



museum of arts and design

## TWELVE EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED JAPANESE CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS EXPLORE THE FUTURE OF KŌGEI

*Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward*  
October 20, 2015 to February 7, 2016

NEW YORK, NY, September 21, 2015 – From October 20, 2015 to February 7, 2016, the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) presents *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward*. The exhibition showcases the work of 12 established and emergent *kōgei* artists, and examines the changing role of this discipline within Japanese culture today. *Kōgei* is a genre of traditional art that may be roughly translated as “artisan crafts”—a means of highly skilled artistic expression, both in form and decoration, that is associated with specific regions and peoples in Japan. The subject is steeped in tradition and rooted in upholding conventional cultural ideals and aesthetics through the mastery of specialized techniques and materials.

While contemporary *kōgei* remains rooted in centuries of cultural history, the work of the artists in this exhibition reflects a decisive and somewhat controversial shift from that of their peers. Most *kōgei* artists see their role as one that upholds traditional Japanese culture of the past, as it was established in the late-19th-century Meiji period, which precludes the opportunity for personal expression or for addressing more topical, global issues. The artists in *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward* transcend this convention by incorporating into their work a high degree of individual expression and addressing ideas about the “future.”

“There is a technical ability inherent in *kōgei* that has the capacity to unleash intense, future-oriented visual imagery,” says Yūji Akimoto, Director of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, and curator of *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward*. “The exhibition considers the contemporary relevance and globalization of *kōgei* by examining innovative applications of traditional techniques and presenting works that reflect a high degree of individual expression.”

The relationship of each of the 12 artists to *kōgei* varies, reflecting the complex and evolving perceptions of the genre today. Drawing inspiration from current trends in Japanese culture, including animation, manga, design, and contemporary art, these artists reimagine conventional processes, surface treatments, ornamentation, and figurative expression to create inventive new forms for traditional use. The individualism found in these works links them equally to art as to traditional craft, extending the vitality of *kōgei* into the 21st century.

“MAD aims to reveal the fluidity of traditional approaches to artistic expression and their complex relationship to contemporary practice,” says Ronald T. Labaco, MAD’s Marcia Docter Senior Curator. “*Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward* presents the work of artists who redefine traditions by considering craft at the intersection of the historical and the contemporary, thus radicalizing the genre.”

**A press preview for the exhibition will be held on Monday, October 19, 2015, from 4:00 to 5:30 pm.**

## Featured artists include:

### **Katsuyo Aoki**

Connected to Japanese horror subculture, Aoki's haunting works combine rococo decorative elements with skeletal forms to create expressive, otherworldly sculpture.

### **Yūki Hayama**

Hayama creates scenarios of a futuristic dystopian society by integrating decorative elements and characters from ancient Chinese myths with those from Japanese manga.

### **Takashi Ikura**

The traditional functions of Ikura's ceramic vessels and covered containers are subverted by dynamically twisting forms and sinuous curves that evoke digital fabrication and generative design systems, but are achieved solely through virtuosic handcraftsmanship.

### **Tatsuo Kitamura (Unryūan)**

Kitamura and his atelier Unryūan (Cloud-Dragon Studio) use newly rediscovered techniques and knowledge gleaned from the study and conservation of historically significant lacquer wares to expand the vocabulary of the discipline, applying the methods to atypical forms.

### **Takurō Kuwata**

Kuwata takes the traditional *chawan* (tea bowl) and reinterprets it as part of contemporary popular culture in the same way that manga sometimes draws from historical people and events.

### **Masayasu Mitsuke**

Working in the tradition of *kutaniyaki*, a style of polychrome glazed pottery from the Edo period, Mitsuke executes highly complex, elaborate geometric patterns—decoration that traditionally plays a subordinate role in the overall composition—as the primary feature of his works.

### **Kōhei Nakamura**

Abandoning the vessel-like qualities and utility of traditional *kōgei*, Nakamura creates ceramic sculpture that references near-future science fiction and post-apocalyptic scenarios by incorporating decorative elements that look like scraps from demolished buildings and other detritus of modern civilization.

### **Shinkyō Nakamura**

Situated in the context of Japan's doll culture beginning in the 17th century, the idealized, highly stylized figurative representations of Japanese courtiers in European costume by master doll-maker Nakamura cross the boundary between traditional craft and contemporary sculpture.

### **Harumi Noguchi**

Noguchi's figurative sculptures of deities and animals illustrate an aspect of contemporary *kōgei* that looks to its ancient and animist roots for personal expression.

