



52 WALKER ST | MAR 4 – APR 1, 2023

From left to right: Shinichi Sawada, *Untitled (187)*, 2018, *Untitled (3)*, 2006-2010, *Untitled (151)*, 2010, Photo by Izzy Leung.

# Shinichi Sawada

## *Messengers*

James Cohan is pleased to present *Shinichi Sawada: Messengers*, a solo exhibition of sculptures by the self-taught ceramicist Shinichi Sawada, on view from March 4 through April 1, 2023 at the gallery's 52 Walker location. *Shinichi Sawada: Messengers* is organized in partnership with Jennifer Lauren Gallery, Manchester, United Kingdom, and spans two decades of hauntingly expressive and chimerical sculptures by the artist. The gallery will host an opening reception on Saturday, March 4th from 5-7 PM.

Sawada's spiked and thorned bodies hover between human-animal and spirit-god forms that emit an intangible energy, poised at once to move, or perhaps to communicate. His sculptures' multi-sided faces are often confrontational, wide-eyed with mouths agape. Sawada constructs unique patterns across the surface of each work—some dense, some linearly geometric, others toothy and sharp. Animals—dragons, birds, frogs and lizards chief among them—extend open clawed appendages towards the viewer. His newer creatures and visages are less readily identifiable, such as *Untitled (173)*, 2021, whose sinuous black form resembles a cross between a snake and dragon, its tail positioned to whip the ground. The sculptures seem plucked directly from the earth in their colorations. These warm tan, burnt umber, ashy gray, and deeply saturated black hues result from the high temperatures (1,200 to 800 °C) of the kilns. Their surfaces range from matte and porous to slightly shimmering, a phenomenon created by ashes crystallizing during the firing. Sawada's chimerical forms have a sentient quality and are emotive in their fierce expressions, particularly true with *Untitled (143)*, 2018, whose intense glare is only exacerbated by horned appendages. Despite their intimate scale, they contain a powerful totemic presence, as if they are guardians, keepers of secrets, or messengers.

While rooted in traditional techniques, Shinichi Sawada's ceramics possess an otherworldly beauty, situated in a

language of his own making. Since 2000, Sawada has attended Nakayoshi Fukushikai—a social welfare organization for disabled individuals—where he creates ceramics that are wood-fired in a hand-made kiln situated in the mountains. The artist, who is predominantly nonverbal, takes a regimented approach to building his richly imaginative forms. He spends several days at a time sculpting each work—carefully adding his signature spikes to clay bodies one-by-one. Masaharu Iketani, who for many years has facilitated Sawada at the studio, describes this phenomenon; “*The simple process of rolling the clay and making it pointy. He’s able to express his world, and his emotions through that.*” His work is closely connected to the millennia-old practice of Japanese Shigaraki pottery; he uses the same clay, tools, and wood firing processes as generations of makers before him. Sawada is uninterested in creating utilitarian objects, instead opting to create rough surfaces that also happen to be incredibly delicate. His ceramic sculptures can be read as incantations of emotion, linked to Shigaraki tradition in their meditative and ritualistic quality; they are not vessels for tea or sake, but rather, are spaces for contemplation.

Shinichi Sawada (b. Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, Japan, 1982) is self-taught and based in Japan’s Shiga district near Kyoto. Sawada’s work is in collections worldwide including the Collection de l’Art Brut in Lausanne, Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, the abcd collection in Paris, and the Shiga Museum of Art, Japan. His work has been exhibited in Massimiliano Gioni’s *Encyclopedic Palace* at the Venice Biennale in 2013, the 2019 Frieze Art Fair in New York, Venus over Manhattan, New York in 2021, *A Través* at James Cohan, New York in 2022, among other venues. In 2024, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in St. Louis, Missouri and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina will host the first touring solo exhibition of Sawada’s work in the United States.

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