

Creation Story of the Wajima-nuri

Part 1

The rapid transformation of traditional Japanese cultures is being compelled by changes in modern lifestyles. In order to pass these cultures on to future generations, Japan designates those with high historical or artistic value as “important intangible cultural properties” and certifies organizations to be in charge of their preservation. Wajima-nuri, which has its roots in the Muromachi period (1336 to 1573), has a history of enriching people's lives while they refined their skills over hundreds of years. The Wajima-nuri Technique Preservation Society was certified in 1977, and has endeavored to preserve and pass on those skills.



Part 2

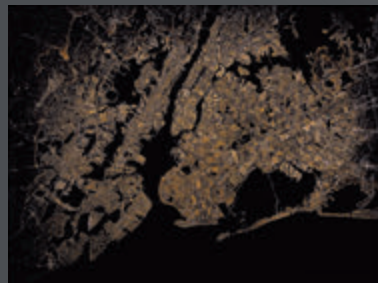
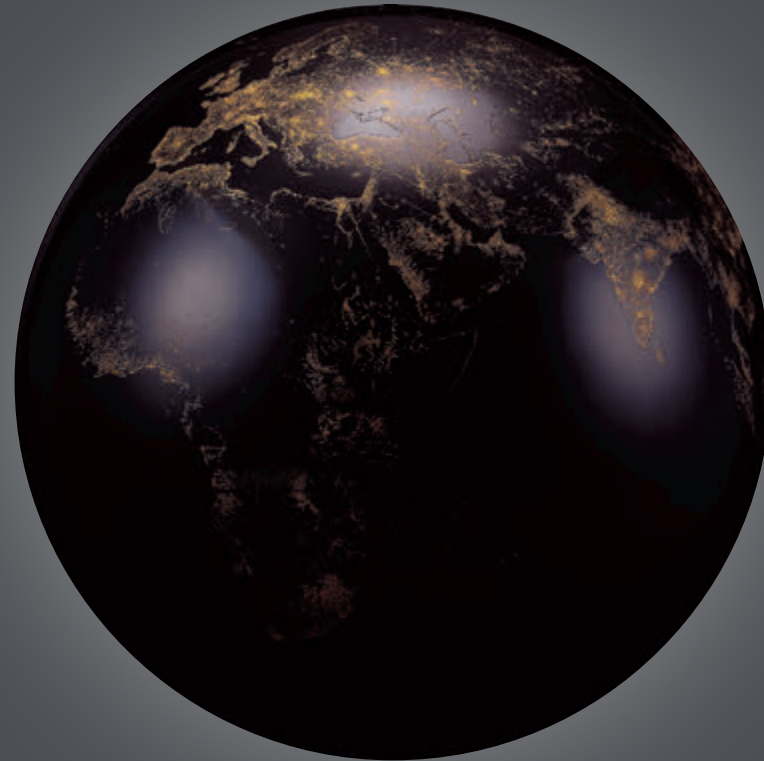
Urushi lacquer art is a representative craft of Japan with various appealing factors. Its ability to convey to many people world-class techniques and its irreplaceable beauty as a craft material are indispensable for the preservation of Wajima-nuri. The Wajima-nuri Technique Preservation Society will do its utmost to produce work that embodies this. Wajima-nuri has a well-established division of labor system based on occupational ability, and the Wajima-nuri Technique Preservation Society has established eight categories for these, including: *wan-kiji* (wood turning to produce objects such as bowls), *magemono* (bending of wood to produce curved items), *sashimono* (assembly of wood into boxes and shelves without the use of nails), *hou-kiji* (specialist carving of more complex shapes), *kyushitsu* (application of Urushi layers), *ro-iro* (polishing), *maki-e* (decoration by sprinkling gold or silver powder) and *chinkin* (decoration by carving patterns onto the surface and filling the grooves with gold and silver powder). We will spend five years working on this collaborative project.



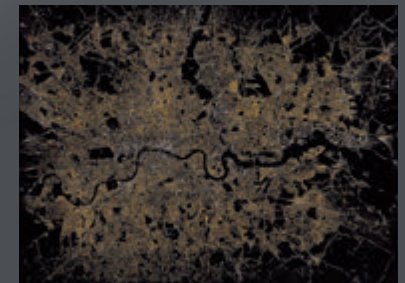
Tokyo



Beijing



New York

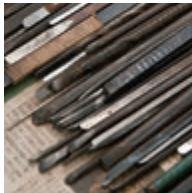


London

Large Globe “Earth at Night”

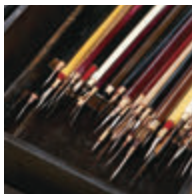
Part 3

The Wajima-nuri Technique Preservation Society determined that this project would be meaningless unless it was completed in Wajima, where extremely difficult work is possible. Following the Wajima-nuri manufacturing method, *maki-e* panels depicting four cities of the world and a large globe using the globe (important cultural property) of Takeo City, Saga Prefecture as a model, were to be produced. Even skilled artisans have no experience creating 1-meter diameter Wajima-nuri spheres. An unprecedented challenge had begun.



