

# KOKESHI TRENDS

JOURNAL

こけし

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Free Publication

あけましておめでとう  
Akemashite omedetō

**Featuring Creator:**  
Barbara M. Posner  
SunColors Creations

**Kokeshi Paris  
Project:**  
Nicolas-Yvan  
Perrot & Artists  
Sei Matsushita &  
Nanami Takahashi

**Author:**  
Interview with  
Manami Okazaki  
& her new book  
release Japanese  
Kokeshi Dolls

**Kokeshka**  
Remodelled &  
expanding their  
online presence



# Welcome to the Quarterly Edition of Kokeshi Trends 2021

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to our quarterly edition of KT 2021. We did not have a 3rd quarter release this year. The current release will cover both 3rd and 4th quarters for 2021.

First, we are sad to report that Instagram has taken down our @KokeshiTrends page. While we tried several times to reach out to them and have provided all the requested information there was no follow-through on their end. We have started a new IG account @ [KokeshiTrends\\_KT](#) please join us again as we start over. Hopefully we can continue sharing Kokeshi content uninterrupted.

Second, we would like to thank you all for your continued readership and subscriptions in 2021. We are also very grateful for your engagement on our social media channels and look forward to continued growth in 2022.

Finally, as this year wraps up we are wishing you all the very best for the upcoming New Year. May your troubles be less and your blessings be more and nothing but happiness come through your door.

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 & KT Team*



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# 2022 Year of the Tiger (虎)



[Kokechi](#) by Hiroyuki Okamoto, Usaburo's grandson. Set of 3 Tiger themed Kokechi for 2022.



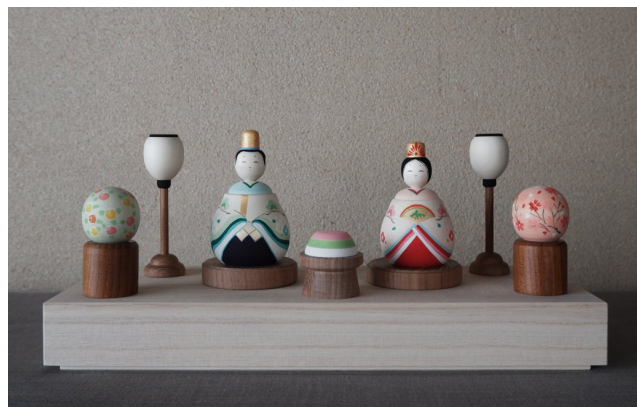
Kokeshi by Hiraga Teruyuki for 2022 featuring Tiger and Kagami Mochi. This little tiger came from [@Galleryshin\\_m](#) on IG.



A Tiger that transforms into 2 tops by Yasutomo Ueda.

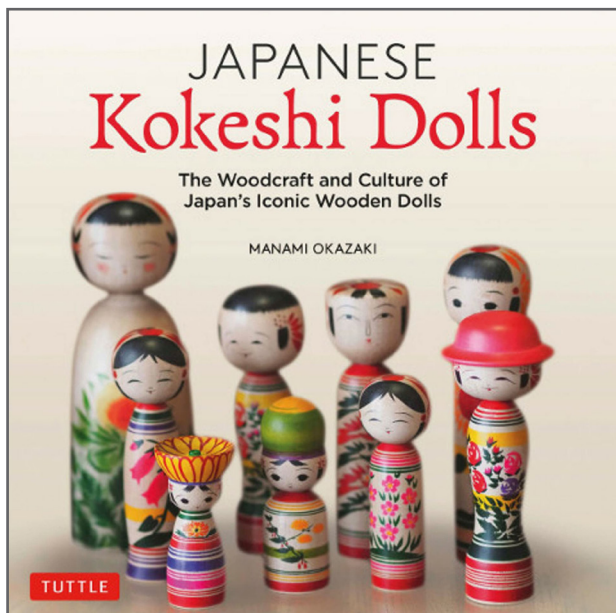


Kokeshi pull toy by Kobayashi Shiego. The Tiger sticks its tongue in and out while it chases the ball being swung by the Kokeshi boy on top. Photo: Aoba Kokeshi Blog.



Kokeshi Hina Set. Pre-orders are being accepted by [Sakurai Kokeshi Store](#) this is just one of many available sets.

Trending



Book Review and Author Feature  
by Jill Holmgren

*Japanese Kokeshi Dolls: The Woodcraft and Culture of Japan's Iconic Wooden Dolls*  
Author-Manami Okazaki

Language: In English  
Tuttle Publishing

Author Manami Okazaki's long-awaited new Kokeshi book can best be described as a travel guide, a journey both through the diverse world of Kokeshi and through the communities and culture that created them.

