

Hyogushi (Scroll mounting)

Masahito Inazaki

Art mounters have played an important cultural role since ancient times. Inheriting the skills and spirit of their predecessors, they continue to quietly uphold Japanese culture.

Profile ● Born in 1969. Second son of the fifth-generation owner of Kyoshindo Inazaki Hyoguten. Certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, 2021. Certified as a Traditional Craftsman by the Traditional Crafts Industry Promotion Association, 2025.

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At the pinnacle of their craft, creating truly captivating spaces

On the day of our visit, three craftsmen were at their workbenches on the second floor of Kyoshindo Inazaki Hyoguten. Seated at the largest platform was Masahito, second son of fifth-generation owner Munechika Inazaki. I put my notebook down, then apologized when I sensed him looking at me. He explained quietly, "We call this 'O-ita,' or 'honorable platform.' It is a sacred place where we place items entrusted to us by the temple, and where we lay a platform for offerings to the gods at the New Year." The two young craftsmen kept working silently while we talked.

Masahito started on this path in his mid-twenties. Like his older brother Tomonobu, he had helped his father as a student, but after university, he got a job as a development engineer at an auto company. "In a large

organization, it is hard to see what you are achieving. I felt that my efforts wouldn't be rewarded in a seniority-based system. When they told me I might be transferred overseas, I quit the job and joined the family business," he says.

Tomonobu took responsibility for the store and community activities, and Masahito focused on improving his skills. He learned from his father and other senior craftsmen, and from industry veterans he knew through the Hyogu Artisan Association. Masahito's dedication to improvement and hard work are evident in the shop's many commissions from famous museums, temples, and shrines.

Today, Masahito focuses mainly on restoring hanging scrolls, folding screens, and framed work, and not only the mountings, but also the artwork itself. Some resto-

ration work was done in his father's time, but Masahito considers it central. "The reason that painting and calligraphy from a millennium ago still remain is that the backing paper has been replaced every few hundred years," he says. "It is our job to do this. We have been preserving culture since the seventh century by creating the mountings for sutras, calligraphy, and paintings. Our work has been a pillar of Japanese politics, religion, art, publishing, and all aspects of culture."

Kyoshindo Inazaki Hyoguten's "Edo Hyogu" is a style cultivated in the town of Edo (today's Tokyo). "In Kyoto, hyogushi (scroll mounters) were distinct from kyoji (picture framers), but an accomplished Tokyo mounter is considered capable of both tasks. Kyoto's culture was formed by aristocrats, but Edo's by townspeople and



As students, the young craftsmen trained in calligraphy and art restoration and then joined the company to become mounters.

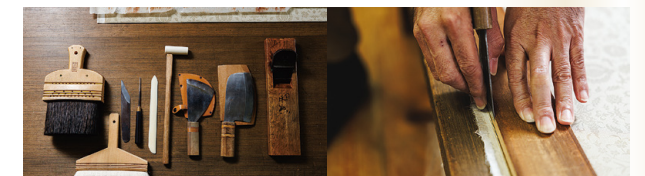
samurai, so it is not ostentatious: the mounting does not take precedence over the artwork. We have three levels of formality in mounting: *shin* (true), *gyo* (traditional), and *sou* (cursive),* and the mounter explains which is appropriate for a given space. In that sense, we are the producers of the space," Masahito explains. He is the backbone of his store, and a pillar of Japanese culture itself.

* Japanese aesthetic concepts found in tea ceremony, flower arranging, architecture, painting, and etiquette. *Shin* is the basic form, strict and formal; *sou* is informal, free, and elegant; and *gyo* is in between.

Supporting all aspects of Japan's cultural heritage



"The most important thing in my work is to be honest, to use high-quality paper, and to put all my skills into it."



Left: Masahito's favorite tools. The blades alone take many forms. Right: Once he has chosen the angle for his blade, he cuts the paper with complete assurance.