



Fig. 1

IIZUKA Rōkansai (1890-1958)  
*Senju hanakago*, ca. 1940-1955  
*Hōbichiku* bamboo, rattan,  
chocolate vine skin and *urushi* lacquer  
29.5 (h) x 22 x 19.5 cm  
Photo: Michel Gurfinkel  
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# GALERIE MINGEI

Galerie Mingei is dedicated to the ancient and contemporary decorative arts of Japan. It has been located in the heart of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood in Paris for fifteen years and is run by Philippe Boudin and his daughter Zoé Niang. The gallery is well-known for its thematic exhibitions, individual artist shows and artist monographs. It has been an ambassador for the Japanese bamboo basketry used for ikebana floral arrangements in tea ceremonies, and Mingei is the most important European gallery that actively promotes this little-known art. The major international collections in this field put their faith in Galerie Mingei, and its activities involve a great deal of collaborative work and partnerships with European museums that include curatorial services, loans, and the promotion of our clients' collections.

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**YOU DISCOVERED THE WABI SABI AESTHETIC IN JAPAN IN THE COURSE OF YOUR TRAVELS THERE AND HAVE HAD A GALLERY DEDICATED TO THE DECORATIVE ARTS OF JAPAN IN THE SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS DISTRICT OF PARIS SINCE 2014. TODAY YOU WORK WITH YOUR DAUGHTER ZOÉ. HOW DO YOU SHARE THE WORK? HOW IS ZOÉ AN ASSET FOR THE GALLERY?**

We actually held our first exhibition of Asian art over twenty years ago, and that was already on the rue Visconti in the heart of the Saint Germain-des-Prés neighborhood. I acquired our current gallery space in 2014 and my daughter Zoé joined me after she completed her art history studies. I used to be an international correspondent, and I traveled around Asia for over fifteen years. I started by collecting for myself before I opened my gallery. Discovering Japan was a real aesthetic revelation for me and during my first trips through the Japanese archipelago I spent most of my time in the museums, temples and Shinto sanctuaries. I especially remember the Mingeikan in Tokyo where I was introduced to a kind of everyday aesthetic of great simplicity but simultaneously of a truly noble nature, expressed through choice of materials and quality of craftsmanship.

Zoé is now co-director of the gallery, and is notably in charge of handling all the aspects of communication that call for a new and modern approach in today's times.

**IS IT STILL YOUR DREAM TODAY TO ORGANIZE AN EXHIBITION DEDICATED ENTIRELY TO IIZUKA ROKANSAI (1890-1958), "THE PICASSO OF BAMBOO"?**

We have several hundred bamboo works in our

collection, including a number of wickerwork pieces by the wonderful artist Iizuka Rōkansai (fig. 1). It is most likely a bit premature to present an exhibition devoted solely to his work here in Europe where the importance of his creations remains not very well understood and his following is limited. We thus decided on an intermediate approach, the year before Covid, by presenting a broader exhibition devoted to the entire Iizuka workshop (Hōsai II, Rōkansai, Shōkansai) and its disciples. The show met with great success and that has encouraged us to persevere with our efforts promoting the work of the founding fathers of the bamboo arts in Japan.

**FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, FINE HANDIWORK AND CRAFTS HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY APPRECIATED. HAVE YOU SEEN THIS INTEREST GROW SINCE THE ONSET OF THE PANDEMIC?**

The pandemic and ancillary events, like the lockdowns and especially the restrictions on travel, have given us the opportunity to put our relationships with the world and with art into a fresh perspective and to find new meanings and points of reference. There has undoubtedly been a renewal of appreciation for the work of the skilled hands of the craftsman-artist who has often been forgotten and even disdained in recent times, in an environment that favored a purely conceptual and "catch-all societal and political approach". That's why we have the following excerpt from the 1919 *Bauhaus Manifesto* by Walter Gropius engraved at the entrance of our gallery: "*There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is but an exalted craftsman.*"

In 2018, we worked with Stéphane Martin, President of the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac at the time, on the exhibition *Fendre l'Air – Art of Bamboo* in Japan, and we could never have imagined how much acclaim this show, on a subject that was after all very little-known in Europe, would be greeted with. This



