

# Hiroto Rakusho

The works of Hiroto Rakusho have various contrasts – yin and yang, stillness and movement, a world of light and darkness, sometimes hazy, sometimes crisp and clear. You could say his works have color, or you could argue just the opposite. The way he plays with light is the source of his color. He wields the faint, flickering light, amplifies it, and in the process, draws the Universe into his works. That is his artistry.



That his light comes from the shimmer and glimmer of metal leaf – in both ancient traditional applications and from contemporary researched techniques that he alone has perfected, is what illuminates his life and work. Rakusho was born into a world of gold and silver leaf, in 1962 in the famous Nishijin district of Kyoto, known for centuries for the finest quality hand-woven brocade fabrics. His father, Jisaku Nishiyama, a winner of the City of Kyoto Award for Outstanding Technical Contribution to Traditional Handicrafts, trained him in traditional metal leaf design using techniques handed down by generations of his family.

Once Rakusho was certified as a Master of Traditional Handicrafts in 1997 by The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, he immediately began to expand what gold leaf could do and be, and to pursue patterned gold and silver leaf as an art form. In a defiant entrepreneurial move, he registered his name, started manufacturing kimonos and opened a gallery to showcase his diverse work. He patented the gold leaf techniques, Kyo-hanga™, he invented to bring creative “life” to digital reproductions of famous, but fragile, damaged art works on paper or wood from the 13th to 17th Centuries, stored in Kyoto’s temples and shrines that he worked to restore and replace, as a participant in the TSUZURI Cultural Heritage Inheritance Project. This project took him to American museums where he was able to reproduce important Japanese cultural art works they owned and return them to be seen by the public in Kyoto museums, temples and shrines.

During this period, he reached out to many artists in France, Italy, Germany and Japan for collaborative art ventures. In Japan, he experimented with new uses of calligraphy with the innovative Master, Sakaki Bakuzan; with space age extruded fabric with Bridal Couture designer Yumi Katsura; and with calligraphy on glass and pottery with actor, TV personality, artist, Tsurutaro Kataoka. For his own art works, he explores the many colors of heated silver metal that vary over time, as part of his fascination with the mystery of the ever changing Moon.

Rakusho has held exhibitions at The Louvre Museum, Paris, Hosomi Museum and Kyoto Kitazoncho Greek-Roman Museum in Kyoto; ARTEXPO New York and Onishi Gallery in New York. His original artwork and four works on Japanese *washi* paper that both he and designer Ralph Rucci, another passionate artist, worked on together, will be exhibited in “collaboration” a two man show at Onishi Gallery, February 9 – 27, 2010. Hiroto Rakusho continues to expand new ways of incorporating glistening, lustrous – gold, silver, bronze, platinum – metal leaf into various forms of new art experiences.