

Contemporary Lacquer by
Yamazaki Mushū



Erik Thomsen LLC 美 Asian Art

Introduction

It has been three years since we introduced the work of Yamazaki Mushū to the West at the 2006 International Asian Art Fair in New York. Since then, his fine aesthetic sense, technical skill, and attention to detail have found wide admiration internationally.

This year's selection, comprising his 10 newest works from 2007 and 2008, shows again his consummate skill in the medium and his continued dedication to making art objects of the highest quality by traditional methods using the finest materials. Coming from an area with a long heritage in lacquer art and inspired by earlier artists, Mushū builds on these traditions and adds innovative and often surprising details. The chestnut *netsuke* (catalog nr. 10) with its worm hole on the side and its elaborate hidden decoration visible only through the the small *himotōshi* holes is a good example of such details.

It is with great pleasure that I present this fourth catalog of works by Yamazaki Mushū, to be introduced in March at our New York gallery.

Erik Thomsen

Yamazaki Mushū

山崎夢舟

Kaga Lacquer Master

Yamazaki Atsushi was born in 1966, the eldest son of lacquer master Yamazaki Geishū. He started an apprenticeship with Kaga lacquer master Nakamura Shōzō in 1985 and became, in 1990, an independent lacquer master using the artist name Mushū. His artist name is composed of two characters meaning »boat« and »dream«; together, they express the wish to transport his dreams into reality.

Since then, he has worked in leading gold-lacquer studios and has exhibited regularly at numerous Japanese exhibitions, including the annual Modern Arts Exhibition; Japan Traditional Arts Exhibition; Japan Traditional Lacquer Arts Exhibition; Ishikawa Traditional Crafts Exhibition; Kenrokuen Tea Meeting Exhibition; Yamanaka Makie Lacquer Exhibition; and the Netsuke Carvers' New Creations Exhibition. He is member of the International Netsuke Carvers Association and has worked as the leading artist and artistic controller for Pelikan Pen's Lacquer Fountain Pen Project.

In 2006 he was showcased by Erik Thomsen Asian Art at the International Asian Art Fair, New York, marking his inaugural exhibition outside Japan. Since then, he has been featured in other exhibitions in New York, Palm Beach, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, as well as in Germany and Belgium. In 2007, his work was exhibited at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, at the exhibition »Contemporary Netsuke: Masterful Miniatures.« In 2008 his work was included in the exhibition »The Hidden Code of Animals in Japanese Art« at The Clark Center for Japanese Art & Culture in Hanford, California.

During the annual New York Asia Week in March 2009, the latest works by Mushū will again be introduced at the Erik Thomsen LLC Asian Art gallery at 44 East 74th Street, New York.

1

Early Spring Tea Caddy

Kanshitsu chaki »sōshun«

乾漆茶器「早春」

平成 20 年製作

H 2 ½" × W 3 ¼"

(6.2 cm × 8.4 cm)

Date: 2008

Dry lacquer tea caddy made entirely of lacquer reinforced with cloth, the surface imitating the color and texture of an old bronze vessel. The top and sides have minute décor in *takamakie* high relief gold and brown lacquer of two flowers and twelve pine needles. The inside and the bottom are decorated with *nashiji* gold flakes and the bottom bears the signature in black lacquer: Mushū. The tea caddy comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the side: »Kanshitsu chaki ›sōshun« or »Dry Lacquer Tea Caddy ›Early Spring« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



2

Cherry Blossom Tea Caddy

Hiranatsume »yozakura makie«

平棗「夜桜蒔絵」

平成20年製作

H 2 ¼" × D 3 ½"

(5.8 cm × 8.6 cm)

Date: 2008

Hira-natsume tea caddy with a striking theme of *sakura* cherry blossom viewing at night. The *sakura* blossoms, which are finely decorated in *takamakie* high-relief polished gold and matte black lacquer contrast well against the *roiro* mirror-black lacquer ground. The inside and the bottom are decorated with *nashiji* gold flakes and the rims are covered with *kinji* gold lacquer. The bottom bears the signature in black lacquer: Mushū. The tea caddy comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is signed on the side: »*Hira-natsume yozakura makie*« or »Gold Lacquer Tea Caddy with Cherry Blossom Viewing at Night« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



3

Chrysanthemum Tea Caddy

Ōnatsume »kiku makie«

大棗「菊蒔絵」

平成20年製作

H 3" × D 3"

(7.4 cm × 7.4 cm)

