

# The Art of Display







*Front cover*  
Detail of catalogue item 2

*Opposite*  
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# The Art of Display

*“Traditionally in Japan life was separated into ‘extraordinary’ days and ‘ordinary’ days.”*

Prof Tsuji Nobuo, Professor Emeritus, Tokyo University and Tama Art University.

Extraordinary days were those of festivals, auspicious events and ceremonies; ordinary days were for mundane work. Many of the objects in this catalogue are pieces created for ‘extraordinary days’, transforming the ordinary into extraordinary through design.

A number celebrate food – an aspect of Japanese society that has come to epitomise our view of the singular Japanese devotion to raising everyday events to a level of an artform, in harmony with the seasons. Some pieces give a sense of occasion to the act of writing and artistic creativity.

Decoration and the art of display, *kazari*, has been central to the Japanese aesthetic for centuries. Japan’s craft traditions have thrived through a historic culture of gift giving between powerful families, to be later consolidated through the 250 years of internal peace that saw the expansion of a wealthy merchant class of patrons. Those values remain very much alive through Japan’s years of modernisation up to the present day.

It is my hope that the examples in this exhibition will stimulate the viewer’s imagination, and although the objects relate to a distant society, perhaps unlock personal memories, and invoke a sense of wonder in their relevance to universal values.

Simon Pilling  
East Asian Art & Interiors



01 **SLEEPING MONK  
INCENSE BURNER**  
*koro*

Momoyama/early Edo period, around 1600  
Lacquer on a wooden base, *choshitsu*  
Silk cushion  
30 x 22 x 20 (h) cm.  
Period storage box and wrapping cloth

An extraordinary image of complete serenity, in which the unknown artist has captured the essence of rest. The figure is of a mendicant Buddhist monk, sitting cross-legged, arms folded across his alms bowl, with his head lowered in sleep, his flowing robes wrapped around in naturally folded textures. He sits on a silk cushion formed of richly embroidered Edo period *kosode* textile.

The work is both stylised and realistic. In absolute terms the proportions verge on the impossible, but transcend this to achieve a very satisfying whole.

The technique is that of dry lacquer, formed over a jointed wooden, *hinoki*, core. The areas of head, neck, collar and bowl are directly lacquered in a deep reddish brown, displaying a rich patina achieved over years of human touch. The contrasting plain brown robes have a finely textured finish through the use of lacquer-soaked hemp laid over the wooden core.

The piece is an incense burner, most probably part of a Buddhist temple's

fittings, in which the smoke would rise from an opening at the rear, just beneath the monk's collar.

From every angle the sculpture displays a beautiful geometry that captures the human condition, and invites reflection on the true nature of a balanced life.





## STANDING TRAY *SHOSHU – Early Autumn*

by **Bison** 美村

Showa period, 1930s  
Gold & silver *maki-e*, coloured lacquers  
45.5 (dia) x 12 (h) cm.  
Signed. Signed *tomobako*

A magnificent, large display tray on a raised foot rim, pierced with foliate openings. Laid out across the surface is a branch of oak, heavy with golden leaves and silver acorns, set against a red lacquer ground. It is a bold and

complex three-dimensional design, capturing the warmth of an autumnal sunset. The red interstices of the ground are given heightened definition through the subtle use of contrasting outlines bringing further life to the overall design. (Research has not revealed any further information about this talented artist)

Long associated with the serving of food, the oak leaf remains a symbol of food-offering rituals within the Shinto religion. It is likely that this tray was intended for such use.





### 03 STEM TABLE *takatsuki*

by **KAMISAKA Sekka**  
(1866-1942) and  
**KAMISAKA Yukichi** (1886-1938)

Taisho/early Showa period, 1920-30  
Gold *maki-e*  
35.5 (dia) x 21.3 (h) cm.  
Signed and sealed lacquered *tomobako*

A flowing design of chrysanthemum, executed in contrasting shades of gold *maki-e*, wraps itself around the base, stem and top platform of this sumptuous display piece. It is likely that the work was designed for bearing offerings in Shinto ceremonies. The style has a painterly quality in the rendition of the myriad flower petals. The whole is set against a ground of gold *nashi-ji* on black lacquer.

It is the design work of the Kyoto artist – Kamisaka Sekka – widely credited as a pioneer of Japanese modern design following the societal upheavals of the Meiji Restoration. Execution of the piece is by his younger brother, Yukichi, 21 years his junior.

