

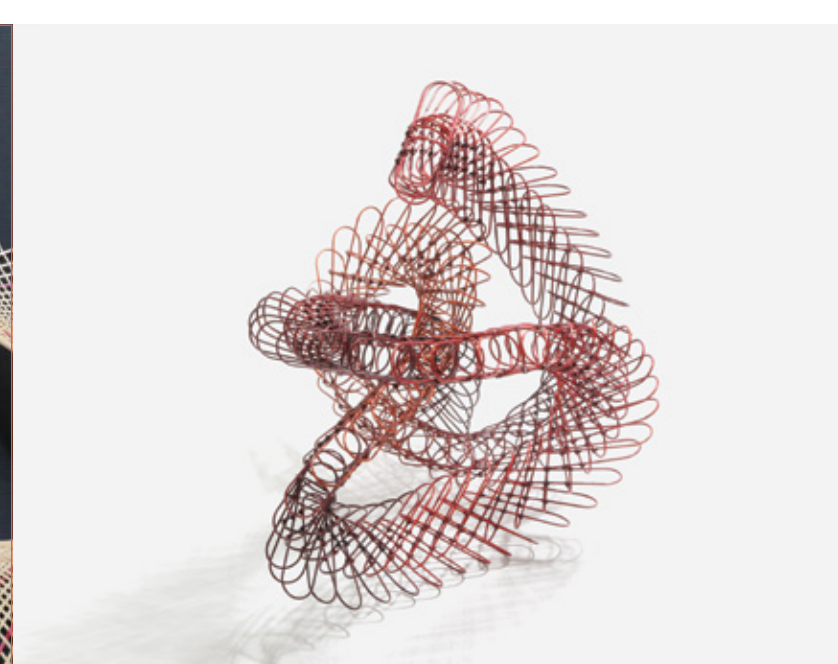
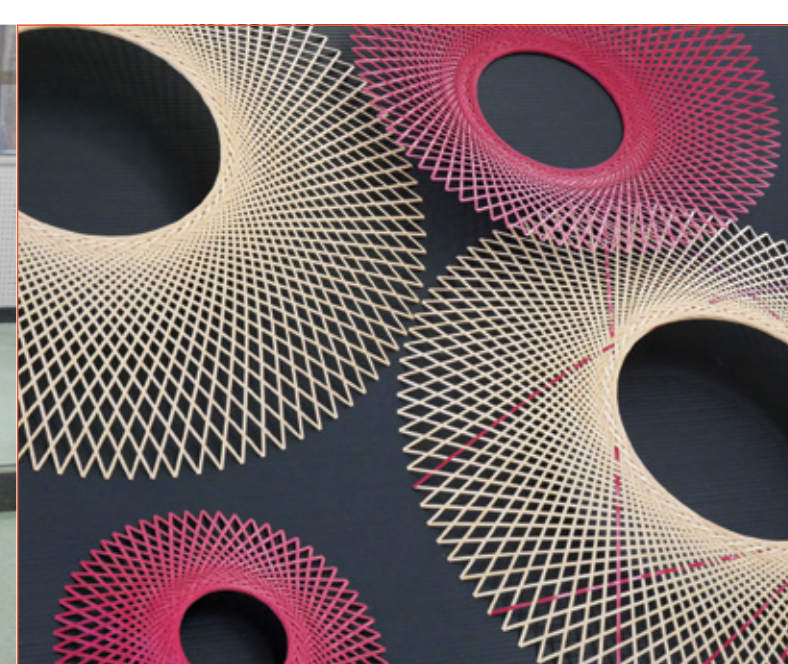
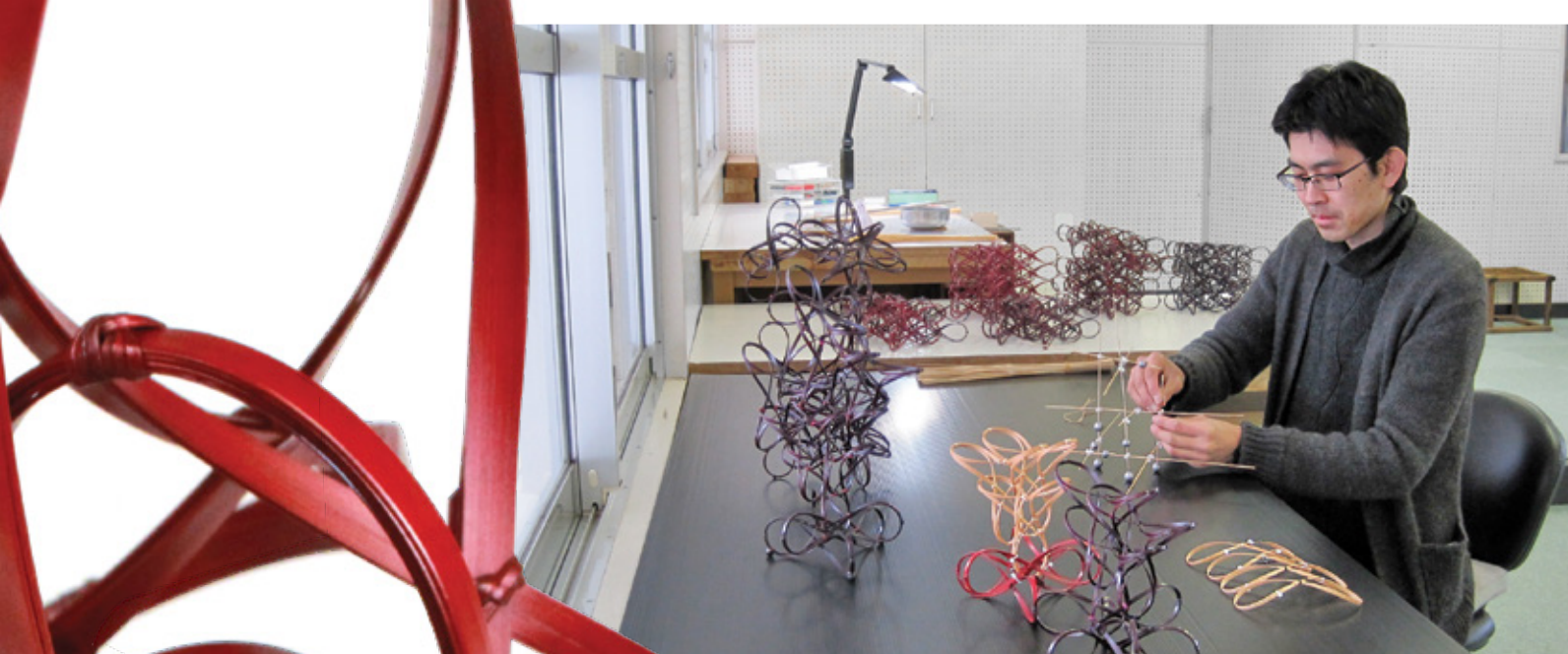


