

Annex

# Traditional Crafts in Japan

## Interviews and Visits

by Kythzia Barrera Suárez

Interview with Professor Haruhiko Fujita, Ph. D. M. Arch  
General Director of the Encyclopedia of Asian Design  
Professor, Osaka University Graduate School of Letters  
Coordinator of the International Institute of Asian Studies  
Author of several books about Arts and Crafts

From: [1050grados@gmail.com](mailto:1050grados@gmail.com)  
Subject: sumimasen...  
Date: Sat, 8 Oct 2011 14:20:22 +0900  
To: [haruhiko.fujita@hotmail.com](mailto:haruhiko.fujita@hotmail.com)

Dear Fujita Sensei,

I hope I am not abusing of your kindness... but I would like to ask you a few questions... if you have time, It would be very nice to have your opinion, as an interview, to finish my research. No one better than you to talk about Mingei Kan in Japan!  
We already talk briefly about some of this themes, but if there is something else you want to clarify, I will appreciate your opinion

Dear Kythzia,

I'll answer after >>>

Interview

1. Do you think about crafts industry development/history in Japan? Do you think is a good situation right now?  
>>>Right now, we are not in a good situation. Cheap crafts from abroad badly affected Japanese crafts.

2. When was the best moment for traditional crafts in Japan and what were the conditions to be so?  
>>>Before the Second World War. Although we are still keeping an excellent level of traditional crafts, the future of crafts is uncertain.

3. What do you think are the key moments for the development of Mingei kan in Japan during Edo and Meiji?  
>>>Mingei kan was started in 1936. There was no Mingei kan in Meiji and of course Edo period.

4. what has been key factors for traditional crafts development? In contemporary times... not Meiji but more Showa period.  
>>>The traditional crafts are not being developed in contemporary times. There are small numbers of the supporter of crafts. The study of Mingei Movement and/or Yanagi Muneyoshi is slowly increasing at some universities.

5. How do you see the future for traditional crafts in Japan?  
>>>The future for traditional crafts in Japan is uncertain.  
Crafts will never disappear in Japan.  
But, there will be no such a high expectation in crafts neither among general citizen.

I hope my answer is helpful.

With best wishes,

Haruhiko Fujita

From: [1050grados@gmail.com](mailto:1050grados@gmail.com)  
Subject: Re: sumimasen...  
Date: Sun, 9 Oct 2011 09:55:00 +0900  
To: [haruhiko.fujita@hotmail.com](mailto:haruhiko.fujita@hotmail.com)

Dear Fujita Sensei,  
Thank you very much for your kind reply. Let me ask you again... to clarify my view on Crafts.

Dear Kythzia,  
Again, after >>> is my answer,

2. The best moment for traditional crafts was before Second world war, why was that?  
>>> Well, I'm sorry I was not clear. Or, it is difficult to answer in e-mail.  
1930s and 1940s were a fresh years of the Mingei movement which was just born. So, I answered like that.  
After the Second World War, there was a new stage development in the Mingei movement and crafts in general.  
But, these years were Japan's Rapid Economical Development. Not only crafts but also almost everything were very very active.

3. What were the key moments for Mingei kan development, from its start in 1936 to nowadays? Do you think now there is Mingei Kan effects? can you give an example?  
>>> Answer is as I wrote above. We have many Mingei-kan's all over Japan. Which is a Mingei Kan effect.  
But, it is very important that Mingei movement is just one movement among many other craft movement or craft exhibitions in Japan.

5. Why do you think there will be not much expectation about crafts in the general citizen?  
>>> It is my anxiety as well.  
I think the number of young people *spacializing* crafts is slowly decreasing.  
Young generations are less capable of making things by hands.  
For young generations, *manupulation of computors* or smart-phone is perhaps more important than *manupulation* of law materials.  
It is a big problem. But, they seem to be moving towards that direction.  
>>> As I mentioned before, 'cheap craft imports' are major reasons of the lowering image of crafts.  
At 100 Yen Shop, people can buy for example a pot, dish, *fabrics*, etc.  
20-30 years ago, these craft products were very bad in quality and design.  
But, in these years, China or Asian craft producers are gradually learning what is modern taste.  
Above all, probably Japanese import company are giving advices to these China or Asian craft producers what kind of shape oe design attracts Japanese or Western consumers with more modern or artistic taste.  
20-30 years ago, we had to pay 2,000-3,000 JPY to buy a good-design crafts.  
Nowadays, we may be able to buy something similar by 200-300 JPY because of the *above-mentined situation*.  
Which is not perfectly ideal good-design craft but quasi-good-design craft.