Born in the closing years of the Edo period, Sekka was the eldest son of a court samurai working at the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. In his early years he witnessed the virtual collapse of Kyoto's traditional arts, caused by Japan's enforced

modernisation and the decline of patronage from the former great families. Sekka's life was to become dedicated to reviving Kyoto's arts to find their place in a modern Japan.

In 1890 the *Kyoto Bijutsu Kyokai*, Kyoto Arts Association, was founded to promote the arts through exhibition and publication. As a designer, Sekka became a central figure in this movement, working across a broad range of media including textiles, painting, ceramic and lacquer.

By 1900 Yukichi was also closely involved, regularly receiving prizes for his lacquer work. His collaboration with Sekka resulted in an impressive body of work very much in a tradition of such collaboration between Kyoto's artists.

Although Sekka is perhaps best known for his revival and advancement of the *Rinpa* style of design, as seen here, his creativity worked across a range of Japan's traditional artistic expressions.





by **MIZUUICHI Kyohei**  
(1909 -2001)

Showa period, 1930s  
Coloured lacquers, *maki-e* techniques  
33.5 (dia) x 14 (h) cm.  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

On a high-standing serving dish, with sand-coloured ground and dark red base, the artist has created a scene of undersea creatures. Three shrimp, *ebi*, and a squid, *ika*, in rich red and gold *urushi* swim against a background of seaweeds and shells in gold and silver. This playful design is an early work by important Kyoto artist Mizuuichi Kyohei, using the signature Heichiro, which places the work around 1940. The work was selected for publication in volume 36 of *Solar Antiques Review*, 2001, as part of their presentation of lacquer in everyday life, and comes accompanied by a copy letter from the artist attesting to its authenticity.

Mizuuichi graduated from the Kyoto City School of Arts & Crafts, Department of Lacquer in 1926. His work was selected for exhibition at the 1st Teiten in 1936. Thereafter he was a regularly awarded exhibitor in the post-war Nitten and other national exhibitions. From 1946 to 1978 he held teaching posts at his *alma mater* and the Hiyoshigaoka High School, Department of Lacquer



Art, While not coming from a lacquer family background himself, Kyohei is firmly rooted in the Kyoto lineage of lacquercraft, passing on the Kyoto lacquer tradition to the current generation, including lacquer artist Saratani Tomizo. In 1990 the Japanese Government awarded him the honour of the Purple Medal, in recognition of his art, and in 1993 a major retrospective exhibition of his work was held in Himeji. Works by him are in the permanent collection of the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art.



05 **SMALL TRAY**  
*bon*

by **IKEDA Taishin**  
(1825-1903)

Meiji period, late 19th Century  
Gold, silver and coloured lacquers  
17.5 x 17.5 x 2 (h) cm.  
Signed. Signed *tomobako*

Entitled *Oshibana maki-e bon*, pressed flower *maki-e* tray, this is an exquisitely delicate work by one of the great nineteenth-century lacquerists – Taishin. The tray is finished in imitation of a metal *shibuichi* surface, achieved through the ground of sprinkled metal powders and pigments. On this lie two pressed Morning Glory flowers executed in fine gold, silver powders and black *urushi* incised with the veins of the flowers' petals. The *tomobako* carries an inscription that the piece was authenticated by Umezawa Ryushin as being Taishin's work.

Taishin was apprenticed in the lacquer studio of Shibata Zeshin from the age of eleven, rising to become his foremost pupil before setting up his own studio. Works by him were shown at the International Expositions taking place at this time, and were widely feted for their quality of design and workmanship.

Based in Tokyo, in 1896 he was awarded the title *Teishitsu Gigeiin*,



Imperial Craftsman, a position first established in 1890. Forerunners of the current institution of Living National Treasure, Imperial Craftsmen received an annual stipend of 100 yen, were obliged to accept commissions from the Imperial Household Agency, and were acknowledged to be leaders in their specific crafts who could inspire future generations of artists while preserving traditional Japanese techniques. (Taishin's teacher, Zeshin,

was the first to have held the title with regard to lacquer). Over the 54-year period of the *Teishitsu Gigeiin* position, just five artists held it in respect of lacquer techniques – Shibata Zeshin, Ikeda Taishin, Kawanobe Itcho, Shirayama Shosai and Akatsuka Jitoku.

