

KISO HIRASAWA

The Spirits of Craftsmanship



Japanese Lacquerware is called “Shikki.” (It is also called “Japan” in reflection of its uniqueness.) Shikki was introduced to Kiso Hirasawa around 600 years ago. By the mid-Edo period, Hirasawa has become widely known as an excellent environment for Shikki production. At the time, a great number of tourists from Kyoto, Osaka, Owari (Nagoya), Edo (Tokyo), and many places passed through Nakasendo-highway in Kiso Valley. As Kiso Shikki was a very popular souvenir among tourists, it had spread gradually throughout Japan. There are around 150 companies and over 700 people (including 62 master craftsmen who are officially recognized by the government) working in this area today.

In the 28th winter Olympic Games held in Nagano 1998, Kiso Shikki was used to make the Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals to honor the winners of the Olympic Games. Later on in 2006, the government designated this area as a Cultural Asset, especially for Shikki manufacturing.

Kiso Shikki



Kiso-Tsuishu

On refined wooden bases, local iron clay is rubbed on for the foundation coating. After a mid-layer is applied and dried, high viscosity urushi is dabbed on to create a water drop-like texture. 12 to 18 layers of colored urushi are then applied on top of it. Each layer of urushi can only be applied when the previous layer is completely dried and this process can often take days. After the final layer is applied and hardened, the uneven surface is to be abraded. Patterns similar to the rings of a tree will then beautifully appear. The pattern of each art piece is always a surprise and unique in its own way. Finally, for the finishing touch, clear urushi is applied for the glossy look.



Matsumoto Dashi-Butai



Itsukushima Shrine



Cleaning

The Inheritance of Japanese Culture

With the help of Kiso Shikki Industrial Association, Kiso Art and Craft Center restores Shikki arts in shrines, Buddhist temples, floats, platform stages and other traditional cultural properties. Shikki craftsmen study the original techniques and are able to recreate coatings from some 400 years ago. These traditional techniques are performed at Japan's national treasure "Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima" and at the platform of Fukashi Shrine. "Home of Japanese Shikki - Kiso Hirasawa" is embraced by gifted craftsmen who are engaged in the restoration of all kinds of Shikki art.



Techniques

The medals for the Nagano Olympic Games were made from the heart using Shikki techniques. These medals present an elaborate combination of the following 3 techniques: the *Makie technique* (sprinkling of gold and silver powder on a pattern drawn with lacquer), the *vitreous enamel baking technique* and the *photographic processing technique* (produces metal figures with precision).

The Face of the Medal

THE FRONT features a rising sun inside olive braches with the emblem of cloisonné in the center. The lettering on the Shikki surface is rendered with intricate gold and silver inlay. THE BACK is predominately Shikki with a depiction of the emblem and the morning glow of the mountains of Shinshu. The pictograms of each event is then added using the same sate-of-the-art metal process that is used to affix lettering on watch faces.



These Medals are displayed at "Shiojiri-Kiso District Original Industry Promotion Center"