Design specialists or people with refined taste can detect it.  
But, the general citizen cannot see the difference.  
Even they notice the difference, many of them may compromise.  
If they can buy a quasi-good-design craft with 300 JPY, they may not like to spend 3,000 JPY for an ideal good-design craft.  
Like this, the general citizen's judgment is lowering, badly affected by an economical judgment instead of aesthetic judgement.  
We need a better design/craft *edication* for future-specialists and for future-consumers.

Best wishes,

Haruhiko

I met Professor Fujita Haruhiko in Mexico City together with Victor Margolis at a Symposium to celebrate the 50 years anniversary of the School of Design at UNAM where he gave a lecture on Japanese Design and Crafts Movement. When I came to Japan I contact him, due to the terrible earthquake events, we could meet until later this year. We spoke first via email then we met and speak about Mingei Kan Movement. Later on he invited me to give a lecture at the International Institute of Asian Studies at Nara. It was a very important person to talk to during my stay in Japan. I am very happy I had the opportunity to meet such a wise person and hope he can come to Mexico again and visit Oaxaca city.

## Interview with Haruhide Yoshida

President GK Kyoto  
Design and Planning

GK Kyoto Meeting Room, Thursday 08 Sept 2011.

I met Yoshida san in July at a visit to GK Kyoto together with Yamamoto Sensei, to which I was 15 mins late! Sumimasen! GK is the most important and big design office in Japan. They have offices in America, China and Japan. Later on I had to write him like 3 times to get another appointment. It was very nice, informal and interesting two and a half hour conversation that blow up my mind with inspiration and happiness. This is only an extract of that wonderful chat.

k: What do you think about crafts industry development in Japan?

Y: Uy! Mutsukashi desu! Difficult question! Are all your questions so difficult?... Some techniques are doing good, Ceramics. Some others not so good. Kimono or Gold. Each craft is different situation. Kawashima is a good example of how crafts had to change, shift for success. They were doing kimonos, now they are doing car textiles and obi. Totally different! It is the only way to survive for crafts. Gold for example, will disappear. That's the overall situation.

But... *another point of view* is that they could mix and combine techniques in order to survive... Join forces! join strengths, materials, use and functions! For that they can also join with another "media"/ "medium". Crafts has to find another "medium" not only traditional product in order to *breakthrough the barrier* of concepts like modern/traditional. For example: I have a hobby project that later on became a real project, the mobile phones with lacquer applications and also the Yamaha motorbike with lacquer applications, small and exclusive products. that's what I mean when I say crafts has to change medium... join forces with technology. Now we are trying to develop a product with Yamaha to apply Urushi, Kimono and Shodo techniques in the water motorbike. We will register all the process and make a book!

To change the medium I have an idea in my mind... I will draw it for you, it is easy for me to explain with drawing... Mix a material with a different technique to get interesting results to discover a different medium... For example: scan paper...

Communication is very important... Newspapers, Magazines. I mean communication to inform the people, the normal citizen. Even communication within your group at your own traditional craft workshop... For example. In a Urushi company, the owner and president of the company develop a newspaper to communicate to his employees the new ideas, the new mindset needed to make Urushi able to survive in the modern Japan. The message he wanted to pass through his employees was: Urushi is not something from the past, it can be applied in a modern way, for example Yamaha motorbike! The employees love it!

k: What have been key factors for craft industry development in modern history?

Y: Don't know about it too much but in general, in Kyoto, government had been promoting the city very much through the development of Crafts, Traditional Crafts. But Kyoto has much more to offer like high technology companies which nobody knows... so maybe the *mixture* of both may result interesting. There is also a lot of companies in Kyoto SMEs interesting companies to collaborate with for crafts industry. The government needs to support those SMEs and be more intelligent about their strategy to support crafts.