making it new

In the hands of five Japanese artists, traditional craft materials and techniques take a contemporary turn

text: daniella ohad

See page 140 for more on bamboo artist Tanabe Chikuunsai IV. ➔



"I wanted to see how far I could push bamboo, to maximize its power and mystery"



Nakatomi Hajime

If Japanese traditional bamboo work has moved from being a folk craft into a recognized contemporary art form, then Nakatomi Hajime (b. 1974) is one of the leaders of the evolution. Bamboo has a special place in the culture and rituals of Japan, symbolizing vitality, prosperity, and courage. For centuries, the country's bamboo artisans have crafted exquisite baskets and other everyday utensils using techniques passed down from generation to generation. The work Nakatomi produces in the southern city of Taketa couldn't look more different than those conventional objects, however. His language is singular: geometric, architectural, almost modernist. He achieves daring forms by approaching the medium with reverence but also with a fresh mindset that's not afraid to experiment with the unknown, employ unconventional methods, and adopt new eco-friendly dyes and lacquers. Nakatomi's ingenious and sophisticated work straddles the line between the traditional and the contemporary, between art and craft. taimodem.com ➤

Clockwise from top left: Nakatomi Hajime handcrafts bamboo in his studio. A work in progress. Like many of his pieces, Prism Ellipse, 2014, incorporates madake bamboo and rattan. The ribbonlike Frill, 2020, silhouetted in a window. A detail of Tension 01, 2017, shows Nakatomi's exquisite craftsmanship.

