

FY 2012 Craft Technique Documentary

Bamboo work

-The Art of KATSUSHIRO Soho-



Japanese bamboo work applies weaving and other techniques, while putting the beauty of simple materials on full display, by employing a plentiful range of bamboos imbued with great strength and flexibility. This film documents the entire process that Katsushiro Soho, a holder of important intangible cultural property for bamboo work, uses to create his "Yasuragi-no-hana (a tranquil flower)" basket, which was inspired by familiar natural surroundings.

Planned by: Agency for Cultural Affairs

Produced: Mainichi Productions

◆KATSUSHIRO Soho

Real name: Katsushiro Ichiji

Katsushiro Soho was born in Tochigi Prefecture in the village of Takabayashi (in the present-day city of Nasushiobara). His father taught him how to work bamboo from a young age. When he grew up, Katsushiro apprenticed under bamboo worker Kikuchi Yoshii and also received instruction on techniques and expression from bamboo artists such as Yagisawa Keizo and Saito Bunseki. For many years since Katsushiro has studied diligently, learning a diverse array of bamboo art techniques while employing his unique expressive abilities to produce works with wide-ranging nature themes. His pieces have been shown at the Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition and drawn critical acclaim.

1934 – Born in Tochigi Prefecture.

1968 – Selected to display work at the 15th Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition.

1972 – Became a member of the Japan Art Crafts Association (now a public corporation).

1983 – Received the Tokyo Governor Prize at the 30th Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition for his basket "*Keiryu* (mountain stream)."

1997 – Received the NHK Chairman Prize at the 44th Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition for his basket "*Seseragi* (murmur of a brook)."

1998 – Received the Purple Ribbon Medal.

2005 – Recognized as a holder of important intangible cultural property for bamboo work (individual recognition).



■ Important intangible cultural property “Bamboo work”



Bamboo art techniques are divided into two groups: "*hensomono*" shaped by weaving and assembling finely split pieces of bamboo, and "*marutake-mono*" using bamboo in its original cylindrical form. Bamboo art produces creations by using the beauty of the materials' simplicity and the bamboo's characteristically great strength and flexibility.

■ Material preparation



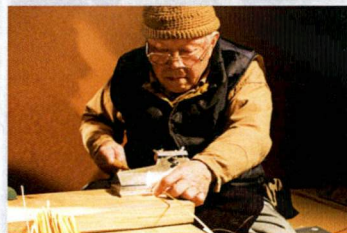
There are two types of bamboo splits: radial and tangential. For this piece, Katsushiro uses strips with 700 radial and 360 tangential splits, as well as many others.

■ Selecting bamboo (Japanese timber bamboo)



Since long ago, fine bamboo has been found around the city of Otawara in Tochigi Prefecture. Bamboo is chopped down in late autumn, when it stops growing.

■ Making bamboo strips



Using a blade, he makes radial bamboo splits 0.4 mm thick. He performs extremely delicate handwork, fully focused on the blade's edge.

■ Removing the bamboo's oil



Katsushiro places the bamboo in boiling water to which he has added caustic soda, thus removing the bamboo's oil. Doing this and then drying the bamboo will make it last a long time.

■ Weaving the basket



Katsushiro ties bundles, each containing 36 radial strips with nodes, gathering the nodes in the middle. These nodes form the stamens of the "tranquil flower." He stacks two and three layers each for the petals, bringing the flower to life.

■ Design concept



The artist plans a new work that will "express an impression inspired by nature," with an ancient lotus that bloomed in his garden for the first time ever as the motif. The theme is a "tranquil flower." Katsushiro works out a design to somehow create a basket that expresses this through the medium of bamboo.

■ Twining



Vertically, horizontally, he closes the gaps between the identical bamboo strips. The *nihontobi* technique weaves pairs of bamboo strips at a time, but occasionally Katsushiro weaves five or six to change the pattern.

■ Wave plaiting



This technique weaves three horizontal tangential strips with nodes into the vertical strips. The parts with nodes are difficult to weave and can snap easily, but Katsushiro uses the bamboo with nodes anyway.

■ Shaping the basket



The basket is soft after soaking in hot water. Katsushiro carefully gives it its final form: the contours, the height.

■ Weaving a two-layer basket



He removes the basket from his worktable, turns it over and weaves the wave plaiting.

■ *Suri-urushi*



Katsushiro gives the dried basket a lacquer finish called "*suri-urushi*," which he applies to draw out the bamboo's beauty.

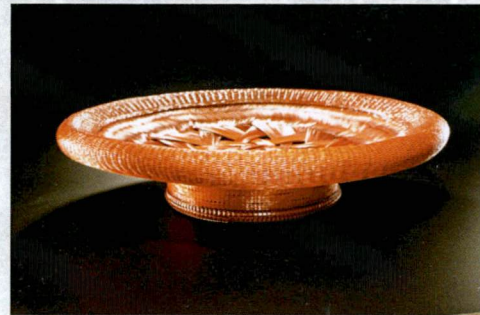
■ Adjusting the foot



Katsushiro decides on the overall shape, adds a bamboo rim and adjusts the foot.

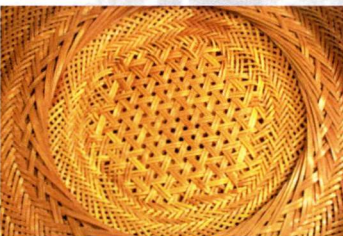
The finished piece

"*Yasuragi-no-hana* (a tranquil flower)" basket



Katsushiro calls his technique of weaving bundled strips "*senshu-ami*."

■ Clematis plaiting



He finishes up the foot with clematis plaiting, named for its resemblance to the clematis flower.



Following the flower's lines, the weave soon overlaps in labyrinthine fashion. The center of a flower is brilliantly depicted by the black nodes. The tranquil flower has blossomed.

■ Dyeing



Katsushiro dyes the woven basket, for which he used different bamboo strips to weave. The strips' color varies slightly, but this dye will make them uniform.

Special Thanks

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FUKUDA Masaru

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