

Crafts of Okinawa

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

June 21st (Tue) – August 21st (Sun), 2016

As the second memorial exhibition of our 80th anniversary, we hold an exhibition of crafts of Okinawa as well as precious photographs of pre-war Okinawa taken by photographer Manshichi Sakamoto (1900-1974), who accompanied with Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the museum, to Okinawa from the end of 1939 to 1940.

Soetsu Yanagi and Okinawa

It was the end of 1938 that Soetsu Yanagi finally visited Okinawa for the first time. Then in 1939 and 1940, Yanagi returned to Okinawa four times in all and stayed for about 100 days there. At that time, Okinawa had been regarded as uncivilized far south islands. Yanagi, however, saw actual Okinawa with his own eyes and found Okinawa remarkable treasure of beauty. He had many opportunities to learn about their way of life or handicrafts, and enthusiastically collected weaving materials in second-hand clothes markets or ceramics and urushi works in antique shops. Having witnessed that various crafts had been preserved as they should have been and that their folk customs, lifestyles, and beliefs still had kept their traditions strongly, Yanagi felt 'it should be a miracle for us to have Okinawa now in such a complicated and chaotic period of Japanese crafts.'

In the second tour to Okinawa, the main purpose was to learn the brilliance and secrets of Okinawa crafts. Shoji Hamada and Kanjiro Kawai learned making ceramics, Keisuke Serizawa learned dyeing, and Yoshitaka Yanagi and Toshio Tanaka learned weaving during this second trip. Returning Tokyo, Yanagi enthusiastically introduced Okinawa through exhibitions in the Japan Folk Crafts Museum or publications like 'Kogei' magazine. Manshichi Sakamoto, who accompanied Yanagi to the third research trip, took a huge amount of precious photos with Yanagi. Those photos include Tamaudon, an imperial mausoleum which attracted Yanagi, bridges, architectures, streets of Shuri, red roof-tiles, stone pavements, traditional Ryukyu dance, women in a Ryukyu style, pottery in the Tsuboya kiln, weaving, and so on. At the same time, the debate began over language standardization policy in Okinawa by prominent members of the Okinawa trip, and Yanagi opposed to the campaign for use of standard Japanese, insisting that splendid Okinawan dialect and culture should be proudly preserved.

After five years since Yanagi and his group visited Okinawa last in 1940, Okinawa became a battlefield of the War and was seriously devastated. The artist-craftsmen who had once learned in Okinawa with Yanagi repeatedly visited Okinawa instead of Yanagi after the War, encouraged local people, and assisted the restoration of Okinawan handicrafts. Photos taken by Sakamoto, on the other hand, are precious materials to show us architectures and landscapes of Okinawa, which were destroyed by the War.

Crafts of Okinawa from the museum collection

Crafts of Okinawa from the museum collection include ceramics with overglaze enamels or incised design, dyeing like *bingata* costume, weaving like *kasuri* or floating weave design of silk, cotton, and ramie, and urushi wares like a vermilion urushi bowl with design of *mitsudomoe* (three comma-shaped figures) and phoenix. Rubbings of sculptures of Yomochi-bashi bridge fences, which used to be a National Treasure, a simple wood tool called *akatori*, and antique paper dolls (papier-mache) are also housed, which indicate the originality and diversity of Yanagi's collection.

Okinawa and the Mingei Movement

Exhibited in this room are ceramics of Shoji Hamada and Kanjiro Kawai, who were greatly influenced by ceramics of Okinawa, ceramics by Jiro Kinjo, weaving works of Shuri by Hatsuko Miyahira and Shizuko Oshiro, weaving works of fine hemp of Yaeyama by Sachiko Aragaki, and *basbo* (banana fiber) by Toshiko Taira.

White porcelain and *Sometsuke* of Joseon Dynasty

In the Chosun peninsula, a technique of *sometsuke* was applied more frequently in the 18th century. Among them those with graceful and unpretentious paintings on milky white ground are called 'autumn grass style', and they have been very popular in Japan especially since the 20th century. White porcelains and *sometsuke* are introduced in this room, focusing on 'autumn grass style' works.

