

KOKESHITRENDS

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Special Issue 9

田邊香
Tanabe Kaori



FOLK ART: CELEBRATING WOMEN ARTISANS 3

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Want to learn more about Kokeshi? Visit our Facebook group [@KokeshiVillage](#) and follow us on Instagram [@KokeshiTrends_kt](#)

INTRODUCTION

Women artisans have always been crucial in preserving and advancing traditional crafts worldwide. Their skills and creativity are often passed down through generations, ensuring that cultural heritage remains vibrant and relevant.

From intricate textile designs to hand-carved or turned woodwork, women artisans bring a unique perspective to their craft by blending tradition with innovation. Their work not only supports local economies but also uplifts communities by promoting cultural identity and gender equality.

Recognizing and celebrating these artisans is important in acknowledging the valuable role they play in the continuity and evolution of Kokeshi art forms. This marks the third time, within our series of nine special issues, that Kokeshi Trends has dedicated a volume to the 'Kokeshi Life' of women artisans and the wooden treasures they create.

The women artisans featured in this issue are just a small representation of the many talented individuals who have made significant contributions to the art form. We plan to showcase more sōsaku and dentō creations from female artisans in future issues. Stay tuned for more beautiful and inspiring work!

While our regular editor, Jill Holmgren, is away, we are grateful to have Kristin McHugh lending her expertise to this issue. Her deep knowledge in journalism has been an invaluable contribution.


Founding Editor



ABE KONOMI

Artisan: 阿部木の实 (あべこのみ)

YOB: b. 1962

Master: Abe Heishiro 阿部平四郎

Strain: Kijiyama

Collection: Soulportals.com



Pattern: Sea Otter,
Polar Bear
Size: 30 cm

About the Artist:

Abe Konomi (born April 18, 1962, in Kawatsura, Akita Prefecture) is a contemporary Kijiyama-kei Kokeshi artisan and the daughter of master artisans Abe Heishirō and Yoko.

From early childhood she was drawn to her father's work, imitating his painting as young as age two. Her earliest surviving painted pieces date to 1967, showing how naturally she entered the craft.

After graduating from Miyagi University of Education in 1986, she returned home and expressed her desire to become a Kokeshi artisan. Her father initially discouraged her, calling it, "heavy work unsuitable for women," but she persisted, demonstrating strength and

determination at the lathe until he relented. From that point, she received formal training on wood-turning and began producing Kokeshi in earnest.

Her work includes both faithful revivals of classic Kijiyama forms and creative interpretations, such as new wooden figures inspired by traditional motifs. She is known for her poetic sensibility, delicate color palette, and the emotional warmth of her small-scale pieces, which are especially popular with younger collectors.



KAMATA UMEKO

Artisan: 鎌田悦子 (かまたえつこ)

YOB: 1928-2019

Master: Kamata Koichi 鎌田孝市

Strain: Yajirō

Collection: Soulportals.com

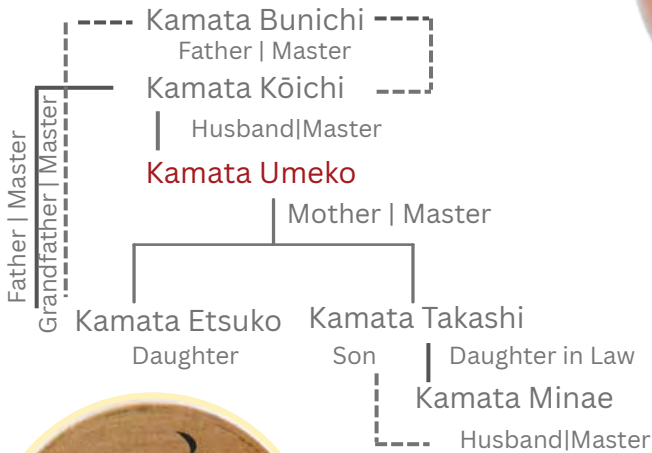


About the Artist:

Kamata Umeko played a pivotal role as a matriarch in the Kamata family of the Yajirō lineage, significantly contributing to the continuity of the family workshop across generations. Born as the eldest daughter of farmer Ōba Taihei, she married Kokeshi craftsman Kamata Kōichi (1925–2004) and became integral to the household's Kokeshi production.

