

# ASIAN ART

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## AUCTION RECORD FOR HOKUSAI'S GREAT WAVE

The iconic Japanese print *The Great Wave* ruled the waves at Christie's New York September sale of Japanese and Korean Art. The work achieved \$1,110,000 against a low estimate of \$150,000 – to set a world auction record for a print by the artist. Two other famous prints by the artist commonly known as the *Red Fuji*, or *Fine Wind, Clear Skies* (*Gaifu kaisei*), sold for \$337,500 (est \$100-200,000), and *Storm Below the Summit* (*Sanka bakuu*), from the same series, published in late 1831, realized \$137,500, against an estimate of \$60-80,000. Two other Hokusai lots sold on, or over, \$100,000 – *New Year's Day in the Yoshiwara* achieved \$125,000 (est \$100-200,000) and *Namichidori* (*Plovers above Waves*), a set of 12 prints, which sold for \$100,000 (est \$80-120,000).

Katsushika Hokusai's (1760-1849) most famous work was created when he was about seventy and is from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mt Fuji* (published around 1831-33). Mt Fuji and its wider spiritual significance was a model for Hokusai in his quest for immortality during his later years.

This series revived Hokusai's career after personal challenges of the late 1820s. The *Great Wave*, with its use of deep perspective and imported Prussian blue pigment, reflects how Hokusai adapted and experimented with European artistic style. On this famous print, whose official title is *Under the Well of the Great Wave at Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa-oki nami-ura*), Hokusai used less than 10 colours: he was ingenious in the use of lines and in the construction of an effective composition similar to a contemporary commercial poster, moreover, he exploited the newly imported brilliant Prussian blue (*Berurin ai*) to capture and surprise the public.

Other lots that performed well in the Christie's sale included a pair of six-panel folding screens (*byōbu*) by Kano Tsunenobu (1636-1713), *Chrysanthemums Blooming in a Garden*, ink, colour, *gofun*, gold and gold leaf on paper, which sold for \$175,000. Several paintings by Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891) also performed well, including the hanging scroll *Long-tailed Rooster*, ink, lacquer and



*Under the Well of the Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), woodblock print, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mt Fuji*, 25.7 x 38.1 cm, sold for \$1,100,000 at Christie's New York on 22 September, 2020, achieving a world auction record for the artist

gold on paper (1854-1936), which achieved \$40,000 (est \$15-25,000), along with *Waterfall*, a hanging scroll, ink and light colour on paper, which sold for \$35,000 (est \$20-40,000).

Also on offer were prints by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), whose top offering realized \$106,250 (est \$18-22,000) for *Evening Snow at Kanbara* (*Kanbara yoru no yuki*), circa 1834,

from the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*.

Additionally, modern and contemporary works performed well with strong results being achieved for *Choo* (*Conspicuousness*), from 1969, by Morita Shiryu (1912-1998), which achieved \$137,500, against an estimate of \$50-70,000. *Jigen* (*Manifestation*) by Kato Gizan (b 1968), a carved wooden sculpture of just over 110 cm was also popular and sold for \$312,500, against an estimate of (\$30-40,000).

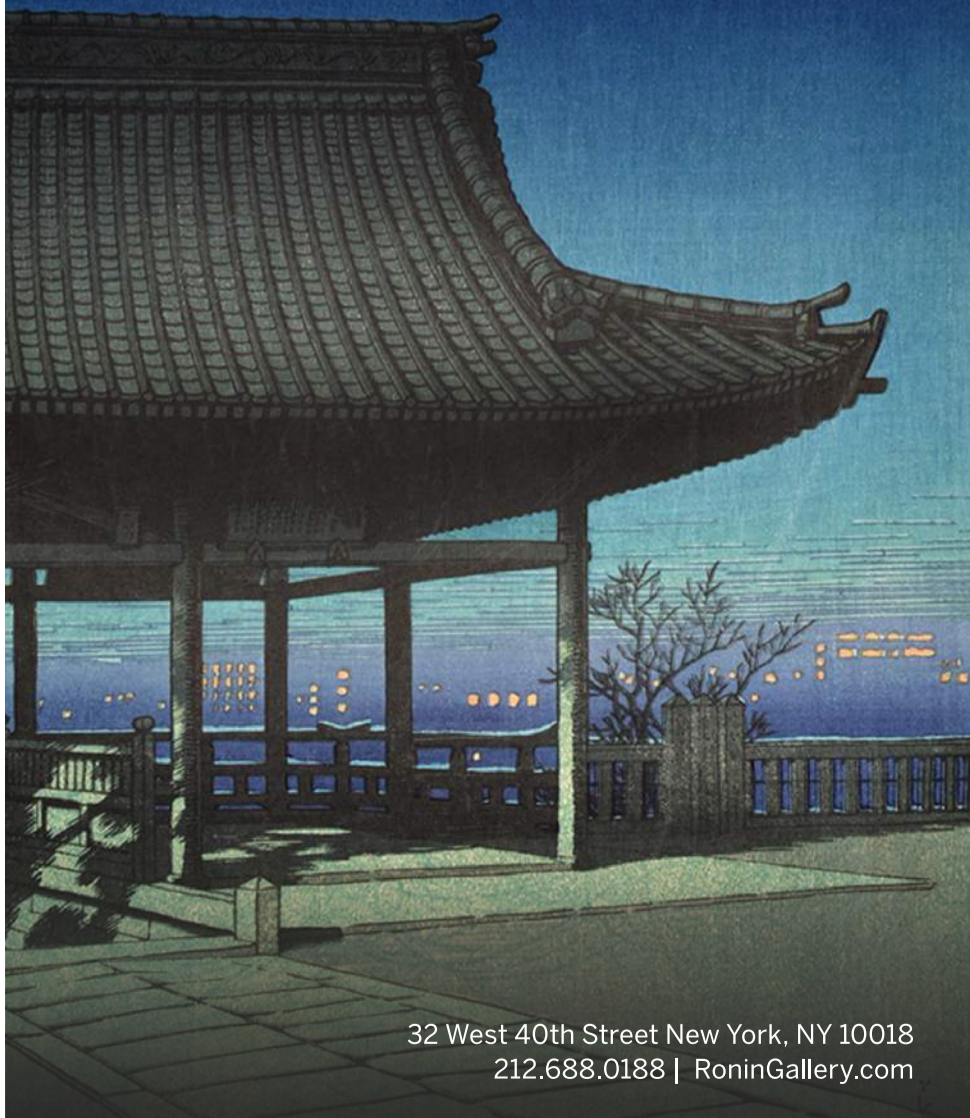
Featured Korean works included a blue-and-white porcelain jar with three worthies playing *weiqi*, Joseon dynasty, that sold for \$750,000; and an eight-panel screen from the circle of Kim Hongdo (1745-1806), *Hunting Scene*, that achieved \$930,000 against a low estimate of \$100,000.

The sale totalled \$8,475,000 with 82% sold by lot and 84% sold by value.

● For more news from the New York September sales, see the auction pages in this issue

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### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### ARTES MUNDI PRIZE

Artes Mundi 9 will take place from 13 February to 6 June 2021 in Wales, across three venues: National Museum Cardiff; Chapter; and g39. For this edition, the winner of the Artes Mundi 9 Prize will be announced ahead of the exhibition opening on 11 February, instead of towards the end of the exhibition as in previous years. Artes Mundi presents the UK's leading international contemporary art prize and is an important arbiter of cultural exchange between the UK and the international visual arts community.

The Artes Mundi 9 Shortlist includes: Firelei Báez (Dominican Republic); Dineo Seshee Bopape (South Africa); Meiro Koizumi (Japan); Beatriz Santiago Muñoz (Puerto Rico); Prabhakar Pachpute (India); and Carrie Mae Weems (USA).

#### MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART

Last month, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) has unveiled its redesigned Himalayan and South and Southeast Asian galleries, marking the first major refresh of these spaces in more than 20 years. *With New Light: Mia's Reinstalled Himalayan, South, and Southeast Asian Art Galleries* features collection highlights, including a recently conserved 1,000-year-old Indian sculpture of Shiva Nataraja – commingled with new acquisitions on view for the first time.

The Jane and James Emison Gallery highlights more than 1,000 years of artistic production in South Asia, which includes present-day Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The earliest works on view date from the Medieval period (about 700-1200), when Hindu (or Brahmanist), Buddhist, and Jain worldviews proliferated across the landscape through the widespread construction of temples. The timeline continues to when Islamic

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# IZUMI KATO

by Olivia Sand

Izumi Kato's practice is captivating and singular, echoing his vision of what art should be. Depicting human-like forms, he sets the stage for the story to be told, a story that the viewer can imagine. Relying on his hands instead of the brush when painting, he brings together line, form, and colour, in order to create works that resonate with the viewer that reach an almost contemplative state.

Beyond painting, Izumi Kato (b 1969, Japan) also uses other materials such as stone and fabric, completing intriguing small sculptures, as well as large-scale installations. During the opening of his latest exhibition in Paris, Izumi Kato discusses his trajectory, sharing his thoughts on his approach and his artistic universe.



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Izumi Kato.  
Photo: Claire Dorn

## NEWS IN BRIEF

rulers introduced new traditions of architecture and the courtly arts, spurring innovations in painting, textiles, and metalwork, and follows these evolving traditions under British colonial rule (mid-1700s–1947) to the present day.

The Himalayan region encompasses the Tibetan Plateau, Nepal, Kashmir, and Bhutan, as well as parts of Northern India, China, and Mongolia. Though geographically isolated, its high mountain passes historically allowed for continuous engagement across greater Asia. Hinduism and Buddhism entered from India, and the region's inhabitants were in frequent contact with China through trade and political alliances.

The final gallery features Southeast Asia, which includes Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Featuring works dating to 1000 BC. This gallery presents connections among Mia's South Asian and Chinese art collections, as well as with the local community; Minnesota is home to the third-largest Southeast Asian American population in the US.

### QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY

The Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) has announced receipt of a AU\$35 million bequest, the largest single cash gift in the gallery's 125 year history and one of the most generous bequests ever

made to an Australian state gallery. The bequest made by the late Win Schubert AO (1937–2017), a Gold Coast-based philanthropist, gallerist, and art lover. Over two decades Mrs Schubert enabled the acquisition of more than 100 important artworks for the state's collection. Some of the most significant include Cai Guo-Qiang's allegorical assembly of 99 replica animals, *Heritage* (2013), Yayoi Kusama's large-scale sculptural work *Flowers that Bloom at Midnight* (2011), Kohei Nawa's *PixCell-Double Deer#4* (2010), and Nick Cave's *Heard* (2012), 15 'soundsuits' that can be activated by dancers and were a major highlight of GOMA's 10th-anniversary celebrations.

### WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

The Worcester Art Museum has partnered with Chiso, the Kyoto-based kimono house, on their first ever virtual exhibition of historic and contemporary kimono from their collection, as an accompaniment to *The Kimono in Print: 300 Years of Japanese Design. Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso* highlights the history and artistry of the prestigious 465-year-old garment maker through the presentation of 14 kimonos from the mid-1600s to 2000s. In addition, a selection of related works – paintings, kimono fragments, and woodblock printed books – from the Chiso art collection – reflect the creative collaborations between Chiso and several celebrated Japanese artists

since the late 19th century.

Also for the first time, a museum presents the kimono as a contemporary art practice – through the commissioning of WAM's own kimono. *The Worcester Wedding Kimono* highlights motifs inspired by the shared appreciation in Japan and New England for the fall season and maple leaves.

### TEFAF ONLINE

The European Fine Art Foundation (TEFAF) has announced the launch of its new digital platform, TEFAP Online, in time for its New York fair. Accelerated in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, this digital marketplace is hosting its inaugural fair 1 to 4 November, 2020, tefaf.com.

### THE ROYAL COLLECTION, LONDON

The exhibition *Japan: Courts and Culture*, originally due to open in June 2020, is now expected to open in spring 2022. The Royal Collection holds some of the most significant examples of Japanese art and design in the Western world. For the first time, highlights from this collection will be brought together to tell the story of 300 years of diplomatic, artistic and cultural exchange between the British and Japanese royal and imperial families. The exhibition includes rare pieces of porcelain and lacquer, *samurai* armour, embroidered screens and diplomatic gifts from the reigns of James I to Her Majesty The Queen.

Asian Art Newspaper: You decided to become an artist when you were thirty years old. What prompted you to leave your previous life behind and reinvent yourself as an artist?

**Izumi Kato:** Originally, I studied art at university, but I was not a very interested student. I nevertheless graduated, and then started looking for a job in order to support myself. Working, however, meant entering active life, becoming a full member of society. It was a strange and trying time for me, as I was confused and disoriented by what I saw in society: for example, I was puzzled by the whole money-spending circuit and, in my opinion, there were many aspects of life that did not work properly. Then, every time I faced a situation I could not understand or comprehend, I kept wondering if as an artist, I would have more choices and alternatives, allowing me to react as I felt best. I came to the conclusion that perhaps the art world was different, and would be more welcoming to me. I realised how concerned I had been, and decided it would be best to make a fresh start, devoting my entire time to painting. With the world organised as it is, I came to understand that the only way I wanted to live was as an artist. I reached that conclusion around the age of thirty.

