

KOKESHI TRENDS

JOURNAL

こけし

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Free Publication

Featuring Exclusives by:

Francesca Iachetta
@artigianatogiapponese
presenting:

**Kojima Takashi
and Kawakami Miharuru**

Madelyn Molina
presenting:

**Claudia Lecler
@PaperCork**

The Kokeshi Paris Project
with Nicolas Yvan-Perrot
featuring:

**Lika Hagi and
Ancco Miura**

Justin Velgus, with
Sendai-Experience.com
presenting:

**The Story and Philosophy
of the Famous Kokeshi
Shop, Shimanuki**



Kojima Takashi

Welcome to the 1st Quarterly Edition of Kokeshi Trends (KT) 2021

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to our 1st quarterly edition of KT 2021. This year we celebrated our 5th anniversary. I can hardly believe we have been going strong for this long!

I have to admit there are days when I want to throw in the towel. Mostly just from exhaustion due to all the different projects I get myself involved in. But then I read a comment or receive a thank you note and I realize how much value KT brings to the Kokeshi Community and I'm compelled to move forward. KT has a life of its own now and thankfully, I have met some great friends that always manage to throw me a lifeline when things get a little crazy. I hope you enjoy this issue of KT.

As always, I'm grateful to all the contributors that volunteer their free time to make KT happen, for the artists, collectors and of course, you, the readers. Thank you for accompanying me on this journey.

KT is actively engaging with you all through social media, so feel free to stop by and say "Hi". Please remember to [subscribe](#) and follow/like us on [IG](#) and [Facebook](#)! See you there!

Sincerely,

Madelyn



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Photo Credit: Elena Statham

These amazing prints are now available for pre-orders! They are by Elena Statham ([@statham_elenas](https://www.instagram.com/statham_elenas)) a children's book illustrator and Kokeshi enthusiast. This is a collaborative work featuring the Kokeshi made by [Megumi Nozawa](https://www.instagram.com/megumi_nozawa). Don't miss out on this amazing opportunity to get this beautiful artwork in A3 (11-3/4 x 16-1/2) and A4 formats (8-1/4 x 11-3/4). DM on IG or E-mail: elena.statham@gmail.com. Check out her Community Spotlight on [DesignCuts](https://www.designcuts.com) to learn more about her work.



Photo Credit: @kyoko_kokeshi

Newcomer mention: Tom Chapman and Phil Shaw [@Kyoko Kokeshi](https://www.instagram.com/kyoko_kokeshi) are making their mark with interesting presentations of Kokeshi inspired works. We will be featuring them in our June edition of KT so be sure to [subscribe](#) so you don't miss it!

Interview by: Francesca Iachetta
of [Artigianato Giapponese](#)
Featuring: Takashi Kojima

The first time I saw one of the works created by the artist Takashi Kojima was in May 2019, at the 61st All Japan Kokeshi Contest. It is an event held annually in Shibukawa. Kokeshi artists, both traditional and creative, from all over Japan compete with each other and show some of their best works. During that event there were hundreds and hundreds of Kokeshi. Among the many, I was struck by one in particular, “Hana No En”, beautifully wrapped in a wonderful kimono that appeared to be ceramic in construction and not of wood.



The Kokeshi was made by the artist Kojima Takashi. It was the first time I had seen one of his Kokeshi and it impressed me so much that I wanted to learn about the artist and see more of his work. I tried to contact him so I could meet him, get to know him, and see his other works. I was lucky enough to meet him a few days after the Shibukawa Contest. On the morning of May 8th, I took the train from Tokyo to Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture, where Kojima-san lives; then I took a taxi. Unfortunately, the address

I had was not correct and so the taxi dropped me at the wrong address. So, I called Kojima-san to inform him that I would be late for our meeting.

He immediately demonstrated that he is a kind and caring person; he told me not to worry and that he would come to pick me up where the taxi had left me and we would go together to his house. He came to pick me up in his car and I was amazed to hear that he was listening to a CD with Italian songs. He told me that the CD was a gift from his son, who worked in an Italian restaurant, and that he likes to listen to it. He loves the music and the melody of those songs even if he doesn't understand the words of the songs. Once we arrived at his house, his wife welcomed us into the house and offered us a cup of tea. In the room where we were drinking tea, eight of his works were exhibited. They were each more beautiful than the other and I could not take my eyes off them.





since then, yet that small Kokeshi in the shop still influences my creativity.

Francesca: When did you make your first Kokeshi?

Kojima-san 25 years ago, I started making Kokeshi as a hobby. I started making Kokeshi on my own, but first I went to Odawara City to study how to work with wood and I learned the potter's wheel technique (lathe technique).

Francesca: What did you do before making Kokeshi?

Kojima-san: For 44 years I worked as a chemical doctor.

Francesca: Why did you choose to make modern Kokeshi?

Kojima-san: In modern Kokeshi there is much more freedom of expression afforded to the artist, both in the shaping and in the making of its patterns when compared to a traditional Kokeshi. In my opinion, however, it is still very important for a modern Kokeshi to maintain a balance of simplicity.

Francesca: How are your works created?

Kojima-san: When creating a Kokeshi I always keep in mind the creative pursuit of simplicity. My imagination develops a simplification of the molding and decoration processes, akin to the short composition of a haiku. Themes usually come from digging up deeply-buried memories.

Then he showed me his other works, exhibited in another room together with some traditional Kokeshi that are part of his collection. Among them was Mushin, a Kokeshi by the artist Watanabe Masao.

As he handed me an album with photos, he said, "These are my other works". After seeing his wonderful works, I started my interview.

Francesca: Where and when were you born?

Kojima-san: I was born in Yokohama City, in 1949.

Francesca: When and where did you first see a Kokeshi?

