



**Kofushiwaki
Tsukasa**
古伏脇司
born 1961

Kofushiwaki chose to study design instead of painting or sculpture, both of which he saw as being limited and constrained within a defined framework. His abstract figurations constitute a radical deviation from traditional lacquer art. He improvises and spontaneously builds dynamic sculptures of unique character while also honoring the venerable medium of lacquer.

Kofushiwaki discovered his creative approach in his first major work, which was nine feet wide. He had intended to complete it by applying a glossy finish, but its large size made that technically impossible. Because the unfinished surface actually suited the sculpture, the young artist recognized that he had unintentionally created a work that went beyond his initial plan.





Fujita Toshiaki

藤田敏彰

1959–2016

Fujita belonged to the first generation of artists who, in the mid-1980s, sought to distance themselves from the time-honored conventions of lacquer art in order to create vital new forms. After graduation from art school, he decided he did not want to be bound by the constraints of functionalism and chose instead to make only abstract sculptures. “I wish to liberate people,” he explained, “from the idea that lacquer is nothing more than a coating by creating lacquer work that can be understood in a direct sensual manner by anyone.”

About a decade ago, as Fujita began suffering from a serious illness, making new works became increasingly difficult. He died unexpectedly in May of 2016.





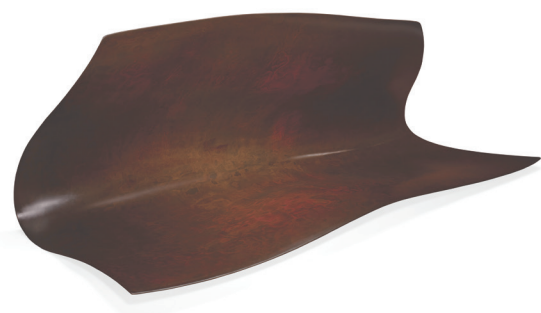
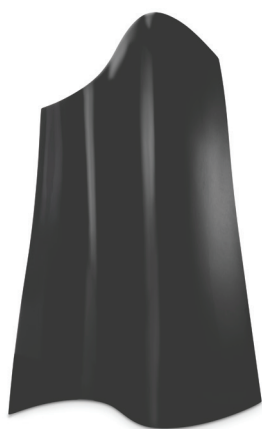
Tanaka Nobuyuki

田中信行

born 1959

Tanaka was drawn to lacquer because of its texture, its glossy smoothness. He finds inspiration in natural phenomena such as the diversity of plants and the irregularity and unpredictability of water in waterfalls. Decorating works with mother-of-pearl or other embellishments does not appeal to him. Instead, he favors a simple surface conveying a kind of purity that recalls paintings by the American Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko.

In 1994, Tanaka began exploring the use of Styrofoam to produce organic forms. Since 1999 he has trained next-generation artists such as Murata Yoshihiko, Aoki Chie, and Yokouchi Mie, all represented in this exhibition.





Kurimoto Natsuki

栗本夏樹
born 1961

Prolific and innovative, Kurimoto in the late 1980s focused on creating massive, intensely colored, three-dimensional mixed-media works. In 1987 he was baptized a Catholic, an event that affected him both personally and artistically. To make a lacquer work, the artist must first purify the lacquer and then diligently labor to achieve the desired outcome. For Kurimoto, this exacting process was akin to tending to one's soul. As he became profoundly interested in the ritualistic, religious, and social aspects of life, the titles he gave some works in the early 1990s—for example, *A Priest's Crown* and *Praying Hands III*—reflect his spiritual growth.

In 1993 Kurimoto became a full-time faculty member at the Kyoto City University of Arts. As an academic, he trains next-generation artists such as Sano Akira and Someya Satoshi, both of whom are represented in this exhibition.





**Matsushima
Sakurako**
松島さくら子
born 1965

As a young woman, Matsushima was fascinated with jewelry. After first creating traditional lacquerware, such as bowls and plates, she began applying lacquer to her jewelry designs. In 1991, with a university degree in lacquer art, she began a postgraduate study of metal carving, a pursuit she soon realized would limit her in creating larger “body jewelry.”

