

The Nerikomi of Clay & Cultures



Nerikomi is a technique for creating patterns with colored clay in ceramic art or pottery. As a master of this technique Japanese native, Tomoko Konno, expresses herself both externally and internally as a ceramicist whose art crosses all cultural boundaries and has found a new home at Jenggala in Bali.

STORY BY Dewald Haynes **PHOTO BY** Suguru Matunanti & Jenggala Doc.



THE NERIKOMI OF CLAY AND CULTURES

A ceramic flower vase created by using the nerikomi technique

OPPOSITE PAGE

A collaboration with composer, Suguru Matutani, and dancer, Yayoi Hatanaka during an exhibition of ceramicist, Tomoko Konno

NERIKOMI IS A CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE TERM, YET THIS 'MARBLING' CERAMIC TECHNIQUE WAS USED IN ANCIENT EGYPT, DURING THE TANG DYNASTY IN 7TH CENTURY CHINA AND EVEN BY THE ROMANS.



THE NERIKOMI OF CLAY AND CULTURES
CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT
—
Tomoko Konno at work in the studio at Jenggala
—
A one of a kind shell vase
—
Ceramic art by Tomoko Konno
—
Functional dish designed for Jenggala



Early ceramics in the Stoke-on-Trent used more than one color of clay for decorative effect. In England this was referred to as 'agateware'. In Japan there are a few pieces from the Momoyama period, and Edo, as well as Mingei and it was there that an explosion of it occurred from about 1978–1995 due probably to Aida Yusuke's advertising and to Matsui Kousei who refers to his work as *neriage*. The term actually started being used in the 1970s to describe related kanji *Neriage*. Yusuke Aida was on a television commercial for Nescafé and it seems to have entered the vocabulary at about that time when his nerikomi coffee cups were available to the first people who contacted the advertisers.

To the novice the use of this technique may seem impulsive with an uncalculated outcome where you create a pattern by means of luck rather than skill. This is however not the reality as slabs of different clays or clays colored with stains or oxides, are stacked, folded, pressed into logs, sliced, and arranged to form a vessel. In this way, the numerous stacked layers appear as fine undulating lines embedded in a surrounding color in the finished vessel. A master ceramist starts by designing the pattern and then creates it by using the technique - a skill that takes years of patience, practice and dedication.



It was after her marriage when Tomoko lived in Hong Kong that her love affair with clay officially started. Although as a child growing up she played with clay, the touch of it as an adult provoked a dejavu response that encouraged her to naturally and intuitively create her art. A career sparked that resulted in many exhibitions throughout Asia and her popularity grew while her artistic sensitivity remained as refreshingly effervescent as her humble nature. Her return to Japan stimulated the development of her skills and through devoted persistence she established her own following and reputation within the highly acclaimed and competitive Japanese ceramic art circle.

Tomoko first visited Bali over a decade ago and thought that in the future she would like to live on this magical island know to be a global melting pot of creative souls of many mediums, backgrounds and nationalities. It was not until after the Fukushima nuclear disaster that she realized her art could take her anywhere in the world and her motherly instincts to protect her daughter, combined with the memory of Bali, had her uproot her family and move to Bali. This move proved to be kismet as she walked into the showroom and factory of Jenggala where many view her work as being inspired by the nature and coral reefs found around Bali.



THE NERIKOMI OF CLAY AND CULTURES
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

— Teapots and cups adorned with colorful and unique details

— Ceramic art that captures the imagination

— Many of Tomoko's designs seems to be inspired by nature



The transition to work from her own studio in Japan, to having to work more regulated office hours at Jenggala has molded Tomoko with her new home as she experienced her own nerikomi: From within the comfort of her established loving and supportive family unit she has been able to melt and marble with Balinese culture and way of life and managed to design the perfect pattern for her to have a new found creative perspective both professionally and personally. Gratitude and Appreciation has been her legs to help her walk the walk of an expatriate artist based in Bali with grace and admiration.

Tomoko has also taken her unique interpretation of nerikomi one step further by mixing clay with other mediums. She found that ceramics alone limited her expression so she started to use other materials such as wood, glass and fabric combined

with ceramics. Furthermore she started to express herself during exhibitions by performing another nerikomi combining her art with dance, music and clothing design during her recent Conrad exhibition and opening supported by Jenggala.

Although many of Tomoko Konno's work for Jenggala involves creating functional items, the interest in her art has seen the introduction of her artwork as pieces proudly displayed and distributed by Jenggala in their showroom. The island of Bali with its diversity in design, culture, people and places seems to be based on the nerikomi technique where here instead of clay, cultures are mixed together to form a unique and beautiful pattern. This nerikomi must have been created and blessed by the Gods as Tomoko successfully embraced and became one with Bali. ¹⁰