

# KOKESHITRENDS

Free Publication July 2024

Special Issue 1



FOLK ART: EXPLORING THE WOODEN TOYS OF JAPAN

■	Introduction	.....	2
■	Hara Shigematsu	.....	14
■	Hayasaka Toshinari	.....	17, 19
■	Hiroi Michiaki	.....	5, 12, 13, 16, 20
■	Kamada Takashi	.....	3, 19
■	Kanou Hiroshi	.....	10
■	Kitayama Moriharu	.....	15
■	Matsuda Tadao	.....	5, 19
■	Tsuta Fumio	.....	6, 7, 8
■	Umeki Shuichi	.....	9, 18
■	Yasushi Fukushima	.....	4, 11

# INTRODUCTION

Despite the widespread popularity of modern toys in Japan, traditional *Furusato no omocha* (hometown) toys continue to hold considerable importance in the lives of the majority of Japanese children.

Many of these hometown toys are rooted in Japanese folklore, local history, customs and legends. Japanese toys frequently symbolize distinct areas of Japan, showcasing **koma** (tops), **rūretto-koma** (roulette/fortune games), **ningyō** (dolls), and miniature replicas of real-life figures and objects. These exemplify the exquisite craftsmanship and artistry of Japanese toy **kijishi**, also called **kijiya** or **rokuro-shi** (wood turner/worker).

Let us explore some of the beautiful wooden toys of Japan.

~Madelyn Molina



See

# no EVIL

**Kamada Takashi**



Speak



Hear

Strain

Yajirō, YOB (1953-)

Maker

Kamada Takashi (かまたたか)

Master

Kamada Bun-ichi

Theme

Pictorial Maxim: 3 Wise Monkeys

Material

Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)

Comment

The three intelligent monkeys represent a Japanese visual saying, illustrating the traditional concept of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil". The monkeys are Mizaru (見ざる), who "does not see" and covers his eyes, (or closes them) Kikazaru (聞かざる), who "does not hear" and covers his ears, and Iwazaru (言わざる), who "does not speak" and covers his mouth.



# YASUSHI FUKUSHIMA (1947-)

## **Tidbit:**

Clowns have their origins in ancient civilizations, but the modern clown, as we know it today, can be traced back to the 19th century when Joseph Grimaldi, an English actor, comedian and dancer, began performing in 1805.

**Title of Work:** Pierrot

## **About the Kijishi:**

Yasushi Fukushima is an independent artisan. He was born in Tokyo, Japan in August 1947 and started making Edo tops around 1970. He learned the craft from the Hiroi brothers, Michiaki and Masaaki. His wood preference is Mizuki (dogwood).

## **Description:**

Three Pierrot clowns skillfully balance on a single ball. While two are grasping and balancing a Koma the third balances them both. Their heads are detachable and also serve as Koma, with their vibrant neck ruffs doubling as Koma as well.





## Hiroi Michiaki

ひろいみちあき  
(1933-2020)