Kojima-san I saw my first Kokeshi in a souvenir shop in the 70's during a trip I took to Hokuriku. There a modern Kokeshi caught my attention. It was small and simply shaped with a hint of color, but I was impressed by its deep expression, and the loveliness it radiated. It has been many years

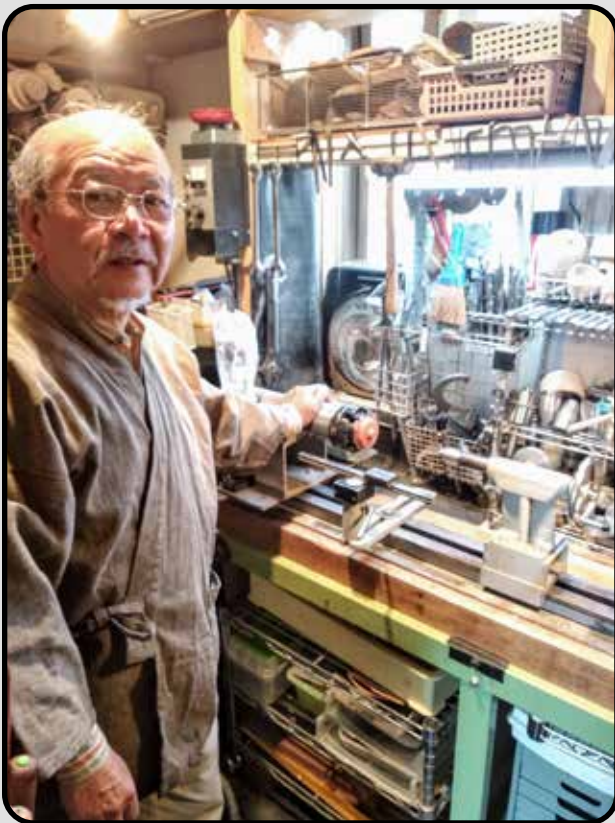
However, they can also come from present memories of an imaginary scene in a haiku. It is like traveling in search of one's own provenance. It would be perfect if one could enjoy my Kokeshi as a physical expression of poetry.

Francesca: I am here admiring your Kokeshi and it is wonderful how poetry can be created from a simple piece of wood. Congratulation for your works!

Francesca: Have you won any awards for your works and, if so, which ones?

Kojima-san: Yes, over the years I have been awarded prizes for some of my works.

Francesca: Congratulations, your works are wonderful and I hope you can continue to make more Kokeshi and win many more awards.



Kojima-san: Come, I'll show you where I create my Kokeshi, my workshop. It's

small but I have everything I need.

Francesca: What are the hardest and most fun parts of making Kokeshi?

Kojima-san: The difficult part is that it is a natural material, so I must make the best use of the grain of the wood. The same grain cannot be reproduced in the work and it may crack depending on the material and processing method. The fun part is that you can freely select materials, create a model, and decorate. Being able to create has a wide range of expressiveness.

Francesca: What do you like to do besides making Kokeshi? Do you have any hobbies?

Kojima-san: I go walking for 10km every day. I walk 1 hour in the morning and do 5km and 1 hour in the evening and do another 5km (3mi). Also, sometimes, I like to work with ceramics and I make small cups. Come, I'll show you...



Francesca: Wow, these are beautiful. My compliments to you!

Kojima-san: Choose a cup; I'll give it to you.

Kojima Takashi Awards

1994: won the Tokyo Journal Award at the All Japan Modern Kokeshi Exhibition

1995: The Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister's Award at the All-Japan Modern Kokeshi Exhibition

1996: The Gunma Governor's Award at the All-Japan Kokeshi Contest and became a Board Coterie at Japan Kokeshi Art Association

1997: The Gunma Governor's Award at the All-Japan Kokeshi Contest

2008: The Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister's Award at the All-Japan Modern Kokeshi Exhibition

2014: The Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister's Award at the All-Japan Kokeshi Contest

2016: The Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry President's Award at the All-Japan Kokeshi Contest

2017: The Economy, Trade and Industry Minister's Award at the All-Japan Kokeshi Contest

2018: The Economy, Trade and Industry Minister's Award at the All-Japan Kokeshi Contest

Cup chosen by Francesca



Francesca: Really? Thank you very much! You are very kind!

Francesca: I have one last question to ask you. Would it be possible to buy one of your works exhibited here for my private collection?

Kojima-san: Yes, certainly, I would be very grateful.

Francesca: They are all beautiful; it is very difficult to choose. I will go instinctively. The first one that I became attracted to was her... (As I point to it with my finger.)



Kojima-san: Its name is Sōryo. You can take it in your hand; it's yours.

Francesca: Thank you so much for this opportunity. She is so simple, but at the

same time so elegant and refined. I love the light wood tones and the fact that she has a cloth band on the wood and an elegant wooden ring that surrounds her kimono like an obi.

Kojima-san: Now, if you like, since it's lunch time my wife and I will take you to eat some good ramen nearby before you go back to Tokyo.

Francesca: You are too kind. I would not bother you. You have already done a lot for me today.

Kojima-san: No disturbance. It's a pleasure. Let's go and then we'll take you to the station.

I was really very happy that morning. I was grateful to him for his availability, for having spent some of his time with me to talk about himself and for giving me the opportunity to buy and take home one of his works.

"This was another beautiful meeting that I will never forget."