Together, they offer a unique insight into the worlds of ritual, honour and artistry linking the courts and cultures of Britain and Japan. The catalogue is already published.

### BANGKOK ART BIENNALE

Bangkok Art Biennale (BAB) 2020 opened on 29 October and runs until 31 January, 2021, showcasing a total of 82 artists across 10 venues – both Thai and international – and includes a huge array of installations, exhibitions, and performances being staged in locations as diverse as the Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre (BACC), Museum Siam, Lhong 1919, and the BAB Box at OneBangkok, as well as historic sites such as Wat Prayoon. More information on [bkkartbiennale.com](http://bkkartbiennale.com)

### WARANGAL FORT, INDIA

The 12th-century temple, Swayambhu Temple, in Warangal Fort, Telangana, has been granted funds for restoration. It was the capital city of the Kakatiyas and Musunuri Nayakas since at least the 12th century, when it was the capital of the Kakatiya dynasty. The Swayambhu, Thousand Pillar and Ramappa temples in Warangal had been part of a serial nomination for consideration for the UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. However, encroachments in the vicinity of the first two monuments had made this impossible and the Telangana government ended up nominating only the Ramappa Temple.

**AAN:** Your practice is quite challenging, as you essentially work with what could be called the fundamentals of art: line, form, and colour. Would you agree?

**IK:** In fact, at the time, I did not have any precise direction, or plan, when it came to making art. Today, however, I have a better vision of the art world, how it could be summarised, and how artists coexist. As I see it, there are two types of artists: the conceptual ones and the others like myself, using colour and line, and who could be qualified as 'academic' artists. I firmly believe that I was made to be part of the classical artists' world more than any other group. I felt there was more potential and I could achieve more with this type of art.

**AAN:** Relying on these three elements, over time you have managed to achieve a very rich narrative. How did you go about that?

**IK:** As I began painting, my work was about conveying hope. Why was that? One needs to take a closer look at the art curriculum in Japan, where there is a strong emphasis on copying, in a hyper-realistic way, everyday items so they look like photographs. We are being taught that this is the basis of painting. I did not share that view at all, and had a radically different approach. Let us take the example of a child: without any guidance, it will draw dots, round shapes, or graffiti. Alternatively, if we move into a more meticulous direction, we end up with something that looks like a photograph. However, today, there are cameras for such a purpose, and I therefore see no need to follow that route. I wanted to paint, even though I realised I could not get back to being the child that I once was. That did not prevent me from coming up with a way to combine the rudimentary tools of line, colours, and dots, while also integrating human forms. Little by little, through this continuous dialogue with painting, my work started to evolve. Also, over time, I began to add more colour, with the human forms being now much more concrete than they used to be. My intention is not to deliver any kind of message, or to explain anything. I complete pieces following a creative process, always making sure the viewer looking at them can open their imagination to all sorts of things. Therefore, some people may recognise a story, while others may feel it is about an extra-terrestrial. I get all kinds of comments.

**AAN:** Within the shapes you depict, there is a very rich content that anyone can interpret as they please, depending on their imagination, their past, their experiences, etc. The overall shape seems like an envelope with a content that remains completely free.

**IK:** Yes, exactly. That is the ideal scenario and is precisely what I want to accomplish.



Untitled (2017), wood, soft vinyl, acrylic, pedestal 163 x 32 x 43 cm. Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

“  
*I am interested in a creative process based on colour, line, and shape*  
”

**AAN:** It is interesting to see that with nothing very representative of the 'envelope content', all the human-like shapes have a strong presence, with a lot of charisma. It could almost be an ode to the human being. How do you see it?

**IK:** What a beautiful comment! I complete such pieces because I myself am interested in human beings, with a creative process based on colour, line, and shape. I place all the information within the piece, leaving ample room for the viewer's interpretation. I feel this is the culminating point of the work.

**AAN:** What is your approach when facing a blank canvas?

**IK:** When creating and completing a piece, I am only in the act of painting, not trying to explain anything. But ultimately, after finishing a piece, I hope that there will be someone who reacts to it, who reflects on it. Strangely enough,

I manage to accomplish this result without intentionally wanting it.

**AAN:** Within your practice, with painting, sculpture, and installation, what do you consider the actual starting point of your practice?

**IK:** The starting point is always painting and everything else derives from that.

**AAN:** A number of your pieces are based on fabric. How do you go about selecting it?

**IK:** I create soft pieces based on a variety of old fabrics. For example, I have used fabrics based on an old indigo-dyeing process popular in Japan, fabrics from Mexico, or textiles I found in France. Basically, the works in fabrics, or in stone, are completed through materials I find locally, depending on where my projects are taking place. The advantage of the fabric pieces is that I can install them in different ways, with a position according to my liking – a character can either be presented seated or standing, giving me a lot of flexibility.

**AAN:** When it comes to selecting stones for your pieces, is there some similarity with the way you choose the various fabrics, for example, from different areas, reflecting the place?

**IK:** Yes, indeed. With regards to the stones, the key element is their shape, as I am combining them. When choosing them, I immediately wonder whether they will allow me to bring to life certain images I have in my mind. Ultimately, for the stones, I am not paying that much attention to local issues. In the case of fabrics, however, I visit various markets, which is something I truly enjoy. I am very receptive to the atmosphere of these markets. For example, the fabrics included in the exhibition in Paris were acquired at the market in Clignancourt. Some dealers have a whole variety of old fabrics, and I am eager to hear from them where and how they were used. That is always a wonderful moment, even though it has no direct impact on the final piece.

**AAN:** For some of your pieces, it is difficult to determine whether one should acknowledge them as sculptures or paintings. How do you see it?

**IK:** Considering the nature of my work, it is hard to say whether a piece should be called a sculpture, a painting, or something else. For the stone pieces, for example, I assemble them, paint and sign them, so perhaps they could also be called paintings? It is difficult for me to identify to which exact category something belongs. What is nevertheless clear to me is that I enjoy painting and my goal for the future is to complete interesting and challenging paintings. That is fundamental. I want to complete good, and even extraordinary, works. Therefore, I will do whatever it takes for me to complete such paintings in the future.



Untitled (2017), wood, acrylic, soft vinyl, 152 x 30 x 45 cm. Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin



Untitled (2018), oil on canvas, 194 x 130.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

**AAN:** As for the stone sculptures, how are they assembled?

**IK:** For the vertical ones, if they are large, they are assembled through an iron rod, but if the piece is small, then the stones are on top of one another, and they are glued. If the stones are horizontally on the floor, then they are just placed next to one another.

**AAN:** Within painting, you highly value ancient cave paintings. Do you see yourself in the continuity of certain artists or movements?

**IK:** In fact, when we look at ancient paintings, we are capable of having a dialogue with these pieces. Basically, the medium allows the information to be transmitted, with time having no importance. When I see cave paintings, I feel something very powerful. On another level, when I see Van Gogh's work, I also have a

very strong response, and I believe there is a bond with these pieces. It is the same with the work of Francis Bacon. These are paintings one can truly say are interesting works and I feel close affinities with these artists. Without sounding pretentious, perhaps I am the continuity of these artists? Perhaps, I am in the continuity of a broader tradition, at the other end of the cave paintings?

**AAN:** Presently, with the pandemic affecting the calendar of the art world, art is often experienced through social media. Do you find that to be a satisfying alternative to galleries, museums, fairs and biennales?

**IK:** Today, with Instagram, times have changed. In earlier times, one had to be a professional in order to be on television. Today, each and every one of us can start making their own publicity through that type of social media. I am not criticising it: it is all right and it is even a good thing. However, it is a tool and the question is, how should we use it? Personally, I would not want to get known or get publicity through the wrong channels. The more people see works on Instagram, the more they come to my exhibition, realising it has nothing to do with what they saw on the screen. Therefore, one comes to the conclusion of why we need art. Let us take an example and try the following experience: looking at art works, at video, one has the opportunity to discuss the pieces, react to them, think about them. Finally, such experiences are necessary for the human being within society and are part of what makes life interesting. In my opinion, that is most likely the purpose of art. Even with nature, one constantly needs to observe it as it is in constant flux: if it rains, we need to make sure not to get wet, or one needs to pay attention not to fall over cliffs. In order to live and survive, we are constantly in the process of thinking, reflecting, defining new ways and strategies. Therefore, to make sure that all these faculties do not decline, we always have to stay sharp, and art allows us to do just that.

**AAN:** After graduating from art school, you deliberately put the brush aside in order to work directly with your hands, or sometimes, with a spatula. What limitations did you encounter in regard to the traditional brush?

**IK:** Perhaps, I was simply not good enough handling the brush. Basically, when I was working with the brush, I ended up creating works that anybody could have completed, and I could simply not obtain the line artists or movements? **IK:** In fact, when we look at ancient paintings, we are capable of having a dialogue with these pieces. Basically, the medium allows the information to be transmitted, with time having no importance. When I see cave paintings, I feel something very powerful. On another level, when I see Van Gogh's work, I also have a

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Spinner (1998), oil on canvas, 45.5 x 273 cm. Courtesy of the Artist. Photo: Kei Okano 1998



View of the exhibition at Perrotin Paris, held from August to October, 2020. Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin. Photo: Claire Dorn



WATCH  
Izumi Kato  
talk about his  
2020 gallery  
exhibition  
in Paris

hands, I can better control them. Contrary to the brush, it is far more homogenous, and with a spray, it is even more homogenous. Therefore, the tool that I find most fitting is the hand simply because it is how I can achieve the result I envision in my mind.

**AAN:** You keep two studios: one in Tokyo, and one in Hong Kong. With the present political uncertainty linked to the situation in Hong Kong, are you planning on keeping that studio?

**IK:** Right now, I cannot go to Hong Kong as for the moment foreigners are not allowed to travel there. There are some unfinished works in my Hong Kong studio, which will have to wait until the situation gets better. Tokyo remains my primary studio, while I rent the one in Hong Kong. Should the political situation in Hong Kong remain uncertain, or get worse, I am not ruling out giving it up.

**AAN:** It is unusual for an artist to have two studios in Asia. What prompted you

to select Hong Kong over London, or New York, for example?

**IK:** The first reason was because my Paris dealer, Emmanuel Perrotin, also had a gallery in Hong Kong, and therefore, a professional connection was already established. In addition, I thought that, in a way, Hong Kong was at the centre of Asia, which encouraged many Western galleries to have a branch there. Also, the Chinese like painting and being in Hong Kong, one has the opportunity to see painting from all over the world without travelling to Europe, or the US. That makes it a marvellous environment for anyone interested in art. As an artist, this is something very positive and considering Hong Kong, its situation is quite different from the one in Japan. Hong Kong is very dynamic, whereas Japan feels very static, with nothing exciting happening. For me as an artist, Japan is very convenient and it is pleasant to live there, but I have to admit that it has become slightly boring.

**AAN:** You are referring to Japan's environment as being too static for an artist? Can you elaborate as from the outside, Japan still seems dynamic?

**IK:** One of the major problems is that the majority of people is opposed to changing things that would require reforms. It is a common pattern that overall people dislike change. That explains why on a political level, things never change, and why there is very little transformation. In addition, as it is an insular country, it is an unwritten rule that people have to have the same appreciation of things: if the majority, or unanimously, people claim something is good, then one has to agree that it is good. In that sense, the pressure in society is immense.

**AAN:** Articles about your practice frequently associate your work with the Japanese Pop Art movement. Do you agree with that statement?

**IK:** I have mixed feelings about it as part of me agrees with that statement and part of me does not. In Japan, people from my generation tended to have many children within one family. Therefore, *manga* and *anime* were part of the main culture and were extremely popular. Using that line of thinking, art was rather considered a sub-culture, and I realise personally I also hold certain Pop features. That being said, I do not quote Pop Art in my work as some other artists may do. As I indicated earlier, I consider myself to be a very academic painter. That is why I only partially agree with that statement

**AAN:** When you say 'academic', do you mean an artist whose work is based on colour, line, and form?

**IK:** Yes, exactly. An artist who struggles with these elements.

**AAN:** In which direction do you see your work evolving?

**IK:** I firmly believe my work is still improving, even though I do not have a precise idea as to how it is going to look. I want to be free to use any kind of material to keep my work evolving, and create pieces that are

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”

different from anyone else's. In order to achieve that, I need to keep practising and experimenting in my studio on a daily basis. I am very happy I have the chance to work in Japan, as well as abroad, as it gives me a certain balance and perspective, from which my work benefits a great deal.