Fig. 2

IIZUKA Rōkansai (1890-1958)  
*Teitei*  
*Towering Loftiness*, ca. 1927-1934  
 Madake bamboo and urushi lacquer  
 52.5 (h) x 11 x 11 cm  
 Ikebana by Ryu Kubota  
 Photo: Aurélien Farina (Paper Tiger)  
 © Courtesy Galerie Mingei – Paris





Fig. 3

TANABE Chikuunsai IV (1973 - )  
*Funagata hanakago Amatsukaze*  
*Heavenly Wind*, boat-shaped  
flower basket  
*Madake* bamboo, *yadake*  
arrow bamboo and rattan  
78 x 32 x 30.5 (h) cm  
Photo: Tadayuki Minamoto  
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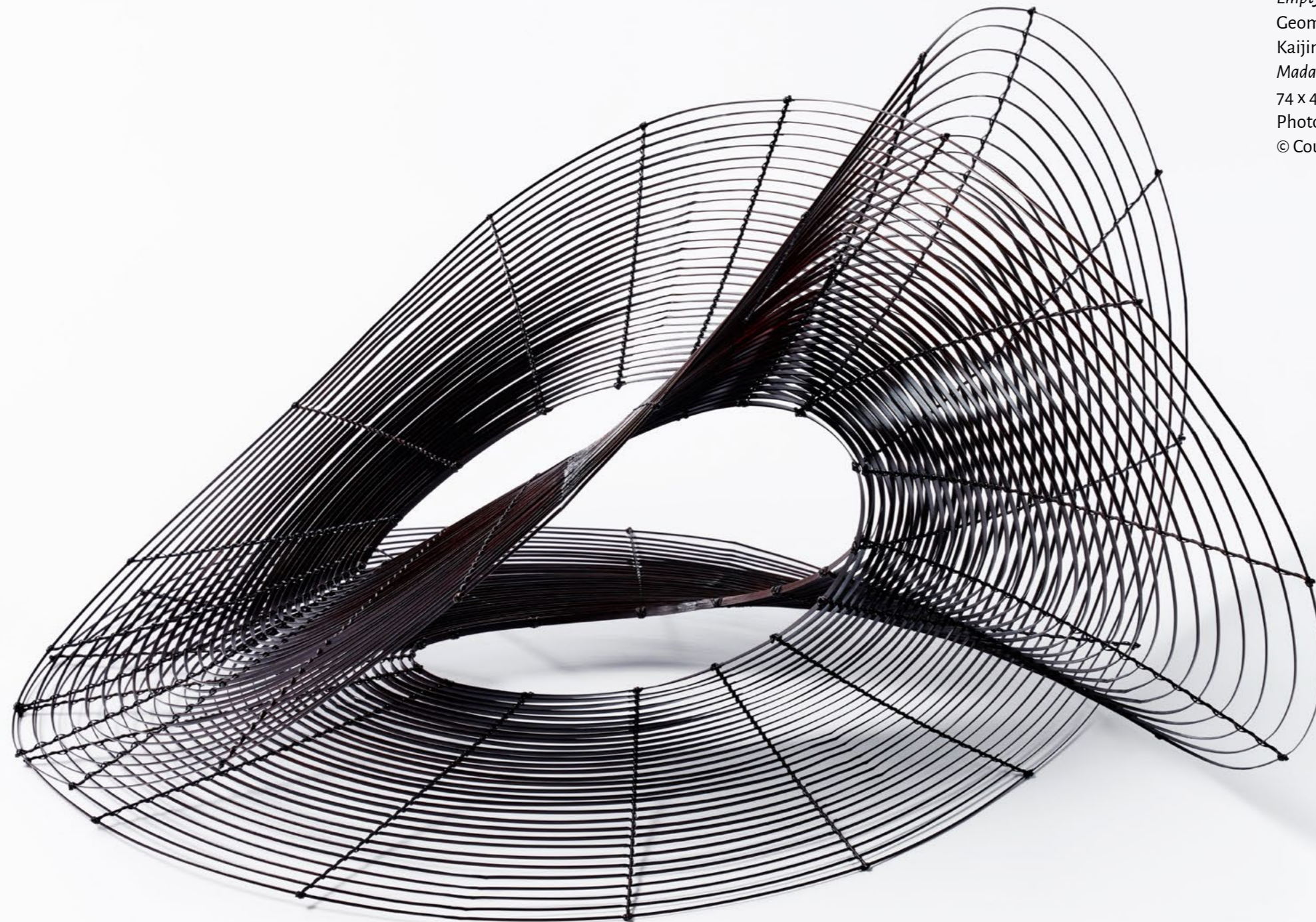


