

Press Release

自然と美のかたち
特別展
工芸
2020

Kōgei 2020

The Art of  Crafting Beauty from Nature

2020
9/21(月祝) - 11/15(日)



東京国立博物館 | 表慶館 |
TOKYO NATIONAL MUSEUM | [Ueno Park]

Exhibition website: <https://tsumugu.yomiuri.co.jp/kogei2020/>
Tokyo National Museum Website: <https://www.tnm.jp/>
Official Tsumugu Twitter account: @art_tsumugu



FY 2020 Japan Cultural Expo Presented and Co-presented Project



Exhibition overview

Kōgei 2020 – The Art of Crafting Beauty from Nature is a special exhibition hosted at the Tokyo National Museum's Hyokeikan Gallery. The exhibition explores the relationship between nature and kōgei (Japanese craft arts) through a collection of works that are admired around the world, in both traditional and modern Japanese disciplines.

The exhibition offers the opportunity to enjoy works by numerous kōgei artists expressing a contemporary aesthetic through traditional kōgei. The artists range from designated Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Properties (commonly known as Living National Treasures) and members of the Japan Art Academy, to mid-career artists, and a new generation of young creators using natural materials to create artworks with a modern twist. Showcased in a beautifully designed space created by architect Ito Toyo, the exhibition is a place for audiences from around the world to experience the power and possibilities of kōgei.

Meanwhile, the parallel program Kōgei Dining (taking place October in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Pref., and December in Atami, Shizuoka Pref.) looks beyond decorative splendor to focus on the functional beauty of kōgei items intended for everyday use. By actively providing a forum for guests and artists to interact, this program aims to expand opportunities for kōgei artists to pursue their activities.



Kōgei, humanity and nature in Japan

This exhibition introduces the work of a multi-generational selection of artists creating Japanese-style vessels, and modern kōgei practitioners shaping the future of fine arts. The exhibition also explores the core Japan Cultural Expo theme of Humanity and Nature in Japan through the medium of traditional kōgei craft art.

By combining kōgei exhibits with an Ito Toyo-designed space inspired by the splendor of natural life, this program facilitates discourse on the hitherto underexplored conceptual layers of Japanese kōgei, bringing together pieces from the various schools and subgenres of kōgei that diverged philosophically and stylistically in the aftermath of World War II, for a unified viewing experience. The exhibition also sheds light on the distinctive cultural elements and unique perspectives on nature in which the Japanese arts are rooted, in the hope of promoting a rediscovery of the essence of nature and a shift in our spiritual values. Japanese arts and culture are underpinned by the conviction that humanity and nature share one indivisible life force, informing a core aesthetic that finds beauty and harmony in the natural world. It is a universal theme that resonates across borders and generations, and therein lies the significance of this project presenting Japanese kōgei to the world.

General information

Title

Kōgei 2020 – The Art of Crafting Beauty from Nature

Dates

Monday, September 21–Sunday, November 15, 2020

Venue

Hyokeikan Gallery at the Tokyo National Museum

Opening hours

Monday–Thursday, 9:30–17:00; Friday–Saturday, 9:30–21:00

Closed

Mondays (except September 21), Wednesday September 23

Presented by

Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan Arts Council,
Tokyo National Museum, The Yomiuri Shimbun

Special sponsors

Canon Inc., East Japan Railway Company, JAPAN TOBACCO INC.,
Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd., MITSUBISHI ESTATE Co., Ltd., Meiji Holdings Co., Ltd.

Sponsors

SHIMIZU CORPORATION, Takashimaya, Takenaka Corporation,
Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, Mitsubishi Corporation

With cooperation from

Tajima Roofing, TAKEO, Toki Corporation

Curation

Moroyama Masanori (former Chief Curator, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo)
Uchida Tokugo (Director, MOA Museum of Art)

Venue design

Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects

Tickets

Adults: 1500 yen/ University students: 1000 yen/ High school students: 600 yen
Junior high school students and under: Free

*Online reservations required.

To prevent crowding, this exhibition requires advance bookings.

Before arrival at the gallery, all visitors are required to make an online reservation for a specified date and time. For further information, please visit the official exhibition website.

Note*1: The special exhibition Momoyama: Artistic Visions in a Turbulent Century
(October 6–November 29) will require a separate reservation and entry fee.

Note*2: Exhibits, dates, opening times, and entry regulations subject to change; please confirm via the official exhibition website.