**AAN:** Looking at your work over the past 20 years, you seem to keep



Untitled (2020), 37.5 x 8 x 8 cm, wood, stone, acrylic, stainless steel. Perrotin Paris, 2020. Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

reinventing yourself rather than pursuing an approach that has proven to be successful.

**IK:** If one does not act in this way, then indeed, it is sheer repetition, and I do not think that is a good thing for any artist. For example, as an athlete, one constantly wants to match or even break one's previous record. Similarly, I want to keep that motivation and I am glad if people actually see and appreciate that aspect of my approach.

**AAN:** Compared to your earlier work, the colour palette has evolved a great deal. Today, what is your approach towards colour?

**IK:** Colour is just colour. Monotone works in black and white, or only red, are very easy to paint. It is gets much more complex when combining various colours, which makes it difficult to complete interesting work. Personally, I like challenges, and I prefer making complicated things instead of easy ones. Of course, I may complete something in monotone, but as it is easy, it does not evolve or improve. That explains why I prefer using a variety of colours, thus increasing the quantity of information presented.

**AAN:** Your works seem to bring together extremes: very serious versus humour, life versus death, real versus unreal. We therefore have two universes that are balanced next to one another. Do you agree?

**IK:** I could not agree more. To me, in order to be successful, a painting needs to bring together antithetical information like life and death, strength and weakness, hot and cold, etc. To me, it is wonderful if people perceive these aspects within my work.

**AAN:** You have also been using vinyl as a medium. How did that come about?

**IK:** As you know, soft vinyl is a Japanese technology. Usually, this material is used for children's toys and, in my case, I became interested as a friend of mine was manufacturing soft vinyl toys. At some point, he suggested we work together. To me, soft vinyl was a simple day-to-day material that I was familiar with – as a child, I used to play with such toys, mainly soft vinyl monsters. Instinctively, I thought I could use this material for my work. As we decided to collaborate, we experimented, creating some prototypes of very small soft vinyl objects that are also commercial. Then, we created larger pieces and, when staging an exhibition, we recreated a limited edition of small sculptures (edition of 100). I thought it would be interesting to have the dolls available at a store in conjunction with my exhibition. So now I sell them, but I also use them in my work.

**AAN:** You used to give titles to your works, which you eventually stopped doing. Why is that?

**IK:** There are two reasons. Firstly, as there is a large quantity of works, I am not always able to find a relevant title. Secondly, if I give a title to the work, people are strongly influenced by it and look at the piece according to the title. For these two reasons, I stopped creating titles.

**AAN:** Do you still own some of your early works?

**IK:** In fact, I hardly have any of them – perhaps just a few. As I was totally unknown as I came out of art school, I sold most of them to support myself. I threw some away and some have been lost, which is very unfortunate.



Torii of Meoto-iwa (husband and wife rocks), in Futamigaura Bay, Mie Prefecture. Their sacred nature is signified by the straw shime-nawa rope joining the islands

Torii at Shirahige Shrine, Takashima, Shiga

Torii at Natakaigan, Kitsuki, Oita

Torii at Einootsurugi Shrine, Uto City, Kumamoto

Torii on Bentejima, Hamamatsu, Shizuoka

# SONY 2020 LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

Sony's 2020 annual photography awards have been announced and the German photographer, Ronny Behnert, was awarded first place in the Landscape section for his series *Torii*. In 2019, Behnert visited Japan to photograph *torii*, the traditional Japanese gate found at the entrance of Shinto shrines. Almost all shrine buildings are approached through this open gateway made of wood, (usually painted vermilion red), or bare stone, shaped roughly like the Greek letter π but with two crossbars, that signifies a portal to the everyday world to the sacred place of *kami* (spirits). Evidence of Shintoism and Buddhism, the most common religions in Japan, are found in every corner of the country. Shrines and *torii* can be seen in the remotest of locations, from the middle of the Pacific Ocean to the highest mountains, and the deepest forests. Shinto, or the way of the gods, is Japan's ancient belief system focused on the veneration of divine phenomena of *kami*

– the nature divinities of the land, sky, and waters. The essence of Shinto lies in the worship of nature and the wish to be in harmony with the living world – the relationships of people to nature with developed rites and rituals to ask for requests, or express gratitude, or atonement. *Kami* can inspire or terrify – as can be experienced in the beauty of nature and landscape, or in the ominous rumble of thunder, the onslaught of torrential rain, or the tragedy of an earthquake. The earliest written histories in Japan describe *kami* as being the creators of the islands of Japan, who descended from the heavens to rule the land. *Kami* were responsible for all manner of tasks, from managing natural resources to protecting against disease, but only descended to earth to inhabit special places in nature such as mountains, forests and waterfalls. Shinto is syncretic and has long been linked to another religion in Japan – Buddhism. The photographer explains: 'With this



VIEW  
Meoto-iwa  
in Futamigaura  
Bay, Mie  
Prefecture

series I wanted to explore some of the smaller, more hidden sites of Japan'. Some of the exposures for Behnert's photographs can last longer than five minutes, which makes any distracting elements in the water or sky disappear – the longer the exposure, the clearer the photograph. He continues, 'I wanted to photograph and show these wonderful gates as minimalistically as possible, to create a unique, spiritual, atmosphere. For example, Einootsurugi was one of the sacred sites with *torii* that was totally hidden. It was difficult to find this amazing spot, but after a few hours of searching and exploring I found it. The special feature here for the composition was the symmetrical arrangement through the two lamps in the foreground. I spent more than three hours there, just because of the spiritual atmosphere at the place'. Behnert used a process of combining neutral density filters (which block out light) with long-exposure times. The

resulting photographs allow the *Torii* and their co-inhabitants to occupy a dominant presence within the frame while other, unnecessary elements become whited out, creating a minimal landscape that's reminiscent of the photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Seascapes*. He concludes of the series: 'As a photographer, I like to create clear, minimalistic photos in black and white but in Japan I started using my colour skills to intensify the strong contrasts I felt were present in Japanese culture. Most of the time, I am working with different neutral density filters to enhance the effect of minimalism in my works. The longer I am able to expose my photos, the clearer the photos, because I am losing every structure of the water and the sky. After three weeks of exploring Japan for my first time I knew that I definitely want to revisit as soon as I can. I drove more than 6,000 kilometres in my first short visit, but I still have many more places I want to discover'.

# HAMRA ABBAS



Hamra Abbas.  
Photo: Amna Zuberi

by Olivia Sand

Looking at the practice of Hamra Abbas over the past 20 years, it seems that she has had several careers: originally training as a sculptor, she has taken advantage of her travels and residencies to constantly improve and broaden her practice, for example, exploring miniature painting, and later to work with marble inlay. A multi-disciplinary artist, she keeps a global outlook on the world and is eager to communicate and create a dialogue with the audience through her art. Born in Kuwait in 1978, and now based in Pakistan, her work is currently on show in the Asia Society Triennial in New York. In conjunction with the opening, she discusses her work with the Asian Art Newspaper, looking at the many sides to her practice.

**Asian Art Newspaper: Your practice is extremely diverse and broad. How would you define it – and yourself – as an artist?**

**Hamra Abbas:** I define myself as an inter-disciplinary artist. Over the years, I have considered this question many times, trying to define what it means for me to work in the way that I do – and why. I have come to identify two main reasons: one is the quasi-nomadic life that I have led from my early years in Kuwait (where I lived until primary school), and later in Lahore, then in Berlin, Leipzig, Boston, London, Istanbul, New York and Singapore with long- and short-term engagements. Now, being back in Lahore after 13 years, everything is coming full circle. The experience of living in different places inevitably encouraged the inter-disciplinary nature of my work. Therefore, when I talk about my practice or journey as an artist, it is often through stories of people and places.

The other major reason for my diverse practice has been my formative training that has always anchored my work. In that context, I must mention the importance of Lala Rukh, a prominent artist and a

women's rights activist from Pakistan (1948-2017), who founded the first graduate programme within the National College of Arts in Lahore. She reimagined the Post-Renaissance term of Fine Arts into Visual Arts, with her vision to create a multi-disciplinary approach that connects art, design, and traditional forms practised locally. In addition, being one of Lala Rukh's first graduating classes, I was influenced by her philosophy. To me, she was like a guiding light.

**AAN: Besides Pakistan, you have also studied in Germany. Was the curriculum a multi-disciplinary continuation of what you experienced in Pakistan, or was it based on painting?**

**HA:** Again, it was entirely Lala Rukh who created the possibility that allowed me to finish graduate school in Lahore. Then I immediately left for Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), where I studied for four years, first as a student and later in the adjunct faculty. At UdK, I was in the Bildende Kunst (Visual Art) department and it was completely multi-disciplinary. The university felt very open and democratic, you



Ka'aba Picture as a Misprint (2014), C-print, courtesy of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai

had the freedom as a student to choose a professor who you thought best suited your work. It was a fantastic place, with leading figures in the art world such as Rebecca Horn, Tony Cragg, Stan Douglas, Georg Baselitz, Katharina Sieverding, Olafur Eliasson and the late Lothar Baumgarten. Berlin was a magical place.

**AAN: You have also attended various residencies in different parts of the world. Was this a time to experiment, or geared to learning new techniques?**

**HA:** Every residency was different. One of the most important residencies I did was at Gasworks in London. It was a joint residency with the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A). Residing with Gasworks, I had complete access to the V&A's collections. Subsequently, I made a work responding to their collection for V&A's first Jameel Prize exhibition, which was entitled *Please Do Not Step: Loss of the Magnificent Story*, which opened new methods of practice for me. Similarly, when I was artist-in-residence at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art in Singapore, I began working in a completely new form of painting. I went to Singapore five weeks after giving birth to my son and was still in a post-partum healing process, both physically and mentally. So I decided not to make any work during the residency, spending most of my time walking around various neighbourhoods in the city. I was sharing the apartment with my late friend Roslisham Ismail aka Ise (1972-2019), who suggested I accompany him for a lesson with a Chinese painter helping him with his project. After some research, I learned that Chinese painting has two main branches: the freestyle ink painting on rice paper, and *gongbi*, the meticulous realist technique often painted on silk, which felt very close to my training in miniature painting. I therefore decided to study *gongbi* while in Singapore.

**AAN: Once you had become familiar with the technique of *gongbi*, how did you use it?**

**HA:** I learned miniature painting in the 1990s in Lahore. It has a special

place in my practice, even though it is not a dominant part of my work. When I learned *gongbi*, I thought it would be easy for me due to my training of miniature painting, but in fact it was not. It took me a long time to learn how to paint on silk, which is entirely different from painting on hand-prepared *washi* paper. *Washi* is a four-ply thick board and is literally indestructible if you paint on it for very long and it has to stay intact. Silk, on the contrary, gives way very quickly. I was especially unable to paint on the silk that I had brought from Singapore. Interestingly, while in New York, I watched tutorials on YouTube to learn painting and mounting techniques on silk, and ended up contacting the person who had made these tutorials. He introduced me to a new kind of Japanese silk, which eventually resolved most of my problems. Later on, my residency in Perugia, Italy, allowed me the time and peace to create a new body of work. After experimenting for five years, I was finally able to bring together the technique of miniature painting and *gongbi* in perfect harmony of surface, pigment, and style of painting. It culminated in a series of portraits of transgender street performers who are presently featured in the Asia Society

**AAN: The series included at the Asia Society Triennial is about the transgender community in Pakistan. Can you further describe the works?**

**HA:** These works are not about the transgender community at large, but the transgender street performers in Lahore only. Initially, these performers were associated with dance, music, and performance. They would perform at various occasions like weddings, or on ritualistic occasions. However, with the changes in society and the aesthetics of modern culture, most of them went out of work. As a result, they now perform on the streets for alms, living on society's fringes. I have been photographing their faces for the last five years, which I then use as a reference when painting. Out of these, 10 are on view at the Asia Society Triennial.

**AAN: All throughout your career, you have been courageous, addressing topics dealing with religion, sexuality, or communities on the fringes of society. Since being back in Pakistan, have you faced any problems in terms of censorship?**

**HA:** Living in Pakistan, you learn that you need to treat sensitive issues – especially those related to body, sexuality, and religion – with subtlety. However, I was indeed less concerned with censorship while I was living in the US, even more so before I had children. Initially, one would understand censorship as something imposed by the state. Now, one has to be more careful with social media, because you do not know who your audience is. Having said that, all of my work is developed with long-drawn conversations with my husband, who is a scholar of religion – an expert in Islamic intellectual history and *tasawwuf* (spirituality/sufism). Hence, together with his knowledge, and my practice and experience, it allows me to question

Every Colour (2020), ink and gouache on silk. Courtesy of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai

these things with an equal measure of critique and understanding.

