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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN  
CRAFT - GLASS**

**YANAGI SOETSU, HIS MINGEI MOVEMENT  
AND HIS ADVICE TO ARTIST/MAKERS ON THE FUTURE OF  
CRAFTS IN AN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART  
& DESIGN AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES AND IN  
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE, FACULTY OF CRAFT**

**DEPARTMENT OF GLASS**

**BY**

**ELAINE RUTH GRIFFIN  
MARCH 1994**



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN  
CHART-Glass

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SWIFT BROAD

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my appreciation to the following people for their guidance and support in the writing of this thesis:

- Mrs Tepko A Utsumi, Programme Director, Japan Folk Crafts Museum
- Mrs Gemma Bradley, Assistant Librarian, National College of Art and Design
- Dr Nicola Gordon Bowe, Lecturer in Design, National College of Art and Design



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must first express my appreciation to the following people for their assistance and support in the writing of this thesis:

My first and most important person is my father, Mr. [Name], who has been a constant source of encouragement and support throughout my life.

My second person is my mother, Mrs. [Name], who has been a constant source of encouragement and support throughout my life.

My third person is my brother, Mr. [Name], who has been a constant source of encouragement and support throughout my life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ever since I began my studies in glass design, I have never felt connected to or particularly inspired by the people who lead the field in contemporary glass making. This is not to say that I have not been impressed by their technical knowledge and professionalism, but as a person, I find it hard to relate to images in glossy catalogues and to the knowledge that these pieces were formed from the most hi-tech and expensive equipment available to the modern day glass maker.

It is for this reason that I began to find traditional folk crafts much more rewarding and inspirational for my own work. I became fascinated by the ability of ordinary people to recognise and appreciate what nature had to offer them, and to use these ready provided raw materials to make utilitarian objects that fulfilled the needs of their daily living.

As my interest in folk crafts developed, I found myself drawn towards *mingei*, the traditional folk crafts of Japan. Their use of simple forms, sensitive approach towards natural materials, their spontaneity and non-egocentricity are all qualities which I empathise with and try to incorporate into my own work, as a contemporary craft designer. It seems to me also that the quality of life was enriched by the constant use of these humble, yet beautiful, objects, which the pre-industrial people of Japan surrounded themselves with, giving them a sense of familiarity and security, something which contemporary crafts seem to have transcended in their desire to be viewed as art forms.

The more I absorbed myself in traditional folk crafts, the more I felt removed from what contemporary crafts had to offer and often wondered how or if it was possible to bridge the gap between the two opposing methods of production. As an emerging artist/maker, I questioned the possibility of working with similar ethics and approaches to folk craft production, in a world that had developed so much, scientifically and industrially. To me it seemed impossible to find a solution to this dilemma, for life has evolved so rapidly







since the production of folk crafts and after all, it was industrialisation, in most cases, that caused their production to cease. I could not envisage a way of maintaining a balance or even finding a point of connection whereby one method could live alongside and complement the other.

That is, until I discovered the teachings and philosophies of Yanagi Soetsu, a Japanese philosophy graduate, who devoted his life to the preservation and re-education of the masses in the appreciation of traditional folk crafts. Although never a maker, Yanagi worked closely with many artisans, such as Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada and Tomimoto Kenkichi, and used his relationships with them as an insight into the development of the folk craft maker, to the artist/maker and the difficulties that arose from the transition of local folk crafts to modern industrialisation. Yanagi was highly respected among many makers for his seeing eye and his ability to recognise the beauty in common objects. A deep belief in truth, faith and beauty as a unity underlaid his life and throughout his search for beauty and the opposition he encountered, his beliefs never wavered.

My thesis will be divided into two parts, each consisting of two chapters. The first chapter will deal with Japan's history and the circumstances surrounding the decline of her traditional folk crafts. I will give an account of the production of crafts in Japan before industrialisation and the circumstances that contributed to their flourishing. I will then proceed to illustrate how mechanisation led to a lower standard of quality in folk craft and eventually to its demise.

The second chapter is dedicated to Yanagi Soetsu, his life and the goals which he achieved. Accounts will be given of his early involvement with art, his friendship with Bernard Leach, which fuelled his interest in traditional folk crafts and the occurrences which led to his setting up of the *Nippon Mingeikan*, the Japanese Folk Crafts Museum.

The second part of my thesis deals with the philosophies and beliefs of Yanagi Soetsu. The third chapter will give an insight into Yanagi's thoughts on the beauty and appreciation of folk crafts. I will use relevant examples to illustrate Yanagi's methods of appreciation and will also at this point talk about the working ethics of the traditional Japanese craftsman.







In my fourth chapter I will give a description of what Yanagi predicted for the future of crafts in an industrial society, and what he believed the responsibility of the artist/craftsman was in order to further develop and encourage the growth of its production. I will draw on a relevant example of a contemporary designer, Kaj Franck, to support his argument.



in the future of the world, we must have a better understanding of the world as it is, and of the forces that are shaping it. This is the first step in the process of world peace. It is the first step in the process of world unity. It is the first step in the process of world progress. It is the first step in the process of world happiness. It is the first step in the process of world peace.

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## PART ONE



PART ONE

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## CHAPTER 1

### JAPAN'S HISTORY: ITS EFFECT ON HER TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Yanagi Soetsu (1889-1961) was born in Tokyo and grew to manhood during the late *Meiji* and early *Taisho* periods, a time of important historical and social development in Japan. Under the rule of the *Meiji* government, Japan had just gone through an almost overnight industrial revolution in 1868, one of the most rapid and dramatic transformations the world has ever seen, and by the early 1900s, was in the throws of Westernised industrialisation. As a result, this modernised industrialisation, which placed heavy importance on mass production and standardisation, practically destroyed the traditional crafts of Japan.

Growing up in this rapid time of change, Yanagi as a young man witnessed this huge influx of Western thought and realised its detrimental effect on Japan's traditional heritage, especially her many distinctive crafts. Compelled by a strong belief in cultural identity and appalled by this new wave of disowning, ignoring and discarding everything connected with the past which was sweeping across Japan, Yanagi made a resolution to devote his life to the preservation of folk crafts and to the re-education of the masses in its appreciation.

One may wonder why Japan so readily discarded her rich culture, only to replace it with one of industry and technology, but for a number of political and historical reasons, by the time the *Meiji* restoration came about, the Japanese as a nation felt that they had a lot of catching up to do.

For over two hundred years, Japan (see Figure 1) lived in self-imposed isolation, cutting itself off from the rest of the world and its economic and political activities. This situation first arose in 1587 when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ruler of Japan at that time, issued a decree of expulsion against foreign religious missionaries. It was believed then, in official quarters, that









Figure 1: Map of Japan. Taken from: *The Edinburgh World Atlas*, Edinburgh, John Bartholomew & Son Ltd., 1954.







the Spanish and Portuguese were using their religious missions as a pretence for the preparation of an armed invasion. Being anxious about security, his successor, Ieyasu, intensified the expulsion policy until by 1689 all foreigners, with the exception of a few Dutch and Chinese, were denied entry into the country, the Chinese being confined to the city of Nagasaki, while the Dutch maintained limited access to their trading station on the artificial island of Deshima in Nagasaki port. The Japanese themselves were forbidden to travel abroad under a death penalty. So complete was the prohibition that not only did any trace of Christian influence vanish from Japan, but with it the outside influence of the Western world.

Another important factor to note is that before the *Meiji* restoration, Japan was divided up into provinces which were ruled by feudal lords, the Daimyo. These Daimyo acquired their land by way of the sword and collected taxes from their people in return for the use of the land, some of them enforcing certain labour restrictions on their subjects. Each fife or province of the feudal system was a self-sufficient, self-sustaining economic unit and existed in relative isolation from the other fifes. Travel between fifes was quite restricted, with border checking posts between each province, the result being that most people remained in their own village and maintained their role as part of the labour force.

Even though these situations seem quite harsh on the people of Japan, they did nothing but encourage their traditional crafts to flourish. Craft production was a local activity and each town produced its own speciality, with a distinctive style and technique. Due to the difficulty that travelling entailed, the craftsmen of one fife rarely interacted with those of another, thus keeping their own style unique and uninfluenced by what was being produced in the neighbouring provinces. It is interesting to note that in Japan, it is customary to refer to articles by the names of the places in which they were produced, so unique are her crafts, due to this feudal structure, that each product is recognisable from that made in another fife. For example, *Yuki* is a kind of *tsumugi*, or homespun silk, produced and distributed from Yuki in Ibaragi Prefecture. Another factor which contributed to this preservation of craft techniques was the fact that each Daimyo jealously guarded the technical secrets of the crafts people in his fife from those in the neighbouring districts, the reason being that his clan held a monopoly on the distribution of



... Spanish and Chinese were using the religious mission as a  
cover for the sale of opium. Being aware of this, the  
Chinese government in 1858 issued a decree forbidding  
all to export opium except for a few Dutch and Chinese  
merchants. The Chinese government was not only  
trying to control the opium trade but also to  
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their wares and to risk sharing information might result in a decline in income.

Due to this breakdown in communications, not only between Japan and the rest of the world, but also within her own social structure, the artisans who engaged in making folk articles just continued to make things as they had always done and, through years of practice and repetition, their techniques were constantly being improved and perfected, until every town had a labour force of highly skilled individuals and, although they were producing goods and utensils for everyday use, each product possessed its own flair and style.

The occupation of hand-making was very much a family affair, with trade secrets being passed down from generation to generation. The discipline behind hand-working was very strict and it was expected of all family members that they participate in any domestic activities, while children were brought up in an atmosphere where helping at an early age become second nature to them. And so the crafts flourished in Japan during the *Edo* period, with each fife supplying its own people with the goods necessary for day to day existence and it remained so until the *Meiji* restoration in 1868.

In 1853, US President, Millard Fillmore, sent Commodore Matthew Perry to re-open Japan. Perry arrived on her shores with a letter which he presented to the *Shogun*, demanding that Japanese ports be made open to foreign ships as a means of access to water and supplies and by 1854 a treaty was signed and two Japanese ports were opened to American ships. It did not take long until the English, Dutch and Russians followed suit and within a short space of time, foreign settlements with consulates were established at the various ports of Shimoda, Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki and on the northern island of Hokkaido.

Now, with the Dutch and Chinese monopoly broken, foreign trade increased so dramatically that, in Japan, shortages of certain products occurred, due to over-exportation. Importation of cheaply manufactures goods from industrialised Western countries were sold for much less than their hand-made Japanese equivalents, resulting in a decline in demand and consequently unemployment. Although it was now the mid-nineteenth century, and America and Europe had gone through the industrial revolution,







Japan remained a medieval feudal country that had hardly changed since the early seventeenth century. A general feeling of humiliation swept across Japan. People began to feel dissatisfied with their government for letting these foreign barbarians impose their will on such a helpless nation, which culminated in a successful revolt against the *Shogun*, restoring the Emperor Meiji to power in 1868.

Convinced of the need for a strong central government and rapid modernisation, Meiji carried out a series of administrative reforms which brought about profound social changes in Japan and during the years following the *Meiji* restoration, Japan's industrial revolution occurred. Her government began inviting European and American engineers to set up Western-style factories geared towards mass production and ceramics, for example, that had previously been made by hand, were now being made in factories on a massive scale. During the first decade of the *Meiji* restoration, the Japanese welcomed and invited a huge influx of Western culture to their shores, with a view to mastering it, and they tended to neglect their own cultural heritage. Many traditional craftsman found little demand for their goods and most were forced to abandon their hereditary family trades and take up factory jobs. In 1871, Meiji abolished the feudal system, replacing the various provinces with modern prefectures. Japanese craftsmen found that most of their market and distribution system had come to an abrupt end and those who lived in more remote areas, who could not obtain factory employment, became redundant.

Luckily, the *Meiji* government fully subsidised exhibits of Japanese goods at international expositions, which were enthusiastically received by Westerners and this provided new employment for a lot of craftsmen. Many Japanese officials and craftsmen travelled to European expositions and brought back with them Western manufacturing techniques, such as the use of plaster moulds for ship casting. As well as these Western expositions, trade fairs at home encouraged a revival in Japanese crafts. Consequently, the *Meiji* government commanded the production of certain traditional crafts, such as ceramics, lacquer ware, ivory carving and cloisonné, for the foreign export market which was rapidly expanding, creating a huge demand for export items. These items produced for the foreign market were known as *hamamono*, *hama* coming from Yokohama, the port through which they were exported, and *mono*, the Japanese word for things (see Figure 2).









