

Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art

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Urushi (Japanese Lacquer) and Urushi Lacquerware

Urushi (Japanese lacquer) is the sap collected from the urushi tree.

It was first used as a paint, an adhesive, and as a waterproofing agent.

It is characterized by its robust coating film, its resistance to heat and humidity, and the fact that it is unaffected by both acids and alkalis.

Urushi

Urushi trees are native to Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and other East Asian countries, as well as Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries. When the trunk of an urushi tree is injured, milky white sap is produced to fill the wound. This sap is scraped from the trunk and collected, and then refined into urushi. Urushi is collected from urushi trees that are at least 10 years old, and only about 200 grams of urushi can be collected from a single tree over the course of one year.

Urushi was first used as a paint, an adhesive, and as a waterproofing agent. It is characterized by its robust coating film, its resistance to heat and humidity, and the fact that it is unaffected by both acids and alkalis.

The raw urushi (kiurushi) from which wood chips and trash have been removed is stirred to homogenize the ingredients (known as the “nayashi process”) and heated to evaporate the water (known as the “kurome process”) to produce refined urushi, which is translucent, candy-colored, and viscous. When iron powder is added to refined urushi, it becomes “black urushi”, and when pigments are added to add color, it becomes “colored urushi”.



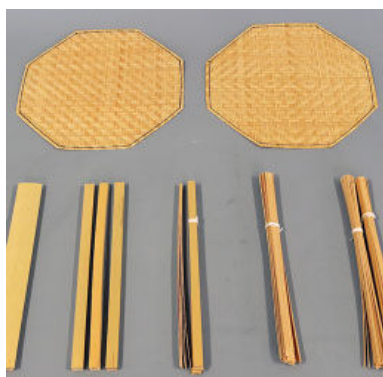
Urushi Tree



Making Colored Urushi



Urushi Bath



Rantai: wicker and bamboo strips

Drying Urushi

“Drying” urushi is the process of solidifying liquid urushi lacquer. Urushi requires an appropriate temperature (around 25 degrees celsius) and humidity (around 75%) to dry (or solidify), and the hotter and more humid the rainy season, the faster it dries. Urushi baths are sealed with boards of cypress or cedar wood to prevent dust, retain heat and humidity, and to maintain the optimal temperature and humidity for drying urushi.

Urushi Lacquerware

In addition to its sturdiness, urushi has a unique texture and luster, and its unique beauty has long matched the aesthetic sense of the Japanese people. Many types of urushi lacquerware have been produced, and each piece is completed through a long and labor-intensive process that consists of multiple steps. First, the body of the piece is created through the base process, then, the base is prepared through the foundation process, and urushi lacquer is applied over this base in the undercoating process. Finally, patterns are added onto the surface of the urushi lacquerware in the decoration process.

Base

The base of an urushi lacquerware is also called “soji”素地 or “kitai”器胎. Urushi lacquerware made of wood is called “mokutai”木胎, bamboo is called “rantai”藍胎, paper is called “shitai”紙胎, leather is called “shippi”漆皮, metal is called “kintai”金胎, and ceramics are called “totai”陶胎. Another technique (“kanshitsu”乾漆) is to coat hemp cloth with urushi over and over. “Rantai” is made by weaving node-less bamboo strips, with the outer skin removed, into a pattern along the wooden form of the lid and body. The method of applying urushi to fill in the weave before applying the decoration is a technique unique to Kagawa.

Urushi lacquerware is a craft unique to the Orient that is produced by using urushi as a coating, adhesive, and waterproofing agent on wood, bamboo, paper, and other bodies.

Urushi lacquerware is completed through the following processes: the base process of shaping the body, the foundation process of preparing the base, the undercoating process of applying urushi over the body, and the decoration process of decorating the surface of the piece with colored urushi or gold powder.

Decoration

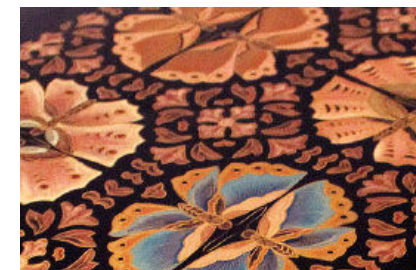
There are various techniques for decoration, the most representative of which are “makie”蒔絵, in which gold powder or other decoration is sprinkled before the urushi pattern is dry, and “raden”螺鈿, in which flat shells are cut into patterns and pasted on the urushi surface. Kagawa has its own three unique techniques of “kinma”蒨醬, “zonsei”存清, and “choshitsu”彫漆.

Kagawa's Three Techniques → see page 9 for the detailed explanation

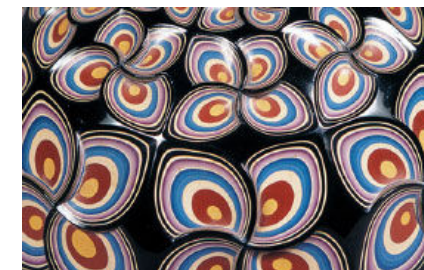
The three techniques are characterized by carving and colored urushi decoration.



Kinma 蒨醬 Urushi is applied over a bare surface of a bamboo or wood body. A design is carved with a sword and the carved grooves are filled with colored lacquer before finally being polished flat to show the intended design.



Zonsei 存清 A design is drawn with colored urushi on a surface primed with undercoating urushi, and the outline and details of the design are engraved with a sword and these engravings filled with gold powder. There is also a technique of embedding colored urushi.