**AAN: Lessons on Love was exhibited at the Biennale in Istanbul, but was also at the centre of debate. Why?**

**HA:** Lessons on Love was exhibited at the Istanbul Biennial in 2007, which was curated by Hou Hanru. I tried to persuade Hanru to show another work, but he was convinced that it had to be Lessons on Love, and later I was, too. The sculptures were made with Plasticine and were supposed to last only for the duration of the exhibition. The series created some media noise and seemed to echo a dispute between the conservative and the non-conservative newspapers in the country. From the folder of press cuttings sent, I could see two narratives: one that was in favour; and the other against the work. However, it was good to see many articles in support of the work. Retrospectively, to be honest, I am still surprised that I made this particular series because today, I may not be able to.

**AAN: You have also addressed a topic carrying a lot of meaning, the Ka'aba, in many different ways. What triggered this interest?**

**HA:** When my son was one-year-old, I went to Mecca for umrah, a pilgrimage with my family. Apart from the rituals, I felt that it is also like a family trip where you come back with souvenirs like 'I Love NYC' T-shirt, or Eiffel Tower snow-globes. I, too, came back with many trinkets, textiles, and prayer rugs that were on sale in the souvenir shops surrounding the holy mosque in Medina and the Ka'aba in Mecca. After I returned to my

studio in Boston, looking at these objects – the keychains, the textiles, the rugs, the scarfs – I noticed that some of these souvenirs, produced in China, might not be too concerned with 'colour correction'. I noticed that the white minarets could be purple, and the black Ka'aba could be any colour imagined. For example, I did this one piece where I bought a set of 12 prayer rugs on eBay, each depicting the Ka'aba in a different colour. Commonly on eBay, the vendors use product titles that would improve their visibility in searches. The vendor I bought the prayer rugs from used the title, 'One rug, any colour', which also became the title of my work. For some reason, I kept thinking about this title, which reminded me that 'black is a combination of all colours'. I decided to use this statement within my work, but wanted a form that would fully justify its spirit and completeness.

Then, one day, I saw a book on Bauhaus with the title written in CMYK misaligned layers. I remember taking a picture and going straight to my studio. I made two rectangles in CMYK layers, misaligned them, and called the work *Ka'aba Picture as a Misprint*. Speaking of influences, Annie and Joseph Albers and Sol Lewitt have been important references, also in regards to my work with marble, once I returned to Pakistan.

**AAN: What is your view on tradition?**

**HA:** To talk about tradition, I will use the example of my work in marble inlay. It is believed that this technique was transported in the 17th century from Italy, where it is known as *pietra dura*, and has been used since then in architecture and



WATCH Hamra Abbas discuss her short-listed work for the Jameel Prize in 2009 at the V&A

Barakah Gifts (water bottle), 2016, fibreglass, metal, courtesy of US Art in Embassies Programme

decorative arts in South Asia. Personally, I am more focused on the materiality of the process than being overly concerned about traditional or cultural specificity. For example, while I was in Massachusetts, I went to MASS MoCA, where I saw a huge retrospective of Sol Lewitt (1928-2007). I came out of the exhibition, completely blown away by the expanse of Lewitt's creative oeuvre. Many months later, on a visit to the old city in Lahore, I was struck by a fountain that could pass for a complete Sol Lewitt, except that it was made in the 17th century. Having learned the technique of marble inlay just recently, I decided to recreate the fountain in marble, and entitled it, *Waterfall: Gardens of*

*Paradise*, which further inspired me to make an extensive series of work in the same genre. I am certain that had I not been to MASS MoCA, or had I not lived in the US, I would have passed the fountain without paying much attention, which turned out to be an impetus of all my works in marble completed after. Much later, I realised that marble inlay is an important art form with a long history in South Asia. But despite its historical importance, surprisingly, it has been completely overlooked in contemporary art.

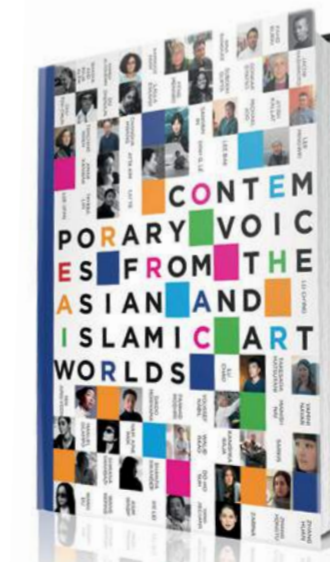
**AAN: As your basic training is in sculpture and you are back in Pakistan where you have more options, is this going to encourage you to pursue sculpture?**

**HA:** Yes, absolutely. In the past, I would use any opportunity to create large-scale works, like Lessons on Love for the Istanbul Biennial, or *Barakah Gifts* that was commissioned by the US Art in Embassies programme. Living in Lahore now, I have my family's support along with wonderful teams of people with whom I can work to pursue more large-scale projects than I have done before. I am in a good place in my practice right now, and eager to complete the new commissions and the public projects on which I am currently working.

➔ More information on Asia Society's Triennial, until 7 February 2021, visit [asiasociety.org/triennial](http://asiasociety.org/triennial)

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Boy Viewing Mount Fuji (1839) by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, Edo period. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, Freer Gallery of Art



WATCH  
Dr Frank Feltns  
talk about  
Mad About Hokusai

Thunder God  
(1847) by  
Katsushika  
Hokusai  
(1760-1849),  
hanging scroll,  
ink and colour  
on paper,  
Edo period.  
Gift of Charles  
Lang Freer,  
Freer Gallery  
of Art

# HOKUSAI

## Mad About Painting

Hokusai produced works of great quality, throughout his long life, up until his death at the age of 90 in 1849. At an exhibition originally planned to commemorate the centennial of Charles Lang Freer's death and also to complement this year's Tokyo Olympics, the Freer Gallery of Art organised an exhibition to explore the Hokusai collection owned by the gallery. Charles Lang Freer recognised the artist's vast abilities and assembled one of the world's largest collections of paintings, sketches, and drawings by Hokusai. Works large and small are on view, including paintings, *e-bon* (picture books), preparatory drawings and other ephemera in the collection, including six-panel folding screens and hanging scrolls to paintings, drawings, and *manga* – Hokusai's often-humorous renderings of everyday life in Japan. Together, these works reveal an artistic genius who thought he might finally achieve true mastery in painting – if he managed to live to the age of 110...

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) has long enjoyed a strong international reputation and is considered by many to be Japan's greatest artist, regarded as one of the most influential and creative minds in Japanese art. Considered the leading *ukiyo-e* artist of the later Edo period (1603-1868), Hokusai had the longest career of any artist of the time – more than 70 years. During his career he changed his style many times, over 30, and made unique contributions to art in all fields. Approximately 120 works of all sizes and mediums are on display over the course of the exhibition, from six-panel folding screens and hanging scrolls to paintings and drawings. Visitors can see rare examples of *banshita-e*, preparatory drawings for woodblock prints often destroyed in the process of carving the block prior



Rats and Rice Bales (1843) by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), hanging scroll (mounted on panel), ink and colour on silk, Edo period. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, Freer Gallery of Art

to printing. These drawings provide a glimpse into Hokusai's artistic process and the process for producing woodblock prints. In order to display the true depth of the Freer Hokusai collection, the exhibition has two rotations, with this final rotation ending in November.

Another notable part of the Freer Gallery's collection is a series of books collectively called *Hokusai Manga*. Meaning 'doodles' or 'idle jottings', Hokusai's *manga* depict deeply insightful and often hilarious renderings of everyday life in Japan. They stretch to 15 volumes (the last three published posthumously), and covered every subject imaginable: real and imaginary figures and animals, plants and natural scenes, landscapes and seascapes, dragons, poets, as well as Japanese gods. Sharing similarities with today's manga, Hokusai's series of books had a lasting impact on this major genre of contemporary Japanese culture. Hokusai's *manga* exhibit the breadth of his artistic skill, blending traditional aspects of Japanese painting with Western notions of perspective and realism. These brush drawing manuals, the *manga* series (published between 1814-1878), helped him gain recognition in society and spread his artistic style and reputation widely to a wider public.

Hokusai began sketching at the age of six, as he approached old age, he was critical of anything he had created before seventy, as he believed that only after turning 110 would he accomplish almost divine mastery of his art. He thought his art would finally achieve some relevance and closeness to the objects and scenes he depicted. He hoped to attain the mythical ability of capturing the essence of things so his paintings would appear to come to life. His ambitions did not stop short of wanting to be a legendary artist – a goal he ultimately achieved.



Lute and White Snake of Benten (1847) by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), hanging scroll (mounted on panel), ink and colour on silk, Edo period. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, Freer Gallery of Art

Throughout his career, and particularly in the later years, Hokusai's paintings brought vividly to life an extraordinary bestiary of mythical figures and holy men. He also continued to use landscape and wave imagery as a major subject and he became increasingly interested in exploring in his art the mutability and minutiae of the observable world – particularly birds, animals and plants and other natural subjects. Hokusai based his exploration of the outside world on his subjective identification with his surroundings rather than any objectively 'scientific', or technical, approach.

As was common with many artists, Hokusai changed his name as their work evolved – early modern Japanese artists often changed their names and brand, too. Hokusai surpassed other artists in the frequency of his name-changes, taking new names as his work progressed and diversified. One of his many names, *gakyō reinjin* 'Old Man Crazy to Paint', appears in the signatures on a number of paintings by Hokusai. This period, beginning

in 1834, saw the production of the series *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fuyaku kyakkei*), a set of three woodblock-printed books that was published in 1834, 1835, and circa 1839 respectively, which is acknowledged as his most complete homage to any one subject – and is considered one of the great masterpieces in the history of book illustration. These volumes are different from his single-sheet colour prints of Mt Fuji, which were simpler line compositions with washes of colour, and demonstrate Hokusai's understanding of monochrome book illustration.

A highlight of the hanging scrolls on view is *Boy Viewing Mt Fuji* (1839). This scroll (one of the first Hokusai paintings that Charles Lang Freer acquired), is among the most iconic images of the artist's work in the museum's collection. Hokusai expertly captured the atmosphere of the scene, with the sounds of the boy's flute mingling with the rushing water below him and the wind rustling through the tree's leaves. Some scholars have questioned its authenticity since the scene seems too sentimental for the artist's personal taste. However, close analysis of the brushwork and painting style have recently reconfirmed its attribution to Hokusai.

Frank Feltns, the Japan Foundation Assistant Curator of Japanese Art at the Freer and Sackler comments on the artist: 'Hokusai had an insatiable urge to paint anything and everything, both real and imagined. The exhibition brings together works from all parts of his career as a painter, from the very beginning to the very end, spanning more than six decades of Hokusai's life. Hokusai truly was a man obsessed with painting.'

● National Gallery of Asian Art, Washington DC, [asia.si.edu](http://asia.si.edu)



Fumei Choja and the nine-tailed spirit fox. Fumei Choja appears as a character in kabuki and bunraku plays which also feature the shape-shifting, nine-tailed, fox and its adventures in India, China and Japan by Katsushika Hokusai, 1829 © The Trustees of the British Museum

## HOKUSAI'S LOST DRAWINGS

Over 100 newly rediscovered drawings by Hokusai (1760-1849) have been recently acquired by the British Museum. Created in 1829 as illustrations for an unpublished book, they came to light in 2019 at an auction in Paris and have now been purchased by the museum. The acquisition was made possible thanks to a grant from the Art Fund.

The existence of these small drawings, 103 in total, had been forgotten for the past 70 years. They were formerly owned by the collector and Art-Nouveau jeweller Henri Vever (1854-1942). By the 1880s, Henri Vever had become one of the earliest Europeans to formally collect Japanese woodblock prints and by the early 20th century his collection comprised many thousands of prints. However, during the First World War, Vever disposed of the bulk of his collection, many of which at that time returned to Japan. Surviving prints from the collection were auctioned after the Second World War by Sotheby's, in four parts, in the 1970s. Prints from the Vever collection can still resurface and come up for sale through the auction houses and dealers.

These recently discovered drawings came to light last year, in Paris, the same city where they were last publicly recorded at the auction in 1948. The drawings were made for a book entitled *The Great Picture Book of Everything* and are thought to have been in another private collection in France in the intervening years before coming

up for sale again – and unknown to the wider world.

The drawings are a major discovery of Hokusai's life and works. They are especially significant as they come from a period in the artist's career where he was previously thought to have created relatively little, due to a succession of personal challenges. Within the previous two years he had suffered the death of his second wife and had also recovered from a minor stroke. And just months after these works were finished, Hokusai pleaded destitution in a letter – in part due to gambling debts incurred by his ne'er-do-well grandson. The reason why these drawings were never published remains unclear, but they mark a turning point in the seventy-year-old artist's career, demonstrating that he was in fact entering a new burst of creativity that would soon give birth to his famous print series, the *Thirty-Six Views of Mt Fuji* (circa 1831-1833).

