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The Japanese Friend

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Marc Petitjean recounts the fascinating, larger-than-life story of Kunihiko Moriguchi: master kimono painter and Living National Treasure.

Born in Kyoto in 1941, Kunihiko Moriguchi has been a yūzen dyer for almost 50 years, honored as a Living National Treasure like his father before him. In the '60s, he studied design at the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs, where the painter Balthus became a friend and influence. He remains nostalgic for his happy years in Paris. Back in Kyoto, he worked beside his father, who passed down the demanding art of resist dyeing. Kunihiko innovated upon tradition, introducing abstract patterns. His kimonos, displayed in the most prestigious museums in Japan and abroad, become in his hands less items of clothing than something subtle, intangibly containing the lives and memories of their wearers.

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