Inquiries

03-5777-8600 (Japanese only)

Official website

<https://tsumugu.yomiuri.co.jp/koge2020/>

Tsumugu Twitter account

@art_tsumugu



FY 2020 Japan Cultural Expo Presented and Co-presented Project



Japan Cultural Expo

Launched in November 2019 to coincide with the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, the Japan Cultural Expo aims to introduce 10,000 years of the arts of Japan—from the Jomon era to the present day—to the world, and to the next generation, under the overarching theme of Humanity and Nature in Japan. Led by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Japan Arts Council, and organized in cooperation with government ministries and agencies, cultural institutions, local governments, and private organizations, the initiative provides year-round opportunities to experience the arts of Japan in person, through a diverse, seasonal program of content including exhibitions, performing arts productions, and arts festivals.



Tsumugu Project

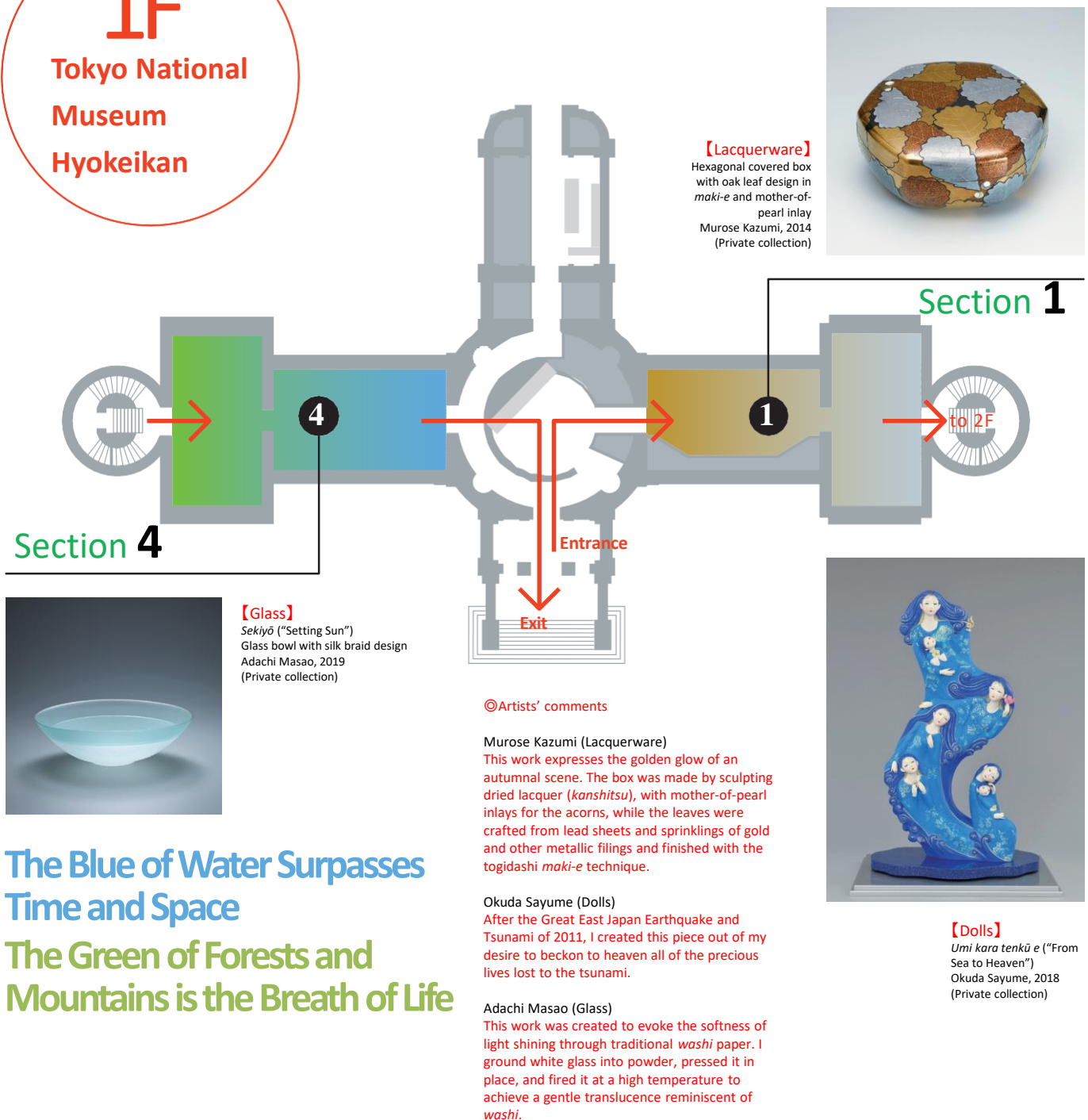
The Tsumugu Project was initiated in November 2018 by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs, Imperial Household Agency and The Yomiuri Shimbun (Tokyo) as a joint effort to promote the beauty of Japanese art across the nation and abroad.

