



FROM TOP
Ko Kado with some karakami screens; the workshop at Kamisoe; Rokudouchinnou-ji temple houses some of Kado's work

TRADITIONAL PAPER CRAFT AT THE CUTTING EDGE

He specialises in the centuries-old technique of *karakami*, but Ko Kado is using contemporary designs to keep the tradition alive

Photographs by Hideaki Hamada

Folding screens for one of Kyoto's historic temples; silver-dyed wall panels for Tokyo's Michelin-starred L'Effervescence restaurant; invitations for parties hosted by high-end brands such as Chanel... These might not seem to have much in common, yet they're all examples of the handcrafted creations of Ko Kado, a modern-day master of all things paper.

Kado, 41, is the creative force behind Kyoto's Kamisoe, a small shop and atelier that specialises in *karakami*, a traditional technique of decorative paper-making using woodblock prints. His creations stand out for their contemporary aesthetic – a legacy of his background as a graphic designer – fused with five years of intense training at a centuries-old *karakami* studio.

Kado reckons he is one of only 10 or so masters of the technique in Japan, half of whom are based in Kyoto. He's also arguably the most modern in his approach. "Traditionally, *karakami* artisans use inherited woodblock prints with old patterns," he says. "But



gaze. But you can see his copper-dyed art panels at the nearby Hotel Kanra and the eye-catching blue-and-white signage made from woodblock-printed papers at Tsuruya Yoshinobu, a famous traditional Kyoto confectioner. You can also buy paper letter sets and custom-designed *karakami*

cards in the Kyoto National Museum shop.

Despite the fact that they vary widely in form and medium, his creations tend to share a common aesthetic: minimal, clean-lined, graphic and quintessentially Japanese (Plus, if you run your finger gently across the surface, you can feel the delicately raised motifs and patterns – reflecting the signature style of *karakami*.)

While many traditional crafts in Japan – and Kyoto in particular – are at risk of dying out as the artisans age and few young creatives are learning the highly specialist techniques, Kado appears refreshingly confident about the prospects of his chosen discipline. "I don't worry about the future of *karakami*," he says, "because there will also be a demand for paper for traditional Japanese architecture – temples and tea rooms. And they will always need to be fixed."

"Current generations understand the handcrafted side and also the computer-generated side of creating," Kado adds. "We don't hesitate to use and respect both."



FIND OUT MORE Kamisoe sells handcrafted envelopes and greeting cards from around £7. A set of 12 papers for one *fusuma* (sliding screen or panel) costs around £175-£350.

Kamisoe: 11-1 Higashi Fujinomori Murasakino Kita-ku Kyoto 603 8223; open 12-6pm, closed Mondays; kamisoe.com

WHERE TO SEE KO KADO'S WORK Kyoto National Museum kyohaku.go.jp; Hotel Kanra Kyoto hotelkanra.jp/en; Tsuruya Yoshinobu tsuruya.co.jp/en