

A Centennial Exhibition
**SALVATORE
FERRAGAMO**
THE ART OF THE SHOE

Salvatore Ferragamo - The Art of Shoe

14th April - 14th May 1998
Sogetsu Kai Foundation

The Exhibition

The concept

This exhibition in Tokyo is the fourth edition retrospective exhibition on Salvatore Ferragamo and his work. The first exhibition entirely dedicated to the creations of the “shoemaker to the stars” was set up in 1985 in the salons of Palazzo Strozzi in Florence at the initiative of the Florence City Council, in cooperation with the Palazzo Pitti Costume Gallery, the only Italian museum dedicated to the history of fashion and costume.

Given its enormous success, the exhibition was hosted by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (cradle of the Art and Craft Movement and city with a long tradition in the decorative arts) in 1987, and by the Los Angeles County Museum (in the city where Salvatore Ferragamo took his first steps and created his own style) in 1992. The retrospective exhibition in Japan is particularly important as it celebrates the centenary of the birth of Ferragamo. To this end, it has been decided to transform it from a travelling exhibition into an important artistic event, in which two of the leading exponents of Japanese art and culture have been involved: Tanaka Ikko and Teshigahara Hiroshi. Thus, the Italian creativity of Ferragamo joins the Japanese one.

The exhibition is being held in a representative building of contemporary Japan: the Sogetsu Kai Foundation – of which Teshigahara is president – and whose construction was contributed to by another two artists: Tange Kenzo, Japanese architect who created the project and the American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, who created the “Plaza”, the splendid entrance hall of the building.

The choice of these two Japanese artists is not accidental. The bamboo structures of Teshigahara Hiroshi constitute the ideal surroundings in which to appreciate Salvatore Ferragamo’s work, forming evocative itineraries full of atmosphere, along which visitors can experience and admire the works exhibited in a more emotive way than in normal art exhibitions.

It is also easy to explain the link between Ferragamo and Tanaka Ikko, graphic art director of this retrospective. Tanaka is the graphic artist, more than any other, and not only in Japan, has been inspired by his own national traditions. In the same way, Ferragamo always obtained his inspiration from the technical, art, craft and cultural traditions of his own country, going back in time until Ancient Rome. But despite this strong attachment to their roots, both of them have been able to provide their creations with an international flavour.

Another link between the two is constituted by colour, which, both in Ferragamo’s shoes and in Tanaka’s graphics, is a dominant element.

It is on this basis that Tanaka Ikko has been asked to interpret the aesthetic value of the Ferragamo tradition and of this exhibition, creating its posters, the invitations, the tickets, the cover, and the layout of the catalogue.

The Salvatore Ferragamo Museum

Located in Florence, on the second floor of the medieval Palazzo Spini Feroni at 2 Via Tornabuoni, it was opened to the public in May 1995 at the initiative of the Ferragamo family, for the purpose of letting the public of the entire world discover the artistic qualities of Salvatore Ferragamo, and the important role which he had in the history, not only of footwear, but also of international fashion.

The museum has a collection of more than 10,000 models created by Salvatore in the forty years of his activity, from the 1920s to 1960, the year of his death.

The creations are exhibited by rotation every two years, and are selected according to different themes which allow new issues to be faced and new fields of investigation to be explored.

Ferragamo's shoes are not simply shoes, but works of a very fine craftsmanship: the handicraft technique, the creativity, the materials utilised, in fact, reveal the mind of an artist who was always in harmony with the cultural atmosphere of the time.

In order to strengthen this link of Ferragamo's with the art world, new initiatives have been set up; some of them, like the creation of the museum, aimed at enhancing tradition and models of the past, others at promoting contemporary culture.

In 1996, the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum sponsored the first Florence Biennale, and was host, in some of the rooms of Palazzo Feroni, renovated for this purpose, to one of the Biennale's shows, the one dedicated to the great American photographer Bruce Weber.

In October 1997, an exhibition of Tanaka Ikko's works was organized and held at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan, the city which is the symbol of modern design, as a result of his cooperation with Ferragamo for the retrospective exhibition in Japan, and because of the feeling which developed with him during the work

Fiamma di San Giuliano Ferragamo, Salvatore's oldest daughter is president of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum.

