

Commemorating the 80th anniversary

Soetsu Yanagi Path of His Collection

— focusing on crafts of Japan

September 1st to November 23rd, 2016

In 1936, Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961) founded the Japan Folk Crafts Museum (Nihon Mingeikan) in Komaba, Tokyo at the age of 47. It is known that Yanagi first found the beauty in daily crafts made by unknown craftsmen used by ordinary people, for which Yanagi coined the word 'mingei'. In addition to the first advocator of Mingei Movement, Yanagi was described as aesthete, religious philosopher, art critic, and many other terms. This fact indicates that works of Yanagi covered a wide range of fields, and also tells us that it is difficult to describe him in one word.

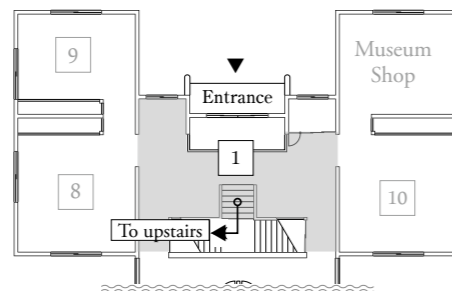
The collection of Nihon Mingeikan have mainly consisted of old crafts which should be followed by present craftsmen as a basement of Mingei Movement since its foundation. However, reviewing the private collection of Yanagi from pre-'mingei' to his late years, it could tell that his collection is broad and diverse as a collection of one individual. For example, Yanagi got interested in formed objects such as wood block printings or reproduced paintings through the western modern art introduced in 'Shirakaba' magazines, which Yanagi took part in the launch at the age of 21 in 1910. Then Yanagi began to devote himself to Korean ceramics in the late 1910's. It is certain that Yanagi already had fine pieces of Eastern antiques such as 'jar with common reed motif in iron glaze, Karatsu ware' (designated as Important Cultural Property of Japan in 2003), 'painted cow, burial figure', and Buddhist paintings. These his private collection were all donated to the museum on the occasion of his 60th birthday in 1949, and have been stored up to today.

As the third exhibition to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the museum's foundation, we would like to pay attention to Yanagi as a collector who had pursued 'Belief and Beauty' throughout his life, rather than an advocator of Mingei Movement. So, on display in this exhibition are the works whose date of collection by Yanagi is clear, centering on crafts of Japan. In this sense, it is a first challenging exhibition consisted chronologically in Nihon Mingeikan. The collection in the 'Shirakaba' period as well as the discover of 'the beauty of daily crafts', the pre-war collection which developed into the establishment of the museum, the collection of Old Tamba wares which were collected centrally after the war, the latest collection when he aimed to accomplish the theory of Buddhist aesthetics; thus, we would like to trace the collection of Soetsu Yanagi and look back his life.

FIRST FLOOR

1 'Shirakaba' period 1910-1923

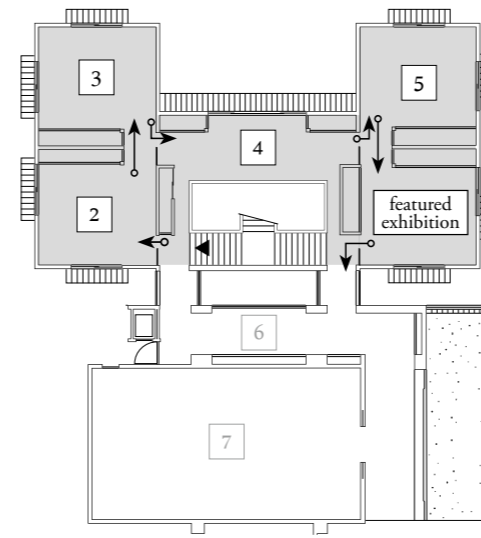
Together with Naoya Shiga and Saneatsu Mushanokoji, who achieved a great success as novelists later, Yanagi participated in the launch of a magazine 'Shirakaba' at the age of 21. Yanagi wrote articles for almost every issue, and also took part in selecting plates of western art. From the middle of *Shirakaba* period, Yanagi got increasingly interested in eastern art such as ceramics of China and Korean peninsula. First, works collected during the *Shirakaba* period, the first collection of Yanagi, are introduced.



SECOND FLOOR

2 Art of Korean Peninsula 1914-

In 1914, Hakkyo Asakawa, who lived in Korean Peninsula at that time, visited Yanagi in Abiko, Chiba prefecture to see a sculpture of Rodin. Asakawa brought a small porcelain jar as a souvenir, which is now housed in the museum as 'beveled jar with autumn flower motif, cobalt blue underglaze'. Then Yanagi got deeply impressed with this piece, started to collect Korean crafts like ceramics and porcelains which had not been evaluated yet in those days, and finally in 1924 established Korean Folk Art Museum in Seoul. He had collected Korean crafts for the rest of his life, and his pre-war collection is especially on display.



3 Beauty of Daily Wares 1924-1931

Triggered by an encounter with a sculpture of Jizo Bodhisartva by Mokuji Myoman, Soetsu Yanagi traveled throughout Japan to investigate works of Mokuji. This research trip led him to pay attention to local crafts made by unknown craftsmen unexpectedly. In 1926, Yanagi announced a prospectus for the formation of a museum of folk crafts, and engaged in collecting many crafts all over the country with his friends, potter Shoji Hamada and Kanjiro Kawai, which are introduced in this room.

