

●—Introduction

From the beginning, when planning this exhibition, I wanted to rethink Kenmochi Isamu's designs from the perspective of "tradition and modernity." Kumashiro Yuichiro, Toyoguchi Katsuhei and others have already written much on this theme. Planning the latter half of the exhibition, which concerns Kenmochi's many activities after leaving the Industrial Arts Research Institute, was a question of picking out a framework from many existing traces, but preparing the parts of the exhibition that present Kenmochi's life from his student days to his time at the Institute required interpreting documents and materials that had not yet been researched. As I researched Kenmochi's life, I realized how much the roots of Kenmochi's designs were shaped by the times in which he lived. In this essay, I introduce a variety of documents from Kenmochi's life, including his diary, drawings and personal photographs. I carefully attempt to Kenmochi's tracks in each period of his life, and hope to uncover a key for unlocking the fundaments of Kenmochi's design.

●—The Nature of Kenmochi Isamu

According to my research, Kenmochi's earliest publicly-presented design appeared in Tate to Yoko ("Vertical and Horizontal") vol. 6. (Plate I-3) The cover is a watercolour, and the main text is mimeographed. Published in 1932 (Showa 7), the year of Kenmochi's graduation, Tate to yoko is a collection of student-designed model rooms. Suzuki Fukuji, later of the Mitsukoshi department store's Furniture Division, played the central role in planning the rooms, and Suzuki and Nagai Kenjo, later of the Kume Architectural Office, were most responsible for their design. The third member of the group, Kenmochi was responsible for the rooms' drawings. According to the division of labour recorded in the group's final report, Kogure Jiro handled the living room, while Suzuki designed the kitchen-dining room, and Kenmochi created a combination children's room and housewife parlour. (Fig. 1) Explaining that "the rights we grant children in their daily lives children are really too unfair", Kenmochi reasoned that "if you combine [the children's room] with another room, it is not impossible even for the middle and working classes to have one," and designed a "combination children's room, veranda and housewife's parlour". The plan shows the influence of the daily life improvement movement popular in the 1920s, and is quite detailed for a house plan.

There is a drawing from the same year, dated August 26, that may be a preparatory sketch for the room. (Plate I - 4) In the drawing, an Art Deco-style lamp with black lacquer legs stands in front of a bookcase with silver-coloured doors, next to a pipe chairs and a chess table. A side table with pipe legs is visible to one side. The room's taste and combination of furnishings and

reflect the clear influence of the latest European and North American styles, yet the overall room feel calm, perhaps as a result of the slightly somber colour scheme. The curtains are sketched in roughly, and have a light, floating feeling. Kenmochi would continue to work with this sensibility for some time afterwards, and his "Drawing for an Exhibition Set" (Plate I - 9) includes directions for to use greenish lacquer for the sides of the pink seats. The Tate to yoko article does not give the artist's name, but we can assume that Kenmochi made these drawings. Kenmochi also used the rectangle intersected by an X seen in Figure in both the tabletop of the table for the model children's room (Fig. 2) and a backrest in the "Drawings for an Exhibition Set." This motif was not a one-time fancy, but can be found in such postwar designs as his logo for Living Art (Fig. 3) and the Decola center (Fig. 4). The design is clearly reminiscent of the four-coloured Z flag used by the Japanese military, and may relate to Kenmochi's pride at having a father in the military.

In 1927 (Showa 2), the 15-year-old Kenmochi appears to have been enamoured of pen and ink drawings, several of which still exist. In one of the drawings (Fig. 5), Kenmochi sketches his grandfather Kenmochi Tomohide (1838-1890), a gun specialist for the Sendai Domain who studied Western knowledge at the end of the Edo period, and worked as a police officer and a judicial official after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In his sketch, Kenmochi depicts his grandfather as a wild-haired young warrior engaged in fierce battle. Kenmochi's family had a long history. In the Edo period, his ancestors lived in Nose County in Sesshu (present-day Hyogo Prefecture) as retainers to the Tokugawa family, then received the Kenmochi name in 1864, and moved to the village of Nobiru in Mono-o County in the Rikuzen domain (part of present-day Miyagi Prefecture). We know that Kenmochi Shingozaemon was renowned for his skill at Hikida-style spearsmanship, and that he received a stipend of 300 koku from Date Tadamune, the second lord of the Date family, as a close retainer. Later members of the family worked as construction and accounts magistrates.