A beautifully-designed hardcover book with multiple photos on every page, *Japanese Kokeshi Dolls: The Woodcraft and Culture of Japan's Iconic Wooden Dolls* has a place in the libraries of both collectors and curators. For the new collector, this book starts at the beginning and thoroughly explains Kokeshi. It also contains much new information that will delight the seasoned Kokeshi scholar. The color photos will inspire many to add additional artists and more Kokeshi to their "wish list".

While focusing on the current state of the Kokeshi world, the author provides both a historical and a cultural context to the evolution of Kokeshi styles. The book defines and describes Kokeshi and their history, clarifying myths and explaining how they arose. The reader learns the terms for design elements and Kokeshi types.

The author explains the different Kokeshi "booms" and the state of the current market.

Each type of traditional dentō Kokeshi, and how they came to be defined, are featured. The book showcases a wide variety of modern Kokeshi, providing important information on the development of the creative style and revealing information on the history of omiyage and sōsaku Kokeshi that this reviewer has never seen in print. For example, the early Usaburo Kokeshi were designed by Nihonga artists, whose fine art is more often found in museums.

Artisan interviews reveal insights into the process of learning how to create Kokeshi, tools and materials, how design is approached, and the artist's personal relationship with the wood. The interviewing skill of the author is evident as artisans discuss the frame of mind necessary for successfully creating a Kokeshi. Contact information is supplied for each featured artist.

A guide through the world of Kokeshi would be more than enough, but *Japanese Kokeshi Dolls* is also a travel guide through each Kokeshi-producing prefecture: matsuri festivals, Kokeshi museums, sights, attractions, not-to-be-missed food and drink, and how to meet Kokeshi artists and buy Kokeshi. This information is invaluable for anyone planning a Kokeshi journey to Japan. Viewing Kokeshi within the culture



that created them deepens one's knowledge and appreciation. For those unable to travel, in addition to the contact information provided with the artisan interviews, there is a list of Kokeshi shops inside and outside Japan.

Readers may be familiar with Okazaki's previous book, *Kokeshi from Tohoku with Love* (now out of print), written to promote Kokeshi and help support the recovery from the Great Tōhoku Earthquake of 2011. At that time, Kokeshi became a symbol of perseverance. The author hopes that this new comprehensive Kokeshi book will build on that effort and encourage and enable Kokeshi fans to travel to Tōhoku, the birthplace of Kokeshi. Just a few hours by train, or a short plane ride, from Tokyo, Tōhoku is a beautiful area with a rich history. Trains and buses make it easy to travel to Kokeshi villages, where visitors can stay in a hotel or a traditional ryokan inn, soak in an onsen, enjoy healthy local foods, meet Kokeshi artists and choose their own Kokeshi. As the author notes, "times of adversity also breed determination... " and " ...the craft is becoming more creative and exciting by the year" while "...encounters with Kokeshi are filled with wonder and joy."

The author requests that Kokeshi collectors consider, when possible, purchasing the book from their local independent bookseller, gallery or Kokeshi shop, in order to support them so that they can continue to offer their valued services to the public.

*Kokeshi Trends* is grateful that author Manami Okazaki was able to take time from her busy schedule to answer a few questions.

#### Author Interview:

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Manami Okazaki is the author of many illustrated books about Japanese art, fashion, craft and culture, including *Toy Tokyo*, *Kimono Now*, *Land of the Rising Cat*, *Kicks Japan*, *Creative Sole*, *Kawaii-Japan's Culture of Cute*, and more. Kokeshi fans have been anticipating the release of her newest Kokeshi book, *Japanese Kokeshi Dolls: The Woodcraft and Culture of Japan's Iconic Wooden Dolls*.

KT: Please tell us a little about yourself.



Featured in the book:  
Hijiori Kokeshi by Seiji Yoshino

" Kokeshi encapsulates the artisanal spirit and philosophy of folk craft; the simplicity and imperfections of Kokeshi are a great way to understand the wabi sabi aesthetic sensibilities of Japan..."



MO: I wear a few hats but in terms of Kokeshi related things, I am the author of *Kokeshi from Tohoku with Love and Japanese Kokeshi Dolls: The Woodcraft and Culture of Japan's Iconic Wooden Dolls*. I curate Kokeshi shows and have written Kokeshi related articles for numerous publications internationally. I also supply many stores across the world with Kokeshi and sell them on occasion as well.

KT: Kokeshi: From Tohoku With Love is quite comprehensive. What made you decide to begin such a big project?

MO: I am a journalist and writer, so producing books is what I do for a living. Our family was directly impacted by the Tōhoku tsunami in that my mother's family house was swept away. I was also doing volunteer work; I was honestly too emotionally shattered to do anything else for a while, I found the amount of death and destruction overwhelming. I went to the US a few months later to do a Master's degree at the School of Journalism at Columbia University and was absent from

Japan for a while (this was something I was already set to do before the tsunami hit) and overseas, the Arab Spring was grabbing attention, and concurrently Occupy Wall Street was taking place in New York so Tōhoku had fallen out of the news cycle by that point. However, my mind was still in Tōhoku and I wanted to do something that utilized my skills as a journalist without producing yet another report of suffering and damage. These articles are important but people become desensitized and for me, Tōhoku was so much more than pitiful stories; it is a place of rich culture, folklore, nature and beautiful people. Kokeshi were ubiquitous in Japanese media post-Tōhoku tsunami as a mascot of the region. I was also researching kawaii culture in Japan and working with high end designers for companies like Sanrio and gaming companies. Many people considered Kokeshi to be one of the best examples of the "roots of kawaii".

