

Soetsu Yanagi and Artists-Craftsmen of the Mingei Movement

– from the museum collection commemorating the 80th anniversary of the foundation

Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the museum, paid attention to the beauty of daily crafts used by ordinary people, which had never been evaluated so. Together with potters Kanjiro Kawai and Shoji Hamada, he named those objects 'mingei (folk craft)', and then enthusiastically collected mingei works as well as those which bear the same kind of beauty. Then in 1936, Yanagi established the Japan Folk Crafts Museum to promote this new aesthetics. Yanagi perceived the beauty of the collection as 'standard of the beauty', and devoted himself to spreading this new aesthetics to the public widely through various activities of the museum and his writings.

In addition, the museum has exhibited works made by artists-craftsmen as well as those made by unknown craftsmen since the foundation. Yanagi pointed out that the latter ones tended to be always practical and to depend on background traditions too much. The former ones, that is works made by artists-craftsmen on the other hand, have uniqueness in creativity and aptness to be just for appreciation. Yanagi, in this way, considered these two kinds of works separately; non-personal other-power approach and personal self-power approach. Yanagi also indicated that there should be great differences between these two approaches not only in the quantity and their prices but also in their attitudes toward creation. Yanagi, however, also considered that the two approaches were not necessarily contradictory nor repelling each other, and that they were just two different trails to climb up one peak, so everybody could meet on the peak in the end.

Yanagi said in his latest years, 'One of the characteristics of artists-craftsmen of the Mingei Movement is that their works are rooted in deep respects for mingei craft works. In other words, they notice themselves inexperienced in mind, reflect on themselves, and keep developing their work. ... They are not at all unrelated to mingei craft works. On the contrary, they have always had modest attitude to produce something as good as mingei craft works.' He continued, 'When we established the museum, we offered one room to display works made by artist-craftsmen. This is because we, of course, wanted to show their beauty, and also because we would like to show the way for both mingei craft works and those made by artists-craftsmen to develop cooperatively. They are not so inconsistent each other. [*Sakka no shina to mingei-hin* (Works made by artists and mingei-works), 1960]

Time has passed, and the museum is celebrating its 80th anniversary since the foundation, which means more than half a century has already passed since Yanagi died. The environment around craftsmen has strikingly changed including nature, social situation, technique, and materials. In fact, it must be difficult for present artists to accomplish the way as Yanagi desired. However, it is very meaningful to review the trails of artists-craftsmen who supported Mingei Movement together with Yanagi on this occasion.

In this exhibition, works produced by Kawai, Hamada, Bernard Leach, Keisuke Serizawa, and Shiko Munakata, who led Mingei Movement mainly, are on display, approaching to their attractiveness. In addition, works produced by Motohiko Katano (dyer), Michitada Funaki (potter), Tatsuaki Kuroda (woodworker), Yoshitaka Yanagi (weaver), Jiro Kinjo (potter), Shigeo Suzuki (craftsman), Kichiemon Okamura (dyer), Tatsuzo Shimaoka (potter), Seiji Takeuchi (potter), Samiro Yunoki (dyer), Kenji Funaki (potter) and other artists-craftsmen, who are so to say 'the second generation' of Mingei Movement, are exhibited. On the first floor at the Main Hall, scripts, calligraphies and other related books by Yanagi are also on display. We introduce works produced by artists-craftsmen who were and are inspired by the beauty of mingei, and this is an absolutely precious opportunity.

January 8th (Sun) – March 26th (Sun), 2017

THE JAPAN FOLK CRAFTS MUSEUM

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Works by Kanjiro Kawai (1890-1966)

Triggered by an encounter with Soetsu Yanagi through Hamada, Kawai totally changed his style from works with various technique to those for practical use. Yanagi admired his works, saying that he is the most talented in handling colors. In this room, those colorful works of Kawai from the museum collection are on display.