The diary Kenmochi kept during his elementary school years predates his brush and ink drawings, but here again the diary's narrative unfolds like a picture book. (Fig. 6) For the young Kenmochi, it must have felt more natural to set down actions like swimming, running and eating through drawing than through writing. It is as if his attempts to convey his experiences were incomplete without visual elements. This kind of representation appears frequently throughout the diary, and emphasizes the extreme to which the young Kenmochi's basic sensibility privileged the visual. He received A's for almost all subjects in elementary school, including drawing, but he did not always make A's in handicrafts. According to his younger brother, Kenmochi became absorbed with making a cigarette box in junior high school, and eventually finished it, but the discovery of such projects and this strong desire appear to have been second nature to Kenmochi. He also made similar drawings during his days at the Tokyo Higher School of Arts

and Technology. (Fig. 7)

Kenmochi's taste for theatre and period dramas (Fig. 8) appears to have come from the movies. His father may have been a strict disciplinarian, but he also enjoyed the theatre, and his interests rubbed off on Kenmochi. Kenmochi must have been well-versed in learning such techniques intuitively from sources like illustrations in magazines. Descriptions of movies he had seen appear often in his diary from his years in Sendai, and indicate a predilection for European films. Several people have reminisced about Kenmochi's skill as an artist, but only his sketch of a plaster sculpture (Fig. 9) and a watercolour sketch (Fig. 10) still exist today, and we have no full-out works from his early years. However, he would have had to take Assistant Professor Wada Kanae's Painting and Drawing class for three hours a week during his first two years at the Tokyo Higher School of Art and Technology, so we can assume that he had basic instruction in the areas. We still have a sketchbook presumed to date from the trip he took after his graduation in 1931 (Showa 6). Kenmochi only had brief glimpses of sights like the passenger cabins of the Asama Maru (Fig. 11) liner and the temples and a temple of Nara (Fig. 12), but proved adept at emphasizing the parts of the images that impressed him in his visual record of the trip. As a general rule, his sketches seem to stress his impressions, rather than strictly recording actual form.

There is no question that Kenmochi was both good at and enjoyed two-dimensional media. Even after he was employed, he submitted a painting to the Shiseido Gallery's "Second Exhibition of New Oil Paintings" in 1934 (Showa 9). The exhibition, a concrete manifestation of the new currents of the 1930s, also featured paintings by Saeki Yoneko, Sano Toshijiro and Yoshiwara Jiro among others. Kenmochi appears to have continued painting in oils until around 1937. In 1941, he received a commission for a cover design from Kagaku Asahi ("Asahi Science". (Plate I-33, 34) Kenmochi drew together close-ups of screws and engines against a photo-collage background of natural science motifs like eclipses, the moon, warships and airplanes. The overall effect was to stress increases in manufacturing and the precision of mechanical production, two themes appropriate for the image's wartime setting.

Needless to say, Kenmochi's use of photographs was an attempt to harness the impact of Constructivism and the strength of photographs as images in a graphic design medium, and this method was popular among designers in the 1940s. Kenmochi was sensitive to trends, and had the ability to master them and make them his own. This cover testifies to the fact that his designs were not at all mere imitation. However, while he was known to enjoy sketching after the war, he stopped publishing his graphic work entirely.

●——Sendai as a Turning Point

Kenmochi spent the summer vacation of his third year at the Tokyo Higher School of Arts and Technology at the Industrial Arts Research Institute (Fig. 13). As he later wrote, he "liked the atmosphere at the Industrial Arts Research Institute instantly", and found a job at there immediately after graduation. The Kenmochi family had come from Sendai, so Kenmochi knew relatives there, and often visited the city with his parents. As a result, we can guess that he had few worries about leaving Tokyo for a new city. Photographs from the early days show the young,

active Kenmochi playing tennis, riding horses, mountaineering and skiing, activities he had enjoyed in his student days, and at parties with old classmates. (Fig. 14 and 15)

When Kenmochi joined the Industrial Arts Research Institute, the Institute was composed of the First Division (woodworking, lacquer and toys), the Second Division (minting, sheet metal, and metallurgy), and the Third Division (drafting, photographic printing, and carving). Kenmochi was assigned to the Third Division as a temporary assistant under Nishikawa Tomotake, who had graduated from the Drafting Department of the Higher School ahead of Kenmochi. (Fig. 16) Nishikawa was responsible for editing *Kogei Nyusu* ("Industrial Art News"). A talented designer, he took first place in the second division of the International Aluminum Agency-sponsored International Aluminum Furniture Competition in Paris, held in November the year that Kenmochi joined the Institute. The turf battle attitude at the Institute and the rivalry its members perceived between the Tokyo Higher School of Arts and Technology and the Tokyo National Higher School of Fine Arts were unbearable for Kenmochi, and the Institute's failure to realize its design principles, a result perhaps of its bows to manufacturers in the respective fields brought him only bitter memories. However, in January the following year, Kenmochi was assigned the design for a mirror stand for the Chicago Exhibition, and by March he had published his first article in *Kogei Nyusu* on modular furniture, an Institute project. Expectations were on the rise for his young talent.

