



Binding Colours through Textiles: Yunoki Samiro's Journey in Arts and Crafts

Monday 1st - Tuesday 2nd July, 2024

Sainsbury Institute for the Studies of Japanese Arts
and Cultures (SISJAC)

Norwich, United Kingdom

Image: © **Norio Kidera**
Samiro Yunoki, *March*, 2001
IWATATE FOLK TEXTILE MUSEUM

It is with great pleasure that I introduce Yunoki Samiro's textile work to the community of Norwich, a city historically renowned for its textile production and trade. My first encounter with Yunoki's textiles was during a warm spring in Kyoto in 2017. Besides making me feel like I had travelled to my native Latin America and driving me to wonder what motivated him to employ such warm, energetic colours despite his Japanese origins, his pieces spoke to me at a deeper level. It came to my attention that he had been involved with the *Mingei* movement and created a diverse corpus of work that continuously appeals to human sensibility.

It was years later that I decisively delved into his world, inquiring into his ethos and milestones in his journey through arts and crafts. Yunoki, born in 1922, created textile works in *katazome*, a dyeing technique that can be traced back to the Nara period (710-794), with the earliest examples of stencil dyeing found in the "*fukie no kami*," preserved in the Shōsō-in Repository of Imperial Treasures. However, its origins are connected to one of the multiple moments wherein China had a major influence on Japanese arts and culture.

Yunoki's interest in *katazome* spurred through a life-changing encounter with Serizawa Keisuke's calendar in 1946, displayed at the Ohara Museum of Art in Kurashiki. From this moment onwards, he would engage in this unique technique, pursuing a lifetime as a dye artist, constantly questioning his creative process and encouraging young apprentices to inquire into this art form. Besides his vast creative output, Yunoki has left an indelible mark on the lives of numerous women artists, who studied under his guidance at Joshibi University of Art and Design in Tokyo.

Earlier this year, Yunoki sadly passed away, at the remarkable age of 101. His passing has not gone unnoticed in Japan or abroad. An exploration of Yunoki's life and works by prominent scholars seems like the best way to commemorate his multiple achievements and enduring legacy. One of the workshop's aims is to explore how Yunoki's expertise in dyeing has inspired countless women artists in Japan. We will also touch upon postwar textile developments and Mingei's traits in transnational contexts.

I would like to express my gratitude to all who have been involved in the organisation of this workshop, particularly Miles Dodd, who had been a long-time friend and supporter of Yunoki's activities, and provided his textile pieces and books for attendees to enjoy. Thanks also to Minako Watanabe and Shizu Ara who sent valuable material related to Yunoki's activities as a professor at Joshibi University of Art and Design. I would also like to extend my thanks to Kevin Freeman from Norwich University of the Arts for allowing us to use their working space for our *Bingata* demonstration, the Sainsbury Institute for the Studies of Japanese Arts and Cultures for providing the funds and venue, Toshio Watanabe who has guided me through this process as a fellow, and the colleagues and staff at the Sainsbury Institute and the University of East Anglia for their continuous support.

Rosanna Rios Perez, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Fellow 2023 -2024

Abstracts

"Yunoki-sensei: Recollections of a warm friendship"

Miles Dodd

Nihon University

This lightweight presentation is a very brief pot-pourri of personal reflections; a little history, a little nostalgia, based on my own photographs. I will mention my favourite Yunoki works and touch on our many discussions including James Dixon, Alfred Wallis, Yanagi Sōetsu, Hamada, Leach, Ethel Mairet, Sōseki, William Morris, Zbyněk Sekal etc. I will recall our memorable experiences together:- St Ives, Kelmscott, the Beatles' museum; Dango-zaka, Sendagi; Paris (Galerie de l'Europe, Musée Guimet); and note four events in which I have exhibited and discussed Yunoki's works.

"Art Without Heroes: Mingei at the William Morris Gallery"

Roisin Inglesby

Curator, William Morris Gallery

Art Without Heroes: Mingei, an exhibition currently on display at the William Morris Gallery in East London, explores Mingei's origins, interpretations and contemporary influence. This talk discusses the curation of the exhibition in the context of William Morris's own work and the mission of the Gallery as an internationally diverse and inclusive cultural space.

"'Decolonial' and 'Trans-' Approaches to the Mingei Movement"

Yuko Kikuchi

Head of Academic Programmes, V&A and Tutor, V&A/RCA History of Design Course

How can we make sense of Mingei (the art of the people) and the Mingei movement in the 21st century, and how can we make it relevant to contemporary decolonial strategy? As a critical reaction to the uncritical and unchallenged normative interpretation of Mingei and the Mingei movement persisting in Japan, and also as an attempt to engage with current intellectual practices which have made a radical shift towards inclusion of the Global South and Black issues (with increased urgency since Black Lives Matter), this paper discusses the transnational, transformative and translational aspect of the Mingei movement. The particular focal points include Sardar Gurcharan Singh (1898–1995) known in India as 'the father of studio pottery' and the founder of the Blue pottery in Delhi, and Theaster Gates (1973-), the Chicago based scholar, artist, community activist who has proposed the idea of 'Afro Mingei'.