Around 1967, Umeko joined the workshop as a painter, skillfully adding facial features and decorative elements to the Kokeshi crafted by her husband and later by their son, Kamata Takashi. Her son, married Kamata Minae, who also became a Kokeshi painter and eventually began crafting her own Kokeshi.

Umeko's contributions were instrumental in stabilizing the family's production during a period of generational transition. She imparted her skills to her daughter, Kamata Etsuko, who would go on to become a fourth-generation painter.



Pattern: Plum Blossoms
Size: 24 cm



KAMATA ETSUKO

Artisan: 鎌田悦子 (かまたえつこ)

YOB: b. 1950

Master: Kamata Koichi 鎌田孝市

Strain: Yajirō

Collection: Soulportals.com

About the Artist:

Kamata Etsuko (born March 28, 1950, in Shiroishi City, Miyagi Prefecture) is a fourth-generation artisan of the Yajirō lineage. The eldest daughter of master artisans Kamata Koichi and Umeko, she grew up surrounded by Kokeshi making but was physically frail in childhood. Beginning in 1969, she joined her parents in the workshop, taking on the role of painter, applying facial features and floral motifs to wood bodies turned by her father and, later, by other craftsmen.

Unlike many traditional artisans, Etsuko did not turn her own wood forms. Her contribution was exclusively in painting, where she developed a gentle, steady style: Her mother handled the rokuro-sen (lathe rings), while Etsuko painted the faces and decorative motifs. After her father aged, she continued painting on wood bodies produced by respected turners such as Imai Norio, Hamatsu Heisaburō, Sugano Shōichi, and Hoshi Sadayoshi.

Beyond Kokeshi, Etsuko is also a poet. She published a poetry collection titled *“Forever – From an Old Diary”* in 1982, and contributed tanka to literary magazines, including *Pallet* (パレット), a journal dedicated to short-form poetry.

Photo Credit: Kokeshiwiki, digitally enhanced with AI assistance by KokeshiTrends.



Pattern: Red
Camellia
Size: 12 cm



KAMATA MINAE

Artisan: 鎌田美奈枝 (かまたみなえ)

YOB: b. 1955

Master: Kamata Takashi 鎌田孝志

Strain: Yajirō

Collection: Soulportals.com



About the Artist:

Kamata Minae (born October 15, 1955) is a distinguished artisan of the dentō Yajirō lineage, based in Shiroishi, Miyagi Prefecture. She is married to Kamata Takashi, the son of Kamata Koichi and Umeko, thereby positioning her within one of the central families of the Yajirō tradition.

Minae embarked on her Kokeshi career in May 1991, initially focusing on painting under the tutelage of her husband. For many years, her production was limited due to external employment commitments. However, following her retirement in 2020, she began mastering the lathe, enabling her to create fully self-made Yajirō Kokeshi.

Her work serves as a bridge between the postwar forms of Koichi and Takashi and the revival of prewar Bun'ichi silhouettes, particularly those once distributed through the Ise Kokeshi Association (伊勢こけし会). Her recreations of early Bun'ichi faces and proportions are highly regarded for their warmth and fidelity to the lineage.

Pattern: Red
Camellias
Size: 12 cm



Photo Credit: Kokeshiwiki digitally enhanced with AI assistance by KokeshiTrends.



Photo: Kokeshiwiki

INOUE YUKIKO

Artisan: 井上ゆき子 (いのうえゆきこ)

YOB: 1932-2010

Master: Sato Haruji 佐藤春二

Strain: Yajirō

Collection: Soulportals.com

Pattern:
Rokuro lathe
lines, Mum
Size: 19 cm

About the Artist:

Inoue Yukiko (born November 8, 1932, in Nishiaizu-machi, Fukushima Prefecture) was a major Yajirō-kei Kokeshi artisan and one of the most skilled painters of her generation. She was the eldest daughter of Inoue Yoshiharu and Matsuno, who operated a folk-craft workshop producing sōsaku (creative) Kokeshi.

Yukiko began learning Kokeshi painting at age 18 under the tutelage of her father, specializing in Nozawa-style creative Kokeshi.