KOJIMA TAKASHI 児島隆

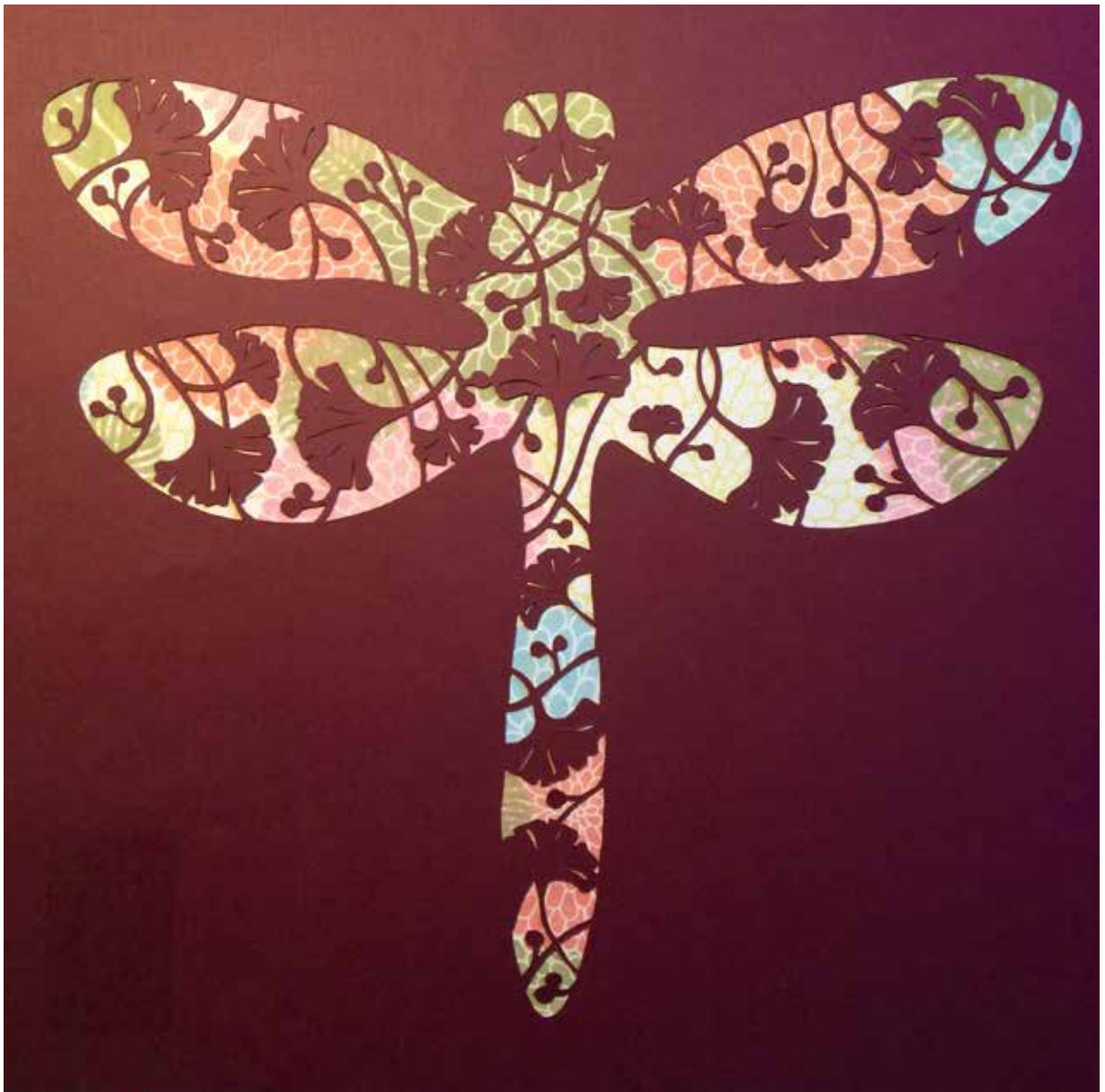


Claudia Lecler

@papercork







Interview by Madelyn Molina
Artist: Claudia Lecler
Instagram: @papercork

Claudia Lecler was born and raised in Italy, where she currently lives with her lovely husband and son. She studied Arts at the Academy in Rome, where she also began her career as a Graphic Designer. Today she is an illustrator, Character Designer, and a big Kokeshi Doll addict!

Although she grew up in Rome, about ten years ago she and her family decided to move to the small north town where she was born, in search of a quieter life by the sea. There they are today, but she is always open and ready to move again, where her heart takes them next!

KT: Please tell us a bit about yourself, your hobbies, favorite things to do etc.

CL: I do love art in general as a form of expression, any kind and any style. Music follows me everywhere. I love traveling and learning. I find great sources of inspiration from different cultures. In particular, I love Japanese tradition and culture and Hawaiian culture. I find them both very peaceful and gentle. That's why I love listening to Hawaiian music while I work on my artworks.

KT: At what age did you become interested in making *papercork* Kokeshi inspired art? When did you create your first "papercork" Kokeshi? What other art do you create?

CL: For the past 11 years I've been creating mostly papercut artworks. Many of them were inspired by Japanese art, but inspiration also came from portraits, nature, etc. I'm very passionate about music and recently I've created a collection of artists' portraits. The Instagram name "Papercork" comes from my passion for papercuts and the quite recent idea of making cork Kokeshi dolls

(or Corkeshi dolls, as I have fun calling them). It was around Christmas 2019 and I was in Los Angeles, visiting my sister. I was frustrated at the idea of leaving and not to be able to go Kokeshi-hunting with her. We were at the dinner table when I grabbed a champagne cork and started drawing a face on it. That was the genesis of my journey!

KT: What gave you the idea to make Kokeshi out of paper and cork materials?

CL: The idea behind paper comes from my love for this material. I've always adored how many different grains and colors there are. It's not just a visual inspiration but also tactile, and it comes natural to me to join the love for paper and for Japanese visual art in my artworks.

Cork was a more practical choice; it is durable and has a perfect weight. It is widely available and can be sculpted and shaped with ease, making it the perfect medium. Cork has allowed me to create my beloved handmade Kokeshi dolls.

KT: Tell us a little about the inspiration behind your designs.

CL: I believe that at the base of everything there is that treasure of information, inspiration, and emotion that I brought back from my travels, especially in Japan, Hawaii and California. I believe that all that visual wealth has streamed through me and shaped my creations.



KT: Tell us more about your tools; for example, the type of paper and paint you use. What do you prefer to work with?

