

# TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

Japanese Techniques  
in Contemporary  
Metal Arts



June 4 – July 16, 2022

PENINSULA SCHOOL OF ART

## Tradition of Excellence

*Tradition of Excellence* explores a wide range of Japanese metalworking techniques and materials. The exhibit brings together over fifty works by Japanese masters, two of whom are Japanese Living National Treasures. The work showcases traditional alloys, patinas, lacquer; techniques such as raising, inlay, lamination, fire gilding, engraving, and enameling; and art forms such as articulated figures.

*Tradition of Excellence* originated at Penland Gallery in Penland, NC and traveled to the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago, IL and the Metal Museum in Memphis, TN before coming to Door County.

## About the Curator

Hiroko Yamada was born and raised in Japan, and her first career was as an architect in Tokyo. She became interested in small-scale design and chose to pursue this interest at the University of Wisconsin-

Madison under the mentoring of metalsmiths Fred Fenster and Eleanor Moty. In addition to becoming an accomplished jeweler, she dedicated herself to helping others create one-of-a-kind works in metal. This commitment has included teaching Penland workshops regularly since 2005.

For the past five years, Hiroko has promoted exchanges between American and Japanese metal artists through exhibitions and workshops with a goal of introducing traditional Japanese metalwork and techniques to Western art metal culture.

Hiroko worked closely with Penland Gallery director Kathryn Gremley in creating two exhibitions that presented the work of American metalsmiths in Japan. The Art of the Brooch appeared at Gallery C.A.J in Kyoto, Kobe Design University, and Museum of Kyoto in 2014. North

American Mokume-Gane Exhibit in Japan appeared at Tsubame Industrial Materials Museum in Niigata and Yamawaki Art College Gallery in Tokyo in 2016.

In 2018 Hiroko's work was included in the Japanese Traditional Art Metal Exhibition in Tokyo and Kumamoto along with work by Seth Gould and Andrew Meers, her students. In 2017 and 2018, she co-curated, with professor Hiroki Iwata of Tokyo University of Arts, an exhibition of work by American and Japanese metal artists at Ginza Okariya Gallery in Tokyo. She also facilitated an invitation for American artists to study with masters and Living National Treasures in Japan, and she invited a Japanese master to teach workshops in the US in 2016, 2017, and 2019.

Hiroko explains all of these activities this way: "The long history of Japanese traditional metal skills has slowly seen a decline in being passed to the next generation. The technique and skill has either been closed and protected or limited to certain families or selected artists. In order to pass on the skills, Japanese artists and masters have realized that there is a need to be open and willing to teach, not only within the family, or even to other Japanese, but also to be open to instruction internationally. My mission is to bring together artistic skills and knowledge that will help both Japanese and American artists grow in their work and achieve new levels of excellence."

## A Brief History of Metalwork in Japan

Bronze came to Japan via the Silk Road in the Yayoi period (300 BCE-300 CE). Gold was also in use in Japan at this time. Artifacts from the Kofun period (300-552 CE) show that basic metalsmithing techniques such as carving, engraving, forging, and casting were developed early.

The introduction of Buddhism in the 6th and 7th centuries brought changes to the craft with a demand for Buddha figures and altar fittings. During the Kamakura period (1185-1333), a new style of architecture featured the tokonoma, a raised alcove for the display of art, thought to have been inspired by the private altars consisting of a narrow wooden table with an incense burner, votive candles, and flower vessels placed before a hanging Buddhist scroll found in the homes of Zen Buddhist priests. Additionally, the warrior culture of the Kamakura and Muromachi (1333-1573) increased the call for metalwork for the sword fittings and armor with precious metal decorations.