Figure 2. *Hamamono* product. Taken from Sparke, Penny, *Japanese Design*, London, Swallow Publishing Ltd., 1987.







Unfortunately, *hamamono* were made specifically to pander to Victorian Western taste, and they could not have been more removed from the functional simplicity and natural beauty of Japanese traditional crafts. Sadly, they actually did more to further remove Japanese crafts from their traditional origins. Vessel shapes began to suffer when European styles, such as Art Nouveau, were thoughtlessly combined with traditional Japanese forms. There was an inconsistency and lack of restraint in *hamamono*, which were decorated over-elaborately, with a combination of academic European styles and traditional Japanese ones. Yet even more disheartening is the fact that many Japanese themselves began to display this Victorian "clap-trap" in their own homes, as a further attempt to become modern.

As is obvious, the distinction between craft and industry was becoming distorted as modernisation continued to develop in Japan. Due to the fact that the government now viewed crafts as a branch of industry, not only for export but also for the domestic market, standardisation occurred and the unique character once so prevalent in traditional crafts began to disappear. The original word for crafts in Japan, *Kogei*, was now stretched to mean industrial technology and, in accordance with European practice, crafts were now thought to be inferior to Art. Consequently, in 1907, the government ceased to include any form of craft in Art exhibitions. On reflection, the only good thing to arise from the production of *hamamono* was the fact that it provided employment to numerous artisans, due to the traditional nature of the goods, and in some way, this saved techniques from extinction.

By the second decade of *Meiji* rule, a strong reaction to Westernisation set in and an upsurge in nationalism began. Many intellectuals, statesmen and artists began to object adamantly to this Western indoctrination, saying that the imitation of another's culture was demeaning to Japan and that Westernisation went against the teachings of the Shinto, Buddhist and Confucian religions. Finally, the Japanese re-assessed their own culture and began to build on their own great traditions. By the third *Meiji* decade, a healthy equilibrium was reached between pro-Western and pro-Japanese artists in Japan, which still exists today. The Meiji government began to directly involve themselves in developing the arts and controlled its revival through its selection of the curriculum used at the government universities, as well as through sponsoring art and craft exhibitions at home and abroad.







And so, Japan's history played a very influential role in the existence of her traditional crafts, going from two hundred years of nurturing and protecting to an almost overnight contrast of disregard and rejection. Modernisation almost killed the traditional crafts of Japan in a very short space of time, but luckily they were saved from extinction at the very last minute, through the efforts of one man, Yanagi Soetsu.







## CHAPTER 2

### YANAGI SOETSU: HIS LIFETIME GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Yanagi Soetsu (1889-1961) was born in Tokyo into a wealthy background, his father being of high rank in the navy. He was educated at the Peers School and Tokyo Imperial University, where he received a degree in philosophy. Around the year 1908, having left college, Yanagi and his friends, some of whom belonged to the old *Kyoto* court nobility, set up a writers' and artists' group, called *Shirakaba*, the Silver Birch. The main aim of this group was to introduce Western literature, art and philosophy to Japan, by holding exhibitions and workshops, and by publishing related articles in a monthly journal also entitled *Shirakaba*. Many of Yanagi's writer friends who formed the nucleus of this group were later to become well-known Japanese literary figures, such as Shiga Naoya, Mushakogi Saneatsu, Kojima Kikuo and Satami Jun.

In the spring of 1909, the English artist, Bernard Leach, arrived in Japan, bringing with him an etching press, in the hopes of teaching the art of etching to some of the local Japanese. Having secured a studio in Sakuragicho, Tokyo, Leach set about advertising his lessons. Among those who attended were ten of the newly formed *Shirakaba*, including Yanagi Soetsu. However, it was not until the following spring that their friendship really began, when the *Shirakaba* group held an exhibition of mainly German artwork, to mark the publication of the first *Shirakaba* magazine in April of 1910. It seems that Leach was a regular visitor to this exhibition, attracted by the etching of Renoir and sketches of Beardsley and Rodin. Impressed by the quality of the work exhibited, Leach was often heard remarking on how superior these works were to anything shown in the annual Buntan Art Exhibition, a showing of work sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Leach felt that more people ought to come and view the *Shirakaba* show. It was then that Yanagi's liking for Leach began (see Figure 3).









Figure 3. Portrait of Yanagi Soetsu by Bernard Leach. Taken from: Leach, Bernard, *Drawings, Verse and Belief*, London, One World Publications, 1973.





Figure 2. Pattern of Y-axis, X-axis, Z-axis, and Time axis.  
Barrett, D. A. and J. A. Barrett. 1993. One World.  
Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.



The friendship between Yanagi and Leach grew rapidly, and for a time they became almost inseparable, each educating the other on the philosophies and ethics of their extreme cultures. For his part, Leach introduced Yanagi to the English mystic, William Blake, while Yanagi familiarised the Englishman with Eastern and Western mystics, as well as the art of Van Gogh. For a time, Leach became a constant contributor to the *Shirakaba* group, showing etchings in their Western art exhibition in 1911 and their Fourth Art Exhibition in February of 1912. He also designed a number of covers for the *Shirakaba* journal around that time, and was the first person to publish an article on Blake in Japan, in the April 1914 issue of the same magazine. Leach heavily involved himself in the preparation of exhibitions and became a leading advisor to many Japanese artists on the differences in framing Western and Japanese style paintings. As a result of his influential involvement with the *Shirakaba* group, Leach's artistic input was considered to be of vital importance to the art history of Japan in the late Meiji Period (1868-1912).

So influenced was Yanagi by Leach and the wealth of information this Englishman had divulged to him, that in 1914 he wrote a major book on William Blake, in whom he was especially interested. That same year, Leach left Japan for China, disappointed with what Japan had to offer him, and with the way in which

the art of old Japan had passed away with the old life and that that which lingered on not only lacked all vitality, but was a hindrance to progress on new lines.<sup>1</sup>

Leach also disapproved of Yanagi's and the *Shirakaba*'s almost blinkered obsession with foreign art and their lack of interest in things Japanese. He was later to express these sentiments in an article which he published in the Tokyo Advertiser in 1918, suggesting that they might be "swallowing an overdose of revolutionary culture from the West."<sup>2</sup>

By that same year, Yanagi had managed to persuade Leach to leave his newly found home in Peking, China, and come back to live on his family

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<sup>1</sup> Moeran, Brian. Bernard Leach and the Japanese Folk Craft Movement: the formative years. *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 2, Nos. 2 & 3, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit.







compound in Abiko, twenty-five miles from Tokyo. Leach did not readily accept Yanagi's invitation, and it was not until Yanagi himself went to China via Korea (his first trip abroad), that Leach finally succumbed. What happened to Yanagi on this important foreign excursion was not only going to affect him as a devoted follower of the arts, but also the future of traditional Japanese folk crafts. En route to China, Yanagi came into contact with a wealth of oriental tradition and culture which he had for so long chosen to ignore in his determined effort to educate himself on all things Western. This trip opened Yanagi's eyes to the wealth of beauty and culture that was readily available to him and allowed him to re-assess the value of recognising and encouraging the traditions of his own culture, one which, unlike that of the West, was rapidly falling prey to the clutches of modernisation. On his return from China in December of 1916, Yanagi expressed his desire to introduce Oriental, and not just Western, art to the *Shirakaba* journal.

When Leach first arrived in Japan, in the spring of 1909, he studied ceramics under Kenzan VI. By 1912, he had opened his own studio and was making his own work from start to finish. For this he was ridiculed by the Japanese, who believed that an artist-potter should create the design and do the decorating, leaving the job of throwing and trimming to a lowly assistant. His insistence, however, on making the entire piece finally filtered through the artist-potter community until eventually that particular method of work prevailed. When Leach set up studio and built a kiln on the Yanagi family estate, he began to explore and reflect more on the value and reward of solely making a piece in its entirety as opposed to a more co-operative method of production. Throughout the year he spent there, Leach and Yanagi talked at length about the problems which arise from the transition of local folk crafts into a modern industrial context, and the emergence of the self-conscious individual artist.

By the time Leach prepared for his return home to England in 1921, he had already instilled a will within Yanagi to preserve and respect the work of his own people. Through his love of things Chinese, he made not only Yanagi aware for the first time of Oriental traditions and culture, but also all the members of the *Shirakaba* group, practising potters, writers and philosophers at the time, who already had an outlet from which to proclaim this new sense of nationalism and self-respect. Leach's role as an instigator







in this upsurge of neo-Orientalism came not a moment too soon, at a time when Japan wanted to reassert herself as being different from other similarly structured capitalist countries in the West. It is ironic that it took a Westerner to rekindle the flame of tradition in the hearts of those from the East, once more a case of greener grass, but it cannot go unsaid that Leach's friendship with Yanagi laid down the solid foundations on which the traditional folk craft or *mingei* movement was built.

In 1922, Yanagi published the first of his craft writings, on pottery, which he dedicated to his good friends Leach and Tomimoto, a Japanese potter who had been a comrade of Leach's and who now, like Yanagi, was pioneering the *mingei* movement. In 1923, Yanagi moved to Kyoto, following the great Kanto earthquake of that same year, and it was here, in the old city, that he wholeheartedly began his discovery of Japanese crafts. Yanagi's decision to exhibit a selection of *Yi Dynasty* ceramic ware in 1924 earned him the respect and support of many of Japan's leading artists, particularly Kawai Kanjiro and Hamada Shoji, two contemporary ceramists, who were soon to feature prominently in the formation of the folk-craft movement (see Figure 4).

By the following year, Yanagi began writing his first major book on crafts and the same year, with his new found potter friends, Kawai and Hamada, coined the term "*mingei*" to replace the traditional word for crafts, *Kogei*, which during the industrial revolution had been extended to mean industrial technology. This new word "*mingei*" was a derivative of the Japanese words for folk and art, and thus the true definition of *mingei* was: art of the common people. In 1926, Yanagi and both of the above named potters founded the *Nippon Mingei Kyokai*, the Japanese Folk Art Association, with Yanagi as its president. The Association began publishing a journal in 1931, entitled *Mingei*, with Yanagi as editor. Sixty-three years later, this publication is still being printed. Support for the Japanese Folk Art Association grew steadily and by 1936, they were able to establish the *Nippon Mingeikan*, the Japanese Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo, with Yanagi as director, a position which he maintained until his death in 1961. Throughout the development of the *Mingei* movement, Yanagi frequently filled lecturing positions in universities, constantly making people aware of the developments and discoveries which he was making, and he spent two years at Harvard, between the years of 1928-1929, lecturing on Buddhist art and aesthetics.



