

Thematic Exhibition

CAPTIVATING KŌGEI: GET IMMERSSED IN JAPAN'S FINE CRAFT

June 8 (Sun.) - July 21 (Sun.), 2024
at Hōsa Bunko Library

INTRODUCTION

Lacquerware, metalwork, ceramics, and other arts are sometimes crafted by skillfully combining different materials. Two examples of supreme craftsmanship can be found in the techniques of *zōgan*, in which a pattern is carved into a material then inlaid with another material, and *raden*, in which pieces of seashell are inlaid or adhered to the surface of lacquerware or wood for decoration. Ingenious design techniques can also be found in a wide range of handcrafted boxes made from cleverly assembled pieces of wood or carefully and tightly fitting enclosures.

This exhibition plays on the Japanese word “hamaru,” which means both to fit together perfectly and to be captivated by something so deeply that one becomes completely immersed in it. By focusing on crafts that involve combining different materials or consist of shapes that fit together perfectly, we explore the wide variety of form and the hidden appeal of Japan’s fine craft.

We hope that these objects will fit with your tastes and captivate you with their brilliant show of craftsmanship.



Food Container, plum flower shape, pavilion and landscape design, mother-of-pearl inlay on black lacquer. China, Ming dynasty, 15th-16th c.

PROLOGUE

This exhibition is conceived around the two meanings of the Japanese term *hamaru*.

The earlier Parts <1> to <3>.....

To fit perfectly into a defined space, such as a hole, or onto or around an irregular surface. For something to be placed in or set in its intended place.

The latter Parts <4> and <5>.....

To become so absorbed in something that one cannot get out; to become completely immersed in another world. To feel attracted to a specific person, thing, or matter.

Whether you enjoy learning about the techniques of fine craft or simply become entangled in its fascinating web, we hope you will enjoy the exhibition by getting hooked on craft in your own way.

PART 1

Techniques for a Good Fit

Exhibit No.1-No.10

One of the techniques used in the production of decorative arts is a method of setting materials into other materials. This section introduces some of the fitting techniques used in the process of creating fine craft objects.

PART 2

Snug, Fit, and Secure

Exhibit No.11-No.24

As in the case of a double or triple box, in which one box is placed inside another, or in the case of a lid and container that fit together perfectly, there are often situations in which something has a precise place where it is supposed to fit. In order to make a perfect pairing, it is necessary to adjust the size and shape of each piece accordingly.

This section introduces works that are cleverly designed and crafted to fit together just right.

PART 3

A Glimpse Using the Latest Technology

Exhibit No.25-No.28

When we see craft objects in their completed form, we cannot tell about their inner construction and the materials that are used to make them. In recent years, however, scientific analysis using CT and X-ray scanning has made it possible to identify aspects of the inner workings of objects that cannot be seen from the outside. These techniques allow us to unravel the inner workings of a piece and the thought process that went into its creation—what materials were used, how it was formed, and what kind of techniques were used to make it.

This section introduces how objects are fitted together through the use of some of the latest technology.



[Important Cultural Property]
Food Container for Sacred Offerings, design of birds, flowers on connected shippō pattern, oil painting and gilt line-engraving red lacquer. Ryūkyū (Okinawa), 16th-17th c.

[National Treasure]
Desk,
The Tale of Genji
“Hatsune” motifs,
maki-e lacquer.
Edo period, 1639.



PART 4

Material × Material = ?

Exhibit No.29-No.41

Decorative art objects are made of various materials found in nature, such as shells, stone, gold, and silver, utilizing the characteristics of each material to its best advantage. These diverse materials are skillfully combined and effectively used in a single work.

Beginning here, we invite you to immerse yourself in the fascinating appeal of these works made from combining an array of different materials.

PART 5

Raden — A Dazzling Rainbow of Color

Exhibit No.42-No.54

Raden, the technique of mother-of-pearl inlay, has fascinated people around the world since ancient times. The most attractive feature of lacquerwares featuring *raden* inlay is the beautifully sparkling shell fragments applied to their surface.

This section introduces various *raden* inlaid objects from Japan, the Ryūkyū (Okinawa), and China. Sometimes the shells are cut out boldly to produce a pattern, and sometimes very thin and fine leaves are used. The craftspeople who create these works are not only highly skilled, but their ability to slice the curved surfaces of the shells to obtain thin and flat pieces to work with is essential to this craft. We hope you will enjoy the dazzling world of these objects and the delicate and skillful techniques involved in their production.



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