After marrying Inoue Shiro (originally Kobayashi) in 1954, the couple moved to Ōmichita, Kitakata City, where they produced new-style Kokeshi together: Shiro turning the wood, Yukiko painting. Her father died in 1962. A pivotal moment came that same year when she demonstrated sumi-ink painted Kokeshi at a craft fair. Seeing the strong sales of traditional Naruko at the fair, she became deeply

interested in dentō (traditional) Kokeshi.

In 1968, Yukiko and Shiro entered apprenticeship under Satō Haruji of Atsushio Onsen. This training transformed their work: Shiro learned to turn Haruji-type bodies, and Yukiko mastered the Haruji-style painting, including its emotional expressiveness and delicate brushwork. Their revival of Haruji's early forms was so successful that in 1969, their reproductions were distributed by the Kokeshi Yumekai (dream) Society and later by the Tokyo specialty shop Tatsumi in Toritsu Kasei.

By the early 1970s, Yukiko was recognized as one of the most faithful and emotionally sensitive interpreters of Haruji's style. After the deaths of her husband (1981) and teacher Haruji (1982), she became the sole active successor of the Haruji line until her daughter Inoue Harumi joined the craft in 1983.



INOUE HARUMI

Artisan: 井上はる美 (いのうえはるみ)

YOB: b. 1955

Master: Inoue Yukiko 井上ゆき子

Strain: Yajirō

Collection: Soulportals.com



About the Artist:

Inoue Harumi (born March 1, 1955, in Nishiaizumachi, Fukushima Prefecture) is of the Yajirō lineage, known for inheriting and continuing the Haruji-gata style. She is the eldest daughter of Inoue Shiro and Yukiko, both of whom worked in woodcraft and later in new-style Kokeshi production.

Her family moved to Ōmichita, Kitakata City in 1959, where her parents produced new-style Kokeshi. In 1969, both parents entered an apprenticeship under Satō Haruji of Atsushio Onsen, shifting from new-style to traditional Yajirō-kei production. Her father turned wood; her mother painted.

After the deaths of her father (1981) and Haruji-sensei (1982), Harumi felt a strong responsibility to continue the lineage. She began formal training in 1983, receiving strict instruction in wood-turning from her mother, Inoue Yukiko. Harumi's own works began appearing publicly in 1984.



Pattern: Rokuro lathe lines, Plum and Mum
Size: 22 cm





TAKAHASHI JUNKO

Artisan: 高橋順子 (たかはしじゅんこ)
YOB: b. 1955
Master: Takahashi Toru 高橋通
Strain: Tsuchiyu
Collection: Soulportals.com

About the Artist:

Takahashi Junko (born February 18, 1955, in Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture) is the eldest daughter of Kobayashi Yōichi. She is a dentō (traditional) Tsuchiyu Kokeshi artisan known for her warm painting style and expressive faces. She is married to fellow artisan Takahashi Tōru.

Junko entered the craft relatively late. In 2002, she began assisting her husband in the workshop, learning both wood preparation and painting. By 2003, she shifted to painting exclusively, developing a steady, intuitive brush style. Her first public distribution occurred at the Tokyo Kokeshi Friends Association in 2004, with her debut publication appearing in *Kokeshi Notebook No. 526*.

The 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster forced the family into a prolonged evacuation, interrupting her production for several years. After evacuation orders were lifted, she returned to Ōkido, Haramachi-ku, Minamisoma City, in Fukushima Prefecture, resuming Kokeshi making in 2018.

Pattern:
Feathers
Size: 9 cm

Pattern: Rokuro
lathe lines, and
Plum
Size: 18 cm





TAKAHASHI MIEKO



Artisan: 高橋美恵子 (たかはしみえこ)

YOB: b. 1958

Master: Takahashi Yoshitaka 高橋佳隆

Strain: Tsuchiyu

Collection: Soulportals.com

About the Artist:

Takahashi Mieko is a third-generation Tsuchiyu artisan. She is the granddaughter of master Takahashi Chūzō, and daughter of Takahashi Yoshitaka, her primary mentor. Yoshitaka himself trained under Chūzō, preserving a direct family tradition of technique. Mieko is the sister of Takahashi Tōru and sister-in-law to Takahashi Junko, both active within the same lineage.