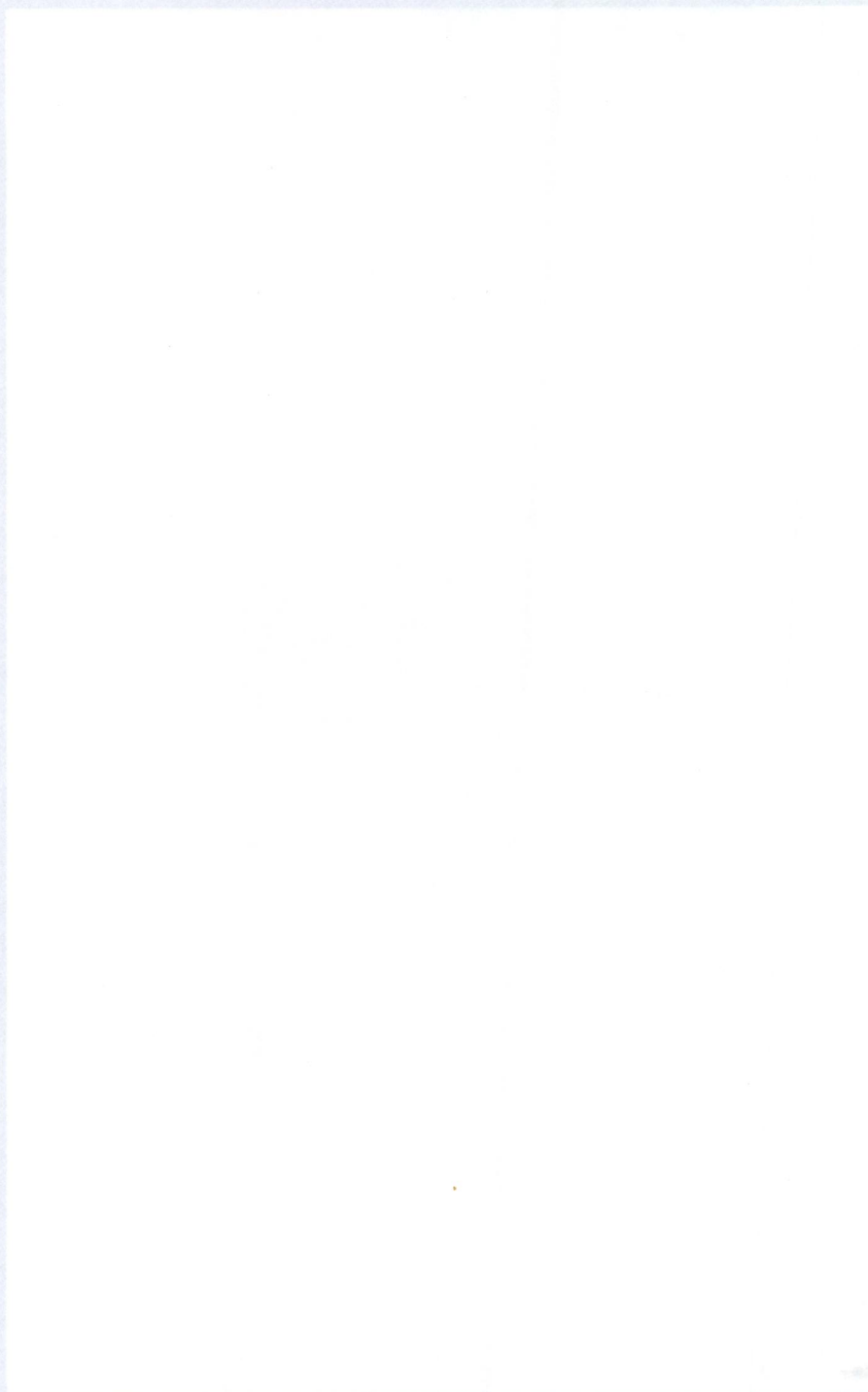






Figure 4. Photo of Hamada, Leach and Yanagi. Taken from: *Hamada, Potter*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1976.







The *Nippon Mingeikan* (see Figure 5) now has branches in Kurashiki, Tottori and Osaka and has become not only a haven for the relics of a past tradition and culture, but also one of Tokyo's biggest tourist attractions. Yanagi Soetsu was the backbone of the *mingei* movement. The adulation and warmth he received from the talented artists who knew him - Bernard Leach, Hamada Shoji, Kawai Kanjiro and Tomimoto Kenkichi - only goes to prove Yanagi's popularity and the sincerity with which people greeted him and his self-less devotion. It would not be an underestimation to say that, without the lifetime dedication of this one man to the art of the common people, very little would be left or known today of traditional Japanese folk-crafts. The legacy of artefacts and documentation on *mingei* which Yanagi left behind will be of value eternally, not only to the Japanese, but also to the rest of the world.









Figure 5. Photo of Nippon Mingeikan. Taken from Nippon Mingeikan Brochure.



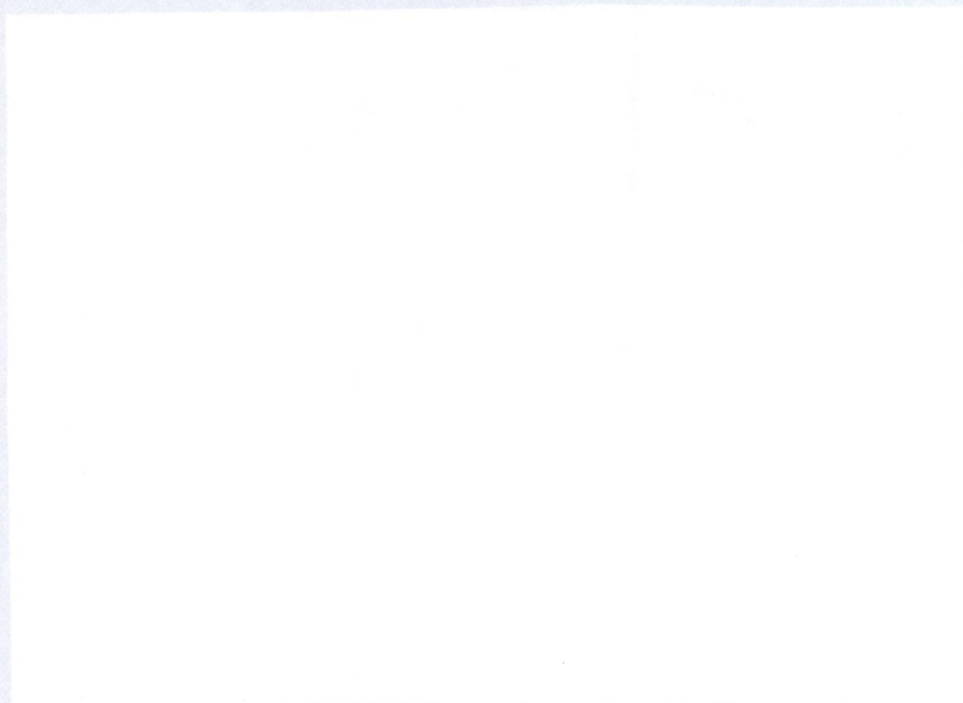


Figure 2. Photo of the specimen taken from the photograph.



## PART TWO



PART TWO

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE BEAUTY OF *MINGEI* AND THE WORKING ETHICS OF THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE CRAFTSMAN

The traditional folk crafts of Japan are varied and cover many aspects of hand-making, ranging from ceramics, furniture, wooden utensils and iron ware to weaving, dyeing, papermaking and leather work (see Figures 6, 7 and 8). Although *Mingei* covers a myriad of techniques, they are all distinguishable by their simplicity, unself-consciousness, intimacy and sensitive use of natural materials. Produced by anonymous craftsmen for everyday use by ordinary people, Mingei objects embody the main characteristics of the Japanese temperament - directness, intuition and enthusiasm. These recognised Japanese traits developed as a result of the influence of the Buddhist and Shinto religions on the native Japanese. Buddhism came to Japan from India via China and Korea during the mid-6th Century. Although the Japanese accepted the religion, they rejected the Indian preoccupation with spiritual values and their belief that reality is illusory and they also tended to avoid the Chinese tendency to intellectualise. As a result, the Japanese remained more intuitive and emotional, dealing with things directly rather than philosophically.

Throughout his research and study of beauty, Yanagi Soetsu relied on, and referred frequently to, the ethics of Buddhism, which based its faith on meditation and intuition. To him, the ultimate beauty is one which is healthy and common. Aware that people might see this statement as an ordinary concept and a matter of mere common sense, Yanagi used well-known concepts in Zen Buddhism to illustrate his argument.

To be healthy does not simply mean to be physically sturdy. It does not mean strong versus weak, but rather to be normal and to be true to one's innate nature. The deepness of this state is explained best in records on Zen. The value of concepts such as '*buji*' (meaning 'without incident, calm, safe') and







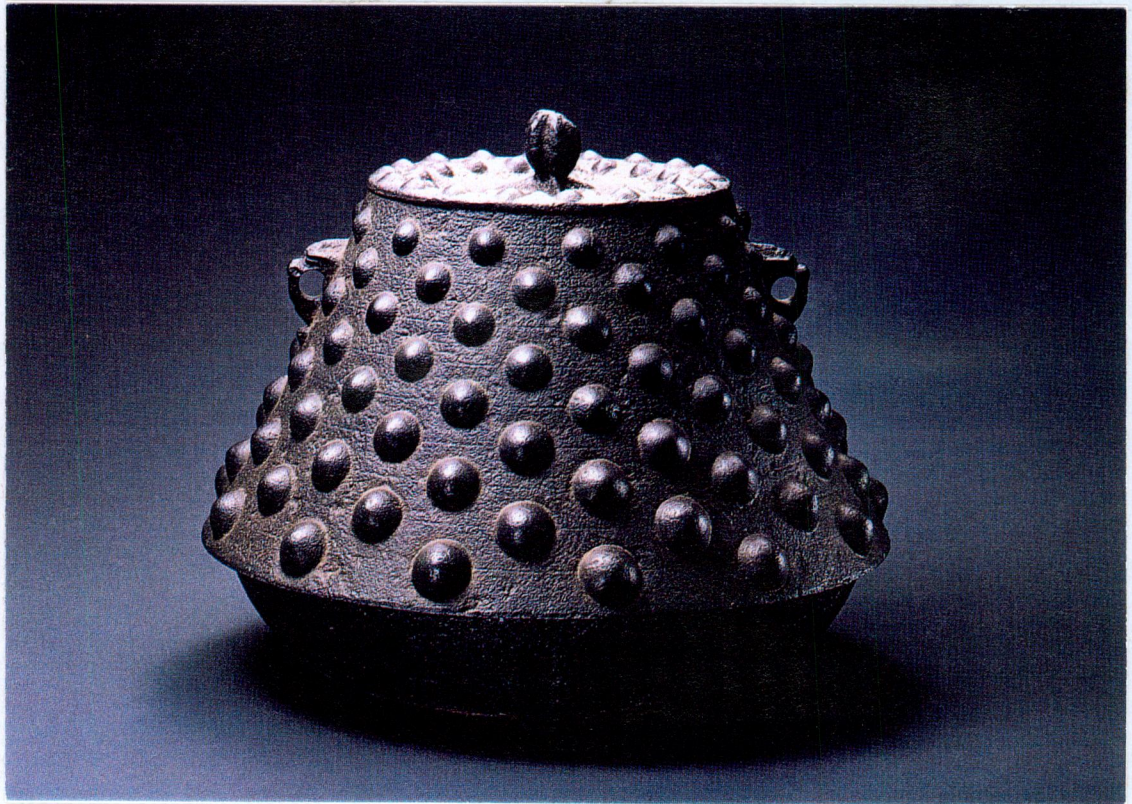


Figure 6. Example of *Mingei* objects. Arare iron kettle, diameter 28 cm.  
Postcard from the Nippon Mingeikan.









Figure 7. Example of *Mingei* objects. *Hidehira* bowl, lacquered peach wood, diameter 14 cm., Postcard from the Nippon Mingeikan





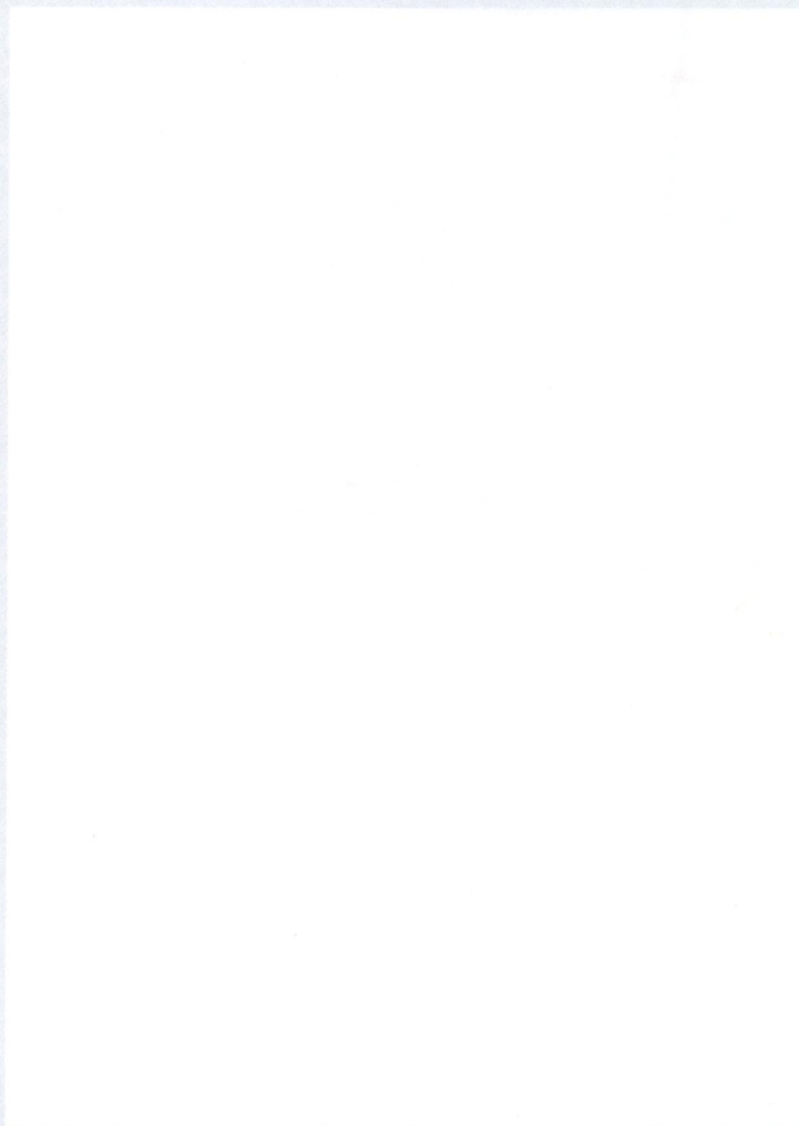
Figure 1. Examples of (a) a white object (100% white) and (b) a black object (100% black) in the field of view.