Works by Taishin are widely held in National and International museums, including LACMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and London's V&A.





06 **INCENSE TRAY**  
*kobon*

by **OTOMARU Kodo**  
(1898 -1997)

Showa period, 1960s/80s  
Carved coloured lacquers, *choshitsu* technique  
Pearl inlays  
29.7 x 29.7 x 2.7 (h) cm.  
Original silk pouch  
Signed. Signed and sealed double *tomobako*

An enigmatic, highly decorative display tray, that features a deep red peony flower head, at the centre of which is shown a single eye from a peacock's tail feather. It is a work that exemplifies the rich colouring for which the artist was known.

For the Chinese, the peony was considered the 'king of flowers', and the introduction of the species into Japan in the eighth century saw it quickly adopted as a decorative feature in the arts, symbolic of good fortune and love. It was also prized for its medicinal uses.

The frequent artistic pairing of the plant with reference to a peacock, *kujaku*, is quite common. It brings Buddhist references and alludes to immortality and love. It seems likely that this tray was commissioned in celebration of a marriage, to mark an extraordinary day.

The work is technically complex and demanding. Beneath the final layers

of red lacquer, carved to depict the peony itself, lie layers of orange and then white, carved through to achieve an apparent pooling before reaching the lowest level of blue.

Born in Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture, Shikoku, Otomaru Kodo dedicated his professional life to the art of carved lacquer. In 1955 he was designated a Living National Treasure for his skills in *choshitsu*. His decision to perfect and advance the traditional skill of carved lacquer came early through his study of the work of Takamatsu artist, Tamakaji Zohuku (1806-69). Showing work for the first time at the Teiten of 1932, Otomaru was thereafter a regular exhibitor, his work gaining honourable mentions in 1942 and 1949. From 1964-78 he was Director of the Japan Crafts Association, *Nihon Dento Kogeiten* – an organisation he had helped found in 1955.

Otomaru's work is held extensively in Japanese and Western museums.





## 07 SENCHA TRAY

*habon*

by **SHOCHIKUSAI Yuho**  
(1868-1936)

Late Meiji/Taisho/early Showa period,  
1900 -30

Carved cherry wood, lacquered  
60 x 24 x 2.5 (h) cm.

Signed. Period storage box

A beautifully organic, sculptural tray, deeply carved from a single slab of cherry wood. The design shows five bats darting across a fluid ground, made luminous through a subtle dusting of shimmering lacquer.

The ground can be viewed as ambiguous – scudding clouds or swirling waters. The latter would represent the flowing water of a Tea Ceremony where water is poured directly onto the tea tray, whereas this tray would be deemed a ‘dry’ tray that creates a rich setting for the sencha tea cups, but would not have water poured directly onto it.

The carving is crisp and sharp, each bat’s face set with inlaid ebony eyes, showing an individual character. The reverse is carved with an inset foot, within which is the signature Yuho.

The eldest son of a samurai family from Himeji Prefecture, he worked

out of Tokyo, Japan’s new capital following the Meiji Restoration. Famed for the elegance of his tea trays, typically carved with bat images, this is a particularly beautiful example.

While in the West the bat might seem an unlikely subject for celebration – typically inspiring a fearsome reaction associated with ‘the other’ - in the East, by contrast, the bat, *komori*, represents the concept of ‘good luck’.

Firstly, in Chinese, the word’s pronunciation 蝠 is of similar sound to the words for ‘blessings’ 福 and ‘riches’ 富. This particular design of five bats additionally represents the Five Blessings: longevity, health, wealth, a love of virtue and a natural death. All very much in keeping with the underlying values of Chado – the Way of Tea – harmony, respect, purity and tranquility.







## SMALL BOX *kobako*

by **HAYASHI Kumi**

Reiwa period, contemporary  
Dry lacquer, *kanshitsu*, with *maki-e* finish  
8.6 x 7.5 x 6.5 (h) cm.  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

An exquisite small domed box formed using the *kanshitsu* dry lacquer technique by female artist, Hayashi Kumi. Entitled *Kakeru*, galloping, a group of deer, rabbit and bird race across its rich gold *maki-e* surface, enlivened with gold *kirikane* highlights. The animals' bodies are rendered in high gloss *roiro* pure black, *urushi*, subtly modelled through a flowing

*takamakie* technique. The design is inspired by a 1919 work of Matsuda Gonroku (1896-1986).

