

THE BEAUTY OF LETTERS

-The World of Craft Letters

Jan. 10th (Sat) – March 22nd (Sun), 2015

Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the museum, had a unique view and attitude toward 'the beauty of letters'. Yanagi collected works with letters he thought were beautiful for the museum, free from established values or manners of calligraphy. Besides, he tried to make it clear and explain why the aesthetics in letters were born or what were its characteristic.

In thinking of the beauty of letters, Yanagi had two fundamental view points. One was that beautiful letters are beyond individuality. Here an individual means ego or self. An adherence to ego or self shall be sensitively reflected in works as intensions and get further from aesthetics. Therefore, letters which are more public, common to a society and don't belong to any individuals tend to have aesthetics. In other words, factors which make non-individual letters beautiful are return to tradition and indirectness. As for indirectness, Yanagi took rubbings as an example. That is, raw letters written by an individual are engraved on stones, get worn by exposing to the weather and then are transferred to paper. Letters are delivered indirectly and this is an important effect of rubbings. Yanagi carefully described about good effect of indirectness for letters.

As a representative who wrote letters of rather personal features, Yanagi cited Wang Xizhi, a Chinese calligrapher who lived in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Yanagi pointed out that calligraphy by Wang was far behind the epigraphs engraved in Han Dynasty or Six Dynasties period in beauty. Yanagi even stated that calligraphy had started collapsing since Wang emerged. Yanagi promoted not to identify letters of high technique or skill

with those which are beautiful in nature. Yanagi's words toward Wang, who is traditionally referred to as the Sage of Calligraphy, well represent Yanagi's original view of calligraphy or letters.

The other fundamental point was elements as a pattern or design. Eliminated the waste of forms and lines, figures of letters get simplified and crystallized. Then finally letters become a pattern or design. Yanagi called it patternization of letters. Furthermore Yanagi mentioned the relationship between patterns and crafts; 'Beautiful letters contain beauty as a pattern. In this sense, all the beautiful letters could be recognized to be beautiful as crafts. If letters have no beauty as crafts, they could not be beautiful. If they look beautiful, then they have some elements as crafts.' Yanagi described that letters should be also regarded as one of crafts, that is, letters are also originated in usage.

In this exhibition, 'indirect' letters drawn or written on paintings, sutras as well as ceramics, dyed works, wooden works and rubbings from the museum's collection are mainly on display. In addition, various original letters which are free from 'harm of ego' are also introduced.

These letters are timeless, beyond races and nations. Letters unknown craftspeople repeatedly wrote, letters from deep beliefs in Buddha, and letters written with no intention by ordinary people. They, without any exceptions, reach the state beyond the beauty and the ugliness. It would be an honor if you enjoy the world of craft letters which Yanagi highly admired.

Wood and Urushi Works of Japan

Raden works (brilliantly shining mother of pearl inlay works), *rankakubari* (sprinkled picture with eggshells), *negoro* (coating of black urushi covered with coatings of red urushi). Works which enriched people's daily lives are on display.

Ceramics with Trailing design

Trailing design is a technique to decorate on a ground or slip glaze, or over applied glazes with utensils such as a long-handle ladle. The ways are varied, and various characteristics could be seen. Ceramic works with this technique which was frequently used especially in Japanese folk kilns are on display.

Washi Paper Crafts -mainly textiles and clothes-

One of the characteristics of washi paper is its strength and so some washi paper is made into garments. *Shifu* is a woven works with paper yarn and *Kamiko* is clothes made of washi. In this room these clothes as well as patterns of Okinawan *bingata* and paper-folding 'Kamon-ori' works designed by Mitsuhiro Uchiyama are on display.

Ceramics of Joseon Dynasty

In this room, ceramic works of Joseon Dynasty are on display which were applied various decoration techniques such as white clay decoration, black glazes, *sometsuke*, copper red (*shinsba*) and iron glaze.

Museum Shop

Dyed and Woven Works of Japan

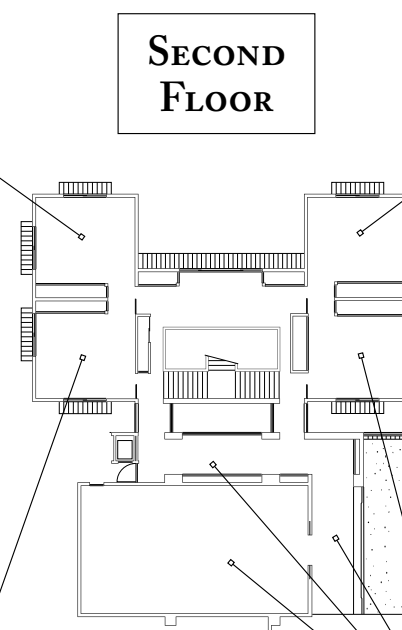
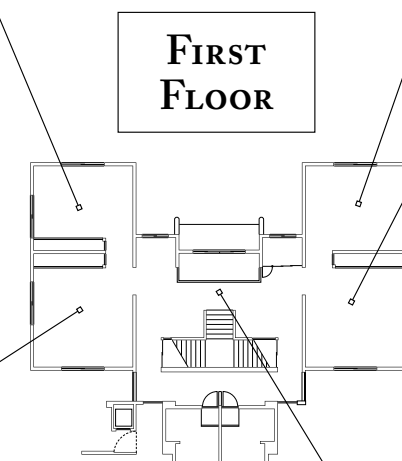
In this room kimono and cloths from various places in Japan from the late Edo period to the early Showa era are exhibited. They vary in materials, colors and designs; kasuri of hemp such as Echigo-jofu and Yamato-gasuri, woven works of silk like Kihachijo, kasuri of cotton from Kurume and San'in, Tamba-fu which are woven with cotton and waste silk yarn, tie-dyed works and so on.

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Beauty of Letters -expressions by Craft Artists

Craft artists who participated in Mingei Movement also produced some works with design of letters. In this room, works by Shiko Munakata (wood block prints), Bernard Leach (ceramics), Kenkichi Tomimoto (ceramics), and Keisuke Serizawa (dyed works) are exhibited.

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THE JAPAN FOLK CRAFTS MUSEUM

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