Kokeshi encapsulates the artisanal spirit and philosophy of folk craft; the simplicity and imperfections of Kokeshi are a great way to understand the wabi sabi aesthetic sensibilities of Japan and what's more, they are super cute. As you know as an editor of Kokeshi Trends, it's truly a wonderful and fascinating topic to write about.

KT: Can you tell us about any experiences or special moments you had while working on this book?

MO: Everything. Every single trip to Tōhoku for me is truly a heartwarming, unforgettable experience. The most memorable experiences involve all the warm and hospitable people in Tōhoku, the mesmerizing stories relayed to me by the artisans, joining the locals in the Kokeshi festival in Naruko, hearing how people managed to survive the tsunami. All the incredible matsuri, riding horses through Shiroishi, staying at incredible ryokans, going to impromptu shamisen gatherings, and who could forget all those incredible hot springs!





Left: Featuated in the book, Narugo traditional Master craftsman Sakurai Akihiro.

Every single artisan has been memorable, going to their houses, being treated like family. I think the word "artisan" is thrown around alot, but in Japan, you wouldn't call yourself or be recognized as a "shokunin" unless you really were a master of the craft -- this can take up to ten years. The dedication to the craft, the training, the humble attitude, the submission to the process and the gratitude to the clients are all part of the artisanal ethos which is encapsulated in the work.

KT: Your new book, *Japanese Kokeshi Dolls: The Woodcraft and Culture of Japan's Iconic Wooden Dolls*, is now available. Please tell us about it.

MO: It is the result of going to Tōhoku over 40 times over ten years, so it is based on original research and fieldwork as well as interviews with other scholars and curators. At this point, I have spent around 2 years in total on fieldwork in Tōhoku and have been to most of the active artisan ateliers. The approach is journalistic, as with all my work. I act as a bridge between the custodians of the craft and the readership and aim to explain Kokeshi in an accessible way that hopefully people will appreciate.

One major difference to my previous projects is that there is a section on contemporary Kokeshi and it is a lot more like a guide (like a birdwatching guide -- super geeky and

practical), so for example with the first book, I wrote about a paragraph for each of the Kokeshi strains. The new book has up to six pages for one strain. It has information about where to go and when, who to visit and where things are. My goal is and always will be to get the Kokeshi lovers to go to Tōhoku and experience all these amazing things for themselves. I hope the new book is useful!

I also curate Kokeshi shows regularly; please watch my Instagram [@japan.mingei](https://www.instagram.com/japan.mingei) to find out if I have events coming up. Most years I host exhibitions at Sway Gallery Paris and London; both cities have a plethora of Kokeshi fans. I also plan to open a very casual weekend bookstore soon in my hood. Please check out [@tonbibooks](https://www.instagram.com/tonbibooks) on IG and of course drop by if you want to experience life in a local community close to Tokyo. I am selling online at the moment, but will shift into a physical space as soon as Covid is less of an issue.

KT: We're interested in your Kokeshi story. When did you first become aware of Kokeshi?

MO: My mother is from Tōhoku, I went to Tōhoku as a child. I have photos of our family going to Kokeshi shops when I was in primary school. Even though I was around 10 years old, I still remember the studios, the resplendent view outside the window of the Naruko ryokan and the Fall leaves. My





Top: Featured in the book, *Tsuchiyu Kokeshi* by Tadao Watanabe

Right: Featured in the book, *Nanbu Kokeshi* by Susumago Morizo



mother is from the generation that used to piggy back Kokeshi and play with them in a way girls play with Barbies now.

KT: Do you have a Kokeshi collection and if so, what have you included in your collection? Have your collecting interests changed since you began collecting?

MO: Usually I collect Kokeshi from artisans I have met. Everyone collects for different reasons, but I am following the tradition of collecting souvenirs -- the joy of Kokeshi (for me) is connected to the people, nature, climate, food, culture and rituals of Tōhoku. Kokeshi is one aspect of all these things combined. You could say they are signifiers, and hold symbolic value. That is, put simply, the warmth and beauty of Tōhoku. Everyone has a different impetus; that is what makes collectors of any genre so fascinating.

KT: I'm interested in your impressions of the current situation of the world of Kokeshi. Have you observed any changes or beginnings of changes in the kinds of Kokeshi artists make or in what types of Kokeshi people are collecting? Do you see changes in how Kokeshi are sold or marketed?