She began formally studying Kokeshi painting at age 24, and the following year left her company position to apprentice full-time under her father. In 1983, she made her debut by presenting her first self-painted Kokeshi at the New Year meeting of the Tokyo Kokeshi Friends Association. Though her production has always been modest, her work is cherished for its clarity, warmth, and faithful continuation of the Takahashi family tradition.

Her production ceased after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.



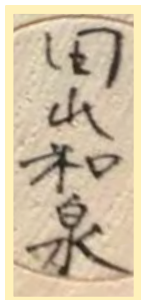
Pattern: Rokuro
lathe lines
Size: 21 cm



Pattern: Cherry Blossoms
Size: 7 cm



Pattern: Dots
Size: 7 cm



TAYAMA IZUMI

Artisan: 田山和泉 (たやまいずみ)
YOB: b. 1981
Master: Tayama Kazufumi 田山和文
Strain: Nanbu
Collection: Soulportals.com



About the Artist:

Tayama Izumi (born on May 23, 1981, in Kitayugaose-chō, Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture), is the eldest daughter of Tayama Kazufumi, a woodworker and maker of traditional wooden folk toys. She entered Morioka Technical High School, and during her second year (1998), she began painting Kokeshi bodies in her father's workshop. By her third year (1999), she advanced to learning woodturning techniques directly under her father's instruction.

Her early training focused on turning the egg-shaped blanks used for zodiac figures, which she turned repeatedly to strengthen her command of the lathe. She later expanded into full Kokeshi production, continuing this work even after graduating from the Department of Arts and Culture, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Iwate University in 2003. Following marriage and childbirth, she remained active in her father's workshop, creating both traditional Nanbu-style Kokeshi and a variety of wooden folk figures.

In 2019, she relocated to Hodogaya-ku in Yokohama City, due to her husband's work, and continues her Kokeshi production there. In addition to traditional Kokeshi, she also creates original wooden dolls, such as Mexican-style Kokeshi, upon request.



ASAKURA KINU



Artisan: 朝倉きぬ (あさくらきぬ)

YOB: 1918-2018

Master: Asakura Eiji 朝倉英次

Strain: Tōgatta

Collection: Soulportals.com



About the Artist:

Asakura Kinu was a dentō Tōgatta-style Kokeshi artisan. Born on April 5, 1918, in Nagano Prefecture. She was the eldest daughter of Asakura Eishirō. In 1943 she married the craftsman Asakura Eiji, with whom she later had three sons: Hideyuki, Mitsuhiro, and Kimiaki. Following the couple's move to Sendai in 1947, Kinu initially focused her artistic efforts on painting "new-style" Kokeshi to satisfy the high demand of the postwar period.

Her transition into traditional forms began in the mid-1960s, driven by a renewed public interest in dentō Kokeshi and her husband's declining health. Kinu stepped in to paint Eiji's traditional forms, utilizing wood blanks turned by Satō Teruo and other local artisans. Following Eiji's death in 1973, she remained dedicated to her craft, collaborating with his former apprentices, notably Ogasawara Yoshio, to provide the wooden forms for her brushwork.

Kinu was widely respected for her steady hand and her unwavering commitment to preserving the classic Tōgatta lineage. She remained an active artisan well into her senior years, embodying a remarkable longevity in the craft. She passed away on March 23, 2018, just shy of her 100th birthday, or 101 by traditional Japanese age counting, leaving behind a significant legacy of wooden treasures.



Pattern: Japanese Thistle
Size: 24 cm



HAYASAKA SETSUKO

Artisan: 早坂せつ子 (はやさかせつこ)

YOB: b. 1935

Master: Hayasaka Takashi 早坂隆

Strain: Naruko



Pattern: Mum

Size: 24 cm



About the Artist:

Born on December 6, 1935, in Miyagi Prefecture, Hayasaka Setsuko is the eldest daughter of Satō Sakuji and Masao. In 1955, she married Hayasaka Takashi, an independent Naruko wood-turner.

Setsuko began painting Kokeshi in 1956, developing her skill by observing and emulating her husband's brushwork. Her work was first featured at the storefront of their Kawamukai District Shop, opened in 1958. By 1967, both Setsuko and Takashi were formally recognized as makers in *Kokeshi Notebook No. 76*.