Date: 2008

Ōnatsume tall tea caddy with décor of chrysanthemum in bright *takamakie* high-relief gold lacquer on a polished *togidashi* ground with *kinpun* gold powder clouds and fine *nashiji* gold flakes. The gold lacquer leaves are finished in two hues of gold with various surface techniques, some also inlaid with pieces of *kirigane* gold foil. The inside and the bottom are decorated with dense *nashiji* gold flakes; the bottom bears the signature in black lacquer: Mushū. The tea caddy comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the side: »Ōnatsume kiku makie« or »Chrysanthemum Tea Caddy« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



4

Silverleaf Tea Caddy

Fubuki »tsuwabuki makie«

雪吹「石菫蒔絵」

平成20年製作

H 3" × D 3"

(7.5 cm × 7.3 cm)

Date: 2008

Fubuki-style tea caddy with a round cylindrical body and wide-beveled rims, finely decorated in *takamakie* high-relief gold lacquer with the medicinal plant *Tsuwabuki* or Japanese Silverleaf. The flower and leaf surfaces are in highly polished gold lacquer in three colors with tiny details such as the illusion of decay; three of the leaves are finished with a rough surface, which contrasts well against the glossy *togidashi* ground which includes *kinpun* gold dust and fine *nashiji* gold flakes. The inside and the bottom are decorated with *nashiji* gold flakes. Signed on the bottom in black lacquer: Mushū. The tea caddy comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the side: »*Fubuki tsuwabuki makie*« or »Gold Lacquer Tea Caddy with Silverleaf« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



5

Inrō with Ants

Inrō »fuyujitaku«

印籠「冬じたく」

平成20年製作

L 3 ¼" × W 2 ¾", Netsuke D 1 ¼"

(8.3 cm × 7.1 cm, 3 cm)

Date: 2008

A three-section *inrō* case with décor of seven ants crawling among seven leaves on a brightly polished *togidashi* ground with gold powders and sprinkles of fine gold flakes. The naturalistic rough surface of the leaves contrasts well against the polished ground. Signature on the bottom in gold lacquer: Mushū with a square red lacquer seal mark reading the same. Together with the *inrō* is a *manju*-type flat round *netsuke* in polished *kinji* gold lacquer with a *hiramakie* décor in black lacquer of a chrysanthemum and a signature next to the *himotōshi* in gold lacquer on a gold lacquer placque reading Mushū; between the *inrō* and the *netsuke* is a round *ojime* bead inlaid over the entire surface with round pieces of *kirigane* gold foil. The *inrō* comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the top: »Inrō »fuyujitaku« or »Inrō »Preparing for Winter« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



6

Festival Ball Tea Caddy

Naganatsume »kusudama makie«

長棗「葉玉蒔絵」

平成20年製作

H 3 ¼" × D 2 ½"

(8.2 cm × 6.5 cm)

Date: 2008

Naga-natsume tea caddy with décor of a *Kusudama* festival ball in bright *takamakie* high-relief gold lacquer on a glossy *kinji* ground using several hues of gold and red lacquer. The inside and the bottom are likewise finished in bright *kinji*; the bottom bears the signature in black lacquer: Mushū. The tea caddy comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the side: »*Naganatsume kusudama makie*« or »Festival Ball Tea Caddy« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



7

Gingko Incense Box

Kōgō »ichō makie«

香合「銀杏蒔絵」

平成 20 年製作

H 1" × D 3 ¼"

(2.4 cm × 8 cm)

Date: 2008

Round *kōgō* incense box with decoration in *takamakie* high-relief gold lacquer of three elegantly curving ginkgo leaves and one ginkgo fruit, all with very fine surface details. The top, bottom and rims of the box are made of rosewood and the sides of bamboo. On the bottom it is signed in black lacquer: Mushū. The incense box comes with its original *kiri-wood tomobako* box which is inscribed on the top: »Kōgō *ichō makie*« or »Gingko Incense Box« and signed Mushū with a square seal mark reading the same.



8

Eggplant Incense Box

Kanshitsu kōgō »nasu«

乾漆香合「茄子」

平成20年製作

L 4" × W 2"

(10 cm × 4.8 cm)

Date: 2008

Kōgō incense box in the shape of an eggplant made entirely in the *kanshitsu* dry lacquer technique using only lacquer reinforced with cloth. The shape, surface texture and surface colors are naturalistic and include fine details such as insect bites on the side and gold powders in the *togidashi* polished surface. The inside surfaces are covered with fine *nashiji* gold flakes and the rims in *kinji* gold lacquer. Signed on the bottom in gold lacquer: Mushū. The incense box comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the top »*Kanshitsu kōgō* »nasu« or »Eggplant Incense Box« and signed Mushū with a black square seal mark reading the same.



