

Kaga *Yūzen* Silk Dyeing

Kaga *yūzen* is a centuries-old silk dyeing tradition in which artisans use hand-drawn designs and a distinctive palette of five colors to render vivid and realistic natural images on silk. Along with Kyō *yūzen* from Kyoto and Edo *yūzen* from Tokyo, it is one of Japan's three major silk dyeing traditions. Today, the Kaga *yūzen* technique is used to decorate accessories, such as bags and scarfs, and to create Ishikawa's luxurious Kaga *yūzen* kimonos.

In the sixteenth-century, Kaga domain (the area of present-day Ishikawa Prefecture) was a noted producer of silk. In the early eighteenth century, the groundbreaking methods of famed silk fan designer Miyazaki Yūzen (?–1758) were introduced to Kaga. His intricate resist-dyeing technique made elaborate, multicolored designs possible by allowing artists to hand-paint complex images while using water-soluble rice paste to protect certain areas of the fabric from absorbing unwanted dye. This process remains the foundation of Kaga *yūzen* dyeing today.

Kaga *yūzen* is known for realistic depictions from nature, such as leaves that have been nibbled by insects or touched by decay. Such imagery is called *mushi-kui* (insect-eaten), and it represents fragility and transience in nature. In addition, Kaga *yūzen* designs tend to avoid the gold and silver ornamentation favored in the more ornate Kyō *yūzen* style. And while Edo *yūzen* tends toward muted colors, Kaga *yūzen* uses a palette of five bold hues known as the *kaga gosai*: indigo, crimson, ocher, dark green, and royal purple.

Yūzen dyeing was designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955, and two Ishikawa residents have become holders of the *yūzen* technique: Kimura Uzen (1891–1977) in 1955 and Futatsuka Osao (1946–) in 2010.