In 1969, the couple moved their studio to the hillside near Naruko Station, where they continued their craft for decades. Their son, Toshinari, began his woodturning training in 1979, ensuring the family tradition continued. Following Takashi's passing in 2010, Setsuko remains a respected figure in the Naruko community, known for her steady, traditional forms.

Photo Credit: Kokeshiwiki, Setsuko Hayasaka, August 2020; Kokeshi Example: [24 cm (1998) (Satsuki Takai)]

TAKAHASHI MATSUKO

Artisan: 高橋松子 (たかはしまつこ)

YOB: 1920-2005

Master: Takahashi Morio 高橋盛雄

Strain: Naruko

Collection: Soulportals.com



About the Artist:

Takahashi Matsuko was born in Naruko, Miyagi Prefecture, the eldest child of Takahashi Sakari and Kikue. Raised in a family deeply rooted in the Naruko tradition, she was sister to Takahashi Morio and Yusa Fukuju.

After graduating from Naruko Higher Elementary School, she worked with her brother Morio at the Yokosuka Naval Arsenal. She later moved to Akita, where she married and welcomed her first child, Masako, in 1945. She returned to Naruko in 1950, and her son Yoshikazu was born the following year.

Around 1952, Matsuko began painting new-style souvenir Kokeshi for the Yokoya Ryokan alongside her sister-in-law Tatsuko. Drawn to the depth of traditional forms, she transitioned to classic Naruko painting around 1956, applying her painting brush to blanks turned by local craftsmen.

Her daughter Masako later married Takahashi Teruyuki, and both would follow the Kokeshi making path. Matsuko's son, Yoshikazu, also became a Kokeshi artisan, continuing the family line.

Matsuko passed away on February 16, 2005, at age 86, leaving behind a quiet but enduring contribution to the Naruko tradition.

Photo Credit: Kokeshiwiki digitally enhanced with AI assistance by KokeshiTrends.



Pattern: Mum
Size: 27 cm

TAKAHASHI MASAKO



Artisan: 高橋正子 (たかはしまさこ)

YOB: b. 1945

Master: Takahashi Teruyuki 高橋輝行

Strain: Naruko



About the Artist:

Born on December 13, 1945, Masako Takahashi is the eldest daughter of Matsuko Takahashi. Her lineage is deeply rooted in the Naruko tradition of Miyagi Prefecture, yet her formative years were spent in Akita following her family's wartime relocation. It was in Akita that Matsuko gave birth to Masako before the family eventually returned to the snowy landscapes of Naruko in the winter of 1950.

Masako's journey into the world of Kokeshi began in her youth. Under the dedicated tutelage of her mother, she developed her skills in the delicate art of Kokeshi painting.

Her personal and professional lives further intertwined in 1965 when she married Teruyuki Takahashi, an accomplished craftsman who had apprenticed under Masako's uncle, Morio Takahashi.

Kokeshi Photo Credit: Kokeshiwiki, Takahashi Masako, May 2020; Kokeshi Example: [21 cm (1996) (Satsuki Takai)]

Artisan photo credit: Kamei Museum Kokeshi Artisan Directory digitally enhanced with AI assistance by KokeshiTrends.

Pattern: Mum
Size: 21 cm



SATO YOKO

Artisan: 佐藤洋子 (さとうようこ)

YOB: b. 1942

Master: Sato Eitaro 佐藤英太郎

Strain: Tōgatta

Collection: Soulportals.com



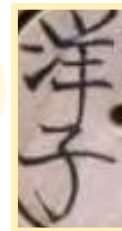
About the Artist:

Yoko Sato was born in Ohara, Chiba Prefecture, and entered the world of Kokeshi later in life through her marriage to Sato Eitaro in 1968. Following the birth of their son, Naohide, in 1969, the family relocated to the Tōgatta region. It was here in the late 1970s that Yoko began her formal study of woodturning, eventually debuting her own Kokeshi in 1980. She quickly earned a reputation for her refined, gentle interpretation of the classic Sato Naosuke lineage, briefly working alongside her son before he left the craft in 1981.