Figure 8. Example of *Mingei* objects. An *ainu* robe, silk appliqué, cotton, Postcard from the Nippon Mingeikan







'*bunan*' (meaning 'without accident, acceptable, safe') must be accepted to the realm of beauty as well. The reason I have thus preferred to use the characters '*kenko*' (meaning 'healthy') is to communicate this state of beauty.<sup>3</sup>

It was Yanagi's belief that this healthy beauty was the main characteristic in the realm of Mingei. To him, healthiness is naturalness, and a natural intention can only exist in a healthy environment. Healthiness stood for truth, honesty and freedom, all of which are characteristics of Japan's traditional folk crafts, and which make our everyday lives usual and therefore healthy.

For this reason, Yanagi often questioned the beauty of Fine Art and frequently called for its revision. He felt that the fine arts had too many unnatural intentions to create beauty and could therefore never enter the realm of normal, natural beauty.

Throughout my research of Mingei, I have come across opposition to this concept of Yanagi. Robert Moes, in his article "The Appreciation of Folk Art in Japan," slanders this concept of Yanagi, saying,

When one reads 'The Unknown Craftsman,' one discovers that Yanagi took his theories too far. He concluded that humble, anonymous crafts are superior to works by famous artists, who he considered self-conscious, egotistical and dependent on the whims of their spoiled, aristocratic patrons. We need not take this part of Yanagi's teaching too seriously, for it would mean rejecting most of the masterpieces of world art!<sup>4</sup>

To me, it seems that Robert Moes is not fully aware of Yanagi's belief and concept of beauty, for never once did Yanagi reject the fine arts. He merely questioned the intentions from which they were made. Indeed, in the earlier part of his career, he was responsible for the importation and publication of reproduced prints of the works of both Cezanne and Van Gogh, something that had never been previously done in Japan. In "The Unknown Craftsman," during his essay entitled "Towards a standard of Beauty," Yanagi says:

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<sup>3</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. What the Mingei Movement has contributed, *Mingei - the standard of beauty*, Meigeikan handout from Spring Special Exhibition, April 13-June 27, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Moes, Robert. *Mingei Japanese Folk Art*, The Brooklyn Museum.







It is my belief that while the high level of culture of any country can be found in its fine arts, it is also vital that we should be able to examine and enjoy the proofs of the culture of the great mass of people, which we call folk art. The former are made by a few, for a few, but the latter, made by the many for many, are a truer test.<sup>5</sup>

Here one can see that Yanagi is in no way dismissive of the fine arts, but feels that they are reflective of a minority, and were made to please that minority, and, hence, do not maintain with his concept of the free, honest and natural beauty that is the basis of *Mingei* art. To him, fine arts did not have that sense of familiarity and intimacy that came from constant use, as *Mingei* did. They were not direct and intuitive responses to nature, but, rather, forced and intellectualised representations of a contrived beauty, which to him was unhealthy and dishonest. Again, in "The Unknown Craftsman," Yanagi makes reference to fine art as being more removed and dislocated from the heart and the intuition.

The special quality of beauty in crafts is that it is a beauty of intimacy. Since the articles are to be lived with every day, this quality of intimacy is a natural requirement. Such beauty established a world of grace and feeling. It is significant that in speaking of craft objects, people use terms such as savour and style. The beauty of such objects is not so much the noble, the huge or the lofty as a beauty of the warm and familiar. Here one may detect a striking difference between the crafts and the arts. People hang their pictures high up on walls, but they place their objects for everyday use close to them and take them in their hands.<sup>6</sup>

Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, has also had a huge influence on her traditional craftsmen. Being an ancient animistic belief, it teaches that a *Kami* or living spirit, is alive in every tree, rock, mountain and blade of grass. As a result, the folk craftsman had great respect for his natural raw materials, as did the Japanese who used his produce every day.

A Japanese craftsman working with wood never rakes and scratches its surface with rasps and sandpaper. Instead, he trims it to its final form with razor-sharp planes and draw-

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<sup>5</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman* (A Japanese insight into beauty), Tokyo, Kodansha International, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman, Form, Textures, Images*, Iwamiya, Yoshida, Gage.







knives. This produces a velvety smooth and absolutely flat surface that permits the colour, texture and grain of the wood to speak for themselves. Similarly, a Japanese sword polisher does not scratch up the steel surface with emery paper or steel wool, nor does he buff it to a high gloss with a cloth wheel and polishing compound. Instead he cuts across the crystalline structure of the steel surface with finer and finer grades of flat limestone polishing stones. This is an extremely meticulous and time-consuming process, but it permits the grain and temper pattern of the steel to show in a way that would be impossible with any other technique.<sup>7</sup>

As you can see from this excerpt, traditional making methods in Japan were often very time-consuming and repetitive. It was due to this fact, Yanagi believed, that the maker became absorbed in his work, and through repetition became unself-conscious and therefore unpretentious and non-individual, allowing the spirit of the man to take over the working of his hands, thus releasing the natural beauty or *Kami* that lived within the raw material.

An article written by Yanagi in 1926, entitled *Zakki no Bi* (The beauty of common objects), describes the relationship of the folk worker to his method of work and his raw material.

Although the Japanese folk artisan is poor and uneducated, he is a fervent devotee of his craft. While it is difficult for him to describe fully what he believes in, his surprising personal experiences are clearly expressed in the crude vocabulary of his work. And even though there is nothing unique or rare about his artistic technique, the essence of his creed is reflected in the objects he creates. Unconsciously, he is motivated by his belief in *Kami* (the spirit of nature) and seized by its indomitable force.

I can say the same thing concerning this dish that now absorbs my attention. It might seem to be something scorned as a poor or clumsily made object, since it is lacking in extravagant elegance and ornate stylisation. Because he was not self-conscious about what he was doing, the man who made this dish had not planned the final outcome of his creative effort. As though he were a passionate believer repeatedly chanting a god's name, he forms the same shape again and again, and time after time he paints the same

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<sup>7</sup>

Moes, Robert. *Mingei Japanese Folk Art*, The Brooklyn Museum.







picture on the vessel using the same glaze.

What is beauty? What is the art of the Kiln? We cannot expect him to be prepared with clear cut answers to such questions, but even though he may not have a thought out knowledge, his hands move rapidly at his work. And we could perhaps say that, just as the voice that speaks the Buddha's name is not actually the man's voice, but is that of the Buddha, so too the hands of the potter are not his own but are those of nature. Rather than the craftsman directing the work, it is nature that comes and protects its beauty. The craftsman has forgotten all worldly cares. As belief grows out of self-less immersion in faith, beauty springs forth spontaneously in the vessel he makes. His creation thus holds me in rapt absorption.<sup>8</sup>

It is this method of working and recognition of beauty which has caused me to become fascinated by Mingei and Yanagi Soetsu's concept of beauty. Since learning of the traditional working ethics of the Japanese craftsman and identifying with my own raw material, glass, I have developed a bond and an almost spiritual relationship with my work. I can fully empathise with Yanagi's theory of self-less immersion and intuition, as it has become a more prevalent pattern in my own working methods, and, as a result, I now feel stimulated and fulfilled by my medium, rather than seeing it, as I had previously done, as a dead and inanimate thing. Through my involvement with *Mingei*, I have grown to respect and understand glass and this has caused me to work with my medium rather than to struggle and fight against it. I now understand Yanagi when he said that alive handcraftmanship justifies itself as an intimate expression of the Spirit of Man.<sup>9</sup>

Although the realm of *Mingei* articles has many variations, I have chosen to describe two utensils, which I feel reflect the various traits and characteristics of *Mingei*.

The first is the *Chasen*, or tea whisk (see Figure 9). Used in much the same way as an egg whisk, the function of the *chasen* is to thoroughly mix the finely powdered green tea, used in the tea ceremony, in hot water. In Japan

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<sup>8</sup> Muraoka & Okamura. *Folk Arts & Crafts of Japan*, Weatherhill/Heibonsha, New York/Tokyo.

<sup>9</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman (A Japanese insight into beauty)*, Tokyo, Kodansha International, 1972.









Figure 9. *Chasen*. Taken from: Austin, Levy & Ueda, *Bamboo*, New York/Tokyo, Weatherill Inc., 1970.







today, there remain roughly a dozen *chasen* makers, most of whom are based near Kyoto, and who have inherited the trade from their forefathers.

The methods involved in the production of the *chasen* are complicated and involve years of practice. A section of bamboo is chosen, wrapped with a temporary binding and immersed in hot water for a few seconds. Once the bamboo is softened, the first splits are made in its upper section, and some of the outer rind is removed. Having done this, sixteen radial splits are made and these splines are then split concentrically, forming an inner and an outer ring. Then the inner splines are broken out and the interior surface is smoothed. Bending the splines backwards produces the correct curve at their base. The splines are then divided into tiny filaments, using a sharp blade. In good *chasen*, there are usually up to 120 filaments, although some have as few as 32. The insides of these splines are further thinned and their tops curved, which is done by holding the *chasen* briefly over steam. A thread is then passed alternately between the splines to separate them into inner and outer parts and the inner filaments are then tied together, forming a central core. This job was usually done by women (see Figure 10).

For me, the beauty of the *chasen* lies in its complete functionality. So often in our modern day society little consideration is given to the visual aesthetics of functional objects. The *chasen*, on the other hand, while fulfilling its utilitarian role, is a curiously beautiful object, with its delicate, gently curving filaments. When you compare it to a more modern whisk, you can understand Yanagi's belief in intimacy and the enriching effect that using a handmade object has on our daily lives. The *chasen* is valued and respected, as it is one of the few remaining folk craft utensils which is still being produced today.

The second utensil which I have chosen to talk about is the *Chatsubo*, or Tea Storage Jar. To me, *chatsubo* are the most beautiful of *Mingei* ceramics, mainly because of their full and satisfying form and their spontaneous glazes. I have chosen two *Chatsubo* to illustrate these characteristics; the first being made at Yatsushiro, in the Higo Province during the 18th Century or Edo period (see Figure 11). This *chatsubo* is made from glazed stoneware with a slip inlay, with a height of 16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches and a diameter of 12<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches.







