

The East-West Center Arts Program, and the  
Center for Ainu & Indigenous Studies, Hokkaido University, present

**Performances: March 1–3, 2013**  
EWC Gallery and Honolulu Festival venues

# Ainu Treasures:

## *A Living Tradition in Northern Japan*

The Ainu are an indigenous people of Japan. “Ainu” means “human” in the Ainu language. They once inhabited northern Honshu (Japan’s largest island), Hokkaido, southern Sakhalin, and the Kurile Islands. Most Ainu now live in Hokkaido, with a limited number in Tokyo, in other parts of Japan, and abroad.

In recent decades, indigenous people throughout the world have taken the initiative to revive their traditional cultures and the Ainu are no exception. One of the examples of such an attempt is a project for Ainu artists to make replicas of Ainu artifacts owned by various museums. This activity is helpful for the Ainu people to regain what has been lost and integrate the traditional skills of ancestors into contemporary works. Moreover, these new cultural resources inspire both innovation and creativity among Ainu artists.

This exhibition features modern Ainu masterpieces and reproductions of Ainu artifacts held by Hokkaido University’s Botanic Garden Museum; early 20th century Ainu handicrafts from the Bishop Museum in Honolulu; historic and contemporary photographs of Ainu craftsmen; and video clips showing historical and social context.

Included in the Gallery are ceremonial objects—quiver, libation sticks, ritual wood shaving sticks, necklace and sword belt; textiles—cotton and wood bark fiber embroidered robes, bags and headbands; and everyday objects—a deer call, harpoon, fish spear, knives, trays and bowl.

This exhibition represents the Hokkaido University Center for Ainu & Indigenous Studies’ first exhibition initiative beyond the shores of Japan. ■



OFFERING. EARLY 20TH C.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: SEIZO KINOSHITA, AINU MUSEUM



EMBROIDERING. EARLY 20TH C.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: SEIZO KINOSHITA, AINU MUSEUM



MASASHI KAWAKAMI OFFERING TONOTO (SAKE), 2010

**ainu no takara: nihon hokubu ni ikizuku dentou**  
**アイヌの宝：日本北部にいきづく伝統**  
**ikor: samormosir imakake ta husko orowano an puri**

Curator: **Michael Schuster**

Guest Curator, Photographer: **Koji Yamasaki**

Additional research: **Masaru Kato, Nanako Iwasa, Vincent Mitsuharu Okada**

Exhibit design: **Lynne Najita, Michael Schuster**

Guest visual artists and lecturers: **Toru Kaizawa, Jirota Kitahara**

Guest performers: **Oki, Marewrew, Shusei Toko, Ikuo Yamamaru**



## The Ainu traditional life and world view

The Ainu believe that spirits dwell in natural phenomena, plants and animals, tools made by humans, and everything else; and that everything comes down to *ainumosir*, the Ainu homeland in different forms to fulfill a mission from the realm of spirits. Such spirits not only dwell in beneficial things, but also in natural disasters and diseases.

Among these spirits, the Ainu respect those that are necessary for people's lives, and those of phenomena beyond human power, as their *kamuy*, gods.

The Ainu believe that stable and peaceful lives can be realized with divine protection and through the obtainment of food. *Kamuynomi* rituals are held to pray for the future continuity of peaceful lives and to offer gratitude for divine protection.

The following artists are all contemporary crafts people who have created unique objects based upon historic Ainu crafts. They continue the traditions of their ancestors and try to replicate both the process and the product in their work.

## Ceremony

**Masashi Kawakami** was raised in Nibutani in Biratori Town and lives in Sapporo. He was involved in Biratori's Ainu-related activities from 2003 to 2007. In 2003, he won first prize at the Ainu Oratorical Contest (Oral Literature Division). He worked for the Hokkaido University Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies from 2008 to 2010.

### Masashi Kawakami talks about asking his elders for advice:

"I asked my elders what I was doing wrong and as a result I found a way to produce *inaw* like the one from Biratori. First, the *makiri* (knife) blade needs to be carefully sharpened on a medium whetstone and then on a finishing whetstone. After barking the willow, it needs to be dried in the shade for about six days to create perfect curling conditions. The most important part is how the knife blade is placed against the willow. First, it should be set cross-wise on the wood and pulled, then gradually tilted diagonally until the wood surface is shaved off all at once. This produces a loosely curled, wavy *inaw kike* with a wide point."

*Inaw* are made by shaving straight branches of willow or dogwood with a knife. A variety of shapes and functions exist. *Inaws* are used as offerings for *Kamuy* (Gods). However, rather than being thought of as simple objects, they are considered to be messengers with their own will that are sent to communicate with the gods. They also play special roles such as fighting and exorcising evil spirits.



CARVING LIBATION STICK, EARLY 20TH C.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: SEIZO KINOSHITA, AINU MUSEUM



**Toru Kaizawa** was born and lives in Biratori Town's Nibutani area. He learned woodcarving from his father, Tsutomu Kaizawa. He runs a folk craft store and produces traditional Ainu craftwork as well as new items created using traditional Ainu techniques. He is recognized as an Excellent Artisan by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido.

