

session

Kumamoto's Traditional Crafts + minä perhonen



photo : Masami Miyai

People meet people, and people encounter things.

Skills handed down through generations encounter new ways of seeing, and each resonates with the other.

“session” captures the moment when this resonance gives rise to an unexpected creation.

Kumamoto's traditional crafts, with more than 100 years of history, entered into a sustained dialogue with minä perhonen's approach to making things.

Obake no Kinta (“Kinta the Ghost,” a mechanical trick doll) and *Karakuri Eto Ningyo* (mechanical Chinese zodiac dolls) possess the power to bring people joy and raise an involuntary smile.

Higo Temari (embroidered thread balls) are made with someone special in mind, a wish worked into every stitch.

Hanatebako are boxes that hold treasured belongings and grow ever more meaningful over time.

The skills, memories, and attentiveness to daily life inherited through each of these traditions resonate deeply with minä perhonen's longstanding belief in connecting things and passing them on.

Tradition does not mean preserving something unchanged forever: it means handing it down to the future through new encounters.

Through “session,” you can experience the dialogue, resonance, and creative process that unfolded here.



photo : Masami Miyai

Star Garden Kin-chan

This collaboration began with an idea: why not make a Kinta doll's *eboshi* (tall formal cap) from a minä perhonen textile? The “star garden” fabric was chosen for the cap, the eyes were adapted from its pattern, and the hairstyle and body were also reimagined as originals. The result is a Kinta with a strikingly bold design.



photo : Masami Miyai

Karakuri Sebasu-chan

Drawing on the techniques of *karakuri* (mechanical) Chinese zodiac dolls that Atsuga Doll Store has been producing for some 30 years, Sebastian, the bear who raises his hand in the “alive” textile pattern, has been given three-dimensional form. Pull the cord at his back and he lifts his left hand straight up, opening his mouth as if to state an opinion. The inspiration for “alive,” released in 2011, came from news reports of bears appearing in populated areas. Now, in 2026, the issue has once again become urgently relevant.

Obake no Kinta

Artisan: Shinhachiro Atsuga (Atsuga Ningyoten / Atsuga Doll Store)

With its bright red face and black *eboshi* (tall formal cap), Obake no Kinta is a *karakuri* (mechanical) doll whose eyes flip over and long tongue protrudes when its cord is pulled. When samurai general Kiyomasa Kato was building Kumamoto Castle, a foot soldier named Kinta, known for amusing people with his comical appearance and antics, came to be known as Odoke no Kinta (Kinta the Jester). In the mid-19th century, the doll artisan Hikoshichi Nishijinya (fifth-generation head of Atsuga Doll Store), who had moved from Kyoto to Kumamoto, is said to have created the original *karakuri* doll based on the legend of Kinta, and it gradually came to be called Obake no Kinta (Kinta the Ghost). Atsuga Doll Store has continued to produce the doll through successive generations ever since. Its current head, Shinhachiro Atsuga, represents the 10th generation.

(Image credit: Kumamoto Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center)





photo : Masami Miyai

Higo Temari ball + “anemone”

Higo Temari (embroidered thread balls) feature a wide range of botanical patterns, but designs rendered in a single color and defined simply by outlines are a departure from standard practice. Reproducing the distinctive petals of the “anemone” pattern required laying out more than 40 fine guide lines, making the piece a formidable challenge for the maker.

“anemone” grew out of “tambourine,” one of minä perhonen's best-known designs, creating a relationship of *tsugu* (continuity through connection) between the two. Another form of *tsugu* can be seen in the design's adaptation from the flat plane of a textile to the sphere of a Higo Temari ball.



photo : Masami Miyai

Higo Temari ball + “choucho”

In this collaboration, “choucho,” minä perhonen's signature butterfly motif, flutters over a Higo Temari (embroidered thread ball) patterned with the traditional *hoshi tsunagi* (linked stars) design. Composed entirely of thread in five shades of white, the ball gleams like a pearl due to its subtle gradations of color and the way

Higo Temari balls

Artisan: Michiko Tsuruta (Higo Temari Dokokai / Higo Temari Society)

Higo Temari balls are distinguished by a core of loofah and a wealth of geometric patterns in French embroidery thread. In the Edo period (1603–1868), ladies-in-waiting at castles began making these balls, and the practice spread to castle towns throughout Japan. It was also handed down through successive generations in the Higo Domain. No formal designs or diagrams were used, and instead women passed on the techniques by making the balls together. The Higo Temari ball also gave rise to the traditional children's song “Antagata Dokosa.”

The tradition disappeared for a time but was revived in 1968 by the Higo Temari Society. Michiko Tsuruta studied under the society's founder, Teru Goto, and succeeded her in 1993. There are some 17 traditional patterns, and simply changing the combinations of thread colors can dramatically alter their appearance. One highly appealing aspect of Higo Temari balls is the limitless range of their designs, which can be adapted or replaced with entirely original patterns.

(Image credit: Kumamoto Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center)



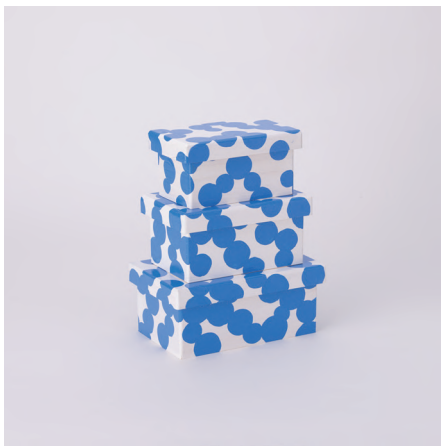


photo : Masami Miyai

Hanatebako + “soda water”

At first glance, the “soda water” pattern may seem far removed from the *hanatebako* box, which is virtually synonymous with floral patterns. In the past, however, *hanatebako* were sometimes painted with motifs other than flowers, such as *seigaiha* (stylized ocean waves) and spirals. This collaboration illuminates a different, often overlooked side of *hanatebako*.



photo : Masami Miyai

Hanatebako + “flowerscope”

In this collaboration, “flowerscope,” minä perhonen's camellia pattern, is applied to a *hanatebako* (small painted wooden box). Keeping the background, a simple white brings out the texture of *honzukuri* (a method in which washi is applied to a wooden box and then painted). Another distinctive feature is the use of white outlines in place of the customary black.

Hanatebako

Artisan: Takayuki Sumioka

(Sumioka Kyodo Gangu Seisakusho / Sumioka Local Toy Factory)

Together with *kiji-uma* (a wheeled wooden toy horse), painted wooden boxes known as *hanatebako* (small painted wooden box) are among the best-known woodcrafts of the Hitoyoshi region and have a history extending back more than 800 years. Tradition holds that fugitives belonging to the Heike clan, defeated at the Battle of Dan-no-ura, fled deep into the Hitoyoshi hinterland and made and sold these boxes to earn their living. To make a *hanatebako*, hinoki cypress or cedar is milled, assembled into a box, given a ground coat, and painted with vivid camellia blossoms. The boxes come in 10 sizes and can be nested inside one another. At Hitoyoshi's spring market (held in the second month of the lunar calendar, around present-day March), they were sold as *ichibako* (market boxes), and it was the custom to bring them home as gifts for girls. The craft nearly died out, but in the late Meiji era (1868–1912) it was revived by Kitaro Sumioka, first-generation head of Sumioka Local Toy Factory. Carried on by the second-generation head, Tadayoshi, and then the third, Takayuki, the workshop marked its 100th anniversary in 2025.

(Image credit: Kumamoto Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center)