### **Toshio Ōhi**

An 11th-generation descendant of the Ōhi family of potters known for a type of Raku ware, Ōhi works in a very traditional style, a result of the 350-year cultural legacy of the technique. He transcends the physical and cultural boundaries of *kōgei* by promoting its discourse beyond Japan through his involvement with university ceramic programs around the world.

## **Yuri Takemura**

The playful, stylized forms and decoration of Takemura's *chawan* reflect a postmodern influence of fashion, design, and media culture, revealing similar processes of reference, consultation, and editing.

## **Shin'ya Yamamura**

Yamamura balances his skillful command of lacquer techniques with personal expression to create new forms in unusual combinations of materials, liberating him from the historical and traditional legacy that has restrained many *kōgei* lacquer artists.

## **EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION, ASSOCIATED PUBLICATION, AND CREDITS**

*Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward* is curated by Yūji Akimoto, Director of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, and coordinated at the Museum of Arts and Design by Ronald T. Labaco, Marcia Docter Senior Curator, and Samantha De Tillio, Curatorial Assistant and Project Manager. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 138-page, full-color catalogue, written by Akimoto and published by the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art.

*Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward* is organized by the Museum of Arts and Design and co-organized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (Kanazawa Art Promotion and Development Foundation).

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## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

### Apocalypse Culture

On August 6, 1945, American forces dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. In the decades following, themes of destruction, post-apocalypses, and dark futures emerged in a multitude of Japanese cultural forms, including *kōgei*. While initially finding an audience with connoisseurs in each cultural area, this wave of activity would eventually break into the mainstream as it influenced the plethora of post-apocalyptic films, books, and artworks that dominate popular culture today.

Exploring these cultural movements, the program *Apocalypse Culture* accompanies *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward* and presents a series of talks, workshops, and cinema screenings to examine the links between history and culture.

#### TALKS AT MAD

##### **Looking Future Forward: Japanese Kōgei Today**

Tuesday, October 20, 2015, 7:00 pm

Free

Join Yūji Akimoto, Director of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan, and curator of *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward*, for an evening of conversation exploring how today's artists are reconsidering the Japanese practice of *kōgei*. Artists from the exhibition, including Katsuyo Aoki, Yūki Hayama, Takashi Ikura, Takurō Kuwata, Masayasu Mitsuke, Shinkyō Nakamura, Toshio Ōhi, and Shin'ya Yamamura, will join Akimoto in discussing how their work represents a decisive and somewhat controversial shift from their peers.

#### ENCOUNTERS AT MAD

##### **In the Studios with the Artists from Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward**

Tuesday, October 20, 2015 - 10:00 am to 3:00 pm and Wednesday, October 21, 2015 – 2:00pm to 4:00pm

Free with Museum Admission

6th floor Studios

Join artists featured in the exhibition *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward*, including Takashi Ikura, Toshio Ōhi, Masayasu Mitsuke, and Takurō Kuwata, for a special demonstrations of their *kōgei* techniques in the Artist Studios. Visitors are encouraged to meet the artists and discuss their materials, processes and concepts while they work. Open to visitors of all ages.

##### **Takashi Ikura | Twisting Porcelain**

Tuesday, October 20: 10 am – 11 am

Ikura couples functional ceramics with sculptural forms that are twisted and curving as if digitally fabricated. Join the artist as he demonstrates his approach to carving and shaping his designs with various clay tools and knives.

##### **Masayasu Mitsuke, and Takurō Kuwata | A New Take of Tradition**

Tuesday, October 20: 11:20 am – 12:35 pm

Join Mitsuke and Kuwata for a joint demonstration that embodies qualities similar to both of their artistic practices: a reinterpretation of traditional techniques and a love for experimentation and innovation. Mitsuke will demonstrate his highly complex geometric technique of painting Kutani ware plates, while Kuwata works on the potter's wheel and hand-building his forms to demonstrate to visitors how he interprets traditional chawan (tea bowls).

##### **Toshio Ōhi | Transcending Cultural Boundaries**

Tuesday, October 20: 1pm – 3pm

Wednesday, October 21: 2:00pm to 4:00pm

An eleventh-generation descendant of the Ōhi family of potters, Toshio ōhi works within the traditional style associated with his ancestors while simultaneously creating dialogue, traveling the world, and giving workshops to artists from other cultures. ōhi will be using the tebinari (twisted by hand) technique, discussing his training, and sharing cultural traditions with visitors.

