

# Asakano News

## Yoshihiro Shiga, 16th-generation Obori Somayaki potter Recovery from 2011 Earthquake

### Establishment of Asakano-gama Kiln in Koriyama

“Hoping to bring new culture to Koriyama.” —Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident, 16th-generation potter of Obori Somayaki at Gakudo-gama kiln, Yoshihiro Shiga, was forced to leave his native city Namie and move to Koriyama. He established a new kiln there and developed a new style of pottery called Asakanoyaki, producing gorgeous pieces that are expressive of the vibrant image of Koriyama city. With these original pieces, Shiga is pursuing his dreams anew in his new home, and says he would like Asakanoyaki pottery to be seen by as many as possible. He has begun to teach pottery classes in the city in an effort to interact more with the citizens of Koriyama, who have shown him nothing but support since his move there. “I want to show my gratitude by sharing the pleasure of making things” he said with a sparkle in his eye.

Shiga established Asakano-gama Kiln in May 2014, once he had finally settled into Koriyama after moving there from Namie, and has been running it ever since. According to Shiga, “Genuine Obori Somayaki does not really exist anymore.” He says that the pottery style had grown into a successful industry due to raw material found in the vicinity of Namie city. The Great Earthquake destroyed both the land and the city, and now Obori Somayaki has been

reduced to a “virtual” tradition. Whereas before Somayaki could only be made using raw materials found in Namie, as a result of technological advancements, Somayaki can now be produced anywhere. Shiga cannot return to Namie city, and the industry that once existed there is also gone. After evacuating briefly to the cities of Nihonmatsu and Motomiya, he moved to Koriyama and established the Asakano-gama Kiln, producing pottery with clay used for mak-

ing tiles that is found in abundance around the city.

The most pressing issue for Shiga is finding a successor. He is worried by the fact that the new generation does not seem to be interested in a life that involves working with mud and a lot of heavy, physical work. “You cannot continue in this line of work unless you really enjoy it. I hope I can find someone that is sufficiently inspired by my work to want to get involved,” he said.



Shiga at work at a potter's wheel



Traditional Obori Somayaki

At Asakano-gama Kiln, Shiga is churning out new pieces that make the most of the Obori Somayaki tradition and techniques.

Obori Somayaki has three distinctive characteristics: a crackle glaze surface, a galloping horse motif, and a double-wall structure. The cracks of the crackle glaze glow with a subtle radiance, covering the surface of the pottery like blue bolts of lightning. The galloping horse motif, resembling frozen motion photography, is a realistic-looking depiction

### Bringing new culture to Koriyama Creating original pieces in his second home

of a horse. The painting style is a tradition that has been handed down for more than 320 years, and is said to follow the Kano School of Painting. The double-wall technique is considered to have been invented in Namie during the Late Edo Period. The idea of using a double-wall structure to keep hot liquids on the inside insulated, and keep the outer layer cool to the touch is a unique technique rarely seen anywhere else in the world, making it an important cultural asset.

Shiga is building on these traditions to pursue new directions. Clay is abundant in Koriyama, which is why tile-making used to be an important

industry in the city. While in Koriyama, Shiga came up with the idea of using clay to develop Asakanoyaki pottery. In addition to traditional teacups and pots, Shiga also makes modern pieces that reflect the vibrant image of Koriyama. The coffee cups and other items made using Obori Somayaki techniques, while very much in keeping with current styles, skilfully blend traditional patterns into their design. There are multiple types of Asakanoyaki pottery. One type uses 100 percent Koriyama clay, and is characterized by its dark color. A second type uses 50 percent of the local clay and has a somewhat lighter color. Another type uses only 30 percent and is

white. Each of these types may or may not have patterns designed on them. Asakanoyaki pottery is expected to go on sale in a few years. Although Asakanoyaki is currently in the experimental stage, Shiga hopes that one day it will develop into a cultural asset for Koriyama.



New Asakanoyaki pottery pieces

### Interaction with the community through pottery classes



Painting experience workshop

Shiga has begun to teach pottery classes to share with others the joy of making things. Pottery and painting experience workshops are also available, and beginners are welcome to join. Applications are also accepted for year-long courses. For applications or related inquiries, call Asakanoyaki at 024-973-6320.



Shiga is standing in the middle.

#### Edited by:

From the right:  
Keisuke Iitani  
(Koriyama First Junior High)  
Yoshikazu Mori  
(Koriyama First Junior High)  
Sakura Suzuki  
(Sukagawa Third Elementary)  
Manaka Ando  
(Sukagawa Third Elementary)