

Kogei no bi:
the beauty of craft





Front cover
Detail of catalogue item 22

Opposite
Detail of catalogue item 4

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Kogei no bi: the beauty of craft

Japan is home to some of the most exceptional craftspeople of any nation in the modern world. Across a range of media their dedication to excellence is extraordinary. This is not a recent phenomenon, but builds on a tradition stretching back over 1000 years. The technical skills required are seen as essential to Japan's cultural identity so that, uniquely, in the 1950s the Japanese government initiated the status of 'Holder of Intangible Cultural Properties' (colloquially known as Living National Treasures) for craftspeople who could preserve and pass these skills on to future generations.

However, internationally there is a central challenge. *Kogei* - translated as 'crafts' by the West – implies a separate category of 'applied arts', that has been considered something lesser than 'fine art', which the West traditionally limits to Painting and Sculpture. This distinction had a profound effect on the Japanese artistic community when Japan was seeking a modernising image in the late 19th century. The 'applied arts' were seen as locked into tradition, and when the Japanese government instituted national art exhibitions in 1907, only the western-facing arts categories of painting and sculpture were included. It was not until 1927 that *kogei* were admitted.

In fact, 20th century *kogei* pushed the boundaries, harnessing traditional skills to create Modern and Contemporary artworks of international importance. This catalogue contains *kogei* of a quality that has the power to enrich our everyday life. Each artwork has a story to tell, and causes us to question the value distinctions made in the West between different artistic media.

Simon Pilling
East Asian Art & Interiors

01 IMPERIAL PRESENTATION BOX *tebako*

Taisho 4, 1915
Gold & silver lacquer, *maki-e*
Silver binding
26 x 21.5 x 14 (h) cm.

If a single item could be considered to represent the high status accorded to *kogei* it is an Imperial Presentation Box gifted by the Japanese Emperor, both nationally and internationally, to recipients deemed to have earned such ultimate honour. Following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war Japan was also consolidating its newly acquired position on the international diplomatic stage, and pieces such as this can be found in the collections of many of Europe's royal families.

As is typical of work commissioned by the Imperial Court, the box is unsigned. The lid displays the sixteen-petalled chrysanthemum crest, *kikumon*, of the Imperial Family. The inscription on the *tomobako* records that it was presented by the Taisho Emperor to mark an auspicious occasion for Princess Toshiko Yasunomiya (1896-1978) on May 17th, 1915 – her marriage to Prince Naruhiko. Princess Yasunomiya was the youngest daughter of the Emperor Meiji, her mother Sono Sachiko (1867-1947) having been a concubine of the Emperor. The box's recipient was the



Princess' aristocratic uncle, Sono Motosuke, and brother of the bride's mother.

The design depicts two plant types – the Summer flowering lily, *yuri*, and the Spring flowering narcissus, *suisen* – whose selection for this gift is appropriate to the season. As befits the occasion of its presentation, the design is strong but restrained. The attractive lily flowers set a feminine mood, while the narcissus is a Japanese emblem of a New Year's good fortune.

To attribute an artist for the necessarily anonymous works commissioned by the Imperial Family is not easy. A small group of leading lacquer artists including Akatsuka Jitoku and Funabashi Shumin were regularly commissioned. The strength of this particular design, the flawless technical skill exhibited, and the importance of the occasion that it was gifted for, confirm that it is the work of one of the leading lacquer craftsmen of the early 20th century.



02 **ORNAMENTAL
ACCESSORY BOX**
tebako

Showa period, 1930s
Coloured lacquers, *raden* inlays
Silver binding
33.5 x 26 x 15.5 (h) cm.

The unknown artist of this exotic work has employed an unusually wide range of lacquer techniques – both traditional and innovative – to achieve the design of a parakeet perching within a camelia bush. It is a showpiece of the artist's skills. Across the central panel, a bold depiction of the bush's leaves, six flowerheads of mother-of-pearl petals with gold *maki-e* centres, form the setting for the rich detail of the parakeet. As is common in designs of this period the central panel is raised, and surrounded by a frame with vibrant corners of gold *kirigane* flakes within which small silver oval frames contain green and red iridescence, possibly suggesting scarab beetles in reference to the Egyptian style popular at the time.