K: Why are you interested in Crafts?

Y: ah! That's an easy question, finally! I was already sweating!!!... Because I was born in Kyoto, I live here, I am a designer, and I see a lot of potential because there is a variety of techniques and materials. The size of the city is very good for collaborations between people and university and crafts and technology and city government... Because those are Fun Projects! The mindset of Kyotonian people is different from Tokyo or Osaka. Over there nobody is interested in Fun Projects, nor in collaborations. Or it is difficult to make them happen, because it is a big city, difficult to move, difficult to change, nobody has time... you know...

K: Would you like to come to Mexico to make a Fun Project!?

Y: Mexico!? Sugoi desu! demo... Chooooto!! I don't know anything about Mexico, and the work you do is very difficult! I don't know if I can help you!... It depends... if it is an interesting theme I might go.

K: So, then let's think together, now, what could be an interesting theme.

Y: Ha! Good push! ...ok! Aaato de... Tools for the bathroom, transports with bamboo, 3 materials combined, children...

K: You see, it is very easy to have Fun Projects with you! I will bring you down to Mexico, promised! Arigato Gozaimasu!

Umebara Design Office  
President at Umebara Design  
Kochi Prefecture,

3th of August 2011

Me and Diego at Umebara San office... totally dizzy and confused after an 8 hours trip... coffee, water, sit down... start!

U: So... What brings you all the way here?

D: You!!!

U: Ha! Why!?

K: We saw you in a magazine, AXIS, and we were inspired by your work. We would like to know more about it. so...

Do you choose your projects? What kind of projects do you choose?

U: At the beginning not so much, but now, I choose the projects. I choose according to peoples, kokoro... spirit, energy. They come here, like you, talk to me, explain the situation and then I see if they have the right kokoro.

K: What`s the right Kokoro? how does it look? or how does it feel?

U: They need to have strength and resistance, but flexible. These kind of projects are difficult, very difficult, take time... no money. That`s another thing... I choose the projects where there is no money! haaaaahahaha! That`s my favorite clients!

K: So, then, how do you pay the bills of this beautiful office?

U: Well, it is a small office. I live in the same property, my house is upstairs! I sell fish in the corner... But the strategy is simple, Do not compromise yourself into something you don`t believe in. The past project pays today`s bills. You should not try to pay today`s bills with today`s project. It never works out well. At the beginning there is no money from the project I am working on, but later on, 2 years later, there should be a *looot* of money! That`s the trick and the risk!... For example the Bonito project... first no money, we start working. Then we stop, and the guy came back 1 year later. We start again and 2 years later it was a 2 million yen business! Today, we are designing the label to export, in English!!

K: Sugoi deshio! demo...? Sounds great, but how do you do that?

U: You need to get involved with the place and with the people. but you need to keep a fair distance with the project, so you can look at it objectively. You should look at it as a business. But you need to believe in the people you are working for and they need to trust you. You have to build up that trust, and the best way is to go and live there, with them and understand the situation. For the project of green tea, I lived there 5 years. For the bridge project also... For the 84 project... I was born in Kochi! so... I know the people, they know me... I made a plan and they follow it. Now we have a brand for Kochi Forest and Woods, every time somebody wants to use the brand, they have to pay me some money! jijij! smart, eh!

You have to be able to see what others don`t see, you have to be able to see potential in every single resource you encounter, even when there is "nothing", there is "everything"... because that is what it is... and you have to be able to transform a given situation. That`s our work as designers... isn`t it? so... That`s always fun. For example, the open gallery in the sea... When they came to see me, they said: *there is nothing here, we don`t know what to do?* So I went there, step in the beach and told them, *there is nothing here? There is space!! lots of space! lets make the biggest gallery in the world!!!* Then you have to make it work as a business, so... I invited many artists, which have to pay a fee to be part of the project and that`s how we finance the whole thing. that`s it!

K: And now the work doesn`t stop, eh?

U: Yes, now those people talk to other people, that talk to other people and now they call me from all over the country, Tomorrow I fly to Fukushima, Yesterday I was in Aichi. That`s how it goes... My girls help me a lot...

So... let`s go! Here is your hotel and a map of the city. Tomorrow see you at the Shrine, at 12pm. Afterwards, you come to have dinner with all the group and we will drink wine together! I invite you!