The 16th century saw further developments in the refinement and use of gold and silver. In fact, until the Portuguese reached Japan in 1543, the nation's use of precious metals was so prevalent that it was known throughout Europe as the Land of Gold. Japanese metalsmithing reached its height during the peace, prosperity, and cultural development that





characterized the Edo period (1615-1858). During this time, swords became works of art and the use of elaborate, ornamental precious metals expanded to many other types of objects.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 brought with it many changes decreasing demand for metalwork. The samurai class was dissolved along with the right to wear swords in public. The Meiji government encouraged the mechanization of metalwork production with western technology. Dress was also westernized, so ornamental hairpins and sash clips for kimonos were no longer needed. Eventually, changes in architecture removed the tokonoma. Many metalsmiths lost patrons and had to find other work. Some began producing work for western markets.

Since then, steps have been taken to preserve knowledge of traditional Japanese metalworking techniques. In 1887 the Tokyo School of Art was founded and began teaching courses in three major categories of metal art: tankin (hammering), choking (chasing), and chukin (casting). Under the 1950 Law for the Protection of

Cultural Properties, the Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology certified sixteen categories of crafts and performing arts as Intangible Cultural Properties. Individuals who have attained high mastery in one of these arts and also further its perpetuation by recording or teaching the techniques are designated Ningen Kokuho (Living National Treasures). In the field of crafts, only 58 people can be designated, and only ten of those are in the field of metalwork. Two of them, Morihito Katsura and Norio Tamagawa, have work on view in *Tradition of Excellence*. In addition to designating Ningen Kokuho, the ministry coordinates exhibitions with prizes and helps aspiring artists receive training from the Ningen Kokuho.



## Differences between Japanese and Western Metalwork

Historically, Western metalwork has been characterized by its bright mirror polish, ornamentation with colorful stones or enamel, and near exclusive preference for silver and gold. The Japanese have focused on different colors of metal alloys, a softer finish that shows off subtle shifts in color, and more natural colors formed by patinas on metal alone. Some people speculate that this difference in taste and focus comes from a relative lack of colored gemstones in Japan. Others theorize that the difference stems from the climate itself. In the mostly dry countries of Europe, rust is seen as a disfiguring blemish. In the damp climate of Japan, artists have long experimented with the deliberate rusting or patination of various metals.

## Japanese Techniques and Metalsmithing Terminology

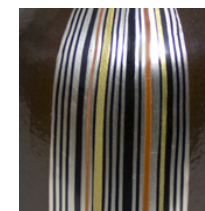
### GINKESHI and KINKESHI

Kinkeshi and ginkeshi are respectively, gold and silver fire gilding (kin, “gold,” gin, “silver,” and keshi, “amalgam”). This process consists of applying a mercury amalgam of precious metals to the base metal, then heating the piece, volatilizing the mercury and leaving the precious metal behind. Depending on how it is applied, this technique can produce a wide range of effects; it can look like pure gold has been applied to the surface – bold and bright, or it can seem as though just a shadow of the material is present.



### HAGIAWASE ZOGAN

Hagiawase zogan is commonly known in western metalworking as marriage of metals. This technique involves joining dissimilar metals together at the edges with solder to create contrasting patterns. This can be done as simply as butting the edge of two sheets together, or more intricately piercing and fitting more complicated pieces.



### HIDO PATINA

Hido patina is done to turn copper a rich, red color. This is achieved by heating the finished piece to a glowing color and then quickly cooling it in a bath of boiling water and borax.



### INLAY (ZOGAN)

Inlay involves the embedding of relatively soft metals such as gold and silver into a harder ground made of materials such as copper, iron, brass, shakudo, or shibuichi. There are a number of techniques, including line inlay (sen-zogan), flat inlay (hira-zogan), high relief inlay (takaniku-zogan), polished out inlay (togidashi-zogan), thread inlay (ito-zogan), and cloth inlay (nunome-zogan).



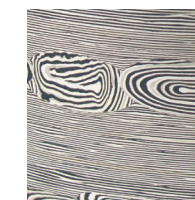
### JIZAI OKIMONO

Jizai Okimono are realistically shaped figures of animals made from iron, copper, shibuichi, or shakudo. Their bodies and limbs are articulated and can be moved like real animals; among these figures, we can find models of dragons, birds, fishes, snakes, lobsters, crabs and insects. Okimono is a Japanese term meaning “ornament for display or decorative object”, typically displayed in a tokonoma alcove or butsudan altar. One subcategory of Okimono is the Jizai Okimono.



