

# Yūzen – The Art of MORIGUCHI Kunihiko –



Yūzen hōmongi kimono  
“Isō kasane-uroko ka mon”

Yūzen is a method of dyeing in which dye resists are used to create elaborate pictorial designs. Yūzen took off in popularity after the techniques were used to produce *kosode* with designs similar to those being created by MIYAZAKI Yūzen, who was a popular fan designer in Kyoto during the Edo period. The methods for this style of hand-drawn yūzen had been perfected by the middle Edo period. Today, these methods are being kept alive in Kyoto, Kanazawa, Tokyo, and a handful of other areas. For his work in yūzen, MORIGUCHI Kunihiko was declared a holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property in 2007. MORIGUCHI was born in Kyoto and studied at the Kyoto City University of Arts. Upon graduation, with a scholarship from the French government, he traveled to Paris to study architecture and graphic design. After completing his studies there, he returned to Japan. MORIGUCHI Kunihiko started to get serious about yūzen the following year, learning the craft under his father, MORIGUCHI Kakō. While Kunihiko was trained in the traditional methods, he used them to develop a unique style—one in which elements such as flowers, snow, and flowing water are composed of and expressed in geometric patterns. His innovative and modern sense of form opened up new possibilities in yūzen, and his work has earned plaudits both nationally and internationally.

## MORIGUCHI Kunihiko

- 1941 MORIGUCHI Kunihiko is born in Kyoto.
- 1963 Upon graduation from Kyoto City University of Arts, he goes to study in France with a scholarship from the French government.
- 1966 MORIGUCHI graduates from École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (Paris).
- 1969 MORIGUCHI wins the “Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award” in the 6<sup>th</sup> Japan Traditional Textile Arts Exhibition.  
He wins the NHK Chairman’s Award in the 16<sup>th</sup> Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition.
- 1973 MORIGUCHI wins the Asahi Shimbun Award in the 20<sup>th</sup> Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition.
- 1986 His work is the subject of a one-man show at Galerie Jeanne-Bucher in Paris.
- 1992 MORIGUCHI wins the Minister of Education Award for Fine Arts.
- 2001 He is awarded the Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon.
- 2007 MORIGUCHI Kunihiko is recognized a holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property.

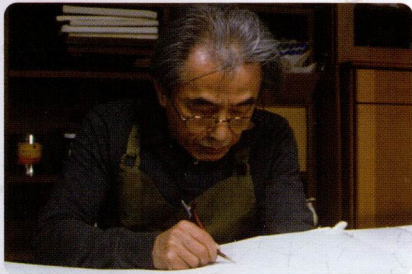






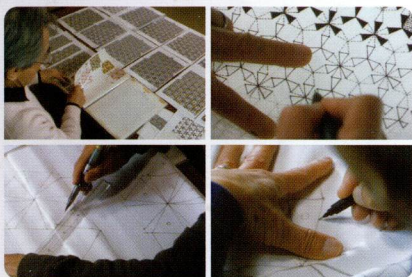
## ❖ Prologue

Japan's kimono culture began to develop along its own unique lines with the creation of the kosode in the Heian period. The dyeing techniques of yūzen were later perfected during the middle Edo period in Kyoto. With these techniques, fabrics can be dyed in virtually any design imaginable. The yūzen style was a hit with the public, and soon became the look of the day.



## ❖ Yūzen artist MORIGUCHI Kunihiro

Yūzen artist MORIGUCHI Kunihiro is carrying on these traditional dyeing techniques. For his work in yūzen, MORIGUCHI was recognized as a holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property in 2007. He is forging new ground in yūzen with his geometric designs, which are the product of a bold imagination and mastery of traditional techniques.



## ❖ Designing, sketching, outlining, back penciling

MORIGUCHI studies his massive collection of sketches to work out his new design. He considers the sketching stage the most important, as the sketches will determine the design through each step of the dyeing process. MORIGUCHI draws the outlines of the design on the fabric using a synthetic blue dye and calligraphy pen. These blue lines will later be washed away, leaving no trace. Some of these lines, he does not want to lose. These will be traced on the reverse side of the fabric with a pencil.



## ❖ Itomenori-oki (outlining with relief paste)

Using a tool similar to a pastry bag, MORIGUCHI applies thin ribbons of gum paste over the outlines of the design. This step is done to ensure that the outlines of the pattern are sharp; if it is not done properly, the outlines will be fuzzy and the fabric will be useless. It is an essential step in the yūzen process.



## ❖ Removing the blue dye

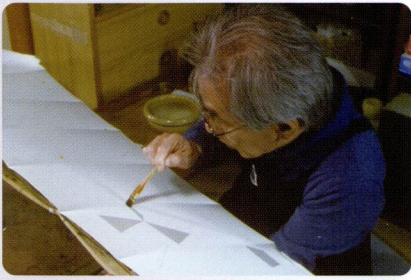
Once the step of *itomenori-oki* is complete, MORIGUCHI sprays the fabric with water to begin the process of removing the blue dye. Working from the back of the fabric, he uses a brush to help erase the blue lines.