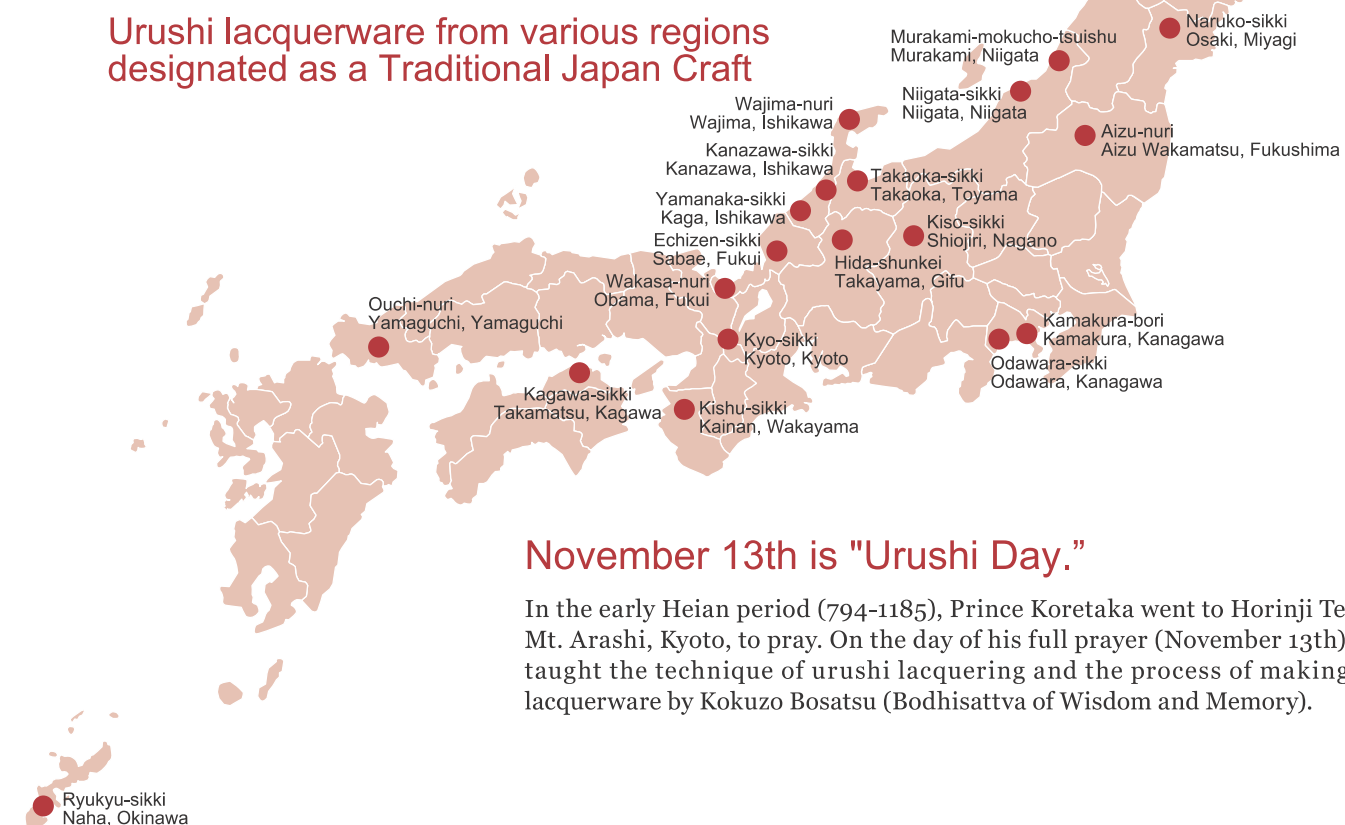


Choshitsu 彫漆 The relief patterns are raised by applying dozens of coats of colored urushi (about 3 mm per 100 coats) and then carving down through the layers.

Urushi Lacquerware Production Areas

During the Edo period (1603-1868), local governments' industrial promotion measures led to the development of distinctive urushi crafts in various regions, which have become today's urushi lacquerware production areas.

Urushi lacquerware from various regions designated as a Traditional Japan Craft



November 13th is "Urushi Day."

In the early Heian period (794-1185), Prince Koretaka went to Horinji Temple on Mt. Arashi, Kyoto, to pray. On the day of his full prayer (November 13th), he was taught the technique of urushi lacquering and the process of making urushi lacquerware by Kokuzo Bosatsu (Bodhisattva of Wisdom and Memory).

漆芸の歴史



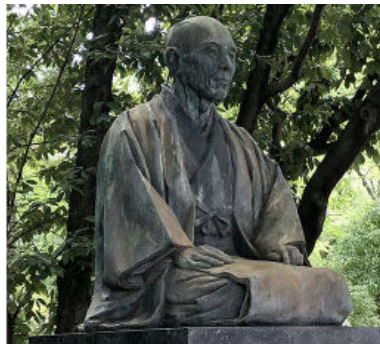
Wooden lacquerware excavated at the Korekawa Stone Age Site
Source: Jomon Archives (photo by Hachinohe City Board of Education)



The front door of “Tamamushi-no-zushi” (Jewel Beetle Portable Shrine, 7th century)



Yatsunashi Makie Raden Suzuri-bako (Writing Box with Eight Bridges, 18th century) by OGATA Kourin



Statue of TAMAHAJI Zokoku, Takamatsu City Central Park

History of Urushi Lacquer Art

The relationship between the Japanese people and urushi dates back to the Jomon period (about 9,000 years ago). As time went by, the technique developed, and by the Meiji period (1868-1912), urushi lacquerware and urushi artwork became one of Japan's major exports, and is now considered one of Japan's representative traditional cultures.

