

Kantha and Sashiko

-Needle Works from Bengal and Tohoku

September 9th (Tue) – November 24th (Mon), 2014

Kantha is a traditional quilted fabric of the former Bengal region which is located in the fertile Bengal delta including Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. Characteristically, ordinary Kantha works have lotus flowers in the middle and paisleys on four corners. In addition, plants and animals such as the tree of life, flowers, fish, horses, elephants, tigers, peacocks, and snakes, festival floats on which people carry God and parade a street, scissors, nuts cutter and other daily objects are livingly and vividly drawn by stitches. Kantha like a picture drawn by a child with mother's love, an accurate Kantha, Kantha like a picture diary of an ordinary life, and Kantha with pray for a family's fortune. Each of them attracts people to its story. Kantha which is as large as a bed sheet is used as a blanket. Kantha as if a picture closely and carefully drawn, which are shown in this exhibition, are put on the floor on weddings or in a ceremony and brides, grooms and attendants sit around them and appreciate them. Smaller Kantha was also used as a carpet in a ceremony.

The former Bengal region is a place where cotton weavings of high quality are made with extremely thin thread, which is known as 'Dhaka muslin'. There women have a custom to draw *alpona*, auspicious omens motifs, with rice flour to invite God to their home earliest in the every morning in front of their entrance. Kantha are made in such areas with several pieces of used white cotton saris and dhotis (waist-garment mainly used by Hindu men). They are put together and stitched into various patterns basically with blue threads dyed with indigo and red threads dyed with madder. Moreover, white backgrounds around patterns are quilted with fine ripples of white stitches.

Japanese sashiko works, on the other hand, mainly from Tohoku area have several different kinds; Tsugaru *kogin* and Nambu *hishi-zashi* in Aomori prefecture, Shonai sashiko in Yamagata prefecture and so on. Tsugaru *kogin* is odd numbers of stitches with white cotton threads on thickly dyed indigo hemp ground. Groups of three, five, seven and one. *hishi-zashi* works in Nambu area are worked in groups of even number stitches with indigo cotton threads on pale indigo

hemp ground. Both Tsugaru *kogin* and *hishi-zashi* in Nambu were mainly made into workers clothes and some aprons with vivid-color wool threads would be found among *hishi-zashi* works.

In the Shonai region, a technique of sashiko was especially developed. Clothes used in Kyoto or Osaka area were shipped by cargo ships called *kitamae-bune* to this area. Then women put several pieces in layers, stitched them checked patterns or herringbone patterns and dyed them with indigo in the end. They were mainly made into workers short coats. Moreover, women embroidered on *tabi* socks, protectors for ankles and even *tabi* socks for children. In fact, embroidery not only gave warmth and strength to clothes, but it became beautiful patterns and thus it enriched their severe life in a snow country.

Kantha, colorful patterns on white grounds from Bengal region, and indigo-dyed sashiko works of Tohoku area in Japan give us different impressions to us at first sight. Both, however, have something in common. That is, women learned technique from five or six years old and embroidered stitch by stitch, spending much time. They were too poor to buy clothes or textiles freely, but women of both Bengal and Tohoku made stitches on used clothes within their reach, hoping comfortable happiness of their family. This handiwork itself must have been their comfort as well as their pleasure in a strict life.

Ms. Hiroko Iwatate, who is known as a collector of Indian textiles, first encountered Kantha just when she began to go to India in 1970's. Ms. Iwatate stayed with her friend in India and a graceful lady visited there one day. She brought a piece of Kantha. White, gentle and soft. The tone of colors was totally different from other textiles of India. It was beautiful like a white egret in a muddy pond. Ms. Iwatate got moved that this was what she had wanted.

In this exhibition, about 70 pieces of Kantha works from the collection of Iwatate Folk Textile Museum and about 60 pieces of Sashiko works of Tohoku area from the Japan Folk Crafts Museum collection are introduced.

*cooperated by Iwatate Folk Textile Museum

Various Japanese Crafts

Many craft works which decorate people's daily lives have been made in various places in Japan. *Jizai*, a pot hanger used in a *iroiri* hearth, signboards, chests used on a large ship, iron pots and bottles, layered boxes and lidded jars made of glass and so on. Please see a simple and powerful beauty which crafts for a daily life have.

Urushi Works of Japan

Urushi paintings usually have plants, flowers and auspicious omen motifs with vermilion urushi or other color urushi. The museum stores bowls, trays boxes and many others. Its attractive feature is living pictures which were drawn by craftspeople and became like patterns. In this room fine works of urushi paintings are on display.

Works by Keisuke Serizawa

A world-famous stencil dyer Keisuke Serizawa(1895-1984) encountered Soetsu Yanagi, founder of the museum, and joined the Mingei Movement. He designed, made stencil pattern, and dyed by himself. In this room, a wide variety of Serizawa's works are on display such as kimono, *obi*, washi paper, privately printed books, books designed by Serizawa and so on.

Stationary of Joseon Dynasty

In the era of Joseon Dynasty, which was praised as 'a country of writings' later, diverse kinds of stationary were made. Especially, various forms and designs of water droppers were one of the most appealing features of Joseon crafts. In this room, brush holders, paper scroll holders, ink stone and ink stone boxes, letter boxes and other stationary and stationary furniture made from different materials are on display.

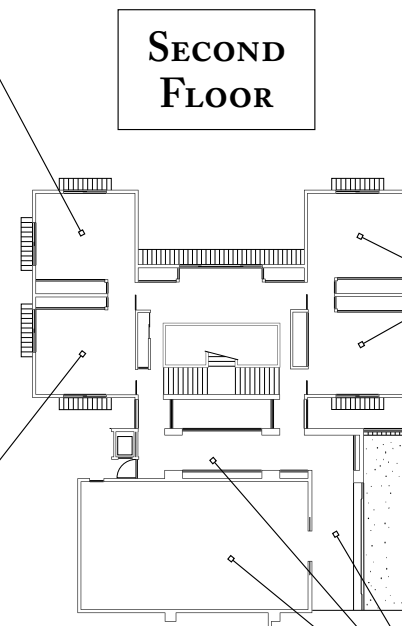
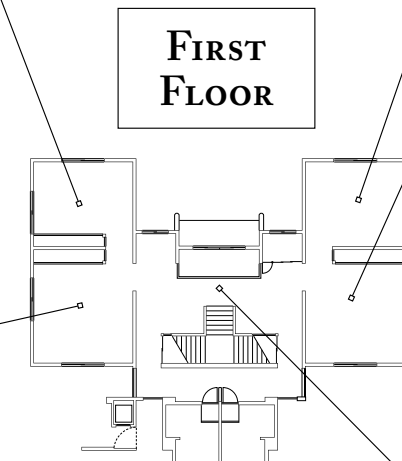
Museum Shop

The Pouring -from Japanese folk kilns-

Kettles, pots, jugs, and spouted sake jars and so on; these were essential pouring vessels. Folk kilns in various areas produced these pouring vessels with materials and ways rooted in each area. Unintentional crafts which were produced truly to their usage, with aging, have been healthy and so distinct.

Sometsuke Porcelain of Japan and China

White ground, cobalt blue under glaze porcelains. Old imari, which has a dignified beauty and refreshing appearance, and old *sometsuke* made by Chinese potters to order from Japanese tea masters, which has free-spirited patterns and attractive forms are on display.



Sashiko

Kantha

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