Hayashi is a member of both the Osaka and Kyoto *Kogei* Craft Associations, having graduated from the Kyoto City University of Arts in 1980. Establishing her studio in Osaka in 1987 her work is regularly selected for *kogei* exhibitions in the Kyoto/Osaka/Hyogo region. In 2018 she won the Osaka Crafts Merit Award.

## TRAY SILVER WAVE

by **BANURA Shogo**  
(1901-1982)

Showa period, c. 1960s/70s  
Gold & coloured lacquers, silver leaf inlays  
40 x 24.5 x 5  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Against a burnt-ochre coloured lacquer ground, fine golden lines and silver leaf inlays create a bold display of stylized waves – a perfect framing for the display of seafood. Its edges

and reverse are lacquered in brilliant black, *roiro*, gloss, and the gently curving tray is raised on two feet.

Banura was a major figure in 20th-century lacquerwork, and particularly respected for his modernist treatment of scenes from nature. Born in Ishikawa prefecture and studying in Wajima, his working life was spent in Kyoto, in 1937 becoming Director of the Crafts Institute, *Kyoto Kogoeiin*. With work first selected for Imperial exhibition at the 11th Teiten in 1930, he went on

to be a regular exhibitor, and prizewinner, both nationally and internationally, throughout his career.

In 1961 he was appointed director of the Nitten annual national art exhibition and founded the Kyoto Lacquerware Artists' Association, *Kyoto Shitsugeika Kyokai*. Two years later he was recipient of the prestigious Japan Art Academy Prize, *Nihon Geijutsuin*. Works by Banura Shogo are held in both the Kyoto and Tokyo Museums of Modern Art.





## 10 FOOD PLATTER

by **KADO Isaburo** 角偉三郎  
(1940-2006)

Showa period, 1980s  
*Kiri* wood, paulownia, with lacquer finish  
51 x 26.5 x 5 (h) cm.  
3-star signature

Hewn from a single piece of *kiri* wood, this food presentation piece comes from the second incarnation of a towering figure in late 20th-century Japanese lacquer – Kado Isaburo. On a highly figured surface coated overall with a rich ground of black on red lacquer its design is completed by quick, broad strokes of red.

Kado Isaburo worked in Wajima, first studying the *chinkin*, filled gold, technique. His skills were quickly apparent and, at the age of 22, his work was selected for inclusion in the Contemporary Japanese Arts and Crafts Exhibition, *Nihon Gendai Kogei Bijitsu Ten*. He was soon also accepted into the *Nitten*, receiving grand prizes in both.

By 1980, however, he had become disillusioned with his work. Cutting all ties with the *Nitten*-related craft bodies, his work took a new direction, to create modern, utilitarian pieces that reconnected with everyday life. No longer signing his work with his name, he adopted a

‘star’ system of signature. As found on this piece he first used a three star signature, the first star denoting respect for the material used, the second star marking the craftsman’s tools needed to create a worthy piece, while the third denoted the artist himself.



## FOX BY MOONLIGHT

by **ITAYA Koji**  
(1925-2006)

Late Showa period, c.1950s/80s  
Gold and coloured lacquers, *chinkin* technique,  
*raden* inlays  
60.5 x 45.3 x 1.2 cm.

In a landscape lit by a crescent moon, a magnificent fox moves stealthily through a golden undergrowth. The workmanship achieves a luminosity and perfect rendering of the fox’s bushy coat through a multitude of engraved lines.

*Raden* inlays highlight the animal’s eye and the moon which glows through deep blue clouds.

The lacquer technique is *chinkin*, most closely associated with the lacquer centre of Wajima, whereby the artist uses fine chisels to incise the design across a mirror-finish surface. The incisions of dots and lines are then filled with metallic powders and foils. This design additionally highlights details such as the fox’s delicate sharp claws for emphasis. It is a magnificent piece of work.

Itaya Koji was born in Wajima, and after the Pacific War studied under lacquer craftsmen Morishita Kodo and future Living National Treasure Mae Taiho. At the age of 23 his work was awarded first prize at the 4th Nitten in 1948.

Subsequently his work was regularly selected for national exhibition, gaining first prize at the 13th Japan Crafts Exhibition in 1966. From 1952 he was a member of the Association for the Preservation of Wajima Lacquerware, considered one of Japan’s important cultural properties.