Fig. 4

TANABE Chikuunsai IV (1973 - )  
*Hanamushin II*  
*Empty Mind*  
Geometric design by Sawako  
Kaijima  
Madake bamboo & rattan  
74 x 42.5 x 41 (h) cm  
Photo: Tadayuki Minamoto  
© Courtesy Galerie Mingei – Paris



Fig. 5

TANABE Chikuunsai IV (1973 - )  
*Kuchiki Syouritsu*  
*Decayed Bamboo Stand*  
*Hōbichiku and kurochiku bamboo,*  
 rattan, bamboo root and *urushi*  
 lacquer  
 48.5 x 54 x 147 (h) cm  
 Photo: Tadayuki Minamoto  
 © Courtesy Galerie Mingei – Paris



seminal “founding” exhibition contributed substantially to the recognition of the skill of the bamboo weavers of Japan and certainly gave a boost to the market for their work.

**YOU HAVE BECOME ONE OF THE LEADING EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF BAMBOO BASKETRY TODAY. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT HOW THE RISE OF THE TEA CEREMONY ACTED AS A CATALYST FOR THIS ART?**

Galerie Mingei can indeed take pride in having contributed to the recognition of this little-known art in Europe. But credit must be given where credit is due, and it must go to the pioneering American museums, galleries and collectors who were the first to understand the importance of this art, traditionally associated with the tea ceremonies. Special mention must be made of Lloyd Cotsen, of his vision, and of his collection of some 2000 pieces of Japanese wickerwork, which is unique in the world and now has its home in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Contrary to common belief, this art of bamboo basketry for ikebana is intrinsically connected with the Senchadō, the Sencha tea ceremony, and with the bunjin, the Japanese literati who were so enamored by the culture of their counterparts, the Chinese scholars.

**IN THE COURSE OF THESE TEA CEREMONIES, JAPANESE SCHOLARS ALSO PRACTICED THE ART OF IKEBANA. YOU KEEP THIS TRADITION ALIVE BY REGULARLY EXHIBITING AND PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR BAMBOO WORKS WITH IKEBANA CREATIONS.**

These literati, or scholars, called the bunjin, practiced and still do practice a very wide variety of the traditional Japanese arts, including the art of the tea ceremony of course, but also those of incense, calligraphy and the ikebana. Their meetings, at which tea was only a catalyst for a broader artistic vision, were the starting points for the elaboration of a vision turned resolutely towards the simple yet complex beauty of nature expressed through delicately ordered floral arrangements presented in wickerwork bamboo receptacles. The original wickerwork artists, and especially these “founding fathers”, were also brilliant bunjin, like Tanabe Chikuunsai I (1877-1937), well-known

for his talents in the fields of ikebana and calligraphy.

It was thus natural for us to want to present and give new life to these bamboo works in the context of the ikebana creations for which they were originally designed. To that end, we have been working with Ryu Kubota, a Japanese ikebana practitioner who has been living in Paris for several decades and was trained in the Sogetsu School (fig. 2).

**IS THIS TOUCH APPRECIATED BY YOUR COLLECTORS?**

Many of our clients are not only collectors but fervent enthusiasts of different varieties of ikebana as well – like Sogetsu, Ohara and Ikenobō, the oldest school of Japanese floral arrangement.

**ÉLOGE DE LA LUMIÈRE – IN PRAISE OF LIGHT IS ON DISPLAY TILL MARCH 27 AT THE BAUR FOUNDATION IN GENEVA. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS EXHIBITION?**

This exhibition is above all a kind of conversation, or dialog, between the works of major French artist Pierre Soulages, who just celebrated his 102nd birthday, and those of internationally acclaimed bamboo artist Tanabe Chikuunsai IV. The juxtaposition of Soulages' “black light” with the transparency of Tanabe's woven bamboo pieces takes us to another and very spiritual world. As the master has said, “Bamboo has knots, which are called *yo* in Japanese. These knots are considered to be the borders between different worlds... / ... and the spaces between the knots represent the eternal world...” Indeed – a world in which the connection between Soulages' black and Tanabe's bamboo enchants us.

