

**PRESS RELEASE****Ligornetto, October 2019****Crafted Japan. Aspects of *Mingei* in the Jeffrey Montgomery Collection  
Museo Vincenzo Vela, Ligornetto, 13 October 2019 – 8 March 2020**

**On October 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 the Museo Vincenzo Vela in Ligornetto opens its Autumn season with an exhibition devoted to a rich selection of items from the Jeffrey Montgomery Collection, internationally recognized as one of the most important in the sphere of Japanese arts and crafts outside of Japan. In line with the reflections on themes of a historical and artistic as well as philosophical and social nature developed on previous occasions, with respect to non-European cultural contexts also, the museum now embarks on a new exploration devoted to art in the everyday life of Japan.**

*Crafted Japan. Aspects of Mingei in the Jeffrey Montgomery Collection*, curated by **Gianna A. Mina** together with **Rossella Menegazzo** and **Hans Bjarne Thomsen**, presents over two hundred items from the Jeffrey Montgomery Collection, one of the most important in the sphere of Japanese arts and crafts outside the Land of the Rising Sun. For over fifty years, with passion and dedication, the Swiss-American Jeffrey Montgomery, resident in Ticino, has built up an extraordinary collection that is indeed unique in terms of variety and quality as well as its temporal span of over two thousand years.

The term *mingei* appearing in the title corresponds to the idea of folk arts and crafts. It was coined in 1925 by the art critic and philosopher Sōetsu Yanagi (1889–1961) for objects of everyday use, hand-made by anonymous craftsmen, usually in large quantities, and emblematic of their geographical area of origin. They are therefore initially inexpensive articles produced on a large scale but in accordance with tradition and the use of materials and techniques handed down and interpreted for years.

The exhibition therefore reveals aspects of a little-known Japan where everyday life is pervaded by a silent beauty, born out of use. The items on display are bound up with the life of Japanese society and embody the mentioned *mingei* ideals: ceramics for various uses, cooking utensils, figurines of an auspicious and religious nature, futon covers and kimonos as well as representations of animals associated with Japanese culture and widely known today, also through manga and anime. The presentation of artefacts, some of which never previously exhibited, in an art museum, an institution with no ethnographic aims, highlights their formal and aesthetic aspects. The latter are unknown or little-known to the general European public, more accustomed to the selective idea of Japanese art fostered in recent years by exhibitions focusing above all on 'high' forms of artistic expression of extraordinary virtuosity and of perfection, produced for the ruling class or aimed at the exportation to sophisticated collectors.

Produced with a variety of techniques and materials including glazed ceramics, wood, lacquer, fabrics, bamboo and iron, the items on show are presented on the basis of thematic criteria in the rooms on the museum's first floor and some parts of the ground floor, in an unprecedented and highly stimulating dialogue with the works in the Vela family's collection.

The different kinds of objects are laid out in a studied and structured order where functional and aesthetic values blend to unquestionably interesting effect. It is precisely in the variety of materials, colours and uses of the items gathered together that the fascination of the Jeffrey Montgomery Collection lies.

The collector was in fact motivated not only by the pleasure of building up an organic whole out of objects differing in terms of history and purpose, but also by a desire to contribute towards the awareness and interest towards a centuries-old tradition, fostering renewed understanding of the true relationship between human beings and artefacts, while at the same time prompting consideration of a different canon of judgement.

This approach to the subject reflects themes to which the Museo Vincenzo Vela attaches great importance. Over the last thirty years, this federal institution has indeed addressed concepts such as the overlapping of categories (art, contemporary design and folk art) and definitions (identitary, hierarchical and public) in the cultural sphere in a broad sense, through exhibitions focusing on remote forms of art (e.g. a rereading of ancient Egyptian art through outstanding European collections and literature) and forms of expression previously confined to the hazily defined sector of applied arts.

The exhibition's accompanying catalogue will be presented and made available in both Italian and English during the international Symposium ***Riconsiderando il Mingei / Riconsidering Mingei*** organized at the museum (25–26 October 2019). This richly illustrated work includes studies by the curators and other scholars specializing in this field.

The exhibition is further accompanied by a series of collateral activities and events grouped together under the title ***Rel-azioni. Incontri di altro tipo / Encounters of Another Kind*** as well as by a conference organized in collaboration with the universities of Zurich and Milan, which will examine the concept of *mingei* in all its complexity with reference to most recent studies.

**Tiziana Conte**

Communication, Media, PR

## Information

### Inauguration

**Sunday, 13 October 2019, 11.00 a.m.**

#### Speakers

Gianna A. Mina, Director of the Museo Vincenzo Vela

Rossella Menegazzo, University of Milan

Hans Bjarne Thomsen, Zurich University

Musical interludes by **Taisuke Yamashita**, cello

### Catalogue

The accompanying catalogue will be presented and made available at the associated **symposium *Riconsiderando il Mingei / Riconsidering Mingei*** (25–26 October 2019).

The richly illustrated bilingual edition (Italian and English) includes studies by Rupert Faulkner, Rossella Menegazzo, Gianna A. Mina, Tamae Sagi, Hans Bjarne Thomsen, Yoshikuni Yanagi, 216 pp., 221 colour illustrations, price 49 Swiss francs (CHF 44.- by showing the museum ticket's.)

### Symposium

In conjunction with the exhibition, a symposium\* will be held at the Museo Vincenzo Vela on 25 and 26 October 2019. ***Riconsiderando il Mingei / Riconsidering Mingei*** is organized by the Museo Vincenzo Vela and the University of Zurich, Department of East Asian Art, in collaboration with Milan University and with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Japan Foundation.

Within the framework of the symposium, which is open to all the public, the **documentary *Silent Voice, Silent Color*** on the textile traditions of Okinawa, directed by Ayako Mogi, will be shown on **Sunday, 27 October 2019 at 10.45 a.m.**

*\* Admission by registration (no charge for students) via email ([museo.vela@bak.admin.ch](mailto:museo.vela@bak.admin.ch)) or online through the website [www.museo-vela.ch](http://www.museo-vela.ch).*

### REL-AZIONI – INCONTRI DI ALTRO TIPO / ENCOUNTERS OF ANOTHER KIND

Interdisciplinary events and activities addressing the subject of the exhibition with originality and sensitivity from different viewpoints.

The complete programme is available on the website [www.museo-vela.ch](http://www.museo-vela.ch)

### Contacts

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