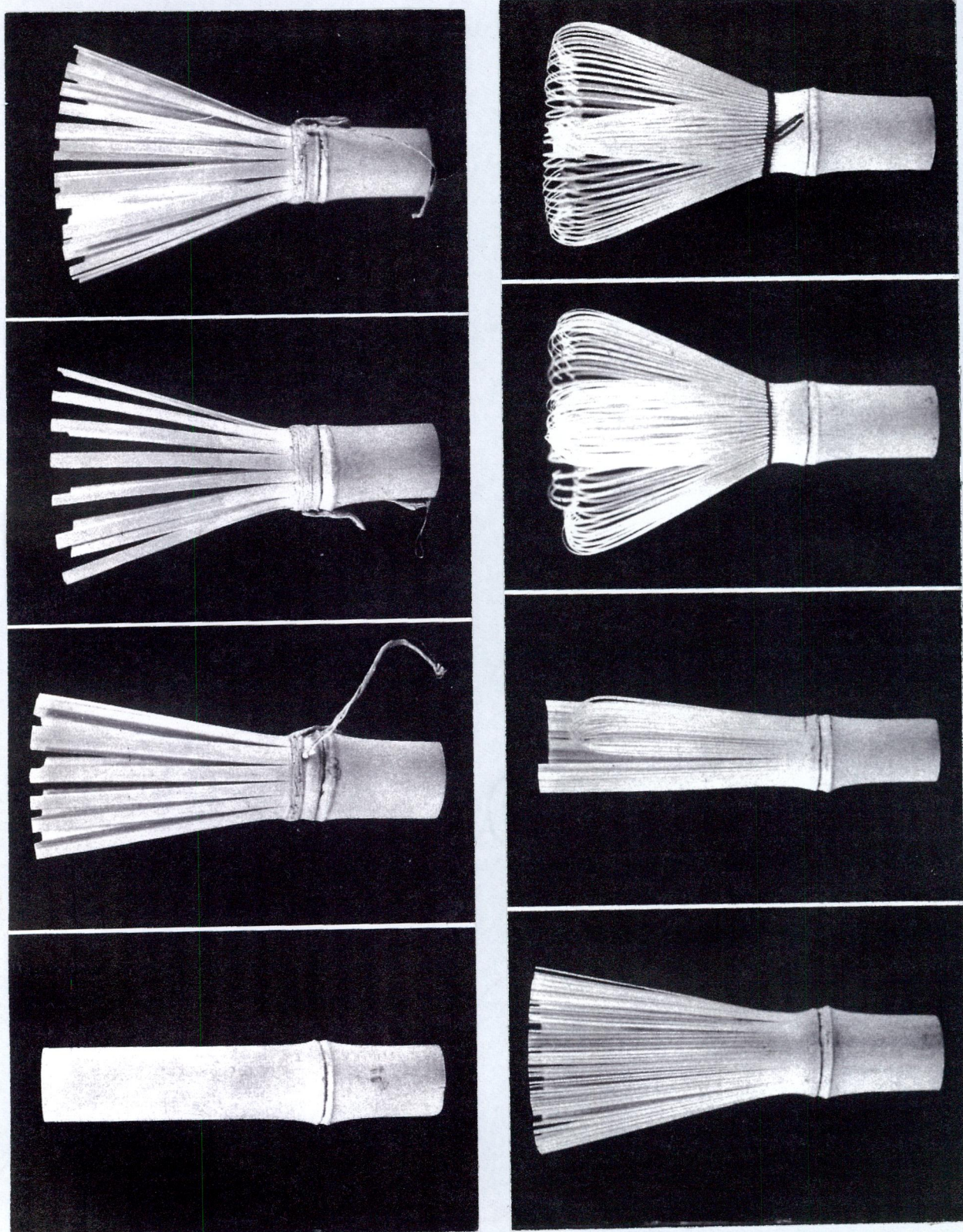


Figure 10. Making process of *chasen*. Taken from: Austin, Levy & Ueda, *Bamboo*, New York/Tokyo, Weatherill Inc., 1970.



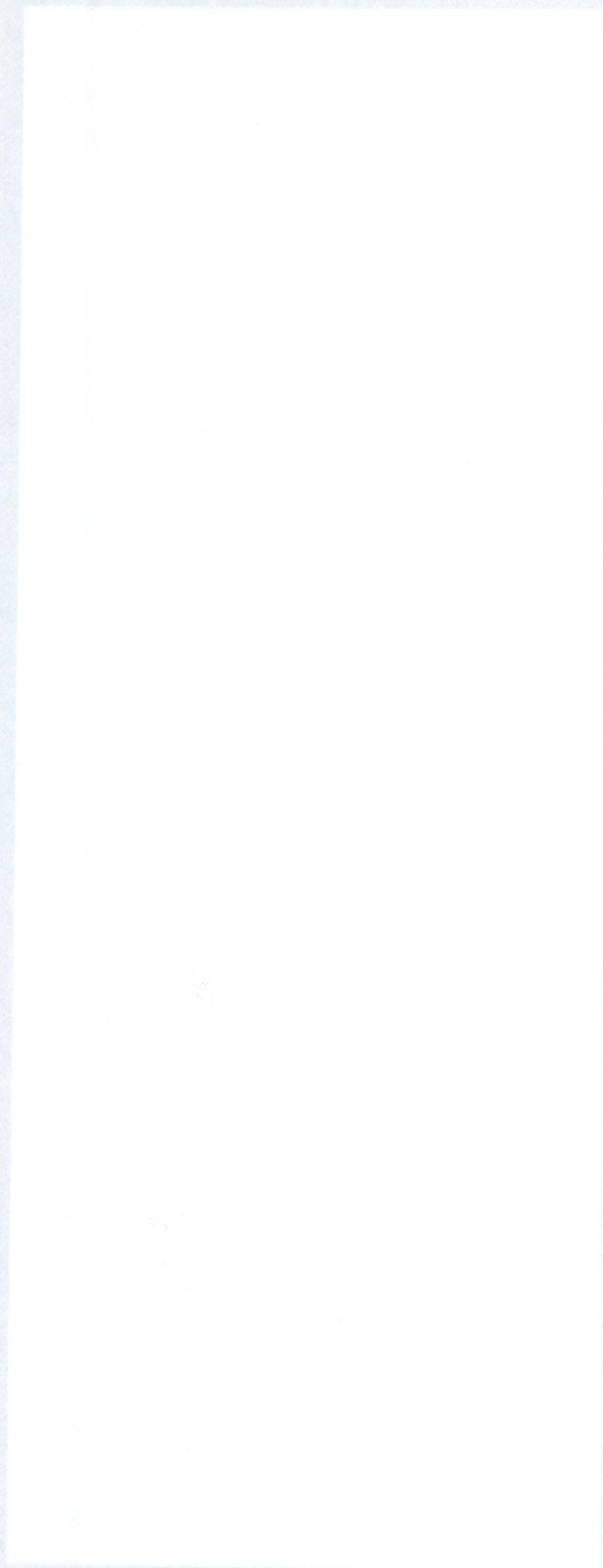
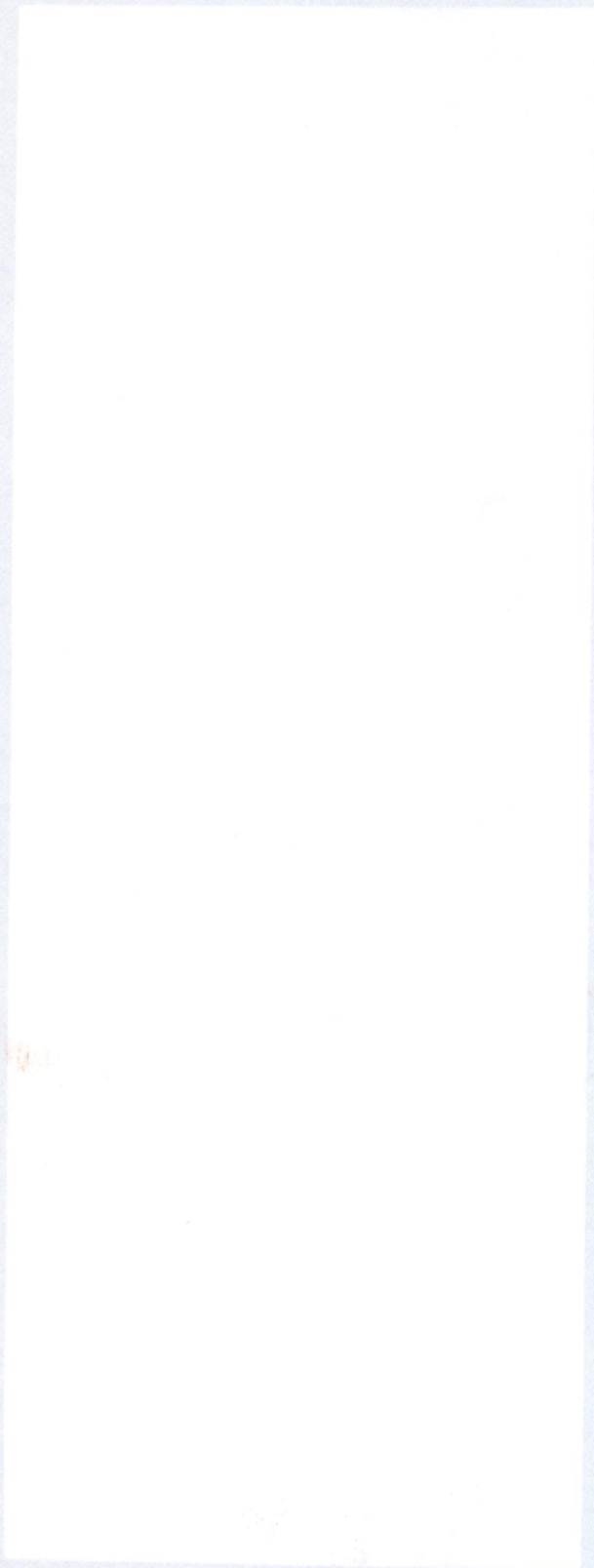


Figure 10: A photograph of a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The page shows signs of wear, including faint smudges and discoloration, particularly along the right edge and bottom. The page is set against a dark background.



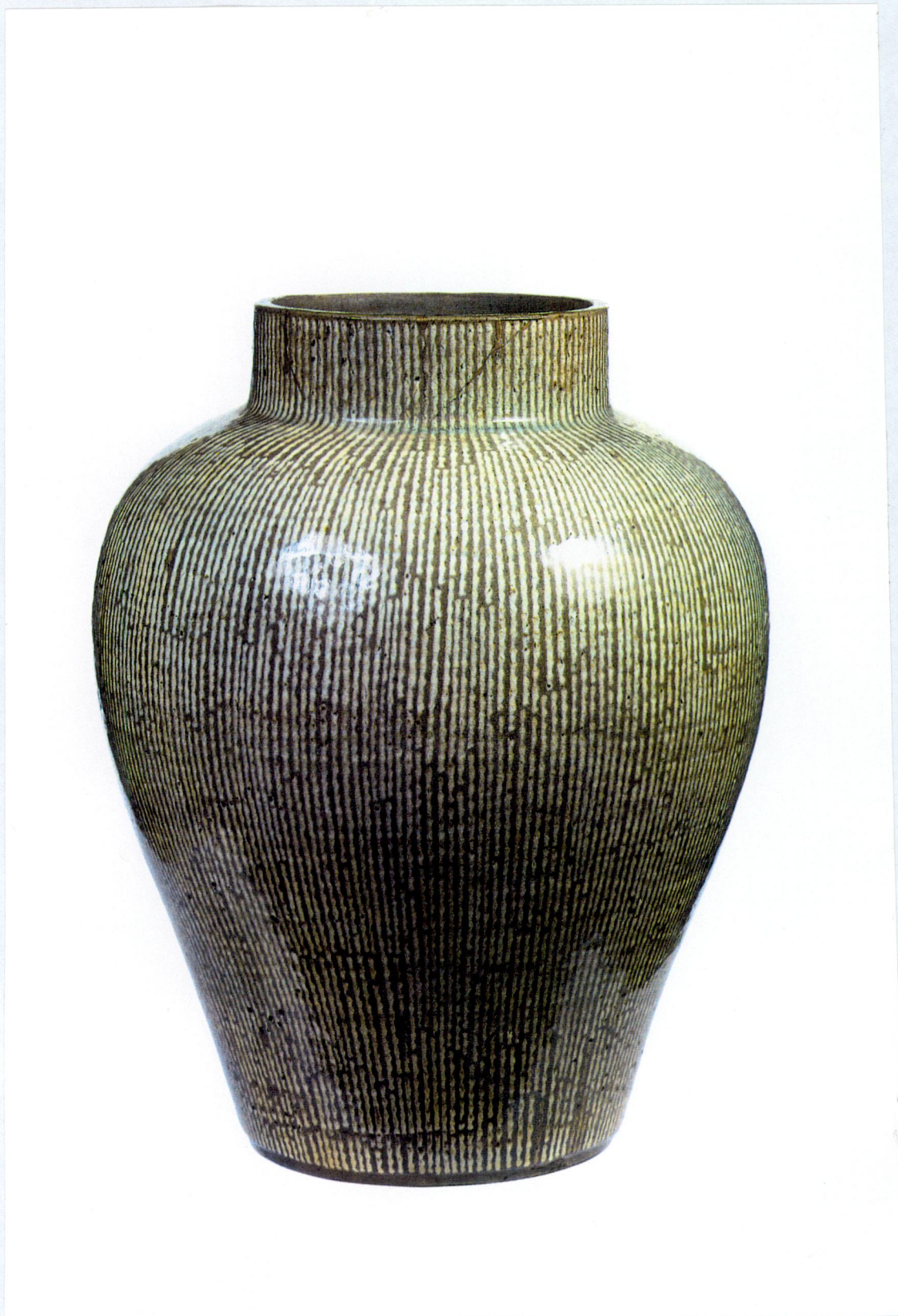


Figure 11. Yatsushiro ware *chatsubo*. Taken from: Moes, Robert, *Mingei - Japanese Folk Art*, USA, Universal Books, 1985.



