

DESIGN SEPTEMBER 05 -30 September 2019**The Japanese influence on 20th century Design**

On the occasion of Brussels Design September, the Gokelaere & Robinson gallery is presenting a selection of pieces by twentieth century designers inspired by the Japanese art of living, in dialogue with the work of contemporary Japanese ceramists such as Machiko Hashimoto and Sawa Kiyotsugu.

After long isolation, Japan opened its gates to the rest of the world in the nineteenth century, revealing the richness of its culture. Since then, it has continuously fascinated and inspired the Western world.

Modernist architects and designers have, among other things, drawn on Japanese fundamentals to create pieces that combine simplicity, elegance, functionality and craftsmanship.

In Europe, the work of Charlotte Perriand probably best reflects this influence. Invited in 1940 by the Japanese government as a decorative arts advisor to the Ministry of Commerce, she discovered a way of life and an approach to design that appeared self-evident to her, and in total harmony with her personal approach focused on the functional and personalized aspect of design.

On returning to France, she applied her discoveries, drawing inspiration for example from the Japanese house building system, consisting essentially of prefabricated and assembled elements like tatami mats, partitions and "shoji" sliding doors, for creating pieces like her Nuage library of the late fifties.

While Scandinavian designers have not been directly influenced by Japan, there are many similarities between the two cultures. Respect for traditional cabinetmaking, the importance of craftsmanship and materials and a refined approach to design can be found as well in Scandinavian as in Japanese artefacts.

We find this approach again in the work of Swedish designer Axel Einar Hjorth. Working mainly in solid pine with a gouge (curved chisel), Hjorth produces sober and functional pieces.

That Japanese culture is present not only in Europe is demonstrated by the United States, home to many Japanese.

George Nakashima, a major ambassador of Japanese know-how, has bequeathed a unique oeuvre that has shaped the history of American design.

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Born in the United States of a Japanese family, he learned from an old Japanese craftsman the traditional cabinetmaking techniques of his country of origin. His pieces are a perfect alchemy of respect for nature and trees, mainly American walnut, and culture, with Nakashima never losing sight of the functional aspect of his furniture.

Ceramics is one of the oldest arts in Japan and an integral part of the Japanese lifestyle. By respecting traditional Japanese techniques, the ceramists we have chosen to exhibit offer their own sensitivity and creativity, echoing the theme of this exhibition on the Japanese influence on twentieth-century design.

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