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**JAPAN SOCIETY PRESENTS**

***BORO TEXTILES: SUSTAINABLE AESTHETICS***

Japanese folk textiles and the impact of this philosophy on contemporary creative practices

March 6 – June 14, 2020

Press Preview: March 4 at 9:30am



Images (L-R): *Tanzen* (padded oversized kimono). Photo by Kyoichi Tsuzuki. Courtesy of Amuse Museum, Chuzaburo Tanaka Collection; Susan Cianciolo, *Run 12: God is a Jacket*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Overduin & Co.

**New York, February 10, 2020**—Japan Society Gallery is pleased to present *Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics*, an exhibition that examines this traditional handicraft, its history of ingenuity, and its continued legacy within creative practices today.

For the first time in the United States, *Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics* assembles over 50 archival pieces from the extensive personal collection of folklorist and cultural anthropologist Chuzaburo Tanaka, alongside contemporary works by influential creators. Included are the pioneers of Japanese avant-garde fashion design, Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, Issey Miyake, and Yohji Yamamoto, who each explore the dynamic between tradition and transgression. Also on view are textile-based works by Susan Cianciolo and Christina Kim, part of a generation of artists whose work appreciates the aesthetics and ethics of mending and patchwork.

*Boro*, which translates as *rags* or *tatters*, is the Japanese term for textiles that have been patched, pieced, and mended. This traditional style, which originated in Japan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, grew out of necessity for survival in a harsh climate. The cold temperatures of Tohoku in northern Japan made cultivating cotton nearly impossible, thereby fostering the practice of combining and layering remnants of used hemp fabric that were then intricately stitched into utilitarian items, including work coats, blankets, and mittens. These hard-used garments were repeatedly reworked from generation to generation, building bridges through resourcefulness and finding beauty in survival.

The exhibition showcases a wide range of quotidian textiles from the Tohoku region, spanning everyday garments, functional accessories, and children's clothing. The pieces are on loan from Amuse Museum in Japan. Highlights are brought to life in a series of new portraits—also on view—photographed by Kyoichi Tsuzuki, the acclaimed editor and photographer of *Tokyo Style* (1997), which chronicled ordinary Japanese lifestyles. Tsuzuki's striking photographs of *boro* textiles underscore the practical nature of the garments, as well as the intensely personal elements of these patchworked pieces.



Images (L-R): *Shigoto-gi* (work clothes) detail. Photo by Kyoichi Tsuzuki. Courtesy of Amuse Museum, Chuzaburo Tanaka Collection; Susan Cianciolo, *Tapestry 3*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue Gallery.

The New York-based architecture firm SO-IL has been specially commissioned to design the exhibition, which is comprised of three galleries. The first introduces the traditional *boro* garments, which will be suspended from the ceiling with reflective bases beneath, allowing visitors to examine these rare objects from multiple perspectives, interior and exterior. Experiencing the exhibition, visitors will be able to walk around each garment and explore its intricate, hand-stitched details up close, while an interactive component of the installation will allow visitors to touch, and even try on, these historic *boro* textiles. The final gallery invites visitors to discover the resonance of *boro* through contemporary works of art and avant-garde fashion ensembles that share an appreciation for imperfections, patching methodologies, and ad-hoc assemblages from found materials. A backdrop of historic textiles in this gallery underscores the ways in which contemporary creative practices have expanded upon the aesthetics and ethics of *boro*, offering new approaches to repair and re-use that highlight this craft's enduring impact worldwide.

"We wanted to contrast the richness of the textures and memories of these *boro* pieces with lightness and reflection, to show the clothing on bodies because they were never inanimate objects to be adorned but everyday architecture that enabled life within," says Jing Liu of SO-IL. "We wanted to show the blankets as making space, so that you could feel the heaviness of them up close. The human scent and intimacy in them passed down for generations make them rich and continue to be alive."

*Boro* pieces embody fundamental principles of traditional Japanese ethics and aesthetics, such as an appreciation for imperfections and irregularities, simplicity, and the avoidance of waste. These values, which emphasize a respect for limited resources, have never been more timely or relevant.

“Sustainability is one of the most critical subjects in our time and is central to the upcoming Tokyo Summer Games in 2020,” says Yukie Kamiya, Director of Japan Society Gallery. “Through this exhibition, we can rediscover the ethics and aesthetics of an anonymous handicraft from the Tohoku region, which was devastated in the 2011 earthquake. *Boro* is not only a historical craft but has had a great impact on contemporary cutting-edge creators worldwide, bridging different generations across geographies.”

Placing traditional *boro* textiles in conversation with contemporary artistic practices, this exhibition connects past and present, domestic and global, and reinterprets the traditional anew.

*Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics* is curated by Yukie Kamiya, Gallery Director with Tiffany Lambert, Assistant Curator, and is organized by Japan Society in collaboration with Amuse Museum. This exhibition is part of *Passing the Torch*, a year-long, institution-wide initiative to spotlight the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo and its central focus on sustainability and recycling.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### PUBLIC PROGRAMS

*Program details are subject to change. Please visit [japansociety.org/gallery](https://japansociety.org/gallery) for ticketing information and programming updates.*

#### Kyoichi Tsuzuki: The Beauty of Survival

Sat., Mar. 7 at 2 pm

\$15/\$12 Japan Society members, seniors & students; free admission to the Gallery included with ticket. Followed by a reception.

Acclaimed editor-photographer of the cult publication *Tokyo Style* (1997), **Kyoichi Tsuzuki** introduces his fascination with documenting *boro* textiles in contemporary settings.

#### Japanese Textiles: New Perspectives

Sun., Mar. 15 at 11 am

\$15/\$12 Japan Society members, seniors & students; free admission to the Gallery included with ticket. Followed by a reception. Co-organized with the Japanese Art Society of America (JASA).

With **Elizabeth Wilson** (co-founder and owner of Asiatica, a fashion retailer specializing in artisanal clothing made from Japanese textiles), **Thomas Murray** (author of *Textiles of Japan*, Prestel 2018), and **Monika Bincsik** of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

#### Escape East @ 333

Fri., Mar. 20, 6–9 pm

Fri., Apr. 17, 6–9 pm

Fri., May 15, 6–9 pm

Free and open to the public; includes admission to the Gallery

Our popular series invites you to view the current exhibition with complimentary snacks, drink specials, and guest artists.

**March 20:** View an interactive installation of headpieces by artist **Tomihiko Kono** commissioned for Japan Society’s lobby. The occasion marks the launch of his book *Personas: The Art of Wig Making*.

**April 17:** In a live performance, artist **Susan Cianciolo** will activate her textile ensembles on view in the gallery.

#### Visible Mending with Christina Kim

Sat., Apr. 4, 10:30 am – 4:30 pm

\$55/\$45 members, seniors & students. Previous experience not necessary. Space is limited and advance registration is required. Program fee includes materials and admission to the Gallery.

This workshop introduces foundations of stitching, mending, and patching *boro* textiles, offering a reinterpretation on the Japanese folk tradition. Artist **Christina Kim** explores this creative process as a personal history and meditation on repair and reuse.

#### **Connoisseurship: Japanese Folk Textiles & The Perseverance of Materials**

Date TBC

\$40/\$35 members, seniors & students.

Noted textile expert **Stephen Szczepanek**, owner of Brooklyn gallery Sri, offers a hands-on seminar exploring the history of Japanese textiles and the importance of materiality and preservation.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **CHUZABURO TANAKA**

Folklorist and cultural anthropologist Chuzaburo Tanaka was born in Aomori Prefecture. He worked at folk-culture museums in Aomori prefecture since the mid-1960s and served as director at Aomori History and Folk-Culture Museum. For nearly half a century, he continued his fieldwork, investigating and collecting folklore items. Tanaka is also renowned for valuable Japanese antique collections such as folk implements and approximately 30,000 items of clothing, of which 786 of them have been designated to be important cultural properties. These collections have been rented for movies by playwright Shuji Terayama and movie director Akira Kurosawa. He was awarded the Medal with Dark Blue Ribbon by the Japanese government in 1983. His private collection is affiliated with Amuse Museum.

### **KYOICHI TSUZUKI**

Kyoichi Tsuzuki is an editor and photographer whose work aims to observe things from a unique standpoint and to express those views in prose and photographs. His photo-reportage *Tokyo Style*, first published in 1997, proposes a full immersion into the private lives of the Japanese through photographs and texts written by Tsuzuki. Private homes in Tokyo that are typically inaccessible are revealed, offering a glimpse into what happens beyond the public life in the Japanese capital. Tsuzuki's works, while eloquently commenting on living conditions in Japanese cities, do not reflect the distant gaze of a sociologist analyzing the world. Rather, Tsuzuki's seemingly banal photographs of everyday urban environments testify to the empathy—tinged with a light irony—felt by the artist when confronted with the desire to create by personally gathering material from contemporary society. Tsuzuki's work has been featured in several exhibitions at key galleries and museums, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, and the MUDAM Luxembourg.

### **SUSAN CIANCIOLO**

Since the beginning of her career as a fashion designer in the mid-1990s, Susan Cianciolo has worked across boundaries. Between 1995 and 2001, working under her label RUN, she created eleven ranges of handmade, unique garments and displayed them in runway shows that incorporated collaborations between music, film, fashion, performance, and hospitality. The term 'collection' for Cianciolo's RUN was as much about a collection of people, or of talents, as it was about the release of a collection every season. This expansive, collective approach has persisted in her work, which is now regularly featured in museums and galleries internationally, as much as through live performances, printed publications, and workshops. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA (2017); The Swiss Institute, New York, NY, USA (2016); Interstate Projects, New York, NY, USA (2016); Lisa Cooley, New York (2016); White Columns, New York, NY, USA (2016); MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY, USA (2015); and Portikus Museum, Frankfurt, Germany, among others.