Her artistry is defined by a masterful balance between strength and grace. While her work maintains the dignified, sturdy structure characteristic of traditional Tōgatta forms, she softened these features with a distinctly warm, feminine touch. This unique aesthetic, elegant without being rigid, make her pieces exceptionally popular among collectors who value a sophisticated silhouette.

Although her production years were relatively limited, Yoko Sato's Kokeshi remain highly admired for their remarkable sense of harmony and timeless beauty.

Pattern: Mum
Size: 24 cm





TANABE KAORI

Artisan: 田辺香 (たなべかおり)

YOB: b. 1974

Master: Okazaki Yasuo 岡崎靖男

Strain: Naruko

Instagram: @kaori.kokeshi

A Life Shaped by Craft:

The Evolving Journey of a Kokeshi Artisan

Kokeshi artisan Tanabe Kaori was born on September 15, 1974, in Toda City, Saitama Prefecture, as the third daughter of Minegishi Tadao, a skilled craftsman in quartz-glass processing. Surrounded from an early age by the quiet discipline of handmade work, she developed a natural appreciation for creating with her hands. After graduating from the Kitasato University in 1998, she built a career in research and water-quality analysis within the fisheries field. She later married in 2010. Alongside her professional life, she nurtured her creative interests, participating in an annual earthenware firing event in Fujisawa-chō, Ichinoseki City, where her pieces received awards for three consecutive years.

Her path shifted when she learned of Osaki City's recruitment program for new Naruko Kokeshi artisans. Drawn by the opportunity to enter a traditional craft

rooted in the region's history, she made the decision to begin anew. In April 2020, she started her formal training under Okazaki Yasuo of Naruko, marking the beginning of her journey as a Kokeshi maker.

Kokeshi Trends had the opportunity to interview Tanabe Kaori. She shared that from early childhood she found joy in creating with her hands. She enjoys painting, pottery, sewing, and woodworking. More recently, she has taken a liking to nurturing plants. These practices, rooted in patience and attentiveness, naturally guided her toward the world of Kokeshi. At the age of 43, she encountered a job posting for a Kokeshi craftsman and although she had known of Kokeshi, she had never imagined becoming a maker herself. Yet through training, she discovered a deep affection not only for the work but for the Kokeshi themselves.

Entering a Demanding Craft

Kokeshi making is a profession that requires both physical strength and great care. The logs used for turning are heavy, and the tools, (circular saws, lathes, carving blades), demand constant awareness. Many artisans have experienced serious injuries over the years. Her master initially worried that the work

Photo Credits: KokeshiWiki, Soulportal Collection, and Photos provided by Kaori-san.

TANABE KAORI

might be too physically demanding for a woman, but he taught her how to work safely and guided her with patience. Today, aside from lifting the heaviest materials, she carries out her work independently. She feels that in modern society, the craft welcomes dedication and skill regardless of gender, with differences arising only in physical strength.

How a Kokeshi Design Comes to Life

Her creative process follows a path shaped by tradition:

Foundation: She begins by making plain Kokeshi using time-honored materials and methods. By studying the works of her master's lineage, she learns traditional painting styles through careful emulation and reflection.

Incorporating Creativity: Drawing inspiration from inherited forms and patterns, she gradually introduces her own ideas, allowing new expressions to emerge.

Developing Individuality: Over time, her personal experiences, knowledge, and the wishes of customers blend into designs that reflect her own artistic voice.

Dentō (traditional) Kokeshi rely on woods such as dogwood, maple, pagoda tree, and cherry, and are painted with sumi ink, food dyes, and natural pigments. Tools range from lathes and carving knives

to horsetail grass for polishing. Sōsaku (creative) Kokeshi may incorporate modern materials like acrylics, expanding the possibilities of expression.

Sources of Inspiration

Among traditional artisans, Kaori feels a special connection to the works of Okazaki Saikichi and Okazaki Shima. In her own original pieces, she is currently drawn to themes of passion and the gentle movement of Miyagino bush clover in the wind. Nature, plants, animals, and seasonal shifts are her primary muse, though she also enjoys creating pieces inspired by fairy tales and fantasy.