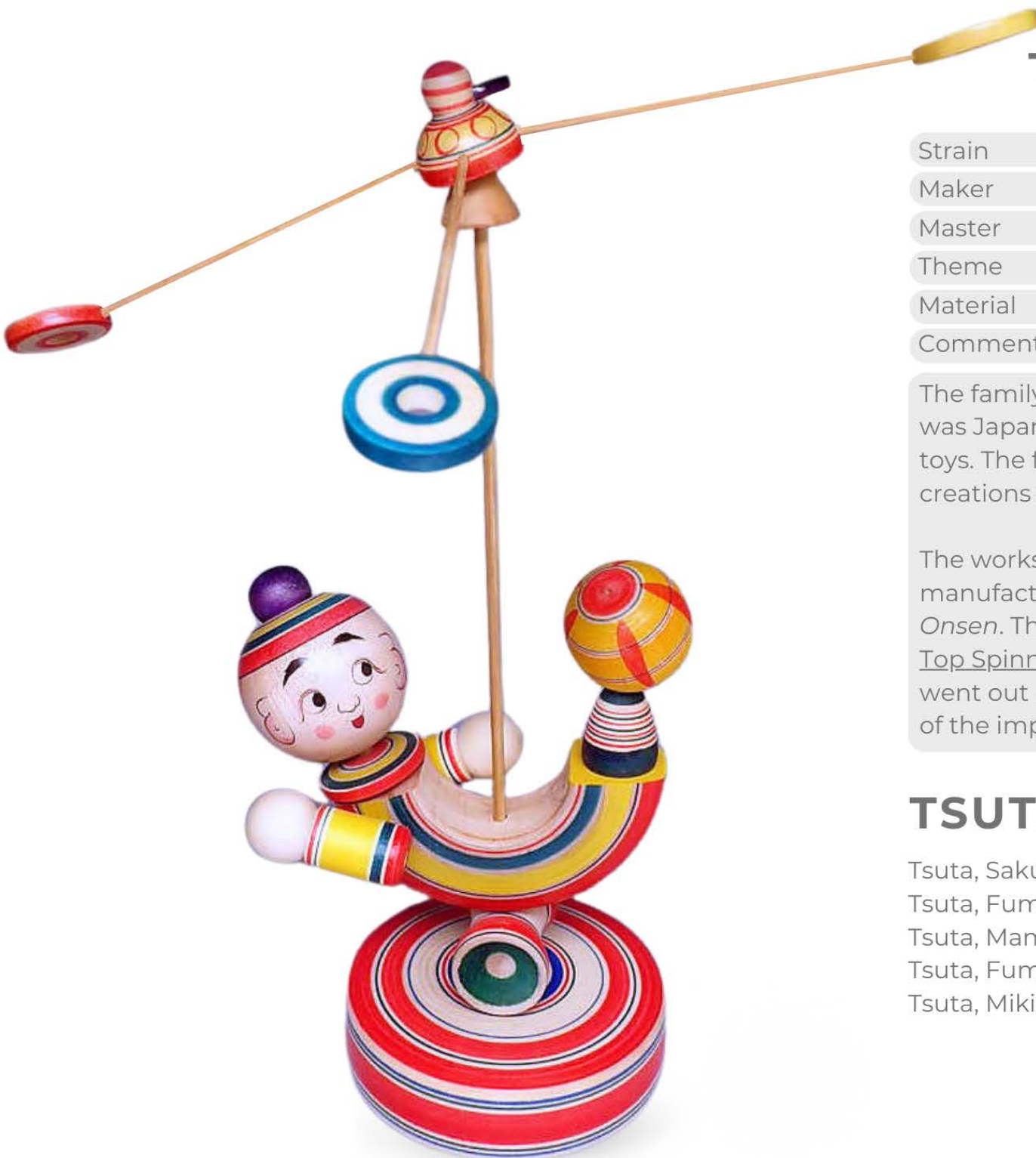
Tōgatta - Yajirōbe  
Master: Hiroi Kenjiro



## Matsuda Tadao

まつただたお  
(1956 -) Narugo

Master:  
Matsuda Hatsumi



## TSUTA FUMIO

Strain	Yajirō, YOB (1944-)
Maker	Tsuta Fumio (つたふみお)
Master	Tsuta Mamoru
Theme	Pierrot Circus
Material	Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)
Comment	

The family business, Tsutaya Bussan Co. Ltd., was Japan's No. 1 source for spinning tops and toys. The family won various awards for their creations in Kokeshi competitions.

The workshop was the main souvenir manufacturing source of toys for *Onogawa Onsen*. They were also members of the [Japan Top Spinning Association](#). Regrettably, they went out of business on May 11, 2020 as a result of the impact of Covid-19.

## TSUTA FAMILY STUDIO

- Tsuta, Sakuzo (つたさくぞう) 1892
- Tsuta, Fumio (つたふみお) 1920
- Tsuta, Mamoru (つたまもる) 1928
- Tsuta, Fumio (つたふみお) 1944
- Tsuta, Mikio (つたみきお) 1954

# TSUTA FUMIO

## PIERROT CIRCUS



The Pierrot circus clown showcases impressive skills by juggling three spinning tops - one on each hand and one on his head. The addition of wobbling while spinning adds an extra level of challenge to the performance.





**TSUTA FUMIO**  
KOINOBORI 鯉のぼり



The carp streamer is adorned with tiny bells at the top, creating a clattering sound when the top is spun. The carp sway, as if being swept by strong winds.

At the base, a young boy wearing a vibrant yellow hat raises his hands in the air, as if cheering for the carp. There is a spinning top near the young boy, just waiting to be played with.

## Umeki Shuichi

Strain	Zaō, YOB (1929-)
Maker	Umeki Shuichi (うめきしゅういち)
Master	Kanayama Buntaro
Theme	Boy's Day, Koinobori, Carp Streamer
Material	Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)
Comment	

Born in Miyamachi Yokochō, Yamagata City on March 18, 1929, he initially trained in general wood products. After serving in the military, he returned home, but still did not make Kokeshi. In 1955, he relocated to Yamagata to establish his own wood crafts shop. It wasn't until 1976 that Umeki-san shifted his focus to Kokeshi making and restoring the old Zaō works. In addition to Kokeshi, he also created whimsical and colorful toys.



## koinobori



# Kanou Hiroshi

Strain	Sakunami, YOB (1954-)
Maker	Kanou Hiroshi (かのうひろし)
Master	Kanou Eiji
Theme	Boy's Day, Koinobori, Carp Streamer
Material	Wood, Metal
Comment	

Kano Hiroshi started crafting Kokeshi dolls for the [Nagoya Kokeshi Association](#) around 1971-1973. Apart from creating small items like Kokeshi dolls and toys, he is also skilled in making long table and musical instrument legs like those of harps.

