

K O K E S H I T R E N D S

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Special Issue 2



FOLK ART: “WOODEN” YOU LIKE TO GO FOR A RIDE?

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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. Popular toys like **Koma** (tops), **rūretto-koma** (roulette/fortune games), **ningyō** (dolls), and miniature replicas of real-life figures and objects exemplify the exquisite craftsmanship and artistry of Japanese toy makers. These toy makers are called **kijishi**, **kijiya** or **rokuro-shi** (wood turner/worker).

This is the second installment of this series, where we will explore transportation-themed toys. The first was [Folk Art: Exploring the Wooden Toys of Japan](#).


Founding Editor

ABE TSUNEKICHI

Strain	Zaō, YOB (1904-1991)
Maker	Abe Tsunekichi (あべつねきち)
Master	Abe Tsunematsu
Theme	Military Horse Rider
Material	Wood



Description:

Japanese military history has involved horses for over a thousand years. The samurai were the dominant class of warriors, riding horses into war during that time.

The horses were used as both draft animals and weapons of war, and samurai were the only class allowed to ride horses into battle. Samurai were skilled in mounted combat and archery, and used horses to charge into enemy lines. Their horses were highly valued.

The artisan's interpretation of a Military Samurai on his horse captures the fierce and strong look of the samurai, along with his trusted steed.

HAYASHI JUKICHI

Strain	Yajirō, YOB (1920-1999)
Maker	Hayashi Jukichi (はやしじゅうきち)
Master	Ishii Sake & Sato Denki
Theme	Horse Rider
Material	Wood



Description:

The horse rider features a striking yellow paint base with a prominent chrysanthemum on the chest and intricate red and purple lathe-drawn lines. The facial design elements exhibit a strong Yajirō strain feel, with janome head circles, scalloped bangs, and side tufts of hair. The horse itself boasts bold red and purple colors, with wheels incorporating all the colors used, to create a seamless flow of color throughout the artwork.





SATO TAKESHI

Strain	Tōgatta, YOB (1945-)
Maker	Sato Takeshi (さとうたけし)
Master	Sato Takeo
Theme	Horse Rider
Material	Wood, Natural Dyes

Description:

Sato Takeshi was taught the art of Kokeshi making by his father, Sato Takeo. He started his training in 1963 and by 1975 he was already crafting Kokeshi dolls under his own name. He inherited the unique "Akiu" style of Tōgatta Kokeshi from his father. In addition to making traditional dolls, he also ventured into creating toys and partnered with [Shimanuki](#) retail store to produce mini-Kokeshi dolls packaged in small cans, which quickly gained popularity as souvenirs.





TSUTA FUMIO

正ちゃん-馬

Description:

These horse riders are by the Tsuta Family. The top one, made by Fumio-san, is a more modern version, while the one pictured on the right (unsigned) is an older model called "Masa-Chan". Both feature beautiful vibrant colors which would appeal to children.





TSUTA FUMIO

TRAINS

Description:

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

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

TRAIN FULL OF TOYS

Description:

This special train features a conductor and a smokestack that also doubles as a Kendama. Additionally, the sand and steam domes can be used as Koma (toy tops), offering endless hours of entertainment.

Kendama



SEYA KOJI

Strain	Nakanosawa, YOB (1952-)
Maker	Seya Koji (せやこうじ)
Master	Seya Shigeharu
Theme	Locomotive
Material	Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)

Description:

The larger locomotive pulls a smaller caboose. Both show signs of aging. However, the rokuro moyō (lathe drawn lines) in red and green are still visible. Camellia buds can be seen on the caboose as a decorative element.



JRPass Ltd.



UNSIGNED



Starting from their debut in 1872, steam locomotives were crucial in Japan's advancement during the modern era. The railway system expanded rapidly, leading to a nationwide network that was taken over by the government in 1906.

Japan eventually started manufacturing its own steam engines, such as the JNR Class D51. The steam engine was retired from normal operations in 1969.

Japanese National Railways (JNR) was privatized in 1987 and divided into six passenger companies and one freight company.

OIZUMI KIYOMI

Strain	Yajirō, YOB (1936 - 1980)
Maker	Oizumi Kiyomi (おおいずみきよみ)
Master	Honda Kametoshi
Theme	Trains, Ejiko O-bunko
Material	Wood, Natural Dyes
Description	

This exquisitely-designed train showcases an Ejiko O-bunko (open-basket) character serving as its conductor. For added enjoyment it contains four mini-Koma hidden inside its chunky body. The steam and sand domes are also Koma, ensuring hours of entertaining playtime.



FUN WITH TRAINS



TSUTA FUMIO

HELICOPTER PILOTS

Strain

Yajirō, YOB (1944-)

Maker

Tsuta Fumio (つたふみお)

Master

Tsuta Mamoru

Theme

Helicopter pilot

Material

Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)



Description:

Helicopter pilots are truly fascinating. With each one donning a unique color helmet and sunshades, they exude a certain charm that is hard to resist. The propellers whirring as the helicopter takes off, the pilot appears to relish every moment of the ride!





