Pace London

Press Release

Mingei: Are You Here?
6-10 Lexington Street
London W1F 0LB

15 October to 18 January 2014

Opening: Monday 14 October, 6-8 pm.

Pace London is pleased to present its first group exhibition at 6-10 Lexington Street from 15 October 2013 to 18 January 2014. Mingei: Are You Here? explores the legacy of Mingei, a Japanese folk craft movement led by philosopher and critic Sōetsu Yanagi and questions the presence of craftsmanship in contemporary art.

The exhibition features eighty works and special commissions by more than twenty-five artists, including paintings, sculptures, works on paper, ceramics and textile shown in a vitrine inspired by ethnographic exhibitions. Systems of display and practical aspects of museum work are one of the central themes of the exhibition.

Curated by Nicolas Trembley, this museum-quality exhibition juxtaposes historical works by Japanese Mingei artists with modern and contemporary artists, designers and architects inspired by the philosophy of Mingei. Pace’s artists featured in the exhibition include Josef Albers, Isamu Noguchi, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Lee Ufan and specifically for this exhibition: Ruth Asawa, Mark Barrow & Sarah Parke, Valentin Carron, Trisha Donnelly, Simon Fujiwara, Naoto Fukasawa, Shoji Hamada, Kawai Kanjiro, Tomimoto Kenkichi, Bernard Leach, Sgrafo Modern, Jasper Morrison, Charlotte Perriand, Stephen Prina, Willem de Rooij, Keisuke Serizawa, Kenzo Tange, Danh Vo and Sori Yanagi.

Inspired by the 19th century Arts and Crafts movement in Europe, the Mingei movement was established in 1926 during a period of rapid growth in Japan that included military imperialism, nationalism, westernisation and urbanisation. It sought to maintain the cultural originality of the different peoples across Japan. The title of the exhibition refers to the philosophical ethos of Mingei which champions the everyday, ordinary and utilitarian objects created by nameless and unknown craftsmen.

According to Sōetsu Yanagi, Founder of the Mingeikan – Japan Folk Crafts Museum: “Dishonesty, depravity, and luxury - this is what Mingei objects must avoid at all costs; all that is natural, sincere, safe and simple – these are the characteristics of Mingei art.”

Highlights include works by Mark Barrow who collaborated with textile designer Sarah Parke to produce
a hand-loomed linen work onto which Barrow has painted a geometrical composition of delicate and interweaving colours. While the interlacing composition might allude to Barrow’s obsession with pixels as well as pertaining to wider evocations of technology, the sciences and phenomenology, the process by which the piece has been made adheres to an artisanal tradition based in natural materials. Here we see a palpable link between tradition and modernity that is integral to the exhibition and, not least, the development of the Mingei movement.

Valentin Carron looked to his native Swiss valley, where he employs local artisans to produce his vases made of unrefined concrete, and finds inspiration through the vernacular shapes one finds in its public spaces. For one of the sculptures in this exhibition, he has used marble from Cipolin, a local quarry that is now shut. The architect Adolf Loos also used this marble for his Villa Müller in Prague. Similarly, the American artist Trisha Donnelly often visits Italian quarries where she engraves marble. One of these marble pieces is shown in Mingei: Are You Here?. For her second sculpture in this exhibition, Donnelly worked with both a locksmith and blacksmith to create a blade that encapsulates the “warrior spirit” of a sabre.

Returning to his homeland, Vietnam, Danh Vo gilds mundane cardboard boxes with gold leaf offering a critique on the oft-tainted contemporary notion of the artisan. Perhaps simultaneously his piece evokes the heritage of Mingei visual culture that refashioned daily utilitarian objects into objects considered ‘beautiful’. The re-use of everyday materials is further found in Stephen Prina’s piece as the artist has painted on simple roller blinds to reference Japanese scroll painting, kakemono. Prina’s work could recently be seen on display at the Pavilion for Japanese Art of LACMA, Los Angeles.