In mid-March of the following year, Kenmochi was distracted by self-loathing for his role as an apprentice, but in May the same year the Institute decided to send employees to Tokyo on a long-term exchange project. On April 26, Takahisa Eiichi, head of the First Department, gave Kenmochi the assignment to open the Institute's Tokyo office. Kenmochi was exultant at being chosen, and his words recording the occasion, "Why was I the top candidate? I have confidence. People have hopes for me. I have special characteristics. The future has been left up to me", are often quoted. That said, he still fell into self-hatred for his "rotten" self many times, and was never able to regain his high spirits after these spells. He moved to Tokyo on April 30, but returned to Sendai July 21, and devoted himself to the preparations for the Institute's first experimental product exhibition, as his absence had impeded them. He was swamped with work from the exhibition (Plate I - 15), and made sport of discord over the budget and the plans for executing the exhibition.

The definitive change came at this time. The exhibition began September 1 at the Mitsukoshi department store in Tokyo, and Bruno Taut visited September 4 with his wife, Kurata Chikatada and Kume Gonkuro. (Fig. 17) Taut promptly criticized the products exhibited, which, he said, were of a high quality in terms of technique, and carefully made, but did not meet the standard for modern design in terms of form. (Fig. 18 and 19) Kenmochi was sent to introduce Taut to Kunii, the head of the Institute. Kurata had invited Kenmochi to join his Keiji Kobo group, so the choice was not an odd one. Taut's criticism was underlaid by his authority as a polemicist of the Deutsche Werkbund. Kenmochi heard Kume's interpretation of Taut's criticism into Japanese, then organized the critique into nine points, which he recorded in detail in his diary. Taut's critique was extremely specific.

Kawakita Renshichiro also visited the exhibition on a different day, and noted that "The scenic,

improvisational curves and play of colour must be eliminated". Before returning to Sendai late in the night, Kenmochi visited Keiji Kobi member Toyoguchi Katsuhei at his home in Daikanyama to seek Toyoguchi's opinion. Toyoguchi answered Kenmochi's questions by saying that "things that show the process from the first idea to finished should be exhibited", and told him that the exhibition was "extremely irresponsible".

Excited by this criticism, Kenmochi wrote, "I have been playing until now", and "I was given the key to having to reflect on my past conduct". He also visited the New Architecture and Industrial Arts Academy. Until the exhibition, the young Kenmochi had lacked any absolute goals. He responded flexibly to the critiques, and, while he did not take all of them positively, was optimistic about the new foundation it had allowed him to discover.

On October 7, the head of the Institute told Kenmochi, "You had your eye on Taut from the beginning, and were able to introduce him to me. Even so, the meeting would have borne only thin results had you not been here." He went on to say, "It is only for three months, but go and draw out the gist of Taut's ideas". Previously, Suzuki Michitsugu of the Research Division had told Kenmochi that Taut's invitation had been a result of Tohoku Imperial University professor Kojima Kikuo 's advice to the Undersecretary of Commerce and Industry Yoshino Shinji. His reaction this time, however, was "I could not be happier" than to know that "They have invited a world-class master for three months for my sake". Only good luck could have brought Kenmochi the opportunity to receive this kind of direction a mere two years into his time at the Institute, but Kenmochi would be blessed many such meetings. Perhaps he was born under a lucky star.

Suzuki, Kenmochi, Okayasu Junkichi and Ogata Tadashi (two 1933 graduates of the Drafting Department at the Higher School of Arts and Technology) were assigned to research standardized prototypes. However, department head Terasaki Takeshi and some of his colleagues were not entirely prepared to accept all of Taut's recommendations, and the atmosphere was not entirely welcoming. Had the department accepted the direction Taut was recommending, it would not have had Nishikawa Tomotake and others' reliance on foreign design sources and Kunii's departure towards a strict crafts program. The Institute's return to promoting exports after Taut's departure would upset Kenmochi. Kenmochi must have decided to follow Taut's teachings because he sympathized with Taut's strict, sharp attitude towards the pursuit of design. Fundamentally, standardized prototype research is also about the pursuit of form, not a search for standardized numerical values. And so all at once, the horizons of Kenmochi's world in the 1930s broadened to include the world, and allowed him to perceive things no longer in the abstract but as reality.

