.

About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from sixteen countries worldwide, nurturing a diverse roster of artists at all stages of their practices with a range of global perspectives. Originally opened as Blum & Poe in Santa Monica in 1994, the gallery has been a pioneer in its early commitment to Los Angeles as an international arts capital.

The gallery has been acclaimed for its groundbreaking work in championing international artists of postwar and contemporary movements, such as CoBrA, Dansaekhwa, Mono-ha, and Superflat, and for organizing museum-caliber solo presentations and historical survey exhibitions across its spaces in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and New York. Often partnering with celebrated curators and scholars such as Cecilia Alemani, Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake, the gallery has produced large-scale exhibitions focusing on the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of the 1980s and 1990s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020); and a survey of portraiture through a democratic and humanist lens (2023); among others.

BLUM's wide-reaching program includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, video series, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. BLUM Books, the gallery's publishing division, democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books.

Across the three global locations, BLUM prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, it was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. BLUM is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in its physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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