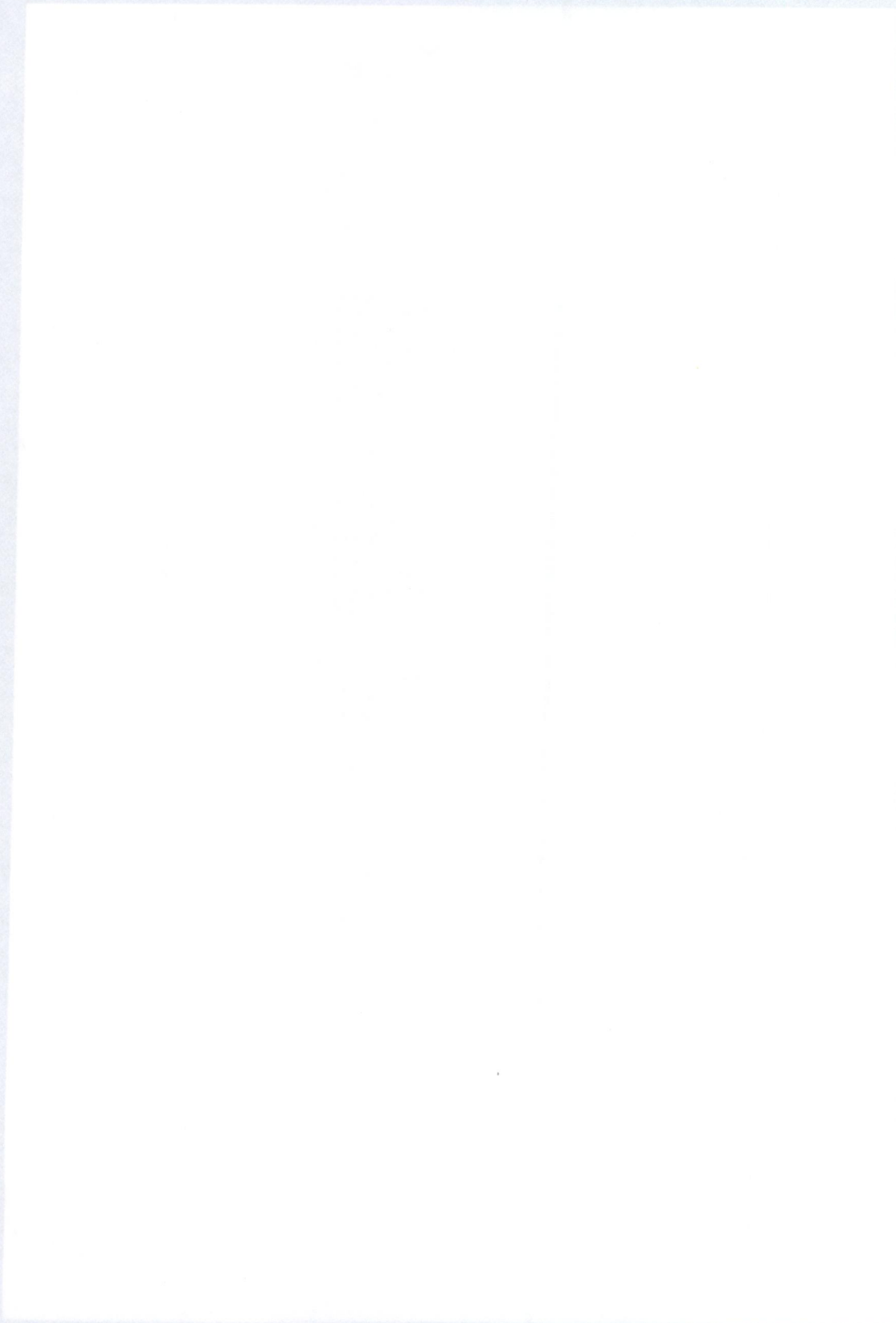


Figure 1. The study was conducted in the most modern laboratory in the world.



The shape of this jar is, to me, very appealing. It creates a very sensuous and full impression. The lines created by the slip inlay seem to accentuate its form and give the piece a flowing, moving appearance. I particularly like the fact that the natural colour of the stoneware has not been covered over, but has been highlighted by the inlay of ivory-white slip, which I feel contrasts very beautifully with the rich grey clay. This method of slip inlay is known as *Mishima*. The effect is created when white slip is poured over a leather-hard clay form, which has incisions and depressions carved into its surface. When the slip sets, the excess is scraped off, leaving an inlay of slip in the depressions. Although the *mishima* on this particular *chatsubo* seems quite controlled, I feel that it gives the vessel an alive and vital presence. The neck of this *chatsubo* is cracked in several places and it has been repaired by filling the cracks with gold lacquer. This was the traditional way of preserving ceramics that were thought to be of good quality.

The second *chatsubo* I have selected is again stoneware, with a bluish white and an olive brown glaze (see Figure 12). It was made in the 19th Century or *Meiji* period in the Tohoku region, in the north-eastern part of the largest island, Honshu, and measures 61.8 cms in height. Again, with this tea storage jar, we are met with this full, rotund form. Although its shape is similar to that of the previous *chatsubo*, the basic form is slightly irregular and not as well-defined. I really like this sense of unevenness and asymmetry, as it gives the piece a sense of character and uniqueness. The contrasting blue/white glaze against the olive brown is very striking, and, again, the haphazard way in which it has been poured creates a definite sense of movement and fluidity. I am especially taken with the blue/white glaze, as, to me, it is reminiscent of the gushing flowing motion of a waterfall, and it gives the *chatsubo* a very fresh and vivacious feel.

Often, when I look at *Mingei* objects, I find it hard to acknowledge that these beautiful things are the products of human hands, for sometimes it seems that they could be the products of nature. For me, they overflow with life and vitality, rarely showing the signs of manipulation. I attribute this sense of freedom and aliveness to the sensitive way in which the traditional Japanese craftsman approaches his raw material, allowing it to be, rather than forcing it to become. For this, I will always greatly respect and continually be inspired by *Mingei*.









Figure 12. Yamamokami ware *chatsubo*. Taken from: Victoria & Albert Museum, *Japanese Art & Design*, London, 1986.



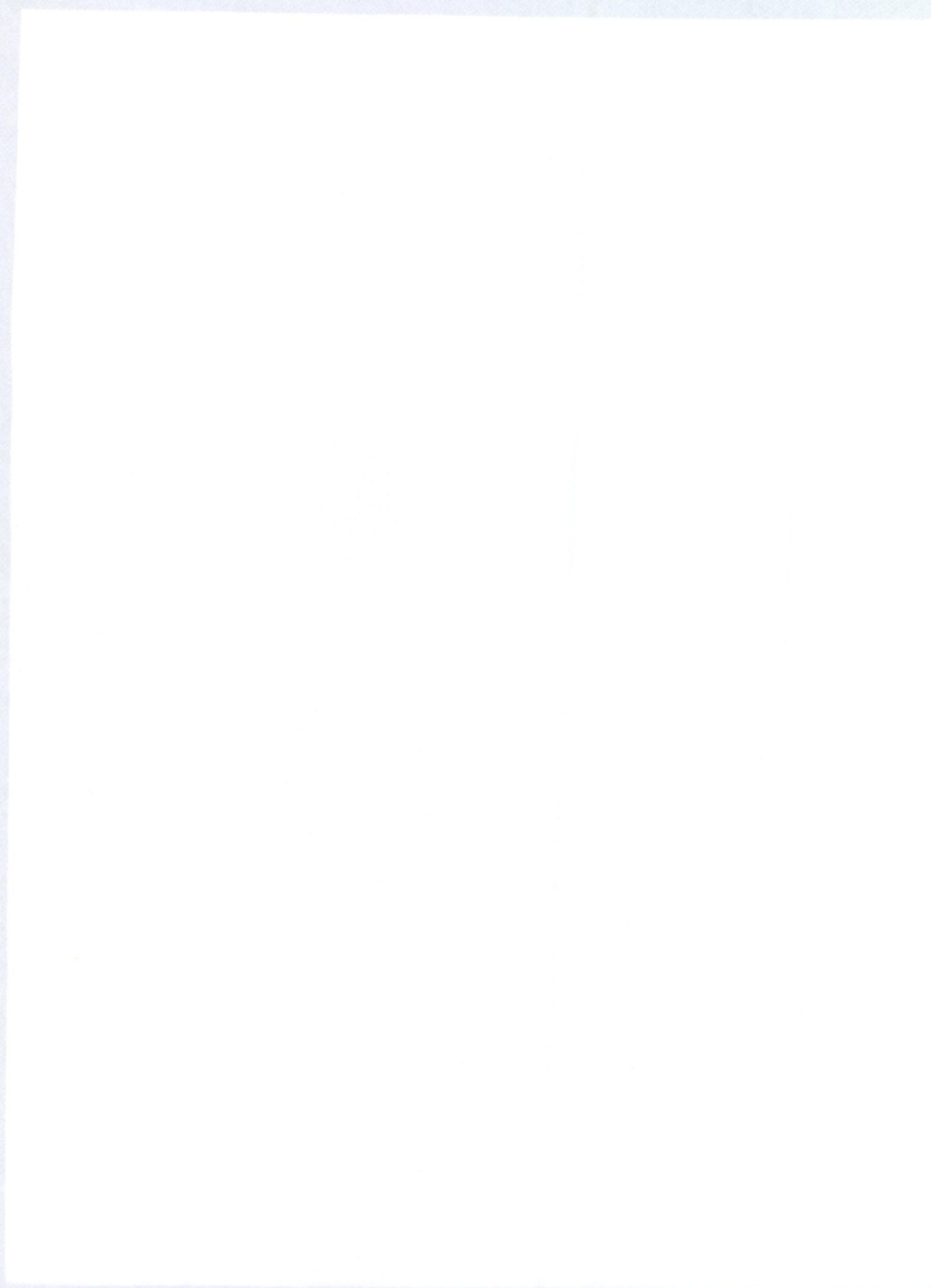


Figure 1. Comparison of the two methods for the determination of the concentration of the solution.



Without the direction and teachings of Yanagi Soetsu, I might never have come to recognise the beauty in these common objects, or, indeed, the beauty and value of my own work. Discovering and researching the work of Yanagi Soetsu has had a cathartic and lasting effect on my attitude towards my work and crafts in general and I intend to continue investigating and studying his teachings and philosophies throughout my career.



Without the direction and leadership of the Board of Directors, I could never have  
been able to see the company through the difficult times of the  
past few years. I have always been proud to have been a part of the work of  
this company and I am sure that the Board of Directors will continue to be  
a source of strength and inspiration to all of us who are proud to be a part of  
this company.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **YANAGI'S ADVICE TO THE ARTIST/MAKER ON THE FUTURE OF CRAFTS IN INDUSTRY; REFLECTED IN THE WORK OF THE FINNISH DESIGNER, KAJ FRANCK**

As well as writing prolifically on the subjects of traditional Japanese folk-crafts and the beauty of common objects, Yanagi devoted a lot of his time to contemplating and writing about what he believed to be the future of crafts. Having grown to manhood during rapid industrialisation, Yanagi witnessed the effect that mechanisation was having on craft production. He also saw, as a result of industry, the emergence of the individual artist/maker. These two occurrences caused Yanagi to worry frequently about the direction in which the crafts were moving, and their future, should the prevailing situation persist. In his book, "The Unknown Craftsman (A Japanese insight into Beauty)", he devoted a chapter to what he believed were the necessary steps which the artist/maker had to undertake in order to protect the future of crafts in an industrial society. This essay, entitled "The Responsibility of the Craftsman," illustrates a number of points which Yanagi felt were the essential guidelines for the individual artist/maker, if the crafts were to survive and flourish in industry.

