

VINTAGE20

KANG MINSOO

백자 달항아리

INCOMPLETE PERFECTION

"The moon jar is trying to achieve imperfection. It reflects life in itself. I think these imperfections, the imbalance, allow you to see things in an unlimited way."

Lee Ufan

Vintage20 is pleased to present an exhibition of moon jars by Korean master ceramicist Kang Minsoo. The moon jar represents one of Korea's most celebrated traditions, dating back to the 17th century; they are characterized by their full-bodied shape and radiant glazed surfaces that resemble lunar landscapes. Kang Minsoo has devoted his life to honoring this legacy while investing it with renewed energy and meaning in the modern era. Widely recognized as a master in Korea, this will be his first solo exhibition in the United States. The exhibition at Vintage20 will consist of fifteen jars, organized according to three sizes.

The title of the show, *incomplete perfection*, is the translation of the Korean word 백자 달항아리; it conveys the vital synergy between control of the medium and an openness to chance and natural imperfections in the process of shaping its final form. This balance characterizes the aesthetics and philosophy of the moon jar. Immediately recognized for their material harmony and comely shape, moon jars marry color and size with a unique construction method that joins two separately thrown pots into an closed volume. Embodying a mix of Confucian and Buddhist ideals of balance and imperfection, each moon jar is a totally unique object based on its fabrication and the conditions of its firing.

The moon jar is a ceramic form intimately connected to the history of Korea. Unique to the Korean mainland, moon jars are best known for the few remaining examples from the 17th and 18th centuries, when the ruling Royal Family sponsored their production and invested in technical improvements in their manufacture. These historic moon jars are all considered national treasures and held in museums around the world.

What is special about the moon jar, however, is that in addition to being an aristocratic art form, it was also widely used by the common people, for storing everything from rice, soy sauce, and alcohol to flower arrangements. This utilitarian usage meant that the form was allowed to evolve according to its environment and the moon jar is best known for including and embracing these imperfections, thereby becoming synonymous with Korean culture and history. This openness to variation was grounded in the philosophy of the Joseon period (1392-1910) and the principles of frugality and purity that underlie Confucian values as well as Buddhist ideals of impermanence. The moon jar's specific construction method and glazing techniques embody these attributes perfectly. This can be seen both in its form and surface. The asymmetry of the jar is caused by its unusual fabrication that involves taking two separately thrown bowls and joining them together forming a discernible seam. This process, in addition to the clay body and conditions in the kiln, often result in subtle distortions in the form's shape. In addition, the firing method and glaze chemistry can result in variations in color, including the widely celebrated orange tones that are caused by sodium vaporizing at high heat.

Kang Minsoo's technique includes a commitment to wood firing, the traditional method used in the Joseon period that resulted in the most complex and beloved imperfections. Technically challenging to master, Kang is widely celebrated for his ability to both control this method of firing and his ability to coax spectral moments in the glaze. These often occur due to salt embedded in the oak wood itself, having grown near the sea. In this way the artist marries a profound balance of chance and technique to produce his exquisite pots. Asked why he remains so committed to the moon jar, the reclusive potter has answered, "just because."

Kang Minsoo works and fires his jars in a kiln built upon the edge of a steep mountain slope located in Gyeonggi Province. A graduate of Dan Kook University, he had exhibited widely in Korea and China. His work is in the collection of the Korean Presidential Palace.

The exhibition will be open from May 3-June 1, 2019.