This exhibition’s strongest thread, however, is Isamu Noguchi, rarely shown in the UK, who personifies a dialogue between the Orient and the West, equally addressing design, sculpture, and architecture as well as acknowledging both tradition and modernity. Flanking Noguchi are friends of his including the architect Kenzo Tange who designed handwoven seats, as well as artists represented by Pace who are now perpetuating an East-West exchange. Indeed, Yanagi’s thinking guided Korean artist Lee Ufan during his days as a philosophy student, and it is Yanagi’s son, Sori Yanagi, who introduced Charlotte Perriand to Japan and Mingei in the 1940s.

Sori Yanagi, who is also featured in Mingei: Are You Here?, was greatly impressed by the exhibition Super Normal: Sensations of the Ordinary conceived by the Japanese designer Naoto Fukasawa and the English product designer Jasper Morrison on the occasion of the 2007 Milan triennial. He stopped before a sieve to ask who had produced it. So commonplace had this object become since it was first designed, he had forgotten that he himself had actually created it. This anecdote is significant. The Yanagi sieve appears in this exhibition, together with its woven bamboo ancestor, which dates back to the nineteenth century Meiji period. The latter belongs to the largest private collection of Mingei artefacts outside Japan. Its owner, the collector Jeffrey Montgomery, admits how enthralled he is by the way in which such objects emanate “vibrations” acquired through “years of handling and stories beyond words”.

Hiroshi Sugimoto presents two new site-specific sculptures in Mingei: Are You Here?. During the 1980s in New York, Sugimoto owned an antique shop which he simply named Mingei after a movement that he would be one of the first to introduce to the United States.

"Mingei: Are You Here? is a fantastic and super inspiring show. Nicolas Trembley has conceived a model of how we can invent the future with fragments from the past." Hans Ulrich Obrist, co-Director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects of the Serpentine Gallery, October 2013.
A catalogue for the exhibition is forthcoming and features introductions by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Nicolas Trembley, and Yuko Kikuchi.

**LIST OF ARTISTS**

Anni Albers  
Josef Albers  
Ruth Asawa  
Mark Barrow & Sarah Parke  
Valentin Carron  
Trisha Donnelly  
Simon Fujiwara  
Naoto Fukasawa  
Shoji Hamada  
Kawai Kanjiro  
Bernard Leach  
Sgrafo Modern  
Jasper Morrison  
Isamu Noguchi  
Charlotte Perriand  
Stephen Prina  
Willem de Rooij  
Keisuke Serizawa  
Hiroshi Sugimoto  
Kenzo Tange  
Kenkichi Tomimoto  
Lee Ufan  
Danh Vo  
Sori Yanagi

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Nicolas Trembley**

Nicolas Trembley was born in 1965 in Geneva and is Swiss. He started his career at the Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou as an assistant, curator and member of the acquisition committee for video works in the New Media Department until 1996.

He is the co-founder and was the director of the bdv (bureau des vidéos) until 2009, publishing house, broadcasting, production, and distribution of contemporary films and videos. He was also in charge of the video programming in 2000 of the MK2 cinemas in Paris. He curated several independent exhibitions in festivals and museums such as the Rooseum Center, Malmö; Moph, Parco, Tokyo; Sketch, London; l’Institut français of Istanbul; le Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse; Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia; the Berlin Biennale; Saint Gervais Geneva; Fondation Cartier, Paris, Capc Bordeaux. Among the creative projects he collaborated with, he curated exhibitions as a freelancer for the Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1999; au Magasin, Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble or at the Centre Pompidou, Paris.
From 2004 to 2008, he was curator at the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris. Exhibitions include: Armleder/Garcia, Swiss Swiss Democracy de Thomas Hirschhorn, Max Bill / Wade Guyton etc

Since 2009, he’s been curator of the Syz collection in Geneva. Thesyzcollection.com

Last year, Nicolas Trembley curated "Telephone Paintings" an exhibition and a catalogue presented at Art Basel.