Japanese Urushi Lacquer Art

The history of urushi in Japan dates back 9,000 years, with urushi-coated vessels excavated from Jomon-era ruins. When urushi craft techniques were introduced in the Asuka pe riod (710-794) from mainland China along with Buddhism, the art of urushi greatly developed. In the Nara period (710-794), excellent urushi works were preserved in Shoso-in, and Buddhist statues made with the Kanshitsu technique, in which linen cloth is coated with urushi, were enshrined in Todaiji and Kofukuji Temples. During the Heian period (794-1185), the techniques of makie and raden were improved to suit Japanese tastes, and urushi was used not only for aristocratic furnishings but also for the interior of buildings such as Byodoin Ho-o-do and Chusonji Konjikido.

From the Kamakura (1185-1333) to Muromachi (1333-1573) periods, urushi lacquered furniture decorated with makie and raden became popular among samurai, while new lacquerware called karamono was imported from China during the Muromachi period and became very popular.

In the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1600), urushi lacquered furnishings, called Nanban-sikki, were introduced to the West. Lacquered tea utensils were also favored by tea masters as the ritual of the tea ceremony was established and the tea ceremony became popular. During the Edo period (1603-1867), urushi craftsmen working for the shogunate, and feudal lords produced elaborate and luxurious makie lacquerware, while industrial promotion by the various domains led to the formation of lacquerware production centers and the spread of lacquerware among the general public. In addition, through trade with Holland, luxurious makie and randen furnishings were exported to Western Europe, where they were favored by royalty and aristocracy.

In the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese lacquerware was well received in Europe, and the government's policy of promoting industrial development and the export of handicrafts helped to develop the industry of lacquerware with distinctive characteristics in each region. The production of urushi craft as an art also began, influenced by Western artistic trends.

Soon after World War II, in 1950, the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties was enacted, protecting traditional craft techniques and establishing a system of important intangible cultural properties. In 1974, the Law for the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries was enacted, designating each region's distinctive urushi lacquerware as a traditional craft and promoting the industry.

Kagawa's Urushi Lacquer Art

Kagawa's urushi lacquerware tradition began with the emergence of an urushi art genius in the late Edo period (1603-1868). With his unique, never-seen-before techniques, Kagawa quickly became known as the urushi lacquer art kingdom.

It began with TAMAHAJI Zokoku

Urushi lacquer art in Kagawa Prefecture took root in the late Edo period (1603-1868), thanks to the works of a gifted urushi artisan named TAMAHAJI Zokoku, who worked for the Takamatsu clan. Born in 1806 into a family of sword sheath painters, Zokoku took over the family business and mastered the art of painting and engraving. He then went to Kyoto to learn new lacquer work techniques, such as the zonsei and choshitsu techniques from China, as well as rantai and kinma from Southern China and Southeast Asia, to replace makie, which was the mainstream at that time. After returning to his hometown, he worked under the patronage of the feudal lord to preserve and repair the domain's treasures, while at the same time producing unique urushi works using carving skills and colorful urushi that had never been seen before. Today, the kinma,

Kagawa’ s urushi lacquer art, created by TAMAHAJI Zokoku, has been handed down to the present day by successive generations of master craftsmen and artisans who have succeeded and developed the art against a background of rich nature, history, and diverse cultural traditions.
New efforts are also being made to pass on urushi culture to the future.

zonsei and choshitsu techniques created by Zokoku are known as the "Three Techniques of Kagawa Urushi Art," and Zokoku is considered the "founder of Kagawa urushi lacquer art”.

Development

Although TAMAHAJI Zokoku died in 1869, his family continued the urushi craft that he had started, manufacturing various types of lacquerware. In 1898, the Kagawa Prefecture Craft School (now Kagawa Prefectural Takamatsu Craft High School) was established in response to the government's policy of promoting industrial development, and efforts to train craftspeople began in earnest. Gradually, the reputation of Kagawa lacquerware grew. While the lacquerware industry took root mainly in Takamatsu City, the spread of the electric potter's wheel led to the mass production of wooden base materials, which in turn led to the production of Sanuki-bori, in which wooden carvings are finished with colored urushi. Hyakka-en, a lacquerware store in Takamatsu at the time, dealt widely in Sanuki-bori as well as lacquerware, and master carvers who inherited the techniques of TAMAHAJI Zokoku, such as ISHII Keido and TAKAHASHI Kanzan, were active in this field. Kagawa is also known as the "Kingdom of Urushi Lacquer Art.” From the Taisho period (1912-1926) to the early Showa period (1926-1989), Kagawa urushi artists attempted to establish Kagawa lacquerware as a fine art in line with the urban movement. At the center of this effort was ISOI Joshin, who, through his study of TAMAHAJI Zokoku's works, learned various decorative techniques and invented the technique of “tenbori kinma” (dot carving kinma), which enabled illustration with depth and a three-dimensional feel. OTOMARU Kodo, who was active at the same time, produced richly poetic choshitsu works using a wide variety of colored urushi. Together with OTOMARU Kodo and others, ISOI Joshin formed a study group called Takumi-kai, and worked hard to improve the standard of Kagawa’s lacquer art.

