



Commonplace Beauty Folk Craft

Have you ever paused to take a close look at the dishes, vases and textiles that we use so nonchalantly in our everyday lives?

The philosopher Muneyoshi Yanagi (1889–1961), who was active from the Taisho period (1912–1926) into the Showa period (1926–1989) espoused the idea that there is beauty in the objects we use everyday. Indeed, he believed that these have inherent beauty, precisely because

of their everyday use, and that this beauty adds richness to our lives. Yanagi promoted a new aesthetic appreciation of the myriad of everyday articles created by unknown craftsmen, such as pottery, lacquer ware and clothing, which until that time had been neglected and regarded as of being little significance. He termed this unpretentious beauty “the beauty of use,” and working with like-minded fellows, he dubbed everyday articles made by crafts-



KEIZO OKUBO

LEFT: A leather *haori*, or half-coat, and numerous ceramic wares are among the goods that today continue to show the beauty of Japan's traditional crafts.

men as *mingei*, or folk craft. In 1936, in order to encourage the spread of the appreciation of folk craft, the Japan Folk Crafts Museum opened in Komaba in Tokyo with a huge collection of approximately 10,000 items, thus allowing Yanagi's philosophy to live on into the modern era.

The "L'esprit Mingei au Japon" (The Spirit of "Mingei" in Japan) exhibition being held from September 2008 to January 2009, in the Quai Branly Museum in Paris has been widely covered by the French media, including the newspaper *Le Monde*. Teiko Utsumi, director of international programs at the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, which provided 100 items for the exhibition, says, "As many as 5,000 people came to the exhibition opening. The curator of the museum, Germain Viatte, had said that 'Parisians would probably never have even heard of the word *mingei*,' but I think that this kind of response suggests that the universal beauty of folk craft resonates equally with people all over the world." The commonplace "beauty" discovered in Japan more than 80 years ago is now in the process of being discovered anew by the rest of the world.

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<http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/>



LEFT: An Imari ware sake bottle — a simple, yet beautiful implement that was used in daily life.

ABOVE: Registered as a tangible cultural property, the Japan Folk Crafts Museum exhibits a range of items such as textiles, ceramics and lacquer ware.