COURTESY OF TAI MODERN



Hashimoto Machiko

A native of Kyoto, ceramicist Hashimoto Machiko (b. 1986) creates sculptural vessels that look like enormous blue-and-white flowers. Working at her home studio in the old imperial city, she uses two fundamental materials: semi-porcelain (commonly known as ironstone) and cobalt-oxide glaze. For her, blue not only is a favorite color but also symbolizes aspects of life: water, sky, and ocean. In her ceramic objects, Hashimoto recreates nature, not in a realistic way—these are not delicate blossoms—but as an abstract, imaginative, and substantial presence. While relying on the Japanese tradition of blue-and-white porcelain, her language is personal, idiosyncratic, and generative. A graduate of Kyoto Saga University of Arts, she produces powerful, expressive work that is labor intensive. Carved inside and out, and fired twice, each giant bloom is unique and takes months to complete. Most remarkably, Hashimoto manages to imbue her sculptures with a palpable sense of both serene calm and furious motion. gallery-sokyo.jp ➔



From left: Ceramicist Hashimoto Machiko with a characteristic piece in her Kyoto studio. Working with semi-porcelain (also known as ironstone), Hashimoto creates large vessels like *Season—Pastel*, 2019, that evoke blossoms.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; COURTESY OF SOKYO GALLERY



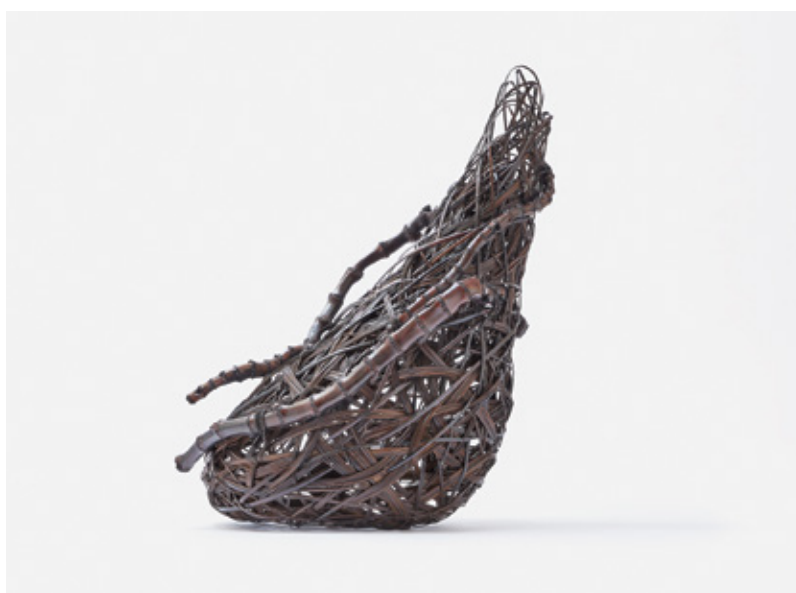
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: DATSUKI NAKAMURA; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; COURTESY OF SOKYO GALLERY; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Kawai Kazuhito