Living National Treasures

After the war, with the establishment of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, kinma and zonsei were selected as intangible cultural properties for which support measures should be taken, and ISOI Joshin was recognized as the holder of the kinma technique and KAGAWA Soseki as the holder of the zonsei technique. In 1955, OTOMARU Kodo was recognized as a holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property (Living National Treasure) for choshitsu, and the following year, ISOI Joshin was recognized as a holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property (Living National Treasure) for kinma. KAGAWA Soseki was designated as a Kagawa Prefecture Intangible Cultural Asset Holder as one of the few remaining holders of the excellent zonsei technique. In 1954, the Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute was established as a facility for the transmission of Kagawa's urushi techniques. Later, ISOI Masami and OHTA Hitoshi were both designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property holders for their richly colored kinma and the wide range of expression they achieved with it. AKASHI Bokkei and OHNISHI Tadao, on the other hand, broke new ground in the field of interior decoration, as seen in their urushi-finished byobu (folding screens) and panels, and expanded the expressive range of Kagawa urushi art.

Other Techniques

In addition to the aforementioned Three Techniques, there are two other Kagawa lacquerware techniques: goto-nuri and zokoku-nuri.

Goto-nuri was created by GOTO Tahei, a samurai of the Takamatsu domain, who applied vermilion urushi to teacup saucers and other vessels and stroked the surface by hand to create an uneven surface and express a unique pattern. Zokoku-nuri is made by carving spirals into the base of round trays and other vessels, applying several coats of urushi, and sprinkling the carved surfaces with powdered makomo (a type of rice plant).

The above are the "five techniques of Kagawa lacquerware," and lacquerware made using these five techniques has been designated as a “Traditional Japan Craft.” Technicians who have been involved in the production of Kagawa lacquerware for many years and possess excellent skills in the five techniques are certified as Traditional Craftsmen to protect their skills.

Other Kagawa lacquerware techniques include Sanuki-bori, in which a pattern is carved into a thin layer of wood and filled with colored urushi, and Koma-nuri, in which a groove is carved in concentric circles and filled with different colors of urushi to create a koma (spinning top)-like effect.



Goto-nuri

Zokoku-nuri

Edo Period -1868

1806-TAMAKAJI Zokoku was born in Takamatsu, the son of FUJIKAWA Riemon, a scabbard urushi artist. He trained under his father and mastered the techniques of lacquering and carving.

Around 1826, he mastered the techniques of zonsei, choshitsu and rantai kinma.



TAMAKAJI Zokoku

1806-1869

Established the foundation of Kagawa urushi lacquer art.



Saishiki Kinma Ryoshi-suzuri-bako

<Important art object>

1854- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

The suzuri (inkstone) box fits inside the ryoshi (paper) box, and these two boxes are combined into a single unit. The base is made by weaving bamboo strips into a basket shape and securing them to a wooden frame, then applying black urushi over the top and finishing with colored urushi using the kinma technique and carving Chinese poetry on the sides.

Ryoshi-bako: length 40.0cm, width 31.1cm, height 11.1cm



Tsuikoku Matsugaura Kogo

<Important art object>

1851- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

Applying several dozen coats of vermilion urushi and then black urushi over the urushi, it is carved down to the vermilion urushi, and then carving out shell and ancient poem associated with Sanuki (the old name of Kagawa). It is finished with the tsuishitsu technique (a technique of carving patterns by applying dozens of layers of urushi).

Diameter 8.6~7cm, height 2.4cm

Around 1826, he returned to Takamatsu and produced more than 300 pieces of urushi works, including “Ikkaku Inro,” “Mastugaura Kogo,” “Tsuishu Tuzumi-bako,” and “Saishiki Kinma Ryoshi-suzuri-bako.”



Ikkaku Inro

<Important art object>

1839- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

Although not a urushi work, the Ikkaku Inro is a piece of artwork with 1,086 carved animals and plants on a unicorn tusk measuring just over 8 cm, attesting to the high level of Zokoku's carving skills.

Length 2.9 cm, width 5.5 cm, height 8.6 cm



Tsuishu Nijubori Tszumi-bako

<Important art object>

1839- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

The hollyhock crest of the Takamatsu domain is placed in the center of the lid surface, surrounded and flanked by two layers of choshitsu with peonies and chrysanthemums on the top and bottom, and butterflyes. It is finished with the tsuishitsu technique.

Height 28.8cm, width 46.0cm, height 24.0cm



Zonsei Bon

Late Edo period, Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

This is one of the few surviving Zonsei works by Zokoku. The bottom of the tray is coated with black urushi and carved with Zokoku's unique design. The inside of the rim is decorated with soybeans, pomegranates, loquats, peaches, grapes, etc., and the outside with katydid, narcissus, mustard, gourd, arabesque, etc., all painted with colored urushi in an elongated pattern.

Length 30.5cm, width 42.7cm, height 5.8cm

Meiji Period 1868-1912

1869- TAMAKAJI Zokoku died.

Zokoku's descendants and their relatives inherited the urushi art that Zokoku had started, and various types of urushi works were produced.