Around the sides of the box runs a continuous band repeating the details of the camelia bush. Within the box, on the lid and base, a bold black grid containing panels of dark *nashiji* enlivened by specks of *raden* gives the appearance of viewing a starry night sky through panes of glass. Even the underside of the box has an innovative sunburst *nashiji* finish.



While the initial visual impact of this work immediately delights, the invention and subtlety of its technical skills repay detailed reflection. The artist has achieved a piece of international modernity through a mastery of the Japanese lacquer craftsman's skills.



03 **WRITING BOX**
suzuribako

Showa period, 1950-70
Carved coloured lacquers, *guri*
24.5 x 19 x 7.5 (h) cm.

A multi-coloured box constructed almost entirely of solid lacquer panels. Accordingly, it has significant weight. The unknown artist has first laid down multiple layers of coloured lacquers – reds, browns, green, black and white. The domed lid being overall 1 cm. deep is made of around 350 lacquer layers, needing a minimum of year's work to create, each layer being required to cure for 24 hours and be polished before applying the subsequent layer. The whole would then have been progressively polished back to reveal the uniquely beautiful design of receding concentric planes of colour. For the sides of the box, the artist has cut the slabs diagonally to achieve a rich, complex, marbled effect, reminiscent of a mineral formation or petrified wood.

While the techniques required are demanding and time consuming, it is the artistic vision to create this glowing, jewel-like casket which ultimately impresses. The inclusion of a loose baseboard confirms that this piece was designed for use as a storage vessel. Its dimensions suggest that this could have been commissioned as a *suzuribako*, to contain an inkstone.



04 PAPER STORAGE BOX *shishibako*

by **MAE Taiho** (1890 -1977)

Showa period, 1956
Coloured lacquers, *chinkin* technique
29.5 x 26.5 x 8.5(h) cm.
Sealed wrapping cloth
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

This two-tiered box for the storage of poem papers was shown at the 12th National Art Exhibition, the *Nitten*, in 1956. It was made by an artist who had, the previous year, been awarded the title of Living National Treasure for his outstanding skills in this particular lacquer technique – *chinkin*.

Its design depicts stylised patterns of the ears of wheat scattered across a ground of weeds. The importance of this food cereal is emphasised by its golden colour standing out against the black ground. The grains themselves are depicted alternately red and black. The background plants have lively variations of gold and pink.

The lacquer decorating technique of *chinkin* is closely associated with the town of Wajima – a pre-eminent centre for lacquerware production since the 14th century. In recognition of its cultural importance to Japan, *Wajima-nuri* was designated an essential traditional Japanese craft in 1975. In 1977 Japanese lacquerware was elevated to the status of an

Intangible Cultural Property. Finally, in 1982, the tools used to create *Wajima-nuri* were also designated as being a Tangible Cultural Property.

Originating in China, the specific technique of *chinkin* involves first engraving the design onto a lacquer, traditionally black, ground. Wet lacquer is then rubbed into the incisions to provide adhesive for gold foil or powder which is applied to the design. The excess gold is then

polished away so that the gold just highlights the design.

Work by Mae Taiho was first shown nationally at the prestigious annual National Art Exhibition, the *Teiten*, of 1939. Thereafter he was a regular exhibitor. Imperial commissions followed and many awards received. His son, Mae Fumio, is the current Living National Treasure for the *chinkin* technique.