12 **WRITING BOX**  
*suzuribako*

Meiji period, late 19th century  
Gold and coloured lacquers, *maki-e* technique,  
*raden* inlays  
24.5 x 22 x 1.5 cm.  
Inscribed *tomobako*

From a delicate gauze bag outlined in the finest *nashi-ji*, 26 fireflies escape across a deep black *togidashie* ground. Within the box the scene is of a rising, silvery, full moon illuminating fine golden grasses through which move a variety of insects. The fronds of the Suzuki grass are enlivened by inlays of metal

and *raden* inlays. A gilded silver *suiteki* captures the fireflies' glow.

Fireflies, *hotaru*, have been a much loved subject in Japanese poetry since the earliest records of the Manyoshi collection of *waka* in the eighth century. In classical times it is known that court nobles would engage in evening parties to observe and net fireflies. Their subsequent release was considered an act of Buddhist piety, and in aristocratic circles it was also considered a symbol of passionate love. In one of the world's earliest examples of romantic literature – *The Tale of Genji*,

written around 1000 AD – chapter 25 describes how the light of fireflies released by Genji from a cloth bag enables Prince Hotaru to see Lady Tamakazura and fall in love.

Fireflies are clearly a fitting subject to inspire romantic writing:

*Numberless insects there are that call  
from dawn to evening  
Crying, I love! I love! – but the firefly's  
silent passion,  
Making its body burn, is deeper than  
all their longing.*

Lafcadio Hearn, *Japanese Lyrics*





## 13 ORNAMENTAL BOX *tebako*

by **ONISHI Tadeo**  
(1918-2007)

Showa period, 1960s/70s  
Coloured lacquers with carved panel, *choshitsu*  
27.5 x 33.5 x 10.5 cm.  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

A flight of six stylised butterflies flutters across the gently canted lid of this sumptuous *tebako*. At either end is mounted a single further example. All exterior faces of the box are finished in richly coloured *shu mijin nuri* lacquer. In this technique fine particles (*mijin*) of red dry lacquer are sprinkled on to a black lacquer surface. With a further black lacquer coating the whole is then polished back to achieve this spectacular finish, on which the carved butterflies have been mounted.

Their representation has been achieved through the carved lacquer, *choshitsu*, technique. Firstly building up a panel of around 130 layers of coloured and black lacquers, the design was created by carving back down the layers to reveal the composite colours. Inside the box, including a lay-in tray, the finish is black gloss *roiro* finish throughout.

Onishi was born in the small city of Zentsuji in northern Shikoku, close by the lacquer centre of Takamatsu, noted for its craftsmen's skills in

carved lacquer techniques. He studied under Tsuishi Yozei XX, credited with revitalising and modernising the *choshitsu* art form in the early 20th century.

With work first selected for show at the Nitten in 1955, Onishi held his first solo exhibition at Mitsukoshi Takamatsu in 1958. There followed numerous and regular exhibitions and awards both in Japan and internationally, including purchase by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Imperial Household Agency.

Works by Onishi are held in Kanazawa's National Crafts Museum, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, and in his hometown where, in 2013, the City Museum of Art opened its Onishi Tadao Memorial Hall.





## 14 CALLIGRAPHY BOX *shikishibako*

by **Mokubei** 木平

Showa period, 1960s/70s  
Carved lacquers, *choshitsu*  
30.2 x 27.5 x 5 cm.  
Sealed *furoshiki*, wrapping cloth  
Sealed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

*Shikishi* are the decorative, square-shaped poem cards used for calligraphy or painting. The papers are usually decorated with gold or silver flakes and have a printed or painted design that will serve as the background to the owner's calligraphy. Being precious items they will typically be stored in special square-shaped lacquer boxes, *shikishibako*.

On this example, the artist has created a scene of two water striders skating across the surface of still waters, under a canopy of stylised water plants.

The lacquer techniques are those of *choshitsu*, carving, for the water, and silver *togidashi-e* for the leaves, boldly outlined in *roiro* black. In building up the design the artist has created a three-dimensional carved lacquer ground to capture the water's pooling, but then brought that up to a flat, mirror-surface finish, through additional layers of clear lacquer polished to a perfect plane. Working on that surface, black, highly polished

*takamakie* creates three-dimensional insects, leaves and the water's edge. Finally, cut-outs are created in the leaves to receive fine silver powder, *ginpun*, scattered irregularly across a viscous, thick black lacquer ground, then polished to a smooth surface. Like so much in the lacquer arts, the technical demands of the work are not immediately apparent.