Like many young men, Kenmochi was also interested in the political climate at home and overseas. He wrote that the February 26 Incident "was quite the shock for me too. We could say that Japan was no exception, and that history would continue its slow changes, but I knew that there would be more abrupt changes, like when water suddenly boils over the moment as it is heated". The next year, Kenmochi left us a caricature (Illustration) based on the Spanish Civil War. Was this the influence of Okayasu, an aficionado of Marx?

Kenmochi wanted to learn something greater from Taut, namely "the organizational direction of Japan's Industrial Arts Research Institute" and "the direction of the essential work of the industrial artist". Was he aware of his role as a leader? Taut is thought to have played a decisive role in determining the direction and content of Kenmochi's subsequent work. This is especially clear in the list of experimental research Kenmochi drew up for the Institute following Taut's departure.

Showa 9 (1934) Research in standardized chair prototypes

Showa 10 (1935) Research in standardized furniture prototypes

Showa 9-12 (1934-1937) Research concerning furniture that can be dismantled

Showa 11-13 (1936-38) Research in the experimental manufacture of woven crafts

Showa 14 (1939) Research in plywood made with metal and wood, and research on the use of natural wood as a substitute material

Showa 15 (1940) Research in the improvement of export housewares requiring immediate upgrades to high quality

Showa 16 (1941) Survey of products submitted for exhibition at the National Daily Life Product Exhibition

Showa 17 (1942) Survey and research in the improvement of products for national daily life.

These topics fit entirely entirely Taut's November 14 call for "standardized prototypes", "original areas" and "extremely advanced things particular to Japan". And so it seems as if Kenmochi remained faithful to Taut's precepts even after Taut had left Japan. We might wonder if the direction of Taut's interest in Japan reinforced Kenmochi's own sensibility. For example, when he took Taut to Dounji temple (Special Figure 13), Kenmochi also took him to the Tsutsumi-yaki kilns, also in Miyagi Prefecture. When he went to Saikawa, an onsen village, with Taut and his wife, Kenmochi introduced them to kokeshi doll craftsmen. However, Kenmochi was awed by "the dignity against which Ginza's modern architecture cannot hold a candle" and by the "power and might of tradition" he found at Saikawa. After Taut helped him to open his eyes to these things, Kenmochi found a way to make a drastic escape from the modernism of his student years. Kojima Kikuo left Sendai in 1934 (Showa 9), and Fujii Sanai was assigned to the Institute. For Kenmochi, Fujii was one of the few superiors who could understand Taut's suggestions. Kenmochi was promoted to assistant engineer ("gishu") status in 1935 (Showa 10), and saw himself as "fairly audacious".

Kenmochi was finally able to work on a more equal footing with department head Terasaki and Nishikawa, his elder at the Institute. In this way, Kenmochi became aware of his position and ability to realize his ideas through his own efforts. He married in 1937 (Showa 12) after a five-year courtship, and the new family had their first son the following year. At the Institute, Kenmochi was assigned to the Planning Division under Fujii. He also submitted a "fruit platter" (Illustration ) to an industrial arts exhibition under his own name. (Illustration ) The fruit platter was the product of the Institute's research into organized crafts and small wood objects, but also demonstrated Kenmochi's affection for the world of everyday objects. Working under Taut taught Kenmochi to take standardization as a theme for his work, and to continue incessantly to

experiment with its results. It also led Kenmochi to appreciate an approach to tradition that began with modernity. He would take this path after the War as well.

●——And then, the Postwar Era

It is hard to recognize Kenmochi's wartime experiences in the traces he left in the postwar years. His wartime research on wood airplanes began when a patron invited him to take on the new project, which he did with Yamawaki Isao as his partner. The two devoted themselves to developing products like airplane seats that used artificial adhesives and were made out of processed plywood.

Kenmochi was promoted to Section Chief in the Tohoku branch in March, Showa 21 (1946). Asked to contribute designs for the furniture for the Dependent Housing of the occupying Ninth Army, Kenmochi used an armchair (Plate I-23) from his 1943 book *Kikaku kagu* ("Standardized Furniture"). In other words, he used his wartime design ideals for someone who had been his enemy at the time those ideals were created. The purpose of his designs may have shifted from wartime economy, utility and efficiency to service to the occupying US forces, but the value of the form of his chairs did not change.

