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Antique fans (above and below) which Mr Ishizumi brought for his lecture.

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FOLDING FANS OF JAPAN: TELLING TALES THROUGH ART
Where: Asian Civilisations Museum
When: Saturday, 10am (lecture) and 2pm (workshop)
Admission: Free (lecture), \$40 (workshop) from Asian Civilisations Museum (go to www.acm.org.sg or call 6332-3284). The workshop is limited to 40 people and participants must be 12 years old and older.

Unfolding art of fan making

lauren yeo

Hailing from a line of Japanese fan makers whose works of art have been collected by Japanese imperial households, Mr Kanji Ishizumi is in town to fan interest in a dying art.

The lawyer-cum-bespoke art fan dealer, 63, will lecture on the history and use of Japanese fans, as well as hold a workshop at the Asian Civilisations Museum on Saturday. Participants of the workshop will have the opportunity to design and make their own Japanese folding fan.

"My motivation is to promote Japanese fan culture to the rest of the world, especially to Europe," he tells *Life!* in fluent English. "There used to be a prevalent fan culture in Europe. After World War II, the export market disappeared."

He feels that fan-making is a dying art. In Japan today, young people use fans mainly for formal events such as

weddings and tea ceremonies. The fans are also used in the arts such as traditional Japanese dance and Kabuki theatre.

With diminishing demand for them, Mr Ishizumi's grandfather and father were forced to close the family's fan-making business in 1977. The business was established in 1881 in Kyoto.

In 2007, Mr Ishizumi decided to revive the family business. Under the brand name Ishizumi & Co, he set up a shop in Tokyo and another in New York. While the branch in Tokyo sells more expensive Japanese fans, the New York branch sells mainly decorative, contemporary Japanese ones.

Up to 16 craftsmen can be involved in the creation of each of these fans. Intricate tasks include shaving and polishing of bamboo, pivot installing, paper cutting and fan leaf painting. Typically, a fan from Mr Ishizumi's shop takes three to six months to be completed.

Their prices, he says, depend on the complexity of the inlaying technique, which refers to how materials are set on-



to the surface of the fan, and the materials used. The most expensive fan he made was adorned with 500 turban shells. It took two years to complete and was sold for US\$50,000 to a Japanese collector in 2009.

He has brought 70 fans along with him on this visit, some of which are worth up to US\$1,700 (S\$2,140). Not all are made by his family. But the museum has selected 17 antique ones from Ishizumi & Co to be sold in its shop, priced from \$50 to \$250.

These days, he manages his fan business on weekends after his week's work as a lawyer is done. The father of four children, aged between 21 and 35, says it is possible that two of them, who are based in the United States, will take over his business. For now, he is toying with the possibility of expanding his business to Europe or Singapore.

He remains optimistic that there is a niche market for Japanese fans. "Fan-making is part of Japanese culture with a long tradition of more than 1,000 years," he says. "People who buy fans appreciate their portability."