The choice of the water strider subject is, of course, highly symbolic. Their unique ability to walk on water demonstrates resilience and adaptability to life's challenges. In Buddhism, they represent detachment from material possessions, working in harmony with nature, letting go of worldly attachments and focusing on spiritual growth. It is thus a fitting subject to inspire creativity and balance in its owner's calligraphic works.

Research has not revealed details of the artist Mokubei, though the style of the work is one closely associated with the lacquer centre of Takamatsu on Shikoku Island.





## 15 FLOWER VASE

by **NOZAWA Tokushu**

Showa period  
Lacquer, *take-nuri*  
Copper liner  
15 x 15 x 36 (h) cm.  
Inscribed and sealed *tomobako*

An apparently simple, striking design – each of the four sides of the vase displaying a strip of black, high gloss lacquer and contrasting adjoining straight sections of mature bamboo. However, the bamboo is an optical illusion, being in fact created in the lacquer coating technique of *take-nuri*. It captures not just the familiar surface texture of mature bamboo, but also its realistic three-dimensional nodes.

By the end of the Edo period Niigata was the foremost lacquer-producing centre in Japan, its importance consolidated by its ready access to both sea and land trade routes. The *take-nuri* technique seen here was introduced in the late 19th century, and is considered the defining speciality of the Niigata region.

The *tomobako* records that the piece came from the Niigata prefectural newspaper agency – possibly a gift.



## HAWK

by **BANURA Yuji** 番浦 有爾  
(b.1935)

Heisei period, 2004  
Dry lacquer technique, *kanshitsu*  
12.5 x 9 x 50 (h) cm.  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Banura Yuji, the second of five sons to important Kyoto lacquer artist, Banura Shogo, has dedicated much of his artistic career to the depiction of birds of prey. This example, taken from a solo exhibition held in Kyoto's Galerie Miyawaki in June 2004, depicts a hawk perched on a tall ledge. The technique is dry lacquer. First an armature is constructed of wire and woodchip mixed with lacquer to provide the basic structure, over which lacquer-soaked cloths are applied to create the finished form. It has a raw, tense, quality that perfectly captures the bird's energy and power.

Throughout his long career, Yuji has been awarded many prizes for his work. The scale and material varies – from small tabletop works to massive, 1000 kg external bronze sculptures, as seen at Yamaguchi Prefecture's UBE Biennale international sculpture exhibition of 1991. The quest to capture the essence of a bird remains constant.





## 17 LACQUER WORKER'S DESK

Showa period, 20th century  
Lacquer on wood panel  
33.5 x 33.5 x 3 cm.

*'It has become an anthropological truism that it is possible to write the biography of an object, to track its life from creation through the different stages of its ownership, its patterns of use and its progress into old age'*  
Edmund de Waal, *Timeless Beauty*, Skira Editore, 2002, p. 9

A craftsman's implements conjure up in us a whole series of reflections and speculations on their years of use, context and the elegance of the artworks that they will have enabled over many years of use. Lacquer workers' objects such as this hold a rich, physical memory of the artistic medium – *urushi*.

It can be speculated that this piece started life as the lid of a box that became broken and discarded, only to be taken by a lacquer craftsman as a work surface on which to create finished lacquer pieces.

Utilising the traditional colours of black and red – perhaps creating simple, everyday bowls for food – years of use saw a random build-up of *urushi* falling onto the surface. The basis of an artwork in its own right was emerging.

Eventually discarded again, being too caked in droplets to provide a practical working surface, the object passed into the hands of a Japanese collector. It was he who had its surface polished back to reveal an extraordinary swirling colour and texture that had been unconsciously created as the by-product of a generation of dedicated craftsmanship. What do we now see in it – a distant universe, the embers of a fire?

The piece now became a uniquely beautiful object for possible use in the Tea Ceremony, or for permanent display of a treasured artwork.

It has now left Japan for the first time, passing into a new environment and subject to new appreciation.





## SAKE CUP

*sakazuki*

by **WAKAMIYA Takashi** 若宮隆志  
(b.1964)

Heisei period, 2008  
Lacquer painting on crackled base coat  
12.9 (dia) x 4.9 (h) cm.  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Although traditional in its form of a finely turned wooden core on a splayed foot ring, this sake cup plays with the viewer's expectations. In place of the usual high-gloss lacquer finish, the artist adopts a crackled lacquer base coat in imitation of a ceramic glaze. Over this is a finely drawn image, based on a design by Shibata Zeshin, showing two herons wading in a rice paddy. Rather than working in *maki-e* it uses lacquer as a painting medium.