Clay is but one medium among many Kawai Kazuhito (b. 1984) utilizes in his highly distinctive work. His creations are odd and edgy, yet so compelling that when he exhibited them at Design Miami for the first time last December, they immediately captured the attention of collectors. After graduating from London's Chelsea College of Arts in 2007, Kawai completed his studies at Kasama College of Ceramic Art in his home prefecture of Ibaraki, where he currently lives and works. He belongs to a generation of young artists who began with conventional ceramic craft but have turned their backs on many *wabi-sabi* concepts—simplicity, economy, modesty—to produce bright-hued, dysfunctional objects with powerfully eruptive surfaces. Combining sensuality with vivid color, Kawai's work reflects a contemporary interest in the aesthetics of the grotesque, which is explored through an exceptional approach to materiality. Resembling flamboyantly irregular candy, his pieces may look like fun, but they incorporate covert critiques of pop culture, fashion, and society. gallery-sokyo.jp ➔

Clockwise from top right: Cutting-edge ceramicist Kawai Kazuhito with a typically powerful work. Titled *Hiroshi Nagai and City Pop*, 2020, this piece comments on popular culture. *Celebrity in the contemporary performing arts* is referenced in *A Friend of Mine Resembles Yuja Wang*, 2019. Brilliant color floods *Cafe AYA*, 2019.





"The foundation of my artistry comes from the spirit of tea ceremony and the art of ikebana"

Tanabe Chikuunsai IV

In creating *The Gate*, a site-specific installation at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2017, Tanabe Chikuunsai IV (b. 1973) helped bring contemporary Japanese bamboo artistry, which infuses traditional craft with radical innovation, to an international audience. As the fourth generation in a long line of distinguished bamboo artisans—previously known as Tanabe Shochiku, he was bestowed with the family's artist-name Chikuunsai, meaning "master of the bamboo clouds," three years ago—he is acutely aware of the central place the spirit of tradition holds when working with the time-honored material today. A graduate of the Tokyo University of the Arts, he trained in the bamboo crafts at a special school on the island of Kyushu, before setting up a studio in Sakai, his hometown.

Tanabe's pieces cross the boundaries between sculpture and architecture, while his dramatic, organic, twisted forms have become an evocative trademark. taimodern.com ➤

Clockwise from top right: Godai, 2019, is partly made of bamboo root. Tanabe Chikuunsai IV constructing Connection-Origin, 2019, in his studio. Black bamboo forms the sculptural Godai (Wind), 2018. A solo exhibition at TAI Modern, Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2019. The artist stands beside Connection-Origin at the exhibition. As its name suggests, Disappear VIII, 2019, has an ethereal, weightless quality.