Exhibition guide

1F

Tokyo National
Museum
Hyokeikan

Gold Gleams with Eternal Light Silver Gleams with Grandeur



The Blue of Water Surpasses
Time and Space

The Green of Forests and
Mountains is the Breath of Life

Japan's unique traditional craft arts, or *kōgei*, grew out of the close-knit spiritual sensibility and distinctive outlook on the living world born of existence in harmony with nature. One significant factor in this is the perspective on nature instilled throughout the long development of Japan's history and culture by the multiplicity of the country's natural environment, from the endlessly diverse landscape to the shifting seasons. This exhibition brings together examples of *kōgei* that showcase Japan's artistic culture to the world, with 82 stunning modern pieces created by 82 artists freely expressing their creative vision through a range of artistic techniques. Though based in long tradition, these works that reflect the connections between nature and beauty of form speak to the affection and awe in which the natural world is held by the Japanese people, while providing an expression of fresh perspectives on nature.



©Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects

The four sections of the exhibition, “Gold Gleams with Eternal Light, Silver Gleams with Grandeur,” “Black Absorbs All Colors, White Reflects All Light,” “The Red of Life, The Spirit of Nature,” and “The Green of Forests and Mountains Is the Breath of Life,” convey four broad themes. These evoke the splendor of nature expressed throughout Japan’s long history, the primal blacks and whites found in the natural world, and the colors that adorn organic craft materials and the natural landscape, all symbolic of the living world.

2F

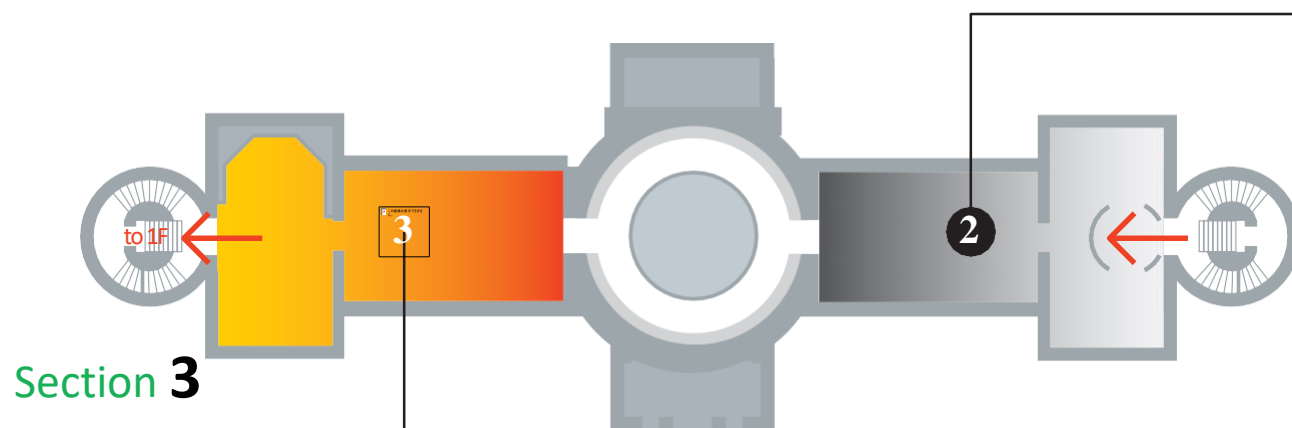
Tokyo National
Museum
Hyokeikan

(Left) **【Metalwork】**
Sora no hibiki (“Sound”)
Haruyama Fuminori, 2017
(Private collection)

(Right) **【Ceramics】**
Faceted jar in white porcelain
Maeta Akihiro, 2017
(Private collection)



Black Absorbs All Colors White Reflects All Light Section 2



The Red of Life The Spirit of Nature



【Bamboo Weaving】
Ryūmon—2018 (“Ripples—2018”)
Honma Hideaki, 2018
(Private collection)



【Textiles】
Kimono with checkered
design on red in *yūzen* dyeing
Moriguchi Kunihiro, 2019
(Private collection)

©Artists’ comments

Haruyama Fuminori (Metalwork)
This work represents an aural ceremonial tool to evoke the romance of the universe.