Matsushima believes nature is the driving force behind her art, and she considers the conception of a new work to be an instinctive, though time-consuming, process. It is vital to Matsushima that her works show a balance among the five elements identified in Japanese philosophy—earth, water, fire, wind, and void.





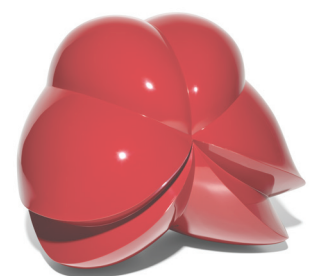
Sasai Fumie

笹井史恵

born 1973

Sasai enrolled at the Kyoto City University of Arts to study ceramics. But she quickly abandoned that medium once she realized she would lack total control over her creations because clay shrinks during the firing process. Exploring other possibilities, she was attracted to lacquer. The step-by-step application of multiple layers suited her personality. Round shapes became her signature design motif, and after receiving a commission from the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Kyoto, she began embellishing them with raised lines.

Even in her functional pieces, Sasai aspires to produce sculptural forms she believes have universal appeal, such as flowers, fruits, and children. Her preference for matte surfaces reflects her hope that people will touch her work (outside a museum!) and enjoy the feel of the lacquer surface.





Muramoto Shingo

村本真吾

born 1970

Muramoto experimented with various sculptural forms before adopting his signature style—small wing-like and leaf-like shapes, which he introduced in 2002. A group of objects collectively titled *Wing of Foliage* was made by stretching hemp cloth over bowed bamboo twigs, a technique Muramoto developed himself. His observations of nature and appreciation of the interrelationships of fauna and flora led him to this new form.

Muramoto's technical mastery and exceptional lacquer artistry are widely recognized, and he has been commissioned to work on culturally significant buildings. For example, he helped restore a part of Tokyo's Zōjōji temple (1632), which is registered as an Important Cultural Property, and he restored the gold leaf at Akasaka Palace, now Japan's State Guest House, where visiting foreign dignitaries stay.





Murata Yoshihiko

村田佳彦

born 1977

As an art student, Murata had intended to learn wood-working in order to design furniture, but then he decided on lacquer instead. His approach at first was utilitarian but eventually shifted to the abstract. During his student days, he had considered how black luster lacquer might be used to suggest shadows, and he imagined how the lines of three-dimensional shapes would flow. Since 2006 he has translated these notions into freestanding works and wall pieces that he calls Silhouettes. The creatures Murata frequently encounters near his remote home in Nanto, Toyama Prefecture—snakes, feral cats, weasels, frogs—inspire him to create new objects. He uses maple wood as a substrate, or base. Although it is difficult to carve, he prefers maple because it is flexible and doesn't snap easily.



