

JAPAN-NESS

and Sustainability



Japanese Style: Sustaining Design was at the centre of Wales' 2012 'Japanese Season in Wales,' exhibited at the Ruthin Craft Centre. Curator **Michael Nixon** reflects on how it casts new light – across design, textiles, ceramics and architecture, and on distinctly Japanese approaches to sustainability.

Sustainability was the underlying curatorial concept for *Japanese Style: Sustaining Design*, an exhibition at the Ruthin Craft Centre (RCC), in North Wales during the summer of 2012, conceived as both an exhibition and a 'Japanese Season in Wales,' Sustainability enabled a focus on examining how designers in Japan are dealing with climate change, and also how the craft traditions of Japan provide a unique view of sustainability. Shown with much of the emphasis is on applied art and craft, but as the national remit for RCC in Wales is wider than craft the 'Season' contained architecture, applied art, design, and also dance and other cultural events. During the research for the exhibition, the T hoku earthquake and tsunami

devastated the northern area of the main island of Honshu. The largest natural disaster in Japan's recent history, the earthquake has caused both the government and the design community to rethink its views about nuclear energy and also building on the coastal plains. The participants in the exhibition had already been selected before the earthquake took place, but their emphasis on sustainability provides approaches that will benefit the reconstruction in Japan, and enable us in Britain to benefit from their thinking. An emphasis on sustainability is often interpreted in the form of technical solutions in Britain, and one of the things that makes the Japanese participants different in this exhibition, is that because of the long tradition of relating techniques to visual and spiritual traditions in Japan, that although they do apply technical solutions, they are doing more than this. They are particularly aware of the visual impact of any technical decisions, and relate any design decisions to their overarching philosophy, which sees human beings as part of nature, and the necessity to respect the planet. This view is now part of climate change orthodoxy, but in the context of Japan comes from both thinking based on scientific information but underpinned with the Shinto and Buddhist traditions. These concerns are prevalent in Japan amongst younger architects, but with some few exceptions, notably Osamu Ishiyama, included in *Japanese Style* for this reason, and Shigeru Ban, featured in this