On the reverse, effectively swirling around the feet of the birds above, a shoal of tiny *medaka* fish – commonly found in flooded rice fields - circles the foot rim.

Finally, within the foot a dense *nashiji*, framing the artist's signature in gold, strikingly counterpoints the crackled finish of the main body, reminding the viewer that, although innovative, the piece is firmly rooted in the Japanese lacquer tradition.



## PLATTER

by **ASAMI Ryuzo**  
(1904-1987)

Showa period, 1946  
Stoneware, Kyoto ware  
43.2 x 28 x 6 cm.  
Sealed *furoshiki*  
Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Two lines of drying persimmon, *hoshigaki*, each individually tied to a vine, are depicted using inlays of grey and black slip. It is a quietly very satisfying design executed in a demanding technique that the artist

had begun working in after the Pacific War. This work was shown at the second post-war Nitten in 1946, where it was awarded the Speciality, *Tokusen*, prize for its inlaid, *zogan*, technique. An auspicious symbol, the persimmon is considered to bring good luck, longevity and wisdom through its transformation from young bitter taste to mature sweetness.

The Asami kiln was established in Kyoto in 1852, by Asami Gorosuke I, and gained respect for its production of Tea Ceremony wares. It continues today under its sixth-generation head.

Asami Ryuzo apprenticed under his grandfather, the second generation head, following the death of his father and elder brother. Graduating from the Kyoto City Municipal Art School in 1923, his work was first selected, and awarded, at the 1929 Teiten, thereafter becoming regularly exhibited throughout his career.

In 1967 Asami gained the prestigious Japan Art Academy Award, *Nihon Geijutsuin*, for his *zogan* technique and, in 1977, he was awarded Kyoto's Order of Cultural Merit for a lifetime's achievement.



## TEA CUP

*yunomi*

by **YOSHIZAKI Eiji**  
(b.1927)

Heisei period, c. 2000  
Ceramic, *kutani-ware*  
9.2 (dia) x 9 cm.  
Sealed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Simply entitled *yunomi*, this form of tea cup, unlike the *chawan*, is designed for everyday *sencha* drinking. But this work's elegance transcends the ordinary to transport its user into an extraordinary experience. Against a silver ground, the artist has created a classical rural idyll accessed across an arching bridge. It is a snow-covered winter's scene, at the centre of which sits a lone figure within a thatched hut. This is a piece to drink from in those demanding winter months, taking warmth from its contents while anticipating the return of Spring.

Yoshizaki Eiji was born in Kanazawa, the second son of *Kutani* potter Yoshizaki Tozan. In 1970s he trained for three years with future Living National Treasure Tamura Koichi. This piece by Eiji very much reflects that influence. From 1975, he exhibited regularly at the National Traditional Crafts Exhibition, the *Nihon Dento Kogeiten*, becoming one of the very few tea-pottery artists working in *Kutani-ware*.



## TEA BOWL

*chawan*

by **YAMAGUCHI Makoto** 佐藤和次  
(b.1978)

Reiwa period, contemporary  
Seto stoneware  
11.5 (dia.) x 10 (h) cm.  
Sealed *furoshiki*  
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Yamaguchi Makoto is the sixth generation head of a Seto potting dynasty dating back to the mid 19th century. In this dynamic teabowl his signature thick blue glaze, *ofuku*, flows and pools into the dense carving and textured surfaces to conjure images of a snowbound, mountainous landscape. Inside the bowl, the residue of a single shell support makes clear the method of firing the piece on its side.

The challenge for any inheritor of a respected family tradition is to continue its work whilst bringing a contemporary originality to the output. Makoto's father was a contemporary apprentice alongside Suzuki Goro, whose presence in Makoto's upbringing will also have brought artistic influence. Today, the Japanese ceramic artist community's respect for Yamaguchi's work, together with the numerous annual solo exhibitions that he has held in leading Japanese galleries since 2009, are testament to his great achievement and intense work ethic.