FUJIKAWA Kokusai

1808-1885



Kacho Zonsei Maru-bon

Meiji Period, Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

This is a work by Kokusai, the younger brother of TAMAKAJI Zokoku. On a black urushi ground, a long-tailed bird, camellia, beak pear, and chrysanthemum are painted in vermilion, yellow, green, and brown urushi, and the outlines and veins are highlighted by line engraving. The rising part is decorated with arabesque patterns in lines without color filling.

Diameter 55.8cm, height 4.7cm

TAMAKAJI Zokoku (aka. Kurakoku)

1878-1912



Tsuikoku Kogo Omodaka-kani-no-zu

Meiji Period, Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

This is a work by Zokoku (also known as Kurakoku), grandson of TAMAKAJI Zokoku. This tsuikoku (tsuishitsu with black urushi) incense container is coated with black urushi and has a vermilion ground pattern of seigaiha (wave crest) with engraved patterns of water plantains and crabs.

Diameter 8.5 cm, height 2.6 cm

1898- Kagawa Prefecture Craft School opened.

Around 1907- Hyakka-en opened in Takamatsu.

FUJIKAWA Ransai

1840-1915



Tsuikoku Sengo

Meiji Period, Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: Takahashi Akira

This is the work of Ransai, the second son of FUJIKAWA Kokusai. The center of the lid is made of a woven bamboo rantai, and the rim is made of a bent thin sheet coated with black urushi and carved with a design using the tsuikoku technique. The sides are decorated with arabesque patterns, and the entire surface of the lid is carved with chrysanthemums in full bloom.

Diameter 21.8cm, height 11.7cm

ISHII Keido

1877-1944



Tsuishu Kikukiri-houoh-mon

Ryoshi-bunko

1926- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

As the chief artisan at Hyakkaen, a lacquerware store in Takamatsu, ISHII Keido produced many Sanuki-bori works. The lid is covered with a layer of vermilion urushi and has a ground pattern of seigaiha (wave crest) with carvings of paulownia trees and phoenixes. The sides are carved with insects such as dragonflies, butterflies, and grasshoppers against a background of chrysanthemums.

Height 40.9cm, width 32.3cm, height 12.7cm

Taisho Period, Early Showa Period 1912-1956

Around 1913- ISOI Joshin invented the technique of tenbori (dot carving) kinma. / OTOMARU Kodo produced various types of choshitsu works.

1952- Kinma and Zonsei were selected as Intangible Cultural Properties to be subsidized under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties.



ISOI Joshin

1883-1964

Holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property for Kinma



Choshitsu Kinma Souka-mon

Tsuzumi-bako

1931- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

ISOI Joshin was active during the Taisho and Showa periods and worked to raise the standard of Kagawa lacquer art. This piece was produced with TAMAKAJI Zokoku's “Tsuishu Tsuzumi-bako” in mind. Each side of the box is covered with layers of black urushi and is choshitsu-embossed with a design of flowers and grasses, and the beveled part is choshitsu-embossed with a geometric design. The veins of the leaves and petals are decorated with gold ten-bori (dot carving) kinma.

Height 30.0cm, width 45.0cm, height 27.0cm



Kinma Jikiro Yukin-no-zu

1958- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

The vessel body, with a rounded shell, is made of stacked blocks of wood, which are hollowed out from the inside, and the bottom is fixed in place with a bamboo screen. The lid is decorated with a phoenix in flight, and the entire surface of the vessel is decorated with floral motifs in vermilion kinma carving on black ground. The outline of the phoenix is carved with a round sword, while the details are carved with a square sword.

Diameter 12.5cm, height 13.6cm

1954- Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute opened.

1955- OTOMARU Kodo was designated as a holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property for choshitsu.

1956- ISOI Joshin was designated as a holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property for kinma.



OTOMARU Kodo

1898-1997

Holder of Important Intangible Cultural Property for Choshitsu



Choshitsu Shikishi-bako Konchu-fu

1938- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

OTOMARU Kodo studied under ISHII Keido and honed his carving technique. This piece is a chamfered, corner-cut, covered box with a lid, in which various flowers and insects are depicted using the choshitsu technique of carving patterns by applying layers of colored urushi. Originally, the colors of urushi were limited to vermilion, black, yellow, green, and brown, using natural pigments, but Kodo was the first to introduce a new material-lake pigment- which expanded the range of color expression to an unprecedented degree and revolutionized the coloring of urushi. This is a monumental work that marked the starting point of that revolution.

Height 31.0 cm, width 27.5 cm, height 6.0 cm



Choshitsu Ajsai Kogo

Around 1950- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

The four petals of a hydrangea are grouped together and carved gradually larger from the center of the lid to the periphery. The vivid contrast of the colored choshitsu accentuates the gorgeousness of the hydrangea in full bloom.

Diameter 7.4 cm, height 5.0 cm

Late Showa Period 1957-1989

1962- KAGAWA Soseki was designated as Kagawa Prefecture Intangible Cultural Asset Holder. / AKASHI Bakkei and OHNISHI Tadao pioneer a new field of urushi art expression



KAGAWA Soseki

1891-1976

Kagawa Prefecture
Intangible Cultural Asset
Holder



Kacho-mon Zonsei Tebako

1969- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

KAGAWA Soseki was particularly skilled in the zonsei technique, one of the “Three Techniques”, and produced many excellent zonsei works. In this box, several pairs of floral butterfly patterns are painted from the center to the sides of the lid surface, and the surrounding area is filled with grass flower patterns. The complex color tones created by blotting, and the gold powder filled in the line engraving enhance the decorative effect, and the widened hem of the lid expresses the high quality of the black ground vessel.