He is a member of the editorial board of Frog, a contemporary art magazine, Art editor for Self Service and Numero magazines, and a regular contributor to arforum.com, Art Collectors, Art Press, Beaux Arts Magazine, Flash Art, Numéro, Vogue as well as many other contemporary art books. He was invited to give a lecture at the School of Art and Design of Lausanne (ECAL) since 2007 and the winner of two awards of the Prix de Médiateur d’art de l’Office Fédéral de la Culture, Berne (2004 and 2005).

He recently presented a touring exhibition ceramic "Sgrafo vs Fat Lava" including a catalogue in French and English. The exhibition was presented at the Centre d’édition contemporaine, Geneva - Frac Champagne-Ardenne, Reims - Kreo Gallery, Paris - EXD11 design Biennial, Lisbon - Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne - Zachary Currie Gallery, New York. A selection of works from this exhibition is featured in Mingei: Are You Here?.

Pace

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the 20th and 21st centuries. Founded by Arne Glimcher in Boston in 1960 and led by Marc Glimcher, Pace has been a constant, vital force in the art world and has introduced many renowned artists' work to the public for the first time. Pace has mounted more than 700 exhibitions, including scholarly exhibitions that have subsequently travelled to museums, and published nearly 400 exhibition catalogues. Today Pace has seven locations worldwide: four in New York; two in London; and one in Beijing. Pace inaugurated its flagship gallery at 6 Burlington Gardens with the exhibition Rothko/Sugimoto: Dark Paintings and Seascapes in the autumn of 2012.

Pace London at 6-10 Lexington Street is open to the public from Monday to Saturday, from 10 AM to 6 PM: www.pacegallery.com

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Mingei: Are You Here? An essay by Nicolas Trembley

This exhibition invokes the ancestral spirit of Mingei, a Japanese philosophical and aesthetic movement that remains as relevant today as it did on its conception in the 1920s by the theorist Sōetsu Yanagi. Mingei philosophy assigned value to and saw beauty in simple, anonymously produced utilitarian objects, signifying a revaluation of popular crafts in the midst of the industrial revolution.

Although this new philosophy was rather slow to develop in Japan, it was more immediately absorbed into the diverse international Arts and Crafts movements that spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a complex time in the history of art. Such new movements were utopian: they longed for mass appeal and cultivated a democratic outlook, wishing to eliminate distinctions between high and low art, artists and craftspeople.

The exhibition Mingei: Are You Here? celebrates a revival of historical crafts evident in work by a new generation of artists. It also marks the first time that works by artists known to belong to the first Mingei circle are presented alongside works by artists of today. Aside from their simplicity, and the processes employed in their production, Mingei objects hold a fascination for contemporary artists doubtless associated with the possibility of an engagement with history and the prospect of collaboration with it. Of contemporary interest, too, is the respectful relationship between materials and local or regional economy inherent in Mingei works.

The various manifestations of the Mingei influence, and the drawing of influence from vernacular or folk techniques, can be traced across the world in the decades following its introduction. The great German modernists Anni and Joseph Albers, for example, who met in 1922 at the Bauhaus before establishing themselves in America, researched traditional wood engraving techniques and Native American textiles while teaching at Black Mountain College. Examples of their responses to both techniques are on show in Mingei: Are You Here? The influential Japanese artist and educator Ruth Asawa, herself a student at the same school in the 1940s, had discovered crocheted baskets on a trip to Mexico organised by a Quaker group. She adopted the technique, applying it to her own wire sculptures, one of which is also included in this exhibition.