He currently resides in Sendai City and is a dedicated craftsman at the Sendai Castle Honmaru Kaikan. His Kokeshi are painted with water-based dyes and typically Mizuki wood is used to create his Kokeshi.



# koinobori



## YASUSHI FUKUSHIMA (1947-)



### Description:

Koinobori, also known as Carp Streamers, can be seen adorning numerous establishments and residences across Japan. This practice is particularly prominent during *Tango no sekku*, a customary celebration that has been officially recognized as Children's Day, a National Holiday.

The Diorama showcases an exquisite arrangement featuring shrubbery and three windsocks designed with carp motifs mounted on a pole. Additionally, the two components affixed to the semi-circular segment of the pole transform into spinning tops, complemented by another golden ornamental Koma on top.

# Hiroi Michiaki

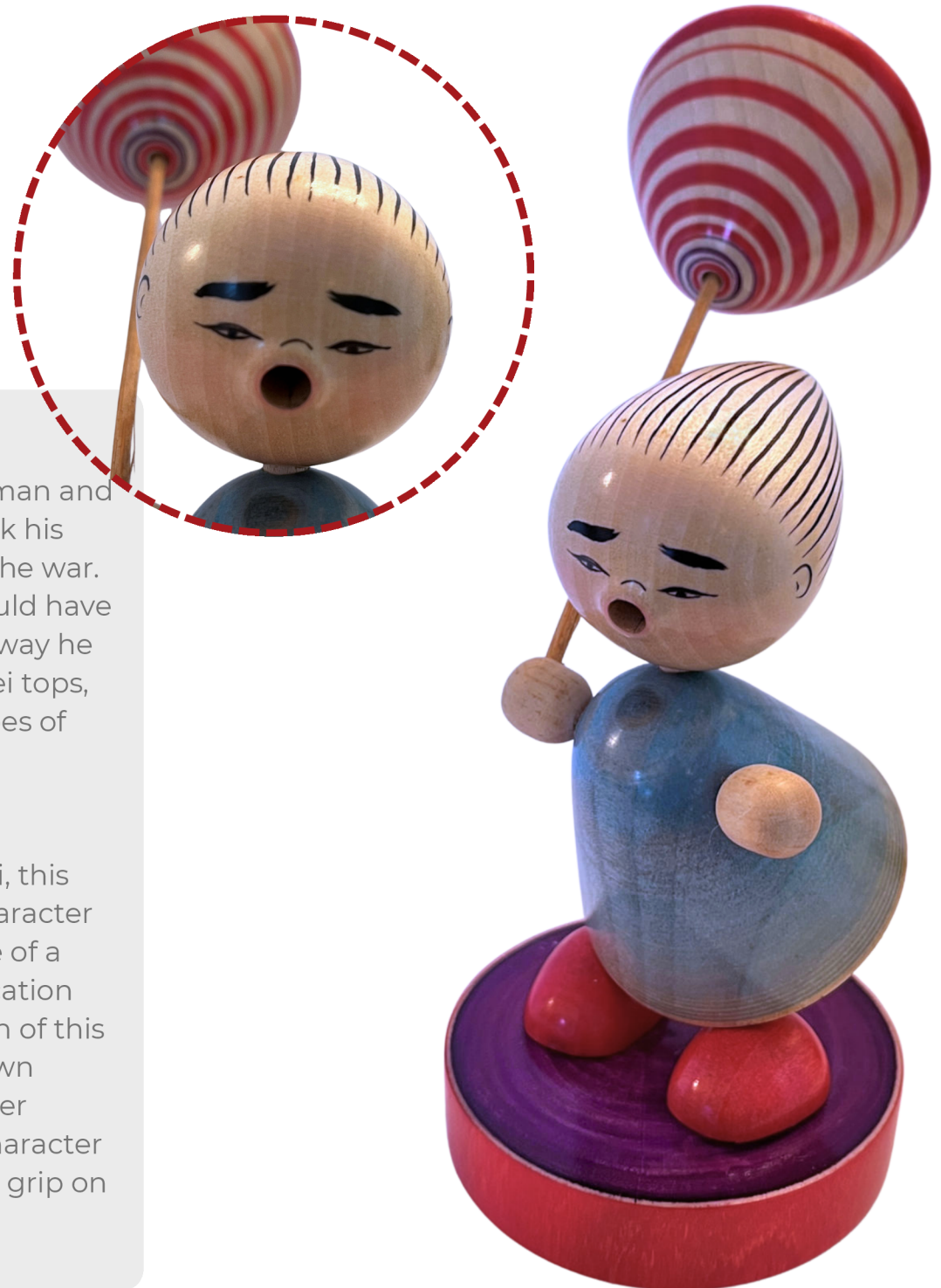
Strain	Tōgatta, YOB (1933-2020)
Maker	Hiroi Michiaki (ひろいみちあき)
Master	Hiroi Kenjiro (Father)
Theme	Sake Cup
Material	Wood
Comment	

