

SIDE GALLERY

SORI YANAGI



Stool model "Elephant"

White Edition
Manufactured by Kotobuki Co.
Japan, 1954
Fiberglass-reinforced plastic (FRP)

Measurements

48 cm × 48 cm × 36h cm
18,9 in × 18,9 in × 14,2h in

Provenance

Private collection, Tokyo

Exhibitions

MoMA Design Collection, New York.
Sori Yanagi: Designer's Spirit, Japan Design Committee,
Tokyo, 2002.

Literature

Japanese Design from 1945. Published by Thames &
Hudson. By Naomi Pollock. London, 2020. Page 105
Modern Furniture: 150 Years of Design, Ergün, Nazire,
eds., pg. 473
S. Makoto, 'Japanese Chairs', Ed. Seibundo Shinkosha,
Tokyo, 2006, pp.14-15

Details

Stamped with manufacturer's label

Notes

Originally designed in 1954 by Sori Yanagi, the Elephant Stool is one of the most iconic works in postwar Japanese industrial design. First produced by Kotobuki Co. in 1956, its lightweight, stackable form and sculptural simplicity reflect Yanagi's philosophy of merging everyday function with organic beauty. Awarded the Gold Medal at the 1960 Milan Triennale, the stool became a symbol of modern Japanese design and is now held in major museum collections, including the MoMA (New York) and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam). It was also featured at the 1970 Osaka Expo.

Biography

Sori Yanagi (1915–2011) was one of Japan's most influential modern industrial designers. The son of Yanagi Soetsu, founder of the Mingei folk craft movement, he grew up surrounded by handcrafted objects that shaped his sensitivity to form and function. Although he initially studied oil painting, his interest in design emerged after working as an interpreter for Charlotte Perriand, which introduced him to European modernism.

Yanagi established his own design approach by sculpting full-scale models in clay or foam rather than relying on drawings, allowing him to create forms that were tactile, ergonomic, and deeply human. His work bridges traditional Japanese aesthetics with modern industrial production, resulting in timeless objects known for their simplicity and usability.

Winner of the 1952 Mainichi Industrial Design Competition, Yanagi went on to design furniture, tableware, cookware, and public objects, many of which remain in production. His philosophy—rooted in the beauty of utility, respect for materials, and honest manufacturing—continues to shape contemporary Japanese design. The Elephant Stool (1954), one of his most iconic pieces, reflects his mastery of sculptural form and innovative use of new materials such as FRP.