Born in Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture. He graduated from Economics, and then worked RKC Production, then quit and travel a little bit. He is a wired mixture between business man and artist, but he calls himself a designer. In 1980, established Umebara Design Office, which aims to utilize design for "revitalization of primary industries" In 1988, with a bonito fisherman of pole-and-line fishing, created "Ippon-zuri Warayaki-tataki (seared bonito, fished pole-and-line style and grilled with straw wrap,)" which in 8 years developed into a 2 billion industry. In 1989, worked as the producer of Seaside Gallery in Kuroshio-town (then Ogata-town), positioning the 4-km beach as a huge museum. Produced "Shimanto Newspaper Bag" in 2005, with the concept "to wrap every product in Shimanto River region in newspaper." The bags are also sold overseas. Based on the fact that "Kochi is the most forested prefecture in Japan with 84% forest coverage," started "Hachi-yon (84) Project" in August 4th, 2009, comparing Kochi to a CO2 absorbing machine. Always wishes to use design to conserve Japan's beautiful landscapes. To meet Umebara San was very important. He made a strong impression on me. He is simply amazing! His way of thinking is alive and full of energy. He is a very peculiar designer. He is my new hero. I wish there were more designers like him! I wish to become like him when I grow up! Ha!

Interview with Shigeki Sakamoto Sensei  
Craftsmen at Ontayaki Valley  
Hita Prefecture

Yamanosobachiaya Restaurant and Guesthouse, 1st of August 2011.

In a very casual way, after a long day visiting several workshops in the Ontayaki Village, I came back to my hotel and there he was: drinking beer, after a hard and long potter's working day. As soon as we enter to the restaurant he asked us:

S: who are you? what brought you all the way here? Not many foreigners come here!!! Welcome!!!

He was speaking in Japanese, demo 私はにほんごすこしはなします!

Lucky enough to me, there was a Japanese person in the restaurant that spoke a little bit of English. So, together with this kind person and my electronic dictionary we manage to communicate and drink sake while speaking about the all times. It was a wonderful afternoon! This is his story and opinion about Mingei Kan Movement.

K: We came to see Ontayaki ceramics tradition. We like ceramics and we were looking for you Sensei!

S: Oh no! no Sensei please... *suate kudasai, osake nomitaideska?*

S: How did you learned to make ceramics?

S: My father taught me how to make pottery. We were 10 brothers and he chose me, I am not the oldest, but I was the one who pick it up. Traditionally in Ontayaki Valley only one son can learn the technique because there is only two turning wheels in the workshop, one for the father and one for the next generation. They can only teach one person at a time. The rest of the family members have to help but will never sit in the turning wheel to receive the secrets and knowledge of the tradition. The girls will learn how to glaze, and move the pots. The mother will also help, but only one son, will be the next master.

K: Tell us about Bernard Leach and the rest....

S: Thanks to Mingei Kan Movement Ontayaki pottery is valued more than ever before. Hamada visited Onta quite often. Yanagi and Bernard Leach too. Yanagi powerful person!! They pushed us to inject more energy to our ceramics. Mr. Shigeki Sakamoto met Bernard Leach, he learned from him and work besides him. I am one of the few guys in Onta that had the chance to meet him that still alive. I was 17 years old when he came the first time in 1956. Then we came back when I was 35.

K: Do you think ceramics is doing well now a days in Japan?

S: I don't know about the rest of Japan, but I feel that Ontayaki ceramics is not so well appreciated because is very simple and they live far away. Nowadays people like complicated things and don't like to make efforts. Maybe we are not doing bad, but we could be better.

k: How do you find market for your production?

S: He receive phone calls from Tokyo, Osaka, Nagano or Kyoto. The shops call, we send by post. And people come here during the weekend to spend the day in the nature and stop by to buy a little present for their family or friends.

k: how often do you use the climbing kiln? who invented the water mill and when was it?

S: The mill? I dont know! It has always been here!! *jijij!* I think it arrived from China, around 16th century, but I am not sure. We use the kiln every 3 months, but we have to gather the production of 5 families in order to be able to use it. it is too big!

