

There are wonders to be found up and down the length of the Japanese archipelago, if you know where to look. A small rural town on the southern island of Kyushu produces 90 percent of the nation's longbows. A snowy mountain town is home to a Living National Treasure who makes paper for Yayoi Kusama. A regional city with a turbulent history is the only place that can produce all of the parts for *wagasa*, or paper umbrellas. Further north, a lovingly tended forest is needed to supply raw lacquer for artisans nationwide. These pockets of craft exist in abundance, not only in the ancient capital of Kyoto or the bustling megapolis of Tokyo, but in every corner of the country.

This long and rich heritage of handicrafts is a testament to the Japanese people's culture of care toward their institutions. Unfortunately, care alone cannot sustain tradition. An increasingly complicated, connected world has seen artisans struggle to find a market, or a successor to carry on their traditions, leading to many crafts going extinct. Despite these setbacks, waves of talented artisans dedicated to the conservation of handicrafts are emerging, more diverse in age and gender than ever before. Spending time with these amazing people, learning about their crafts, inevitably raises questions about our modern lifestyles: What do we value in the things with which we surround ourselves? How can the dedication these masters show toward their respective professions inform the way we lead our lives?

The popularity of Japanese handicrafts has rallied in recent years, partly due to the timeless aesthetic appeal of traditional Japanese design, and partly because of a new generation of artisans finding more creative ways to utilize their centuries-old techniques. And because a growing number of sustainability-minded consumers are no longer looking to buy the quickest and cheapest. More than that, I believe people are touched by the intimacy of a handmade thing—especially if they can see how it is made. Despite the mastery poured into each object, there is something very human about the products of these artisans: they remind us of our drive to be better, of how to keep striving toward an ideal. They remind us of all that has come before us: the people, the hours spent toiling over a workbench and in tutelage of the next generation. Japanese crafts are alive and evolving, and this book is a tour around the different craft regions of Japan, bringing you inside the workshops of these wonderful, dedicated people.

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