Works by Keisuke Serizawa (1895-1984)

Serizawa got impressed with the book '*Kogei no michi* (The Way of the Crafts)' written by Soetsu Yanagi, and got strongly attracted to colors and patterns of *bingata* textiles which were exhibited at the pavilion 'Mingeikan' in the Industrial Exposition in Ueno in 1928. Then he decided to be stencil-dyer, respecting Yanagi as his only master. His wide variety of works such as kimono, Japanese curtains, calendar, book designs are on display.

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Works by Bernard Leach (1887-1979)

An Englishman Leach spent his childhood in Japan. Returning in 1909, he started making pottery triggered by an encounter with Soetsu Yanagi. Then he opened a kiln in St. Ives, England, and established a unique style mixing both Eastern and Western pottery technique. In this room his ceramics as well as etchings and wood block prints are on display.

Works by Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961)

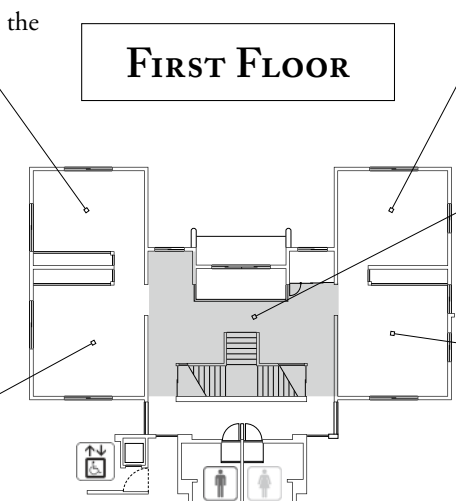
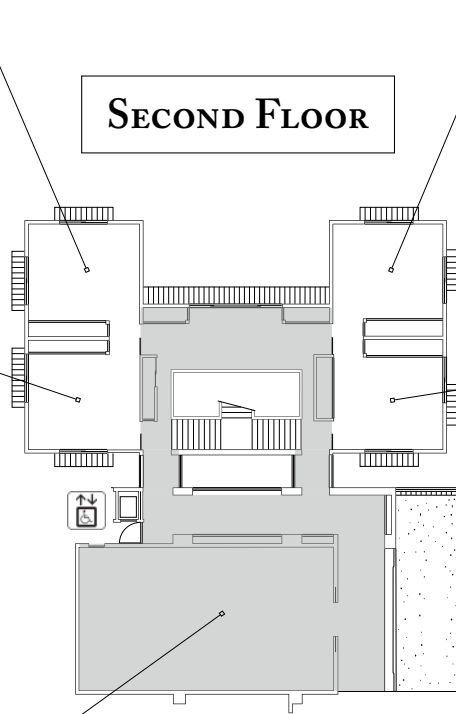
Yanagi, who had started his career as a religious-philosopher, left no works as an artist. It could be said, however, that his unique collection and the museum itself, which Yanagi participated in the basic design, are Yanagi's representative works. Here, Yanagi's book covers, related books, and his short phrases are introduced.

Works by Shoji Hamada (1894-1978)

Hamada encountered Yanagi through Leach, and he had known Kawai since his schooldays. Hamada, who had stayed England with Leach, settled Mashiko, Tochigi prefecture after returning to Japan, and produced firm and steady ceramics for practical use there. On display in this room are daily tableware such as bowls and tea-pots.

Works by Shiko Munakata (1903-1975)

A unique style of Munakata's work had been paid attention to, and then the Japan Folk Crafts Museum bought his works as the collection. This led the relationship between Munakata and Yanagi deepen. Since then, Munakata had respected Yanagi as his master and worked on. This is why most of Munakata's works of the museum collection are first prints. Besides, they were mounted by Yanagi into scrolls or screens. Here, his representative works produced during his frequent contact period with Yanagi are introduced.



Museum Shop

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Works by Samiro Yunoki (1922-)

Yunoki became a dyer inspired by philosophy of Soetsu Yanagi and works by Keisuke Serizawa. He has also devoted himself to educating the youngers. Recently, his exhibitions have been held at various museums including Guimet Museum in Paris, and he continues working enthusiastically. In this room, his variety of works are introduced commemorating the donation of works from Yunoki himself.