This acquisition joins the British Museum's collection of Hokusai works, one of the most comprehensive outside of Japan. They bring the total number of works relating to the artist at the Museum – paintings, prints, drawings and illustrated books – to over 1,000.

The most famous Hokusai work at the British Museum is a fine, early, impression of the print popularly known as *The Great Wave*, acquired in 2008, also with the assistance of the Art Fund. It was the centrepiece of the major exhibition *Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave* in 2017

and was seen by 150,000 visitors.

All 103 drawings are now available to see on the British Museum Collection online, including the ability to see the drawings up close, using zoom technology from the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF). This allows the fast, rich zoom and panning of images so viewers can see them in detail. It is planned that the newly acquired drawings will go on display as part of a future free exhibition at the museum.

The subjects of the newly acquired drawings are wide-ranging: from depictions of religious, mythological, historical, and literary figures, to animals, birds and flowers and other natural phenomena, as well as landscapes. They are dominated by subjects that relate to ancient China and India and include Southeast and Central Asia. Many subjects here are not found in any previous Hokusai works, including fascinating imaginings of the origins of human culture in ancient China.

Tim Clark, Honorary Research Fellow of the British Museum, says of the acquisition: 'These works are a major new re-discovery, expanding our knowledge of the artist's activities at a key period in his life and work. All 103 pieces are treated with the customary fantasy, invention and brush skill found in Hokusai's late works and it is wonderful that they can finally be enjoyed by the many lovers of his art worldwide.'



Cats and Hibiscus, showing a stand-off between two cats with hibiscus behind, by Katsushika Hokusai, 1829 © The Trustees of the British Museum

VIEW  
all 103 drawings at  
The British Museum  
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The Azuchi-Momoyama (1573-1603) period refers to the 30-year period from the 1573 fall of the Muromachi shogunate until the establishment of the Edo shogunate in 1603. In this exhibition, Tokyo National Museum has focused on the arts that flourished during this period, considered one of the most vibrant and magnificent in Japanese art history, from famous masterpieces, Important Cultural Objects and National Treasures, to explore Japan's shifting aesthetics during this time. It was an era of great change that saw a shift from the medieval to the pre-modern, a time when Japan emerged from the medieval into the modern age, and a time which also saw great patronage and flourishing of the arts.

In 1543, the arrival of firearms (the arquebus, long gun) in Japan symbolised the beginning of what would become the Sengoku 'warring states' period that lasted almost 100 years, until Portuguese boats were banned from Japanese waters in 1639, a year after the Shimabara Uprising had ended. This turbulent period had been initiated by the Onin War in 1467, when the existing feudal system that comprised a patchwork of competing warlords (*daimyo*) collapsed and the country was escalated into a wider civil war – the Sengoku period. By the end of the Muromachi period, power was weakened and the most powerful warlord of the time, Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), led the battle to reunite the country, a fight that was continued by his successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598). By 1568, after several years of fighting, Oda Nobunaga triumphantly entered Kyoto and installed Ashikaga Yoshiaki as the hereditary 15th and final *shogun*, however by 1573, Nobunaga had banished the shogun to usher in the new Azuchi-Momoyama period. This was a time when the Emperor and court was not permitted to administer the government and was expected to use its influence through the arts and scholarship, and to maintain the tradition of music, dance, religious ritual, poetry, calligraphy and writing. However, a new and powerful aesthetic also began to emerge at the time, *Cha No Yu*, the Way of Tea, including the cultivation of *wabi-sabi* sentiments, which were mainly pursued and promoted by the *samurai* class. Sen no Rikyu (1512-191) was the leading tea master to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who greatly supported him in codifying and spreading the Way of Tea, he also used it as a means of solidifying his own political power.

Hideyoshi's tastes were influenced by his teamster, but nevertheless he also had his own ideas to cement his power such as constructing the Golden Tea Room (the original has been lost, but replicas exist) and hosting the Grand Kitano Tea Ceremony at the Kitano Tenmagnu shrine in 1587, considered a major cultural event of the Momoyama period, when the symbiotic relationship between politics and tea was at its height. Warlords rewarded their vassals with costly gifts of tea utensils. Sen no Rikyu served Nobunaga for 12 years and Hideyoshi for nine. The restrained, aesthetic taste surrounding the tea ceremony is in brash contrast to the ostentation seen in screens and the 'golden world' of public spaces.

The name of the era comes from one of Hideyoshi's castles, south of Kyoto – the building was demolished by his successors, as it was a visible reminder of their rival's power, and the hill planted with peach trees, hence the name Peach Tree Hill (Momoyama). Once in control,



Sketch for a portrait of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, attributed to Kano Mitsunobu, Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century, Itsuo Art Museum, Osaka, Important Cultural Property

# MOMOYAMA

## Artistic Visions in a Turbulent Century



Chinese Lions by Kano Eitoku, Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century, Sannomaru Shozokan (The Museum of the Imperial Collections), Imperial Household Agency



Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons by Kano Motonobu, Muromachi period, 1550 (Tenbun 19), Hakutsuru Fine Art Museum, Hyogo, Important Cultural Property



Nobunaga commenced construction on his own enormous castle strategically located at Azuchi, northeast of Kyoto. Eventually Nobunaga was assassinated by one of his own generals, allowing Hideyoshi to come to power. The third great Momoyama general was Tokugawa Ieyasu, who was destined to move the centre of power to Edo and establish a new shogunate in the city of Edo (present-day Tokyo), ushering in a more peaceful and steady regime in the country.

The exhibition presents 230 works created during these turbulent years of transition in order to look at the lives of the Japanese during these chaotic years and explore the development of the emergence of a distinct culture and taste. The show is divided into six themes to better explore these complex changes in society and taste during this pivotal period in the country's history.

It opens with *Momoyama Essence: Art for Unifying Figures*, offering an array of masterpieces representing the period when regional military rulers strove to unite the Japanese islands under a single ruler. These changes are documented in screens created at the time depicting the capital from the late Muromachi to early Edo period, reflecting the political and aesthetic changes of the times. This genre of screen paintings, called *Rakuchu rakugai zu* (Scenes in and around the Capital), capture the early capital of Kyoto from a bird's-eye-view, showing the city's temples and shrines, the Imperial Palace, the daimyo's residences, as well as various shops and the townspeople going about their business. On show is one of the finest examples, *Scenes in and Around the Capital* (1565), known as the Uesugi version, it has been passed down in the Uesugi clan for generations. It was painted by Kano Eitoku (1543-1590), who served as an official painter for the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534-82), and who gave the screen to the renowned warlord Uesugi Kenshin (1530-78). Other Eitoku highlights include a portrait of Oda Nobunaga and *Chinese Lions*, a six-panel folding screen, on loan from the Imperial Household Agency.

A sketch for a portrait of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, attributed to Kano Mitsunobu (1565-1608), a son of Kano Eitoku, shows the warlord and hero of the times portrayed in his sixties, with pointed beard and a 'monkey face' for which he was notorious. Hideyoshi fabricated an aristocratic ancestry, claiming descent from the Fujiwara family. In 1586, he was appointed to the highest court office to those outside the imperial family, as Prime Minister



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This turbulent period saw the emergence of a distinct culture and taste  
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(*Dajodajin*). However, he spent most of his life on the battlefields. There are several extant portraits of Hideyoshi, but all seem to have been executed within a few years of his death in 1598.

Works representing other great artists of the time are also on view, including the screens *Pine Trees* and *Maple Trees* by Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610). An example of Kano



Pine and Hawk (1626), by Kano Sanraku, sliding door panels and wall paintings, Edo period, former Imperial Villa Nijo-jo Castle Office, Kyoto City, Kyoto, Important Cultural Property



Maple Trees by Hasegawa Tohaku, circa 1592, ink, colour, and gold on paper, Chishakuin Temple, Kyoto

Motonobu's (1476-1559) work, *Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons* from 1550, shows the utter luxury of these screens, with their typically lavish gold-leaf backgrounds that were in taste at the time.

In contrast, the Shino and Oribe ware ceramics are more austere and exude a simple and refined aesthetic, typical of examples used in the Tea Ceremony. Arms and armour on show reflect the fact that power and politics were a driving force of the civil unrest and wars, a large part of life for all classes during this period, as represented by the elaborate armour worn in battle by Sengoku generals. Kodajiri *maki-e* lacquer and *Nanban* (Southern Barbarian) arts, European and other foreigners, reveal a wider world view and experience of the time, especially reflecting the interaction with Portuguese missionaries and traders.

The section *A Century of Change: Muromachi to Edo* looks at how art and taste changed during the period. Calligraphy by Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu are all featured in the exhibition, along with portraits of the Sengoku generals, alongside paintings and a selection of decorative artworks ranging from stationery boxes to Tea Ceremony kettles, mirrors, and even coins. The objects on display convey how these changing times brought about changing tastes and aesthetics not only to art, but also to daily life.

The Muromachi period built the groundwork for what would become the golden age of Momoyama culture. In *Momoyama Prelude: Warring States Aesthetics*, a series of luxurious gold-ground screens depicting the capital Kyoto and large format panel and wall paintings especially created for Zen temples around Kyoto became art forms in their own right. These works emphasised aesthetics that honoured the pomp and ritual of ceremonies and events related to the emperor or shogun. From the Onin War (1467-1477) and the Meio Coup (1493) onwards, the dominant culture of the

day began to influence the regional daimyo and filtered through to the townspeople (*chonin*) throughout Japan. Their tastes added a new dimension to earlier art forms and taste, as they migrated into the next era of influence. This section confirms the classic aesthetics of the late Muromachi period, while showing the transition of taste and patronage in the nascent buds of the developing Momoyama taste that would follow. This change can be seen by comparing the calligraphies of the Emperor, the warlords Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu, and the portraits of Yoshiteru Ashikaga, the 13th Shogun of the Muromachi Shogunate, and the Sengoku generals, including a young Ieyasu Tokugawa, who would eventually usher in the following era – the Edo.

The Momoyama culture is known for its lavish gold screens and luxurious artefacts, but the foundation for this taste was laid during the Muromachi period. Before the dawn of this change of taste in the 16th century, cultural activities that had mainly been developed with an emphasis on rituals and prestige that were centred on the Emperor and the court. However, the power and influence of the warlords began to rise during the civil wars and the Sengoku daimyo became more powerful after the Onin War, when the influence of the court waned and the military class took control.

*Making Tea: Chanoyu from Rikyu to Oribe*. As the Muromachi shogunate waned, the townspeople emerged as the standard-bearers of a new age. They studied *renga* linked-verse (in which two or more poets supplied alternating sections of a poem) and attended noh theatre performances, and built rustic buildings in the city where they could also enjoy the tea ceremony within suitably *wabi* settings, as in *samurai* culture. As part of this process Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591), tea master to the ruling generals of the day, created a new form of tea ceremony aesthetic. He



Ki-Seto vase, known as Tabimakura, Mino ware, Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century, Kuboso Memorial Museum of Arts, Izumi, Osaka, Important Cultural Property

turned everyday items into tea utensils and made his own utensils that spoke to him. He broke free from the emphasis on tea utensil provenance and style, instead giving form to tea as a sincere meeting of minds. Rikyu's aesthetic had a great influence on later tea masters, an influence which continued for centuries. On show are the tea utensils made and used by one such master, Furuta Oribe (1544-1615), which exude a powerful and overwhelming presence. Seemingly the direct opposite of his teacher Rikyu's tastes, in fact, some aspects of Rikyu's tastes can also be found in the elegant Oribe ware especially created for the Tea Ceremony.

During this era when warlords were competing for power and the townspeople were gaining wealth, both classes sought out expensive objects related to the tea ceremony as

well as utensils. Sen no Rikyu created new styles by choosing tools that appealed to his sentiments and visually appealed to him, regardless of trends. This spirit of Rikyu had a great influence on the successors of Furuta Oribe and others. On show are masterpieces relating to this important period of the Tea Ceremony along with Momoyama-period tea wares.

The height of taste and creation during this period is explored in *Mature Momoyama: From Splendid to Stylish*. The distinctive painting style of Kano Eitoku, the painter most favoured by Hideyoshi, was also the preferred painter for the other Sengoku generals and became the *de facto* painting style of the Azuchi-Momoyama period. His successors, however, distanced themselves from ostentatious displays of power, creating instead a world of beauty that emphasised refined elegance and natural harmony. This development can also be seen in the calligraphy of the time, from the uninhibited freedom of the poet Konoe Nobutada (1565-1614) to Honami Koetsu's (1558-1637) calligraphy which brushed against a background of underpaintings by Tawaraya Sotatsu (1570-1643). There was a shift, too, in ceramics from accidental and powerful forms to more designed, stylised beauty.

