

Modern Glass

By Iseki Masaaki

Historically, it would be difficult to say that glass has been closely tied to everyday life in Japan. Since ancient times, some people owned a small amount of glass utensils or glass jewelry, but this was limited to the upper classes. The material used predominantly for everyday utensils was ceramics, not glass, while in contrast, in the advanced

nations of Europe, glass goods were produced for and used by commoners in many aspects of their day-to-day lives.

Domestic production began under the influence of glass from Holland, imported through Nagasaki in the mid-19th century. Edo cut glass, a clear cut glass characterized by a curved cut, was produced in Edo. Satsuma cut glass was produced in the Satsuma region, at the

southern tip of Japan, by artisans brought from Edo by local daimyo. Both of these are examples of glass produced solely for the upper classes.

The change came after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 with the impetus to catch up with the civilizations of the Western advanced nations and the Westernization of Japanese lifestyles. After much trial and error, glass manu-

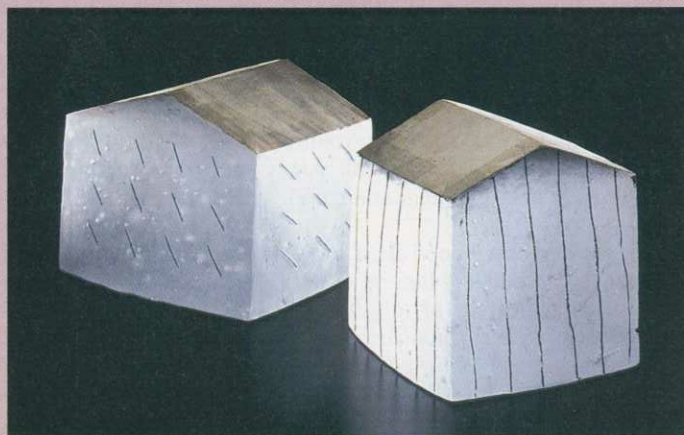
facturing gradually got off the ground and mass-production began. With the production of plate glass, bottles, eating utensils and light fixtures also came the creation of glass for the sake of art. However, what we call glass art today only secured this status after World War II, paralleling the field of pottery, which had a long tradition as a utilitarian form but only emerged as objets d'art after the war.

In speaking of the state of glass in Japan today, two names cannot be overlooked: Iwata Toshichi and Kagami Kozo, both of whom played a major role in the development of the trend towards glass as art. Already at the beginning of this century, Iwata Toshichi realized that as a medium, glass has a fully modern sensibility and held limitless possibilities for expression. He developed a free art form using glass that was based in a clear artistic awareness.

Kagami Kozo stud-



(Left): Kazaribako— Kohakubai (Decorative Casket), Fujita Kyohei, 1991
(Below): Watashi no Aozora/Ame no Hi mo Aru (Very Funny Place/Rainy Day), Ougita Katsuya, 1991



ied in Germany before the start of World War II and he was directly influenced by art déco. There he also learned the techniques for making crystal. His works had distinct designs which gave the glass a modern feeling.

These two leaders both established their own glassworks in Japan, mass-producing glass of excellent design while at the same time creating glass art works. Kagami, in particular, devoted himself to fostering the development of his students, producing individualistic glass designers such as Awashima Masakichi, Sato Junshiro and Kohata Masao. The seeds sown by these predecessors in turn nurtured postwar creative artists like Fujita Kyohei and Iwata Hisatoshi.

Fujita Kyohei's *Kazaribako* series, released in 1973, made him an internationally renowned glass artist. The series was based in a traditional Japanese artistic sensibility. The surfaces of the works were decorated with colored glass particles as well as gold, silver and platinum foil.

Since the 1970s, glass art in Japan, similar to the world of ceramic art, is expanding rapidly into the field of abstract art. This change was stimulated

by the free and innovative glass forms that came out of the studio glass movement initiated in 1962 in the United States and the modern and superior glass production processes and through education of glass artists and craftsmen in Northern Europe and Czechoslovakia. However, the move toward abstract art in Japan also reflects

the diversification and flourishing of the nation's glass art world.

More and more, glass artists have appeared since the 1980s, but only a few can be mentioned here. Artists such as Masuda Yoshinori, Yokoyama Naoto, Takeuchi Denji and Ito Makoto are all highly regarded for producing high-quality compositions and expressing their individuality. However, their styles vary. Some deal with social problems, others express a nostalgia for things Japanese, still others use distinct geometrical components and others communicate humor through the use of materials.

A large and even younger generation of artists is also coming on the scene. Ougita Katsuya is attracting attention for his unique works with pottery-like surfaces. His forms are warm and have a simplicity and delicate feeling which gives his works an aura of Oriental philosophy. Japan's glass art finds itself in the fortunate position of being able to explore various prospects in the future.

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Kanata o Omotte (Long for You), Uchida Mamoru, 1994