Dyeing of Okinawa *Bingata*

Soetsu Yanagi highly praised that stencil-dyeing is the most genuine and qualified among dyeing textiles, and that *bingata* is the most beautiful above all among stencil dyeing textiles. A wide variety of materials are applied as motifs such as peony, lily, cherry blossoms, paulownia tree, maple tree, crane, tortoise, phoenix, and landscapes. Wrapping cloths in a *tsutsu-gaki* style (free-hand resist dyeing) are also exhibited in the room.

Porcelains of China

Chinese porcelains of the museum collection mainly consist of old *sometsuke* and *akae*. Both were produced during the Tianqi period at the end of Ming Dynasty in Jingdezhen kilns. Using rough white porcelain and deep cobalt pigment, motifs like landscape, figures, animals and plants were freely depicted.

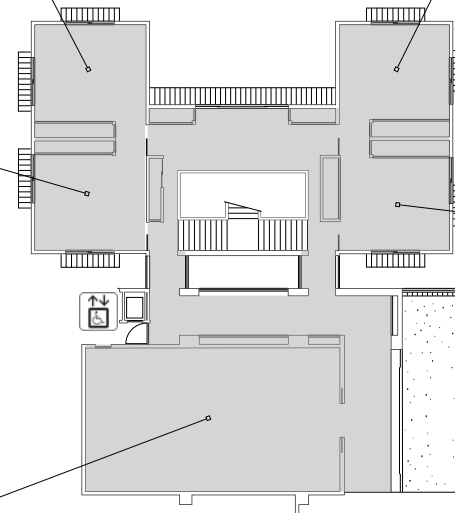
Porcelains of Japan

The museum houses about one thousand porcelains such as Imari, Saga prefecture and those made in Seto, Aichi prefecture or Hirasu, Kagoshima prefecture. Most of them have designs of geometric motifs, plants, and landscapes depicted in *gosu* pigment. In this room, about 50 pieces of excellent porcelains made in Imari including *iro-e* (overglaze enamels) works of *Kokutani-style* are exhibited.

Special Exhibition

Photos of pre-war Okinawa taken by Manshichi Sakamoto

SECOND FLOOR



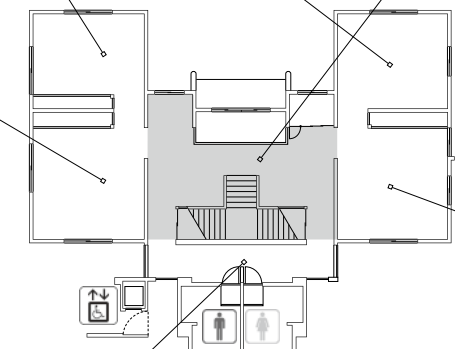
Ceramics of Okinawa

The Tsuboya ware was established by uniting various kilns of Ryukyu in 1682. This room mainly introduces daily wares called *Jo-yachi* decorated in various styles like *akae* (overglaze red enamels), white glaze design, or copper green glaze. As represented by a crescent-shaped sake server called *dachi-bin* or funerary urn called *ji-shi-gami*, a diversity of forms is also one of the attractiveness of Okinawan ceramics.

Weaving of Okinawa

In Okinawa, weavings have been produced which have regional varieties. Floating weave design called *hana-ori* of raw silk or lattice work and *kasuri* design in Shuri, *hana-ori* of cotton or *tisā-ji* in Yomitan, colored *kasuri* of ramie or white-ground *kasuri* of cotton in Yaeyama, *kasuri* of pongee in Kume Island are included. In addition, pieces of woven cloths collected by Toshio Tanaka are on display.

FIRST FLOOR



Urushi Works of Okinawa and Shisā

Urushi Works of Okinawa are characterized by the brilliance of vermilion color. On display here are bowls, bottles and round containers with gold-inlay design made at the court school for urushi craftsman in Ryukyu Kingdom period. Also, trays and food containers made in private studios after Meiji period are also introduced. Shisā (guardian lion on a rooftop) on display were made by roofers with surplus stucco after laying roof-tiles, praying for good fortune and warding off evil influences.

Paintings and Crafts with Plain and Simple Expression

Otsu-e painted as souvenirs to passing travelers as well as paintings on urushi, ceramics, and porcelains are shown in this room. Crafts and paintings of Japan sometimes have plain and simple styles, and this room showcases the attractiveness of line drawings in a simplified form.

Special Exhibition

Thematic Exhibition

Special Exhibition

Special Exhibition

Thematic Exhibition