

# Biography: The Life of Itchiku Kubota



Itchiku Kubota was born in Kanda, Tokyo, Japan in 1917. He was apprenticed at the age of 14, learning the art and craft of Japanese kimono at the studio of a master of the yuzen dyeing technique, Kiyoshi Kobayashi. During these early years, he studied a variety of traditional forms & techniques and eventually entered art school. In 1937, during a visit to the Tokyo National Museum, Kubota first became intrigued with the mysterious, centuries-old technique known as *Tsujigahana*.

He married and began creating kimono on his own, but with the coming of World War II, he was drafted into the army. Near the end of the war, he was imprisoned by the Russians in Siberia, and was interned for six years. During these years as a prisoner of war, Kubota later recounted, he found solace in the simple pleasures of nature that were still perceptible in the stark surroundings of a Siberian prison camp: the sun, the sky and the mountains—themes which would resonate in his work later in life.

After his return to Japan in 1951, Kubota resumed crafting kimono, and also began raising a family, becoming the proud father of a son and daughter. He continued to research and experiment in his search for *Tsujigahana*. His business grew, but he would spend decades refining the process he would eventually call *Itchiku Tsujigahana*.

His first exhibition was presented at Tokyo's Mikimoto Gallery in 1977, followed by a second exhibit the following year. His work was warmly received and he was given the Award for Cultural Contribution by Japan's Cultural Association for Folk Costume. For the next fifteen years, Kubota's fame grew as he created new work on his kimono canvases for exhibitions throughout Japan and Europe. In 1990, the French Ministry of Culture awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres to Kubota after an exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

In 1994, Master Kubota opened the Itchiku Kubota Art Museum at Lake Kawaguchi near Mount Fuji in Japan. The Museum's setting and construction used the same respect and affinity for nature that marked his life's work.

A year later, Kubota's art made its first appearance in North America in an exhibition entitled: *Homage to Nature: Landscape Kimono* by Itchiku Kubota presented at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec. Kubota's art was fêted and received enthusiastic reviews in the press. The exhibit's catalogue became the best selling catalogue in Smithsonian history.

Although Kubota expressed a hope that he would live to be 120, he passed away in 2003 at the age of 86. The legacy of work he began is continued today by his family in the Itchiku Kubota studio in Kodaira, Tokyo.