The Azuchi-Momoyama period was a turbulent time of constant battles and in *Equipping a General: Arms and Armour*, the physicality of war is explored. To cope with the seemingly endless repetition of battles, a new type of armour was developed, the *tssei gusoku*, a simplified structure that protected the entire body. A new type of sword mounting, the *ubigatana*, could also be quickly drawn and cut, while long scabbards with sword-guards bound on by cords were widely used. All of the armour and weapons used by the Azuchi-Momoyama period generals were further enhanced with decorations and special features, elements to display their rank and personal tastes. With the advent of the Edo period, these details of individual expression became symbols of military class status and privilege.

The final section looks at the drive for peace in *Towards Peace: Art for a New Shogunal Era*. With Tokugawa Ieyasu's defeat of the Toyotomi forces in the Siege of Osaka (1614-15), the daimyo declared a new reign name of Genna (1615) and the end of an era of war. The Edo shogunate, headed by the Tokugawa family, then established a series of laws and edicts regulating the behaviour of the military class families and thereby brought about a new era of real peace in the land. Nijo-jo Castle was the Tokugawa family's residential castle in the city of Kyoto, which through their patronage became one of the best examples of Momoyama taste and design, adding a quiet sense of restrained dignity to the lavish magnificence of the Azuchi-Momoyama period. The provenance of tea utensils handed down from the powerful members of the Muromachi shogunate was revered and became a status symbol of the new elite, with complete reverence given to the items owned by the Edo shogunate's founder, Tokugawa Ieyasu. In this final section, the dawn of the new social order is explored alongside the end of the Sengoku period of warring states, and the rise of the Tokugawa Edo shogunate at the beginning of the 17th century.

• Until 29 November, at Heiseikan, Tokyo National Museum, tnm.jp

An unusual exhibition exploring beauty rituals of women during the Edo period (1603-1868) highlights practices and traditions that sometimes still echo in Japanese society today. Organised in four sections, the Maison de la culture du Japon in Paris brings together about 150 prints and 60 artefacts to display the art of make-up and hairdressing that was not only for special celebrations, but also mirrors the changing beauty ideals held by society during the Edo period.

The prints in the exhibition depict beautiful women (*bijin-ga*) with make-up and hairstyles of great diversity, including prints of women at dressing tables or busy with their toilette which often feature make-up utensils and other objects; they bear witness to the social importance of make-up in Edo Japan. Numerous physical brushes, compacts, mirrors, combs and decorative hairpins used in the Edo period are also on display in the exhibition alongside intricately shaped miniature wigs.

The sophisticated art of hairdressing reached its peak during the Edo period and the elaborate styles changed so rapidly that there were eventually hundreds of different ways for women to dress their hair, which, in turn, brought an enthusiasm for hair ornaments. Like makeup, hairstyles were indicators of age, social class, marital status, or even profession. In the hierarchical class-conscious society of the Edo era, women could not freely choose their make-up or hairstyle. However, one of the greatest opportunities for adornment and individual taste could be seen in the choices made for a wedding ceremony.

Michiyo Watanabe, from the POLA Research Institute of Beauty and Culture, who co-organised the exhibition says: 'The Edo period spanned 265 years and throughout this period, under the reign of the Tokugawa shoguns, Japan experienced strong economic growth which was accompanied by considerable cultural development. While traditional arts such as kabuki and ukiyo-e flourished, the codes of feminine adornment were also being established: fashions for *kimono* and *obi* (belt), white powder make-up and hairstyles. The habit among women of looking after their appearance and using make-up dates back to ancient times, but it was only during the Edo period that make-up became a part of the everyday norms of the ordinary classes.'

The make-up of the Edo era was more basic than today and consisted mainly of three colours: white, black and red. These are explored in the first section of the exhibition. Showing-off a pristine white skin was an important aim for women in the Edo period, with white powder always applied to the face, neck, and back of the neck. Whiteness was considered to be the first point for consideration in a woman's beauty. 'The whiteness of the skin hides seven flaws' was a famous saying in old Japan. These powders contained either lead or mercury and were mixed with water before being applied with a finger, or brush, to the face, neck, back of neck, and chest.

The art of applying oshiroi white powder was a complicated task. There were two kinds of white powder in common use at this time, one leaded (lead white), the other mercury-based (*keifin* or 'light powder'). Lead white was cheaper and more easily absorbed by the skin, so was the most commonly used. After applying a base on bare skin (with a lotion of scented oil, *bitsuke-*



Bien Senjoko (Face Powder) by Keisai Eisen, circa 1842. The text to the left of the cartouche is an advertisement for the popular face powder made by Sakamoto, alongside a poem



Goten-yama (1858) by Utagawa Kunisada, from the series One Hundred Beautiful Women at Famous Sites of Edo



Before the sanctuary of Shiba Shinmei (1858) by Utagawa Kunisada, from the series One Hundred Beautiful Women at Famous Sites of Edo



Kasumigasaki (1857) by Utagawa Kunisada, from the series One Hundred Beautiful Women at Famous Sites of Edo



Bonito Fishing in the Province of Sagami (sankai medetai zue), 1852, by Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi



Feminine rituals (1847) by Kochoro Kunisada. All images © POLA Research Institute of Beauty and Culture

# BEAUTY SECRETS

*abura*), the liquid powder was applied. The base did not cover only the face, the neckline and the back of the neck it was not spread quickly, so applying it evenly required some skill and experience. A handbook from 1837, explains that for women on manners and make-up describes the task in detail, accompanied by illustrated boards, it shows the different procedures for applying white powder correctly and how to highlight the face by changing the thickness of the layers.

The use and application of white oshiroi powder differed across geographies and times. The *Morisada Manko* (Illustrated Miscellanea of *Morisada*), from 1837, explains that from the Tempō era (1830-1844), even if the women of Kyoto and Osaka continued to favour thick make-up, in Edo only the women from the *daimyo* and *samurai* classes and their servants along with the courtesans use the white powder in such compact layers, whilst the townswomen preferred a finer texture. This transition of taste occurred in the middle to the end of the Edo period, as tastes of the townswomen evolved from a heavy to a lighter application. This tendency to let the natural beauty of the complexion shine through contributed to an experimentation in beauty techniques and in the change of aesthetic taste of Japanese women in all classes, which helped to form the trend for enhancing bare skin and natural beauty found today.

The colour black was deeply linked to female rites of passage, for example, women would dye their teeth black when they married and shave their eyebrows at the birth of their first child – both acts symbolised the status of a married woman. However, at court, etiquette required noblewomen and women of the samurai and upper classes, after a certain age, to redraw their eyebrows at the top of the forehead.

*Obaguro*, the custom of blackening one's teeth has, it seems, been prevalent in Japan since the 4th

century onwards. Evidence of blackened teeth has been found from the Kofun period (250-538) in buried bones and on *haniwa* (clay figures). In *The Book of Wei* (a chronicle of the Wei dynasty (386-535), a Chinese historical text), Japan is referred to as 'land of black teeth'. This phenomenon is also mentioned in the 12th-century tale of court life, *Genji Monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*).

In the Edo period, the blackening action was obtained by either using two products at the same time, or alternating them to acquire the desired effect. The 'water for blackening the teeth' (*obaguro-mizu*) was a mixture of vinegar and *sake*, rinsing water from rice, and broken nails to create ferric acetate; the second product, a powder called *fushinoko*, was made from dried gallnut powder and other ingredients. To preserve the colour, it was necessary to coat the teeth every

morning, a process which had the side-effect of forming an effective protective layer against cavities and periodontal diseases. Some of the most prominent users in the Edo period were the *geisha* from 'The Floating World', as can be seen in the popular prints of the time. The 'Floating World' referred to the pleasure quarters – licensed brothel and theatre districts of Japan's major cities during the Edo period and were the playgrounds of the emerging newly wealthy merchant class. Despite their low status in the strict social hierarchy of the time, actors and courtesans became the style icons of their day, and their fashions spread to the general population via the popularity of inexpensive woodblock prints that portrayed the popular characters of the day.

The final colour, red, was considered a rare and precious colour in Japan, so it was used sparingly on the lips and cheeks. Both the 8th-

century *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*), an early Japanese chronicle of myths, legends and semi-historical accounts and anecdotes, and the *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicle of Japanese History*) reveal, even in ancient times, that specific beauty customs such as painting the face with red pigments were already in existence. Besides being used as lipstick and blusher, the colour red was sometimes also used to enhance the corners of the eyes or nails. Extracted in small quantities from the safflower used by textile dyers, it was considered a rare and extremely expensive product.

An unusual make-up style from the time is called *sasa-iro beni* (bamboo grass red) and was in high demand during the Bunka and Bunsei eras (1804-1830), at the end of the Edo period. The upper lip is painted red, while the lower one appears green. This was achieved by red makeup, *beni* (a dye derived from safflower) that also turns an

iridescent green when thickly applied. *Beni*, at the time, was a product as expensive as gold and this fashion was, it is said, initiated by geisha who covered their lips daily to show off this luxury. The dye was bought in cups (*benizara* or *benichoko*) that were coated inside with this precious substance. To use, it was wiped with a finger, or a wet brush, to spread on the lips in successive thin layers. After use, the bowl was placed upside down on the dressing table to prevent oxidation.

One print in the exhibition, *Feast of the Auspicious First Day of the Year* (1854) by Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III) shows three women whose status and social class are recognisable by their costumes, hairstyles and hair ornaments. The woman on the left, with teeth stained black, has slipped a protective talisman between her kimono and her obi. She is holding a long-handled tobacco pipe in her hand. She wears a *kogai-wage* (bun wrapped around a *kogai*) and has a *kanzashi* pin adorned with a *daruma* (*Bodhidharma*-bearing lucky tumbler) in her hair. The young girl in the centre undoubtedly belongs to the warrior nobility. She has tucked a large pin adorned with a tumbled

sparrow into her Shimada bun. Its obi with stylised flower motifs in hexagons is tied vertically. The woman on the right is a geisha. Her *tsubushi-shimada* (crushed shimada) style bun can be seen as a pin adorned with a cocoon-shaped ball, which is given on the New Year as a good omen. She wears an inner garment with patterns of fishnets and physalis, a fruit that can be found at the bottom of her black coat, also adorned with lucky patterns of 'monkey with tied legs'.

Hairstyles and ornaments are grouped in section two of the exhibition. The Edo period marked an important turning point in women's hairstyles. Since the Heian period (794-1185), women traditionally let their long hair hang down their backs, however, *kabuki* players and geisha eventually began to lift and tie their hair in a bun on top of their head by the end of the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1603). During the Edo period, the bun becomes the norm. This evolution of techniques and styles has seen various stages, but during the Edo it reached its peak with a multitude of styles available. *Nihon-gami*, a term used today to refer to 'Japanese hairstyle' (as opposed to 'Western hairstyle'), refers to this art of hairdressing that originated during the Edo period. *Nihon-gami* has four parts: a fringe/front hair (*maegami*), shells on the sides (*bin*), a section going from the back of the head to the nape of the neck (*tabo*) and the hair tied up in a bun (*mage*), whose shapes and balance changed according to the fashions of the time.

The four basic types of chignons that span the entire Edo period were *hyogo-mage*, *shimada-mage*, *katsuyama-mage* and *kogai-mage*. All followed fixed rules depending on class and social rank, age, marital status, and geographical region. Along with the diversification of hairstyles, hair ornaments, such as combs and decorative pins are developed. These elaborate objects, using materials such as gold, silver, ivory, tortoise shell, wood and mother-of-pearl, were mainly used as a contrast against black hair.

Social rank and society and the role of personal adornment is discussed in section three of the exhibition. In the Edo era, at the height of the popularity of The Floating World, geisha and kabuki actors were constantly in the

limelight and leaders of fashion in their class. The townswomen who, unlike the nobles and other elite, were less bound by tradition, were able to copy the latest trends generated by copying the popular prints produced at the time and arrange their hairstyles and make-up in their own way, using these new styles as their models. However, fashion may have influenced some levels of society, but there were still general strict rules in place for makeup, hairstyle, and dress in a population that was divided into distinct social classes. This distinction allowed a visitor to learn to distinguish a married woman from a young girl, a nobleman from a middle-class woman, or a high-ranking courtesan. Edo-period societies, based entirely on a hierarchical system of classes and various rules, were highly influenced by social rank, age, profession, and stages of life, so that women had to be careful in choosing their make-up or hairstyle. Fashion was not just for The Floating World of entertainment that encouraged competition in style, it also had a general social branding function that helped distinguish an individual's status in society. But, as strict as the law was, the system did not stop the attraction of beauty, or the spirit and inventiveness with which women showed in their goal of reconciling social rules and elegance.