K: Do you buy the clay, or How do you make the clay? Do you prepare it yourself?

S: We dont buy the clay, we go and get it from the mountains over there....My clay was done and prepared by my grandfather. I dig the clay and prepare it for my grandsons. That's the tradition around here. otherwise we wouldn't be able to make ceramics. We have to think in the future generations and let them everything ready, just as I got it from my father.

Mr Shigeki is often interviewed for TV shows, newspapers and sometimes gives lectures at the Mingei Kan Museum in Tokyo. He is one of the most talented artisans in Onta, he has book about his life and has many things to share. Very humble man.

Interview with Omine Jimmei Sensei  
Ceramic artist and artisan at Yomitan  
Okinawa Prefecture, China Sea.

K: What do you think about Mingei kan development in Japan? and in Okinawa?

O: It is good that you make the distinction. It seems you are an intelligent person, an old soul. Please, let me ask you first: What do you think about Okinawa and Tsuboya ceramics?

K: oops! hm, hm!... okay... excuse me?...

O: Yes, What do you think about this place?

k: I think Okinawa is very strange. It is kind of ugly... beautifully interesting. To be honest I don't understand very well what's behind the surface. It is a very strange place, with mixtures of all sort of things, and the American side does not make things easier. I have a very strange feeling about this place, it is a feeling I had never experience before. A little bit familiar, but totally unknown at the same time. Tsuboya pottery I think is very commercial, but within commercial boundaries, I think is very good quality. It is pseudo-crafts. industrial but crafty. and very well done.

O: So!! you have a good eye. Yes, Nara has a horrible side. I will later try to explain your feeling. But now I will answer your question. Mingei Kan now a days is fashionable. That is good news but also not so good at the same time. The Mingei kan that Yanagi was interested in was different. He like some Mingei production, but not everything, he used to chose the special Mingei. Yanagi liked the no-name object, anonymous. I dont like Mingei kan now a days. It is a bit perverted.

k: Doshte anata wa tsukinaideska?

O: Yanagi came to Okinawa in 1936, to help development of Mingei kan here. But it was already too late. Mingei Kan in Okinawa had been destroyed by then and the beauty was finished. So please, do not think that you are looking to traditional ceramics here. What you are looking at here in Yomitan, is not traditional ceramics, is the leftover of traditional ceramics. It used to be great pottery here, but not anymore. Yanagi realized that it was already too late, when he came. The good Mingei in Okinawa as finished and he knew there was nothing to do about it. Meiji prohibited to Okinawa artisans to make their products with their traditional techniques. The government in Meiji Period, forced Okinawan people to become Japanese, but we were not Japanese, we are Okinawan. Meiji goverment forced them to use the techniques from Seto, and sent a lot of teacher to teach Setoyaki techniques to Okinawan artisans. Yanagi took some of the last pieces of original Okinawan techniques and now they are in the museums, but does not exist here anymore.

k: Let me rephrase my question...what do you think about ceramics in Japan now a days?

O: Ceramics in Japan is like nowhere else in the world. A privilege and a challenge for its artisans. There are 3 kind of ceramics in Japan. 1. The everyday object. 2. The artistic one of a kind sculpture. 3. The Tea Ceremony object. To be a good ceramist in Japan you need to be able to produce objects for each of them.

k: Why do you do what you do?

O: I was a high-school teacher before I decided to take ceramics as my path. I dont know... I just love it. When I became aware of the History of Okinawa I felt I just had to be a ceramist. The history of Okinawa is a mixture of Taiwan, Phillipines, Thailand, China and the North of Osaka, Japan. At some point, all these cultures merged here. It happened that there were a lot of ideas imported from China, Ming Dynasty, 14th Century. The merchants from China came to make business at Okinawa, at that time Ryuku kingdom. Ryuku grew up and evolved in the south part of Okinawa. It is said that it was the land of hospitality, and you can still feel it is truly like that. During the 14th to the 17th Century Riuku Kingdom developed. Kagoshima area and rulers realized it was an interesting place, Hideyoshi, the most important Japanese ruler realized about that fact, but he was already too old, he died and then Kagoshima invades Ryuku. Kagoshima takes over the control of Ryuku kingdom and this is the moment when China decides not to get involved with this land anymore. The economy crashes and Ryuku kingdom comes to an end. Then Okinawa starts as what we know now. In 1682 Tsuboya project and settlement starts in the center of Nara capital city. It was aiming to be an industrial ceramics production center, using Chinese techniques. Tsuboya starts producing their alcohol in ceramics bottles for overseas market, mainly China. It grows, and grows and grows again, until it reaches its peak moment and then down again. Meiji government prohibits Okinawa lifestyle and sends them to Kagoshima to study other technologies. Then World War II and by 1945 Tsuboya artisans could not make a living anymore from ceramic production... This is when I decide I have to become a ceramist, but not only everyday ceramics. I realized I have to aim for more, and with the time, I became a ceramist artist.