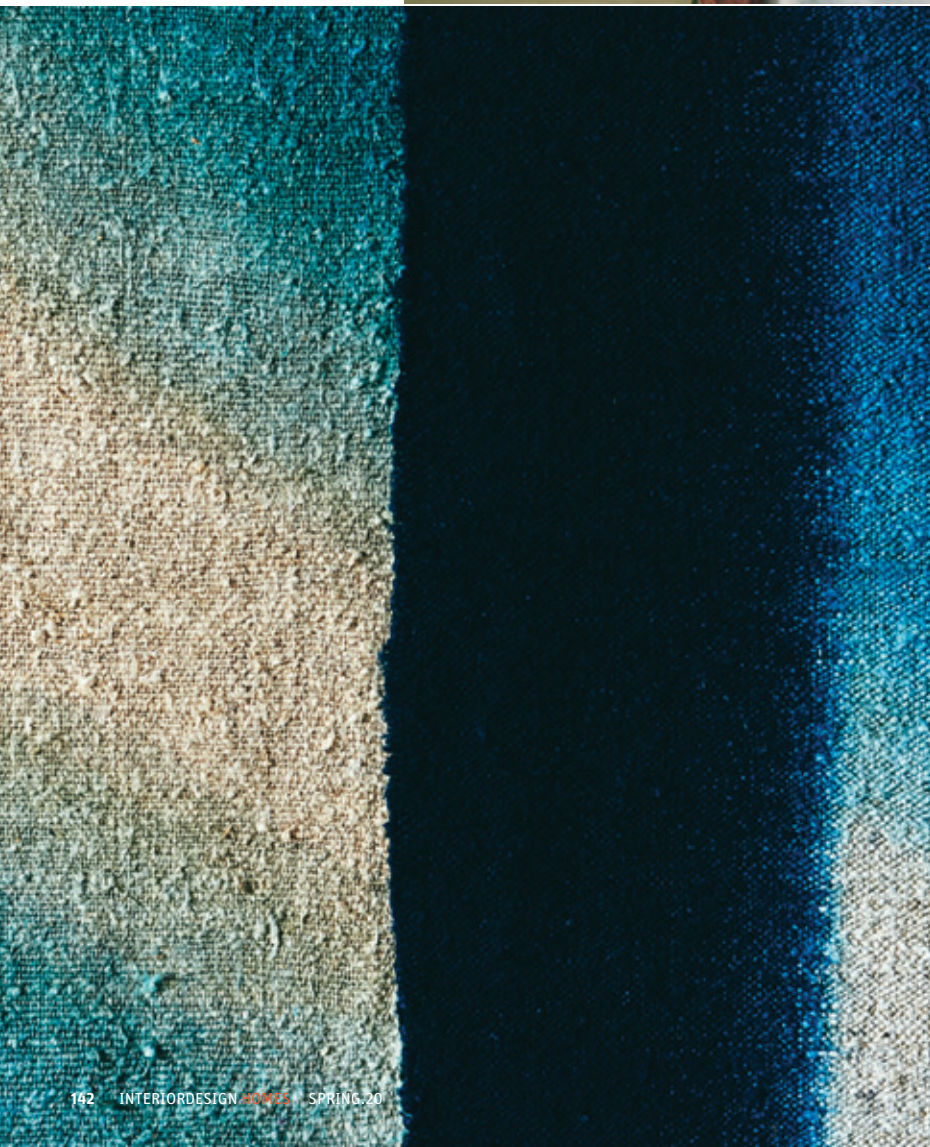
CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: TADAYUKI MINAMOTO (2); INCREDIBLE FILMS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TADAYUKI MINAMOTO; GARY MARKUS (2)



"I am influenced by the tradition and culture of Kyoto—and the color of indigo, which is associated with the rivers, water, and ocean of Japan"