The *ukiyo-e* prints in the exhibition aim to depict women from different worlds. Careful observation of and portrayal of their appearance in these prints makes it possible to distinguish three general categories: the upper classes, imperial aristocracy (*keuge*) and warrior nobility (*buke*); the class of merchants, craftsmen and townspeople (*chonin*); and finally prostitutes (*yujo*). In the upper classes, which also had their own sharp divisions, the wives and concubines of the emperor, or the *shogun*, were at the top of the hierarchy, and women have a formal appearance, in accordance with the etiquette of their rank. The middle classes and merchant class, on the other hand, despite restrictions on fabrics or patterns due to the sumptuary laws, enjoyed a relative freedom in choice of clothing, and were dictated more by their economic means. Subtle differences in rank could also be found amongst the women of the pleasure quarters with the *oiran* (the



Parodies of the Six Immortal Poets (1848) by Ichiyosai Toyokuni

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The prints in the exhibition depict women from different social worlds  
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great courtesans at the top of their hierarchy), who were fashion experts and cultural leaders, highly regarded for their lavish fashion-conscious outfits and elaborate hairstyles.

The wedding ceremony is universally one of the greatest occasions for a woman to adorn herself. In an age when make-up and hairstyle clearly differentiated a marital girl from a bride, marriage was not only a memorable ceremony, but a significant change in status in a woman's life. In Japan, the bridal costume is called *shiomuku*, a formal outfit, entirely white, made-up of different elements: from the *kosode* kimono to the *uchikake*, a long open coat placed on the shoulders, including the *bakoseko*, an accessory in the shape of a paper case, shoes or even the headgear. In the samurai class, the bride's attire appears to have been the *shiomuku*, which featured an *uchikake* coat, *kosode* kimono, and padded jacket, also all white. As the culture of the Edo *bourgeoisie* developed, black or red *uchikake* appeared among the

prosperous *chonin* class and wealthy merchants. Worn over a white *kosode*, this long coat embroidered with gold and silver thread with auspicious patterns – often cranes and turtles, or pine trees, bamboo and plum trees, whose fleece hem must drag on the ground, gives the bride looks more lavish than the understated elegance of the *shiomuku*.

It was at the beginning of Edo that the *kosode* (an everyday garment with small sleeves), the origin of the current kimono, became the costume of ordinary class women. While women from wealthy ruling families adorned themselves with heavy *kosode* with heavy patterns and precious embroidery, lower classes wore rustic *kosode* made of linen, or other coarse fibres, tied with simple cord around the waist, an *obi*.

The final section of the exhibition explores the world of Edo beauties that can be found in prints. Among the *ukiyo-e* prints, there is also a series of *surimono*. The series *One Hundred Beautiful Women at Famous Sites of Edo* is the culmination of the work of Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III), who is renowned for his depiction of beauties (*bijin-ga*). His work features women from extremely varied social groups, from the wives of *daimyo* (warriors and lords of fiefdoms) to city dwellers and women of The Floating World.

Also on show is the series *Chiyoda Castle* (1894-96) by Yoshu Chikanobu (1838-1912), which comprises 40 prints that portray the habits and customs of the wife and concubines of the shogun and is considered the quintessential work of the artist. It was impossible for any outsider to observe the inner workings of castle as very limited access was ever granted, however, the artist, as a vassal, had permission to access the court. The series constitutes precious documentation of the dress and manners of the women who surrounded the shogun at the end of the Edo period. As well as their daily life, the annual festivals and rites are also observed. In one print, a woman, seated in front of the basin, is the official wife of the shogun. To the right, a *churo*, a mid-rank companion, holds a container of hot water. They are performing a purification ceremony that took place on the first three days of the New Year. In accordance with custom, the shogun's wife wears an *ousherakushi* hairstyle, her hair tied behind her back in a long tail. horse, and she wears a *karaginuma*, garment with 12 layers. Once the shogun and his wife have addressed their wishes and wished their parents a happy new year, the *churo* prepares the basin and the hot water container in the pavilion of the private apartments (*goza-no-ma*), where she leads the wife of the shogun. The latter stretches out her hands, as if receiving hot water from the receptacle held out by the *churo* to recite a specific poem.

The exhibition, through prints and other artefacts, brings to life an almost forgotten world of strict etiquette, rules, and visual signs that once every member of society would have been able to instantly recognise and use to navigate the society in which they lived. Today, the viewer is left to ponder the loss of these complex signs and mores of the Edo and to recognise the remnants of this past society in the modern world of Japan today.

● Until 6 February, 2021, Maison de la Culture du Japon, Paris. A catalogue is available in French, Euro 28.



The Dressing by Yoshu Chikanobu, from the series Chiyoda Castle (1894-96)



Trees, studio of Towaraya Sotatsu (1570-1643), pair of six-panel folding screens, circa 1600/1630



Willow Bridge, unsigned, pair of six-panel folding screens, late 1500s

# EDO AVANT-GARDE

Filmmaker Linda Hoaglund was born and raised in Japan, so it is perhaps no wonder that her documentary *Edo Avant-Garde* involves a cross-cultural study of artistic traditions. The film explores the delicate beauty and variety of folding screens (*byōbu*) and scroll paintings (*kakejiku*) of the Edo period (1603-1868), examining the innovative techniques of master painters including Sotatsu, Korin, Okyo, Rosetsu, Shohaku, as well as many others who left their art unsigned. Curators, historians, and collectors offer insights into subject matter, compositional strategies, techniques, and styles, including experimental approaches and encompassing both representation and abstraction. Comparisons with Western painting from the Renaissance through Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism reveal the impact of Edo period painting on Western art. Filmed by cinematographer Kasamatsu Norimichi, the film covers an impressive collection of rare artworks held in collections inside and outside of Japan. In this article, Linda Hoaglund discusses her inspiration for the film and its production.

Edo Avant-Garde reveals the untold story of how Japanese artists

of the Edo era (1603-1868) helped pioneer modern art. During the Edo era, Japan prospered in peaceful isolation from Western powers, while bold artists innovated abstraction, minimalism, surrealism and the illusion of 3-D. Their originality is most striking in images of the natural world, often depicted with gold-leaf backgrounds on large, six-panel folding screens. In a way, these can be seen to anticipate 20th-century installation art. In interviews with scholars and priests, the film traces the artists' original visions to their reverence for nature, inspired by Buddhism and Shinto animism. From collectors and dealers we learn how prosperous merchants urged artists they commissioned to surprise and delight viewers, encouraging them to experiment with innovative artistic approaches. To capture the dynamism and scale of the folding screens, it was filmed on dolly tracks to recreate their mesmerising power. Permission was also gained to film the folding screens in indirect sunlight, as well as candlelight. Below, Linda Hoaglund discusses her inspiration for the film and its production.

'I was inspired to make Edo Avant-



WATCH a trailer for Edo Avant Garde

Carp by Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891), Edo period, late 19th century, lacquer on paper panel with metal powder, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Garde when I saw a pair of Japanese six-panel folding screens depicting a flock of crows in highly stylised, abstract images. I was shocked to discover they had been painted 400 years ago at the beginning of the Edo era, and the phrase 'Edo Avant-garde' instantly came into my mind. Although I was born and raised in Japan, I rarely paid attention to classical Japanese art, dismissing it as conservative and decorative. Once I began researching art from the Edo period (1603-1868), I discovered hundreds of works by artists who had explored abstraction, minimalism, impressionism and surrealism – centuries before Western artists developed "modern art".

'Overwhelmed by the sheer amount of Edo avant-garde art I had discovered, I decided to narrow my focus to folding screens that represented the natural world. Japanese paintings of nature from this era reveal a radically different vision of nature from what is reflected in Western art. Instead of depicting nature from a linear perspective as seen by the human eye, Japanese artists devised a "gods' eye" perspective, which yields a different image as the viewer's position moves. Also, Japanese folding screens are so large (a pair of screens is usually 16 metres wide and 1.7 metres high) and versatile that they dramatically transform whatever space they are exhibited in, anticipating the emergence of installation art in the 20th century.

'Working with master cinematographer, Kasamatsu Norimichi, we decided to film the folding screens by putting the camera on dolly tracks to allow viewers to look up at the byōbu as though seated on *tatami* mat floors, like people in the Edo era. As the camera slowly

“  
*I decided to narrow my focus to folding screens representing the natural world*  
”

tracked across 16 metres of folding screens, cherry blossoms and waves seemed to leap out of the screen towards and the camera and we realised that Edo artists had utilised the screens' indentations to pioneer the illusion of 3-D. Wherever possible, we also filmed the screens in indirect sunlight, which brought the gold leaf backgrounds back to shimmering life and we were able to film a pair of screens in candlelight, just like Edo merchants had illuminated them in their homes, centuries before electric lights.

'We also intentionally filmed scenes in nature, such as birds, flowers, trees and waves with Sony's 4K camera, using super slow motion and tight close-ups in order to imagine how Edo artists might have perceived the innate spirits residing in all of nature, kami, as explained by the Shinto and Buddhist priests.

'Pre-production for the film began in late 2015, when we filmed two major exhibits at the Kyoto National Museum and the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Research and production continued until the film was completed in March 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, two major

issues I address in the film have become increasingly urgent: the threat posed by global climate change and the movement to expand the definition of modern art, to incorporate non-Western art. The film addresses climate change by revealing how Edo era artists perceived and depicted human beings as part of nature. The art they left behind provides stunning evidence of how the natural world appears when humans respect nature instead of trying to control or conquer it. The film contributes to efforts to redefine modern art by revealing how artists who lived centuries before industrialisation and modernisation helped inspire and influence world art today.

'Other members of the team that helped bring the project to fruition include the film's art history advisor, Professor Yukio Lippit, who is a pre-eminent American scholar of Japanese art at Harvard University, Department of History of Art and Architecture. The Japanese scholars, Dr Yamashita Yuji, and Dr Okudaira Shunroku, are widely respected as experts in Edo-period art. Sawaragi Noi is an authority on contemporary Japanese art. The curators Dr James Ulak, Dr Matthew Welch, Dr Laura Allen and Hollis Goodall are responsible for important collections of Japanese art held in US museums.'

• The film is playing exclusively at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive through their 'Watch From Home' virtual cinema programme. The purchase price (US\$10) is facilitated by Eventive, which accepts credit card payments.

➕ Watch director Linda Hoaglund discuss the film at [bampfa.org/event/edo-avant-garde](http://bampfa.org/event/edo-avant-garde)



White Cockatoo, circa 1755, by Ito Jakuchu (1716-1800), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, with mounting 190 x 62.3 cm, gift of Rosemarie and Leighton R Longhi 1967. Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery



New Year's Sun (1800) by Ito Jakuchu (1716-1800), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, with mounting 215.9 x 55.56 cm, gift of the Clark Center for Japanese Art & Culture, Minneapolis Institute of Art

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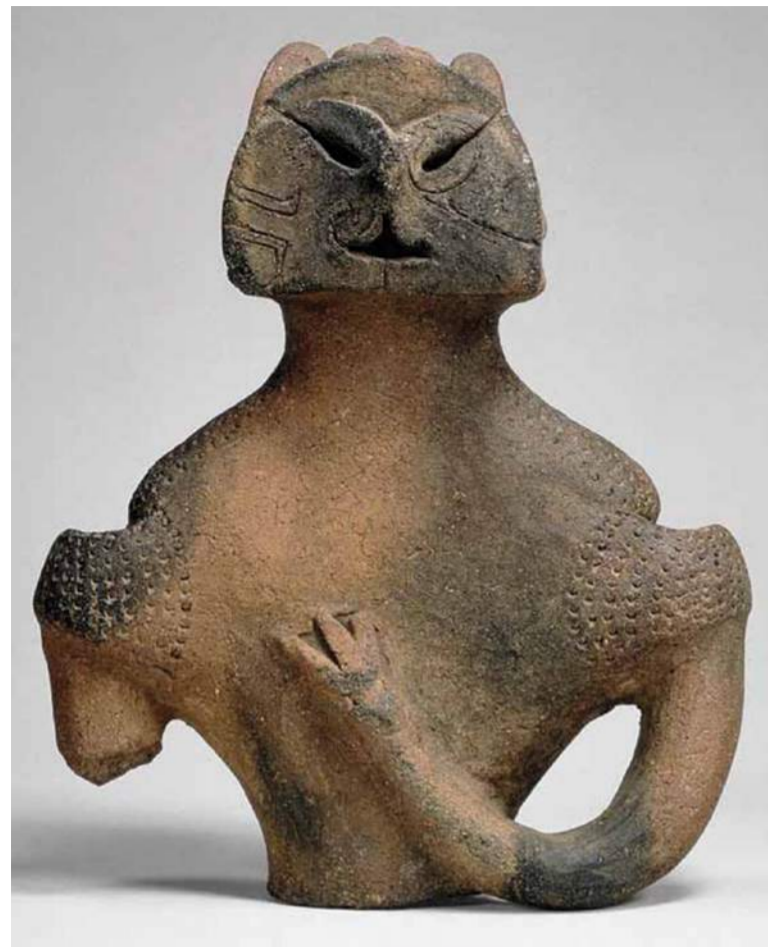
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Animal-faced dogu, Kamikurokoma, Yamanashi prefecture, Middle Jomon period (3000-2000 BC), Tokyo National Museum



Clay figure of a wild boar, Tokoshinai, Hirosaki city, Aomori prefecture, Late Jomon period(2000-1000 BC), height 8.2 cm, Hirosaki City Museum

*Dogu* are abstract clay figures with recognisably human or animal features that have a fascinating history in Japan and date back thousands of years. These enigmatic figures have long captured the imagination of antiquarians, archaeologists and the public alike. They provide a tantalising link to the mysterious yet remarkable Jomon period (about 12,500-300 BC) of Japanese history. Dogu were hunter-gatherers and closely related with agriculture and developed as figures of an earth mother deity who was worshipped in prayer for rich harvests, production and fertility.