Length 31.5 cm, width 22.5 cm, height 15 cm



Sanuki Zonsei Kou-bon

Year of creation unknown, Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

Decorative tray with a dragon in the center depicted by the zonsei technique. The dragon is said to often cause clouds and call rain. Zui-un (auspicious clouds) are placed behind the dragon and surrounded by a decorative frame shaped according to the dragon's figure. The patterned parts are layered up with vividly colored urushi to emphasize the three-dimensional effect.

Diameter 36.0 cm, height 3.5 cm

1976- Kagawa urushi lacquerware was designated as a Traditional Japan Craft (recognized by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry).

1985- ISOI Masami was designated as a holder of IICP (Important Intangible Cultural Property) for kinma.



AKASHI Bokkei

1911-1992



Kanshitsu Kazari-tubo “Kunpu-enzen (modest sweet-scented winds)”

1987- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

AKASHI Bokkei used traditional urushi techniques to create works with a new sense of form. This work is decorated with irises on a kanshitsu (dry urushi) base with a garlic motif, and the background is adorned with a stylized iris.

Diameter 42.8 cm (major axis) 40.3 cm (minor axis), height 43.5 cm



OHNISHI Tadao

1918-2007



Urushi-gaku “Bara (rose)”

Year of creation unknown, Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

OHNISHI Tadao, a contemporary craftsman active mainly in the Nitten, Nihon-shinkogei, and Nikkokai exhibitions, pioneered a new field of urushi art by creating urushi panels and folding screens to decorate architectural structures.

Height 152 cm, width 121.5 cm

Heisei Period 1989-2019

1994- OHTA Hitoshi was designated as a holder of IICP (Important Intangible Cultural Property) for kinma.

2009- Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute moved to the Kagawa Prefecture Cultural Hall.



ISOI Masami

1926-2023

Holder of IICP for kinma
Medal with Purple Ribbon
Person of Cultural Merit of
Kagawa Prefecture
The Order of the Rising Sun,
Gold Rays with Rosette



Kanshitsu Kinma Nami-mon Moriki

1958- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

ISOI Masami, the third son of ISOI Joshin, expanded the expressive range of kinma by creating his own unique techniques of expression, including the “oufuku-bori (reciprocal carving)” technique, in which dots are layered horizontally to form lines, and lines are layered horizontally to form planes. In this platter, urushi is applied over a wire mesh base to form the shape of a shell. The wave pattern is then carved into a band using the kinma technique of line carving and dot carving.

Length 39 cm, width 50 cm, height 11 cm



Kinma Pagan Sekiryo Goushi

1993- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

This work was produced in 1990 based on interviews during a visit to Pagan, the ancient capital of western Myanmar, the source of kinma. On the front of the lid, the moon floating in the dark night is represented by a white butterfly shell, and on the side is a silhouette of a pagoda floating in the moonlight. The work expresses an image of time and space coming to a stop mid-flow, layered with a sense of desolation.

Diameter 23.8cm, Height 15.0cm

2013- YAMASHITA Yoshito was designated as a holder of IICP (Important Intangible Cultural Property) for kinma.



OHTA Hitoshi

1931-2019

Holder of IICP for kinma
Medal with Purple Ribbon
Person of Cultural Merit of
Kagawa Prefecture
The Order of the Rising Sun,
Gold Rays with Rosette



Rantai Kinma Hakkaku Jikiro Souka-mon

1980- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

OHTA Hitoshi studied under ISOI Joshin and invented the rich color expression method of kinma. This octagonal food basket is produced using the rantai technique, a technique revived by OHTA Hitoshi, in which woven bamboo strips are used as the base material. The surface of the basket is coated with urushi, and flowers such as mustard, peony, and orchid are expressed using the kinma technique. The background is a continuous pattern of chrysanthemums.

Length 25.6 cm, width 25.6 cm, height 8 cm



Rantai Kinma Chabako “Harukaze (spring breeze)”

1998- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum, Photo: TAKAHASHI Akira

The double-weaved bamboo rantai base is coated with urushi and finished with a floral motif on a background of bush camellia and white-eyes using the kinma technique. The technique is a combination of traditional line carving and the “nunome-bori (texture-like carving)” kinma technique, invented by OHTA Hitoshi, in which fine vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines are drawn and filled with colored urushi to create shading and a three-dimensional effect. It expresses a peaceful moment of a sunny day, with a pleasant spring breeze under the soft light.

Length 14.6 cm, width 22.4 cm, height 15.7 cm

Reiwa Period 2019-

2020- OHTANI Hayato was designated as a holder of IICP (Important Intangible Cultural Property) for kinma



YAMASHITA Yoshito

1951-

Holder of IICP for Kinma
Medal with Purple Ribbon
Person of Cultural Merit of
Kagawa Prefecture
The Order of the Rising Sun,
Gold Rays with Rosette



Kinma Maki-e Bon “Ochi-tsubaki (fallen camellia)”

1989- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

YAMASHITA Yoshito studied kinma under ISOI Masami and maki-e under TAGUCHI Yoshikuni after completing his studies at the Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute. This work depicts a camellia flower falling and floating on the surface of the water while maintaining its shape. The background, which imitates the surface of the water, is carved with kinma, a technique in which a device is used to fill in the colors to create a variegated pattern. The camellia flowers, the main subject of the piece, are vividly depicted in maki-e that sprinkles vermillion, and the white lines along the edge of the tray represent the ripples that remain in the water.