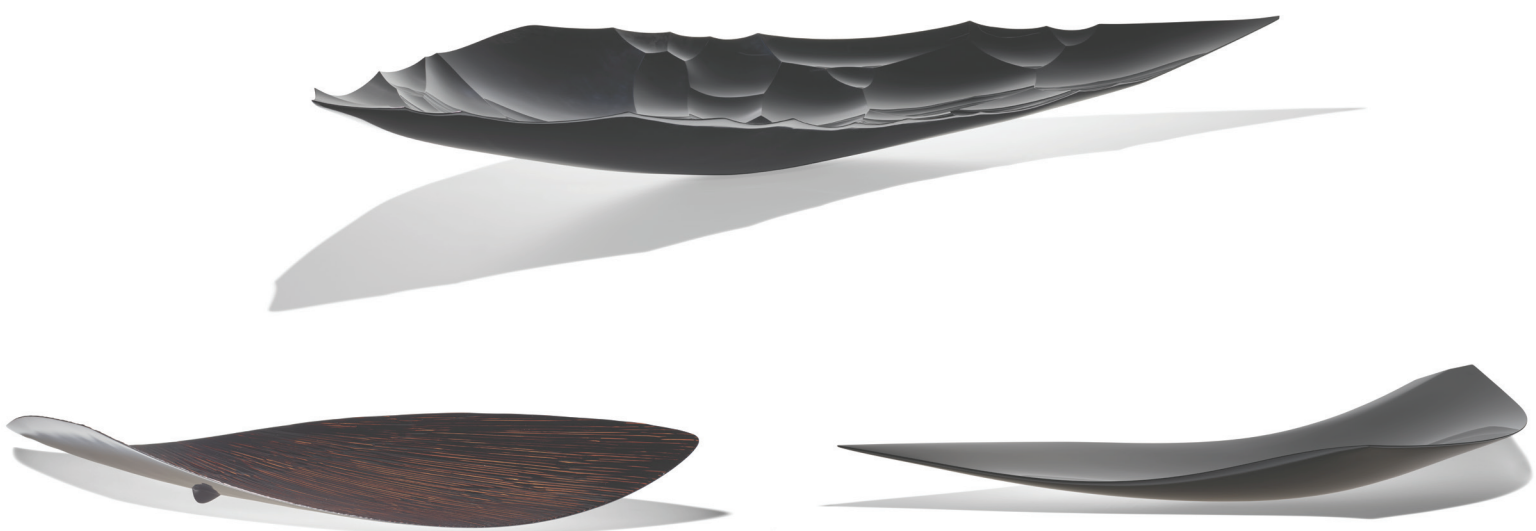


Igawa Takeshi

井川健

born 1980

When Igawa entered the Kyoto City University of Arts, he was particularly interested in woodworking and knew little about lacquer. Eventually, however, his growing preference for lacquer prompted him to write his doctoral dissertation on expressions achievable with lacquer coating on various substrate materials. His signature forms resemble steel blades or shards of broken glass. The play of light and shadow over their highly polished surfaces enhances the deep luster of the lacquer finish. To fashion large, free-form lacquer objects, Igawa uses high-quality expanded polyurethane as a substrate instead of the traditional wood.





Aoki Chie

青木千絵

born 1981

Aoki chose a career as a lacquer artist because working in this medium she could achieve distinctive surfaces and create a seemingly limitless number of forms. She began studying lacquer art under Tanaka Nobuyuki, who is also represented in this exhibition. Aoki says she was greatly influenced by the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, who addressed psychological themes in his art, and the Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti, who sculpted attenuated bodies that express existential struggle. Aoki's practice of manipulating the natural form of the human body exposes, she believes, the essential darkness in human beings.



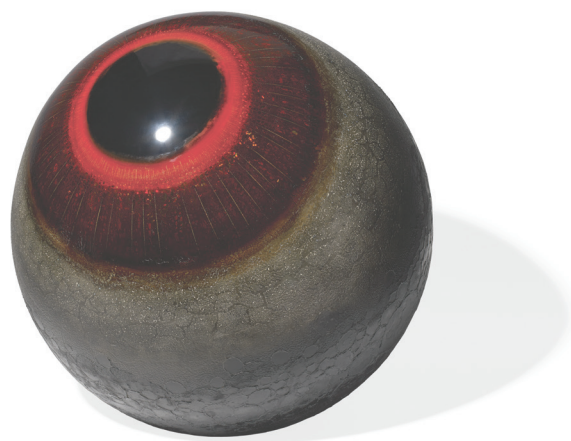


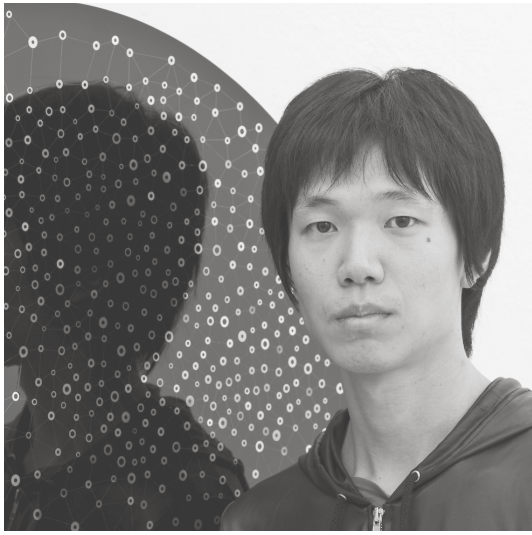
Yokouchi Mie

横内みえ

born 1982

The mysterious texture of lacquer intrigued Yokouchi the first time she painted the medium on a wooden board. In the objects she has since created, she attempts to convey her belief that lacquer is almost animate. Trained at the Kanazawa College of Art under Tanaka Nobuyuki, she has made large abstract sculptures and, more recently, small tableware pieces.