05 **DOCUMENT BOX**
bunko

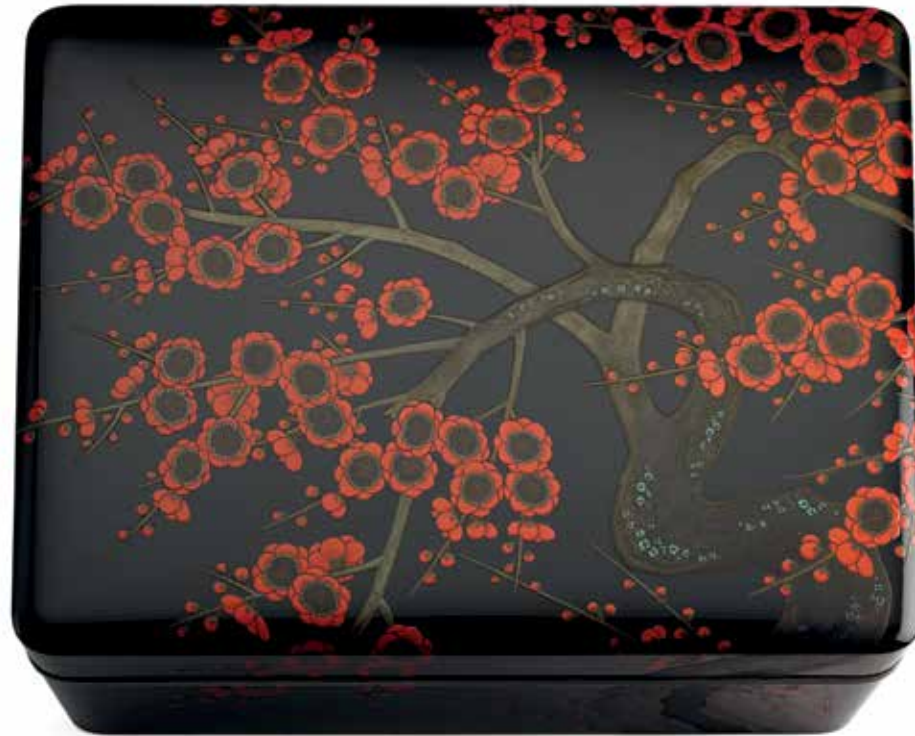
Showa period, 1930s/50s
Coloured lacquers, *raden* inlays
Pewter binding
36.5 x 30.5 x 13.5 (h) cm.

A classic *rinpa* design to celebrate the end of Winter and the return of Spring. Across a pure black ground, indicating a night-time scene, a gnarled plum tree grows to envelope the entire box. The tree is laden with exuberant red-petalled blossoms with

golden stamen centres. Along the textured trunk and branches minute concentrations of iridescent green shell inlays represent growths of lichen. These replicate the pooled colour, *tarashikomi*, painting technique that is a defining characteristic of the *rinpa* style.

On the underside of the lid a river swirls through a setting of water plants rendered in muted gold and coloured *makie* against a *nashiji* ground.

The plum blossom has a long history in East Asian arts, celebrated for its sweet perfume and early flowering despite the lingering cold and snows of winter. Adopted from Chinese symbolism, it became central to Japanese poetry in classical Heian times, only to be later supplanted in importance by the cherry and maple as the Japanese arts increasingly focused on celebrating the transience of life.



06 FOOD CONTAINER

jikiro

by MINORU

Showa period, 1960s/80s
Gold and coloured lacquers, *raden* inlays
23 x 23 x 16.5 (h)
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Against a glowing orange ground, a sunburst of iris flowerheads decorates the lid, while around the four sides bands of irises rise from low-growing plants. It is a celebratory design of warmth and optimism, minutely detailed through the delicate carving of the lacquer surface and the fillings of gold and *raden*.

Removing the deep sleeve lid reveals a further, contrasting, stylised design of wood sorrel, *katabami*, in gold against a black ground. Designed to be a food container, the choice of sorrel – a plant noted for its health benefits – is clearly appropriate. There is a removable upper tray above the interior box.

Entitled '*Sanuki nuri Zonsei jikiro*', this piece exemplifies the lacquer traditions of Kagawa Prefecture in northern Shikoku. The *Sanuki nuri* tradition was originated by the craftsman Zokoku Tamakaji (1806-69) towards the end of the Edo period. Based on techniques seen in China,

this master craftsman identified three techniques – *Kinma*, *Choshitsu* and *Zonsei* – which he brought back to Kagawa. Unlike the Japanese tradition for *makie* – sprinkled pictures using powders over wet lacquer – these new techniques all involve carving into the lacquer surface and filling with colour or gold. For the *Zonsei* technique, the outline and details of the painted lacquer design are carved and filled with gold.



INCENSE TRAY

kobon

by **OTOMARU Kodo** 音丸耕堂
(1898-1997)

Showa period, 1950s/60s
Incised & colour-filled lacquer, *kinma*
30.5 x 30.5 x 3.3 (h) cm.
Original silk pouch
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Born in Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture in Shikoku, Otomaru Kodo dedicated his professional life to the art of carved lacquer, and in 1955 was designated a Living National Treasure for his skills. Here he has created an almost impossibly delicate representation of poppy flowers and seed heads using the *kinma* technique.

