

Katie Jones has been dealing in contemporary Japanese applied arts for three decades. What draws her to it is the depth of technical skill, maintained to this day through rigorous teaching in disciplines from ceramics to metalwork, glass, bamboo and lacquerware, or *urushi*. "Arguably, no other society has so consistently valued and encouraged artistic endeavour as a central component of civilised living as Japan," she says.

Each year, Jones visits Japan to seek out new work by the best artists. She is looking for work that "demonstrates historic skills but with a contemporary sensibility". For the 10th anniversary edition of London's Pavilion of Art and Design (PAD), she is bringing pieces by many of her stars. Ryuhei Sako has transformed the 17th-century metalwork technique *mokume gane*, once reserved for samurai swords, where layers of different metal alloys (in this case, the copper alloys *shakudo* and *shibuchi*) are hammered and cut to make decorative metal vessels whose surfaces swarm with exquisite patterns.

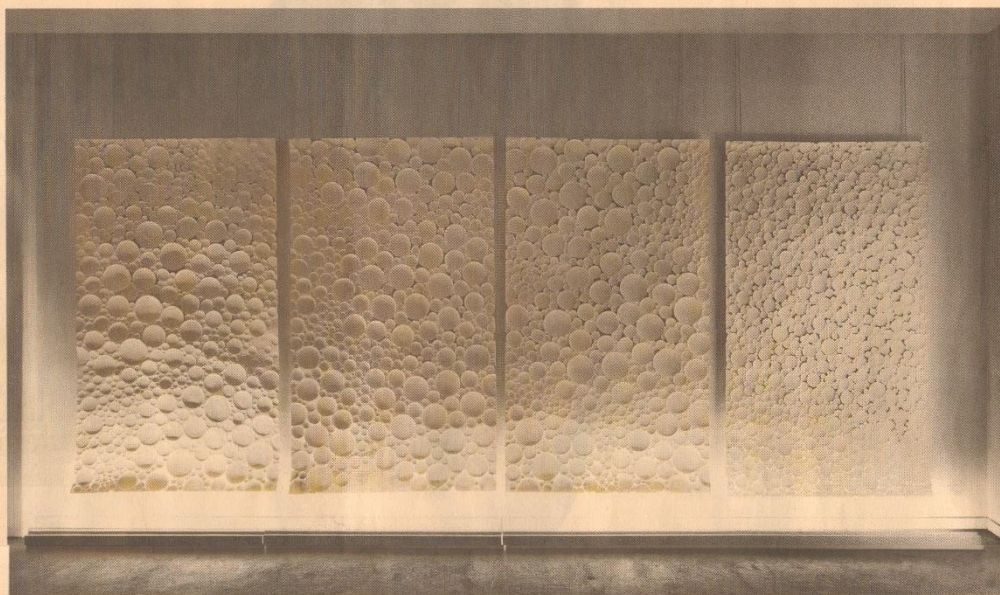
Koji Hatakeyama is a master patina- tor whose elegant cast bronze boxes gleam with colourful abstract landscapes. Takayuki Sakiyama's swirling stoneware vessels with their gritty sand glazes, from the series "Choto: Listening to the Waves", suggest the ebb and flow of the ocean. Kyoko Kumai, a textile artist, makes delicate sculptures out of stainless steel fibres.

Adrian Sassoon, a dealer who has many Japanese makers among his stable of international applied artists, also values the "great strain of traditional techniques". As he says of Takeshi Igawa's minimal red lacquer dishes, "His is an utterly contemporary aesthetic, but expressed through mastery of this ancient *urushi* technique". At PAD, Sassoon will also show some plump, tightly coiled sculptural objects woven from bamboo by Shouchiku Tanabe, who recently filled the rotunda of the Musée Guimet in Paris with a monumental bamboo sculpture.

Jean-Jacques Dutko, a French dealer who was brought up on Art Deco and focuses primarily on design, stresses the importance of Japanese aesthetics and craft skills to 20th-century art and design. At PAD, he will exhibit the sculptural paper panels of Hitomi Uchikura and the shell-like ceramics of Shoko Koike. Alongside them he will also hang paintings by the Paris-based Gutai artist Takesada Matsutani.

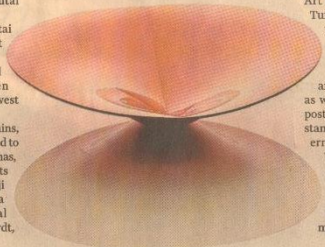
Today the radical postwar Gutai artists are all the rage, but in the past they have not always found large audiences – unlike Japanese applied arts, in which there has been a consistent interest both in the west and in Japan.

