

DEVALS



Biography

Akihiro Nikaido (b. 1977, Sapporo, Japan) is a Japanese ceramic artist whose practice is distinguished by a rigorous formal vocabulary, the nuanced use of local clays, particularly those associated with Mashiko, and a sustained engagement with the philosophical and aesthetic traditions of Japan.

A graduate of the Ceramics Department at Bunka Gakuin College of Art in 1999, Nikaido established his independent practice in 2001 and has since emerged as an internationally recognized figure within contemporary ceramic art.

Central to Nikaido's artistic philosophy is the concept of *Yūgen* (幽玄), the classical Japanese aesthetic principle associated with the evocation of an unseen depth beyond immediate perception. Historically theorized by figures such as Fujiwara no Shunzei, Fujiwara no Teika, and the Noh playwright Zeami, *Yūgen* discloses, behind the multiplicity of objects that occupy our attention, a deeper reality in which all things emerge from the Void only to return to it. In this experience, where the distinction between subject and object dissolves, what endures is not being itself, but the very passage of beings and things. Marked by impermanence and quiet melancholy, *Yūgen* reveals the fragility underlying all forms of existence. This sensibility profoundly informs Nikaido's approach to form and atmosphere. His ceramics privilege silence, absence, and resonance, inviting a meditative encounter between object, nature, and viewer. As he himself explains, "Pottery is completed by us as beings."



Fig. 1 Akihiro Nikaido in his studio © Akihiro Nikaido

Akihiro Nikaido's ceramics are distinguished by their extraordinary delicacy and technical refinement. Through a highly controlled firing process, he produces surfaces of remarkable thinness, whose fragile edges often resemble sheets of oxidized metal or weathered bark. The complex patinas that envelop his works generate subtle trompe-l'œil effects, creating shifting impressions of density, erosion, and stratification. Their textures and fragmented surfaces evoke, at times, the rusted austerity of corten steel, the dark patina of gunmetal, or the pale mineral softness of kaolin clay.

Nikaido's works appear as living, breathing entities, conceived within an open relational field that encompasses both the maker and the viewer. His ceramics embody a dynamic exchange recalling the earth's crust as it opens outward and allows its porous surface to breathe. Through their fissured textures, delicate apertures, and stratified patinas, these forms convey an organic vitality, as though animated by the slow respiration of matter itself and shaped by the elemental forces of time and nature.

For his exhibition at DEVALS, Akihiro Nikaido will present large-scale works from a new series first unveiled in Tokyo in 2025. Expanding upon his ongoing exploration of materiality, impermanence, and elemental transformation, these recent works made in red clay, yellow clay and black glaze mark a new development in his practice, characterized by increasingly complex surfaces.



Fig. 2 Akihiro Nikaido, Untitled, 2025 © Akihiro Nikaido

Nikaido's works have been presented extensively in Japan and abroad, establishing his reputation as one of the foremost voices in contemporary Japanese ceramics.

Significant exhibitions include *Next Generation Energy* at the Mashiko Ceramic Art Museum Messe and the Ibaraki Prefectural Ceramic Art Museum (2013); *Phenomenon*, a contemporary ceramic art exhibition at the Ibaraki Prefectural Ceramic Art Museum (2014); the solo exhibition *Wabi-to-Ima* at the Globus Washitsu Tea Room in New York (2015); and *Wabi-to-Ima – Wa –* (2016), a multi-site project in New York exploring Japanese culture through the aesthetics of the tea ceremony.

In 2018, he presented the solo exhibition *January and July* in Paris, followed in 2019 by *Wabi-to-Ima – San –* across several venues in New York.

Alongside approximately ten solo exhibitions annually, his works have been exhibited internationally in cities including New York, Paris, London, Taipei, Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai.

In 2010, Nikaido founded the collective *Toh-ism*, conceived as a platform for dialogue and experimentation within contemporary Japanese ceramics. In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, he also played a leading role in the socially engaged initiative *Tō ISM – Utsuwa no Chikara Project* ("The Strength of Vessels Project"), through which handmade ceramic vessels were distributed to residents living in temporary housing following the disaster.

In 2026, Nikaido relocated his studio to a hilltop site in Izu, Shizuoka Prefecture.



Fig. 3 Akihiro Nikaido, Untitled, 2025 © Akihiro Nikaido

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