The decisive turning point in Kenmochi's life came in 1952 (Showa 27), when he traveled in the United States from April to November. The experiences he had during this half-year would solidify the direction of his wartime activities, and were precluded by his meeting with Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi was asked during a stay in Japan to design the interiors for Taniguchi Yoshiro's new Banraisha building on the Keio University campus in Tokyo. He was provided with stone and wood materials, and given space at the Industrial Arts Research Institute to use as an atelier. Noguchi visited the Institute on July 28, 1950 with Inokuma Genichiro, and was welcomed by Kenmochi, whom he had met previously at Tange Kenzo's office. (Fig. 22) Noguchi began working on August 2, and created a corner table, benches (Plate II-1 and 2), and a bamboo chair in addition to his sculpture. (Fig. 24) Noguchi showed a photograph of the chair to Charles Eames after returning home. This thrilled Eames, who was then working on weight-saving. Kenmochi talked about American movements in the arts and attitudes towards Japanese design with Noguchi, and must have had a premonition from his close contact with the unpretentious design of Noguchi's work that the design sense he had pursued since his time with Taut could work in the world at large as well. The knowledge that he shared his understanding of the times with foreign designers must have given him much confidence.

Kenmochi set sail from Yokohama on April 31 two years later. He met Mendelssohn, a close acquaintance of Taut, in May, (Fig. 26) and Charles Eames in June. Kenmochi felt as if "interestingly, he and I have differences in taste and design direction, but are very synchronized". Kenmochi and the Eames found many things in common, and Kenmochi spent two nights at the Eames' home upon their invitation. (Fig. 27) On July 9, he was greatly moved to meet Mies van der Rohe, to whom Mendelssohn had provided an introduction. Mies wrote him to say "Learn from the past and work for the future", which made Kenmochi even more pleased. (Illustration) He also became more confident that Japan could create designs to rival the

Swedish modern designs then gaining praise in the United States. Regarding George Jensen and other representatives of Scandinavian Modern's advances into the New York market and buyers interested in modern Japanese style, he explained, "I want a store devoted to Japanese things exclusively in New York. Not something like the Okajima antique shop on Madison Avenue. I want a store that can be called Japanese Modern". Kenmochi had already become conscious of the "Japanese Modern" during his time in the United States. For him, this was not a personal change but a personal discovery. The year after his return to Japan, Kenmochi began "research into modern Japanese style" with Yoshitake Mosuke, Noguchi Tsuneyoshi and Takama Ryuji. Based on the premise that "Our country too needs original design that is based on its regionalism and traditional techniques and can live in the present", the group made 33 different bamboo, lacquer, wood and metal products. This was after he had seen how the governments of Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Denmark had launched shops in the US. Kenmochi had confidence and recognized himself as a pathfinder. This made him all the more passionate about implementing this sensibility in the design for the exhibition space for fairs like H55 (Plate II-9-18) and Seattle. (Fig. 30) The high acclaim these received overseas only further bolstered his confidence.

However, Kenmochi's chance to drop all pretenses and talk heart-to-heart with his seniors in America in such a short period of time must have been exceptional for the period. The extent of the inferiority Japan felt after losing the war and the sheer difficulty of acquiring the necessary language skills can only be unimaginable today. Since meeting Taut, Kenmochi had had the opportunity to mix with Charlotte Perriand, Noguchi and the Eames across national borders. This was more than one Japanese's international outlook—we cannot help but recognize Kenmochi's particular talent and conviction to seize the opportunities that arose. He extended his stay in the US, and returned to Yokohama on November 29. He would go on to travel to the US again in 1953 to attend the Third Aspen International Design Conference, and in 1955 to conduct a survey of industrial design. As a designer, Kenmochi met all the conditions necessary for familiarity with the world stage through knowledge of world design trends and activities.

●——Searching for an Image of Kenmochi

I think that Miyauchi Yoshihisa's evaluation of Taut as "a martyr for the times" is entirely appropriate. He was conscious of new issues in design almost immediately, and soon made them his own. Of course, this could happen because Kenmochi was well-prepared, but it also shows how well this one naïve youth was able to create a system in his confrontations with the world. When touching on Kenmochi's design, we cannot help but think of introducing us to tradition. The appearance of his designs is strikingly modern but also gives us a glimpse of tradition, fountain of tradition is filled under the skin of modernity. This speaks tacitly to the fact that we are looking at the end of a struggle lying just under the surface, and is both the source of his designs' originality and the root of their charm. These two areas connected Kenmochi to the world from the time he first became aware to the universal world during his time with Taut, and the vectors he discovered during this time similarly pin him to the time and place of the twenty-first century.