CL: For my papercuts I use 120gsm. paper in various colors and grains. I also use origami paper to create more complex textures. I use a wide range of tools similar to medical surgical knives (bistoury). Lately, I bought an extra-precise ergonomic cutter to avoid hand pain and work better. It was made in Boston, specifically for this kind of craft. When I work with cork, I start by carving it to the chosen shape. After that, I use rasps and nail files to perfect it. I draw the hair and face using ink, and I use a variety of Japanese fabrics, tapes and paper to create the dresses. I usually purchase them in Japan or in California, when I visit my sister. My favorite materials are often hard to find, so I try to stock up as much as possible when I have the opportunity. This last year of self-isolation has been very creative for me, but at the same time particularly challenging as far as hunting for fabric and paper.

KT: What would you say is the most important part of making a *papercork* Kokeshi?

CL: When I work on one of my papercuts, for example the portrait of a Geisha, I love to precisely carve the subject's expression. I also enjoy working on the beautiful and intricate designs on kimonos. When I am working with cork, their hair, obi and their complex dresses are my favorite parts. My technique references the traditional Kimekomi dolls, but in my own personal version.

KT: Do you have a favorite design motif that you like to use on your *papercork* Kokeshi?

CL: I have some sort of obsession with Ginkgo biloba leaves, cherry blossoms

and dragonflies, with their delicate shapes, colors and fragility. I still have to try these designs on my dolls, but they are often present on my papercuts. At the moment, I am working on a series of larger papercuts which will include both Ginkgo leaves and dragonflies.

KT: Is there a message you want your art to communicate to the viewer?

CL: I really wish I could be able to convey to them the same sense of joy and serenity I experience while creating my artworks. It comes from my most beloved memories.

KT: How has Japanese tradition, culture and symbolism influenced your artwork?

CL:
It surely had a huge impact on me. I was born in 1967 and, at that time, the Japanese culture was quite unknown in my country. When I was a child, I fell in love with Japanese style thanks to the kimonos and the other many objects that my father would bring home from his business trips to Tokyo, together with a large amount of stories, curiosity and information about that unknown and fascinating country.

I also cherished a kimono and some objects that belonged to my grandmother and a Kokeshi doll that my parents bought on their honeymoon. I remember going through the pages of my mom's favorite magazine looking for Shiseido ads. Back in the 70's, they portrayed their fashion models with a modern Geisha makeup twist. My passion for graphic design was born from there, I think. I was a very curious child, and this style was so far from what we would normally see in Italy. It really captivated me. Harmony, balance and simplicity are what make Japanese art perfect, in my view.



Music Claudia recommends:

Hawaiian Classics by Mahi Beamer.

Beamer was a famous tenor, falsetto singer and composer. All of his songs are very charming.

"My favorite song is by Keali'i Reichel, titled Ke Aloha. It reminds me of the precious last days I spent with my father before he passed away. We used to listen to it together."





KT: What advice would you give to an aspiring Kokeshi Artist?

CL: I'd suggest trying to connect as deeply as you can with these creatures. It is important to feel their sweetness, serenity, simplicity and balance. Each one of them has a story to quietly tell. They are not loud. They are gentle creatures, and they tell the story of ancient traditions. I do believe that they create themselves; my hands are just the tools they use to come alive.

KT: Do you personally collect Kokeshi dolls?

CL: I own fewer Kokeshi dolls than I'd want to, but I still have a nice collection, composed of traditional dolls and a beautiful Kimekomi I recently purchased. I do not have a favorite artist; I take inspiration from every style and size there is. I love to go hunting for bargains with my sister. She lives in California and we share many passions. One of them is Kokeshi dolls. We are always competing against each other while looking for dolls in thrift stores and flea markets but, like good sisters, we always end up sharing what we find. It has become our tradition now.

KT: What memorable response have you had to your artwork from collectors?

CL: When I first started, I wasn't planning on turning this passion into a source of revenue, but it all changed when we had to go into lockdown back in March of 2020. I had more time to spend improving my craft, and I slowly started receiving interest from people online and my first orders!

Some fellow artists began following my account. It was a wonderful surprise when I realized KokeshiTrends was one of them! This made me feel appreciated as an artist

and sparked more inspiration.

KT: Do you sell your *papercork* Kokeshi inspired dolls? If yes, do you ship internationally? What payment methods do you accept?

CL: I started selling my Kokeshi just a few months ago, both large and small ones. I sold most of them here in Italy and some in California. At the moment, I don't have a website or an online shop, but I plan to open one very soon. Right now, I use my IG account @Papercork to receive and discuss orders. Payments can be made via PayPal and I can ship worldwide. I have to confess, it is always quite hard to part with them, because every doll is unique. I've been asking my clients to send me pictures of them in their new houses!

KT: Is there something more you would like to share with KT readers?

CL: I want to thank all of you for the interest you have shown for Papercork. I feel honored and happy to share my passion with you, feeling part of a community which loves Kokeshi dolls. And last, but not least, don't miss the chance to listen to Hawaiian music, while creating or just spending time with your Kokeshi dolls. I know this sounds weird, but I love it!





新人賞

Interview by: Francesca Iachetta
of [Artigianato Giapponese](#)
Featured Artist: Kawakami Miharuru

I love Kokeshi. In addition to selling them I collect them, especially sōsaku, and every time I go to Japan for work, I try to go and meet Kokeshi artists not only to conclude business deals but above all to get to know them better and add some of their Kokeshi to my private collection.

I haven't yet met in person the artist I am presenting to you because I discovered her last year. I hope to meet her and get to know her the next time I go to Japan. She is a young artist and I think her Kokeshi are very funny, original, and cute. I think she deserves to be introduced to other Kokeshi lovers like me. So, I decided to interview her so you, too, can get to know her better. She is Miharuru Kawakami.

On to the interview...

Francesca: Where and when were you born?

Kawakami-san: I was born on December 17th in 1981 in Saitama Prefecture.