### Toru Kaizawa describes his process:

"A glimpse at the perfect articles produced by our ancestors and used daily by people helped me to acquire the skills of those artisans, thus inspiring further creativity and confidence...For me, engaging in the replica production means finding my inner self. The rebellion and objection which I felt until I reached my 30s, has softened from seeing various works produced by friends and ancestors. Now, I think we also need to see a change in Ainu craftwork, but we must also be careful to maintain our own distinct identities. I look forward to continued self-expression through craftwork."

In the above photo, Kaizawa is making a ceremonial quiver. These objects, usually used for hunting, were also made as treasured ritual items. The ceremonial quivers were often made with Japanese lacquer, which was prized by the Ainu, and the body of the quiver was frequently decorated with metal discs. During the ceremony, they were hung from walls or from the altar. "For the *ikayopikor* (quiver), I am satisfied that I used glue derived from deer nails as an adhesive agent."



## Daily Objects

**Koji Kaizawa** was born and lives in Biratori Town's Nibutani area. He learned woodcarving from his father, Tsutomu Kaizawa, and now runs a folk craft store. He has presented numerous works beyond the boundaries of traditional Ainu craft. He is recognized as an Excellent Artisan by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido.

### **Koji Kaizawa describes the process of carving an *ita*, or tray:**

"The moment I saw a tray produced by Shitaehori (a venerable Ainu artist from the 19th century) among the works by our ancestors, I thought, "This is it," and decided to make a replica of it.

"While I was carving the tray's floral design, I wondered what its producer, Shitaehori, was feeling and thinking while creating his work.

I imagined him carving peacefully in a place surrounded by flowers.

"While producing these replicas, I was surprised by our ancestors' skill, wisdom and eagerness for production. I would like to use the lessons I have learned from these reproductions in my own work in the future."



**Urakawa Tahachi** was born and lives in Urakawa Town. While producing and selling a wide variety of Ainu craftwork, he also creates everyday items for occupations such as hunting and fishing. Well versed in various aspects of Ainu culture — particularly woodworking techniques — he has produced numerous replicas of museum materials, and his knives are highly valued. He is recognized as an Excellent Artisan by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido.

### **Urakawa Tahachi talks about making items the same way as the older generations:**

"When I create objects in the same way as the old materials were produced, I can understand the difficulties experienced by those who made them. Even though the chisels available in those days must have been inferior to the ones we have now, my work still cannot compete with theirs.

"One of my concerns for the future of Ainu craftwork is the lack of successors. I would also like others to carefully select materials for woodcarving. I began producing knives for my own use, and trying them out during hunting made me realize that painted maple (*Acer mono*) is the best material. I believe that most old knives are made from this because it is the only material hardy enough for practical use."

## Textiles

**Yasuko Uetake** was born in Muroran City and lives in Noboribetsu City. She was head of the Noboribetsu Branch Office of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido. She has made a significant contribution to the development of Ainu culture in Noboribetsu since around 1978, when she made a replica of a garment with local Noboribetsu Ainu motifs based on old photographs. She is also committed to educating young people in her role as an Ainu embroidery class instructor.

### **Yasuko Uetake wonders about how the original maker felt when making her own item:**

"When I make a replica, I consider what the producer of the original might have been feeling while creating it, and I try not to compromise that sentiment. That is, I try to avoid doing it my way or choosing the easy way. Above all, the important thing is remembering to appreciate the works of our ancestors."



WEAVING. EARLY 20TH C PHOTOGRAPHER: SEIZO KINOSHITA, AINU MUSEUM



**Eiko Ota** (née Fujie) was born in Shiraoi Town and lives in Sapporo. She has been interested in Ainu embroidery since 2004, when she began working for “Yukara

no Sato” (Ainu Kotan) located in the Noboribetsu Bear Park. She has studied Ainu embroidery under Nobuko Tsuda and Shizue Kato since 2006.

**Eiko Ota talks about the resonance that older items carry with them:**

“Old items carry the weight of the times with them. In today’s world, it is easy to create symmetrical designs and clothes due to the availability of various tools and types of cloth. In those days, however, they used the thickness of fingers, the size of palms or even finger joints to measure a half, a third or a quarter of the width of a piece of cloth. I was impressed by these wonderful techniques. In addition, I could easily envision an Ainu woman spending many evening hours lovingly sewing clothes for her family by the light of a fireplace or a kerosene lamp.”



**Noboku Tsuda** was born in Mukawa Town and lives in Sapporo. She serves as a curator at the Hokkaido Ainu Center. Through her detailed academic research into Ainu women’s handiwork (particularly sewing, basket making and braid work), she has made a significant contribution to identifying and restoring traditional techniques that had been lost. She is also involved in efforts to educate young people and produce textbooks.

