

# Bernard Leach – Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Leach's career as a potter

## June 19 - August 26, 2012

Bernard Leach (1887-1979) was one of the most important and influential craftsmen of the 20th century in the United Kingdom, who produced not only ceramics but etchings, sketches, woodworks and so on. Leach was born in Hong Kong and had lived in Japan until he was 3 years old. Then at the age of 10, he returned to his home country England to receive an education. He learned drawings in an art school and got affected by Yakumo Koizumi or the painter James McNeill Whistler. Leach spent his youth with a deep interest in Japan even though he was away from Japan.

It was in 1909 when Leach finally went back to Japan again. He was at the age of 22 then. To his fortune, he was welcomed and treated well by the members of the literary magazine *Shirakaba*, artists and intellectuals. Among them was Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), who was the founder of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum and also played a main role in the *Shirakaba* school. The encounter with Yanagi was the most influential to the later works and thoughts of Bernard Leach. Yanagi was also inspired by ideas of aesthetics and themes of creative works Leach represented. Later on Leach was getting deeply involved in the Mingei Movement which Yanagi and other followers advocated. Thus, Bernard Leach and Soetsu Yanagi respected each other as a lifelong friend, and developed trust and friendship.

In 1911, aspiring to be a potter, Leach began to learn the rudiments of making a pottery from Kenzan Ogata VI. It could be said that his devotion to ceramics gave a chance for his friend Kenkichi Tomimoto (1886-1963) to aim to be a potter. In 1920, Leach set off for his home country England accompanied by Shoji Hamada (1894-1978) as an assistant. Leach established a climbing kiln in St. Ives, Cornwall and began to make pottery there. Since then he continued his vigorous creative activities based on St. Ives until he died in 1979.

The main characteristic of Leach's works is pictures on pottery and it is not too much to say that these works by Leach are as good as drawings of early Imari in the beginning of the 17th century and those of Holland pottery. Its beauty is nothing less than a miracle viewing from the present, when abilities to create designs or skills of paintings are rather declining.

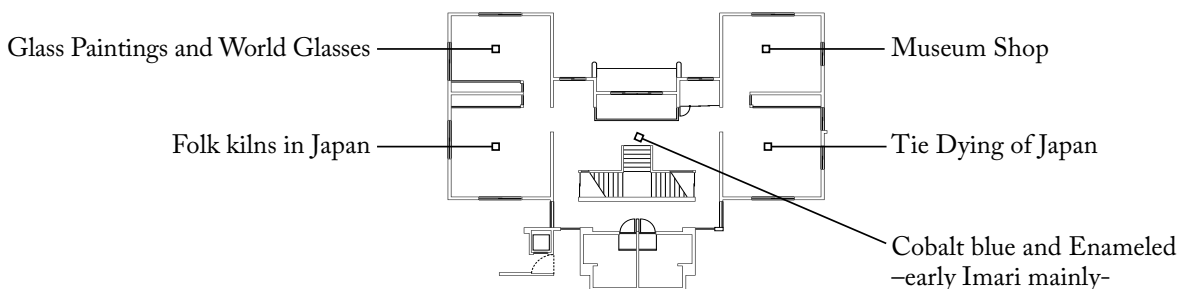
Works produced in many kilns located in various places is also Leach's characteristic. As for England, Leach engaged in creative works in St. Ives and Dartington. In Japan they ranged all over the country. In each place, Leach made most use of locally available materials and methods of producing. Furthermore he produced works with rich individuality of his own. Moreover, Leach played a role as an important instructor for artists or main supporters of the Mingei Movement who got acquainted with Leach, an enthusiastic seeker of beauty.

Bernard Leach considered it significant the mutual connection between himself as an English man and East Asia especially Japan and he determined his principle 'the marriage of the East and the West'. Leach practiced and achieved his idea through both his creative activities in his home country and as many as 15 times visit to Japan including a stay in his childhood.

The year 2012 is a memorial year for Bernard Leach; the 125th birthday of Leach and also the 100th anniversary of Leach's career as a potter. In this occasion as many as 170 pieces of representative works by Leach including etchings from early years to ceramics made in his late years are on display from the museum collection. It would be a good opportunity to honor Leach's creative activities and achievements.

Through Leach's works which are natural, warm and filled with poetic sentiments, we could experience the ideas of Bernard Leach at present which is beyond the East and the West.

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