## 22 THREE SERVING PLATES

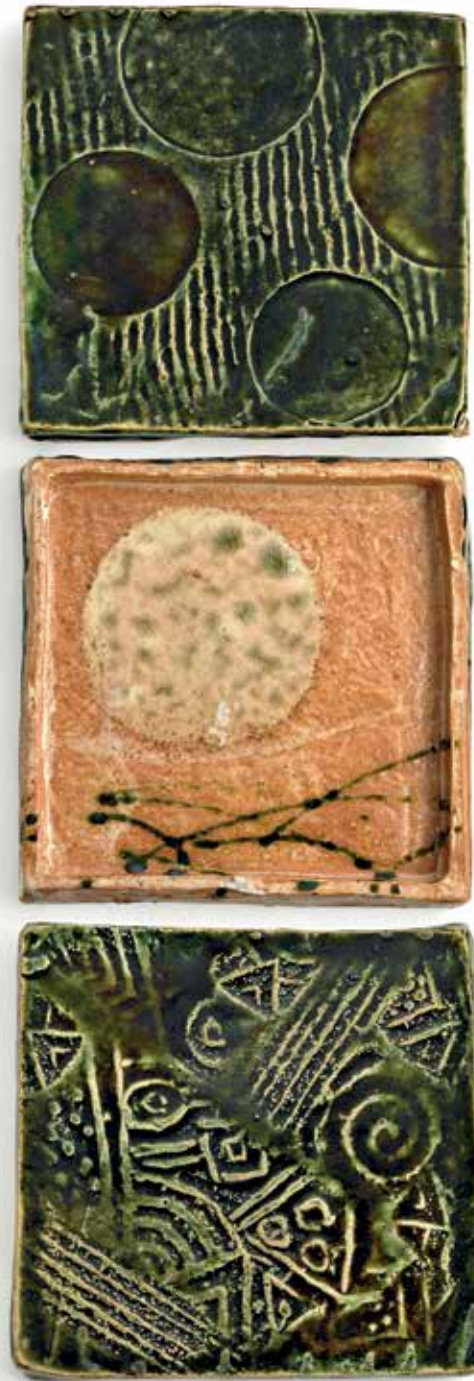
by **SATO Kazutsugu** 佐藤和次  
(b. 1945)

Heisei period, 1980s/90s  
Stoneware, *Oribe*  
Each 21 x 20 x 3 (h) cm.  
Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Three serving plates in the *oribe* ware tradition. On the face of each is a similar rendition of a full moon rising above autumn grasses. Turning the trays over, however, reveals three very different lively abstract designs on bases with pressed and combed surfaces. Either side could be used to present the food, to match mood, season or ingredients.

Graduating in Tajima, Gifu prefecture, Sato went on to study for six years under leading Shino potter, Hayashi Kotaro (1940-81), whose influence is very much in evidence in these pieces. In 1978 he opened his own kiln, named *Sawarabi*, in Tajima.

Works by him have been widely exhibited in Japan, including at the Gifu Prefectural Art Exhibition, the Chunichi International Exhibition of Ceramic Arts, the *Nihon Shin Kogei* Exhibition and the Asahi Ceramic Art Exhibition.





## 23 ENFOLDING

by **LU Xueyun**  
(b. 1987)

Reiwa period, 2020  
Porcelain  
30 x 36.5 x 14.5 (h) cm.  
Signed *tomobako*

A translucent 'bowl of light' built up from the thinnest strips of pure porcelain. The technical demands of its construction and the dangers of failure within the kiln are enormous, but the successful result expresses a uniquely diaphanous fragility combined with underlying strength, absolute purity and an ethereal delicacy. Entitled 'Enfolding', the work prompts reflection on its symbolism – receding mountain ranges, foaming waters or merely pure form?

The young female artist, working in Japan under the local reading of her Chinese name – Ro-san – was born in Chongqing, and graduated from Sichuan International Studies University in 2010. Rejecting the expected transition into corporate business, she moved to Japan, enrolling in TASK – the Traditional Arts Super College of Kyoto 学校法人 二本松学院 京都伝統工芸大学校 – from where she graduated in 2019. (Opened in 1995, TASK is a joint initiative between Japan's Ministry of the Economy, Trade and Industry [METI]) and the Kyoto Traditional Arts and Crafts Sponsorship Foundation

[KTAX] to foster continuation of Japan's traditional craft skills.

Lu's artistic career is just beginning, and while her work is being selected for exhibitions in Japan, this is her first piece to be shown in the West.





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