

For Immediate Release

**Rosanjin Kitaoji**  
**Ceramic and Calligraphic Works from the 1940's and 1950's**

**September 20th through October 19, 2002**

Rosanjin Kitaoji (1883-1959) is internationally recognized as one of the most influential and illustrious Japanese ceramic artists of the 20th Century. Franklin Parrasch Gallery is honored to present over twenty original ceramic and calligraphic works by Rosanjin in the first United States exhibition of this artist's work since 1972. A full-color catalog of this exhibition including an essay by Ken Price (one of the numerous American artists influenced by Rosanjin) will be available.

In the Zen tradition, Rosanjin focused his energies on an array of disciplines including seal engraving, calligraphy, publishing, culinary arts and pottery. As an acclaimed epicurean, who established a private eating club in Tokyo, Rosanjin developed a heightened appreciation of ceramic vessels and, in particular, pottery of the ancient Japanese masters. The Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 led to the decimation of his Gourmet Club along with his vast collection of functional antique ceramics. In 1925 he set out to open what would eventually be the most famous restaurant in Japan. In the course of planning, he decided to create all new ceramic wares to enhance the quality of the food he served and create a total sensual experience for his guests.

After considerable research and with the help of *Living Treasure* designee Toyozo Arakawa, Rosanjin excavated ancient kilns in Korea and present day Gifu-Prefecture, relocating them to his own property in Yamazaki. As he was not a production potter, Rosanjin brought many of the best ceramicists of his time to his compound to take advantage of these ancient kilns and their ability to achieve the firing effects of previous periods. The result was a marriage of glaze-colors and patterns reminiscent of various Japanese periods, but the forms were uniquely Rosanjin's creation. It was Rosanjin's gifts with the brush and calligraphy that not only distinguished the surfaces, but also the basis of the gestures (lines, bulges, weights and balances) of his clay forms.

Much has been discussed of Rosanjin's painful and tumultuous childhood. Born under the name Kitaoji Fusajiro in 1883 to Seiso and Tome Kitaoji, he was the unexpected result of an affair his mother had with a funerary worker in Kyoto. His father was so shamed by this dishonor that he took his own life prior to Rosanjin's birth. His mother was financially unable to care for Rosanjin and left the young boy in the care of a local policeman who shortly thereafter also committed suicide. Rosanjin was eventually placed in the foster care of a local sign carver, where he arguably received his first artistic training. In the end, however, all of his experiences with family and marital relationships were by and large tragic and unsuccessful. His best rapport was with artists and art (including several years in the early 50's that Isamu Noguchi lived and worked on Rosanjin's compound), and even then only when and with whom his exacting standards were maintained.

In 1954 a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York brought Rosanjin to the United States and later led to meetings with Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall both of whom were admirers and collectors of his pottery. Despite all his accomplishments in pottery, he turned down the Japanese government's attempts to designate him as a Living National Treasure in 1955 and then again in 1956. After his death in

1959, Rosanjin's work was exhibited in the United States; in 1965 at the M. H. de Young Museum in San Francisco; and in 1972 at the Japan Society Gallery in New York City. Concurrent with this exhibition, the Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan is mounting a show of their permanent collection of Rosanjin's work.