**Noboku Tsuda talks about traditional Ainu pattern composition:**

“I realized then that the producer of this *matanpusi* (headband) made the patterns by folding the cloth into eight horizontally equal parts and four vertically equal parts. I checked this by folding the copy a number of times before creating a full-size background cloth. Next, I placed a piece of cotton fabric onto this background cloth and sewed frames for the patterns, which I then tacked. This is a traditional Ainu pattern composition method. Researching about 300 long-cherished artifacts taught me of the existence of pattern composition methods like this. Using the technique eliminates the need for rough sketches and design work. It is a traditional method created by Ainu artisans at a time when paper and pencils were not available. Accordingly, this *matanpusi* replica has no sketch design.”



**Kayoko Nishida** was born in Kitami City’s Tanno Town, and lives in Akan Town. After marrying, she learned Ainu embroidery and other aspects of Ainu culture from Sawa Kotori and many other *huci* (elderly women) while running a folk craft store in the Ainu Kotan Village at the Lake Akan Hot Spring Resort. She has also replicated a number of museum garments, and is recognized as an Excellent Artisan by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido.

**Kayoko Nishida talks about the soft lines in patterns:**

“I replicated a robe characterized by the soft lines of its pattern. Although it’s not possible to meet the producer of the original, I believe she was a kindhearted woman. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have been able to produce soft lines like these. The method of combining embroidered designs was also unique, although viewers may need to look very closely to see it. This robe was embroidered with white and purple silk thread. Purple thread was used first, and was replaced briefly with white thread halfway through the embroidery before reverting to purple thread again. I believe this indicates that the producer cherished short threads as much as long threads. I hope people will enjoy the softness of the pattern and the shades of the embroidery’s colors.

“I began making replicas because I wanted to let people know about the wonderful designs of our ancestors. The ideas they wove into the garments do not want to be buried in museum warehouses hidden from view. I think they want to be seen more and more so that they can convey the ideas of their producers to people.”

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Center for Ainu & Indigenous Studies,  
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The Ainu Museum, Hokkaido



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## Special Events

All in the EWC Gallery, admission free.

**Sunday, January 20, 2:00-3:30 p.m.**  
**Exhibition Gala Opening** including reception, invocation ceremony and art demonstration.

**Sunday, February 3, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**  
Illustrated talk "**Ainu 101: Japan's Indigenous People**" by Vincent Mitsuharu Okada, UH doctoral candidate in social welfare.

**Sunday, February 17, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**  
Illustrated hands-on presentation "**Ainu: Teaching Young Learners the Importance of Preserving Culture and Language**" by Terrina Wong and Naomi Hirano-Omizo.

**Sunday, March 3, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**  
**Performance Demonstration** by Oki and Marewrew quartet, renowned Ainu musicians.

### March 1-3

Ainu artists will perform at the Hawai'i Convention Center and in Waikiki, as part of **Honolulu Festival**.  
[www.honolulufestival.com/](http://www.honolulufestival.com/)



**Sunday, March 10, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**  
Illustrated talk "**From ku=kor ikor (my treasures) to an=kor ikor (our treasures): New Perspectives and Challenges in Ainu Art**" by Nanako Iwasa, M.Ed. and doctoral student, Hokkaido University Graduate School of Education.

**Sunday, April 14, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**  
Illustrated talk "**An Illegal Dam Still Stands: The Nibutani Dam and Nibutani Village.**" UH Law Professor Mark Levin discusses environmental action by Ainu villagers.

**Sunday, May 5, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**  
Illustrated talk "**Handprints of Our Ancestors: Curating an Exhibition about Ainu Traditions and Continuity.**" Guest curator Koji Yamasaki, Associate Professor, Hokkaido University Center for Ainu & Indigenous Studies, discusses his work with the Ainu community.



*Object photos courtesy of  
The Botanic Garden & Museum,  
Hokkaido University*



The **East-West Center** promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options. The Center is an independent, public, non-profit organization with funding from the U.S. government, and additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments in the region.

The **East-West Center Arts Program** for 35 years has enriched the community through concerts, lectures, symposia, and exhibitions focusing on traditional arts of the region, and by arranging cultural and educational tours by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.  
<http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>

**EWC Arts Team:** Karen Knudsen, director, External Affairs; William Feltz, arts program manager; Michael Schuster, Ph.D., curator; Eric Chang, arts outreach coordinator, Yining Lin & Jason Li, arts assistants.

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**East-West Center Gallery  
Honolulu, Hawai'i**

*John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road  
(corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)  
Gallery hours: Weekdays: 8:00 a.m. -5:00 p.m.  
Sundays: Noon-4:00 p.m.  
Closed Saturdays, holidays, and March 31 (Easter)*

For further information: 944-7177  
[arts@EastWestCenter.org](mailto:arts@EastWestCenter.org)  
<http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>  
*School & group tours available*

**Gallery visitors interested in joining the EWC Arts 'Ohana can obtain the appropriate flyer in the gallery, by telephoning the EWC Foundation at 944-7105, or online: <http://arts.EastWestCenter.org>**



HOKKAIDO SCENERY, 2010



SALMON FISHING, EARLY 20TH C. PHOTOGRAPHER: SEIZO KINOSHITA, AINU MUSEUM



URAKAWAI TAHACHI: SALMON FISHING, 2012