Having completed the basic maroon-coloured tray, Otomaru has carved the overall stylised design into

the surface of the lacquer. A single, central, flowerhead is emphasised by the addition of gold leaf. The whole is given 3-dimensionality through thousands of fine lines and minute incisions of varying density to achieve the illusion of receding planes. The carved design is then overlayed with white lacquer which, when polished back, remains solely in the incisions. It is a design of great movement, the fragile flowers seemingly swaying before us, while a single stem rises beyond the confines of the tray.

Showing his 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, and from 1955 his work was exhibited annually at the Japan Crafts Association, *Nihon Dento Kogeiten*. Works by him are extensively held in Japanese and Western museum collections.





FLOWER VASE

by **HIRAI Koushu**

Taisho/early Showa period, 1920s/30s
Lacquer, *raden* inlay
17 (dia.) x 13 (h) cm.
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Across the subtly granular, brown lacquer ground of this elegant vessel scrolls a design of wild carnations, *nadeshiko*, created in pieced mother of pearl, *raden*, inlays. Selected for its lively character, the *raden* glows in shades of iridescent greens and pinks. Koushu studied under Kyoto craftsman Koda Shuetsu, from whom

he took his art name. He became a member of the *Jishuen* – an organisation founded by Nakazawa Iwata for the promotion of young artists – and went on to be a regularly exhibitor and receive numerous prizes for his work. A member of the Showa *Kogei* Association, he was based in Imazu, Hyogo prefecture.

FRESH WATER JAR

mizusashi

by **MORI Miki** (1901-70)

Early Showa period, 1930s
Dry lacquer, *kanshitsu*
16 (dia.) x 21.5 (h) cm.
Signed. Signed lacquered *tomobako*

This is a striking and elegant design that exemplifies the pre-war Deco style. The outer face of the vessel is octagonal, and on each face – alternately rising or falling – is a bold 5-striped design. It exudes a timeless beauty and tranquility.

On the death of his biological father, the creator of the work was adopted at the age of 10 by lacquer craftsman Morishige Jiro (the 1st generation Mori Miki). He went on to study under Asobe Sekisai (1878-1953), renowned for his tea-ware, and under whose influence Mori studied the Tea Ceremony and Noh. In 1929 he moved to Tokyo, attending the Tokyo Fine Arts School (today's Tokyo Gedai) to consolidate his lacquer skills under the mentorship of Yamazaki Kakutaro (1899-1984).



10 STORAGE JAR *tsubo*

Heian period, 12th century
Tokoname stoneware, natural ash glaze
35 (dia.) x 30 cm.

This magnificent jar epitomises the simple, mis-shapen products of the ancient *tokoname* kiln – the most prolific of the so-called ‘six ancient kilns’. With a wide mouth, wide shoulder, and a small base, it would have been intended as a strictly functional object for the storage of grain. The shoulder of the vessel is encrusted with kiln debris, *kutsuki*, while a natural ash glaze has formed and drips down the surface to terminate in deep olive-green globules.

However, it is clear that this example was lost in a kiln conflagration, quite possibly a total collapse of the kiln which, typically, would have been dug directly into a hillside. This can only be speculation, but it is most likely that the collapse would have resulted in the abandonment of that kiln and its contents. Probably around 800 years later in the 1950s, when such archaeological digs became common, it was excavated and the pieces of this vessel retrieved. It has been meticulously reconstructed through the *gintsugi* technique of lacquer joining with silver maki-e finish. All the pieces have been retrieved save for one area – presumably totally destroyed – and

now remade in silver finish. It is high quality workmanship.

The origin of this uniquely Japanese technique – the repair of broken ceramics using lacquer decorated with *makie* – is said to date from the 15th century, when Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, disliking the traditional Chinese repair method of metal staples, prompted Japanese craftsmen to find a more sensitive and aesthetic solution.

Much has been written regarding the philosophy behind these repairs:

I do not consider breakage to be a negative thing. I firmly believe that all things that have form are destined to break someday. Moreover, a

breakage creates the possibility of reconstructing the future. Like the tea masters of the Muromachi period, gazing with joy at a once-broken tea bowl repaired with gold, the kintsugi view encourages us to interpret the ‘breakages’ in our life as new starting points, to see damage, disappointment, and failure as profound natural phenomena worthy of appreciation.

