

Woodworking

Woodworking has long been a key component of traditional architecture and numerous other crafts, such as lacquerware and basketry. The importance of woodworking was formally recognized in 1970, when it was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Japan's varied climate and geography support a wide variety of native timber suitable for woodworking. Simple artifacts made of wood, such as bowls, bows, and boats, have been found at archaeological sites dating back to the Jōmon period (10,000–400 BCE). The spread of iron tools during the Yayoi period (400 BCE–200 CE) and the arrival of expert engineers and craftspeople from mainland Asia starting in the Kofun period (ca. 250–552), led to increasing complexity and sophistication in the craft. Beginning in the seventeenth century, urbanization and the growing wealth of the merchant class contributed to a woodworking boom in which highly specialized skills evolved to meet demand for ever more intricate and lavish works. From the nineteenth century on, increased international trade and exchange fueled broad demand for Japanese crafts, prompting woodworkers to turn their traditional skills to the making of innovative works of art. These creations established woodworking as a major artistic discipline.

Woodworking in Ishikawa Prefecture falls predominantly into four categories. Joinery (*sashimono*) involves fastening wooden boards or panels together without the use of nails. This is usually done so that the joint is concealed. Carving (*kurimono*) involves the use of planes, knives, and chisels to shape objects from blocks of wood. The technique requires careful attention to the grain and other features of the timber, and artists adjust their work to make the most of the material's organic qualities. Bentwood work (*magemono*) involves soaking pieces of softwood like cedar or cypress in hot water to make them pliable and then bending them into cylinders or ovals. This technique is often used to make rice and bento boxes, as the naturally antiseptic wood retains heat and moisture. Finally, lathing (*hikimono*) involves the use of blades to shape blocks of wood rotating on a lathe, making it ideal for circular items like bowls and trays. All of these techniques require the artisan to have an expert understanding of the wood's properties, since cut wood can warp or split due to changes in temperature or humidity.

Woodworking has become a highly developed craft in Ishikawa partly because it is used

to craft lacquerware substates (base objects). Having a finely formed base on which to apply lacquer is the first prerequisite not only in traditions like Yamanaka ware—where the wood grain remains visible through thin layers of lacquer—but also in the more thickly lacquered and ornately decorated styles of Kanazawa and Wajima.

Ishikawa has produced several Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in woodworking, including the very first one: Himi Kōdō (1906–1975), designated in 1970 for *sashimono*. Two more woodworking holders from Ishikawa are Kawagita Ryōzō (1935–), named in 1994 for *hikimono*, and Haisoto Tatsuo (1941–2015), named in 2012 for *sashimono*. Works by each of these artists can be found at the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art.