### **CHRISTINA KIM**

Christina Kim moved with her family to Los Angeles from Seoul, South Korea when she was fifteen. She studied painting and art history at the University of Washington, Seattle, under the mentorship of painter Jacob Lawrence. In 1984, she founded *dosa*, a fashion and housewares brand based in Los Angeles, with her mother, a talented designer. Kim's designs draw on traditional textile cultures from around the world, particularly India and Oaxaca, incorporating hand-crafted textiles and labor-intensive techniques. She works with local artisans, for whom she is able to provide sustainable livelihoods by engaging in long term, collaborative relationships and paying fair wages. Over the past thirty years, Kim's design process has evolved to include a system-wide approach to reuse and recycling, including using cutting-room waste to create new products. Widely recognized for her global and sustainable design practices, Kim was named by TIME Magazine as one of its Innovators of the Year in 2003 and received the "Innovation in Craft" Award by Aid to Artisans in 2006.

### **SO – IL**

SO–IL, or Solid Objectives – Idenburg Liu, is an internationally recognized architecture and design firm based in New York. The firm was founded by Florian Idenburg (1975–) and Jing Liu (1980–) in 2008. The firm aims to create structures that inform new

cultures, institutions, and networks, working across countries and continents. They believe that through deep collaboration, architects can reconnect communities to their environments, working within pre-existing ecosystems to ensure that places remain adaptable to a dynamic future. SO–IL creates urban spaces, residences, and workplaces on a variety of scales. Among their projects include: the inaugural presence for the Frieze Art Fair in New York City (2012), Kukje Gallery in Seoul (2012), Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California at Davis (2016), CTF Museum Hong Kong (2017), offices for Derek Lam Atelier (2009) and New, Inc ( in New York, private residences worldwide, Las Americas Social Housing in Leon, Mexico (2016), and retail spaces for Versace (2015) in New York. They have been featured in publications including *The New York Times* and *Architectural Record*, and have received recognitions including the Curbed Groundbreakers Award and the MoMA PS1 Young Architects Program Award. Institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and the Art Institute of Chicago have acquired their work.

#### **ABOUT JAPAN SOCIETY GALLERY**

Since 1971, Japan Society Gallery continues to be the premier institution in the United States for the display and interpretation of Japanese art and culture. Through groundbreaking exhibitions and related programs, the Gallery cultivates a broader understanding and appreciation of Japan's contributions to global artistic heritage; explores the artistic interconnections Japan shares with its Asian neighbors, the U.S., Latin America, and Europe; and celebrates the diversity of Japanese visual expression from prehistoric times to the present day.

Founded in 1907, Japan Society in New York City presents sophisticated, topical and accessible experiences of Japanese art and culture, and facilitates the exchange of ideas, knowledge and innovation between the U.S. and Japan. More than 200 events annually encompass world-class exhibitions, dynamic classical and cutting-edge contemporary performing arts, film premieres and retrospectives, workshops and demonstrations, tastings, family activities, language classes, and a range of high-profile talks and expert panels that present open, critical dialogue on issues of vital importance to the U.S., Japan and East Asia.

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#### **DIRECTIONS:**

Japan Society is located at 333 East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues (accessible by the 4/5/6 and 7 subway lines at Grand Central or the E and M subway lines at 53rd St. and Lexington Ave.).

#### **HOURS:**

Tuesday-Thursday, 12 p.m. – 7 p.m. | Friday, 12 p.m. – 9 p.m. | Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

The Gallery is closed on Mondays and major holidays.

#### **ADMISSION:**

\$12/\$10 students and seniors | FREE for Japan Society members and children under 16. Admission is free to all on Friday nights, 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. Docent tours are available free with admission Thursday-Friday at 2:30 p.m. (English), and Fridays at 6 p.m. (Japanese) and 7 p.m. (English); reservations only necessary for group tours.

*Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics* is part of Japan Society's year-long, institution-wide *Passing the Torch* series, a celebration of vibrant Tokyo and the upcoming 2020 Summer Games. *Passing the Torch* continues this spring with a schedule of programs encompassing sports, technology, culture and eco-fashion, with all roads leading to our summer viewing extravaganza.

Exhibitions and Arts & Culture Lecture Programs at Japan Society are made possible, in part, by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund, the Mary Griggs Burke Endowment Fund established by the Mary Livingston Griggs and Mary Griggs Burke Foundation, Raphael and Jane Bernstein, Friends of the Gallery, and an anonymous donor. Support for Arts & Culture Lecture Programs is provided, in part, by the Sandy Heck Lecture Fund. Transportation assistance is provided by Japan Airlines, the exclusive Japanese airline sponsor and American Airlines, the exclusive U.S. airline sponsor of Gallery. *Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics* is supported, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and the Japan-United States Friendship Commission, as part of the institution-wide *Passing the Torch* series.

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