

The Art of the RAMEN Bowl

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*Complimentary



JAPAN HOUSE

LOS ANGELES

Introduction

Ramen—wheat noodles served in soup with toppings—was introduced to Japan in the late 19th century and became deeply connected with the culture of post-war Japan. Originally Chinese, this hot noodle soup served in a single bowl is a fast food that can satisfy hunger for a reasonable price.

The dish has evolved differently in each region of Japan, featuring diverse ingredients and seasonings, and, with the spread of Japanese food globally, ramen can now be made vegan, halal, and gluten-free. It's safe to say that ramen has become the most popular Japanese food in the world.

In Japanese food culture, vessels of diverse shapes, styles and materials appear on dining tables, even for ordinary meals. However, the bowls used in Japanese ramen shops are often porcelain *donburi* bowls with almost uniform dimensions and designs.

Although this exhibition touches on the history and culture of ramen, its primary goal is to spotlight the *donburi* itself. Then, in the hands of thirty artists, the bowls serve as blank canvases where the many possibilities of ramen are uniquely expressed. In addition, the exhibition introduces the region of Mino in Gifu Prefecture—Japan's largest producer of porcelain ramen bowls—and its long history of ceramic production, from tea bowls to housewares to *donburi*.

The exhibition is curated by designer Taku Satoh, art writer, editor, and curator Mari Hashimoto, and designed by Taku Satoh Design Office (TSDO Inc.) in conjunction with the Ceramic Valley Association, Mino, Japan. *The Art of the Ramen Bowl* is presented in three sections, the first in the Sub-Gallery and the second and third in the Main Gallery.



Plastic food samples by Iwasaki Mokei Seizo Co., Ltd.

Section 1

Ingredients and Anatomy

Section 1 begins with an introduction to ramen, its history and culture. Here, the anatomy of a bowl of ramen noodles is dissected, breaking the dish down to not only examine the ingredients such as the noodles, broth, and toppings but also to reveal insights into the smell, flavor and time taken to eat and appreciate

the noodles. Intricate plastic models of food (including a giant ramen bowl) made by Iwasaki Mokei, the renowned manufacturer of Japanese plastic food samples, and other objects, drawings and text illustrate the rich diversity and range of ingredients that make up a bowl of ramen.



Plastic ramen sample by
Iwasaki Mokei Seizo Co., Ltd.

Section 2

Design

Section 2 explores the uniquely Japanese approach to design, to both decoration and its placement in ceramic vessels. This presentation highlights the traditional Japanese belief that utilitarian vessels can also be works of art. On display are thirty porcelain ramen bowls (*donburi*) and spoons (*rengo*) decorated by artists, designers and architects mostly from Japan. Each is displayed on a pedestal as a work of art and includes a label with information about the artist and their design.



From top to bottom, left to right: Tabaimo, Akira Minagawa, Hisashi Tenmyouya

Section 3

Skill and Technology

Section 3 introduces the Ceramic Valley of Mino and its tradition as a major Japanese ceramics center that has produced beautiful utilitarian wares for over 500 years. The section includes maps, videos and photographs introducing the geography of Mino, its history, as well as the work and skill of its ceramic makers.

On display in this exhibition are shards of historic Mino ceramics, a collection of 90 small Mino porcelain plates (*kozara*) each with a unique design, ten Mino ramen bowls decorated in the major styles of Mino ceramics and a collection of examples demonstrating contemporary industrial and artistic ceramic innovation from Mino.



From left to right: Taku Satoh, Tadanori Yokoo



Keiichi Tanaami



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Curation
Taku Satoh, TSDO Inc.
Mari Hashimoto

Art Direction
Taku Satoh, TSDO Inc.

Exhibition Photography
Yusuke Nishibe

Graphic Design
Ayame Suzuki and
Momo Hasegawa, TSDO Inc.

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Akira Tachibana
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Keiichi Tanaami