Part 4

The Wajima-nuri Large Globe “Earth at Night” was completed in March 2022, made possible by the artisans’ experience and wisdom that was leveraged during the various challenges faced. The fantastic, beautiful night views of the earth floating in space and the cities are depicted by jet black color and the brilliance of gold, which only Urushi art can properly express. Examining the globe gives the viewer a bird's-eye view of the world. We hope that it will be cherished for a long time as a work that conveys, from one corner of Wajima to the world, the meaning of considering others beyond conflicts and divisions.



Wajima-nuri Large Globe “Earth at Night”

Opening hours

9:00–17:00 (admission : 30 minutes before closing)

Closed days

During exhibition rotations
Year-end period

Access

- About 20 minutes by car from Noto Satoyama Airport
- About 100 minutes by car from Kanazawa city using the Noto Satoyama Kaido (highway)
- About 120 minutes by bus (Hokutetsu Okunoto) from Kanazawa Station.
Get off at “Wajima Ekimae”
- About 15 minutes by foot or 7 minutes by car from Wajima Ekimae bus stop



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facsimile: +81-768-22-9789

<https://www.art.city.wajima.ishikawa.jp>

WAJIMA MUSEUM OF URUSHI ART
石川県輪島漆芸美術館

The most important part of the globe is the sphere. The smallest units of the sphere were rings made by thinly cutting and bending planks of reaction wood. There were 295 wooden rings of various size prepared based on careful calculations. They were then assembled from large to small, with Urushi used for bonding. Several assemblies of rings were created.



Preparing the wood



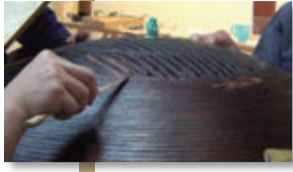
The assemblies of rings that made up the sphere were then shaped using a lathe. The largest was over 1-meter in diameter. A curve-guide was used to shape the rings into the required curvature. If they were carved even a little too much, the shape of the sphere would be spoiled, so work proceeded with great care. After joining all the assemblies of rings together, the resulting shape was a perfect sphere.



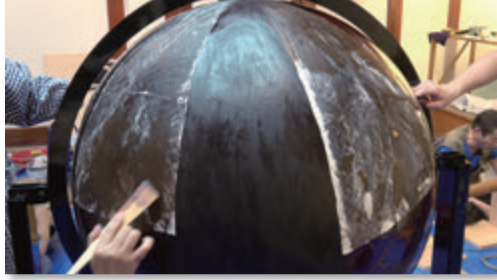
Zelkova and magnolia were used for the sphere's pedestal. The horizontal ring around the sphere is a wooden mosaic made by gluing small parts together with Urushi, one by one. The curve of the outer edge was created using various kinds of planes.



The central pillar and legs that bear the weight of the sphere were turned on a lathe. Careful shaping was performed while using the elegant appearance of the model globe as a reference. Once the sphere and pedestal parts were complete, they were temporarily assembled to check the work's overall balance.



Wajima-nuri, an important intangible cultural property, has a prescribed Urushi coating process. Foundational processes are carefully performed one after the other, including hardening the wood through raw Urushi absorption, applying *kokuso* paste to the joints between wood, and applying linen cloth for reinforcement of some areas. During the Urushi application process, we also decided to use a wood-drying furnace to accelerate the hardening of the Urushi.



The greatest characteristic of Wajima-nuri is the use of Wajima *Jinoko* (powdered diatomaceous earth) in the base Urushi layers. The name and order of application differs depending on the size of the *Jinoko* particles: *ippenji*, *nihenji* then *sanbenji*. *Ippenji* has the largest particles and is applied first. Layers of *Jinoko* and Urushi were repeatedly applied and polished.

Applying the Urushi

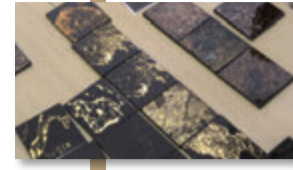
Jibuchibiki is one of the traditional methods of Wajima-nuri, and increases durability. Raw lacquer was applied to areas that are easily chipped, such as the corners of the legs and the edge of the horizontal ring, each time a base layer was applied.



For the middle and final Urushi coatings of the sphere, the collective knowledge of the artisans was utilised to make the best choices in regards to the various factors that greatly affect the finish, such as the viscosity and hardening speed of the Urushi, the thickness of the coat, and humidification adjustments. In addition, the metal latitude ring connected to the sphere was also lacquered black so it matched the appearance of the wooden parts. All the lacquer work was now complete and the full picture of the Wajima-nuri globe emerged.