Kiyokawa Hiroki,
The Spirituality of Kintsugi, 2021

Such a celebration of life’s impermanence and uncertainty contrasts traditional European attitudes, and increasingly causes us to reflect on our own fragility.



11 TEABOWL *chawan*

Muromachi period, c.15th century
Seto stoneware, glazed
17 (dia.) x 6.7 (h) cm.

Elegant *kintsugi* and *gintsugi* repairs redefine this simple *seto*-ware *chawan* dating from the Muromachi period. Spreading out from the inner bowl, gold *maki-e* is replaced by silver as the repairs broaden into draping panels over the rim and fall down the outer surface.

As is attested by the annotated storage box, the piece comes from the collection of Kyoto ceramicist Mashimizu Zoroku II (1861-1936), whose father Mashimizu Zoroku I (1822-77) had established the family kiln in the *Gojozaki* neighbourhood. A family noted for its Teaware production, it is probable that this fine piece would have formed part of Mashimizu II's own practice of the Tea Ceremony.

Seto was the most celebrated of the six ancient kilns, and where the first actively glazed Jaoanese stonewares were fired during the Muromachi period. This piece displays the characteristic *seto* pale yellowish-green glaze, thought of as capturing the soft tints of autumn leaves.



SMALL DISH

Late Momoyama/Edo period, early 17th century
Karatsu stoneware
15 (dia.) x 3 cm.

Fine quality *kintsugi*, golden joinery, and *yobitsugi*, shard insertion, working with *karatsu*-ware have created a very satisfying piece which would have been used in the Japanese Tea Ceremony.

There is a lively dynamic whereby the design of the *kintsugi* – gold outlines

framing black bands with gold sprinkled *maki-e* – takes its inspiration from the underglaze iron pine tree decoration, drawn across two-thirds of this lobed dish. Completing the form is a similar *karatsu* shard in two pieces that harmonises with the larger portion, and that has been joined by the *yobitsugi* technique. To achieve such satisfactory visual and practical success indicates the technical proficiency of the craftsman who created this work for a demanding client, in all probability a Tea Master



Karatsu-ware takes its name from the port in Kyushu that was the main entry and exit point for early communication between Japan and Korea. Following Hideyoshi's war campaigns of the 1590s against Korea many Korean potters – both prisoners and, later, artisan immigrants – established the *karatsu*-ware tradition. The work was simple and primarily for everyday use. It is *karatsu*-ware's very simplicity and irregularity that endears it to the Japanese psyche.

13 VASE

by **FUJINO Takanori** (b.1974)

Heisei 14, 2002
Porcelain with coloured enamels
26 (dia.) x 31 cm.
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Fresh flowering branches of red magnolia, *mokuren*, range across a faceted vase, as if the pure white form itself was suspended within the branches. This refined piece was selected for exhibition at the 42nd *Nihon Dento Kogei Shinsaku-ten*, the National Traditional New Crafts Exhibition, of 2002.

Born in Oita, Kyushu, the artist graduated from the Kyushu Design School and was then apprenticed to Nobuhiko Sueoka. He, in turn, had been a pupil of Yoshimichi Fujimoto, whose skills in overglaze enamelling had gained him the status of Living National Treasure in 1986. Fujino had thus entered this particular *kogei* specialisation at the highest level, as reflected in the national recognition of this piece. Thereafter, he was a regular exhibitor and prizewinner, before becoming a full member of the *Nihon Kogei-kai*, The Japan Craft Association, in 2005.

Since 2011, when he established his own kiln at Komoro in Nagano Prefecture, Fujino has consolidated his national reputation in this demanding, refined, field of work.





TEA BOWL *chawan*

by **ATARASHI Manabu** (b.1973)

Reiwa 5, 2023
Stoneware
12.5 (dia.) x 10.5 cm.
Signed and sealed *tomobako*

A signature work by acclaimed artist Atarashi Manabu. The piece exudes a raw energy – its carved and torn surface exposing the granular characteristic of its *Iga* clay, while its

high-gloss pale green ash glaze pools across the fissured clay surface, complementing the vivid red burns, *hiro*, of the exposed unglazed body. It is a satisfyingly tactile piece.