## About the Kijishi:

Michiaki Hiroi (1935~2019) was a 4th generation craftsman and one of the two Hiroi toy-making brothers. Tragedy took his mother, young brother and many classmates during the war. He chose to honor them by doing something that would have made them happy. He made Koma (tops), and in this way he could remember their smiling faces. With his Kyokugei tops, he revitalized the art, and made over 3,000 unique types of tops during his lifetime.

## Description:

Made by the famous Kokeshi toy maker, Hiroi Michiaki, this spinning toy is titled "sake cup" because it shows a character gripping onto an upside-down umbrella in the middle of a powerful typhoon. The facial expression is a clear indication that the wind has picked up! The name and the design of this toy create a clever play on words, since the upside-down umbrella resembles a sake cup (ochoko) and will gather rainwater that resembles sake. As the toy spins, the character appears to be flailing around, as if trying to maintain a grip on the umbrella in the midst of strong gusts of wind.



## Hiroi Michiaki

**Title:** Kappa Cucumber Chase

**Description:**

This creative toy is sure to make you smile. Give the top a spin and watch as the Kappa twirls around, teasing fellow companions with a cucumber! Each Kappa is linked to a lucky gourd, hoping to snag that tasty treat!



## Hara Shigematsu



### About the Kijishi:

Hara Shigematsu was an independent artisan who specialized in crafting Edo-style toys in Tokyo, Japan. He gained international recognition by participating in events at various department stores across Japan and serving as a cultural ambassador for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representing Japan in countries worldwide. Starting in 1955, he conducted classes on top and pottery making. He passed away in 2010.

His spinning tops are famous for their vibrant colors and imagination. His works are highly regarded within traditional crafts organizations, and they are permanently showcased in museums in Boston, Chicago, and various other cities.

### Description:

Rotate the bright red Koma to initiate the nurturing act of the female bluebird as she feeds her offspring perched in a tree hollow.



Strain	Tsugaru, YOB (1947-)
Maker	Kitayama Moriharu (きたやまもりはる)
Master	Yamaya Kiyo
Theme	Neputa Kite Flying
Material	Wood
Comment	

Kitayama-san is renowned for his skill in crafting Kokeshi dolls, as well as for his artistry in producing Neputa lanterns for Aomori's annual festival. Here his skills for both are combined into this wonderfully crafted pull toy.

The image of Neputa is depicted on the kite flown by the boy and the pull toy is designed so that when the string is pulled, the upper body sways up and down, creating the illusion of the kite flying above and behind him as he speeds around in his wheels.

## Kitayama Moriharu





## Hiroi Masaaki



### Description:

Here are two popular designs made by Hiroi Masaaki, the younger brother of Michiaki-san. He was born in 1935 and also learned Kokeshi toy-making from his father Hiroi Kenjiro. He died in 2019.

First we have a dango-eating Kokeshi. Spin the top and the Kokeshi lifts the dango (dumpling) from the plate and opens its mouth.

Last, we have a singing and Shamisen-playing Kokeshi.

# Hayasaka Toshinari

Strain	Narugo, YOB (1960-)
Maker	Hayasaka Toshinari (はやさかとしなり)
Master	Hayasaka Takashi
Theme	Holiday Tree Tops
Material	Wood
Comment	

Hayasaka Toshinari is skilled in operating a foot-operated lathe and occasionally showcases his expertise at the Naruko Kokeshi Festival and the Koganji Demonstration and Exhibition Hall in Sugamo, Tokyo.

This holiday tree is brightly painted in green with floral decorations. A wood curling and tucking technique was used on the rim of each of the four Koma sections of the tree.



January: New Year



February: Ume & Bush warbler



March: Hina Matsuri



April: Sakura Viewing



May: Carp Streamers



June: Frog & Hydrangeas



July: Teru Teru Bozu



August: Summer Veggies



September: Raccoon Moon Viewing



October: Mushrooms



November: Mum & Mandarin



December: Christmas



**Matsuda Tadao**  
Tree Full of Tops



**Kamdada Takashi**  
Year of the Dragon



**Hayasaka Toshinari**  
Year of the Dragon



**Kamdada Takashi**  
Chasing Top



## Hiroi Michiaki

### Description:

A Kijishi is selling a range of Koma. Each one can be taken off the stand and is a real Koma that can be played with.



# FOLK ART: EXPLORING THE WOODEN TOYS OF JAPAN



Nakanosawa  
Den-den daiko