MO: Again, I find Kokeshi collectors so disparate, I can't really say on the whole asides from a general proclivity to kawaii and small things. Something I have seen lately, is that the fans are becoming more diverse, from the fans that are seduced by the musing of the mingei movement intellectuals, to females who are part of kawaii culture, to the youth in the designer toy movement which was born out of Tokyo street culture. The notion of collaborations is very strong in street culture and they are bringing these sensibilities to the Kokeshi world so the same kinds of people who collect, say Sofubis or Medicom Toy BEARBRICKS are also getting into Kokeshi too. In that way, many cool and hip contemporary artists are also producing Kokeshi of their own.

KT: Please comment on the creation of Kokeshi art beyond the borders of Japan.

MO: There are many non-Japanese practitioners of Japanese culture. I included [Cynthia Leigh Carden](#)<sup>1</sup> and [Jacob and Lisa Holt-Hodsdon](#) in the book because they are extremely talented and their work shows the wide diversity of work within the sōsaku Kokeshi world. They bring something completely new to the world of Kokeshi; there is no one else making work like theirs.

On a side note, I recently dropped by [Seiji Yoshino's](#)<sup>2</sup> studio after I sent him the book. He was so impressed by the Hodsdon's work and was really fascinated by the way they process the wood and the material itself. This cross pollination of ideas is how cultures thrive and is stimulating for the artisans here as well.

This is the case not just for the Kokeshi world, but for pretty much every creative culture I have written about, for example the Wafrica brand of kimonos that uses artisanal wax fabric from Africa, American practitioners of Japanese tattoos and so on. They all bring something to the table.

Of course, there is a huge difference between these people and hacks and bootleggers. I'm also personally not a fan of companies that make mass produced "Kokeshi" in factories overseas from resin and then market them as Japanese or Kokeshi, as they are the antithesis of Japanese craftsmanship.

KT: You have spent a lot of time examining aspects of Japanese culture. Kokeshi, with so many styles, seem to be an intersection between traditional and popular culture. What place do you think Kokeshi hold in Japanese society today?

MO: I answered this above to a degree, but for Japanese people wood is a material that people have a great affinity with. Japan is covered in woodlands and wood is used in all facets of life, from architecture to eating utensils.

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1 Previously known as Cynthia Carden Gibson

2 Traditional, Hijiori, craftsman

There is an elemental fascination with wood -- the smell, texture, appearance -- people find the material warm and comforting. As technology develops, politics becomes more polarized and we get bombarded with way too much information, there is something fundamentally attractive about something crafted slowly, one by one with natural materials by a master craftsperson's hands. I remember discussing this with Yasunobu Oki; think of all the available options in Japan and how far entertainment and tech has progressed, yet despite this, Kokeshi are still relevant and are popping up in unexpected places. It's really strange, but also endlessly fascinating.

KT: Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate your observations and insights. And we all enjoy your books!

Featured in the book:  
Yajiro Kokeshi by the Sato Family which consist of Seiko Mikiko, Hideyuki and Yusuke that make these adorable ejiko (baby in a basket) Kokeshi.



Featured in the book:

Zao Kokeshi by  
Umeki Naomi



I wanted to create a character similar to that of Little Red Riding Hood... I always paint animals but now I created something different, mixing my art with the idea of Kokeshi ~Sei Matsushita



## Sei Matsushita

Sei Matsushita was born and raised in Ehime on the island of Shikoku (Japan). In 2009, she settled in France and took courses at the Beaux-arts in Versailles. In 2011, she was awarded the prize of the School of Fine Arts of Versailles during the "Artistes dans la rue" event. She is passionate about animals having grown up around them and often conveys them in her artwork, particularly rabbits. Check out her [website](#) for more information on her work.

Interview by:  
Madelyn Molina  
Artist: Sei Matsushita

Sei Matsushita obtained a degree in linguistics before studying multimedia at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia. Then, she moved to France and studied at the Beaux-arts de Versailles, where she specialized in drawing and engraving printing.

Naturally, she turned to animals as a subject, trying to find a proper technique to express herself.

Rabbits became her favorite subjects. The rabbit is a powerful symbol in many cultures. Feeding silently on shoots and grasses at dusk, it embodies the transition between day and night. It therefore symbolizes rebirth and the cycle of life.

In Q1 2020 of [Kokeshi Trends](#), volume 5 we featured the Kokeshi Inspired work of Sei Matsushita. It is our honor to interview Sei-san about her experience with the Kokeshi Paris Project.

KT: You created a very unique and interesting

work of art for the Kokeshi Paris Project. When Nicolas approached you about his project, did you know right away that you wanted to take part in the project?

Sei-San: Thank you for appreciating my work! As a Japanese person, we know Kokeshi as a wooden Japanese traditional doll. But not many people do know about the original history of Kokeshi. Nicolas is a huge collector of old Kokeshi. He showed me some of his favorite old Kokeshi dolls, which inspired me to draw Red Riding Hood Cat. I wanted to mix the original history of Kokeshi with the art I used to do on canvas.

