

## Takuro Kuwata *From Tea Bowl*

Alison Jacques Gallery, London 7 October – 5 November

To see some of Takuro Kuwata's large, colourful untitled ceramic works (all 2016) in Alison Jacques's main gallery space, you'd hardly imagine that they are rooted in the traditional techniques of Japanese tea-bowl manufacture. The melting, exploding and often phallic forms look more like something a Shaivite nightclub owner with a lingam fetish might have littering his house. One such work, its surface pitted with fingermarks, features a bright blue tublike base topped by a shining gold protuberance, the whole spotted by pustules, from which has oozed a red-brown chocolaty excrement. Despite the evidence of handcrafting offered by the fingermarks, the overall impression is that the artist's materials have exerted a control over their final form. Smaller, often candy-coloured works dotted around these almost three-metre-high totems, in a kind of rock-garden arrangement, look like the experiments of a cake decorator gone mad – thick glazes that have

cracked and fallen down the sides of objects, applied droplets of glaze that appear like so many sprinkles, or seeds on a fruit, or drips of sweat. And all are sensual in the extreme: they make you want to caress, lick and fondle their glazed surfaces.

The gallery's side space, however, contains a series of more conventionally palm-size cuplike works – at least cuplike in the sense that they offer some sort of obvious functionality, however wonky or collapsing their overall form – presented in a museological display in two neat rows on chest-high shelves. Each of these demonstrates an aesthetic or technique found in the generally larger works displayed in the main space. Among those techniques are *kairagi*, a means of introducing imperfections caused by the shrinking and cracking of the glaze, and *ishihaze*, in which stones are overheated in the kiln until they melt or rupture. Importantly such techniques originally evolved as a result

of knowledge gained through accidents, before becoming part of a codified tradition of tea-bowl making. And Kuwata's works as a whole are self-evidently a mixture of nature and manufacture, planning and accident, and the acceptance, and perhaps overcoming, of the latter. Within all that, of course, is a strong element of *wabi-sabi*, the sense of a beauty that is imperfect, impermanent and incomplete. Yet ultimately a sense of any particular philosophy is not the overwhelming impression with which these works leave you. The artist talks about how he found that his early work in traditional ceramics didn't really communicate with friends he had met on the hip-hop street-dance scene of which he was a part. His decision to take his work to a material and aesthetic extreme did. And it's those extreme sensual pleasures, an unthinking feeling of fun, that make Kuwata's work linger in the mind. *Mark Rappolt*



*Untitled (detail)*, 2016, porcelain, glaze, pigment, steel, platinum, 83 × 75 × 70 cm.  
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