Francesca: When did you make your first Kokeshi?



1st Kokeshi

Kawakami-san: When I was about 10 years old. I was in a souvenir shop in a hot spring town and I bought a simple Kokeshi doll, a piece of wood not decorated (an inexpensive Kokeshi doll for drawing and playing by yourself). It was a lot of fun. This experience was the beginning of everything.

Francesca: Why did you start making Kokeshi; who or what inspired you?

Kawakami-san: I have loved to draw ever since I was little. I also like dolls, cute



miscellaneous goods, and old Japanese toys. So, I combined my favorite things, and that is my Kokeshi doll. After graduating from high school, I went to a professional art school and I studied design and illustration. I thought it would be cute if the illustrations I was making at the time were Kokeshi dolls.



Graduation Work

I made Kokeshi dolls as part of my graduation work. Making Kokeshi dolls was a lot of fun. I wanted to make more. That was the trigger.

At that time, I couldn't cut the wood by myself, so I bought a plain wood Kokeshi from Usaburo Kokeshi by mail and made it. I wasn't satisfied. I wanted to cut the original wood myself. But at that time, I couldn't find a way.

After graduating from a professional school, I couldn't make Kokeshi dolls

because of work, marriage, and childbirth. When my son was growing up, I really wanted to make Kokeshi dolls, so I looked for a carpentry course. I was taught how to use a woodworking lathe.

After practicing for several years, I started my activities in 2016. I made Kokeshi dolls by myself, but around 2017 I was introduced to a teacher of the Kokeshi Crafts Association, Yamazaki Yuko. She taught me a lot and then I started to participate in competitions. There I met Horiuchi Chiyomi and Nozawa Megumi, all of whom you know and collaborate with. They have been very nice to me.

Francesca: Is there a Kokeshi artist you follow in particular as a model or are your Kokeshi born only from your creativity?

Kawakami-san: My Kokeshi doll is my own original. There are many Kokeshi artists I respect, but I always want to make works that only I can make, rather than making similar works to other artists.

Francesca: Is there a pattern or design that you usually like to use on your Kokeshi?

Kawakami-san: The pattern of an old kimono. Patterns of retro and vintage miscellaneous goods and clothes. Old children's clothing. I may also refer to the design of old souvenir Kokeshi dolls.

Francesca: What differentiates your Kokeshi from those of other artists?
Kawakami-san: My Kokeshi are kawaii.
Francesca: What tools do you use to make your Kokeshi?

Kawakami-san: Woodworking lathes, wood burning pens, acrylic paints, watercolors, colored pencils, etc.

Francesca: How long does it take approximately to make one?

Kawakami-san: 2-3 days for small ones. I don't have a machine, so I go to a rental workshop and there I work the wood. I have a family and having to look after my children I don't have much time to make Kokeshi.

Francesca: Have you exhibited your work at Kokeshi performances or exhibitions?

Kawakami-san: Yes, I have participated: in the National Modern Kokeshi Doll Exhibition and The All Japan Kokeshi Doll Contest.

Francesca: Have you been awarded prizes for your works; if so, which prizes and in what year?

Kawakami-san: Yes, I have won some awards.

Francesca: Thank you very much for this interview and for agreeing to collaborate with me for some of your Kokeshi to be presented in my online shop artigianatogiapponese.it

Kawakami-san: Thank you. I am very honored to have been interviewed and to make Kokeshi for you. I will continue to do my best.



AWARDS

2016: Moonlight Exhibition Selected (Group Exhibition at a Small Gallery in Ginza)



2017: Honorable Mention Award at National Modern Kokeshi Competition



2018: The Sennan Shinkin Bank Award, at All Japan Kokeshi Contest



2019: The Jury Special Award, at National Modern Kokeshi Exhibition

Kawakami Miharu





Kokeshi Paris Project

@KokeshiParisProject (FB)





The Kokeshi Paris Project is the brainchild of Nicolas-Yvan Perrot, a Kokeshi aficionado who has been working with Paris artists to create an exclusive collection of Kokeshi inspired works. The ultimate goal is to introduce Kokeshi into mainstream art venues, demonstrating that what was once a simple child's toy is so much more.

This is the 7th installation in the project. It is by Lika Hagi titled Cosmos Messenger.

Please [download](#) our prior KT issues for full articles on each of the KPP Kokeshi inspired works.

Lika Hagi

Artist Lika Hagi was born in 1957 in Tokyo, Japan. She has lived and worked in the Paris region since 1985 and has regularly participated in fairs and exhibits since 1997. Hagi-san, originally a self-taught painter, began creating works expressing the concept of unity between the earth and sky. She later took various workshop courses in painting techniques, calligraphy, and sacred paintings to hone her skills. We are excited to see her work applied to Kokeshi, as an artist of the Kokeshi Paris Project.

KT: My compliments to you; the work you created is stunningly unique. Let me ask you, when Nicolas approached you about his project, did you know right away that you wanted to take part in the project?

Hagi-san: When Nicolas approached me about his project, I was hesitant at first because Kokeshi are far from my artistic universe. But then, I decided to accept the challenge!

KT: Looking at the blank Kokeshi pieces, what were your thoughts? Was there any immediate idea about what you would create?

Hagi-san: It was the beauty of the clear lines and the grain patterns of the raw Kokeshi that immediately gave me an idea of where I wanted to go artistically.

KT: Did you find any challenge in using Kokeshi as a medium for your art?

Hagi-san: Once I got the idea, it was very natural and smooth. I did not find any particular challenge.

KT: Tell me about your creation process; what came to mind when you decided on the color and design scheme for the Kokeshi? What materials did you use to create it?

Hagi-san: I imagined my Kokeshi representing the human body as a "Receiver of messages from the cosmos". The colors, lines and designs all come from the meridian flow and the chakra. I used acrylic paints as a medium.