KT: When you saw the blank Kokeshi pieces did you immediately think of what you would create?

Sei-San: When I first saw the plain wood Kokeshi piece which came from Japan, I was so impressed by it, by the quality of the wood. It was so beautiful that I did not want to draw anything on it.

KT: Was there any challenge in using Kokeshi as a

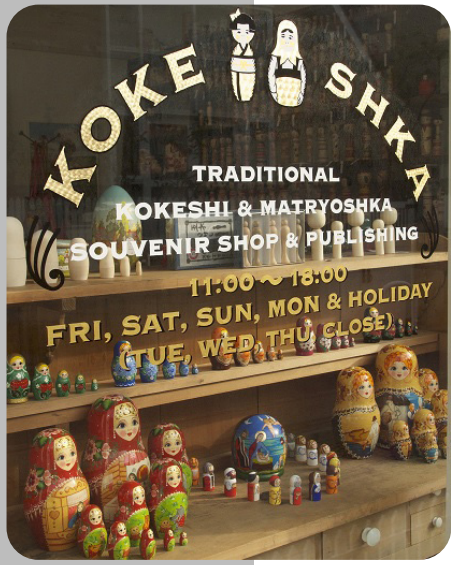
medium for your art?

Sei-San: I usually draw on paper, and had never drawn on a Kokeshi, which is a three-dimensional shape. That's the reason why it was a little challenging for me to adapt my technique, but at the same time it was exciting to explore new fields. I created two faces, one on the front and the other on the back side, to show different emotions of the Kokeshi cat.

KT: What came to your mind when you decided on the color, art mediums and design elements that you would use to create your Kokeshi?

Sei-San: I wanted to use red as a main color like a traditional one. I used acrylic and varnish.

KT: Thank you for sharing your design process with us.



# KOKE - SHKA コケーシカ





# KOKESHI - MATRYOSHKA SHOP



(left-right) The newly renovated store has custom made Kokeshi display cases that are just stunning. (Bottom) Numata-san.



KOKE-SHKA by Jill Holmgren  
1-2-15 Hase Kamakura-City Kanagawa,  
2480016 Japan  
Phone: 0467-23-6917  
Site: [kokeshka-en.com](http://kokeshka-en.com)  
[kokeshka.theshop.jp](http://kokeshka.theshop.jp)  
Facebook: [Kokeshka](https://www.facebook.com/Kokeshka)  
Instagram: [@kokeshka\\_kamakura](https://www.instagram.com/kokeshka_kamakura)

Taking its name from a combination of Kokeshi and Matryoshka, the Koke-Shka shop honors a historical connection between Russia and Japan. The iconic Russian Matryoshka nesting dolls first appeared in the 1890s and are believed to have been inspired by Japanese nesting figures of the seven lucky gods. Like Kokeshi, the nesting dolls were created on a lathe.

Koke-Shka is located in the ancient coastal capital of Kamakura, a popular tourist destination and a short and scenic train ride from Tokyo. Follow the map on their website to find the shop, on a quiet street a few minutes' walk from Yuigahama Station on the famous Enoden (Enoshima Dentetsu) train line. From Koke-Shka it's a brief walk to the beach,

shopping, restaurants, temples and the famous Kamakura Daibutsu Buddha statue near Hase Station.

Koke-Shka sells vintage and new Kokeshi, Matryoshka and Russian crafts, and wooden toys from both Japan and Russia.

The shop is known for exclusive limited-edition items. For example: Kokeshi-themed fans, bags, pens; Russian style painted Kokeshi and Matryoshka pieces painted by Kokeshi artists. They also make highly coveted theme boxes, such as the recently released Nakanosawa "Taco Box".

Numata Genqui and Numata Ayami own the shop. Numata Genqui is a well-known publisher, poet and photographer. His photos illustrate the 14 Volume (17 books) Kokeshi Jidai, ([kokeshijidai-en.com](http://kokeshijidai-en.com)) a set of art magazines featuring each style of Kokeshi, artists past and present, and the hot springs where the Kokeshi were created. His photo studio, Icoi, is adjacent to the Kokeshi shop. Numata-San's Kokeshi photos can be seen on Instagram [@koke\\_shiki](https://www.instagram.com/koke_shiki).





they can increase their offerings by adding items to the web shop. New items are added weekly. In December, look for winter-related and Christmas products. Notifications of new Kokeshi and links to the web shop can be found on the Koke-Shka social media pages. Customers are advised to contact the shop about shipping costs before ordering, as shipping options vary by country. The Numatas encourage anyone with questions to email them at [kokeshka@kjd.biglobe.ne.jp](mailto:kokeshka@kjd.biglobe.ne.jp)

What's next for Koke-Shka? The Numatas have a dream. When people can once again freely travel abroad, they want to open Koke-Shka pop-up shops in several countries.

