

# Mingei

みんなげい  
民 芸  
mingei  
folk arts

しよく にな  
職 人  
shokunin  
craftsman

もく はん が  
木 版 画  
mokuhanga  
woodblock print

とう げい  
陶 芸  
tōgei  
ceramics

Left to right:

**MUNAKATA Shikō** 棟方志功  
Japanese 1903–1975  
*Upāli* 優波離;  
*Samantabhadra* 文殊菩薩の柵;  
*Pūrnamaitrāyaṇīputra* 富楼那弥多羅尼子  
from *Two Bodhisattvas and ten great disciples of Sakya (Nibosatsu shakajiyudideshi* 二菩薩釈迦十大弟子)  
1939 (Samantabhadra is re-carved in 1948)  
woodblock  
91.7 x 28.2 cm irreg. (image)(each);  
103.9 x 41.9 cm irreg. (sheet)(each)  
Felton Bequest, 1969 (P40-1969)  
Purchased, 1964 (1390A-5) Felton Bequest, 1969 (P34-1969)  
© Estate of Munakata Shiko

Left to right:

**KAWAI Kanjirō** 河井 寛次郎  
Japanese 1890–1966  
*Vase* 1955 Japan  
stoneware  
23.5 x 22.6 x 10.6 cm  
Presented through the NGV Foundation  
from the Bequest of Kenneth Hood,  
Founder Benefactor, 2003 (2003.125)

**KAWAI Takeichi** 河井武一  
Japanese 1908–89  
*Vase* c. 1963 Japan  
stoneware  
15.5 x 10.5 x 7.0 cm  
Presented through the NGV Foundation  
from the Bequest of Kenneth Hood,  
Founder Benefactor, 2003 (2003.127)

**HAMADA Shōji** 濱田庄司  
Japanese 1894–1978, worked in England 1920–24  
*Jar* c. 1965–1970 Japan  
stoneware  
25.5 x 13.2 x 13.1 cm  
Presented through the NGV Foundation  
from the Bequest of Kenneth Hood,  
Founder Benefactor, 2003 (2003.143)

*Vase* c. 1965 Japan  
stoneware  
22.5 x 15.9 x 9.4 cm  
Presented through the NGV Foundation  
from the Bequest of Kenneth Hood,  
Founder Benefactor, 2003 (2003.141)

*Mingei*, literally meaning 'arts of the people', refers to handcrafted objects produced for everyday use and enjoyment. *Mingei* is also the name of a creative movement established in the 1920s by the art philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu and the ceramicists Hamada Shōji and Kawai Kanjirō. Woodblock print artist Munakata Shikō and stencil dying artist Serizawa Keisuke joined the movement in the 1930s. *Mingei*, however, is not limited to works produced by these twentieth century artists. Its true origins and influences are in the work of unknown craftsmen producing ceramics, furniture, clothing, bamboo items, paintings, calligraphy, prints, sculptures and paper items over the centuries.

During the early twentieth century, Japan, along with the rest of the developed world, was rapidly modernising and experiencing a great tide of industrialisation and social urbanisation, resulting in the demise of the handmade object. As a reaction to this, Yanagi and his followers travelled the Japanese countryside, the islands of Okinawa and the Korean peninsula, discovering the beauty and historical importance of utilitarian objects. According to Yanagi, these objects made by the common people were 'beyond beauty and ugliness'. He believed that this kind of purity in art and design was not the result of any conscious intent but was born by chance and the cumulative skills of generations of unknown artists. His activities culminated in the establishment of the Japanese Folk Crafts Museum in 1936, to collect and promote an appreciation of the raw beauty found in folk craft.

## MUNAKATA Shikō

The twentieth century was a time when woodblock print artists returned to the origins of printmaking and executed all steps of the print process, including hand cutting and printing themselves. This style was called *Sōsaku Hanga*, meaning 'creative prints', and displayed the emotional expression of the artists in more vivid terms than the *ukiyo-e* prints of historical Japan, where the production process was divided between artist, publisher and skilled craftsmen.

The spirit of *Mingei* and *Sōsaku Hanga* can be clearly seen in the dynamic woodblock prints and humble origins of Munakata Shikō. Munakata was born in 1903, the third of fifteen children, to a working class family in the northern reaches of Japan. Due to his family's impoverished circumstances, he only attained an elementary education. As a child he showed a great passion for art. Known as the 'crazy boy painter', and with little money for materials, he would paint directly on to the road with an old brush and charcoal ink, or produce kites with bold painted figures influenced by local festivals. Inspired by the paintings of Van Gogh, Munakata moved to

Tokyo in his early twenties with the ambition of becoming an oil painter.

By the 1930s he discovered woodblock prints were more suited to his temperament and expressionistic style. In 1939 he visited the historical temples of Kyoto and, overwhelmed by the imposing scale and dramatic presence of Buddhist statues, he went in search of large wood boards to produce a new monumental style of wood-print. The twelve-print series *Two Bodhisattvas and Ten Disciples* (of which three works appear here) was the result of this new large-format print and is considered by many to be his greatest work. Munakata was famous for making no preparatory drawings, directly painting with ink onto the wood in the same vibrant manner that he would have painted onto the road as a child. He would vigorously cut the wood with simple chisels, brush ink onto the surface and print by rubbing a hand-held bamboo bark-wrapped *baren* (burnishing tool) on paper placed on the woodblock. During his career, he went on to combine multiple woodblocks and pieces of paper that joined together to create work on a scale previously unseen in this medium. In doing so, he established himself as one of the most well recognised and respected Japanese artists of the twentieth century.

## HAMADA Shōji and KAWAI Kanjirō

During the twentieth century, Hamada Shōji and Kawai Kanjiro were not only responsible for preserving traditional techniques and historical folk aesthetics, but they also developed individualistic styles that continue to inspire future generations of ceramicists. Faithful to Japanese ceramic traditions, Hamada promoted the use of local clays, glazes, stone and ash, which resulted in ceramic ware that is readily identifiable to the area in which it was made. He also developed a simple but distinctive gestural brushed, dabbed and dribbled glazing, which unmistakably distinguished pieces as his own while maintaining nostalgia for the anonymous potters of a bygone era. Hamada's close colleague, Kawai Kanjirō, working with a climbing (dragon) kiln in Kyoto, also produced traditionally influenced, simple slab moulded bottles, vases, containers and dishes but preferred a decoration style of raised line relief and flat areas of glazed colour. His interest in Buddhist traditions is evident in his stylised blossoming flower buds, like those sometimes found in the hand of a compassionate Bodhisattva (blue ceramic bottle pictured). The influence of Hamada and Kawai lives on through their numerous disciples and countless ceramic followers around the world. The *Mingei* spirit and the principle of using local materials inspired the English Studio Pottery movement in Cornwall, and influenced numerous potters working in Australia to produce a unique Australian style of glazed pottery.