Art dealer Boris Vervoort explains, "The Gutai Movement artists wanted to break away from tradition and dogmas, in order to start from scratch. Artists such as Shiraga, Shimamoto, Ryuji Tanaka and Maekawa all show a highly creative and personal approach." His gallery, Axel Vervoort,



A red sun rises

Japan | Emma Crichton-Miller on how the resurgent popularity of radical postwar Gutai artists has led new audiences to an appreciation of the country's multi-faceted art and design



has been an advocate for the movement, which has seen auction prices for its leading figure Kamo Shiraga (who died in 2008) reach \$4,869,000 in 2014, and such significant museum shows as the Guggenheim New York's *Gutai: Splendid Playground* in 2015.

Today, the dynamic, sometimes vividly coloured, thickly impasted paintings by Gutai artists are a staple of international art fairs. At this year's Frieze Masters, Axel Vervoort will show works by Shozo Shimamoto, Tsuyoshi Maekawa, Masatoshi Masanobu and the movement's founder, Jiro Yoshihara, who urged his peers, "do what no one has done before".

It was Yoshihara's death in 1972, and the subsequent disbanding of the Gutai group that, according to Vervoort, contributed to the world forgetting the significant creative dialogue these artists had sustained with movements as diverse as US Abstract Expressionism, Art Informel in Paris, Arte Povera in Turin, Minimalism and the Zero movement in Germany.

Japanese postwar art has undoubtedly benefited from the dramatic rise of the Asian market and of western interest in Asian art, as well as the re-evaluation of other postwar movements. Harder to understand is its lengthy eclipse. Tate Modern's current Boiler House display, *A View from Tokyo: Between Man and Matter*, bringing together works by artists who featured in the 1970 Tokyo Biennale of the same name, including sculptures by Jiro Takamatsu, Noriyuki Haraguchi, Lee Ufan

and Susumu Koshimizu, underlines how integrated they were at the time into the international conversation.

One factor was the distrust the wild Gutai artists from Osaka felt towards the Tokyo art establishment. Another has been the lack of a strong local art market in Japan following the financial collapse at the end of the 1980s. The Japanese artists who broke into the international scene – preeminently the "superflat" superstars Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara – did so with the support of western galleries such as Blum and Poe in Los Angeles.

The rediscovery of the Gutai artists has driven a more general reconsideration of Japanese artists, including the almost contemporaneous Mono-ha group. In 2009, Annelly Juda Gallery mounted the show *Experimental Workshop: Japan 1951-58*, focusing on another distinct cadre which included Hideko Fukushima, Shozo Kitadai, Kioji Otsuji and Katsuhiko Yamaguchi. These artists worked across media in a spirit of radical experiment that paid homage to Russian Constructivism.

The show reflected Annelly and David Juda's long-term interest in Japan and also, according to the gallery's associate director Nina Fellmann, increasing institutional and collector interest: "It is a bit of a niche market, but it is growing". The gallery has represented the younger Tachashi Kawamata (born 1953) since 1997, and showed his installation "Stairs" last year. Next month at Frieze Masters, radical sculptor Yoshishige Saito (1904-2001) has a solo presentation on

Clockwise from above: Hitomi Uchikura's 'Lumière' at Dutko Gallery; Hiroshi Suzuki's 'Seni Vase' (2015); Takeshi Igawa's 'Line and Surface' (2015) at Adrian Sassoon (all at PAD); Tsuyoshi Maekawa's 'Kohama' (1956) at Axel Vervoort, Frieze Masters



the Annelly Juda booth. The gallery first showed his striking constructivist work in the UK more than 30 years ago.

For Roberta Entwistle at the tribal art specialists Entwistle, the renewed interest is gratifying. She set off to Japan in the 1990s, mostly to sell western works into Japanese collections. But about 10 years ago, she says, "I fell in love with postwar Japanese art". Above all she was drawn to the work of two artists who went to Paris and were affiliated with the Informel movement: Hsiao Domoto and Toshimitsu Imai.

It was Domoto who first introduced the influential French critic Michel Tapié to the Gutai group.

"What excites me in Imai is his unbridled passion and the combination of a Japanese sensibility for paint and surface with a reverence for nature," Entwistle says. At Frieze Masters, she will show a striking gold and orange folded mixed media piece by Domoto from 1963, "Solution de Continuité", and delicate twig and paper constructions by the Kyoto-based artist Yoshio Kitayama (born 1948).

At Frieze last year, the young Tokyo gallery Misako and Rosen's artist Ken Kagami made a splash with his comically subversive free drawings of fair visitors. This year they are bringing an aluminium sculpture Kagami created for "Your Memories are our Future", a parallel event to this year's Manifesta in Zurich, as well as new paintings by Yui Yaegashi.

Yaegashi makes intimately scaled and playful abstractions that have a strong following in the US, but her work is less well known in Britain. Gallery owner Jeffrey Rosen is hopeful that "we can generate a context for the understanding of the work of the artists we represent – both Japanese and from abroad".

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