Ishizuka Genta

石塚源太
born 1982

As an elementary school student, Ishizuka showed an interest in experimenting with unlikely materials, a proclivity that eventually drew him to lacquer as an artistic medium. By integrating commonplace items into his works, he defies convention and expands the potential of lacquer art. The reaction of viewers to the unexpected in his sculptures intrigues and gratifies him.

The signature works of Ishizuka are black and red lacquer panels decorated with mundane metal objects—knife blades, staples, paper clips, washers, fish hooks. He strives to make ordinary items appear unfamiliar. He wants viewers to rediscover them in surprising new guises as pieces of mother-of-pearl, shell, or precious metal powders—materials traditionally used to embellish lacquer art. He has even incorporated the worn blades from pencil sharpeners, which he collected as a child.





Aoki Kōdō

青木宏懂

born 1976

When he was 24, Aoki visited Kyoto and saw an ancient Chinese bronze at the museum of the Sumitomo Collection. The vessel's decoration resembled animals, especially insects, which had intrigued him since childhood. In 2004, inspired by that venerable object, he created his first “protection box” (*shubako*), standing a stately 31½ inches. Protection is important in the life of animals, and Aoki is responsive to that need. He regards the lacquer containers he makes as time capsules meant to shelter their contents in perpetuity.





Yoshino Takamasa

吉野貴将

born 1976

Bullied as a child, Yoshino found comfort in the beauty of dolls. Eventually he sought to craft dolls of his own, seeing them as an expressive medium. But then he switched to lacquer.

Today, Yoshino creates fantastic figurative sculptures that he calls “idols” (*gūzō*). To him, this term alludes to the objects of longing and worship he feels bound to make. Lacquer, he believes, is the ideal medium. He regards it as the life of the trees from which it is extracted, drop by drop. Animals, plants, and humans inspire his idols, which symbolically exhale this essence of life. The anime and manga characters associated with the renowned Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki, director of *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* (2001), also inspire him.





Sano Akira

佐野暁

born 1981

Sano began studying lacquer under Kurimoto Natsuki, who is also represented in this exhibition. During a half-year residency in Germany in 2007, he became aware of how Germans generally perceived Japan and its culture and noticed their particular attention to manga and anime. This encouraged him to promote an interest in lacquer abroad, and he decided to make objects reflecting two distinct aspects of Japanese popular culture—*kawaii* (cute) and *kyarakutaa* (character). The popularity of clothing, appearance, and even behavior considered “cute” emerged as a phenomenon in Japan in the 1970s and spread to all age groups and areas of life. Mascots in the form of anime characters are now ubiquitous in advertisements not only for products but also for nearly every Japanese institution, from museums to the military to prisons.





**Someya
Satoshi**
染谷聡
born 1983

Someya was born in Tokyo but soon moved with his parents to Indonesia, where he lived until he was seven years old. An early interest in traditional Buddhist statues—fashioned from wood, metal, clay, or stone or from dry lacquer over a mold—fostered his love of lacquer. The decorative features of Edo- and Meiji-period lacquerware are discernible in Someya’s figurative sculptures, but his work most closely resembles Pop art, which emerged in the 1960s, taking its imagery and subject matter from popular consumer culture.

Someya is intrigued by the myriad ways lacquer art can be decorated, and his playfulness and penchant for innovation seem unlimited. In 2008 he began a series of fantasy beasts whose heads resemble traditional lacquered bowls, with the bowl’s foot as the creature’s face.

