

# Art in the Garden

Hakkodo, the Artisans of Kamakura

Spring 2015



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*Hakkodo: the Artisans of Kamakura* was the third in a series of three exhibitions featuring Japanese lacquerware – a unique art form that is still little known outside of Japan. This exhibition offered a rare chance to see how a centuries-old tradition has evolved from generation to generation down to the present day.

## CARVING A NEW PATH FOR AN ANCIENT TRADITION

In Kamakura, Japan, a small history-bound city located about an hour south of Tokyo, the craft of carved, lacquered woodwork has been passed down from father to son for 29 generations. One of the oldest establishments working in this medium is the Goto family's Hakkodo. Breaking new ground as the first woman to head the family business, Keiko Goto is building upon the tradition of her ancestors while creating work that is both innovative and uniquely her own. In this exhibition, Keiko and her artisan sister Naoko Goto have brought all four generations of Hakkodo work to the Portland Japanese Garden for the first time in more than one-hundred years.

Hakkodo's skills have been passed through generations, but they're not afraid of adding modern methods to make beautiful objects of art.

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## AN EVOLUTION OF DESIGN

The woodcarving tradition of Japan began with Buddhist sculpture, which flourished in the Kamakura period (1185-1332). In the 14th and 15th centuries, Buddhist sculptors in Kamakura became known for their creative use of lacquered wood in a technique now referred to as Kamakura-bori.

Inspired by imported Chinese methods of carving low-relief patterns into many layers of lacquer on religious objects, the new Japanese method of applying lacquer after carving the wood resulted in stunning designs that had greater depth and design possibilities.

When Buddhism fell out of favor in Japan in the 19th century, Buddhist sculptor Itsuki Goto redirected his work to produce objects for everyday life such as trays and bowls which showcased his mastery of this technique in their ornate designs, establishing Hakkodo in 1900.

Eager to show the world this exquisite example of Japanese workmanship, Japan sent work by Itsuki and his son Unkyu to the Lewis & Clark Centennial Exposition of 1905 in Portland, where Hakkodo was awarded a Gold Medal for outstanding craftsmanship.

A graduate of Tokyo National University of Fine Art & Music, Keiko Goto has continued to take Kamakura-bori in new directions as Hakkodo's chief designer. "The beautifully carved robes of Buddhist sculpture by Ms. Goto's great grandfather are reflected in the flowing lines of her contemporary work, adding a new chapter to this artisan family's long history," said Diane Durston, the Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Arts and Education.

This exhibition brought the Goto family back to Portland 110 years later.

While Keiko Goto is making history as the first woman to run the family business, she follows a family tradition of innovation. Shuntaro Goto, Ms. Goto's father, also played a significant role in the evolution of Hakkodo's designs. His plate titled "Pomegranate" can be seen as a seminal piece that bridges past and present with bolder, more expansive design elements.



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