



Artisanal Intelligence Inspiring Generations

English Guided Tour

2025/10/17

**Exhibition Venue /
National Taiwan Craft Research
and Development Institute ,
Taipei Branch**

**No. 41, Nanhai Road, Zhongzheng District,
Taipei City**

Introduction

In the early development of AI (Artificial Intelligence), the “Turing Test” conducted by British scientist Alan Turing reminds us of two important things: first, what we call a “perfect result” is never the work of machines alone. It begins with human imagination and artisanal skill, which set the standards that technology later strives to replicate. Second, in craft practice, the relationship between human, tool, and material is irreplaceable. From this relationship arises diversity and boundless creativity. In this sense, we can understand AI through the concept of “Artisanal Intelligence.” AI is HI (Human Intelligence).

The term “craft” appeared for the first time as an independent chapter in *The General History of Taiwan*, published in 1920. Today, “craft” reflects both the traditional life skills of Taiwan’s diverse communities and the ways they have responded to the pressures of modernization.

For over a century, Taiwanese craft practitioners have met challenges with creativity and resilience. By continuously adapting and transforming inherited techniques, they have shaped a cultural landscape that is uniquely Taiwanese. This is Taiwan’s own form of AI—Artisanal Intelligence.

This exhibition approaches craft history through the lens of “simultaneity,” tracing how different generations of makers have pursued innovation across time: from the emergence of local lacquer art under colonial rule in the 1920s to the decolonial pursuit of artistic autonomy; the design vocabulary rooted in local tradition inspired by Yen Shui-long’s deep engagement with Taiwanese craft between the 1930s and 1950s; the awakening and efforts of safeguarding local culture in the 1970s; the revival of Indigenous cultures in the 1980s; the integration of craft into community-based sustainability after the 1990s; and, today, artistic expressions created under the theme of Taiwan Feng-tu (Taiwan’s unique sense of place shaped by environment, people, industries, and culture). Together, these moments reveal how Taiwanese craft, through diverse interactions, has continuously rolled forward, accumulated vitality, and generated new life.

Finally, the exhibition declares a Manifesto for the Future of Craft, guided by the National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute’s vision: “Living Crafts, Lively Craft.” Taiwan is not only a Silicon Island of artificial intelligence—it is also a Craft Island, flourishing with artisanal intelligence.

Chief Curator
Chen Tian-Li

Curator
Chiang Ming-Chin

Entering the **Spaces** and **Times** of Taiwanese Craft

Though small in size, Taiwan is a land of mountains and seas, with diverse terrains, pure waters, fertile soils, and climates that nurture an extraordinary variety of species. These natural conditions have provided local communities with the unique resources to develop their own artisanal intelligence.

This Artisanal Intelligence emerges from the genuine relationship between people, materials, and tools. The abundance of resources shaped by Taiwan's Feng-tu has long been the source of creative vitality across generations.

This section presents a “river of creativity” flowing through Taiwan, woven from different materials—ranging from synthetic optical fiber to natural ramie.

Once widespread across the island, ramie gradually disappeared under the pressures of colonial rule, industrial change, and environmental transformation. It was only with the rise of Indigenous cultural revitalization movements that the plant and the weaving knowledge tied to it were reclaimed. Many communities have since replanted ramie in their homelands, reviving traditional techniques, restoring cultural knowledge, and opening new paths for cultural resilience and sustainable industry.

These research and innovations rooted in Taiwan's natural fibers form the foundation that Generational Artisanal Intelligence has laid for cultural identity, economic development, and ecological sustainability.

AI! 1920s

Plus ✕ Now!

Artisanal Intelligence • Locally

The term “Taiwanese Craft” first emerged as an independent concept in close dialogue with the rise of modernity. Around the 1920s, under the colonial policy of “promote industries and commerce,” local materials and techniques in Taiwan were categorized and systematized, while new forms of craft were also introduced to the island. Through layers of reinterpretation, self-aware reflection, and transformation, today (Now!) we can see creative expressions rich with Taiwan’s unique character—an ever-evolving, locally generative vocabulary of Artisanal Intelligence in craft.

The genealogy of Taiwanese lacquerwork began with the Japanese craftsman Yamanaka Tadasu (1886–1949), who lived in Taiwan during the colonial era. His creation of “Hourai Lacquerware” —named after Taiwan, imagined as the “Hourai Island” in Japanese—captured the Japanese vision of “local color” through carved wooden bases, tropical flora and landscapes, and motifs inspired by Indigenous life. Even before the war, this style had already gained recognition as a distinctive local industry. The lacquer workshop and training programs that Yamanaka established in Taichung Prefecture cultivated the first generation of local lacquer artists, who would go on to become the backbone and inheritors of Taiwan’s lacquer craft after the war.

What began as a localized expression shaped under a foreign gaze has, over the course of more than three generations of craft practitioners, been continually rethought, transformed, and creatively developed. Today, it has blossomed into a rich and diverse body of lacquer art that belongs uniquely to Taiwan.



Hourai Lacquerware Box
Yamanaka Tadasu



Prosperity
Huang Li-shu

AI! 1930s

Plus * Now!

Craft Aesthetics

Design Intelligence

In the 1930s, painter Yen Shui-long (Gân Súi-liông, 1903–1997), who had studied in France, began his surveys of Taiwanese crafts. From the 1940s onward, he devoted himself to promoting industries such as rush weaving and bamboo craft in Tainan and other regions. He once remarked:

“How can we bring beauty to our homeland in Taiwan? A key task is to spread artistic awareness. If it’s only fine art, it takes longer for people to take it in. But if the beautification of everyday forms is promoted in relation to daily life, people’s living spaces will become more aesthetically refined, and through that process, their sense of beauty will gradually be cultivated—thus transforming their overall poise and sensibility.”

In 1952, Yen published *Formosa Industrial Art*, the first monograph dedicated to Taiwan’s crafts. In its preface, he highlighted the influence of Charlotte Perriand’s concept of “selection, tradition, and creation.”

Yen stressed the importance of drawing from Taiwan’s wealth of traditional forms, materials, and techniques—selecting those most suitable, and then redesigning them into objects that could serve modern life. In 1954, invited by Nantou County, Yen founded the Craft Research Class, a pioneering program

that became Taiwan’s most important professional training ground for craft practitioners. This became the foundation for what is known today as the National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute.

Yen Shui-long’s design philosophy marked the beginning of a design practice with Taiwanese people as its central subject—a form of Design Intelligence belonging to Taiwan. His contributions to craft and design education laid the groundwork not only for Made in Taiwan, but also embodied the spirit of Making for Taiwan.



Bamboo Nursing Chair

Yan Shui-long,
Li Rong-lie,
Hsu Cheng



43 Chair

Konstantin Grcic,
Chen Kao-ming

AI! 1970s Plus ✖ Now!

Craft Aesthetics Generational Innovation

In the 1970s, Taiwan's export-oriented handicraft industry flourished, with many households working their "living rooms as workshops." Yet this period also marked a time of dramatic industrial and social change. Under the pressures of rapid urbanization and industrialization, traditional crafts faced enormous challenges. It was during this time that dedicated researchers and cultural advocates began documenting folk crafts, laying the groundwork for the 1982 Cultural Heritage Preservation Act.

Many of Han Taiwanese folk crafts trace their origins to skills carried across the sea by migrants from Fujian and Guangdong, China. Over generations, these traditions interacted with local Feng-tu, materials, and needs, evolving into distinctive craft expressions preserved in temples, traditional architecture, and daily life. Examples include architectural decorative crafts such as Koji pottery, Jiannian (cut-and-paste) craft, temple painting, wood carving, and stone carving; as well as folk crafts like Deity statue making, pewter craftsmanship, papier-mâché, Chan-hua (coiled floral ornaments), and embroidery. These practices—rooted in Formosa—are a form of Artisanal Intelligence that continually innovates from tradition.



Mazu Parade
Chen San-huo

AI! 1980s

Plus × Now!

Craft Return

Cross-border Amplification

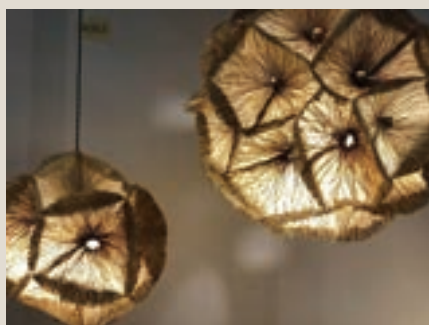
Beginning in the 1980s, Taiwan's Indigenous peoples launched cultural revitalization movements. Through craft “return,” they reconnected with cultural identities that had been suppressed or fragmented under colonial rule. Examples include the Atayal's revival of traditional weaving, the Paiwan's glass beadwork, and the Kavalan's use of banana fiber. These practices were restored through multiple pathways—materiality, visual display and performance, Indigenous cultural research, and knowledge transmission. Together, they revitalized cultural subjectivity, strengthened collective identity, and demonstrated a dynamic, grassroots-driven force outside of official frameworks.

Over generations of effort, Indigenous crafts have grown from the reconstruction of skills and cultural knowledge into a diverse power that combines ethnic education, creative industries, and international exchange. In particular, collaborations with Austronesian communities across the Indian and Pacific Oceans have transformed the idea of “return” into one of “amplification,” forging connections that transcend territorial boundaries. Today, a new generation of Indigenous craft practitioners continues to express this legacy with rich diversity and creativity.



Skirt Panel Curtain

Chen Li-you-mei



A Step of Paper Mulberry

IASIRAW Workshop: Baliranxi Gazhane

AI! 1990s

Plus * Now!

Artisanal Intelligence

Community Sustainability

By the 1990s, Taiwan's export-oriented handicraft industry was in decline, and transformation was urgently needed. The Taiwan Provincial Handicraft Research Institute, once responsible for developing and promoting export crafts, was renamed in 1999 as the National Taiwan Craft Research Institute (the predecessor of today's National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute). With this change, craft was repositioned with 'culture' at its core, affirming both the value and direction of Taiwanese crafts.

In 1994, the Community Empowerment Policy was officially launched. Even before that, grassroots groups had been gathering local memories, seeking to recover identities eroded during the martial law era and to find new paths for local development in the wake of industrial restructuring. Craft industries rooted in collective memory became key resources for community sustainability. Early examples of such community-driven revitalization included Sanxia indigo dyeing, Yuanli rush weaving, Puli papermaking, Sanyi woodcarving, and Lukang traditional arts, which later inspired movements across Taiwan. Both the Handicraft Institute and, later, the Craft Research and Development Center played long-term roles in helping local crafts serve as engines of cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Since the 1990s, many members of the younger generation have joined in community craft-making—some returning to their hometowns, others putting down new roots. For them, the embodied practice of craft has become a source of strength and confidence, a way to reintroduce making into community life and to enhance the collective quality of life.

This movement can be described as a form of community-centered AI: a craft wisdom developed in direct response to the needs of communities.



Feast of Nature

Ceramic and Tin Craft – Wang Bang-jen (Ceramics),
Tu Ju-yueh (Weaving), Yang Hui-ju (Tin)



**Chiayi Signboard
“Jinlong”**

Carving Craftsman

AI! Century Plus

The Art of Craft

For centuries, Taiwan has been a place where mountains and seas converge, and where people have continually met, moved, and mingled. Against this diverse backdrop, Taiwanese craft may appear multifaceted—even elusive—but in truth, it has long drawn sustenance from the island’s fertile cultural soil to grow into forms uniquely its own. This section, themed around “the Mountains of Taiwan,” highlights how generations of artisans have drawn inspiration from Taiwan’s Feng-tu to create their own expressions of Artisanal Intelligence.

This real relationship emerges in response to human needs—constantly confronting both material and immaterial uncertainties—while striving for balance within all the constraints of reality. When it reaches its fullest and most complete state, it becomes an artistic realm, one that exists not only in the material outcome we can see, but also within the layered processes of carefully planned craftsmanship.

We invite you to spend as much time understanding it as the artisans spent creating it. Of course, Artificial Intelligence can help us analyze and deconstruct processes with great efficiency. But we should not forget: without an understanding of the layered and complex pathways of Artisanal Intelligence, AI would have neither a beginning nor the possibility of true innovation.



Landscape Reflections
Chen Jing-lin



Eternal Spring of Yushan
Wang Ching-shuang

Manifesto for the Future of Craft

Craft Island

Craft has never been only about skill—it is also the embodiment of spirit. Its values are rooted in the ideals of ‘working with care and dedication, treating others with kindness, creating with beauty in form and function, and sustaining truth, goodness, and beauty in the heart.’ At its core, craft reflects attentiveness to life and goodwill toward society. It not only shapes the beauty of objects but also allows makers to engage in deep dialogue with materials and the environment through the collaboration of body and mind.

“Living Crafts, Lively Craft” signifies the inseparable bond between craft and daily life, while “Slow Living with Craft, Crafting Slowly” reminds us that the rhythm of craft is steady and enduring, accumulating through time and responding to everyday needs. Today in Taiwan, from mountains to seas, craft hubs are scattered across the island, echoing one another to weave a rich and diverse cultural network.

Craft also embodies the wisdom of sustainability—emphasizing the care for natural resources, the recycling and renewal of materials, and the pursuit of balance between making and use. Craft is both a vessel of culture and a practice of sustainability. Looking ahead, Taiwan will take craft as its root, growing into an ‘Island of Craft,’ where truth, goodness, and beauty coexist sustainably in everyday life.