I saw the work of Omine Sensei in a gallery in Nara city, Okinawa capital. It was the most beautiful bowl I have ever hold before. It was pure beauty and Simply perfect: Precise shape, exact proportion, perfect weight, black, mate, with a strange "effect" green, red, yellow glaze color. It was as beautiful as the creation of the universe. When I hold it in my hands I could feel there was so much knowledge in the hands of its author and I ask the owner of the gallery: *Who made this bowl?* He look at me in the eyes, not common in Japan at all, and with a strange accomplice smile replied: *Ab! that one... is from Omine, he is the best around here!...* Next day I went to look for him and luckily enough I found him at his place at Yomitan, Okinawa.

Interview with Kotaro Nishibori san  
President of Hiyoshiya Co. Ltd.  
Kyoto city.

kyt: Hi kotaro san, thank you for receiving us and for your precious time. You must be very busy. We like very much Wagasa and Hiyoshiya Co. because it is an inspiration for the work we do in Mexico. We are in an important moment now because we need to make our project economically sustainable. Could you tell us about your experience? how was it in your case?

kot: Now a days we sell in 12 countries: Europe, USA and Asia. For the USA product we import some parts and assemble everything in Japan. So we like tradition, but tradition may change, I think that it is more important to preserve the skills than to stick to a material or shape. The tradition is the concept behind, and the continuity of the skills, not the object in itself. I would advice you to get the information that you need to get into market. If you want to sell in other countries, you need to develop products for the needs of those countries, potential needs, habits, rituals.

kyt: how did you get started into big business?

kot: First of all, I became an artisan, I got all the knowledge into my bones. I became a skillful wagasa maker. Then I build up the website and the online shop in 1998 to sell only wagasa/umbrellas. We didnt have new products yet. But only with the website and the shop we could see sales raising abruptly. When we launched the new product, the lamps, sales went up to the sky! You have to communicate that you are special shop. with special products. It doesnt matter if it is a small shop or a small product. If it is special people will come to look for you! But you should always remain special and unique. In that way, you will attract not very much people, 10% of the market, and your quality will stay always high. We don` t produce for ordinary market, but specialist market. Our strategy is to address a 10% of the market in many different countries.

kyt: Wakarimashta. So if you started with the website in 1998, When did you started with your new product?

ko: In 2005 we launched the new product. It took us 2 years for development. But we knew we needed to invest in a new product for diversification, the specialist market was asking for it. I had an idea of a lamp, then I made a research on the economical figures of the lamp industry and I saw interior design was a small part of the final bottom line, so then my intuition was confirmed: I could make a lamp and address the interior design small market with a specialist, high-end product.

kyt: is it selling well?

ko: It is going very well. Our income comes of 62% from umbrellas and 38% from lamps. We don` t pay the designers for the product development, but we give 5% of royalties as long as the product is in the market. It is an investment for both, them and us. And we always give the credits to the designers. We make a contract of commitment for sale in the long term. But most important than the contract is the personal agreement for unconditional trust.

kyt: What do you think about the recent trend on crafts? do you think is going to last long enough to stabilize into normality?

ko: I dont know, but we have to move slowly but with confident steps and consolidate ourselves. I think is a trend, and fashion that gives a lot of opportunities to many of us. I do believe there will be a shift of lifestyles and we are part of that shift. Designers are very interested in these techniques. Government is shifting to support traditional Japanese products, they now are thinking different on how to address international market and competitiveness with China.