"Iterations of Mingei in Brazil: the role of Japanese immigrant artist-craftspeople"

Liliana Morais

Rikkyo University

In the post-war era, a new wave of Japanese immigrants arrived in Brazil. Among them were Japan-trained artists and craftspeople who had been influenced by the Mingei philosophy and movement developed in the previous decades. This talk introduces Japanese migrants who established pottery studios in the countryside of São Paulo and traces the impact of their making philosophies, processes, and civic activities in their host communities, with a focus on the rural town of Cunha. Holding the largest concentration of Japanese wood-firing climbing kilns (*noborigama*) in the country, Cunha received the title of Brazil's capital of high-temperature ceramics from the Brazilian senate in 2022. By exploring the influence of Japanese migrants on local ecosystems of craft in Brazil, we will uncover how their activities provided opportunities for change and renewal, ultimately leading to the creation of new and hybrid craft traditions, some of which align with Yanagi's criteria for folk craft.

“Grassroot Activities with Samiro Yunoki”

Tadamoto Oshima

IDÉE Director

This presentation focuses on grassroots movements themed around 'Enriching Life through Art,' inspired by the encounter with dyer and artist Samiro Yunoki. Since the initial meeting with Samiro Yunoki, a wide range of creative projects have been undertaken. These include exhibitions highlighting the appeal of *katazome* for everyday life, collaboration with the prestigious lithography studio Idem Paris for original lithograph production, and the development of products aimed at enhancing daily living. Additionally, contributions have been made to exhibitions and merchandise production at Samiro Yunoki's museums and, also, at universities, fostering diverse professional engagements arising from this connection.

“Dressmaking Fabric Transformed into Freely Floating Textiles: Yunoki’s Leap into the Arts”

Rosanna Rios Perez

Sainsbury Institute

In 1967, Yunoki Samiro travelled outside Japan for the first time, initially encouraged by his mentor, Serizawa Keisuke. However, it was in the 1980s when his understanding of craftsmanship was challenged by a life-changing trip to India with his former student Hiroko Iwatate. Yunoki's use of colour and design reflected a deeply-rooted influence from this region. It was also around this time that he persistently worked on printmaking techniques, driving him to decrease his textile production and later question his process as a dye artist. In this presentation, we will examine significant inflection points in Yunoki's career to delineate how his conception of textiles shifted from the *Mingei* folk craft ideal to the emergence of large, abstract, monochrome dye works.

“*Katazome*: Economic viability of the craft and continuity of the tradition”

Maria Santamaria Hergueta

International Christian University

Katazome, or stencil dyeing, is a group of traditional folk textile dyeing techniques in Japan. Although its roots can be traced back several centuries, modern *katazome* is particularly associated with the Mingei Movement of the 1920s and with Serizawa Keisuke. As other traditional crafts, *katazome* has experienced three waves of popularity coinciding with Mingei, the aftermath of WW2 (1950s), and the response to massive import of crafts into Japan (1970s). The last 50 years have witnessed a steady decrease in the consumption of *katazome* and its production, with a gradual disappearance of traditional *kōbō*.

The challenges confronting the traditional folk textile dyeing in Japan in a globalized economy, which is focused on economic efficiency, are tremendous. Although it requires strenuous efforts to ensure the economic viability of traditional folk textile dyeing as an indigenous/genuine Japanese craft, the continuity of the tradition is not at risk. This is due to several factors. On the one hand, traditional *kōbō* have streamlined their creation towards saleable crafts in order to survive, leaving master-signed pieces for an elite niche of consumers. Other *kōbō* have internalized new production techniques that have modernized the tradition. At the same time, the market is flooded with products sold as “traditional” dyeing, with consumers priming lower prices than the craftsmanship, the place of production (*kōbō*), and artisanal techniques of production.

The continuity of the *katazome* tradition is also ensured by the network of mediators supporting the visual, cultural, and symbolic consumptions of the craft through successful strategies. Profit and non-for-profit intermediaries compete and collaborate at prefectural and local levels, piggybacking on national initiatives. These national initiatives enhance the national culture and identity of Japan, with some of them also supporting the economic recovery of the craft sector at local level.

It is evident that the folk textile dyeing tradition is modernizing as a response to liberal policies pursuing economic efficiency. This modernization has provoked changes in *katazome* production, impacting on the craftspeople and their *kōbō*. These changes illustrate how the tradition is evolving. In such a dynamic situation, it is worth exploring those options which would contribute to the survival of a diversified and vibrant traditional folk textile dyeing technique in Japan.