KATSUNORI YOSHIDA

KOKESHI AIRPLANE

Strain	Narugo, YOB (1954-)
Maker	Katsunori Yoshida (よしだかつのり)
Master	Sakurai Shoji
Theme	Kokeshi Airplane
Material	Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)

Description:

Originally launched in 2015 as a promotional item for the Sky Journey Sendai Marketing campaign, the plane was intended to be a raffle prize. Surprisingly, it gained immense popularity, leading to the production of more airplanes. Customers had to wait as long as one year to receive their orders!





Description:

After spotting a similar airplane on a popular auction site, I decided to contact the store manager who collaborated with the artisan to inquire about placing an order. The manager kindly reached out to the artisan to ask about the possibility of fulfilling my order, and to my delight, the artisan agreed!

Feeling emboldened, I decided to take it a step further by requesting a removable mini-pilot to be placed on top of the plane. The manager posed several clarifying questions to confirm their understanding of the request before passing the information, along with a straightforward diagram, to Niyama-san. He confirmed that he could create the requested design and several weeks later, the customized airplane arrived as promised!

NIYAMA MINORU KOKESHI AIRPLANE

Strain	Yajirō, YOB (1956-)
Maker	Niyama Minoru (にいやまみのる)
Master	Niyama Manabu & Hiroi Michiaki
Theme	Kokeshi Airplane
Material	Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)

Bold colors were used in the creation of this beautiful airplane. All the standard design elements are present for this strain; the circular head pattern (janome), scalloped bangs, kimono v-neck and dragonfly-like mum flowers.



Re-ment Antique shop



UNSIGNED CAR & DRIVER

Description:

Numerous craftsmen made unique cars and drivers, but unfortunately, they frequently neglected to sign their creations. Upon closer research, it appears that buyers would often purchase the toys directly from the artist at an event, making signatures unnecessary. Occasionally, collectors would write down information on the toy's bottom to ensure they remembered the details.





**KOKESHI
LET'S GO FOR
A RIDE!**



Description:

The signature is absent on this piece. However, the facial expression and design elements suggest a possible connection to the Kobayashi family. The color scheme, floral motifs, and overall aesthetic are reminiscent of their distinctive style.

The intricate details of the front-facing headlight, steering wheel, and seats, complete with an empty spot for a companion, add a charming touch to this piece. It conveys a sense of readiness for a joyous journey on the road, with space for a friend to tag along.





SEYA KOJI

VW BEETLE RIDE

Strain	Nakanosawa, YOB (1952-)
Maker	Seya Koji (せやこうじ)
Master	Seya Shigeharu
Theme	Volkswagen (VW) Beetle Ride
Material	Wood, Mizuki (Dogwood)

Description:

It was a delightful surprise to come across this VW Beetle, especially knowing it was crafted by Nakanosawa artisan Seya Koji. Seya-san acquired the art of Kokeshi making from his father "Seya Shigeharu" in 1972. His father, learned from founder and master, Iwamoto Zenkichi. Koji-san started creating Kokeshi for the public in 1973 and continued until 2002, when his health declined. After recovering in 2014, he began sharing his knowledge of Kokeshi making. By 2017, he had taken on an apprentice and expanded his teaching to more individuals.