On the whole, I have found Yanagi's suggestions very interesting and worthwhile, although there have been times when I have felt that his advice is too idealistic and valid only in a utopian world. I, myself, have spent a sizeable portion of the last nine months working as an artist/maker in an industrial factory environment, and there have been times when I have found Yanagi's recommendations invaluable to the outcome of the finished item. On the other hand, there are points of his argument which I can appreciate, but which I feel would be almost impossible to put to practice in our modern industrial context. Although I have the experience of working in a factory situation, I feel that my knowledge in this field is limited; but I hope that, as







my career progresses, the suggestions of Yanagi to the artist/maker will become more clear and applicable to me.

Yanagi was aware that, since the Industrial Revolution in Europe, most forms of traditional manual work had been obliterated and replaced by machine-made produce, which, to him, did not offer that sense of intimacy that handmade objects did. He knew that this was not only due to the limitations of the machine, but also to the fact that they were being used commercially to make enormous profit. To him, there were three main points which would have to become the basis of craft production in industry, if the crafts were to develop and surpass the design level of the machine-made items that people were growing to accept.

The first necessity, according to Yanagi, is that a large number of conscientious individual artist/makers emerge, their function being to protect the beauty of crafts. Yanagi had a very high expectation of what a conscientious individual maker should be:

An artist should be a proper appreciator of beauty, also its creator, and, in a word, a genius. Our aesthetic culture will improve to the extent that such active men of genius appear. They must be qualified with the right sensibility towards beauty; sufficient technical training; scientific knowledge, which is indispensable to crafts; strong will and passion; creative talent.<sup>10</sup>

As you can see, Yanagi's idea of an artist requires the artist/maker to be competent in a broad number of specialised areas. To me, the reality of one individual being able to fulfil all these requirements at once is not impossible, but will take a very special and devoted person, and will only evolve after years of experience. The likelihood of large numbers of these so-called conscientious artists emerging together, to me, seems rather slim, due to the extensive knowledge they must acquire. At the same time, I can appreciate Yanagi's suggestion that, as our aesthetic culture improves as a result of the input from these conscientious artists, more like-minded artists will appear.

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<sup>10</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman* (A Japanese insight into beauty), Tokyo, Kodansha International, 1972.



my career, I've been the recipient of a lot of criticism. I've been told that I'm not a team player, that I'm not a leader, that I'm not a good communicator. But I've also been told that I'm a hard worker, that I'm a dedicated professional, that I'm a person who gets things done.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of communication in the workplace. But what if we could communicate without words? What if we could communicate through our actions, through our body language, through our facial expressions? That's the idea behind the new technology of non-verbal communication. It's a technology that's been around for a long time, but it's only now that it's being used commercially. It's a technology that's being used by a lot of people, and it's being used in a lot of different ways. It's a technology that's being used to improve the way we work, to improve the way we live, and to improve the way we communicate.

The first step in using non-verbal communication is to understand the basics. There are a lot of different ways to communicate without words, and it's important to understand the basics of each one. The first step is to understand the basics of body language. Body language is the way we use our body to communicate. It's the way we use our posture, our facial expressions, and our gestures to communicate. It's a very important part of non-verbal communication, and it's something that we all use every day.

Another important part of non-verbal communication is facial expressions. Facial expressions are the way we use our face to communicate. They're a very important part of non-verbal communication, and they're something that we all use every day. There are a lot of different facial expressions, and each one has a different meaning. It's important to understand the basics of facial expressions, and it's important to be able to read them. That's the idea behind the new technology of non-verbal communication. It's a technology that's being used to improve the way we work, to improve the way we live, and to improve the way we communicate.

As you can see, non-verbal communication is a very important part of our lives. It's something that we all use every day, and it's something that we all need to understand. That's the idea behind the new technology of non-verbal communication. It's a technology that's being used to improve the way we work, to improve the way we live, and to improve the way we communicate. It's a technology that's being used by a lot of people, and it's being used in a lot of different ways. It's a technology that's being used to improve the way we work, to improve the way we live, and to improve the way we communicate.

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Yanagi's next point was that, unless society acknowledged and respected the value and importance of these conscientious craftsmen, it would be impossible for them to work to their best ability.

Whether artists can do good work or not depends chiefly upon society. Both in Europe and America for a long time painters and sculptors have been socially acknowledged as 'artists.' It is only recently that craftsmen also have received the same recognition. It is quite doubtful if people in general look at a pot with the same respect as they do at a painting. Without the recognition of society, even the greatest artist cannot do sufficient work, because he has to face constant economic anxiety.<sup>11</sup>

I am very much in agreement with Yanagi's thought on the importance of societal appreciation of the artist/maker. In Scandinavia, the general public have been educated to respect and appreciate the value of well designed industrial or handmade objects, and design practice within industry has been given the room to expand and flourish. I feel in parts of Europe and particularly in Ireland, it is only a minority who respect and appreciate the quality of well designed and crafted objects. As a result, production has become somewhat stagnant. To me, it seems to be something of a vicious circle for, if a country has a low standard of living, such as Ireland has, the appreciation of well designed craft objects becomes something of an élitist pursuit. This is not to say that the general public do not spend money on expensive production items, for they do, but their patronage tends to be more directed at the large well-established companies, who make what is perceived to be produce of a high standard, and which has a long traditional or social standing.

Yanagi believed that the only way to combat this situation and to improve the attitude of society was through increasing aesthetic and cultural awareness at school, by making the study of their appreciation part of the basic curriculum. To him, modern day school education tends to place more emphasis on developing the intellect and, as a result, awareness of cultural identity and tradition suffer.

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<sup>11</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman* (A Japanese insight into beauty), Tokyo, Kodansha International, 1972.



...the value of the work is not in the work itself, but in the results it produces. The value of the work is not in the work itself, but in the results it produces.

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His third suggestion was that intense co-operation should be considered between the individual artists and industrialists of machine production. Through witnessing social and industrial development, Yanagi became aware that handmade products alone would not be able to meet the demands of the rapidly increasing population, or to compete with the low prices that were being charged for machine made items. Consequently, he felt that it was necessary for the artist/maker to have a connection with machine production, in order to reform and improve its quality. If a designer in industry creates excellent designs, the products that are sent out into the market will be of excellent quality. But if the standard of design is low, the quality of produce will be low and therefore bad design will flood the market. For this reason, Yanagi saw the job of the designer as being of ultimate importance to the future of crafts. He felt that companies should respect and recognise the important position which the designer holds and avoid letting commercialism and profit margins restrict his designs.

To him, the ideal situation would be that where the designer works alongside the men of technology, so that the designer acquires the scientific knowledge to recognise the capacity and restrictions of the machine. The industrialist can educate the artist on the quality of materials, the aim of the product and the natural forms and colours suited to machine production. In return the artist can apply his freedom and originality confidently, avoiding forms and materials which are unsuitable for machine production. With his newly acquired knowledge, the artist/designer can then strive to produce objects that are aesthetically pleasing, functional and which will assist us in our daily living, thus creating a better quality of life.

I feel that Yanagi made a very valid point in encouraging the artist/designer to work in co-operation with the industrialist. In my own experience of working within industry, one of the main problems which arose repeatedly was the difficulty of translating the designer's submission from paper to the three-dimensional finished product. This was due to lack of knowledge, on the designer's behalf, of the capacity of the raw material with which he was working - in this instance, glass. The outcome of this situation was a huge waste, not only of raw materials, but also of design and production time. Again, with my own design submissions for industrial production, many changes of form and scale had to be made in order to produce the suggested items, due to my lack of knowledge of machine production, also







resulting in waste. I firmly believe that, unless you understand the working properties of your raw material, particularly when designing for machine production, it is impossible to create objects that are practical, functional and pleasing to the eye. To me, it is of vital importance, if the quality of machine produced crafts are to improve, that large companies realise the necessity of employing good designers. They must encourage this co-operative working environment, not only from a profit point of view, but also to improve the standard of living. As a young emerging designer, I find Yanagi's suggestions very relevant and informative for my future as a craft artist/maker. Inspired as I am by his viewpoint on the future of crafts in industry, I feel that large production companies are not taking on the responsibility of keeping a keen eye on contemporary craft design and are not making use of the wealth of young, talented designers who graduate from college each year. Unless this situation improves, I feel that my ability as a designer will not be pushed to its maximum potential and that the design of machine produced crafts will remain somewhat stagnant and outdated.

When one looks at contemporary design success stories within industry, Scandinavia has always been considered to be one of the pioneers. Finland, in particular, has produced some of the most conscientious and successful designers of all time, one of the most renowned being Kaj Franck (1911-1989) (see Figure 13). When observing Franck's design ethics and the way in which he dealt with machine production, many parallels can be drawn between his approach to design within industry and the suggestions made by Yanagi on the same issue. It is for this reason that I have chosen to write of Franck's design success, although it is unlikely that he was ever influenced by Yanagi Soetsu, and I have not been able to find any documentation to suggest otherwise.

Throughout his career, Franck was always at the forefront of design for industry. At the age of thirty-four, he took up the position of designer for Arabia, Finland's largest pottery and porcelain factory, and, having been promoted to the position of artistic director, he remained working there until 1970. While working at Arabia, Franck also held a design post with Nuutajärvi Glassworks, where he also became artistic director until 1973, when he left the company. In addition to holding both of these positions, Franck



resulting in a vast, if not infinite, number of possible solutions. The  
properties of the various materials, however, when designed for a specific  
function, are responsible for creating a specific, and usually, functional and  
predictable result. The first of these is the ability of materials  
to protect a structure from the elements, thereby ensuring the necessity of  
employing good design. They must also be able to provide a safe working  
environment, not only from a point of view of safety, but also from a point  
of view of health. As a result, the design of a structure must be based on a  
series of assumptions and criteria, which are often very difficult to define.  
At the same time, the design must be able to provide a safe working  
environment, not only from a point of view of safety, but also from a point  
of view of health. As a result, the design of a structure must be based on a  
series of assumptions and criteria, which are often very difficult to define.

When one looks at the design of a structure, it is often with a mixture  
of admiration and awe. The design of a structure is often a complex  
task, and one that requires a great deal of skill and experience. The  
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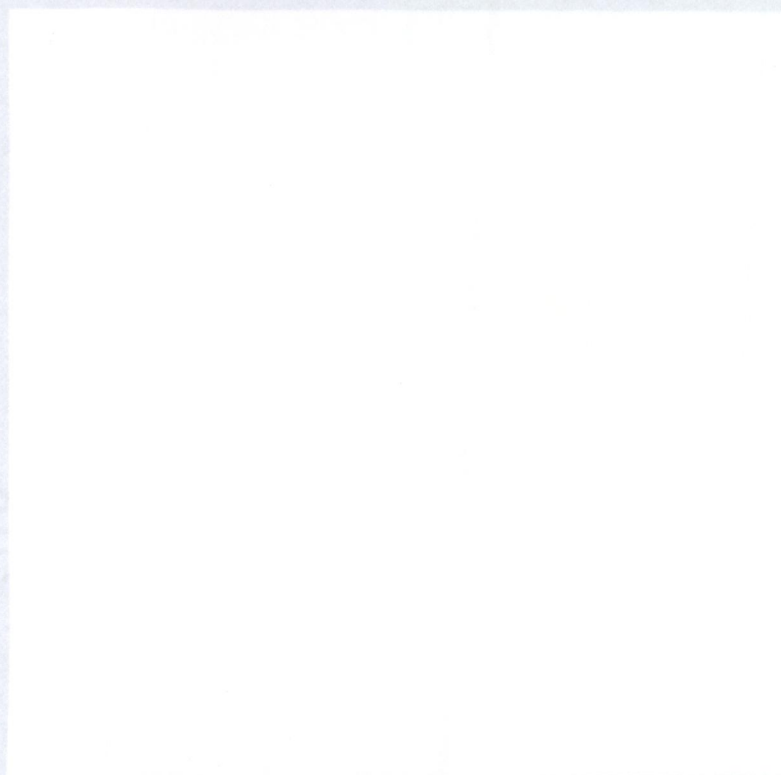
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Figure 13. Photo of Kaj Franck. Taken from: Iittala Finland/Arabia Finland Brochure, Helsinki, Hackman Tabletop Oy Ab.







was also artistic director of the Institute for Industrial Art in Helsinki from 1960 to 1968.

One may wonder what was so unusual and special about Kaj Franck's design capacity, for him to occupy so many situations of high esteem. His success can be attributed to his "search for the pure, enduring and basically straightforward relationship between man and industrially produced objects,"<sup>12</sup> and in his unswerving resolve to design and make timeless anonymous products.