Through Koke-Shka and Kokeshi Jidai, Numata-San has endeavored to support Kokeshi artists and to encourage the revitalization and recovery of the area devastated by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Koke-Shka was remodeled during the pandemic lockdown and reopened in December 2021, welcoming collectors Fridays, Mondays and holidays. Check the website for hours and updates. The new shop is decorated with hand-crafted details, such as Kokeshi-shaped door handles and unpainted traditional Kokeshi as part of the structure of custom display shelves, the natural wood creating a serene backdrop to these endearing works of art.

Collectors outside Japan can shop online at the Koke-Shka web shop. The Numatas expanded the shop during the lockdown and plan to continue, as it provides a service to foreigners who cannot come to Japan. Also, with limited shop space,

Beautiful custom counter, definitely an experience to be had in person. We certainly hope KOKE-SHKA comes to readers' countries in the near future.





My spirit was the Parisian kokeshi. I love to paint scenery and Parisians people. I mix 2 cultures. Japanese kokeshi and Parisian model -Nanami Takahashi



Interview by Madelyn Molina  
Kokeshi Paris Project  
by Nicholas Yvan-Perrot  
Artist: Nanami Takahashi  
Website: [nanamitakahashi.blog.fc2.com/](http://nanamitakahashi.blog.fc2.com/)

Kokeshi Trends is honored to continue to be a part of the Kokeshi Paris Project by Nicolas-Yvan Perrot. In Q1 2020 Kokeshi Trends, Volume 5 we featured the Kokeshi Inspired work of Nanami Takahashi. Combining her love for color and pattern, Nanami created a Kokeshi-inspired work, generating a feeling of life in Paris.

Nanami-san was born in Tokyo and grew up in the city of Yokohama before moving to France. She currently resides in Paris. She reflects that once upon a time, Yokohama was a city that prospered in foreign trade. It's a very vibrant city with Chinatown, a port, and a foreigner's cemetery. She is inspired by walking around the city and taking in the local scenery. She says inspiration can come from landscapes; some make you feel calm while others can evoke a feeling of nostalgia.

It is my pleasure to share this wonderful opportunity to interview Nanami Takahashi.

KT: Please let me congratulate you on creating a very unique and interesting work of art. When Nicolas approached you about his project, did you know right away that you wanted to take part in the project?

Nanami-San: To be honest, I was wondering whether to participate in this project. I was worried that I could not finish the precious Kokeshi doll that Nicolas finally received because I always deal only with flat works.

KT: When you saw the blank Kokeshi pieces, what were your thoughts? Did you immediately think of what you would create?

Nanami-San: After picking up a blank Kokeshi doll, I didn't do anything for a week and just looked at the Kokeshi doll. Finally, I decided I would draw a Parisienne, which often appears in my paintings. By drawing Parisienne on Japanese Kokeshi dolls, I decided to try to create a fusion of cultures.

KT: Was there any challenge in using Kokeshi as a medium for your art?

Nanami-San: After I actually started coloring the Kokeshi dolls, I realized that the Kokeshi dolls were smaller than I

# Kokeshi Paris Project

by Nicolas-Yvan Perrot @KokeshiParisProject (FB)

expected. I focused on the coloring and how to express my idea as a work.

KT: Please share with me your creation process. What came to your mind as you decided on the color and the design that you would use to create the Kokeshi? What art medium(s) and special techniques did you use to create it?

Nanami-San: I had already decided to use acrylic paint for coloring before designing. This is because acrylic paints go well with wood.

However, I had never colored on a three-dimensional medium. So, I practiced by coloring eggs because they resembled the face of a Kokeshi doll. The face of a Kokeshi doll is important!

KT: Wow, how interesting!

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

Nanami-San: I am very grateful to Nicolas for the Kokeshi Paris Project. Through this project, my experience as an artist has increased and I was able to participate in this project with other artists who are active in Paris. I am very interested in the Kokeshi dolls made by other artists.

KT: Thank you for taking the time to share your experience working on the Kokeshi Paris Project with us.





# SunColors Creations

Featured Artist: Barbara M. Posner  
Etsy Shop: [SunColorsCreations](#)  
Facebook: [SunColors-Creations](#)  
Home Base: Turnwater, Washington

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Barbara M. Posner has been a stained-glass artist for over forty years - her glass studio is **SunColors Creations**. Her parents had her in art and music classes from a young age and she was winning art competitions at County and State Fairs, Girl Scouts, etc., by the time she was ten.

Music and Theatre were also a big part of her life; she started college as a piano/voice major but the Fates saw otherwise and she ended up with a degree in history instead. Barbara has performed on stage, directed children's and community theater, directed children's and adult choral groups, and sung with groups such as the New Hampshire Symphony Chorus and the Victorian Country Christmas. She doesn't perform anymore because of health issues, but lives vicariously through her youngest son, who has been a professional singer/actor / puppet master for twenty years. Barbara got involved with her husband's woodturning group and noticed that some of the turners decorated their pieces with Pyrography (wood burning). Since she had done that as a child she thought "Hey I can do that!" and she started decorating her husband's work. To her surprise, she was hooked!

