

A M E R I C A N C E R A M I C S

SHINMAN YAMADA AT LONGHOUSE RESERVE



December, 2007

by Janet Goleas

Okinowan ceramicist Shinman Yamada installed a group of earthenware vessels this summer at LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton. The eleven spheres, collectively titled “Hamon”, were dynamically placed within the rectangular geography of the Reserve’s sculpture court. With an exacting eye, the artist sited the works as if placing them across an immense tatami mat, echoing the centuries-old precision of a Japanese tea ceremony.

The vessels are sculptural and organic, defined by their visual weight and fiercely expressionistic skins. Infused with a sense of ritual, they exude an ancient simplicity, as if unearthed after a long burial under the world’s crust. Drawn into the internal logic of these forms like Druids called to Stonehenge, one is captivated not only by their haunting beauty but also the compositional logic employed by the artist in his strategic placement of each element.

Yamada’s art is inspired both by the bounties of the natural world and by the traditions of Okinowan pottery that date back over 6,000 years. In Yomitan, he shares a climbing kiln (*noborigama*) with three other potters. The chambered oven, heated by wood fire, produces a natural ash glaze that is achieved by no other method. Blistered and abraded, Yamada’s globes radiate a solemn intimacy that is primordial. As observers, the artist invites us to witness an internal phenomenon: the spheres appear to heave from within, throbbing outward, breaching the surface and rupturing through thick walls of clay. Warped from their own weight, each swollen orb is mottled with gashes and gaping maws that erupt in craters and crevices across the surface. The cavity edges rise up like broken lips formed by a volcanic blast, variously shaping into bottlenecks, gorges and fissures. In moving beyond the craft traditions of one of the world’s most significant ceramic cultures, Yamada continues to redefine the conventional vessel through his poetic insistence of sculptural identity and expressionism.