kyt: how is the government supporting Crafts? Can you explain the strategy they are following?

ko: Their strategy started 10 years ago. They push up traditional industry by investing on it. They develop a program that you can apply for as a traditional artisan. if you can prove and pass their qualifications, then they will support you for export, money for exhibitions overseas, the first one we organize was in Paris, great success! We were 10 companies together in a small tiny booth! They created a brand, with a stamp for traditional crafts, like a certificate. You could do the same in Mexico. use your uniqueness as mexicans, you are quite sexy culture!

kyt: I want to make a project to involve Japanese expertise to come to Mexico and start a cultural and commercial exchange. We need you to help us, and we can offer you an interesting LA market. The 10% of LA is not a small quantity, it is very attractive!

ko: Yes, we could keep talking about it. It is interesting. You may invite designers and sale people. It is always great to invite people from outside to give input and look at crafts with different eyes. But you know... Mexico feels very far away for us. You need first to let Japanese people to be interested in Mexico, you need to show it to them first. Then you can show your products, your techniques. In the meantime you need to get information of Japan`s market. And adjust your product to it. Start today!

I met Kotaro san a few times before. This was the 3rd time I talked to him, so we went straight into "business". You can read more about his company in the previous document. Diego and Kotaro san, stayed talking hours and hours on that day. I had to go to University to another appointment. But it was the beginning of a very nice friendship and hopefully fruitful business relationship. We are very grateful with Kotaro san for his advice and for sharing time and experience with Innovating Tradition.

Visit to Matsumoto Sensei  
Wood Sculpture Artist  
Kyoto Prefecture

The visit to the workshop of Matsumoto Sensei, was very inspiring. I didn't make an interview, but I would like to make a brief summary of his words during the visit. His talent and wisdom made a deep impression on me.

Matsumoto Sensei:

...Any single human activity shall start with observation of nature. A sculptor of Budha may compromise 3 different trees, then apply the colors, then the blue glass eyes. The most difficult part is the face, because they shall be handsome, and the expression of the mouth. For the beauty of the overall piece the expression of the hands are very important. They shall be refined, humble and delicate. One has to include all the single details and put all your effort in details, they should be perfect, like humans are.

Japanese culture created the chop-sticks to eat. Their function is better than western cutlery. Japanese invented chopsticks to be more elegant and to eat with sophistication. We are a very sophisticated people. Japanese technology is admired all over the world. Budha sculpture should also be the best japanese creation.

The team work is what give us that possibility. We may fail if we do or stop doing something. The headmaster, sensei, has to develop the ability to supervise every single step. We should give instructions at every point to avoid failure, so that the overall result may be pure beauty. But we are a team, and the bell shall always sound beautiful no matter who rings it. That's the Japanese mentality

To be totally devoted to your work is very important. That was Budha's last teaching: be dedicated with joyful effort. By working hard, one can become big and strong, like a Budha. Budha shows me the way but I have to put the right motivation. If one improves himself as an individual, the whole country improves as well. If every individual shines, the whole nation shines. If a house lady shines by taking care of her children, the whole world shines. But to get the right motivation is very difficult. We have to make a big effort to find it. And even if the result is not good enough, you have to keep trying. Never loose the will to make your best effort, always, no matter what! Gambate!

Water Museum, Sayamaike, Osaka  
Architect Tadao Ando Lecture  
May 1st 2011

The lecture was in Japanese language. After it finished my dear friend Tako san translated his notes to us. Here is only list of what he shared with us. Although translation is very brief, Ando`s words are very precise and inspiring.

- Eco in architecture is important because it helps to recognize your presence, your humanity.
- Passion, to realize your work.
- Strength to be able to push things forward, to make them happen.
- Without a team, you cannot work.
- We need to recover the sense of community.
- We have to think on the benefit of others.
- We need to work less and share more.
- We need to build up individual identity, a personal development will lead to regional development.
- Every one of us here is responsible of his own life and death.
- Open your mind to small realities. Big ambitions through small achievements.
- Become a sensei. Master your skills. It is your duty as human being.
- Enthusiasm attracts people, inject enthusiasm to the people that surrounds you.
- The challenge of a good project is to enhance participation of as much people as possible.