Maeta Akihiro (Ceramics)
Shadows on the surface of the white ceramic strengthen the sense of a life force residing within. While expressing my own artistic vision, I strive for a shape that lets the shadows work their mysterious charm.

Honma Hideaki (Bamboo Weaving)
This represents the surging waves of the Sea of Japan, with sea spray lashing against the rocks. I used countless u-shaped strips of bamboo to capture the pattern of the waves, and bound them to the frame.

Moriguchi Kunihiro (Textiles)
As the name suggests, kimono (which means “an object to be worn”) only express the artist’s vision in complete form when worn. The criss-crossing black and white pattern presents a sense of depth, which flows in a spiral around the wearer’s body, creating curves against the scarlet backdrop.

Kōgei by category

Ceramics

Earthenware, porcelain, stoneware, and china all use clay and pottery stone as their basic materials. Items are shaped using techniques such as turning, coiling, and slab construction, then fired at high temperatures in a kiln. Many contemporary practitioners combine traditional techniques with a modern, scientific approach, melding their own creative vision and skill with experiments in materials, shaping, decoration, glazing, and firing to create a diverse range of artworks.

© Artist's comment

Imaizumi Imaemon (Ceramics)

By combining *sumihajiki*, a wax-resist staining technique dating back to the Edo period, with the delicate whites of *sekka-sumihajiki* and *purachina-sai* glazing, I created this piece with a bold composition of grey and white that would hitherto have been impossible.



Lidded jar with design of snow-covered pines
Imaizumi Imaemon, 2019
(Private collection)



Mori tamanaka ("In The Depth of the Forest")
Nakai Teiji, 2012
(Musée de Somé Seiryu)

Textiles

This artistic discipline covers the dyeing and weaving of materials including silk and hemp, from garments designed to adorn the human form, to household fixtures and fittings, and decorative drapes, as well as modern uses of fabric and threads to define the atmosphere of a space. Elements such as the sheen of the textiles, their texture, and the opacity of dye, as well as dyeing and weaving techniques, open up great scope for creative expression, from pictorial depictions to ornamental designs.

© Artist's comment

Nakai Teiji (Textiles)

This work represents the massed tangle of entities within a forest, that vitality, that energy – the density of the forest.

Lacquerware

In Japan, the sap of the *urushi* lacquer tree has been used since the Jōmon era as a dye, a pigment, and an adhesive, both for decorative items and daily use utensils. From the Nara and Heian periods, ornamental lacquer techniques introduced from China became combined with scenes inspired by Japan's nature and distinctive lifestyle practices to inspire a range of technical and expressive methods that convey a uniquely Japanese aesthetic.

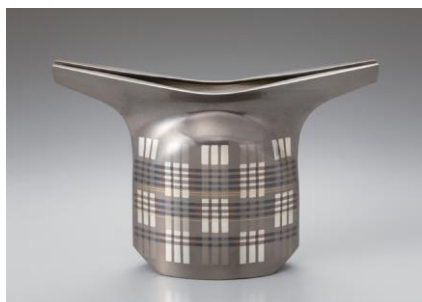
© Artist's comment

Itō Hiroshi (Lacquerware)

The image of Mt. Fuji is a thematic constant in the hearts of all Japanese. I used layers of colored lacquer to gradually build up the relief form of the mountain and the forests in the foreground, and used gold leaf, along with powdered gold and platinum, to capture the moon, mist and clouds.



Akafuji ("Red Fuji")
Itō Hiroshi, 2015
(Private collection)



Chekku to ichimatsu ("Check and checkered")
Flower vessel in *oborogin* with inlay design
Nakagawa Mamoru, 2020
(Private collection)

Metalwork

The unique characteristics of metals, including their melting properties when heated and tensile properties when struck, enable them to be shaped and formed into a range of craft and decorative objects. Since ancient times Japanese metalworkers have primarily made use of gold, silver, copper, tin, and iron to produce alloys such as bronze and *oborogin*, developing and applying techniques suited to the nature of each material in order to craft a variety of items, from personal accessories, to Buddhist statues and altar fittings, tools, and furnishings. In recent years, artists have begun experimenting with new options ranging from aluminum to stainless steel.

© Artist's comment

Nakagawa Mamoru (Metalwork)

For this work I used gold, silver, copper, and other metals to create a complex inlay that superimposes tartan check and classic checkered patterns.

