

Contemporary Lacquer by
Yamazaki Mushū



Erik Thomsen LLC 美 Asian Art

Introduction

A year has passed since we had the privilege of introducing the art of Yamazaki Mushū to the West at the 2006 International Asian Art Fair in New York. Since then, his fine aesthetic sense and his attention to detail have found wide admiration internationally.

This year's selection, spanning a decade of his work from 1996 to 2006, shows his early mastery and illustrates 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 surprising and innovative details.

It is with great pleasure that I present further works by Yamazaki Mushū in this second collection, to be shown at the 2007 International Asian Art Fair.

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 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 Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as in Germany and Belgium.

In 2007, his work can be seen at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, at the exhibition »Contemporary Netsuke: Masterful Miniatures.« In March 2007, the collection in this catalogue will be on display in New York with Erik Thomsen LLC Asian Art at the International Asian Art Fair and thereafter at his gallery at 224 East 83rd Street, New York.

1

Dragon Bowl

Makie Moriki »Tenkaichi«

蒔絵盛器「天海地」

平成8年製作

H 2 ¾" x D 13 ¾"

(7 cm x 35 cm)

Date: 1996

Large bowl with décor of heaven, ocean and earth. Heaven is shown around the border by a gold- and silver-lacquer *togidashi* dragon among clouds and a raised *hiramakie* crescent moon; the ocean is shown on the reverse border by blue lacquer in a *hakeme* wave pattern; and the earth is symbolized in the center by warm-brown, irregular-surfaced lacquer. Signed in red lacquer on the black-lacquer bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Lacquer Bowl: Heaven, Ocean and Earth« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



2

Daikoku's Hammer

Hō-ō Makie »Kozuchi«
鳳凰蒔絵「小槌」
平成 18 年製作

L 6" x W 3"
(15 cm x 7.6 cm)
Date: 2006

Auspicious *okimono* of Daikoku's hammer. Daikoku, the god of wealth, is one of the Seven Lucky Gods. The décor is of a *hō-ō* phoenix in fine *takamakie* relief lacquer in gold and red with accents in inlaid mother-of-pearl and *kirigane* gold foil, all on a silver and gold *togidashi* ground. The handle has inlaid *kirigane* gold and silver foil and a pebbled black lacquer surface. The artist has hidden another of Daikoku's attributes under the handle: a rat holding a flaming pearl. Signed in gold lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With double wood boxes, the inner fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Phoenix Gold Lacquer: Miniature Hammer« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



3

Mountain Tea Caddy

Ōnatsume »Enzan Makie«
大棗「遠山蒔絵」
平成 12 年製作

H 3" x D 3"
(7.8 cm x 8 cm)
Date: 2000

Natsume tea caddy, for storing tea powder in the tea ceremony. Depicted is décor of 12 distant mountains, executed entirely in *togidashi* lacquer using gold in different hues, and highlighted with sprinkles of *nashiji* gold flakes. The inside and the bottom are covered with dense *nashiji* gold and silver flakes. Signed in gold lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Gold Lacquer Tea Caddy: Far-Away Mountains« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



4

Winter Tea Caddy

Ōnatsume »Yuki Sansui
Togidashi Makie«
大棗「雪山水研ぎ出し蒔絵」
平成 13 年製作

H 2 ¾" x D 2 ¾"
(7.3 cm x 7.3 cm)
Date: 2001

Natsume tea caddy, for storing tea powder in the tea ceremony. Décor of a winter scene with a dog by a snow-covered village, a waterfall, and a smoky camp fire. Executed entirely in silver-, gold- and red-lacquer *togidashi*. The inside and the bottom are covered with silver *togidashi* clouds and gold *nashiji* flakes. Signed in red lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Tea Caddy: Snowy Landscape in Togidashi Lacquer« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



5

Gourd Tea Caddy

Hira-natsume »Karasuuri Makie«
平棗「烏瓜蒔絵」
平成 11 年製作

H 2 ¼" x D 3 ½"
(6 cm x 8.6 cm)
Date: 1999

Hira-natsume tea caddy, a wide *natsume*, for storing tea powder in the tea ceremony. The décor is executed in *takamakie* relief lacquer, with the two gourds in red, the flowers in silver and the leaves in gold lacquer. In addition the gourds have *togidashi* gold dust surface details, two leaves have minute *kirigane*-gold foil squares, and one leaf has silver lacquer areas simulating wilting. The décor is on a ground of *roiro* mirror-black lacquer. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Gold Lacquer Wide Tea Caddy: Snake Gourds« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



6

Harvest Tea Caddy

Hira-natsume
平棗
平成 11 年製作

H 2 ¼" x D 3 ½"
(6 cm x 8.6 cm)
Date: 1999

Hira-natsume wide tea caddy, for storing tea powder in the tea ceremony. The décor is of harvested rice next to a wood board with hanging bamboo sections designed to rattle in the wind. The rice kernels and leaves are executed in gold *takamakie* relief lacquer, some inlaid with mother-of-pearl, others decorated with fine gold lacquer details and *kirigane* accents in gold foil. The wood grain is in *togidashi* lacquer, all on a rich-brown lacquer ground. The inside and the bottom are decorated with *togidashi* gold-dust clouds accented with red-colored gold flakes. Signed in gold lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Wide Tea Caddy « and signed and sealed by Mushū.