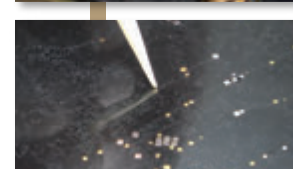
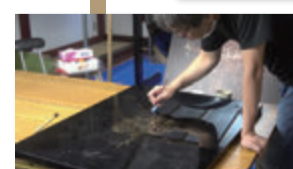
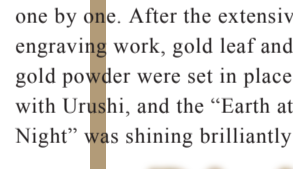
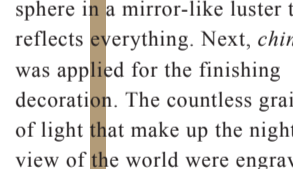
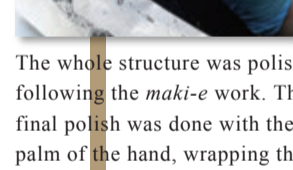
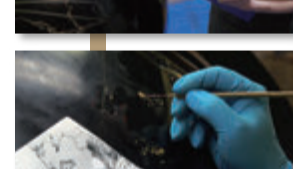
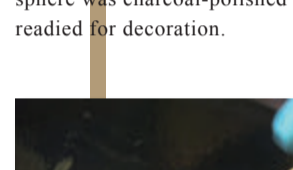
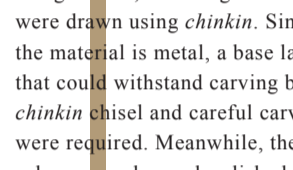
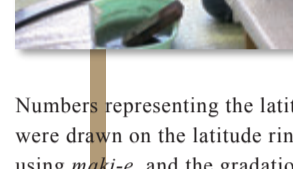


Draft sketching based on reliable data was indispensable for expressing the fantastic appearance of the earth at night as seen from space.



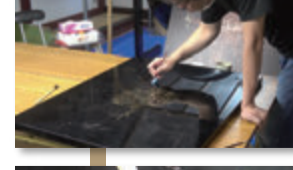
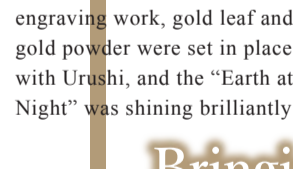
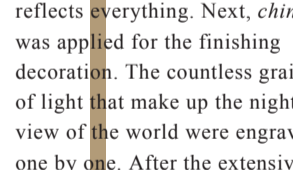
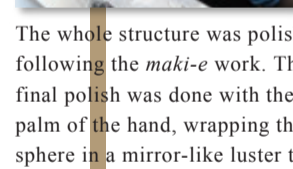
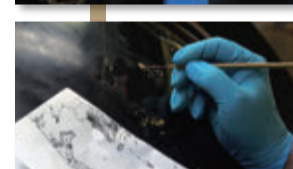
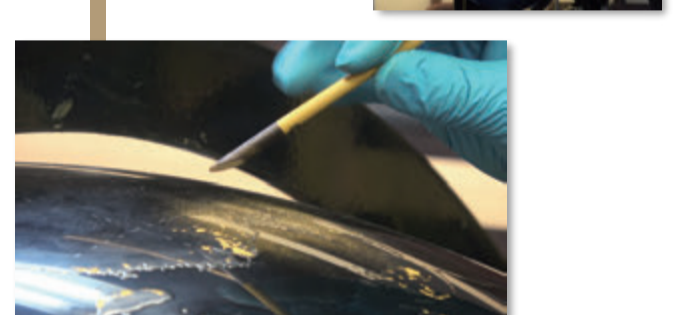
The Kanazawa College of Art assisted in creating the draft sketches from satellite images. Numerous trials were conducted to reproduce these using the techniques of *maki-e* and *chinkin*. The horizontal ring that surrounds the sphere was decorated with patterns depicting the atmosphere and water. In consideration of reflections on the sphere, translucent Urushi was

applied over the *maki-e*, which also used mother-of-pearl.



Numbers representing the latitude were drawn on the latitude ring using *maki-e*, and the gradations were drawn using *chinkin*. Since the material is metal, a base layer that could withstand carving by *chinkin* chisel and careful carving were required. Meanwhile, the sphere was charcoal-polished and readied for decoration.

In order to maintain the beautiful line of the perfect sphere, the land areas were only very slightly raised. All coastlines were drawn with a *maki-e* brush, and dry Urushi powder was sprinkled within them and sealed. On top of these, the bright, glittering urban areas of the world were drawn using *maki-e*.



Bringing out the shine



The four panels surrounding the globe are the night views of the four cities of Tokyo, Beijing, London, and New York, and were finished using mainly gold and platinum. "Earth at Night" was now complete, a story of the innumerable human lives contained in each glittering point and within the darkness.