### KASANE-GANE

Similar to mokume-gane, Kasane-gane is the fusing or solder and layering of dissimilar metals. The result is a striated pattern on the finished piece, as you are looking at the patterns on edge.



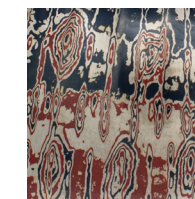
### KUROMIDO

Kuromido alloy contains 99% copper and 1% arsenic. This alloy is used as an alternate material to the more expensive gold-bearing alloy called shakudo. The color of kuromido is not the same as shakudo, but they both produce a lustrous deep black patina.



### MOKUME-GANE

Mokume-gane is a procedure which produces a mixed-metal laminate with distinctive layered patterns, as well as the laminate itself. Mokume-gane translates closely to “wood grain metal” or “wood eye metal” and describes the way metal takes on the appearance of natural wood grain. Mokume-gane fuses many layers of differently colored precious metals together to form a sandwich of alloys called a “billet.” The billet is then forged out to reduce thickness. At this point it is carved to create a pattern by revealing the layers of dissimilar metals. Finally, the billet is reduced to its final thickness, creating a flat sheet of metal that can be raised, chased, formed, or fabricated into a final piece.



## NUNOME ZOGAN

Nunome zogan, literally “cloth inlay,” consists of using a hammer and chisel to create a crosshatch pattern on the entire surface, giving it a texture that resembles woven cloth. This pattern is essentially a series of burrs into which foil or wire can set, permanently fixed in place with a burnisher or small hammer.



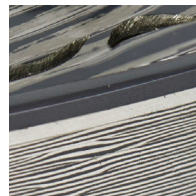
## ROKUSHO PATINA

Rokusho patina is a chemical patina used to color copper-based alloys. The materials are fully finished and then boiled in the rokusho solution to obtain the desired depth of color. Depending on the composition of the patina and the specific alloy, one can expect the following colors: copper becomes light brown to deep red; shakudo becomes deep purple to black; shibuichi becomes light to dark grey.



## SHAKUDO

This is perhaps the best known of the specialty Japanese alloys. It is made by melting together 3-5% pure gold with the balance being copper. The metal can be worked with traditional metalsmithing techniques, and is used for jewelry, small castings, and ornaments such as sword furniture. To develop a dark purple to black patina, the artist would warm the finished piece and immerse it in a hot niage solution.



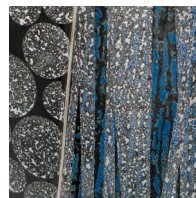
## SHIBUICHI

This is another alloy unique to Japan. The name comes from “ichi,” which means one, and “Shibu,” which means “four.” The alloy consists of one-fourth silver and three-fourths copper, sometimes with a percent or two of pure gold added.



## SHIPPO

Enameling is a metal working technique where a multi-colored glassy glaze is baked onto a metal



surface and is similar to works developed in the ancient Mesopotamia and Egyptian cultures. Enameling is said to have traveled from Southeast Europe to China via the Silk Road and eventually to Japan. In English, this is called enameling, but in Japanese it is known as “Shippo”. “Shippo” means “Seven Treasures” and is taken from the Buddhist Sutra describing the beauty of seven kinds of treasure being spread out.

## UCHIDASHI

The uchidashi technique involves a hammer and punch forming a flat metal sheet from the front side, defining a form in a way that retains the thickness. The definition of form, before the details are added, leaves the piece appearing as though a thin cloth or piece of clay were draped over it. The details are then chased in.



## URUSHI

Urushi work is the art of creating designs on the surface of artworks by painting them with the sap of the Urushi tree. After it dries, Urushi repels water and forms a hard film that prevents rotting.



## WABORI

Wabori is carving and engraving using hammer and chisels. The work piece is generally set in pitch to hold it steady, and sharpened steel chisels struck with a hammer are used to carve the surface of the metal, removing material in a controlled manner.