9

Sea Shells Netsuke

Makie netsuke »kaisō«

蒔絵根付「海想」

平成 19 年製作

L 2 ½" × W ¾"

(6.3 cm × 1.8 cm)

Date: 2007

Netsuke made of *umimatsu* black coral with fine décor in *takamakie* high-relief gold lacquer of three shells and seaweed, with additional inlays of *aogai* mother-of-pearl. The ends are inlaid with minute round pieces of *kirigane* gold foil; it is signed on the reverse in gold lacquer on an oval black lacquer placque: Mushū. The *netsuke* comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the top: »*Makie netsuke* »*kaisō*« or »Gold Lacquer Netsuke »Thoughts of the Sea« and signed Mushū with a red square seal mark reading the same.



10

Hidden Decor Netsuke

Kanshitsu kuri netsuke »uramasari«

乾漆栗根付「裏勝り」

平成20年製作

H 1 ¼" × L 1 ¾" × W 1 ¾"

(3.3 cm × 4.7 cm × 4.3 cm)

Date: 2008

Netsuke in the shape of a chestnut, made entirely in the *kanshitsu* dry lacquer technique using only lacquer reinforced with cloth. Fine naturalistic details of the surface texture and colors in *hiramakie* and *takamakie* gold lacquer, with further details on the reverse of a worm hole and three crawling ants in black *takamakie* high relief lacquer. When looking through the *himotōshi* holes, one is rewarded with a surprising decoration on the inside surface in gold lacquer of ginkgo leaves. The *netsuke* is signed between the *himotōshi* in black lacquer: Mushū. It comes with its original *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box which is inscribed on the side: »Kanshitsu kuri netsuke ›uramasari« or »Dry Lacquer Chestnut Netsuke ›The Hidden décor Wins« and signed Mushū with a square seal mark reading the same.



Glossary

Techniques:	<i>Makie</i>	The Japanese gold lacquer technique in which powders of gold, metals or minerals are sprinkled onto still-wet lacquer. The sprinkled surface is then polished until it becomes glossy.
	<i>Hiramakie</i>	<i>Makie</i> which has been raised above the surrounding area with several layers of lacquer.
	<i>Takamakie</i>	<i>Makie</i> which has been raised and modeled with a mixture of lacquer and clay or charcoal. This is the same mixture used to prime the wood surface before applying the many layers of lacquer.
	<i>Togidashi</i>	Technique in which <i>makie</i> is first applied on the lacquer ground and then completely covered with additional layers of black lacquer, hiding the <i>makie</i> decoration. The surface is subsequently polished with fine pumice and powders until the decoration reappears, now incorporated into the totally flat polished surface.
	<i>Kanshitsu</i>	A method of building a body using only lacquer and cloth. Layers of cloth and lacquer are let dry over a wood form. When the body has stiffened, it is removed from the wood form and receives further layers of lacquer reinforced with cloth until the desired thickness has been reached. Since no wood is inside the body, it is light and extremely durable.
Surfaces:	<i>Hakeme</i>	Decoration of relief parallel lines created with a stiff brush on partially hardened lacquer.
	<i>Kinji</i>	Surface of fine gold dust which has been polished to a high gloss.
	<i>Kirigane</i>	Small pieces of thick gold foil cut into squares, rectangles, or triangles and inlaid into the surface, forming brilliant accents, often as a mosaic.

Nashiji Small irregular flakes of gold foil, suspended at varying angles in many layers of translucent brown lacquer. The resulting shimmering surface is often used for the insides and bottoms of boxes.

Roiro Black lacquer which has been polished to a mirror surface.

Objects:

Natsume A cylindrical tea caddy used in the tea ceremony.

Hira-natsume A lower and wider form of the *natsume*.

Kōgō Incense box used in the tea ceremony.

Okimono A decorative object used as an alcove centerpiece.

Inrō A carrying case made of stacked tiny nested boxes for holding small objects such as seals and medicine. It was carried by hanging it from the *obi*, or sash.

Ojime Literally a cord fastener, a bead worn between the *inrō* and the *netsuke* to keep the *inrō* cases together.

Netsuke A toggle formed as a small sculptural object, which is used to suspend an *inrō* medicine case or a tobacco pouch from the sash of a *kimono*.

Himotōshi The holes or channels through which the cord connecting a *netsuke* with an *inrō* is passed. In *netsukes* the *himotōshi* is generally a pair of holes close to each other.

Tomobako The original fitted wood box which an artist commissions for his art work. A *tomobako* usually bears the inscription, signature and seals of the artist.



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