Diameter 32.5 cm, height 3.5 cm



Kinma Shikishi-bako “Haruka (far away)”

1989- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum

“The work is overlaid with white urushi and silver powder, and the wind pattern is changed from white to black by filling in color 25 times using the kinma technique, with pale yellowish brown in some areas, adding color to the monochrome world and bringing it together in a refined manner. A man is traveling in the desert. After struggling with whether to turn back or to go on, he finds something ‘far away.’ He walks in search of hope and romance. Is this the mindset of the author who continues his journey with no choice but to go on? It is an excellent work with substance.” General Comments on the 36th Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition, Asahi Shimbun Award.

Length 27 cm, width 30 cm, height 6 cm



OHTANI Hayato

1954-

Holder of IICP for Kinma
Medal with Purple Ribbon
Person of Cultural Merit of
Kagawa Prefecture



Rantai Kinma Ajiro-ami Kazari-bako

1994- Collection of Kagawa Prefectural Museum

OHTANI Hayato graduated from the lacquerware course at Takamatsu Craft High School and studied under OHTA Hitoshi. The subject of this work is the Seto Inland Sea where the artist was born and raised. Waves composed of gradations and fish carved with nunome-bori kinma are covered with black ripples to express the transparency of the deep sea and a sense of rhythm. The base is a double-layered rantai, the inner surface is woven with chrysanthemum bottom weave, and the outer surface is made of bamboo strips, one by one, delicately painted with colored urushi and then woven together. Winner of the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Award at the 12th Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition.

Length 21 cm, width 27.5 cm, height 8 cm



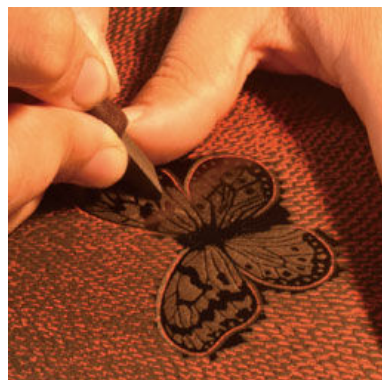
Rantai Kinma Kashi-ki “Kawase (shallows of a river)”

2009- Collection of Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

The vessel body is a double weave of rantai formed into a dodecagonal shape. The design depicts the graceful flight of dragonflies on the surface of a strolling river. The river flowing in the background is made of several layers of nunome-bori kinma, with pebbles placed on top of the kinma. Normally carved at right angles, they are crossed at an angle of about 40 degrees to more closely resemble waves. The inside is finished in roiro (wet and deep urushi black), and the weave is faintly transparent.

Diameter 25.5 cm, height 5 cm

香川の 三技法



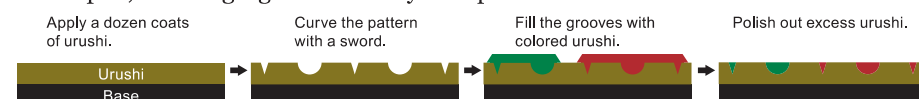
[Representative Artists]
TAMAKAJI Zokoku, ISOI Joshin, ISOI Masami, OHTA Hitosh, YAMASHITA Yoshito, OHTANI Hayato

Three Techniques of Kagawa

The Kagawa urushi art was founded by TAMAKAJI Zokoku. Kagawa lacquerware is characterized by detailed carving with a chisel or sword and rich decoration with colored urushi, and kinma, zonsei, and choshitsu are called the "three techniques of Kagawa." Another technique unique to Kagawa is rantai, in which bamboo strips are woven into a basket-like shape and used as the base material.

KINMA

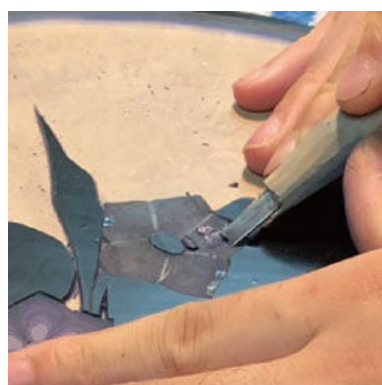
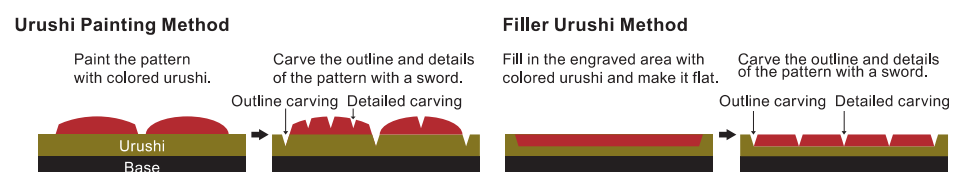
This technique is used to express the intended design by applying a dozen coats of urushi over a base made of bamboo or wood, carving the design with a kinma sword, filling the carved grooves with colored urushi, and polishing the surface flat. This technique was introduced to Thailand and Myanmar from southern China, and then to Japan around the end of the Muromachi period (16th century). Kinma is characterized by the detailed expression produced by the processes of carving, color-filling, and polishing. In recent years, in addition to the traditional sen-bori (line carving), techniques such as "ten-bori (dot carving)," "oufuku-bori (reciprocal carving)," and "nunome-bori (texture-like carving)" have been developed, enabling a greater variety of expression.