Born in Osaka, Manabu is the third generation of the Atarashi family. His father – Kanji – is credited as one of the leading revivalists of the *Iga* pottery tradition in the post-war period. Following an apprenticeship with his father, Manabu built his first climbing kiln, *anagama*, in 2002,

followed by two further kilns in 2008 and 2021. His work is widely exhibited across Japan and considered to be taking the *Iga* tradition into the 21st century with its innovative, sculptural qualities. Multiple intense firings create the characteristic glaze pooling, *bidoro*, and the feeling of atmospheric landscapes shrouded in shifting mists. Contrasting the movement of its external surface, the inside of the bowl descends into a calmer, fully glazed, deep space.

WHITE-SLIP-PATTERNED VASE

by **KONDO Yutaka** (1932-1983)

Showa period, c. 1982
Stoneware
12 (dia.) x 21.5 cm.
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

Three generations of the Kondo family have created an important ceramic lineage in Kyoto. Established by Kondo Yuzo (1902-85), and today continued through the innovative work of his grandson Kondo Takahiro, the work of Yuzo's sons Hiroshi and Yutaka provides a powerful bridge in form and decoration between historical reference and contemporary experimentation. This signature work by Kondo Yutaka takes its energy from the Korean tradition of *buncheong* ware, whereby the surface is incised or stamped with an intricate pattern, which is then filled with contrasting semi-liquid clay and wiped over to create a contrasting design. This work – entitled *funka bin*: scattered flowers bottle – evokes petals strewn across a richly textured ground.

Yutaka was an innovator, inspired by travel overseas, but conflicted by the challenges and limitations of his craft, whose struggles and tragic early death are believed to have inspired his nephew Kondo Takahiro to devote his life to the innovative work he creates today.





PLATTER

by **MURAKOSHI Takuma** (b.1954)

Reiwa 1, 2019
Stoneware
30 x 30 x 0.3 cm.

Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

"Delicious food requires plates of a comparable level of beauty; without them it is incomplete. People content with low-grade tableware can only produce low grade food."

Rosanjin, 1883-1959

The controversial, opinionated, brilliant artist and gourmet Rosanjin vocalised a central traditional Japanese value in which the perfect

meal appeals to all human senses – in harmony with the seasons in all aspects of its presentation.

These tablewares come from a series that Murakoshi has named 'Spring and Autumn' in which the glaze colours reflect specific seasons. Within the glazes we see areas of rugged unglazed *shigaraki* clay, showing the distinctive high-fired red *hi-iro* flame colours.

The thick, white, unctuous, feldspar glaze speaks of a blanket of snow. It can be seen as retreating, while from under green Spring shoots appear through the use of an ash glaze. Alternatively it reminds us that the

reds of Autumn leaves will inevitably eventually follow, leading into Winter as nature closes down again in the annual cycle of the seasons.

Murakoshi came to potting relatively late in his life, in his late 20s, studying with Kyoto potter Umehara Takehira, and setting up his first kiln in 1997 in the historic Kiyomizu pottery district. Five years later he moved his kiln to the remoter location of Nagaoka in Niigata Prefecture. His energetic work is driven by a passion for *shigaraki* clay, and his tableware is now to be found in high-end restaurants across Japan.

5 DISHES

by **MURAKOSHI Takuma** (b.1954)

Reiwa 1, 2019
Stoneware
Ea. 19 x 19 x 5 cm.
Signed and sealed *tomobako*



18 RESTING TURTLE DOVE

by **OZAKI Susumu** (b.1946)

Heisei period, 1990s/2000s
Carved wood with bronze details
41 x 15 x 21 (h) cm.
Signed and sealed *tomobako*

An extraordinary raw energy is held within this larger-than-life powerful sculpture of a resting oriental dove.

Taking a single piece of highly scented camphor wood, the artist's work plays with our imagination through carving, scoring and distressing the wood to create the distinctively patterned plumage of this migratory bird. Dense, varied, surface textures are reinforced by multiple metal studs. Two bronze castings – the beak and foot – complete the work.

Susumu was born in Shingu, Wakayama Prefecture, and studied at the prestigious Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo Gedai. His works have been regularly shown at the national Art Exhibition, the *Nitten*, which, in 1975, awarded him their Special Prize.