## ❖ Applying volatile oil

Once the blue lines have been removed, MORIGUCHI uses a towel to soak up dye and water, and the fabric is allowed to dry. He then brushes on a volatile oil, which helps the relief paste penetrate deeper into the fabric.





### ✿ Gojiru ji-ire

MORIGUCHI prepares *gojiru*, a liquid made from soaked soy beans, and mixes in *funori* seaweed. He will brush the *gojiru* onto the fabric. In the next step, called *iro-sashí*, dyes will be painted on by hand. *Gojiru* helps ensure that these dyes go on evenly and penetrate well into the fabric. The colors will be deeper as a result.



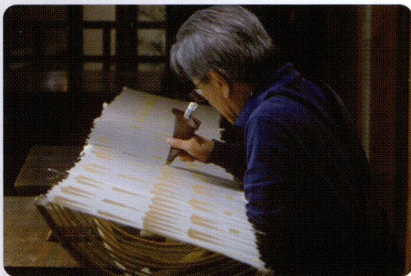
### ✿ Iro-sashi (dye-painting)

MORIGUCHI fills in the triangles, painting within the lines of *itomenori* paste. He wants to make sure that the colors penetrate through to the back. He will then go over the surface with a special brush, checking that the dyes are evenly applied and that there is no pooling.



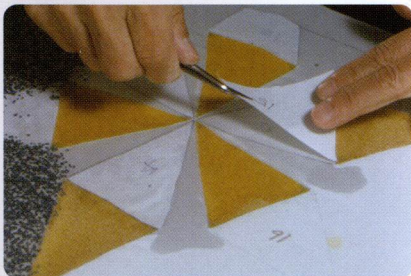
### ✿ Mizumoto (water washing)

After completing the step of *iro-sashí* comes the process of *mizumoto*. MORIGUCHI uses an alum-water solution to fix the dyes, then washes the fabric in water. Excess dyes and impurities are washed away in preparation for the next step, called *fusenori*.



### ✿ Fusenori

In this step, the hand-painted areas are covered with dye resist so they will not be dyed over by the ground-color. Resist is also applied to areas meant to remain white. Fine sawdust called *híkiko* is then sprinkled onto the resist, helping to reinforce the surface and hold in moisture.



### ✿ Making and applying embuta

In the next step, another type of resist called *makinori* will be applied, but not to all areas. Paper masking stencils called *embuta* will be used to cover the areas that are not meant to be decorated with *makinori*. MORIGUCHI carefully shapes the *embuta*, lines them up with the pattern, and sticks them down. By doing this, he ensures that the parts of the pattern decorated with *makinori* will have clearly-defined edges.



### ✿ Makinori

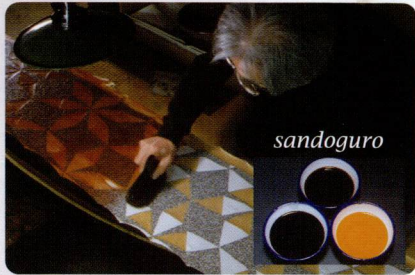
MORIGUCHI Kakō, Kunihiko's father, took inspiration from *maki-e* (lacquerware sprinkled with gold or silver dust) to develop the *makinori* techniques he would use in his *yūzen* work. Kunihiko took those techniques and built on them to develop the techniques he now uses to create his signature style of *yūzen*.





### ✦ Mizu ji-ire

After MORIGUCHI applies the *makinori* and goes back to adjust the covering density, he will go over the fabric once a day with a wet brush in a process aimed at ensuring the *makinori* is fixed firmly to the fabric. This process, called “*mizu ji-ire*”, goes on for several days.



### ✦ Ji-zome (using sandoguro dyes)

The ground color will be black. The dye used is actually a set of three dyes, called *sandoguro*. Together, they give a deep color. These vegetable dyes, which are made in France, produce a jet-black that MORIGUCHI likes to use in his work.



### ✦ Mizumoto & finishing

After the bolt of fabric is dyed in the ground color, it is brought to a craftsman who specializes in *mizumoto* and finishing. The fabric is immersed in water. This softens the *fusenori* and *makinori* resists, and washes away dirt and excess dye.



### ✦ Sewing

The task of sewing is also left to a seasoned expert. Working with the sorts of geometric designs favored by MORIGUCHI presents special challenges for the tailor, because the seams in the patterns have to line up just right.



### ✦ The completed yuzen homongi kimono, entitled “Isō kasane-uroko ka mon”

MORIGUCHI asked friend HORIKI Eriko, a *washi* paper artist, to model his newly completed kimono. It features an all-over speckling of *makinori*, and the predominant colors are black, maize yellow and white. And with that, a new MORIGUCHI Kunihiko creation comes into the world, as he once again breathes new life into the yuzen tradition.

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