"Addressing the possibilities of katanori and katagami by comparing katazome in Japan and China"

Ko Shingen

Lecturer, Tokyo Kasei Gakuin University

This presentation focuses on Katazome, which has roots in China and developed independently in Japan. In my hometown, Nantong City, Jiangsu Province, there is a traditional technique called LAN YIN HUA BU, which has many similarities with Japanese Katazome but also many differences. By comparing Japanese Katazome and Chinese LAN YIN HUA BU, I have grasped the dyeing techniques of Katazome and considered how Katazome should be adapted to modern times. After analyzing the characteristics of Japanese Katazome and LAN YIN HUA BU, I clarified the differences between the 'Katanori' and 'Katagami' used for dyeing in Japan and China and compared the differences between them. Then, I conducted experiments to explore the possibility of improving raw materials employed in 'Katanori' and manufacturing 'Katagami' using modern technology.

“Resilience in Dye: Unraveling Historical Narratives Through Bingata Kimono”

Eriko Tomizawa-Kay

University of East Anglia

Bingata Kimono, originating from the Ryukyu Kingdom, serves as a compelling medium for exploring resilience and historical narratives. This traditional dyeing technique, renowned for its vivid patterns, was initially reserved for royalty but faced decline under the Meiji government's assimilation policies. Despite this, Bingata became cherished by intellectuals and artists, such as Yanagi Soetsu (1889–1961) and Fujita Tsuguharu (1886–1968), who recognised its cultural significance. Over time, Bingata's image became intertwined with Japan's mingei movement and exoticism.

The pre-war painting "Ryukyuan Classical Harmony" (1939) by Nadoyama Aijun (1906–1970) beautifully captures the elegance of Ryukyuan society and the external influences that attempted to redefine its cultural identity. In contrast, contemporary artist Yuken Teruya's "You-I You-I" juxtaposes traditional Bingata patterns with images of US military bases, offering a critique of the ongoing implications in Okinawa. Teruya's work is a powerful assertion of Okinawan agency, transforming the narrative from passive subjects to active cultural participants, a testament to the resilience of the Okinawan people.

Adapting the Bingata Kimono in contemporary Okinawan art underscores the ongoing efforts to reclaim and preserve cultural identity. Artists, as active cultural participants, are reclaiming and reinterpreting Bingata. They embed it with reflections on historical injustices while preserving traditional aesthetics. These challenges imposed historical narratives and fosters a deeper understanding of Okinawan history and identity. Their work significantly contributes to the broader discourse on cultural preservation and transformation, marking a new chapter in the narrative of Bingata Kimono.

“Pictorializing Okinawa: Serizawa Keisuke’s gaze on Okinawan Culture”

Ana Trujillo Dennis

Comillas Pontifical University

Serizawa Keisuke first became acquainted with Okinawan *bingata* in 1928 and travelled for the first time to Okinawa Prefecture in 1939 as part of a Mingei research group led by Yanagi Muneyoshi. From that time on, and throughout his career, Okinawa seems to have occupied an important place in Serizawa's imagination. This is reflected in how references to the Ryūkyū Islands appear constantly in Serizawa's work throughout his life in multiple formats: kimono, obi, folding screens, wall hangings, illustrated books, etc. This presentation aims to situate Serizawa's Okinawa-inspired work within the artist's own gaze on Japan's southernmost prefecture, not only as part of the Mingei group's relation with Okinawa, but also as part of a broader Japanese gaze towards the Ryūkyū Islands.

“The Spirit of Samiro Yunoki's Creation: Enjoying the challenges of a creative process”

Minako Watanabe

Joshi University of Art and Design

Samiro Yunoki, who died this year at the age of 101, was a leading Japanese artist who developed his unique style of expression and attracted many people with his richly coloured works.

His first encounter with Keisuke Serizawa's work led him to the world of dyeing. As he studied under Serizawa, he became eagerly involved with artists of the Mingei Movement and developed his works while participating in the activities of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum and the Japan Folk Crafts Association. He also took part in the pioneering period of the Department of Textiles at Joshi University of Art and Design, which was established soon after the end of World War II. During this time, he laid the foundation of arts and crafts education, together with Soetsu Yanagi, Keisuke Serizawa, and Yoshitaka Yanagi. Since then, he has spent about half a century of his more than 70-year life as an artist, as well as a professor, sharing his knowledge with students in the field of art education.

This presentation will focus on his creative and educational spirit cultivated at Joshi University of Art and Design. By introducing the new Chusen technique that Yunoki established with his students and his daily life as a teacher, I will explore his unique theory of education and spirit of craftsmanship. Samiro Yunoki's spirit of making things is to discover and enjoy the fun that occurs in the process of creating things, and to challenge its creative possibilities continuously.