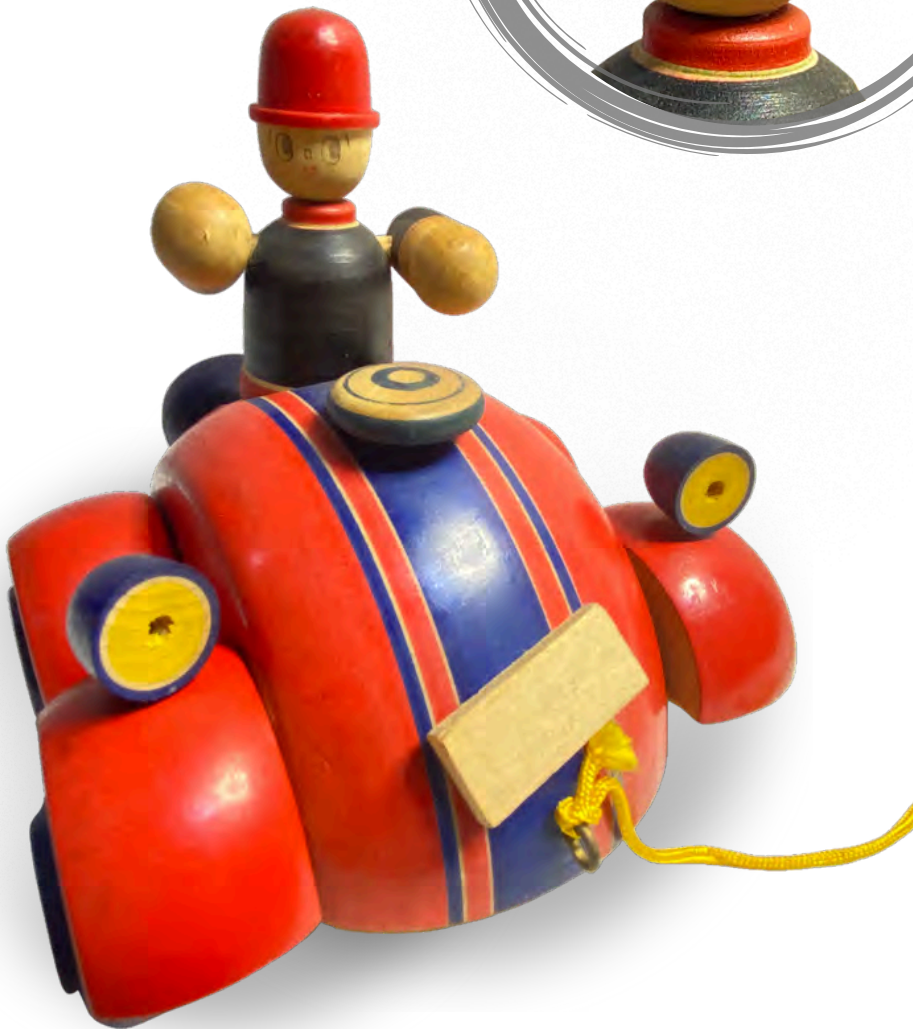
TSUTA FUMIO

Me & My VW Beetle

Description:

Tsuta Fumio, a Yajirō strain artisan, fashioned a toy modeled after the Volkswagen Beetle, known as "The People's Car." The car had been designed by Dr. Ferdinand Porsche and was manufactured from 1937 until 2019. Its popularity soared, thanks to its low cost, with sales exceeding one million units annually during its peak.

As the car is pulled, the driver looks from side to side.



KOMA DELIVERY TRUCK

Description:

This truck driver has a load full of Koma! Each Koma is delightfully painted and two are fashioned after fruit, an eggplant and a peach. The two large headlights are also Koma. A great toy to keep children entertained for hours of play.



KUSAKA HIDEYUKI

Description:

Yotsuguruma (四つ車) literally translates to four-wheel car or wari-sha (割り車) split car. Some references refer to these toys as a bicycle.

In 2009, Kusaka Hideyuki, a former civil engineer, discovered an advertisement for the "Traditional Kokeshi Craftsman Successor Development Project" in Zao Town, Miyagi Prefecture. He applied and was accepted to join the project. He spent 3 years learning the art of Kokeshi making. After that, he became an apprentice to Sato Tetsuro and eventually became a skilled craftsman.

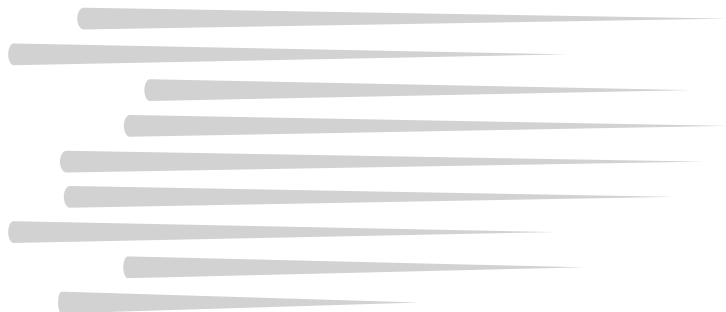


Strain	Tōgatta, YOB (1977-)
Maker	Kusaka Hideyuki (くさかひでゆき)
Master	Sato Tetsuro
Theme	Bicycle Rides
Material	Wood, Natural Dyes

Unsigned



Born to Ride



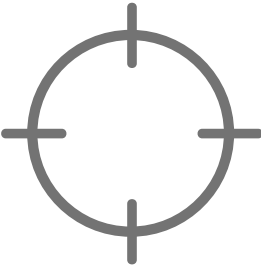
Production: Nekokeshi by Wataru Kato
Location: Sakata, Yamagata
Title of Work: The Rider
Type: Sōsaku
Material: Hinoki wood, water-based pigment

Description:
Wood-turned Neko (cat) figure with a red scarf blowing in the wind. This kitty loves to ride his motorcycle.

The motorcycle consists of various laser-cut wood pieces that are layered to create the required thickness for kitty to sit right in. Hand-painted, each one is uniquely made.



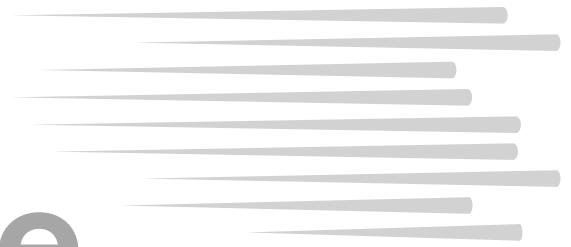
Cannon Toy



Description:

Take one of the cannon bullets from the set of four on top of the cannon and place it into the front opening. Aim, pull the lever at the back, and let go! Watch as the cannon bullet flies off - the real question is, did you hit your target?

Ready Aim Fire



Description:

This Kokeshi toy is unsigned. Most of these toys date back to the late 1950's.

He looks laser-focused on finding his target. Wearing a protective hat and a striped body pattern, he's ready to bring his A-game!

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