

# 紬織

*Tsumugi-ori*  
Weaving

## The Art of SASAKI Sonoko

SASAKI Sonoko, the holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property, *Tsumugi* Weaving. Using elegant colors and highly original designs, SASAKI conveys her inner emotions in works of stunning beauty. Step by step, we see the delicate beauty of her pictorial ikat come into being.

This video documents SASAKI's creative process, weaving together descriptions of the techniques involved and her philosophy towards her art.

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# *Tsumugi-ori* Weaving

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## Prologue

Once SASAKI sits in front of her loom, she focuses her entire being on weaving, reminding us of *Yuzuru*, the story of a crane who becomes a woman by day, but spends all night plucking her feathers to weave cloth for her husband.



## History of *tsumugi* weaving

*Tsumugi* is a traditional fabric woven with threads of *mawata* (carded silk) made from spoiled cocoons (*yogore mayu*) or double cocoons (*tama mayu*) spun by two or more silkworms. Threads from such imperfect cocoons contain slubs or soft nubs. Hand woven, these give a simple, rustic fabric with a distinctive sheen. Originally made for household use, *tsumugi* has evolved into a highly sophisticated fabric.



## SASAKI Sonoko's studio

SASAKI's studio is in a quiet residential district just a step away from one of Tokyo's busiest streets.



## Her introduction to weaving

SASAKI's mother, Aiko, was a textile scholar who visited production areas throughout Japan. After observing her mother close at hand, it was natural that Sonoko chose to become a weaving artist.



## Discovering pictorial ikat

Attracted to the non-linear beauty of *e-gasuri* (pictorial ikat), SASAKI decided to master the technique through regular visits to Yumihama, an area in Tottori Prefecture famous for the production of cotton *e-gasuri*. This took her seven years.



## Representative work: *Tsumugi* kimono with pictorial ikat, 'Autumn'

Gradually, she moved on to works that convey inner emotions rather than just outward beauty.

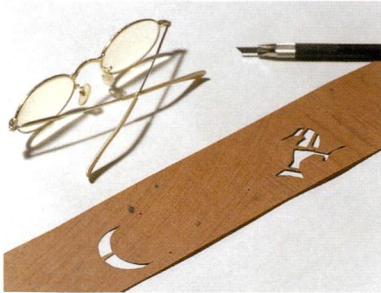
The exquisite harmony of gradation in this resist-dyed *yokogasuri* (weft ikat) with purple pinstripes expresses the delicate beauty of early autumn.





## Creating the design

First she creates a sketch on graph paper. The white section will form the background of the design. She then makes several copies of the sketch, and assembles them in the shape of a kimono.



## Creating the pattern

She then begins the process of preparing the stencils. She places a pattern the same width as standard kimono cloth onto the material that will form the stencil, and uses a knife to cut it out.



## Preparing the guide thread

Cotton thread is passed back and forth between the teeth of the comb-like reeds on each end of the *tane ito* frame. The stencil is then taped onto the resulting thread plane. The motif is then transferred onto the thread using *sumi* ink and a stencil brush. This thread acts as a guide for creating the *e-gasuri* pattern, and is called the *tane-ito* (guide thread).



## What she is trying to express

SASAKI is hoping to convey the energy and sense of eternity symbolized by birds that fly long distances despite being so small.



## Aligning the guide thread and weft thread

After winding the guide thread around the pegs of the weft frame, she then winds a bundle of *tama-ito* (double cocoon) silk threads around the pegs, following the path of the guide thread without stopping.



## Binding

Once the winding has been completed, the silk and guide thread are taken off the weft frame and wrapped onto a weft ikat winder. The silk is then bound with nylon thread following the *sumi* markings on the guide thread in a process called *kukuri* (binding).



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## Dyeing with natural vegetable dyes (1) Dyeing the thread yellow using gardenia pods

In order to highlight the white in the design, SASAKI decided to dye the background a deep green. Using water from the well, she boils gardenia pods overnight to make a yellow dye for the initial dyeing.



## Dyeing with natural vegetable dyes (2) Layered dyeing with indigo dyes

SASAKI then soaks the yellow threads in an indigo solution.



## Removing the bindings

The bound sections resist the yellow and indigo dyes and remain white. Each of the finished threads is wound onto a *kasuri* frame to prepare for weaving.



## Weaving

Weaving is very intense work that requires total concentration. There's no room for mistakes. SASAKI clears her mind of irrelevant thoughts as she manipulates the heddles.



## The final product: *Tsumugi* kimono with pictorial ikat, 'Faint Moonlight'

This kimono conveys SASAKI's passion for birds. The subtle gradation of colors in the ikat provides a perfect backdrop for the birds as they fly up towards the stars in the soft light of the crescent moon.



## SASAKI Sonoko

SASAKI Sonoko was born in Tokyo in 1939. From 1965, she studied hand-loom weaving for three years in Shizuoka Prefecture, after which she studied warp ikat, weft ikat and pictorial ikat in Yumihama, Tottori Prefecture and Hirose, Shimane Prefecture.

In 1969, she opened her home studio, where she uses natural, plant-based dyes to produce delicate colors, combining abstract and concrete motifs to create elegant designs. In 2005, she was recognized as the holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property, *Tsumugi* Weaving.

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