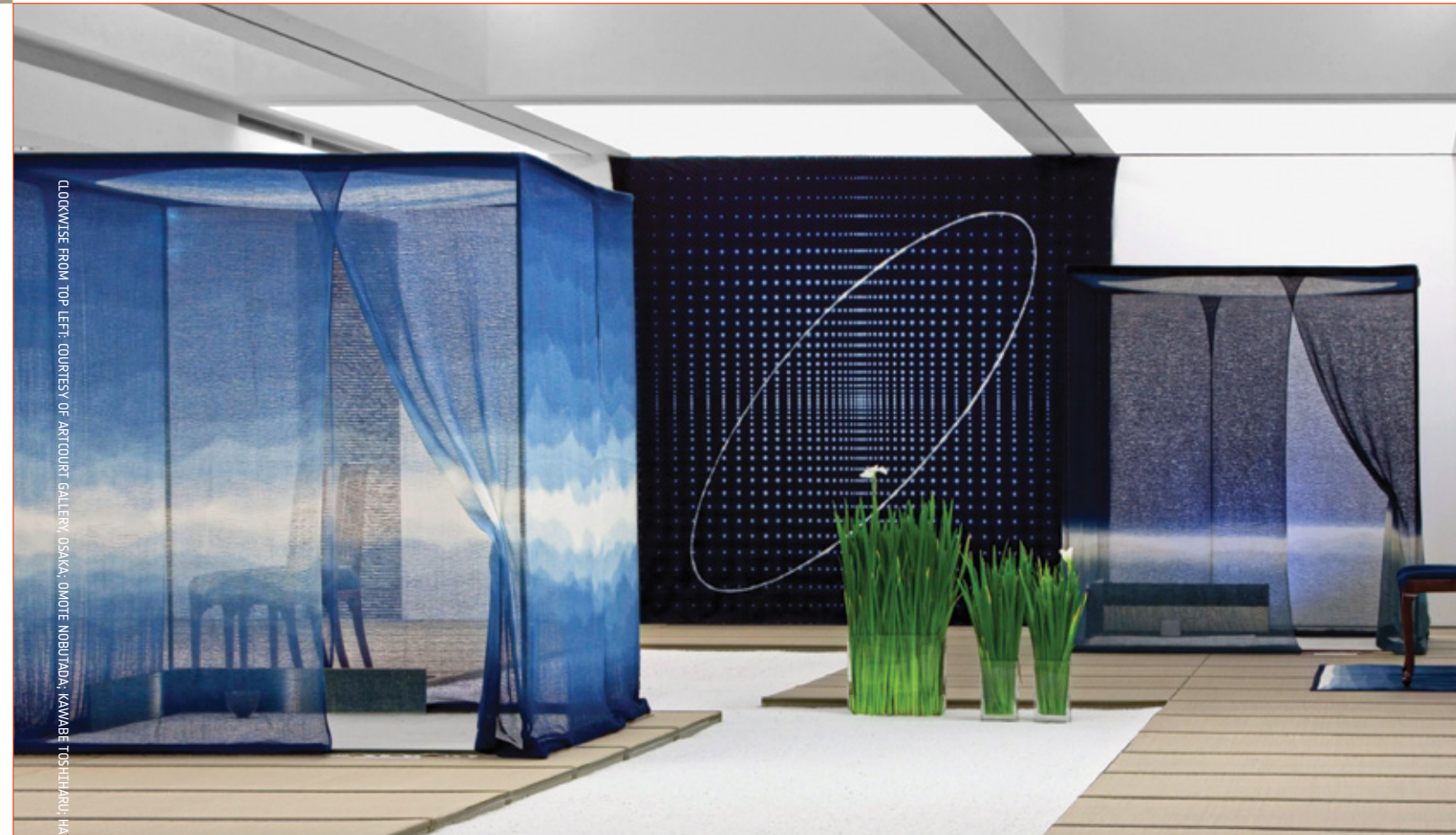


Fukumoto Shihoko

With works in the permanent collections of some of the world's finest museums, Fukumoto Shihoko (b. 1945) is one of Japan's leading fiber artists. Indigo—among the few blue dyes found in nature—is her magically rich and deep medium. The plant-derived color arrived in Japan in the eighth century and has been used ever since in table linens, clothing, and everyday objects, becoming an integral part of the country's craft repertoire. Kyoto-based Fukumoto, who discovered indigo at 30, uses *shibori*, the ancient resist-dyeing technique, to produce abstract, conceptual works of textile art. Since the 1970s, she has been developing her voice as an artist connected to Japanese identity, one who is interested in culture, history, and the rediscovery of old or extinct textile production and processing methods. Her "canvases" are rare fabrics and vintage kimonos woven of linen and hemp, which she finds in tiny shops all over the country. Fukumoto deconstructs those old garments, immerses them in luminous indigo dyes, and then reconstructs them into remarkable wall tapestries that offer the viewer a quietly intense, almost mystical experience. gallery-sokyo.jp

Clockwise from top left: Textile artist Fukumoto Shihoko in her Kyoto studio. *Tsushima-X*, 2012, incorporates an old kimono from Tsushima Island. *Made of ramie*, Echigo-I, 2012, is named for the place the textile was woven. The title *Okusozakkuri-II*, 2009, refers to the hemp work-coat from which it is constructed. *Tearoom* installations in a solo Fukumoto exhibition at the Musée de Somme Seiryu, Kyoto, in 2010. A detail of a hemp work, *Ungen*, 2019, shows the artist's mastery of indigo-dye techniques.

TANAKA KOTARO



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF ARTCOURT GALLERY, OSAKA; OMOTE NOBUJADAI; KAWABE TOSHIMARU; HATAKEMAMA TAKASHI



interiordesign.net/japanesecraft20 for more contemporary Japanese artisans