Wood & Bamboo Work

Blessed with a varied climate and landscape, Japan is home to an abundant array of useful trees—from hinoki cypress to pines to Japanese zelkova—in addition to *madake* and other varieties of bamboo. These resources have long been used as building materials and to fashion the furnishings and tools used in daily life. Amid the transition to modern times, wood and bamboo craftwork has taken on a contemporary sensibility, observable in highly distinctive, artistic wooden creations that draw on the finest techniques chosen to match a broad selection of raw materials, as well as bamboo works showcasing artists' customized braiding and staining methods or featuring their own unique interpretations of three-dimensional sculptural and modeling techniques inherited from traditions such as *hanakago* flower baskets.

© Artist's comment

Murayama Akira (Woodwork)

The emphasis here is on curved surfaces designed to let viewers feel a sense of movement generated by light. Expansive curves to left and right open up to form the curves of the prow and stern, with the side panels similarly carved to resemble the line formed by the planks of a boat.



Boat-shaped tray in zelkova wood finished in wipid lacquer

Murayama Akira, 2017

(Private collection)

Dolls

The Japanese archipelago has a long history of dollmaking for a wide range of purposes, from spells and religious rituals to toys. In addition to cherubic *goshō* dolls, the Japanese dollmaking tradition also includes dolls dressed in costumes with the edges of the fabric intricately tucked into grooves in a wooden base, affixed with further fabrics and traditional Japanese paper, and colored. The mid-1920s marked the emergence of a flourishing creative movement that has seen the craft evolve into the dollmaking of today—an expressive artform featuring unique themes, creative methods, and designs.

© Artist's comment

Hayashi Komao (Dolls)

Inspired by the spirit of cross-cultural exchange present in ancient Japan, I decided to base this doll on Gojo, a character from *gigaku* dance, which came to Japan via continental Asia in the 8th century and captured the hearts of the nation.



Gojo (character from *gigaku* dance)

Hayashi Komao (2015)

Private collection

Enamel, glass, *kirikane*

Enamel artwork is created by first applying patterns to a metal base using a glass glaze, baking and fusing the item in a kiln, and polishing it down to create the final piece. Related artforms include transparent glasswork, made by shaping and cooling a molten base composed primarily of quartz sand, and *kirikane*, the technique of cutting gold and silver leaf into fine lines and small shapes and affixing them to surfaces to create patterns.

© Artist's comment

Tsukioka Yūji (*Kirikane*)

Captivated by the elegance and dignity of flowers, I gave this piece a colorful floral theme. For the base, I drew upon tempera techniques to layer plaster and create raised lily flowers, adding color with mineral pigments. I then used colored sand and gold leaf to add the finishing touches.



Kirikane

Rin ("Dignity")

Tsukioka Yūji (2015)

Private collection

Venue design

Ito Toyo (President, Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects)



We introduce continuity between the floor and the display stand by replacing the perpendicular face of the stand and the floor with a curve. It is as if the display stands had risen from the ground, symbolizing the energy vortex of nature, shaped into works of art by the hands of artists.

【Biography】

- 1941 Born in Seoul, South Korea. Spent childhood in father's hometown of Shimosuwa, Nagano Prefecture
- 1965 Graduated with a degree in architecture from the Faculty of Engineering, University of Tokyo
- 1965–1969 Kiyonori Kikutake Architects and Associates
- 1971 Started own studio, Urban Robot (URBOT)
- 1979 Renamed studio Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects

Key projects

- 1984 Silver Hut (Tokyo)
- 1991 Yatsushiro Municipal Museum (Kumamoto Pref.)
- 1997 Odate Dome (Akita Pref.)
- 2000 Sendai Mediatheque (Miyagi Pref.)
- 2007 Tama Art University Library (Hachioji campus, Tokyo)
- 2015 “Minna no Mori” Gifu Media Cosmos (Gifu Pref.)
- 2016 Museo Internacional del Barroco (Mexico)
- 2016 National Taichung Theater (Taiwan)
- 2018 Shin-Aomori Sports Park Athletic Field (Aomori Pref.)

Awards

- 2002 Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement of the 8th International Architecture Exhibition NEXT at the Venice Biennale
- 2006 Royal Gold Medal from The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)
- 2010 The 22nd Praemium Imperiale in Honor of Prince Takamatsu
- 2012 Golden Lion for Best National Participation for the Japan Pavilion, 13th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (Commissioner)
- 2013 Pritzker Architecture Prize
- 2017 UIA Gold Medal



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