

Beautiful Porcelain for Everyday Life



Kutani ware decorated with paintings of flowers
Photo: Courtesy of Ishikawa Prefectural Tourism League

Tokuda Yasokichi IV, the fourth head of a famous family of Kutani ware potters, has been dedicating her life as an artist to enrich people's everyday lives through porcelain.

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KUTANI ware is said to have originated in what is now Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The pottery is known for its elaborate figurative paintings of landscapes, flowers and birds. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), a technique to add gold to colored glaze, called *saishiki-kinrande*, was developed by the porcelain artist Kutani Shoza (1816-1883). The style of pottery which developed using this technique became known globally as “Japan Kutani” after examples were exhibited at the 1873 Vienna World’s Fair.

However, not all Kutani ware is made using the *saishiki-kinrande* technique. According to

potter Tokuda Yasokichi IV, “Just as each person has a different face, so there are many different types of Kutani ware.” This point of view should not be surprising since Tokuda’s father, Tokuda Yasokichi III (1933-2009), a living national treasure, was known for works which entirely broke with the characteristic figurative painting style of Kutani ware. His works are treasured for their abstract designs featuring beautifully gradated color glazes.

In Japan, the works of living national treasures typically become art objects that are exhibited in art museums. According to Tokuda, however, “My father wanted his pottery to be used intimately by people.”

Tokuda inherited her father’s name after he died and continues the family potting traditions as Tokuda Yasokichi IV.

“It is difficult to maintain a handicraft pottery studio today, when many products are flooding the market. I’ve thought about closing the studio when I’ve fallen ill. But I want to create porcelain that enriches

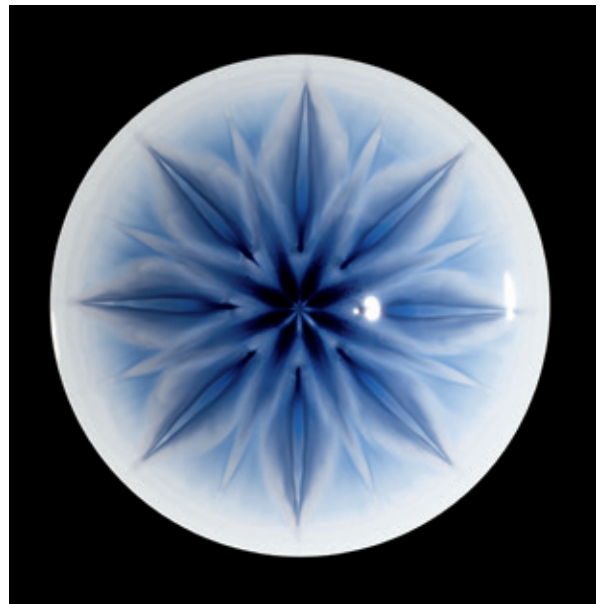
Kutani ware works by Tokuda Yasokichi IV on display at the British Museum in London
Photo: Courtesy of Tokuda Yasokichi IV



the everyday life of as many people as possible and I want to share these techniques with young people. I am able to keep going because I have this sense of duty.”

Having studied in the United States, offered guidance in pottery abroad and having received guidance from her distinguished father herself, Tokuda sincerely hopes that more people outside of Japan will become familiar with and use Japanese pottery. She says that she wants to interact with people from around the world through pottery as she searches for Japanese identity. Tokuda’s stage is expanding globally, with some of her works now being displayed as part of the permanent exhibition at the British Museum in London. Her works are popular among international art collectors, too.

Enriching everyday life by using quality pieces of pottery—even just a single piece. Inside Tokuda Yasokichi IV is a strong will to communicate this Japanese tradition to the world. **7**



A Kutani ware plate by Tokuda Yasokichi IV made using colors and techniques inherited from her father (2009)
Photo: Courtesy of Tokuda Yasokichi IV