The authors

Stefania Ricci, costume and fashion historian, has from 1995 been the director of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum. She is the author of essays and catalogues for history of costume and fashion exhibitions which she was curator of, including: *Anni Venti La nascita dell'abito Moderno* at the Costume Gallery of Palazzo Pitti in 1991 (catalogue Centro Di); *Sala Bianca: Nascita della Moda Italiana*, held at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence in 1992 (catalogue Electa); *Il Costume all'Epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, at the Civic Museum of Prato in 1992 (catalogue Charta); *Moda alla Corte dei Medici*, Palazzo Pitti in Florence in 1993 (catalogue Centro Di); *Emilio Pucci at Palazzo Pitti* for the first Florence Biennale in 1996 (catalogue published by Skira). She has been in care of the Ferragamo archives since 1984, and she has drawn from them to organize the three exhibitions which were held in 1985 in Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (catalogue Centro Di), in 1987 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (catalogue Centro Di), and in 1992 at the Los Angeles County Museum (catalogue Rizzoli International).

Gian Carlo Calza is professor of Far Eastern History of Art at the University of Venice and director of the Hokusai Centre for Japanese Arts.

He is the author of books and catalogues of Japanese and Chinese art and culture exhibitions including: *Stampe Popolari Giapponesi*, Milan, Electa 1979; *Hokusai. Le cento vedute del Fuji*, 2 volumes, Milan, Editoriale Nuova, 1982; *Pittura giapponese dal XV al XIX secolo*, Todi, ET&B, 1990; *Hokusai Paintings. Selected Essays*, Venice, The International Hokusai Research Centre, 1994.

He has organized and chaired international congresses, organized many exhibitions and drawn up their catalogues, including: *Le stampe del Mondo Fluttuante*, Milan, Castello Sforzesco, 1976 (catalogue published by Scheiwiller); *Japanische Plakate Heute. 250 Beispiele von 25 Künstlern*, at the Kunstgewerbemuseum der Stadt Zürich, Zurich, 1979 (catalogue published by Electa International Verlag); *7000 anni di Cina. Arte e archeologia cinese dal neolitico alla dinastia degli Han*, (joint-curator) Venice, Palazzo Ducale 1983 (catalogue published by Silvana Editoriale); *Giappone: Segno e Colore. 500 manifesti di grafica giapponese contemporanea*, Milan, Triennale, 1996 (catalogue Electa); *Tanaka Ikko, la Grafica del Giappone*, Milan, PAC, 1997 (catalogue Electa).

He writes for various magazines, both academic and illustrative.

Salvatore Ferragamo

Born poor in 1898 in Bonito, a small village in southern Italy, Salvatore Ferragamo emigrated in 1914 to the United States, and thanks to his tenacity, ability and his capacity for taking risks, he became rich and famous in Hollywood, making shoes for the historical films of the time and “fashionable” models for the stars of the American cinema. His creations soon became famous in every corner of the United States, and Salvatore won the name of “shoemaker to the stars”.

In 1927, he decided to return to Italy, where he was entirely unknown, drawn there by homesickness and aware of the fact that only in Italy would he be able to find the capable shoemakers who could make absolutely unique, entirely hand crafted shoes. It was not by chance that he chose Florence as the headquarters for his activities, as this is a city with a long tradition of able craftsmen.

The first few years were not easy, and indeed Salvatore encountered a series of difficulties which reached their apex with his bankruptcy in 1933.

But this financial catastrophe did not signal the end of Ferragamo, but the beginning of his rebirth and a continuous stream of successes in his work and in his private life; the appreciation of his local clientele and fame; the return to exports; the purchase of Palazzo Spini Feroni in 1938; but above all, the encounter with Wanda Miletta, the young daughter of the Bonito local doctor, marriage, the birth of six children, three boys and three girls.

During the second world war, Ferragamo represented the Italian “miracle”. Because of the absence of quality materials, and the closing of the frontiers, the need arose to find new solutions. And Salvatore was extremely good at this, utilising poor and unusual materials for the creation of uppers. Raffia, straw, cellophane paper, cork managed to stimulate his creativity and technical ability in the same way as the more luxurious materials. In 1947 he won the international “Neiman Marcus” prize, the fashion Oscar, set up in Dallas by Neiman Marcus, one of the most famous department stores in the United States, for persons who had distinguished themselves in the fashion world through their style and their creations.

It is in this period that Ferragamo reached the apex of his career, and Palazzo Spini Feroni became, during the fifties, a drawing point in the panorama of international fashion; theatre actors and movie stars, representatives of the jet set and of royal families came to Florence to order their shoes.

This extraordinary life continued even after its epilogue in 1960, when Salvatore Ferragamo died at the age of 62.

