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BOOK “Grafted”

No one seems quite sure how to describe the work of Kohei Oda. Owner of Qusamura, the avant-garde plant store in Hiroshima, Japan, Oda is usually tagged as a horticulturalist; in the introduction to *Grafted* (August Editions), Glenn Adamson, the director of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, offers the term “plant sculptor.” It’s an inexact description of a method that has won Oda international acclaim: combine two living plants—often cacti rescued from the trash heaps of commercial nurseries—and “encourage them to weirdness,” to borrow a phrase from the novelist Robert Stone. *Grafted* is a collection of quietly arresting photos that showcase Oda’s collaboration with Adam Silverman, the Los Angeles-based ceramicist whose work can be found everywhere from design museums to Heath Ceramics and the restaurant Trois Mec. “It was not the most obvious pairing,” writes Adamson. “A plant sculptor and a potter?” Well, actually, yes. In fact, a more obvious pairing is difficult to imagine. Oda’s cacti mash-ups have so much personality that you wouldn’t be surprised to hear them speak, while the surfaces of Silverman’s ceramics evoke everything from mold, to shrapnel, to salt flats and undiscovered planets. And while Oda and Silverman don’t speak the same language in the literal sense, the dialogue that emerges between the plants and pots in *Grafted* elevates the work of both men. The book’s most compelling moments occur when the camera zooms in for close-ups so extreme that you wonder, for an instant, whether you’re looking at a plant, a pot, or some combination of the two. It’s a study in contrasts but also in crisscrossed and confounded expectations; there are moments when Silverman’s layered glazing appears more organic than the multicolored, mutant plants. The two men found each other through the designer Tamotsu Yagi, whose daughter Ritsuko owns the Los Angeles gallery Chariots on Fire. “My instinct is to say yes to anything Tamotsu suggests,” Silverman admits in the introduction, “though a voice inside me was saying: my being a potted plant guy is not necessarily going to get me to the next level as an artist.” The voice inside him lied. —**Stan Parish**