KT: How long have you and your husband been making Kokeshi Inspired dolls?

Barbara: Oh, it seems like forever, but it's only been about two years! I had a Physical Therapist of Japanese descent, Kelly, who knew that my husband was a wood turner and she showed us two Kokeshi that she had. I think she got them on a trip to visit family in Japan. I don't have any details about the dolls, no photos, or information about who made them. My husband brought the dolls home and after watching some fascinating videos about how the dolls are turned (Japanese makers turn upside-down and backwards on their lathes, compared

to American turners - it's just amazing!) he made exact replicas of Kelly's dolls. Then they sat on the windowsill, in his workshop, until early Spring of 2020 when he handed them to me and said "Here, do something with these!"

KT: What was it about Kokeshi that inspired you to begin to create Kokeshi inspired works? Do you personally own any Kokeshi; if yes, do you have a favorite artist?

Barbara: Oh, my favorite artist is, without a doubt, Cynthia Leigh Carden, who creates the most beautiful and elegant dolls I have ever seen! I first saw some of her works at an AAW (American Association of Woodturners) National Convention several years ago where she was exhibiting her dolls and fell in love. That was when I decided I had to try to make some Kokeshi for

myself. I would give just about anything to have one of her "babies". I do own several unique little pieces, creative dolls all made by Americans, and I just recently started collecting what some purists would call the "real thing". I have a marvelous little Amabie made by Miura Setsuko and a Sakura-komachi.

KT: Are you familiar with the different types of Kokeshi, such as traditional (dentō) and creative (sōsaku)? Which would you say influences your work more?



# BARBARA M POSNER

Barbara: I am learning more all the time; thanks to your fine magazine and the work you do. I do love some of the chubbier little ladies. No doubt, I am into sōsaku.

KT: Tell us a little bit about the tools you use to create your Kokeshi inspired dolls?



Barbara's husband is hard at work on the lathe



Barbara: I am still trying to get my husband pinned down on the wood. I like a nice, tight grain; both Cherry and Maple work well. Right now, I am having good luck with some Silver Maple we harvested right here on our property. My husband's lathe is a Laguna Reversible 24/36. Please don't ask me to explain that (smiley). He has every kind of tool imaginable in his workshop (and he would definitely refute that).

For my Pyrography I use a Colwood SuperPro II; there are others on the market, but I've checked them all out and I prefer this one. I have 16 or 17 different tips that I can use for burning effects, and I just asked Santa for three more. I have a Dremel tool with many bits for carving and sanding, and I have all sorts of hand tools as well. My Daddy would be so proud. For painting I mostly use Daler Rowney Acrylic Inks, whatever Acrylic Paints I can get my hands on, liquid dichroic glass, many kinds of beads and jewels, etc.

KT: Share with us a little about your design process. How do you decide what type of doll you want to create?

Barbara: Well, first off, it depends if it is a commission piece. I recently did a birthday gift for someone who has a small collection (again, I had no details, just a photo) but I was told she likes Roses, Seashells, and PINK. I chose a body type that is different from her other dolls, but not glaringly so. Because I wanted to give the doll a crown of roses, I chose to give her a topknot bun. Most of my girls have flowers in their hair: some are cascades, some crowns, and sometimes I just paint some flowers. I have been known to completely draw out the specs for a design (front, side, and back, with all the measurements and floral details) so that helps. I have, I think, seven different female body types, five or six males and several animals. I have done a couple of kitties and last Christmas I did a panda bear for my grandson. In preparing for this discussion with you, Madelyn, I created a new Kokeshi and tried to photograph different steps of my process. It is one of my favorite designs, a stately Kokeshi with a parasol and a fan.

KT: I noticed many of your dolls have green

eyes, why is that?

Barbara: Ha-ha! I wondered if you would ask that! Everybody does! It's just something that I do. Green IS my favorite color and yes, my eyes are greenish-blue. Also, it's part of a family story; my little brother is married to a woman of Japanese descent and their younger daughter has a beautiful face with my brother's startling baby blue eyes. I at least gave my dolls green eyes instead of blue.

KT: Have you had any memorable feedback that you received from customers about your work?

Barbara: Oh yes. One customer who reviewed her purchase said "this handcrafted Japanese doll is gorgeous, chic and such high quality" - I was so thrilled! Another collector called my work "painstakingly beautiful, colorful and whimsical, an angry rotund little figure." Most people are impressed by the tiny details I am able to burn into the wood.

KT: Are your dolls for sale; where would one pick one up?