4 Otsu-e Paintings, the early period c.1916-1926

Otsu-e paintings were sold to travelers as a souvenir around Oiwake, Otsu-town of present Shiga prefecture in the Edo period. Yanagi, who published a first systematic research book on Otsu-e paintings, had first got interested in Otsu-e around 1916 to 1917 in Taisho period before he coined the word 'mingei'. Yanagi collected especially Otsu-e drawn in the early period. In this room, those Otsu-e paintings from the museum collection are on display.

5 'Kogei' magazine 1931-1951

The first issue of 'Kogei' magazine published in 1931 introduced various crafts in which Yanagi and his company found beauty, and the magazine played an important role to spread out a totally new idea 'mingei'. The cover was designed by artist-craftsmen like Keisuke Serizawa, and 120 volumes were published in total by 1951. A 'Kogei' magazine itself could be a piece of splendid craft works, and various crafts introduced in the magazines are on display from the museum collection.



Plum blossoms.

ink on paper. Ming Dynasty, China, 15th century. 80.5×30.6cm.
(collected in 1953. with a 'Treasure of Soetsu')

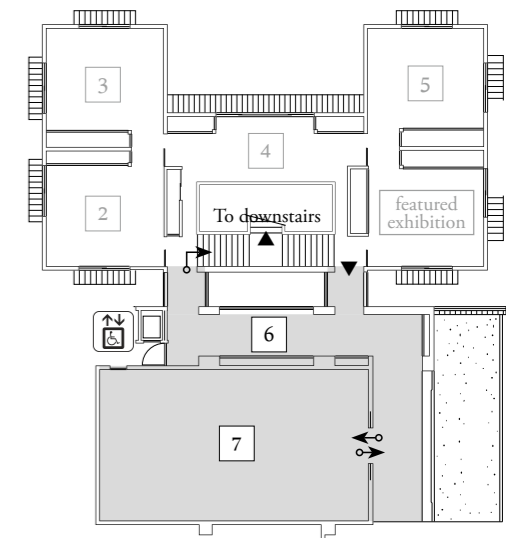
featured exhibition Honor by Soetsu Yanagi

Some collection have words by Soetsu Yanagi on storage boxes, most of which are paintings. In addition to those honorable works, the works highly appreciated by Yanagi, for example those with 'bu-tsu-ge' (short applause words for the beauty of works) as well as those on which Yanagi wrote articles are featured in this room.

SECOND FLOOR

6 Establishment of Nihon Mingeikan

It was just ten years later since the prospectus for the formation of a museum of folk crafts was announced when Nihon Mingeikan was founded. Works introduced in *Kogei* magazine vol.70, which commemorated the opening of Nihon Mingeikan, and the collection displayed before the war based on photographs at that time could be seen.



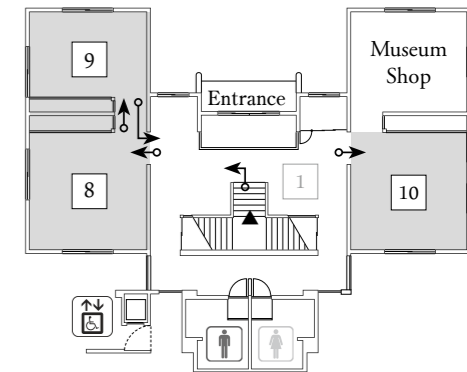
7 Present Folk Crafts of Japan 1926-1945

As indicated in the fact that the opening exhibition of Nihon Mingeikan was 'Exhibition of Works by Present Artists-Craftsmen' like Kanjiro Kawai, Shoji Hamada, Keisuke Serizawa, and Shiko Munakata, crafts which were being produced at that time were enthusiastically collected. In this room, those crafts made throughout Japan are on display along with a great masterpiece 'Map of Mingei in Japan' by Keisuke Serizawa which was produced on the occasion of 'Exhibition of Present Japanese Mingei' in 1941.

FIRST FLOOR

8 Collection of Tamba ware 1949-1961

Tamba ware was attracting attention at the very beginning of Mingei Movement, but it was actually the late years when they were particularly collected. Most of them are works called 'hai-katsugi', with ashes of wood on surface during firing. They benefited from natural resources such as fire, clay, and wood. This room shows old Tamba wares collected by Yanagi during his latest 10 years.



9 Abstract and Free Form

Yanagi, in his latest years, published books like 'Kisu-u no Bi' (the beauty of deformation), 'Chū-shō-bi ni tsuite' (about the beauty of abstract), and 'Nihon no me' (eyes of Japan), and especially paid attention to primitive abstract patterns of tribal crafts or crafts of free form like encrustations or unevenness. On display in this room are mainly works introduced in Mingei magazine vol.63 which featured abstract patterns.

10 Buddhism and Aesthetics

Yanagi sought for principles of beauty crafts bear in Buddhism in his latest years, and he collected many crafts which are related to Buddhism at the same time. In this room, crafts related to the philosophy of the gateway of the Pure Land, which influenced the formation of Yanagi's idea, Buddhist paintings and wood block prints are exhibited.

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