His greatest wish had always been that of dressing women “from head to toe”, to have a fashion house in which to create not only shoes. The dream which he was not able to achieve in the years of his life, could only have been fulfilled at this point by his children who were growing up.

Thanks to his wife Wanda, faithful interpreter of his wishes, and without whom nothing of what was achieved after Ferragamo’s death would have been possible, the principles which had guided Salvatore’s life and work were carried on also through his children in a way of life and were applied to other manufacturing sectors.

The location: the Sogetsu Kai Foundation

The Sogetsu School of Flower Arrangement was founded in 1927 by Teshigahara Sofu, father of Hiroshi, who modernised ikebana, releasing it from the formality of the ancient styles which were in the process of suffocating this art form. The fame of this school has grown rapidly in Japan and abroad, until it reached, at a certain point in its history, one million members throughout the world.

Its Tokyo headquarters are located in an imposing building which is to be found in front of the Akasaka Palace, the palace of the Crown Prince. The building also contains the Sogetsu Art Museum in which works representing African, Mexican, Maya, Chinese, Korean, Italian and, naturally, Japanese traditions are exhibited.

The museum concentrates in particular on 20th century art, with painters such as Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Lucio Fontana, Jasper Jones, Wassily Kandinsky, Georges Mathieu, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Okamoto Taro, Imai Toshimitsu, Domoto Hisao, as well as Sofu and Hiroshi Teshigahara.

The exhibits

The exhibits are composed of 195 made by Salvatore Ferragamo from 1927, year in which he returned from the United States to establish himself definitively in Italy, up to 1960, the year of his death. The exhibition also contains six advertising sketches by the Futurist painter Lucio Venna, created for Salvatore Ferragamo in 1930 and Salvatore Ferragamo's portrait painted in 1949 by Pietro Annigoni, the portrait painter to the most famous European families. The exhibition is laid out on three levels: the entrance hall, the "Plaza" and the sixth and seventh floor of the building. Each of the three sections contains different itineraries and installations based upon an exhibition concept which is not chronological, but thematic: colour, shape, materials, creativity. The exhibition is the brain-child of Stefania Ricci, director of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum in Florence, who has arranged the exhibition with the support of Gian Carlo Calza (professor of Far Eastern History of Art at the University of Venice, and director of the Hokusai Centre for Japanese Arts), and of a Cultural Committee

The catalogue

The catalogue of the retrospective exhibition, richly illustrated, contains photographs of Salvatore Ferragamo's work and life and is the product of collective efforts: it is published by the Japanese publisher Kodansha. The layout and cover are by Tanaka Ikko. The texts have been written by Stefania Ricci and Gian Carlo Calza with a preface by Wanda Ferragamo, wife of Salvatore and chairman of the company which bears his name.

Tanaka Ikko

The name of Tanaka, among leading contemporary graphic artists, is the one which is most linked to events of a cultural interest. His posters, like most of his production as designer, refer to exhibitions, theatre presentations, musical events, publication of books. Tanaka's art can be defined as an art having a strong social content; shape and colour take on an aesthetic value, which transmit, through him, the values and principles for the pursuing of a higher standard of living.

Tanaka is president of the Tokyo Art Directors Club, he is one of the directors of the Japanese Designers Association (JAG-DA), representative of the Tokyo Design Space, member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale, member of the New York Art Directors Club and director of the Council of the Tokyo Fashion Foundation.

His posters are to be found in the collections of the most important museums of the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, the Musée de la Publicité in Paris and the Fur Gestaltung Museum in Zurich.

Teshigahara Hiroshi

The name of Teshigahara Hiroshi, founder (Iemoto) of the Sogetsu School, jumped unexpectedly into the spotlight of international cultural circles with the film *The woman of sand*, inspired by Abe Kobo's famous novel, which Teshigahara directed. This film was a great cultural event and won, at the international Cannes Film Festival in 1964, the Critics Special Prize.

However, his name became famous at a world level, also as promoter of cultural events linked to music and the theatre.

From films to operas, from painting to calligraphy, from ceramics to sculpture, from the tea ceremony to ikebana, from installations to set design; in an era when art also succumbs to the laws of specialisation, Teshigahara moves in an elegant and agile way through complex paths, translating ancient values and traditions into a style which is appropriate for our times.

He started dedicating himself to bamboo installations approximately ten years ago, creating both theatre sets and independent works of art. The special quality of these creations is that they don't need to be looked at only, but they should be physically experimented, as he himself has emphasised on various occasions.