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SHIHO MUROTA, CONTEMPORARY SATSUMA BUTTON PAINTER

by Mika Jarmusz

Shiho was born in Kagoshima, an area which used to be called Satsuma, on the southern end of Kyushu Island of Japan. After earning a college degree in fabric design, she worked for a local Satsuma ware kiln for ten years, painting decorations on traditional tea sets and tableware.

In 2004, Shiho was chosen for the Art Exchange Program in Florence Italy, representing her regional craft of Satsuma pottery. In 2005, fascinated by a magazine article featuring images of vintage and antique

Satsuma buttons, she went to Tokyo to visit the Button Museum, which was still operating at that time. Shiho subsequently established her own button painting studio in the city of Tatumizu, Kagoshima.

In 2015, in order to commemorate her tenth year of becoming an independent Satsuma artist, Shiho reached out to the National Button Society to demonstrate her painting skills at the Manchester NBS Convention. Sue Jordan, the NBS Vice President in charge of programs that year, graciously accommodated Shiho by providing a time and a space.

To pay respect to the established culture of NBS, Shiho generously and spontaneously donated to the NBS fundraising auction a button she was painting in the showroom. Because the button would not be finished on site, Shiho promised to ship the button to the winner of the NBS 2015 auction once additional colors were added at her studio in Japan.

The diamond-shaped large Satsuma button, with encrusted microscopic gold birds perched on an intricately intertwining background of tri-colored chrysanthemum petals, was mailed in late October 2015 to the lucky winner, Nancy Boyer. Nancy not only trusted Shiho's promise but had been kind earlier by lending a lamp for Shiho's Monday demonstration session.



Shiho paints on a Satsuma button.

Photos in this article are courtesy of Reggie Ruth Barrett.

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Shiho's 2016 button donated to the NBS auction, showing some of the steps in its creation (clockwise from top). The button image depicts two laborers mining traditional Japanese treasure symbols which include the Scrolls of Wisdom, Magic Mallet, Locking Circles, Hiding Hat, Calibration Weights, Hiding Poncho, Sacred Flame, Cloves, and the Treasure Pouch.



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For the 2016 NBS Convention in Denver, hosted by WRBA with the local support of the Colorado State Button Society, Shiho brought an original design that whimsically celebrated the 2016 NBS show theme 'Mining in Button Mountains' (see page 17). In the showroom, Shiho demonstrated her fine brush painting skills, completing the gold and platinum outlining step of the ten-step process required to finish this particular button. It is worth noting here that, unlike the antique and vintage Satsuma button painting methods adopted in locations outside of Satsuma, the traditional painting method handed down in the Satsuma Province, according to Shiho, is to apply the gold outlines BEFORE

colors are added, creating hydrophobic compartments to contain the colors which pool within those lines.

The 2016 Denver NBS original button design features two Japanese laborers mining a mountain loaded with treasures symbolized in traditional Japanese folklore. In the background stands the majestic Pikes Peak, which resembles the unmistakable Mr. Fuji. This 2016 auction button has now been finished and is being shipped to the winning bidder, George Gauthier.

The openwork Satsuma seen at the National Show, which generated great interest, is the work of Mr. Kamibeppu. His technique comes from the traditional design of Japanese incense burners.

The city of Tarumizu is proud of Shiho and her art, seen in the promotional video on YouTube, and her website: <http://satsuma.cc>.

The openwork Satsuma seen on two of the Satsuma buttons at the National Show, which generated great interest, is very scarce due to the limitations of hand crafting. This openwork seen on the two buttons is the work of Mr. Kamibeppu. His technique comes from the traditional design of Japanese incense burners.



REGGIE RUTH BARRETT

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This button by Shiho won the 'Excellence Award' & 'Judges Award' in the 2010 Japan Button Grand Prix sponsored by the Iris Co. LTD. The pattern is named 'Yo-Raku-Mon' after the traditional Buddhist religious decorations called 'yo-raku'.



Shiho's lovely Satsuma button showing her pet bird. The central disc floats above the beautiful openwork of Mr. Kamibeppu. Shiho holds this button in the photo below from the NBS 2016 convention showroom in Denver. Photos from NBS 2016 courtesy of Reggie Ruth Barrett.