KT: Is there a feeling you would like the Kokeshi to convey to the viewers?

Hagi-san: Through this Kokeshi and my painting work, I would like the viewers to be able to feel the immensity of their interior space.

KT: Is there anything more you'd like to share about the experience of working with the Kokeshi Paris Project?

Hagi-san: I would like to thank you and Nicolas for giving me this opportunity.



Lika Hagi

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Nicolas-Yvan Perrot

Kokeshi Paris Project
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Photo Credit: Nicolas-Yvan Perrot



Shimanuki Online Shop



1936 February Shimanuki
Tabacco Shop
Photo credit: Shimanuki



SHIMANUKI

The Story, Philosophy, and History of a Famous Kokeshi Shop



Welcome to the Mecca of Kokeshi. Located in the “Gateway to Tohoku” Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, just a 10-minute walk from Sendai Station inside the lively shopping arcades, is a holy land for Kokeshi lovers. For decades, Shimanuki has fascinated domestic and foreign pilgrims with its extensive collection of carefully selected Kokeshi dolls, but it's more than just a sophisticated souvenir shop.

Over its 130 years the family-run business has survived both manmade and natural disasters, reinvented its entire business, done its part to share the culture and history of the region and even played an active role in sparking innovation in the world of Kokeshi. I sat down with Mr. Shimanuki himself to learn the story, history, and philosophy behind this famous Kokeshi shop.

“We started by selling tobacco,” chuckles Akihiko Shimanuki, 5th generation President of KOKESHINO SHIMANUKI CO.,LTD. Over a cup of green tea, Mr. Shimanuki, together with Senior Managing Director Hirofumi Shimanuki, his son, share the story of the business.

The family business opened in 1892, in the same location where it stands today. This is exactly one year after the opening of the JR Tohoku Line connecting Tokyo with Sendai. Also, this was the middle of the Meiji period, a time of rapid changes in technology, eating habits, education, fashion, and lifestyle.

The entrepreneurial Shimanuki family saw a lucrative business opportunity to sell high quality tobacco and snacks to passersby in the busy city center. Following customer

requests, the store slowly increased the offering of products to include fancy tobacco ashtrays and utensils, and later, high quality traditional local crafts such as lacquerware and *umoregi zaiku* (bogwood carvings)—but no Kokeshi yet.

In 1945, in one of the last major US bomber air raids of World War II, Shimanuki was burned to the ground along with much of downtown Sendai. The store was rebuilt and began to sell Kokeshi around 1950.

A few decades later, in the newly upgraded building the shop now occupies, Shimanuki decided to heavily focus on selling traditional crafts, including Kokeshi dolls.

At first, they sold only local Kokeshi; then eventually, strains from around Tohoku were added to the product line. Through tireless efforts and personal connections, Shimanuki gradually increased the number of products they handle. Before long, the shop became well known as a place where visitors can purchase not just one strain of Kokeshi or Kokeshi by a single artist, but a wide range of Kokeshi from many producers across the region.

“The charm of Kokeshi is their simplicity



and depth of design. No arms, no legs, no clothes. Yet even within this simplicity there is an incredible variety. With a little practice, you’ll soon be able to know the region a Kokeshi came from by its painted motifs or shape.” Mr. Shimanuki can’t resist to go on-and-on when it comes to “talking Kokeshi.” He explains to me that we are

living in the third “Kokeshi boom”, where interest and sales of Kokeshi have peaked.

The first “boom” started in the early 20th century (1914). Sendai resident **Tomiya Amae** (1899-1984), an author and avid collector of Kokeshi dolls, wrote “Kokeshi Houko no Hanashi” (“*Origin Story of Kokeshi*”). This book about Kokeshi introduced the styles of wooden dolls and manufacturing methods to people outside of the Tohoku region for the first time. Before the book, each town or area had its own local dialect name for Kokeshi, even though the dolls were essentially the same with slight variations. Various names such as *kokesu*, *dekoroko*, or *kokeshibobo* would all now be called by the collective name of “Kokeshi”.

The second “boom” follows the recovery of the postwar economy and a travel trend peaking around the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

It is said that we are now in the third boom. Following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the Tohoku region received much media attention, spurring a resurgence of popularity in the region’s traditional products, particularly Kokeshi.

I believe that the rise of social media has also played a major part in spreading the cuteness of these cultural ambassadors around the world.

Along with the third boom of Kokeshi comes an increase in popularity of *sōsaku*, or creative/modern Kokeshi. Unlike the 12 traditional strains with defined characteristics, the shape, colors, and designs of *sōsaku* Kokeshi are flexible and free-flowing. Shimanuki sells both, with traditional and modern Kokeshi styles going back and forth as sales leaders every few years.

To my surprise, the father and son feel that Japanese and non-Japanese have different tastes for Kokeshi dolls, which is very interesting. Japanese tastes are divided

into "traditional" or "creative". However, foreigners tend to find and buy their favorite Kokeshi dolls regardless of type, choosing whatever Kokeshi speaks to them. The reason seems to be as follows: Traditional homes around Tohoku are often filled with a dozen or so Kokeshi, as there was a strong custom of giving Kokeshi as gifts to celebrate occasions such as weddings, graduations. Japanese people have been accustomed to traditional Kokeshi dolls since they were children. Meanwhile many non-Japanese seem to come into contact with the variety of Kokeshi dolls for the first time when they come to Shimanuki.

At Shimanuki there are some repeat visitors, especially during the exclusive Kokeshi exhibition sales events featuring a particular artist. However, the staff confesses that after people visit a few times they tend to know what kind of Kokeshi they like. From that point, they will still come, but gravitate to venturing out to the countryside where the Kokeshi are made and where they hopefully even have a chance to meet the artist.