**Object as Story: A Guided Narrative Tour in Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward**

Thursday, December 17, 2015 - 6:30 pm

Free with Museum Admission

3rd floor galleries

Behind many works featured in Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward are myths, legends, and cultural traditions explored through symbols, icons and ceremony. Join MAD staff on a tour that shares these stories and narratives that inspire a closer viewing of the objects featured in the exhibition. This program is suitable for all ages.

CINEMA AT MAD

Akira Kurosawa's Dreams

Friday, November 6, 2015, 7:00 pm

\$10 General, \$5 for Students and MAD Members

1990, Dir. Akira Kurosawa

119 min, 35mm

Largely overlooked in its initial release, Akira Kurosawa's genre-breaking mosaic *Dreams* is now considered one of his late masterworks. Ranging from glowing abstraction to the horrifically tangible, Kurosawa's *Dreams* illustrates an eccentric mindscape that is unified by his deep-rooted fears of increasing industrialization and the prospect of nuclear destruction. Throughout the course of the film, viewers encounter a kaleidoscopic procession of forested spirits, forlorn mountaineers, silent phantom armies, and even Vincent van Gogh in a coy performance by Kurosawa's preeminent contemporary—Martin Scorsese.

A

Friday, November 13, 2015, 7:00 pm

\$10 General, \$5 for Students and MAD Members

1998, Dir. Tatsuya Mori

With Hiroshi Araki

136 min, digital projection

Director Tatsuya Mori's *A* crafts a personal look at one of the most iconic moments in Japanese history in recent decades, attempting to unearth meaning in the acts of those who take apocalyptic prophecies into their own hands. The documentary follows the Japanese doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo in the years following their sarin gas attack on a Tokyo subway system that killed 13 commuters, seriously injured 54, and harmed 980 more. Featuring the remaining spokesperson for the cult, 28-year-old Hiroshi Araki, the film chronicles his attempts to communicate with the press and public in the years following the attack. What emerges is the tale of a young man lost in the wake of choices made by senior cult officials whose reasons behind the attack remain a mystery to all.

Battle Royale

Friday, November 20, 2015, 7:00 pm

\$10 General, \$5 for Students and MAD Members

2000, Dir. Kinji Fukasaku  
With Tatsuya Fujiwara, Aki Maeda, and Takeshi Kitano  
121 min, digital projection

Director Kinji Fukasaku's cult classic, adapted from Koushun Takami's novel of the same name, is set in the near future and follows a class of Japanese middle school students, who are sent to a remote island and forced to fight to the death, until only one survivor remains. The last film by Fukasaku, *Battle Royale* predated the Hollywood blockbuster *The Hunger Games* by over a decade. A smash success in its native country, where it was nominated for Best Picture at the Japanese Academy Awards and won the award for popularity, *Battle Royale* ran into controversy outside of Japan. Only available as a bootlegged cult phenomenon until 2012, the film has become an icon of recent Japanese popular culture for its pitch-black satiric look at the future of education and social conditioning.

### Akira

Friday, December 4, 2015, 7:00 pm  
\$10 General, \$5 for Students and MAD Members  
1988, Dir. Katsuhiro Ôtomo  
With Mitsuo Iwata, Nozomu Sasaki, and Mami Koyama  
121 min, 35mm (English dubbed version)

A landmark of Japanese animation, director Katsuhiro Ôtomo's *Akira* revolutionized genre cinema, forever altering the depiction of dystopian futures on the silver screen. Based on the manga, also written by Ôtomo, *Akira* follows two motorcycle gang members who stumble across a secret military project in Neo-Tokyo, 2019. As the gang members are drawn into a shadowy world of the government, they start a sequence of events that will change Neo-Tokyo, quite possibly releasing a power worse than the atomic bomb, a force that could herald the end of the world.

## FAMILIES

### Studio Sunday

Sunday, December 6, 2015, 2:00 pm  
Free with Museum Admission  
6th Floor – Classroom, MAD

Families are invited to explore *Japanese Kōgei | Future Forward* and draw inspiration from *kōgei* techniques to transform ceramic vessels into decorated sculptural forms using clay and paint.

Studio Sundays are intergenerational workshops, included with Museum admission, during which families work with artist-educators who provide insight into creative processes. Each Studio Sunday workshop is unique, and open to anyone ages 6 and up.

## ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields, presenting artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill to their work. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's

curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving 21st-century innovation, fostering a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design.

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