Kokeshi, with their simplified forms and absence of limbs, invite imagination. The unseen parts become a space for the viewer's own interpretation. She believes a Kokeshi is completed only through the meeting of the maker's intention and the viewer's imagination.

Although Kokeshi began as children's toys, she hopes people will still pick them up, take them on outings, or gently polish them with a cloth; interacting with them as companions rather than just collectible objects.



TANABE KAORI

The Japanese Aesthetic That Shapes Her Work

Japanese culture has long embraced expression through suggestion, the beauty of what is left unsaid. Concepts such as wabi-sabi and the Noh teaching “Hisu reba hana nari, hisazu ba hana narubekarazu” (“That which is concealed becomes the flower; if it is not concealed, it cannot become the flower”) resonate deeply with her. These ideas mirror the intentional simplicity of Kokeshi, where restraint allows imagination to bloom.

This aesthetic sensibility has profoundly influenced her approach. She believes that leaving space for the viewer’s interpretation is essential to Kokeshi expression.

Tradition as a Living, Evolving Path

Kaori believes that culture and tradition are nurtured over a long period of time. Tradition is not something that remains unchanged simply because it is old; rather, it grows and adapts with each era. When traditions stop evolving, they risk fading. For this reason, she actively challenges herself to create new expressions within the Naruko tradition. To Kaori, honoring tradition means both



preserving the past and allowing it to reach new heights. The Kokeshi considered “new” today will one day become part of the tradition passed to future generations.

Her own work is just one small part of that ongoing flow, but she hopes it will be carried forward by future hands, helping Kokeshi culture continue to live and breathe.

The Heart of Her Craft

Although Kaori does not consider herself a collector, she owns and admires the works of Kokeshi artisans Okazaki Saikichi, Okazaki Shima, and Takahashi Sadasuke, because she loves their painting and color schemes.

People who see her Naruko-style or creative Kokeshi often comment on the eyes: “The eyes were so striking I wanted to look again” and “Your way of expressing the eyes is truly unique.” As someone who places great importance on the eyes, these words remain deeply meaningful to her.

Kaori is grateful for every opportunity to share her work and expresses heartfelt thanks to those who cherish Kokeshi.

TANABE KAORI

What Makes a Good Kokeshi

To her, a good Kokeshi is not defined by the maker, age, price, or rarity. A good Kokeshi is one that feels cute, beautiful, or comforting to the heart.

Kaori hopes that everyone will encounter a Kokeshi that feels truly “good” to them, and she will continue devoting herself each day to creating pieces that inspire that feeling.



Photo Credits: Photos provided by Kaori-san.



Promoter of Kokeshi Culture & Sustainable Craft Practices

Kaori-san supports approaches that honor the time, skill, and generational knowledge invested in each handmade piece. Ensuring that selling prices reflect a living-wage standard helps sustain the artisans who continue these traditions, allowing them to create innovative, high-quality works that can be cherished for generations. By valuing craftsmanship appropriately, we nurture both the cultural heritage of Kokeshi and the future of those who dedicate their lives to this art.

TANABE KAORI



Pattern: Red
Riding Hood
Size: 8 cm

RESOURCES

KOKESHIWIKI.COM
SOULPORTALS.COM

INSTAGRAM:

@KAORI.KOKESHI
@KOKESHITRENDS_KT





Dedicated to the women who refused to step aside, the artisans who picked up the Kokeshi mantle with steady hands and unshakable resolve. To every maker who said yes, we can in a field that did not always make room for them, your courage, creativity, and quiet persistence have reshaped the future of this craft. The path you walk is not easy, yet you continue to carve, paint, innovate, and honor tradition in equal measure. This page stands as a tribute to your strength and the legacy you are building for generations to come.

道を切り開いてきた女性たちへ

「私たちならできる」と声を上げ、ためらうことなくこけし創作の担い手となったすべての女性工人に捧げます。伝統を守りながら新しさを生み出し、静かな強さと揺るがぬ意志でこの世界を前へと進めてきた皆さまの勇気と創造性に、深い敬意を込めて。このページは、あなた方が築き続けている未来への遺産に捧げる小さな賛辞です。

FOLK ART: CELEBRATING WOMEN ARTISANS



Kachou Fugetsu
花鳥風月
Beauties of Nature



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