Cover: Morihito Katsura, Vase, 1990. Silver, gold, shakudo, copper; hagiawase zogan, kinkeshi, rokusho patina, 4½ x 4¼ x 4¼ | First page, upper: Kiyoko Fujie, Ornament, *Kadsura Japonica*, 2013. Brass, shakudo, silver, copper, gold; uchidashi, kinkeshi, zogan, wabori, rokusho patina, hido patina, 1½ x 1¾ x ½ inches | First page, lower: Seisei Asai, Incense Burner, *Dance of the Moor*, 2002. Silver, shakudo, gold; kasane-gane, kinkeshi, ginkeshi, rokusho patina, 5 x 7½ x 6 inches. | Second page: Noriko Hagino, Flower Vase, 2007. Silver, shakudo, kuromido; kasane-gane, rokusho patina, 12½ x 3 x 3 inches. | Third page, upper: Haruo Mitsuta, Jizai Okimono, *Locust*, 2018. Copper, brass, bronze; jizai, patina, 2 x 3½ x 1½ inches. | Third page, lower: Ryota Nishikata, Vase, 2018. Copper, tin; rokusho patina, 7¾ x 16 x 6½ inches.

## Featured Artists

SEISEI ASAI 浅井盛征 Tokyo, Japan

Studio artist; education: Hosei University; teaching: Tsukuribe Koubō; exhibitions: Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition—Award Recipient; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

KIYOKO FUJIE 藤江聖公 Tokyo, Japan

Studio artist; education: Bunka Women’s Junior College; teaching: Yamawaki Design Art School (Tokyo), Hijiri Koubō; exhibitions: Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition, Art Exhibition of Kita-ku—Award Recipient (Japan); full member, Japan Kōgei Association

NORIKO HAGINO 萩野紀子 Saitama, Japan

Studio artist; education: Musashino Art Junior College; exhibitions: Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition—Award Recipient, National Museum of Denmark, MOA Museum of Art (Japan), Kōgei Contemporary Japanese Art (NY), Contemporary Metal Art (Korea); awards: 20th Mokichi Okada Award; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

HIROKI IWATA 岩田広己 Tokyo, Japan

Studio artist, director—Japan Enamelling Artists Association; education: MFA Tokyo University of the Arts (Japan); teaching: Tokyo University of the Arts (Japan); exhibitions: SOFA Chicago (IL), Collect (UK), Masterpiece London (UK), Contemporary Japanese Art Jewelry (Australia), PAD (UK), Schmuck (Germany), Beijing Contemporary Craft and Jewelry Exhibition (China); collections: the National Museum of Scotland, Aberdeen Art Gallery (UK)

MORIHITO KATSURA 桂盛仁 Tokyo, Japan

Japanese Living National Treasure, designated in 2008; studio artist; education: Musashino Art University (Japan); exhibitions: Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient; awards: Sokeikai Award; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

HARUO MITSUTA 満田晴穂 Yokohama, Japan

Studio artist; education: MFA Tokyo University of the Arts; exhibitions: Japanese Sculpture Next 100 Years Project (Japan), Insects—Gallery Art Morimoto (Japan), Mori Museum (Japan), Toyota City Museum (Japan), Honolulu Museum (HI)

HIROSHI NISHIKATA 西片浩 Nīgata, Japan

Studio artist, Seigado; education: MFA Tohoku University of Art and Design; exhibitions: Japan Craft Exhibition, Takaoka Craft Exhibition (Japan), Arai Gallery (Japan), Tourindo (Japan), Contemporary Japanese Metal Work (Australia)

RYOTA NISHIKATA 西片亮太 Nīgata, Japan

Studio artist, Seigado; education: MFA Nagaoka Institute of Design; exhibitions: Manchester Art Gallery (UK), Collect (UK), Yufuku Gallery (Japan), Velvet da Vinci (CA); Galerie Marianne Heller (Germany), Kyoto Prefectural Arts and Crafts Exhibition (Japan), Nīgata Prefectural Arts and Crafts Exhibition (Japan)