[Representative Artists]
TAMAKAJI Zokoku, FUJIKAWA Kokuai, KAGAWA Soseki, AKASHI Bokkei

ZONSEI

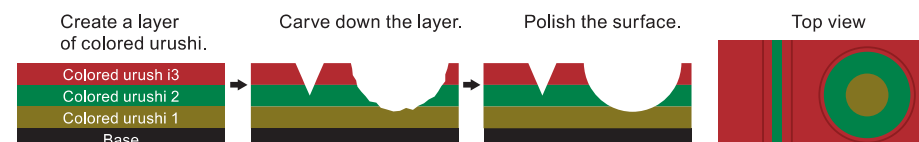
The surface of the lacquered base is painted with colored urushi and then engraved with a sword to create outlines and details, and the engraved edges are filled with gold powder or gold leaf to enhance the design (Urushi Painting Method). TAMAKAJI Zokoku used this technique to produce zonsei works. There is another technique of zonsei that involves carving a design on the surface of a lacquered base with an engraving knife, filling in the carving with colored urushi and polishing it out, and then carving it with a sword to enhance the design. This is called the "Filler Urushi Method."



[Representative Artists]
TAMAKAJI Zokoku, FUJIKAWA Ransai, TAMAKAJI Zokoku (aka. Kurakoku), ISHII Keido, OTOMARU Kodo, OHNISHI Tadao

CHOSHITSU

Choshitsu is a technique of carving a pattern in relief by applying dozens of coats of various kinds of colored urushi to create a layer of colored urushi (about 3 mm thick at 100 coats) and then carving down the layer. The three-dimensional effect of the carving itself and the contrast of colors depending on the depth of the carving create a unique beauty. TAMAKAJI Zokoku, who excelled in carving techniques, introduced it to Japan from China in the Muromachi period (1336-1573), and devised his own choshitsu technique to produce his works. The technique of coating only vermilion urushi is called tsui-shu, and the technique of coating only black urushi is called tsui-koku, both of which are types of choshitsu. Today, with the development of pigments, various colors of urushi are used.



香川県 漆芸研究所

Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

The Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute aims to nurture successors and improve the techniques of Kagawa's urushi art under the guidance of outstanding instructors (including Living National Treasures), and to disseminate information about Kagawa's urushi art through permanent exhibitions of urushi works and hands-on classes for residents.

The Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute was established in November 1954 as the first facility of its kind in Japan to preserve the Three Techniques of Kagawa and to train successors and improve lacquerware techniques. Initially, the purpose of the program was to improve the skills of craftsmen in the lacquerware industry, but with the cooperation of the industry, studios employees from various workplaces also joined the institute and received instruction directly from accomplished artists such as ISOI Joshin and KAGAWA Soseki.

Subsequently, in order to further promote local culture, operations related to culture and the arts were placed under the jurisdiction of the governor's department, and in April 2009 the institute was relocated to the Kagawa Prefectural Cultural Hall and re-launched as a base facility for the promotion of urushi lacquer art in Kagawa under a new training environment and management structure.

The Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute, which celebrated its 60th anniversary in November 2014, has more than 450 graduates who are active as urushi craft artists and urushi craft technicians, contributing to the promotion of traditional urushi art craft in Kagawa.

In 2013, Senior Lecturer YAMASHITA Yoshito (a graduate of the 15th Research Student Course) became the first graduate of the Institute to be designated a Living National Treasure, and in October 2020, Senior Lecturer OHTANI Hayato (a graduate of the 1st Fellowship Course) became a Living National Treasure.



Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute established in 1960



Present-day Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute (Kagawa Prefectural Cultural Hall)

Classroom Instruction by Living National Treasures



Senior Lecturer ISOI Masami



Senior Lecturer YAMASHITA Yoshito



Senior Lecturer OHTANI Hayato

Kagawa Urushi Lacquer Art Institute

1-10-39 Bancho, Takamatsu, Kagawa, 760-0017, Japan

Phone: +81 (0)87-831-1814 Fax: 831-1807

E-mail: shitsugei@pref.kagawa.lg.jp

<https://www.pref.kagawa.lg.jp/sitsugei/>





YAMASHITA Yoshito
Kinma Maki-e Bon "Ochi-tsubaki"



OHTANI Hayato
Rantai Kinma Ajiro-ami Kazari-bako



ISHII Keido
Tsuishu Kiku-kiri-hou-oh-mon Ryoshi-bunko



ISOI Joshin
Kinma Jikiro Yukin-no-zu



KAGAWA Soseki
Zonsei Zuicho-no-zu Jikiro



ISOI Masami
Kinma Zonsei Rinkan-hisho -bako



OTOMARU Kodo
Choshitsu Shikishi-bako Konchu-fu



OHTANI Hayato
Rantai Kinma Kashi-ki "Kawase"



YAMASHITA Yoshito
Kinma Shikishi-bako "Haruka"



TAMAKAJI Zokoku
Tsuishu Nijubori Tsuzumi-bako



ISOI Masami
Kinma Kikyū-no-tabigoushi



OTOMARU Kodo
Choshitsu Ajsai Kogo



ISOI Joshin
Choshitsu Kinma Souka-mon Tsuzumi-bako



OHTA Hitoshi
Rantai Kinma Hakkaku Jikiro Souka-mon



OHTA Hitoshi
Rantai Kinma Chabako "Harukaze"