More Contemporary artists include the American Mark Barrow. He collaborates with textile designer Sarah Parke, who uses one of the world’s earliest known machines, a mechanical loom, to create the structures on which he paints. The Dutch artist Willem de Rooij similarly draws on the skills of weavers who operate a self-managed workshop in Germany. Valentin Carron looks to his native Swiss valley, where he employs local artisans to produce unrefined concrete vases and finds inspiration from the objects found in public spaces, such as monuments. A Carron sculpture in this exhibition has been created in marble from Cipolin, a quarry local to the artist that is now closed (although it once produced marble used by Adolf Loos for his Villa Müller in Prague). Loos had critical theories of his own, which he directed against the decadence of aristocratic decoration and developed in his famous book Ornament and Crime.

Exploring themes related to globalisation and his homeland, Vietnam, Danh Vō gilds mundane cardboard boxes in gold leaf. The American artist Trisha Donnelly has worked with a locksmith and blacksmith to create her sculpture, which resembles the blade of a sword she has also worked in a marble quarry to produce the second work in the exhibition. Stephen Prina, also American, paints on simple roller blinds that refer to the verticle Japanese hung scrolls known as kakemono.

The overriding common thread running through Mingei: Are You Here?, however, is arguably the influence of the late artist Isamu Noguchi. He personified a dialogue between the Orient and the west, equally addressing design, sculpture, and architecture and acknowledging both tradition and modernity. Sharing in Noguchi’s concerns were his friends and contemporaries such as the important twentieth-century architect Kenzo Tange, who also designed hand-woven seats, and artists represented by Pace Gallery, also featured in Mingei: Are You Here?, who perpetuate an east-west exchange today. Yanagi’s thinking guided Korean artist Lee Ufan, for example, known for drawing on eastern and western schools of thought, during his days as a philosophy student in the late-1950s. In New York during the 1980s, Hiroshi Sugimoto owned an antique shop, which he named Mingei after an art he would be one of the first to introduce to the United States.
Design cannot be left out of the discussion here. In his iconic 1933 text *Mingei no Shushi*, Sōetsu Yanagi listed the following precepts: one must value what is “useful, honest with regard to its intended use, authentic, safe, modest, durable”, as opposed to that which is “luxurious, expensive, subjected to the whims of fashion, vulgar, frivolous, or amoral”. Sōetsu Yanagi’s son Sori Yanagi went on to become an important designer, adhering to his father’s principles yet applying them to processes of large-scale production (his Butterfly Stool, conceived in 1954, is considered an icon of twentieth-century design). He also introduced the French architect and designer Charlotte Perriand to Japan and Mingei in the 1940s. Mingei artists and their country’s ancestral traditions would profoundly influence Perriand, as this exhibition attests by presenting one of her bamboo fireside chairs.

On the occasion of the 2007 Milan triennial, the Japanese designer Naoto Fukasawa and the English product designer Jasper Morrison conceived the exhibition *Super Normal: Sensations of the Ordinary*. It represented a contemporary kind of Mingei manifesto, albeit one composed of industrial objects. The banality of everyday utensils was unsettled by the exhibition’s presentation of them, leading them to appear extraordinary in their perfect functionality. By then older than ninety, Sori Yanagi visited the exhibition. He stopped before a sieve to ask who had produced it. So commonplace had this object become since it was first designed, he had forgotten that he himself had actually created it. This anecdote is significant, and so the Yanagi sieve appears in this exhibition, together with its woven bamboo ancestor, which dates back to the nineteenth century Meiji period. The latter belongs to the largest private collection of Mingei artefacts outside Japan. Its owner, the collector Jeffrey Montgomery, admits how he is enthralled by the way in which such objects emanate “vibrations” acquired through “years of handling and stories beyond words”.

