

Encounters with Okinawan Dyeing and Weaving: How it All Started

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After 21 years of waiting, Sachiko Arakaki's great achievement has been recognized and she has been awarded the title of Living National Treasure. I would like to join all of you in congratulating her from the bottom of my heart.

My collection of works with dyeing and weaving began with a chance encounter at Sachiko Arakaki's "2nd Solo Exhibition" held at Wako, Ginza, Tokyo in June 2003. The exhibited works were composed of innovative and exquisite weavings with vivid colors that rewrote the traditional image of Yaeyama *jofu*. I was deeply moved by the fact that the textiles were born from the history and climate of Yaeyama. Later, when I returned to Ishigaki, I visited Arakaki's studio and was shown a sample book. This was the beginning of my collection of dyed textile works in Okinawa, and I would like to introduce the details of the collection and donation of all 116 works, including 26 works by Mr. Arakaki (14 kimonos, 7 *obis*, 5 curtains, etc.).

In January 2019, I donated to the Ishigaki City Yaeyama Museum a representative work by Keisuke Serizawa (certified as a living national treasure in 1956), "Iroha-patterned Six-panel Folding Screen," four framed *bingata* works by Eiki Shiroma, and 25 pieces of pottery by Kiyohisa Kuniyoshi. In May of the same year, on the occasion of the "Retrospective Exhibition of Kiyohisa Kuniyoshi 20 years after his death," the Director of Education and curators requested the donation of *bingata* works by Yuko Tamanaha, an honorary citizen of Ishigaki City. Mr. Tamanaha was designated a Living National Treasure in 1996 at the young age of 60, and his works have been purchased twice by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and are in the collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, among others. Overwhelmed by his original works composed of a variety of techniques, including delicate and precise double-sided dyeing, I was convinced that he was the one and only *bingata* artist, and was able to acquire 46 pieces (23 kimonos, 20 *obis*, and 3 others), including 3 double-sided dyed pieces considered his masterpieces. I then focused on the works of Yoshitaro Kamakura, Eiki Shiroma, and Reiko Fujimura, all of whom have deep ties to Yaeyama, and further broadened our scope to include the works of four living national treasure weavers.

Eiki Shiroma lived in Ishigaki for seven years from the age of 13 to 20, experiencing a very difficult life. Later, Mr. Shiroma devoted himself to the postwar revival of *bingata* and became a central figure in it.

I was very eager to acquire Shiroma's works, and was fortunate to be able to obtain 10 pieces, including stage curtains and *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono). The expensive stage curtain was strongly recommended by Mr. Yoshihiro Hanashiro, former chairman of the Okinawa Churashima Foundation, who said, "You will never see this work again, get it even if you have to give up other works."

The two double-sided dyed works, which are considered family heirlooms of the Tamanaha family, were initially difficult to obtain, but their son, Yukatsu, emphasized the significance of having them in the Yaeyama Museum, his father's hometown, and spent two years persuading his parents to let me purchase them. I am convinced that the stage curtain and the double-sided dyeing will become the greatest treasures of the Ishigaki City Yaeyama Museum & Art Museum.

Mr. Yoshitaro Kamakura (certified as a Living National Treasure in 1973), who left behind a vast amount of research on Ryukyuan history, culture, and art, was the first honorary citizen of Ishigaki City. From 1975 to 1982, Mr. Kamakura donated art and craft materials, such as Yaeyama Kuramoto Eshi Manuscripts and illustrations, to the Ishigaki City Yaeyama Museum.

The “Yaeyama Kuramoto Eshi Gakou”, which was later recognized as an important cultural property, vividly depicts rituals, people making tribute cloth, and foreigners, and is a valuable asset for understanding the customs and folklore of Yaeyama. I was able to acquire five of Mr. Kamakura's stencil-dyed *obi*.

As for the works of Reiko Fujimura, who has a deep connection with Yaeyama, I was able to acquire three kimonos and two *obis*, including a dance costume. In his book “Ryukyu Cloth Travels,” nonfiction writer Hisae Sawachi praises her works, saying, “Her *bingata* works will not fade away even after a hundred years of time.

As for the works of living national treasure weavers, I decided to acquire 12 works of *bashofu* by Toshiko Taira (6 kimonos and 6 *obis*), 4 works of Shuri textile by Hatsuko Miyahira (3 kimonos and 1 *obi*), and 1 *obi* of Yomiyama *hanaori* by Sada Yonamine.

In July 2023, the Shuri weaver Kyoko Shukumine was recognized as a Living National Treasure. Her works are full of tradition and creativity, and her refined sense of color and novelty bring new life to traditional Okinawan dyeing and weaving. I visited the Shukumine Textile Research Institute and was able to obtain five of her works, including a reproduction of the Berliner material. I also acquired four other works, including a Yonaguni flower weaving.

It is deeply moving to be able to show seven living national treasures and two artists designated as prefectural intangible cultural assets in one place at this exhibition.

Through the 21 years of collecting textile dyeing and weaving in Okinawa, I have reaffirmed that Okinawa has always been, and still is, a dyeing and weaving kingdom. In order to further revitalize the dyeing and weaving industry in Okinawa and to promote the dyeing and weaving culture to the rest of the world, I hope that Mr. Tamanaha, Mr. Shukumine, and Mr. Aragaki will be followed by more Living National Treasures.

All 119 works mentioned above were collected mainly by artists who are closely related to Yaeyama. These will be donated to Ishigaki City, and we are all eagerly awaiting the early

realization of the new Ishigaki City Yaeyama Museum and Art Museum. I would like to continue collecting so that the new museum will be a treasury of contemporary Okinawan dyeing and weaving.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Ishigaki City and the Ishigaki City Board of Education for hosting this exhibition, to the Okinawa Churashima Foundation for co-sponsoring the exhibition, and to the related organizations and experts in various fields for their support.