**WHICH ARTWORK IN THIS EXHIBITION IS YOUR FAVORITE AND WHY?**

The 35 works on display at the Baur Foundation were selected to illustrate the exhibition's four themes: Light, Nature and the culture of the *bunjin* with which the Tanabe family has been closely connected for over a century. These works are the products of such different worlds that it is difficult to single out just one. But the following three works are certainly emblematic of the exhibition:



Fig. 6

TOSHIMASA Kikuchi (1979 -)  
*Geometrical Form - 012*  
Hinoki wood (Japanese cypress),  
urushi lacquer and pigment  
2014  
347 x 80 x 80 cm  
Photo: Tadayuki Minamoto  
© Courtesy Galerie Mingei – Paris

*Funagata Hanakago Amatsukaze* (fig. 3) is a functional work for Ikebana in the shape of a boat called *Celestial Wind*. This 78 cm long wickerwork piece was made from several types of bamboo – *madake* which is the most commonly used type, *susudake*, or smoked bamboo, *koyadake*, or "ancient arrow" bamboo, enhanced with *urushi* lacquer by artist Takashi Wakamiya, and rattan. The use of arrows in this work is a tribute to the artist's great-grandfather, Tanabe Chikuunsai I (1877-1937), who was one of the founding fathers of the bamboo arts and a prominent *bunjin* of his time.

*Hanamushin II* (fig. 4) is a creation that is representative of Tanabe Chikuunsai IV's avant-garde approach, and was produced in collaboration with Sawako Kaijima, an architect and Associate Professor of design at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Kaijima created a computer-generated shape based on the mathematical formula for the Enneper surface that Tanabe Chikuunsai IV then used much like architectural blueprints would be used to give material existence to what they illustrate.

*Kuchiku Shōritsu* (fig. 5), a very large scale work (147 cm high), is an homage to nature. It is made of *hōbichiku* and *kurochiku* bamboos and has a handle of decaying bamboo that is particularly appreciated for the expressiveness of its strange and distorted shapes. A work with similar qualities by Tanabe Chikuunsai IV called *Disintegrated Bamboo Daruma* was the winner of the first Mingei Bamboo Prize, and he thus became the first recipient of this award created by Galerie Mingei in close cooperation with the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques - Guimet.

**YOUR TASTE FOR CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ART IS NOT LIMITED TO BAMBOO WORKS. YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE ASIA NOW FAIR SHOWING AN INSTALLATION BY THE ARTIST TOSHIMASA KIKUCHI. CAN YOU TELL US MORE?**

On account of his training in the restoration of old wooden sculptures, Toshimasa Kikuchi is connected above all with the tradition of Buddhist statuary. The level of virtuosity he has attained is evident not only in the quality of his figurative work in wood, but also in the variety of the artistic techniques he uses in the creation

of his works. His materials include not only wood, but lacquer, traditional Japanese pigments, gold leaf and stone. Kikuchi especially distinguishes himself with his mastery of the *dakkatsu kanshitsu* technique, known as the hollow dry lacquer technique (fig. 6), which was widespread in the Nara Period (794-1185). The installation at the Asia Now show in 2020, and the one at the Carte Blanche show devoted to the artist's work at the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques - Guimet in 2021, presented a series of geometrical forms inspired by mathematical models now at the Institut Poincaré, and made famous by Man Ray and Max Ernst in issue 1-2 of Christian Zervos' *Cahiers d'art* in 1936 with twelve photographs of them by Man Ray.

Kikuchi shows a special fondness for a surface studied in 1884 by German mathematician Theodor Kuen. The Kuen surface (fig. 7) has a negative curvature on which the meeting between two surfaces produces a pure line that imparts its formal tension to the sculpture. It is moreover a shape that is devoid of any organic life – truly a pinnacle of abstraction, freed of the usual preoccupations with mass and movement, which leads to a reconsideration of the traditional relationship between negative and positive space in sculpture.

Fig. 7

TOSHIMASA Kikuchi (1979 -)  
*Kuen Surface - Needles*  
 Hinoki wood (Japanese cypress),  
*urushi* lacquer and pigment  
 2019 & 2020  
 Heights from 47 cm to 225 cm  
 Photo: Tadayuki Minamoto  
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