7

Cricket Tea Caddy

Hira-natsume »Aki No Ne Makie«
平棗「秋野音蒔絵」
平成 10 年製作

H 2 ¼" x D 3 ¼"
(5.7 cm x 8.5 cm)
Date: 1998

Hira-natsume wide tea caddy, for storing tea powder in the tea ceremony. Décor of a cricket among autumn grasses; the cricket has minute details in gold and silver *takamakie* relief lacquer, while the grasses and leaves are in gold *takamakie*, some with additional highlights in *nashiji* gold flakes and *kirigane* gold foil. The black lacquer ground has *kinpun* polished gold which gradates from light gold sprinkles on the top to intense gold along the bottom. The inside and the bottom are covered with dense *nashiji* gold flakes. Signed in black lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Gold Lacquer Wide Tea Caddy: Music of the Autumn Fields« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



8

Snail Tea Caddy

Take-gata Chaki »Ameagari«
竹形茶器「雨上がり」
平成 18 年製作

H 4 ¼" x D 2 ¼"
(10.7 cm x 6 cm)
Date: 2006

Cylindrical tea caddy, for storing tea powder in the tea ceremony, in the naturalistic shape of a bamboo trunk with a snail crawling over the edge after the rain, which is suggested by water drops along the rim. The snail is finely made in brown *takamakie* relief lacquer and gold highlights; the bamboo surface has brown lacquer raised spots simulating the surface of the *goma-dake* bamboo species. The inside is covered with dense *nashiji* gold flakes. Signed in black lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted silk pouch and fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Bamboo-Shaped Tea Caddy: Rain Clearing« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



9

Frog Incense Box

Kanshitsu Kōgō »Ishino Uenimo«
乾漆香合「石の上にも」
平成 18 年製作

H 2 ¼" x L 2 ½"
(5.8 cm x 6.2 cm)
Date: 2006

Kōgō incense box in the naturalistic shape of a frog sitting on top of a moss-covered rock, the rock formed entirely in the *kanshitsu* dry lacquer technique using lacquer reinforced with cloth. The exterior is decorated in polychrome lacquer, the inside rims in *kinpun* polished gold lacquer. Signed in gold lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Dry Lacquer Incense Box: Also on the Top of Rocks« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



10

Setsubun Netsuke

Kanshitsu Netsuke »Setsubun«
乾漆根付「節分」
平成 18 年製作

H 1/2" x L 1 1/2" x W 1 1/2"
(1.2 cm x 3.5 cm x 3.5 cm)
Date: 2006

Square *manju*-type *netsuke* with the *setsubun* motif, formed entirely in the *kanshitsu* dry lacquer technique using lacquer reinforced with cloth. *Setsubun* is an annual ritual performed before the start of spring, where evil spirits would be cast out of the house by throwing beans and chanting »*oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*« (»evil out, happiness in«). Hence, the outside decor of this *netsuke* depicts a sinister *oni* mask in red and gold *takamakie* relief lacquer and has silver inlays in the form of bean pellets; the auspicious inside decor is a *fukumusume* mask and the attributes of the Seven Lucky Gods, executed in gold *takamakie* relief lacquer with *kirigane* gold foil and other inlays. Signed in gold lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Dry Lacquer Netsuke: Setsubun« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



11

Chestnut Netsuke

Kanshitsu Netsuke »Kuri«
乾漆根付「栗」
平成 17 年製作

L 1 1/2"
(3.5 cm)
Date: 2005

Humorous *netsuke* in the shape of a chestnut with wormholes and with a worm coming out of a *himotōshi*-opening. Formed entirely in the *kanshitsu* dry lacquer technique using lacquer reinforced with cloth, the surface is decorated in polychrome lacquer with fine gold-lacquer details. Signed in black lacquer on the bottom: Mushū. With fitted *kiri*-wood *tomobako* box inscribed »Dry Lacquer Netsuke: Chestnut« and signed and sealed by Mushū.



Glossary

Techniques:

Makie 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.

Hiramakie *Makie* which has been raised above the surrounding area with several layers of lacquer.

Takamakie *Makie* 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.

Togidashi Technique in which *makie* is first applied on the lacquer ground. The entire surface is then completely covered with additional layers of black lacquer, hiding the *makie* décor. The surface is subsequently polished with fine pumice and powders until the décor reappears, now incorporated into the totally flat polished surface.

Kanshitsu 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:

Hakeme Décor of relief parallel lines created with a stiff brush on partially hardened lacquer.

Kinji Surface of fine gold dust which has been polished to a high gloss.

Kirigane 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 bases of boxes.

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

Objects:

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

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

Kōgō Incense box used in the tea ceremony.

Natsume A cylindrical tea caddy used in the tea ceremony.

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

Okimono A decorative object used as an alcove centerpiece.

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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