Aside from the textile designer Keisuke Serizawa and the woodblock printmaker Shiko Munakata, all artists in what can be called Sōetsu Yanagi’s circle were potters, from Kawai Kanjiro to Tomimoto Kenkichi; Shoji Hamada to Bernard Leach. The latter presents an interesting case: originally an Englishman from Hong Kong, Leach relocated to the coastal town of St Ives in Cornwall and established himself there, installing traditional kilns and importing the techniques he had learned in Japan. He famously published *A Potter’s Book* in 1940. Intended for craftspeople and students, it is considered one of the first treatises of its kind. Leach has inspired numerous projects by the young Anglo-Japanese artist Simon Fujiwara. Fujiwara’s work *Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the Father of Pottery)* (2011–12), for example, exhibited at Tate St Ives, where Fujiwara was raised, re-enacts a display of Leach wares held in the same gallery in 2001. Alongside this, a staged conversation between Fujiwara and his father (played by an actor) is screened, in which the pair discuss a pottery class they took in Japan, and the copies of standard Leach objects they made together there.

Alongside parallel developments in Art Nouveau, the multifarious history of styles associated with the Arts and Crafts movement comprises a range of diverse aesthetics. Forms produced in Austria within the Wiener Werkstätte, or in Great Britain by William Morris and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, have little in common with the Mingei aesthetic, which is simpler, bordering on austerity. Mingei’s sober and minimalist style did, however, influence the ceramics of the Müller brothers, who founded a studio named Sgrafo Modern in Germany during the 1950s. By then the country’s Deutsche Werkbund, an association of artists, applied arts workers and industrialists, was also supporting a revival and expansion of craftsmanship. The Müller brothers’ small workshop, before it disappeared along with many others during the reunification of the country, produced famous ceramics inspired by nature. These Korallen vases have long remained unattributed and valueless, thrown away by their owners because they had fallen out of fashion.

As in the exhibit *Super Normal: Sensations of the Ordinary*, display is a crucial factor in the story of Mingei. An essential trait pertaining to members of the original Mingei movement was their ceaseless will to establish a collection and, further, to exhibit it. Many Mingei artists acquired objects on their journeys through the Japanese provinces where they met farmers and modest craftspeople. At first their collected wares were displayed at department stores such as Daimaru. During the 1930s and at Yanagi’s initiative, this led to the founding of the Nihon Mingeikan, The Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo. Sori Yanagi took over as the director of the museum after his father – and now Naoto Fukasawa is at the helm. Ethnographic museums had for a long time exhibited exotic and utilitarian artefacts, whose appreciation evolved particularly during the twentieth century, until some objects became recognised as masterpieces of the newly coined ‘primitive’ art. The writer James Clifford, author of the 1988 essay ‘On Collecting Art and Culture’, has explained how art and anthropology have had reciprocal bearings on each other. Their shifting, shared boundary has notably affected ways of collecting and exhibiting, and in turn had significant effects on the shaping of cultural identities, be they national or individual.
When traditional and popular art museums were created in the nineteenth century, there was a need to conceive new systems of presentation that would imbue value in seemingly ‘valueless’ objects. The vitrine and the plinth, together with the use of invisible threads allowing objects to be suspended, were instrumental. Once protected, elevated in space and out of reach, objects were beautified and injected with a new grandeur. The former Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris directed by George Henri Rivière was a good example. The exhibition Mingei: Are You Here? is inspired by and intends to emulate such display conventions.

Mingei objects have lasted centuries and, importantly, remain relevant. This ability to transcend time chiefly bears witness to the strength of Sōetsu Yanagi’s essential ideas. The new generation of artists invited to be part of this exhibition and who make use of traditional techniques do not consider themselves craftspeople. Rather, their approach is conceptual. One may find parallels between their visual approach, which is devoid of representation and often minimal in form, and Mingei principles. There is no need to categorise here; it is no longer a matter of positioning one artistic field against another. Instead, these artists play with art history and simultaneously consider modes of exhibiting. They evaluate anew a certain strand of ‘everyday’ creation.

The core of the Mingei project as it continues to influence artists and makers today, and to seduce many of us, is its offer of an alternative way of seeing things: in taking what is supposedly worthless and, by extracting it from its original context, revealing its fundamental qualities by way of display. This is about a viewpoint, a spirit, that we may still apply to our surroundings; an art of living.

