

Mingei, 6 June-12 July, Bungendore Woodworks Gallery.
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Mingei is a Japanese term that describes both a way of making and a way of living. Each of the artists in this exhibition—Peter Rushforth, Mary Taguchi, and Masayuki Ogura—produce utilitarian objects [pots, bowls, tableware, clothing] of great beauty and high skill which still refer back to ancient handmaker traditions, as well as the natural environments the artists live in and from which they glean their materials.

The *Mingeihin* movement in Japan was actually a reaction against the industrialisation of crafts in the late 19th century. By 1919, the continuing practice of various handicrafts was seriously under threat. Western-influenced philosopher Soetsu Yanagi recognised the crisis, and galvanised a group to promote and collect *mingei*—“the art of the people”—especially between the years of 1926-1945.

Since the 1970s, Australian academic and textile artist Mary Taguchi has been active in her travels to and from Japan, collecting, promoting and making connections between various *mingei* weavers, dyers, potters and woodworkers. She imports bolts of indigo-dyed cloths for her own textiles label, making-up in her rural NSW home. The linchpin of this exhibition, she has linked the Japanese influence in Peter Rushforth’s glazes and the “reverence for grain” in Masayuki Ogura’s lacquer ware into a very satisfying exhibition.

Ogura, a master wood grain artist who lives in the mountainous Kiso region of Japan, tells a poignant story of his own grandfather’s special reverence for the trees he cut down. A lineage practice dating back to 859AD, the Ogura clan still plant and care-take forests as an extension of their reverence for the materials that supply their specialist trade.

Respect for materials is evident in each created piece. Ogura’s bowls are preserved with 5 layers of lacquer, giving each an extraordinary, lustrous sheen. The modesty of his works is belied by the incredible skill, a 50cm in diameter bowl turned out of a single piece of wood. He speaks of the wood as virtually alive in the making process, the maker adjusting to the grain’s ‘shifts and flows’ with every touch of the blade. Despite their size, these objects embrace you with a warm tenderness.

Smaller pieces, such a sized series of round plates, resemble a line of birds in flight. Irregular oblong serving plates float like driftwood. They sit quietly in place, holding songs of the sea. Ogura’s ancestors have always devised their own tools, according to necessity. Prince Koretaka, who taught Ogura’s ancestors in 859, fashioned the woodturning tool *rokuro* which is still in use to carve out the round pieces on display.

Rushforth’s pottery carries more weight, each piece hand-thrown and kiln-fired, rustic in texture, yet very delicately glazed. Whilst Ogura’s works hold the thinness of mountain air, Rushforth’s pots reflect the weight of his home Australian home [Blue Mountains rocks and soils]. Taguchi’s shirts, coats, and other textiles are radiant with their indigo blue patterned against cream, yet unostentatious in their design. The three exhibitors

share a compassionate, earthy modesty. Unlike the '*wabi-sabi*' [perfect imperfection] which drives many of the Japanese 'high arts', these works embody the *mingei* concept that some things "are not perfect when they are finished; they become perfect as they are lovingly used".