FLOWER BASKET

by **MAEDA Chikubosai II**
(1917-2003)

Showa/Heisei period, late 20th century
Lacquered bamboo and rattan
17 (dia.) x 26.7 cm.
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

This elegant, bottle-shaped, basket epitomises Chikubosai's characteristic style of refined modern sensibility. Secured by rattan twining to four horizontal bamboo rings, extremely fine round section bamboo strips create a delicate, swirling pattern, capturing space and attaining depth while maintaining transparency.

Born in Sakai city, Osaka, Maeda first learnt his craft from his father Chikubosai I, one of the greatest bamboo artists of the early 20th century. He later apprenticed under Yamamoto Chikuryosai, before working independently from 1941. In 1952 he succeeded to the family name, after which his work was regularly accepted into the *Nitten*. In the 1970s he left to join the Japan Art Crafts Association, *Nihon Kogei Kai*, to focus on objects of functional beauty. A work by him was presented to the Showa Emperor and, in 1992, he received the Order of the Sacred Treasure, *Zuihosho*. In 1995 he was awarded the status of Living National Treasure, *Ningen Kokuho*, for his exceptional bamboo *kogei* skills.



DRYING FISH

by **YAMAMOTO Rikichi** (1898-1977))

Taisho/Showa period, 1920s/30s
Carved wood
72 x 18 x 6 cm.
Signed. Signed and sealed *tomobako*

The common practice of hanging fish to preserve and dry has long inspired Japanese artists in a variety of media. This example presents an extraordinary life-sized trompe-l'oeil of the fish complete with its rope hanging. The filleted fish, with its drying and contracting skin is perfectly captured through meticulously detailed carving, further enhanced with pigments of deep blue and white for the scales, and straw yellow for the rope.

Born in the ancient town of Tsurugi, Ishikawa, Rikichi first trained as a transom carver, before going on to study painting under Sato Chozan (1888-1963). His works were regularly exhibited at the *Teiten*, *Inten* and *Nitten* national art and craft exhibitions.



21 FLOWER VASE

Taisho/early Showa period, 1920s
Hammer raised, *uchidashi*, and patinated
copper
Silver rim
16.5 (dia.) x 20 (h) cm.

The *namazu*, catfish, has been central to Japanese mythology since at least the 16th century. According to the legend, this enormous creature lives beneath the Japanese Islands. Normally restrained by the thunder god Takemikazuchi, the giant catfish occasionally manages to wriggle free, and its thrashings cause the earthquakes that Japan regularly experiences. Following the great Ansei earthquake of 1855, numerous woodblock prints depicted the *namazu*'s actions.

On this piece, the unknown craftsman has created a mysterious image emerging from the murky depths of a rich patination. The eyes glow with gold. The technique – *uchidashi* – is a demanding one, comparable to Western repoussé, in which the vessel has been hammer-raised from a flat sheet of copper.



INCENSE BOX *kogo*

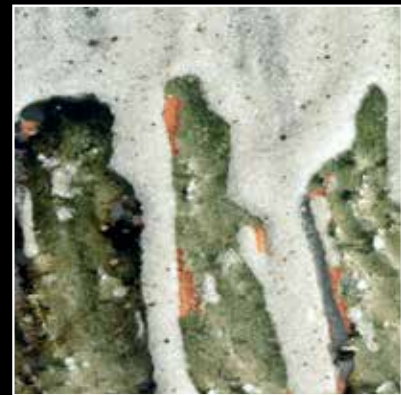
Showa period, 30s/50s
Carved lacquer, *choshitsu*
7 (dia.) x 3.5 (h) cm.

The early 20th century saw a revival in the techniques of Chinese carved red lacquer, led by the Kyoto-based Tsuishi family. This, unsigned, piece exemplifies the style.

Against a finely patterned red ground are two carved black butterflies. Around the sides of the box runs an Egyptian key design – a favoured art deco motif – while the base includes the archaic Chinese characters – *Long Happiness, 1000 years Life* – set into the shape of a traditional roof tile cap.

How should this piece be interpreted? The butterfly crest, *agehanocho*, is most closely associated with the Taira clan, whose defeat by the Minamoto clan in 1185 changed the direction of Japanese history. It is possible that this piece was created as a nostalgic reference to that distant classical period.





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