Nicolas Trembley

Translation: Lucile Dupraz
Mingei Are You Here?

First Floor, 6-10 Lexington Street, London, W1F 0LB
15 October – 14 December 2013

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Credit information must be listed as follows:
Image:
left:
Sugimoto, Hiroshi
Reservoir 1, 2013
Cypress, nickel silver, glass, stainless steel, LED
210.5 cm x 20 cm (82-7/8" x 7-7/8")
© Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery
	right:
Sugimoto, Hiroshi
Reservoir 2, 2013
tin, nickel silver, glass and copper, iron, LED
210.5 cm x 13 cm (82-7/8" x 5-1/8")
© Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery

Photo credit: © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery
**Image:** Mark Barrow  
*YMCK5*, 2013  
Acrylic on hand-loomed linen  
47 x 40 inches (119.4 x 101.6 cm)  

**Photo credit:** Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York. Photo: Etienne Frossard

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**Image:** Lee Ufan  
*From Winds*, 1982  
Watercolour on paper  
57.5 cm x 76.5 cm (22-5/8" x 30-1/8")  

**Photo credit:** © Lee Ufan, courtesy The Pace Gallery

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**Image:** Lee Ufan  
*Dialogue*, 2007  
Oil on canvas  
227 cm x 182 cm (89-3/8" x 71-5/8")  

**Photo credit:** © Lee Ufan, courtesy The Pace Gallery
**Image:** Isamu Noguchi
Little Slate, 1945
cast bronze from the slate original
28.6 cm x 28.6 cm x 17.1 cm (11-1/4" x 11-1/4" x 6-3/4")
Cast 2 of 8
Edition of 8 + 2 APs

**Photo credit:** © 2013, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**Image:** Sgrafo Modern
Korallen Series (design by Peter Müller), ca. 1960-1980,
porcelains
33 vases.

**Photo credit:** Photo: David Smith

**Image:** Unknown
Boro Futonji, Early 20th Century
mended and patched textile used as futon cover (futonji), fragment of Indigo Cotton mounted on canvas
136 cm x 90 cm (53-9/16" x 35-7/16")

**Photo credit:** Courtesy Mingei Arts Gallery, Paris. Photo: Michel Gurfinkel
**Image:** Bernard Leach  
Vase, c. 1955  
ceramic with black and brown glaze  
37 cm x 15 cm (14-9/16" x 5-7/8")  
Courtesy the Montgomery Collection  

**Photo credit:** Courtesy the Montgomery Collection

**Image:** Trisha Donnelly  
Untitled, 2011  
stainless steel  
68 cm x 9 cm (26-3/4" x 3-9/16")  
Edition of 8 + 1 AP and 1 HC  

**Photo credit:** Copyright Nicolas Trembley
**Image:** Ruth Asawa  
*Untitled (S.114. Haning, Six-Lobed Continuous Form within a Form with One Suspended and Two Tied Spheres), c. 1958*  
Iron copper and brass wire  
332.7 cm x 55.9 cm x 55.9 cm (131” x 22” x 22”)

**Photo credit:** Courtesy Christie's Inc & the Estate of Ruth Asawa

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**Image:** Charlotte Perriand  
*Low chair, c. 1950*  
Bamboo  
72.5 cm x 77 cm x 61.5 cm (28-9/16” x 30-5/16” x 24-3/16”)

**Photo credit:** Courtesy Galerie Downtown François Laffanour and Pace London, London. Photo: Damian Griffiths
**Image:** Unknown
Negoro Bon, Momoyama period (1573-1603) wood and Negoro lacquer
35.6 cm x 35.6 cm (14’ x 14”)
Courtesy the Mingei Arts Gallery

**Photo credit:** Courtesy the Mingei Arts Gallery // ETHNIC-ARTS S.A.R.L

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**Image:** Danh Vo
Danh Vo
Untitled (Flag), 2012
cardboard, gold - 395 gr.

**Photo credit:** Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel