November 5, 2016 – January 30, 2017

BINGATA!

ONLY IN OKINAWA

紅型

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
THE TEXTILE MUSEUM
OKINAWA PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT
kinawa (沖縄, "Ocean Rope"), Japan’s southernmost prefecture, comprises dozens of semitropical islands in a chain stretching over a thousand miles from Kyushu to Taiwan. Although humans have inhabited these islands for more than 30,000 years, the archipelago began to unite politically in the fifteenth century as a kingdom called Ryukyu (琉球). With its capital on the island of Okinawa, the largest and most populous in the chain, the Ryukyu Kingdom developed distinctive sociocultural, religious, and artistic traditions, and remained an independent monarchy for 450 years.

A prosperous center for maritime trade, the Ryukyu Kingdom gained renown throughout East Asia for its superb textiles. Among the kingdom’s most famed fabrics were those patterned with bingata, a uniquely Okinawan resist dyeing technique that uses rice paste applied to a textile, freehand or through stencils, to prevent dyes from coloring certain areas. Although the origins of the technique remain obscure, records indicate that bingata dyeing had developed to its present form around three hundred years ago. Ryukyu maintained tributary relations with China and Japan—countries with well-established stencil resist dyeing traditions—and sea trade brought block printed fabrics from India and wax resist batiks from Java. Nonetheless, the bingata technique of using paper stencils to create multicolored patterns is unique to Okinawa.
Bingata! Only in Okinawa is the first major American exhibition focusing on this unique art form. Bringing together textile treasures from three of Okinawa’s most distinguished institutional collections, the exhibition is the result of several years of close collaboration between the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum and the Prefectural Government of Okinawa. The exhibition includes a colorful array of eighteenth- to early-twentieth-century garments and furnishings as well as recent works by contemporary artists and fashion designers inspired by historical bingata textiles; stencils and other tools used to make bingata fabrics; films showing production techniques and theatrical performances featuring bingata costumes; reproductions of eighteenth- to early-twentieth-century paintings and photographs; and interactive touch screens offering additional contextual information.

The exhibition reveals that bingata dyeing developed within the context of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s royal court, where colorful textiles communicated the wearer’s rank in the court hierarchy. Laws restricted the use of bingata to the ruling class. The royal court controlled production, and the heads of bingata workshops were awarded lower gentry status. The royal treasury typically distributed costly imported dyestuffs and fine fabrics to the bingata workshops, and court painters often provided the patterns. Most bingata textiles were commissioned for use as

Left: Tanashi (summer garment worn by the gentry), Shuri, Okinawa, 19th century; Warp: ramie / Weft: ramie; Stencil-dyed on both sides; Private collection (on loan to Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum)
upper-class women’s wear, but high-ranking children of both genders wore bingata garments during formal and festive events. Both the color and the size of bingata patterns could indicate the wearer’s rank.

With the collapse of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1879, bingata workshops lost the patronage of the royal family and upper classes, and production steadily declined. Approximately forty dyeing workshops operated during the dynastic period, but forty years after the fall of the kingdom only about a dozen remained. World War II destroyed most examples of the art form, along with the dyers’ studios and the homes of bingata consumers.

After the war, artists returned to the ruins of their workshops and began to use discarded items as tools and flour sacks as fabric, dyeing them with lipstick, crayon, and whatever other materials they could salvage. The bingata tradition thus was revived from the ashes of war. Today, bingata is officially acknowledged as an important cultural expression, and it has become one of the most widely recognized symbols of Okinawan identity. While some artists have found new uses for bingata in Japanese and Western-style clothing, others employ it as a medium for expressing their own artistic viewpoint. With exhibit objects ranging from eighteenth-century Ryukyuan court robes to contemporary fashion designs, Bingata! Only in Okinawa provides a compelling overview of this art form’s history, technique, and cultural significance.
Left: *Dujin* (inner garment), Shuri, Okinawa, 18th–19th century; Warp: cotton / Weft: cotton; Stencil-dyed on both sides; Naha City Museum of History

Below: *You-I, You-I*, Yuken Teruya, Okinawa, 2002; Warp: ramie / Weft: ramie (cloth attributed to China); Stencil-dyed on one side; Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum
Museum Information

Location
The museum is located at the corner of 21st and G streets, NW, four blocks from the Foggy Bottom–GWU Metro station (Blue, Orange, and Silver lines). For directions and parking information, visit museum.gwu.edu/visit.

Hours
For the most up-to-date information on the museum’s visiting hours, please check museum.gwu.edu/visit. Closed Tuesdays and university holidays.

Admission
$8 suggested donation for non-members. Free for museum members, children, and current GW students, faculty, and staff.

Accessibility
The museum is wheelchair accessible and designated garage parking is available nearby. Visit museum.gwu.edu/accessibility for more information.

Museum Shop
Visit the shop for unique jewelry, home décor, books, and gifts from Washington, D.C., and around the world.

Arthur D. Jenkins Library
The reading room is open Wed–Thu 1–4 PM and by appointment. Please contact the librarian before your visit at museumlibrary@gwu.edu.

Albert H. Small Center for National Capital Area Studies
The reading room is open by appointment Mon, Wed–Thu 11:30AM–4PM. Please email washingtoniana@gwu.edu to make an appointment.

Public Programs
For the most up-to-date list of the museum’s educational programs, visit museum.gwu.edu/programs.

Exhibition Tours
Free walk-in tours of the galleries are offered each Saturday and Sunday at 1:30 PM (textile tour) and 2:45 PM (Washingtoniana tour).

To schedule a docent-led tour for groups of six to forty people, call 202-994-5578 at least four weeks in advance.

Join or Donate
Support from members and donors is the driving force that allows the museum to continue its work bringing art, history, and culture alive for the GW community and the public. To join or renew a current membership, or to make a donation, visit museum.gwu.edu/support or call 202-994-5579.

Stay in Touch
Follow the museum online for more information about works on view, programs, and behind-the-scenes activities.

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Cover: Detail of child’s costume, Shuri, Okinawa, 19th century; Warp: cotton / Weft: cotton; Stencil-dyed on both sides; Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum

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