

SIDE GALLERY

SORI YANAGI



Butterfly Stool

Manufactured by Tendo Mokko
Japan, 1960s
Thermoformed plywood, brass stretcher

Measurements

42 × 31 × 39,5h cm
16,5 × 12,2 × 15,6h in

Provenance

Private collection, Japan

Details

Manufacturer's stamped

Literature

Sembach, K.-J. (1997). Modern Furniture Design
1950–1980s. Atglen: Schiffer, p. 33.
Yanagi, S. (1983). Sori Yanagi's Works and Philosophy.
Tokyo: Yobisha, p. 91.
Centre Pompidou. (1996). Design Japonais 1950–1995.
Paris, p. 65.

Biography

Sori Yanagi (1915–2011) was a pioneering Japanese industrial designer, son of philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu, founder of the Mingei (folk craft) movement. He studied painting at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, but shifted toward design after working as an interpreter for Charlotte Perriand, whose collaboration with Le Corbusier influenced his thinking.

In 1952, he gained recognition by winning the Mainichi Industrial Design Competition, using the prize to establish his own design foundation. Working as an independent designer, Yanagi developed a highly personal approach, creating full-scale models in materials like clay to refine form through touch and ergonomics rather than drawings.

His work spans furniture, tableware, industrial products, and even infrastructure design. Iconic pieces such as the Butterfly Stool (1956) and Elephant Stool reflect his signature blend of organic form, functionality, and material sensitivity. Deeply influenced by the Mingei philosophy, he emphasized simplicity, usability, and the inherent beauty of everyday objects, often designing for mass production without sacrificing quality.

Yanagi later became director of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, reconnecting with his father's legacy. His enduring contribution lies in defining a distinctly Japanese modern design language, uniting traditional craftsmanship with industrial production and a human-centered philosophy.