By addressing his daily life as an artist and ethos as an educator, the world of Samiro Yunoki will be revealed, as an individual who accomplished artistic expression beyond the possibility of crafts by thinking deeply about the spirit of craftsmanship.

“Ilse Watanabe and the knitwear boom in post-war Japan”

Toshio Watanabe

Sainsbury Institute

In 1948 Ilse Watanabe, my German mother, published *Saishin Keito Amimono Zenshū* (Complete works of the latest yarn knitwear) from Ondorisha, Tokyo. This hit the immediate postwar market in Japan with enticing colour illustrations, using attractive European models and with clear and detailed instructions of how to make each illustrated item. This Complete Works series has produced new volumes each year for nine years and the first edition continued to be republished with different covers until 1952, quite unusual for this kind of stylebooks. This paper will try to tell the story of a German designer in postwar Japan within the context of postwar knitwear boom (late 1940s-early 1960s), women’s education in handicrafts and also how this affected their roles played within the Japanese society at that time. The paper will conclude with the story of Ilse Watanabe’s assistant, Itō Hiroko, who became a prominent knitwear designer in her own right and was handpicked by the Ministry of Imperial Household as the knitting teacher of the Empress Emerita Michiko. As it so happens, two of Itō’s best works have been donated by her to the V&A and are currently on view at the Museum.

"From Mingei to Studio Weaver: MUNEHIRO Rikizo's Cultivation of Ikat *Kasuri* Technique and Life."

Tomo Yoshizawa

Researcher and Cultural Translator

Tomo YOSHIZAWA invites the audience into the life and creative journey of her grandfather, Rikizo MUNEHIRO, who was designated Living National Treasure for his *tsumugi*, pongee silk, weaving pattern technique.

Rikizo turned to pongee silk weaving after WW2 as an industry to support the struggling local community in Gujo Hachiman, Gifu.

Among many supports Rikizo received, creators and weavers from the Mingei movement, including one of the founding members Kajiro KAWAI, took a crucial part in forming his craft, as well as his philosophy.

Through her presentation, Tomo depicts the ideal of Mingei through MUNEHIRO's works and life, and the art born of the extraordinary time of Japan.

Programme

Monday 1 July, 13.30 – 17.00

Transnational Mingei: Exchange and Influences from Other Localities

13:30 – 13:40: Opening Remarks

Rosanna Rios Perez, Sainsbury Institute

“‘Decolonial’ and ‘Trans-’ Approaches to the Mingei Movement”

Yuko Kikuchi (Head of Academic Programmes, V&A and Tutor, V&A/RCA History of Design Course)

“Iterations of Mingei in Brazil: the role of Japanese immigrant artist-craftspeople”

Liliana Morais (Rikkyo University)

“Art Without Heroes: Mingei at the William Morris Gallery”

Roisin Inglesby (Curator, William Morris Gallery)

——Short break——

“Pictorializing Okinawa: Serizawa Keisuke’s gaze on Okinawan culture”

Ana Trujillo Dennis (Universidad Pontificia Comillas)

“Resilience in Dye: Unraveling Colonial Narratives Through Bingata Kimono”

Eriko Tomizawa-Kay (University of East Anglia)

CHAIR: Simon Kaner, Executive Director, Sainsbury Institute

Tuesday 2 July, 9.30 – 12:00

Textiles in Japan: Handicraft Groups and Diffusion of Dyeing Techniques

“Ilse Watanabe and the knitwear boom in post-war Japan”

Toshio Watanabe (Sainsbury Institute)

“From Mingei to Studio Weaver: MUNEHIRO Rikizo’s Cultivation of Ikat *Kasuri* Technique and Life.”

Tomo Yoshizawa (Researcher and Cultural Translator)

——*Short break*——

“Addressing the possibilities of *katanori* and *katagami* by comparing *katazome* in Japan and China”

Ko Shingen (Lecturer, Tokyo Kasei Gakuin University)

“*Katazome*: Economic viability of the craft and continuity of the tradition”

Maria Santamaria Hergueta (International Christian University)

CHAIR: Eriko Tomizawa-Kay, Lecturer in Japanese Language and Culture, University of East Anglia

13:30 – 17:00

Yunoki Samiro's Journey in Arts and Crafts

“The Spirit of Samiro Yunoki's Creation: Enjoying the challenges of a creative process”

Minako Watanabe (Joshibi University of Art and Design)

“Dressmaking Fabric Transformed into Freely Floating Textiles: Yunoki's Leap into the Arts”

Rosanna Rios Perez (Sainsbury Institute)

——*Short break*——

“Grassroot Activities with Yunoki Samiro”

Tadamoto Oshima (IDÉE Director and Planner)

“Yunoki-sensei: Recollections of a warm friendship”

Miles Dodd (Nihon University)

– General discussion –

Closing Remarks

CHAIR: Rosanna Rios Perez, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Fellow