Since 2009 President Shimanuki and his staff have developed two signature Kokeshi brands of their own. The first is the “*Akari Kokeshi*”, or “Light Kokeshi”. With a literal jolt of inspiration after a medium-sized earthquake in 2008, Mr. Shimanuki developed this unique Kokeshi brand he released in 2009. It features a Kokeshi with an LED light concealed inside the base. The light automatically activates when the Kokeshi is toppled over by an earthquake. The Kokeshi will light the way to safety during any power outages.





2015 gave birth to “*Can Kokeshi*”. Traditional strains of Kokeshi are miniaturized so that they can fit in the size of your palm, then packaged neatly into a sealed can, not unlike a can of tuna. The cans are perfect for souvenirs as they are easy to pack in even a small suitcase, hard to break, and an indescribable joy to open! These two original Kokeshi designs can be purchased through Shimanuki’s online shop or in limited quantities at select shops in Japan.

I ask father and son -What’s next in the world of Kokeshi? What are the future challenges, opportunities, and dreams? Akihiko Shimanuki expressed the need for younger Kokeshi craftspeople to replace the outgoing generation. While the prefectural governments provide some monetary and support programs to match a new apprentice with a master for the necessary 2~3 years to learn the basics of the trade, there is no quick solution to replacing a true master. Distinguished by the title “*koujin*” (工人), which could be translated as “*artisan*” or “*craftsman*”, this title separates the top-in-class from the more common but still very talented Kokeshi makers.

Besides browsing Kokeshi or the other beautifully displayed traditional handicrafts and souvenirs, you should visit Shimanuki for its experience programs. Try your hand at making an LED candle lamp from local Japanese paper, painting a culturally important *Ogatsu* stone, or decorating your own Kokeshi

(see details here:
<https://sendai-experience.com/en/ho/21>).

There are many Kokeshi decorating experiences around Tohoku. They usually use brush and paint. At Shimanuki you use thin markers, which allows more control and accuracy to create your own masterpiece with more confidence.

Finally, allow me to finish with a message from President Shimanuki and Senior Managing Director Shimanuki. Through its promotion of local traditional handicrafts, business innovation and personal ties with the community, Shimanuki has cemented itself into the history and culture of Sendai. "The present Shimanuki represents how far we have come. Therefore, we will continue to make efforts to pass on the culture and history of the Tohoku region as living proof of our predecessors".

Shimanuki values hospitality and looks forward to welcoming you with high quality products, knowledgeable staff, and some of the best Kokeshi dolls in Japan.



Make your own Kokeshi



Sōsaku Kokeshi

Contributor: Justin Velgus
(ジャスティン・ベルガス)
E-mail: j-velgus@sentia-sendai.jp

仙台旅先体験コレクション
<https://sendai-experience.com/ja/>

English Site: See Japan,
Experience Sendai Activities.
URL: <https://sendai-experience.com/en/>

Shimanuki
Kokeshino Shimonuki Co., Ltd.
3-1-17 Ichibancho, Aoba-ku, Sendai City,
Miyagi Prefecture





Interview with
Annco Miura みうらあんこ
by Madelyn Molina

Website: <http://does.bz/annco>
Instagram: [@anncomiura](https://www.instagram.com/anncomiura)
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Tel (Japan) +81 90 2481 9138
Tel (France) +33 6 20 18 54 46

Annco Miura was born in 1981 to a traditional Japanese family in Shizuoka, Japan. She loved art at an early age and learned Japanese calligraphy from her aunt, a teacher and a master of calligraphy. Thanks to her aunt, Miura-san would later become an expert in calligraphy and drawing. She is living in Paris but travels often to Japan.

Miura-san's artworks are often made up of squares, circles, lines, and curves. This allows her to create infinite and complex pieces, some of which resemble labyrinths. These labyrinths can be interpreted as paths of life, discoveries, adventures, failures and/or successes. Her works can be found in collections in many countries. In 2021, exhibitions will be held in Japan, France, Italy, and Spain. Visit her website for more details.

KT: First, I must congratulate you on creating an incredibly beautiful work of art. When Nicolas approached you about his project, did you know right away that you wanted to take part in the project?

Miura-san: It was my first attempt. So, I thought about it for awhile before agreeing to participate.

KT: When you saw the blank Kokeshi pieces, what were your

thoughts? Did you immediately think of what you would create?

Miura-san: I didn't have an image for awhile. But when I picked up the paint brush, I was able to finish it right away.

KT: Did you find any challenge in using a Kokeshi as a medium for your art?

Miura-san: It is not a flat surface; so, it was difficult to get the right balance.

KT: Tell me a little about your creation process; what came to mind when you decided on the color and design scheme for the Kokeshi? What materials did you use to create it?

Miura-san: I thought about life in the countryside of old Japan. To create it, I used acrylic paints as a base. Then, I used a brush and the ink for calligraphy, Sumi, which is one of my techniques. I thought it would go well with the traditional Kokeshi; and it led to a beautiful line.

KT: What feeling would you like the Kokeshi to convey to observers?

Miura-san: I want the viewer to feel whatever they want to feel.

KT: Is there anything more you'd like to share about this experience working with the Kokeshi Paris Project?

Miura-san: I am glad to see, once again, that there are people all over the world who love Japanese traditions.



This is the 8th installation in the Nicolas-Yvan Perrot's Kokeshi Paris Project. It is by Ancco Miura.

Please [download](#) our prior KT issues for full articles on each of the KPP Kokeshi inspired works.

Anncō Miura

みうらあんこ

Painter



Draftsman



Kokeshi Museums in Tōhoku, Japan

(Aomori, Miyagi, Fukushima. There area none in Akita/Iwate.)

Last updated: December 15, 2020
Justin Velgus / Jill Holmgren

AOMORI PREFECTURE:

Museum Name:

Tsugaru Kokeshi-kan (津軽こけし館)

Highlights: Collection of 4,000 Kokeshi, corner to view Kokeshi being made by craftsperson, Japan's largest Kokeshi (4.21m, 755 kg)! Gift shop sells over 1,000 Kokeshi representing all 11 types from around Japan.

