

FY1987 Craft Technique Documentary 35 mm / Color / 30 minutes
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Makie

The Eggshell Art of TERAJ Naoji



Makie is the creation of images by sprinkling gold or silver powder designs onto pieces coated in Japanese *urushi* lacquer. It is one of Japan's most distinctive decorative techniques of Lacquerwork. There are many different variations of *makie* techniques, the artistic expression of the form is broadened further by the incorporation of such elements as *raden* (mother-of-pearl), *hyomon* (sheet metals) and *rankaku* (eggshell) inlay.

TERAJI Naoji was born in Kanazawa in 1912 and worked in lacquerware materials research at RIKEN after studying lacquer art at Ishikawa Prefectural Industrial School of Arts and the Tokyo Fine Arts School.

Following World War II, he embarked on his own creative path as a lacquer artist, delving deeply into the intricacies of *makie* technique, especially eggshell inlay. His innovative mastery of the art earned him broad recognition, he was honored in 1985 as Holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property: *Makie*. This title is more popularly known as Living National Treasure.

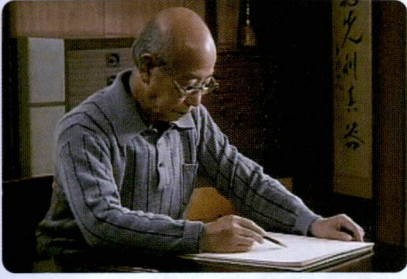
Teraji extended the expressive potential of *makie* with his ability to evoke depth, dynamics and gradation in his work, and pioneered ways of bringing lacquer coloration to white eggshell inlay.

These achievements, along with his highly developed artistry, brought him wide acclaim.

He also was instrumental in advancing *kintai soji*, or the use of metal core materials in lacquerwork.

This film faithfully records the many processes involved in his creation of the piece known as *Kintai Makie Urushibako "Hisyo,"* or "High Flying."

It was conceived and produced as a way to help preserve this Important Intangible Cultural Property for the cultivation of his successors and the edification of future technicians, researchers and scholars.



TERAI Naoji, a Holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property: *Makie*

TERAI Naoji was highly skilled in the techniques of *makie* and eggshell inlay, he created brilliant works in this genre, enriched by his poetic imagination.



Ishikawa Prefectural Wajima Institute of Lacquer Arts

In the latter half of his life, Teraï taught and mentored followers at the Institute of Lacquer Arts.

He particularly emphasized to students the importance of design, while continuing his own artistic endeavors.



Design Concepts and Focus of this Work

To use eggshell to express a group of flying *tancho-zuru* cranes.

To capture the essence of the vast natural world encompassing these sublime crane figures.

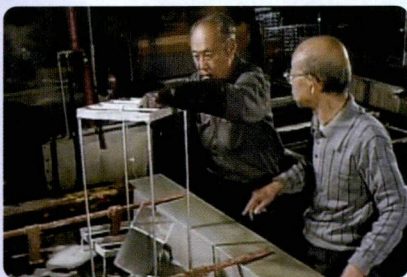
And to create the prototype of a box that embodies and develops this overall design.



Base Material and Core Production

He selects aluminum as the material to produce a light and sturdy box.

Sheet aluminum is bent to fit a wooden form and welded into final shape.



Surface Processing of Base Material

Alumite processing is used to create countless micron-sized pores on the surface of the aluminum.

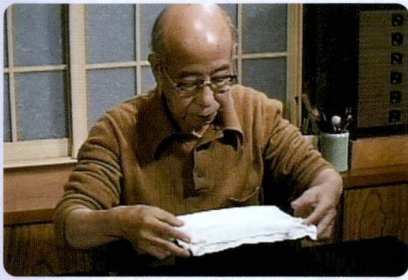
This enables the lacquer to penetrate and adhere to the metal surface.



Base-coating

The alumite-finished aluminum is then coated with lacquer.

Carefully controlled temperature and moisture conditions assure that the lacquer dries to a strong, durable film.



Foundation

Thin strips of tanned cowhide are attached, to ease the coldness of the metal.

It is then wrapped with hemp string, for additional reinforcement. The string and leather are saturated with thin lacquer, and the box receives multiple additional layers of lacquer and other coatings.



Concept Development and *Okime* (Pattern Placement)

After refining the design concept while considering the arrangement of gold *makie* and white eggshell elements, the final pattern is complete.

This is copied with lacquer onto *washi* paper and transferred onto the box.



Preparation of Eggshells

The shells of quail eggs are used, as they are thinner than those of chickens.

These are cleaned with a nitric acid solution, and any blemished pieces are removed.

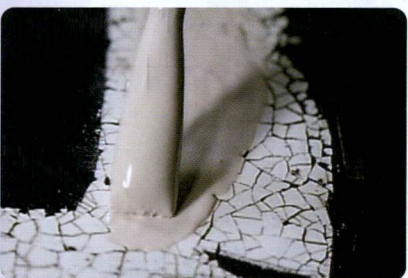
The inner membrane is carefully peeled off. Black ink is painted on the inner side to easily distinguish it from the face.



Placement of Eggshell

Roiro-urushi, a non-oily black lacquer, is applied to the areas where the eggshells are to be placed.

Starting with the largest design elements, he presses to break the shell pieces into smaller and smaller fragments, and arranges them according to shape, size and tone to create the crane's features and form.



Urushigatame (Eggshell Fixing with Lacquer)

Once the eggshell figures are finished, they are coated with white lacquer, or *shiro-urushi*. This penetrates into any fissures to fix the eggshell fragments in place, while heightening their white color.

Kuro-urushi, black lacquer, is coated on surrounding areas.



Hyomon

Thin gold sheets are cut for design elements such as the cranes' beaks and reeds in the bog, and adhered with lacquer.

This technique of inlaying figures of sheet gold or silver is called *hyomon*.



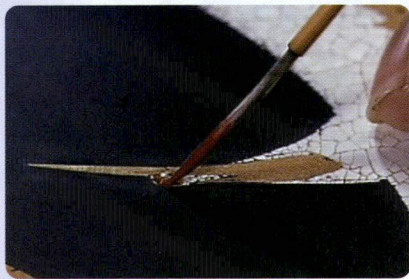
☪ *Makie and Raden*

He places small flakes of gold called *hiramefun* one by one on the areas of grass, and sprinkles the surroundings with gold powder. Then he attaches slivers of *tamamushigai*, from abalone shell, to indicate the water surface and sky.



☪ *Nurikomi (Coating) and Togidashi (Abrading)*

He coats the piece in *kuro-roiro-urushi* and, once it's fully dry, begins the abrading process. After a rough sanding with *surugazumi* charcoal, he polishes eggshell elements with the powdered charcoal.



☪ *Final Details and Polishing*

More *makie* is added on details such as the cranes' necks and feathers. *Hyomon* gives the cranes their eyes. Legs are drawn from powdered gold, carved in delicate lines by a needle. Red *shu-urushi* lacquer colors the heads of the *tancho-zuru*. And every detail is painstakingly polished with *hari-zumi*, charcoal bar.



☪ *Finishing the Box Inside and Out*

A decorative hexagonal *kikkomon* pattern on the three-tiered inner boxes brings a sense of warmth and familiarity to the user, while the paulownia wood *masamezai* lining softens the hardness of the metal body.



☪ *Kintai Makie Urushibako "Hisyo" Completed*

The piece called *Kintai Makie Urushibako "Hisyo,"* or "High Flying," is now complete—a work of art that condenses the vastness into which cranes fly away onto the surface of an exquisite lacquerwork.

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