



Different view (top) and close-up view (bottom) of *Ice Flow series no. 10*

Jeff Shapiro arrived in Japan as a 23-year-old in search of an authentic experience. It was not easy to absorb a culture so removed from his own, but with sensitivity, drive, and an openness to learn, he developed a vision of himself as a ceramic artist. It sparked a passion for what has become a lifelong commitment.

In the beginning of any love affair, there is an all-consuming passion. No doubt, his senses were ignited by the intricacies and technical nuances of the physicality of the process—the clay, the building of form, and the complexities of the firing, particularly with the use of a Bizen-style kiln. But artistic mastery is not the same as the mere acquisition of skills and technical knowledge. No, mastery evolves when experience is so integrated into the act of creation that the viewer is inevitably transformed. One sees the ordinary become the extraordinary.

Clay is one of the most expressive artistic materials in which every gesture is revealed and made evident in the process of formation. Scale, texture, form and the effect of the intense heat upon a glaze offer a metaphor of Nature encapsulated onto a surface. Every element in the process—the pigments, the grit of the clay, the volatile ash of the wood cascading around the forms—is coaxed into fulfilling its potential when in the hands of a sensitive artist. In fact, he pushes tradition even further by experimenting with varying melting points of glazes in post-ash firings to enhance the effects that his super surfaces initiate.

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Shapiro's *anagama* tunnel kiln



Close-up image of *Ice Flow series no. 9* (see page 12-13)

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In Shapiro's latest exhibition, *Cascades and Glacial Landscapes*, we see works that are reflective of his masterful handling of varied firings—from an anagama wood-fueled kiln to an electric kiln—all orchestrated to manipulate and control the surfaces on his sculptural forms. These forms both convey and reference water.

In the sculptures called *Cascades*, molten glazes appear to ooze and drip from hot blue-greens reminiscent of lush lagoon waterfalls descending from mountainous terrains. In *Glacial Landscapes*, the viewer is shown icy formations of crystals trapped in suspension within forms reminiscent of the barrenness of the Arctic.

These effects are not serendipitous. It is Shapiro's sensitive responsiveness to natural formations in the landscape, and years of firing experience, that bring these nuanced surfaces and forms to fruition. Trial-and-error, repeated again and again, provides a cumulative memory: knowing where to place work in the kiln, where the fall of the ash will have the fullest impact, choosing specific wood to burn, learning which oxides provide the richest colors, and most importantly, how long to keep the fire box stoked with wood so that objects emerge from the fire filled with exuberance and beauty... this juggling act, this balanced dance, marks the master at work.

Jeff Shapiro has fine-tuned his inspiration and knowledge and has blurred the line between art and craft. He has opened a door into the natural world of earth and sky, of erosion and water, and has delivered a body of work of imagined landscapes that brings Nature into our conscious awareness with a clarity of expression that signals an artist at the height of his creative power.

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February 2021