Website: <http://tsugaruKokeshi.com/>

Hours: Open year-round 9:00-17:00
(closed Dec 29~Jan 3)

English Address: 72-1 Tomiyama,
Fukuro, Kuroishi, Aomori 036-0412
Japan

Japanese Address: 〒036-0412青森県黒
石市大字袋字富山72-1

MIYAGI PREFECTURE:

Museum Name: Japan Kokeshi
Museum(日本こけし館)

Highlights: One of the largest Kokeshi museums in Japan, display of past winning Kokeshi from the famous Naruko Kokeshi Festival, paint-your-own Kokeshi experience.

Website: <http://www.kokesikan.com/>

Dedicated English website: <https://k-k-s.tokyo/>

Hours: 10:00-16:00

English Address: 74-2 Naruko Onsen
Shitomae, Osaki, Miyagi 989-6827

Japanese Address: 〒989-6827宮城県大
崎市鳴子温泉字尿前74-2

Museum Name: Iwashita Kokeshi
Museum (岩下こけし資料館)

Highlights: Half Kokeshi shop with many original creations, half museum with free admission. Located between central Naruko Onsen area and the Japan Kokeshi Museum, largest collection of Kokeshi-related literature in Tōhoku, Kokeshi painting experience.

Website: <https://www.iwashita.info/>

Hours: Open year-round 8:00-17:30

English Address: 74-2 Naruko Onsen
Furutomae, Osaki, Miyagi 989-6827
Japan

Japanese Address: 〒989-6826宮城県大
崎市鳴子温泉字古戸前80

Museum Name: Museum of Kamei
Collection (カメイ美術館)

Highlights: The museum houses three main collections: butterfly specimens, paintings, and Kokeshi. Located a 10-minute walk from Sendai Station, collection focuses on older Kokeshi with regular special exhibits about more unique types/themes.

Website: <http://www.kameimuseum.or.jp/>

Hours: Open year-round 10:00-17:00
(closed Mondays, and Dec 28~Jan 4)

English Address: 1-1-23 Itsutsubashi,
Aoba-Ku, Sendai, Miyagi 980-0022
Japan

Japanese Address: 〒980-0022 仙台市青葉区五橋1-1-23

Museum Name: Zaō Kokeshi Museum (みやぎ蔵王こけし館)

Highlights: Collection of 5,500 Kokeshi from around Tōhoku makes this the largest collection in Japan, Kokeshi painting experience, occasional chance to see artisan making Kokeshi.

Website: <http://www.Kokeshizao.com/>

Hours: Open year-round 9:00-17:00 (closed Dec 29~Jan 3)

English Address:
Shinchinishiurayama-36-135
Togattaonsen, Zao-machi, Katta-gun,
Miyagi 989-0916 Japan

Japanese Address: 〒989-0916宮城県刈田郡蔵王町遠刈田温泉字新地西裏山36番地135

Area Name: Yajiro Kokeshi Village, Shiroishi City

Website: <https://www.city.shiroishi.miyagi.jp/site/kanko/1481.html>

<https://shiroishi-navi.jp/en/detail/yajiro-kokeshi-doll-village/>

Hours: April-October 9:00-5:00
November-March 9:00-4:00

English Address: 72-1 Yajirokita, Fukuokayatsumiya, Shiroishi 989-0733 Miyagi Prefecture

Japanese Address: 福岡八宮字弥治郎北72-1

FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE:

Museum Name: Nishida Memorial Museum (原郷のこけし群西田記念館)

Highlights: About 1,000 Kokeshi on display, including important prewar Kokeshi, located between central Fukushima City and Tsuchiyu Onsen inside tourist attraction Anna's Garden.

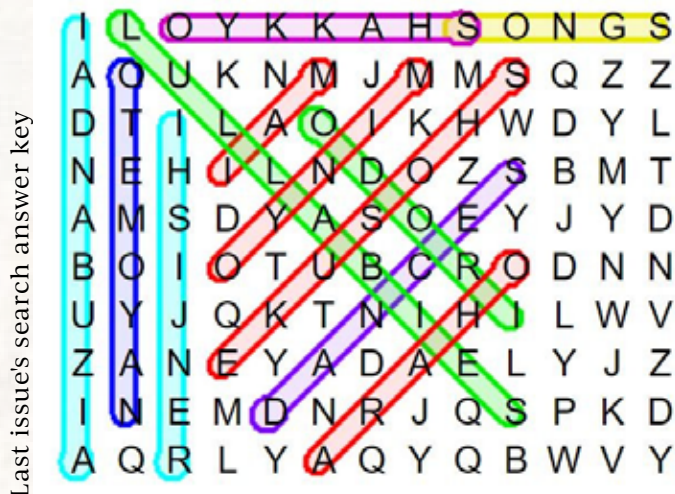
Website: <http://nishidakinenkan.or.jp/>

Hours: Open year-round 10:00-17:00 (16:30 in winter) (closed Dec 29~Jan 3)

English Address: 3-183 Arai-Yokozuka, Fukuro, Fukushima, Fukushima 960-2156 Japan

Japanese Address: 〒960-2156 福島県福島市荒井横塚3-183

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Kokeshi Books Authors:

English

- [Sunny Seki](#)
- [From Tohoku With Love by Manami Okazaki](#)
- [A Collector's Guide: Traditional and Creative Kokeshi and Toys Michael Evans & Robert Wolf](#)
- [The World of Japanese Kokeshi Dolls by Réka Tóth-Vásárhelyi](#)
- [Japan's Dento Kokeshi by Robertta A Uhl](#)

Japanese (some English)

- [Kokeshi Jidai](#)

French

- [Kokeshi, the art of Japanese dolls by Laetitia Hébert](#)

Artists websites

- [The Amazing Doll](#)
- [blue bear vending co.](#)
- [Clark Studio Galleries](#)
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