Barbara: I do sell my girls, partly because my husband is worried that they are taking over the house! I sell at craft fairs (COVID allowing) and I have an Etsy shop that handles all of my creative enterprises: SunColorsCreations. You can also see a lot of my work, new and old, on my Facebook page, Barbara M. Posner and the secondary SunColors page. My studio is in my home in Tumwater, Washington.

KT: Is there anything more you would like to share with our readers about your work?

Barbara: Yes. I realize that what I do is quite a bit different than traditional (dentō) Kokeshi, more flamboyant and colorful, I suppose. But I have studied Japanese culture my entire adult life, and taught aspects of it too, because my husband is a fourth degree dan in Judo and our whole family has been practicing Judo since our kids were babies.



Representation of the four seasons.

Our oldest still teaches at the club our family started in New Hampshire in 1985. What I'm trying to say, I guess, is that I have the greatest respect for traditional Kokeshi, even if I don't make mine that way.

KT: Thank you, Barbara, for taking the time to introduce your beautiful work to us. The wonderful world of Kokeshi continues to influence people all around the world to create their own inspired versions of Kokeshi. We can appreciate, love and acknowledge artists' contributions to the folk-art world by continuing to share them with as many people as we can, whether that be by creating inspired art, writing about them, photographing them and in any way possible! We want them to be around a very long time.

### Update:

KT: I am super excited to have received the newly-created doll Barbara made. It arrived just in time for the holiday and I was truly impressed by the details and many elements used in the creation of the doll. The signature green eyes on Barbara's work are much more subtle in person, (the camera tends to make them look fluorescent in photos). The hair is incredibly detailed and beautifully adorned with flowers. The amount of work that has gone into creating this very special doll is notable. The parasol is beautifully created with a pointed top, pyrographed with blossoms and Mt. Fuji with its peak covered in a cloud and birds flying in the distant sky towards the sun (kudos to Barbara's husband; His lathe skills are incredible). The parasol left me in awe. No detail was spared, the underside of the umbrella is loaded with more beautiful blossoms. She also holds a hand fan meticulously decorated with blossoms, a kumo cloud and lovely little pearl. The obi has a large bow on the back and the finish of the piece has an iridescent sheen. It is an overall beautiful and elegant design. I'm honored to have it in my collection. Many thanks to Barbara for creating such a wonderful work of art. (Pictured on page 20.)



First dolls created by Barbara







A Santa Claus design



A Samurai design



Iris and Rose both have beautiful top buns decorated with lovely flowers and a kanzashi pin.

## 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/>

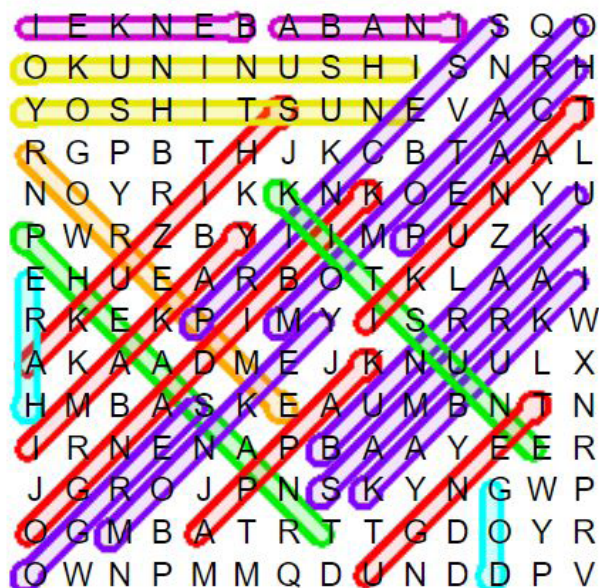
**Hours:** Open year-round 10:00-17:00 (16:30 in winter) (closed Dec 29~Jan 3)

**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](#)
- [Yukiko Ryburn](#)

### 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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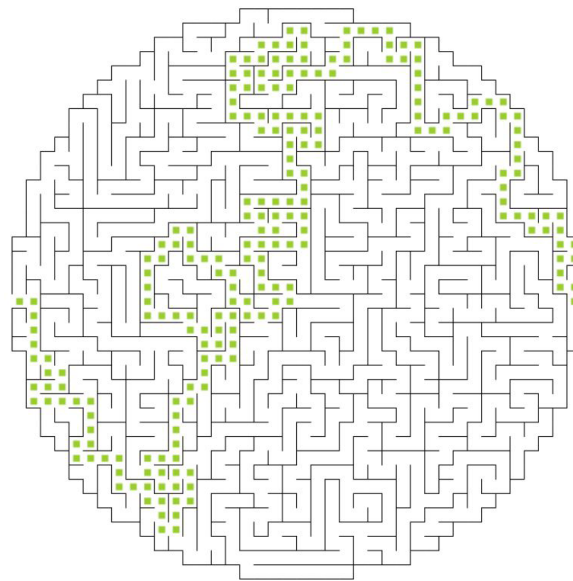
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