

Tohoku Crafts and Shiko Munakata

April 3 - June 10, 2012

It could be said that the natural climate is a mother of Mingei as well as the source of aesthetic. A world-famous woodcut printer Shiko Munakata (1903-1975) from Aomori prefecture obtained nourishment of aesthetic from the rich nature of the Tohoku region and produced many works which were full of energy. His ingenious and astonishing works of *hanga** are definitely nothing but an expression of an innocent soul.

Known for his bold composition and rich colors, Munakata was often said to have an instinctive sense. However, Munakata had awe to the all nature and a desperate prayer in his mind with a profound insight and these things fundamentally supported Munakata's works.

Speaking of a desperate prayer, there is a work titled 'In Praise of the Tohoku District' made in 1937. Munakata used as many as 120 printing blocks. This is a pair of six-fold screens and approximately 10 meter-wide. This is the largest work before the war and especially spectacular. Munakata thought of his hometown Tohoku where the life and the nature are severe and poor, prayed for fortune with help of the power of Buddha, and produced this work.

On the centre of the screen was a two-divided Amida Nyorai (Amitabha Tathagata), and Bosatsu (Bodhisattva), Rakan (Arhat), Monk, an ordinary person and Mizuko (dead baby or infant) are arranged on each side of the screen. This implies the way to the Buddhist pure land, being bathed in the light of Amida Nyorai. Munakata prayed for Buddha to appease various evil spirits or calamity by letting them go from the two-divided Amida Nyorai.**

In addition, Munakata made a work titled 'Birds of Sorrow' (*Utō Hangakan*) with an affection to his hometown Aomori in 1938.

This work is based on a *Nō* play 'Utō', a sad story about a hunter whose occupation is to kill birds and animals. This play describes a painful affection of both a hunter family who are to kill and *Utō* or rhinoceros auklet's parents and children which are to be killed. Munakata depicted a sorrow at parting of *Utō* family and a distress of the hunter who is pursued in hell for having killed. Munakata engraved these sorrows into blocks recalling his hometown.

For Munakata, these works themselves were his desperate prayer for his hometown. One year has passed since the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, and we hope that Munakata's deep prayer for repose of souls would reach the Tohoku district, where is still suffering from a disaster.

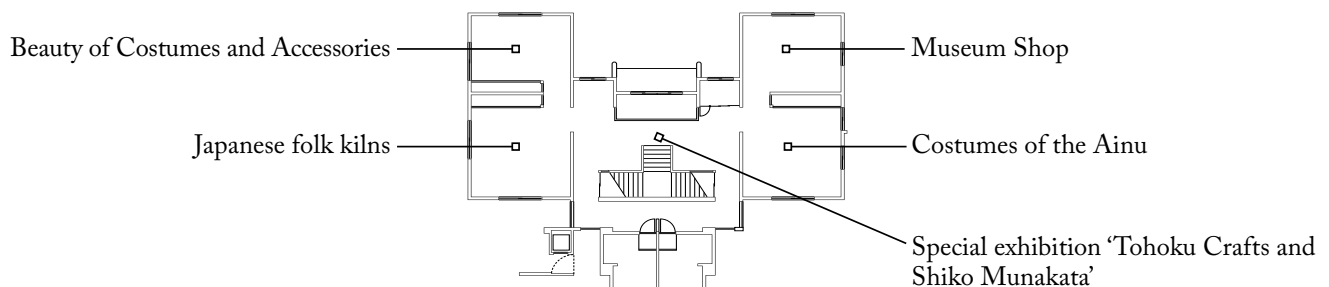
Besides in this exhibition on display are folk kilns from Tohoku such as *Kuji*, *Hirashimizu*, *Shiraiwa*, *Naraoka*, *Aizu-Hongo* and *Tsutsumi*, braided works such as *mino*, *ker*a and protector for backs called *senaka-ate*, dyed and woven works such as *katsugi*, *bishizashi* and *kogin*, fine works such as *kaba* or birch works and lacquer wares, which were all produced in the Tohoku region.

A fertile craft culture was born in a traditional and steady life of Tohoku. Its specific beauty of crafts indicates a repository of the folk crafts or rather *Mingei* in the north area of Japan.

* When Munakata said '*hanga*', he used a Chinese character '*ita*' which means block and emphasizes the importance of block itself. Usually when Japanese people say '*hanga*', a Chinese character '*han*' is used which means to be printed and emphasizes the process. This distinction meant a lot to Munakata.

** Tohoku is located in the north-east of Japan and this direction is considered to be unlucky, a devil's gate in Japan.

FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