Like Yanagi, Franck believed that the beauty of an object lay in its functionality. He once said, "Isn't the ultimate meaning of beautiful necessary, functional, justified, right?"<sup>13</sup>

Franck echoed this statement in the objects which he produced, which were ultimately utilitarian and self-justifying (see Figure 14). The main basis for his designs stemmed from his desire to create functional items which blended so well into day-to-day living as not to be noticed. He hoped that the beauty of the object would distract the viewer from the thought that the object had actually been designed. This philosophy is very much on a par with that of Yanagi, and supports Yanagi's theory on the beauty of functionality, the quality of intimacy and the enriching effect that using such items has on our daily lives.

Franck's desire to create objects of anonymity is also something which Yanagi advocated to the artist/maker. Yanagi strongly opposed the signing of pieces by individual artist/designers. Although he did not think it was wrong, he felt that signing one's piece revealed a sense of attachment, which went against the notion of self-less immersion and non-egocentricity. To him, the signature was also a form of self-advertising and pandered to the needs of the buyers and critics, because the public respects and often values a piece simply because it is signed. Signatures went against Yanagi's theory that beauty can only stem from freedom and he believed that in signing one's name on a piece, the beauty of the object died, because it now drew attention to itself and entered into the realm of self-consciousness.

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<sup>12</sup> Siltavuori, Eeva. A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function, Finland*, No. 3, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> Iittala, Finland. Arabia Finland Catalogue on Kaj Franck. Hackman Tabletop Oy AB, Helsinki, Finland.









Figure 14. Carafe. Kaj Franck, Nuutajärvi Glassworks, 1954. Taken from:  
Siltavuori, Eeva, A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function, Finland*, No. 3, 1987.







The most beautiful work will be completed when the artist entirely absorbs himself and his honour in his work. It does not mean killing himself; on the contrary, it is the best way to keep alive. But if he sticks to himself or is restrained in some way or another, he cannot freely make his objects nor give them true meaning. Without freedom, there is no beauty. Beauty will be accomplished only when complete freedom is acquired. Most of the artist craftsmen are the slaves of artistry.<sup>14</sup>

Franck mirrored this belief when he said that the considerations of the object itself, as such, should not be the aim of the designer. To him, the designer's aim should be "the creative solution to the problem in hand."<sup>15</sup> This statement only serves to further emphasise his belief that objects produced for everyday use should remain anonymous. Franck often expressed his difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that the industrialisation had turned the design of utility objects into a battlefield for the designers own need to express himself:

It bothers me that designers of utility ware seek to approach art.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his career, and despite his success, Franck always marketed his produce under the company name and never once signed any of his work.

The need for individual affirmation which grew from self-consciousness was something which frustrated him and which was in total contrast with his own striving to understand the essence and meaning of the object.

The purpose of design is to serve people, whereas nowadays, people tend to serve design.<sup>17</sup>

With regard to working as a designer within industry, Franck, for a time, broke down many of the previously existing barriers. Aware of the fact, as Yanagi stated, that industry and technology puts constraints on the craftsman, in the form of his use of skill and materials and on the designer, in

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<sup>14</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman*.

<sup>15</sup> Iittala, Finland. Arabia Finland Catalogue on Kaj Franck. Hackman Tabletop Oy AB, Helsinki, Finland.

<sup>16</sup> Siltavuori, Eeva. A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function, Finland*, No. 3, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit.



The first design work will be done in a very simple way. The designer will be asked to design a simple object, such as a box, and to think of it in terms of its function. The designer will be asked to think of the box as a container, and to think of it in terms of its shape. The designer will be asked to think of the box as a container, and to think of it in terms of its shape. The designer will be asked to think of the box as a container, and to think of it in terms of its shape.

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that he is forced to work within the restrictions of an industrial process, Franck, while working for Arabia, challenged and overcame those limitations. At that time, Franck was lucky enough to be working with a team of strong designers who shared many common goals. This sense of team spirit and unity gave him the support that he needed to launch a new and radical table service which he had been designing (see Figure 15). The object of this new "Kilta" service was to upstage the concept of integrated services, the forms being so basic and reduced that other objects, such as part of old services, would not look out of place on the same table. Initially, the Arabia management team had reservations about launching the product, but once the "Kilta" service made a breakthrough in the market (by 1975, 25 million pieces had been sold), the factory management gave the designers a freer hand. For the rest of the time that Franck worked with Arabia, marketing did not intrude on the work of the designers and he recollects this time as being of ultimate reward and importance to the rest of his career.

As a member of a small group, a designer experiences the close intimacy that stems from creative interaction ... the division of roles loses all meaning and everything is subordinated to the common goal.<sup>18</sup>

Yanagi Soetsu also firmly believed in the value of the individual artist/designer working co-operatively with other artisans, as he felt that the individual artist should be socially conscious enough to accept the responsibility of leadership, guidance and protection of his neighbouring artisans.

The individual artist should feel that his new mission is to work together with many other artisans. Though the work that no one but he can produce naturally has its value, nevertheless, the essential aspect of practical art is to be found in the presentation of the individual artist, together with many other artisans. To absorb the individual character in a union of artisans, or in other words to revive the individual artist in a united co-operation will be necessary. We call him the individual artist, because he generally lives by himself, but the artist in the future should sometimes live outside of his ivory tower.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Siltavuori, Eeva. A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function, Finland*, No. 3, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Soetsu, Yanagi. *The Unknown Craftsman*.









Figure 15. Kilta service. Kaj Franck, Arabia Finland 1953-74. Taken from: Siltavuori, Eeva, A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function, Finland*, No. 3, 1987.







Yanagi's beliefs in the necessity of cultural and traditional appreciation were also a main concern of Franck's, when it came to designing. To him, "tradition could be a cage which imprisons and restrains, but at best, it can be a spring that gushes forth new strength." <sup>20</sup>

Franck constantly referred back to the past when designing utility objects, and often spoke fondly of the anonymously mass produced objects created during pre- and early industrial times.

Their manufacture exploited the means of the new technology, but their forms referred to neo-classical economy of expression and to meticulously studied everyday articles whose origins were way back in the handcraft tradition ... In fact those anonymous objects ... should be looked on as early classics of industry. <sup>21</sup>

To Franck, making use of tradition was not to imitate, preserve or regress, but was the "gushing spring" which could give rise to fresh, new and successful designs (see Figure 16), so long as it was considered as part of general cultural development.

Yanagi Soetsu died in 1961, at a time when Kaj Franck had established himself firmly as a pioneer of utility design in industry and was reaping the benefits of his conscientious working methods. It is quite unlikely that Franck was influenced by the philosophies of Yanagi, as the first English edition of "The Unknown Craftsman, (a Japanese insight into beauty)" was only published in 1972. It is fascinating to think that while, on one side of the world, Yanagi Soetsu was writing his beliefs on the future of crafts in industry, Kaj Franck, on the other side, was actually putting those thoughts into process. What seems even more incredible is the almost identical approach to production in industry that both individuals had, as if some form of telepathy had united their views together. I am sure that if Yanagi Soetsu had lived to witness the outcome of this predictions, reflected in the successful working ethics of Kaj Franck and to hear these words from the "conscience of Finnish design," he would have felt some optimism for the future of crafts and a deep sense of reward for his lifetime dedication.

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<sup>20</sup> Iittala, Finland. Arabia Finland Catalogue on Kaj Franck. Hackman Tabletop Oy AB, Helsinki, Finland.

<sup>21</sup> Siltavuori, Eeva. A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function, Finland*, No. 3, 1987.



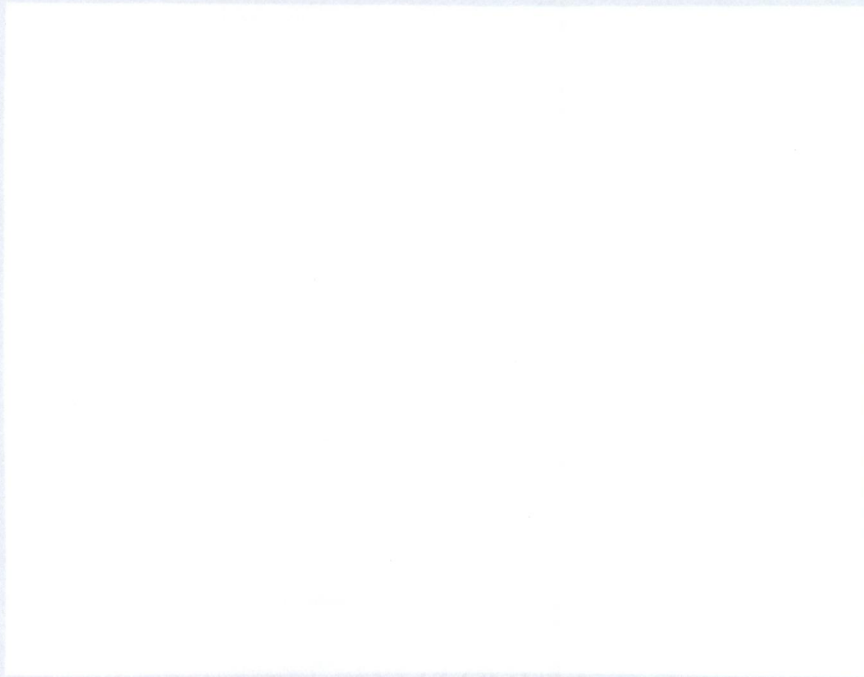






Figure 16. Porcelain Condiment Set, Kaj Franck, Arabia Finland, 1956. Taken from: Siltavuori, Eeva, A dream of a timeless object, *Form, Function Finland*, No. 3, 1987.





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Nobody believes anymore that the world can be transformed with a beautiful everyday object, but still we continue to see and sense in many objects inspired by the ideal of 'beautiful utility ware' their profound social message; that dream of a better more beautiful and more real world.<sup>22</sup>







## CONCLUSION

Throughout my research of Yanagi Soetsu, his *Mingei* movement, and his philosophies on beauty and the future of crafts, even though I found his thoughts and suggestions very interesting and valid to my own work as an emerging craft designer, I was anxious about the credibility of his argument, because of the fact that he was never a maker or designer himself.

Having familiarised myself with the work and achievements of Kaj Franck, and having recognised the almost identical similarities between both men's visions and goals, I now look on Yanagi's guidelines to the artist/maker of the future in a more directed and convinced manner. The fact that Franck has qualified Yanagi's theories, by unconsciously putting his philosophies into an actual and successful reality leads me to believe that Yanagi Soetsu has left an invaluable legacy to the world of crafts; one which should not be discarded due to its philosophical nature, but absorbed and digested by all who wish to participate in the future of craft production.

Having completed this study, I feel that I have developed a deeper understanding of folk crafts and a keener sense of design, which I aim to nurture and put to use in my future work. Appreciating the working ethics of the traditional Japanese craftsman and Yanagi's concept of beauty has caused me to become more stimulated by my field of work and I am now eager to explore my capacity as an artist/maker within an industrial society.

The importance of societal recognition of the artist/maker to the future of crafts is something which has become very obvious to me as a result of doing this thesis. I intend, in the future, to explore a means of re-educating society in the value of culture and tradition, be it through my work or on a more academic level. I hope, with my newly acquired knowledge and enthusiasm, that I can inspire my fellow colleagues to do the same, so that together we can strive to design objects that will push both Yanagi's and Franck's dream of a better quality of living closer to being a reality.







## LIST OF FOOTNOTES

- 1 Moeran, Brian. Bernard Leach and the Japanese Folk Craft Movement: the formative years. *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 2, Nos. 2 & 3, 1989.
- 2 Op. cit.
- 3 Soetsu, Yanagi. What the Mingei Movement has contributed, *Mingei - the standard of beauty*, Meigeikan handout from Spring Special Exhibition, April 13-June 27, 1993.
- 4 Moes, Robert. *Mingei Japanese Folk Art*, The Brooklyn Museum.
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17. Station EA-1A, A-1000, 1000 ft. above sea level, Fort...  
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18. Station EA-1B, A-1000, 1000 ft. above sea level, Fort...  
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19. Station EA-1C, A-1000, 1000 ft. above sea level, Fort...  
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26. Station EA-1J, A-1000, 1000 ft. above sea level, Fort...  
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11. The Board of Directors of the Corporation shall have the right to elect and remove the officers and directors of the Corporation.

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