YUKO OKAHARA 岡原有子 Shizuoka, Japan

Studio artist; exhibitions: Eastern Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Art Exhibition of Kita-ku—Award Recipient (Japan); full member, Japan Kōgei Association

MOTOKO OSHIYAMA 押山元子 Yamanashi, Japan

Studio artist; education: Bunka Gakuen University; teaching: Bunka Gakuen University; exhibitions: Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, MOA Museum (Japan); full member, Japan Kōgei Association

RYUHEI SAKO 佐故龍平 Okayama, Japan

Studio artist; education: MA Hiroshima City University; exhibitions: Collect (UK), PAD London (UK), Asian Week (NY), Messe Muenchen (Germany), Design Museum (UK), Okayama Museum of Art (Japan), The Museum of Arts and Crafts ITAMI (Japan), Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition; collections: Machiko Hasegawa Art Museum (Japan), Victoria and Albert Museum (UK); full member, Japan Kōgei Association

HIROKO SATO-PIJANOWSKI ひろこ さとう-ピジャンノウ  
スキー Yokohama, Japan

Studio artist; education: MFA Cranbrook Academy of Art; teaching: University of Michigan, School of Art and Design; exhibitions: North America Mokume-Gane Exhibit in Japan; collections: Museum of Arts and Design (NYC), National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo), Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum (DC)

MAKOTO SUSA 須佐真 Nīgata, Japan

Studio artist; education: studied with Norio Tamagawa (Gyokusendo); exhibitions: Sanjo City Museum Exhibit—Award Recipient, Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition, Nīgata Prefecture Arts and Craft Exhibition (Japan), North America Mokume-Gane Exhibit in Japan; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

FUMIKI TAGUCHI 田口史樹 Kobe, Japan

Studio artist; education: MFA Tokyo University of the Arts (Japan); teaching: Kobe Design University (Japan); exhibitions: Gallery CAJ (Japan), Schmuck—Munich Jewelry Week (Germany), MOCA (NY), Collect (UK), SOFA Chicago (IL), Neues Schloss Schleißheim (Germany); awards: Herbert Hoffmann Prize, JJA Jewellery Design Awards (Japan)

MAKI TAKEHANA 竹花万貴 Tokyo, Japan

Studio artist, exhibitions: Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition—Award Recipient; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

EMIKO TAKENOUCI 竹之内恵美子 Tokyo, Japan

Studio artist, director—EMSWORKS; exhibitions: International Jewelry Exhibition (Japan), Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

NORIO TAMAGAWA 玉川宣夫 Nīgata, Japan

Japanese Living National Treasure, designated 2010; studio artist, Gyokusendo; exhibitions: Tokyo National Museum, Tsubame Industrial Materials Museum (Japan), North America Mokume-Gane Exhibit in Japan, Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition — Award Recipient; awards: Nīgata Nippo Culture Award, Order of the Rising Sun—Gold Rays with Rosette; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

TATSUSHI TAMAGAWA 玉川達士 Nīgata, Japan

Studio artist, Gyokusendo; education: studied with Norio Tamagawa; exhibitions: Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition—Award Recipient, Japanese Traditional Metalwork Exhibition, Tsubame Industrial Materials Museum, North America Mokume-Gane Exhibit in Japan; full member, Japan Kōgei Association

MIZUKO YAMADA 山田瑞子 Tokyo, Japan

Studio artist; education: MFA Tokyo University of the Arts; teaching: Tama Art University, Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College; exhibitions: Japan Craft Exhibition—Award Recipient, Craft Council Gallery (UK), Museum of Arts and Design (NYC), National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo), Museum of Arts and Crafts ITAMI (Japan); residency: the Royal College of Art (UK), Edinburgh College of Art (UK)

## Sources

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*Mokume Gane: A Comprehensive Study* by Steve Midgett

*The Soul of Gold: Tales from a Japanese Metal Artist's Studio* by Ōsumi Yukie

*Handbook for the Appreciation of Japanese Traditional Crafts* by the Japan Kōgei Association, nihonkogeikai.or.jp/en



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