These Japanese clay figures seem to have first appeared in the early days of the Jomon period (about 13,000 years ago) and developed most rapidly between the mid-Jomon period (3000-2000BC) and the final-phase Jomon period (1000-400 BC), during which many dogu with unique characteristics were created. Japanese dogu have distinct features which distinguish them from ancient European or West Asian ritual figures.

This 2009 exhibition featured 67 extraordinary objects, lent by many different public and private collections in Japan. Three of the exhibits were designated National Treasures of Japan by the government in 2009 and it was the first time the three National Treasures had been exhibited together: the Jomon Venus from Tanabatake (middle Jomon period, 3000-2000 BC), from Nagano prefecture, central Honshu; a dogu with palms pressed together (late Jomon period, 2000-1000 BC) from Aomori prefecture, Honshu; and a hollow dogu (late Jomon period, 2000-1000 BC), from Chobonaino site, Hokkaido. An additional 25 examples that were included in the exhibition are ranked as Important Cultural Properties and Important Art Objects. It was the first time that such a wide range of the best existing examples of these early figures had been brought together in a single exhibition.

Dogu were first discovered in the northern-most part of Honshu in the 17th century. While the Tokugawa shogunate was establishing itself in the earlier part of this century, strange objects were starting to be recovered and recorded at Kamegaoka, or the Hill of Jars, in the Tsuragu Peninsula; the objects came from the final Jomon period that is often called the Kamegaoka Culture. A diary from northern Honshu, the *Eiroku nikki* (1623), describes the finding of a ceramic figure. Such finds were not unique, and the pace of discovery picked up during the latter part of the Edo period (1603-1868), when amateur



Dogu with palms pressed together, from Kazahari I, Aomori prefecture, Late Jomon period (2000-1000 BC), National Treasure, Hachinohe city, Aomori prefecture

antiquarians developed a passion for collecting these odd relics from an ancient past, which they usually considered remnants of the 'Age of the Gods' (a time that is considered to be the period between creation of the Japanese islands and the establishment of the rule of the mythological emperors). It was not until the end of the shogunate, and the restoration of imperial rule in 1868, that a new understanding of the archipelago's ancient past began to develop.

The clay figures evolved within the earliest dated continuous tradition of pottery manufacture in the world, stretching back to about 12,500 BC. They were produced by the Jomon culture, prehistoric foragers in the temperate forests that covered the Japanese archipelago. Research suggests that the people of the Jomon culture lived in tune with the seasons and shared their rich natural world with the spirits. Since the Edo period (1615-1868), dogu have continued to be excavated from many sites throughout Japan, the best examples coming from central and north Honshu, from where most of the exhibits from this 2009 exhibition were drawn. More than 1,000 dogu have been recovered from each of two major sites, Shakado in Yamanashi prefecture and Sannai Maruyama in Aomori prefecture, however, these finds have been mostly in fragments. In 2009, the total number of known figures was about 18,000.

Dogu are made from high-quality pottery and come in a variety of shapes often featuring intricate decoration and geometric designs. The techniques include modelling, clay appliqué, marking with twisted

plant fibres (*Jomon* means 'cord-marked') and burnishing. One of the largest complete figures in the exhibition, from Chobonaino, Hokkaido, is some 42 cm high. However, fragments have also been found of much larger examples that must originally have been over one metre in height; such an example is the Late Jomon-period head from the Shidanai site in Iwate prefecture, classified as an Important Cultural Property. In addition to their often elaborate decoration, some dogu were painted – typically with red pigments – or covered in lacquer. They can take intriguing and attractive forms, with heart-shaped faces or triangular pointed heads. Some squat, perhaps in childbirth, others appear to be praying, still others apparently wear masks, such as the magnificent hollow-masked dogu discovered in 2000 in Nagano prefecture. Many of the figure have recognisably female characteristics, while others appear less gender-specific. All the figures may be hollow or made of solid clay.

There is much debate about what dogu meant to Jomon people and how they were used, particularly because many seem to have been deliberately broken before scattering or burial. In fact, they probably fulfilled a range of uses: as embodiments of spirits, venerated and revered; sometimes buried with the deceased to guide them to the next world; and most often fragmented during or after their use in Jomon rituals. Such rituals were perhaps intended to secure safe childbirth, or ensure a successful hunt.

In the 20th century, dogu served as a potent source of artistic inspiration, and in recent decades they have even featured in manga comics and computer games. It is testimony to the power of these figures that they can serve, simultaneously, as symbols of prehistoric Japan, entrancing works of art, and protagonists in contemporary culture.

- The Power of Dogu: Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan was at the British Museum in 2009 and travelled to Tokyo National Museum in 2010.
- Catalogue available



Jomon Venus, Tanabatake site, Nagano prefecture, Middle Jomon period (3000-2000 BC), height 27 cm, National Treasure, Chino City Board of Education



People gathered from Azukizawa and Osato to perform the Gonggen-mai and Kosho-mai

“Go to the village hidden in the deep snow, where I lived a long time ago”

# ZAIIDO

This book project by Yukari Chikura, influenced by the passing of her father, is an evocative photographic documentary of the 1,300-year-old Japanese ritual *Zaido*. Following a series of tragedies and her own critical accident combined with the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, Chikura recalls how her father came to her in a dream with the words: 'Go to the village hidden deep in the snow where I lived a long time ago'. And so, with camera in hand, she set off on a restorative pilgrimage to northeast Japan (the first of numerous journeys), which resulted in this book. Chikura remembers, 'I followed his instructions and boarded a train called the *Galaxy Express*, named after Kenji Miyazawa's fantasy novel *Night on the Galactic Railroad* (1934). When I alighted at a small village it was covered in silvery white snow. Mist had settled, and it seemed like a dream world'.

Chikura explains that the majority of the main photographs for this book were completed in the first year or two. After that, she spent more time interacting with the villagers and fleshing out the rest of the book. Chikura then came up with ideas to create a unique worldview, added abstractions and made drawings and paintings for insertion in the book. In order to add some depth to her work, she spent a lot of time researching the history and culture surrounding and relating to the *Zaido* festival.

For centuries, the inhabitants from the different villages in the area gather on the second day every year to conduct a ritual dance to induce good fortune. The performers dedicate their sacred dance to the gods and undergo severe and strict purifications for the ritual. Combining photos of snowscapes that border on abstraction with images of the intricate masks and costumes of *Zaido*, Chikura's

photographs depict the cultural diversity of the participants, as well as their common bond in creating a collective memory and ensuring the survival of this ritual.

*Zaido*, also known as 'Important Day Dance', is thought to have originated in the early 8th century, during the Nara period (710-794), when the Imperial Palace's ensemble visited Hachimantai in Akita Prefecture. This shrine ritual is performed on the second day of every new year, when villagers from four communities from the area make their way to selected sacred sites to perform seven ritual dances which they hope will bring them good fortune in the year ahead. Part of the observance has participants undergoing a harsh cleansing ritual before the dances and ceremony can be performed. It is said that the court performers repaid the villagers' warm welcome and generosity by teaching them their art. Through this somewhat unlikely union the dance has been preserved until today in the form of folk art.

The modern-day ritual is performed at a shrine which dates to the Nara period and involves four local communities from Osato, Azukizawa, Nagamine and Taninai taking part in the observance by performing dance dedicated to the patron god of the shrine. The communities begin their pilgrimage to the sacred sites where the nine ritual dances: the Miko-mai; Kanate-mai; Gonggen-mai; Koma-mai; Uhen-mai; Tori-mai; Godaion-mai; Kosho-mai; and Dengaku-mai. This observance is on the second day of the new year – and starts well before the break of dawn – as the dances themselves need to start with the first rays of the sun.

Though the festival's history is long and it has been passed down to many generations, there are times when it has been under threat, for example, during the Edo period in the late 18th century it seems to

have been interrupted for almost 60 years. Because of numerous fires, most ancient texts concerning the ritual as well as ancient religious imagery were destroyed, and its only way of surviving was through word-of-mouth. There is said to have also been a time when the gold-leaf-covered mask used for the Godaion-mai was stolen, thus interrupting the sacred gathering of the four villages. It was only because of the dedication of the communities and their shared spiritual beliefs that the ritual has managed to survive – not unchanged – but instead taking on the unique characteristics of this place, something in which the people of Hachimantai still take great pride.

Before the ritual, the *noshu* (those performing the sacred dance) are required to undertake a very strict purification. In the longest documented cases, some of the *noshu* have gone through 48 days of complete abstinence. During these periods of religious asceticism, the participants are prohibited from sleeping in the same room as their spouses and must avoid childbirth in their own home, as well as visiting the homes of the recently deceased. They must also not eat the meat of any animal that walks on four legs. Though currently preserved as a part of the purification ritual in only one of these communities, the performance of *mizugori* (cold water ablutions) still exists.

These purification rituals still hold great importance, because it is thought that bad things would occur if the *noshu* were not to perform them. All of this is done by paying great attention to detail and observance, although temperatures at this time of year, at the border of the three prefectures of Aomori, Iwate and Akita, can reach minus 20°C. From a modern society's viewpoint, *sojinkessai* (ritual cleansing) seems like a very hard and harsh thing to accomplish.



A group performing the Godaion-mai. The two performers wearing the golden masks are Obakase and Kobakase. The chant that the Obakase is singing is said to have been passed down from generation to generation, however, because of the sudden death of an Obakase a long time ago, the meaning of the chant has now been lost, so the performer is actually only pretending to chant



A shrine hidden in an other-worldly snow landscape. The Taiyo-sha is dedicated to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, located in an area known for its heavy snowfalls. It is on the border between the three prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, and Akita

Chikura observes: 'These days, I fear that the culture that has been preserved and passed down from generation to generation through many sacrifices, is sadly starting to disappear. And yet, regardless of how many hardships they have to endure, how many times they have to fall down and get back up, there

still exist people who are willing to continue protecting it. It is through their dedication and the great impact it left, and continues to leave, on me that I am able to find a meaning to life again'.  
● *Zaido* was published by Steidl in September 2020, ISBN 9783958293137, Euro 85



by Allysa B Peyton

This exhibition, housed in a thousand-square-foot gallery in the David A Cofrin Asian Art Wing, uses temporality as an investigative tool. Through the lens of the Harn Museum of Art's Japanese art collections, this theme allows us to look at how time has been measured in the visual record, how art objects can portray several moments in time, and how artists experience time during the production of their work. The celebration of the natural world (*shizen*), through life cycles and the acknowledgment of mortality and the changing of the seasons, is also a recurring theme in Japanese art highlighted within this exhibition. Objects from the Edo (1615-1868) to the Showa (1926-1989) echo the pervasiveness of the passage of time in both sacred and secular contexts.

Despite our varied life experiences, we all have experienced the subjective nature of time – how time feels to us in our awareness of temporality. Collectively, the experience of time common within a society or group is more objective, and has more coherence. In Japan, this larger picture has been influenced by the history of the opening and closing of the nation itself in the 19th century and following the Second World War, which resulted in a potent awareness and valuing of traditional cultural practices.

**Linear Time** It is easy to observe the lifelines of different species: birds, flowers, trees – and ourselves. The commonality of this biological timeline is the presence of a beginning and an end. A handscroll by Ishiyama Taihaku is an excellent example of linear time. Over 50 feet in length, the landscape measures a solitary journey from the mountains to the sea. It is a metaphor for a single life. The handscroll, communal in nature, would typically be revealed scene by scene amongst a gathering of friends. During this two-year-long exhibition, the scenes are shifted every six months, a snail's pace when compared to the active unrolling of an appreciative viewing – and yet markedly slower than the passage of a person's life. Born in Yamagata Prefecture, Ishiyama Taihaku (1893-1961) began studying painting at the age of eleven. He also was an accomplished tea master who worked diligently to increase the appreciation and study of the Japanese tea ceremony.

**Simultaneous Time.** Multi-armed figures can be seen as embodiments of simultaneous time. Several hands hold ritual instruments while others display meaningful hand gestures (*mudra*) of meditative prayer and compassionate vows. Visually, it is necessary to interpret all of these attributes separately, but it can be understood that their divine nature implies omnipresence and simultaneity.

# Tempus Fugit TIME FLIES



Bodhisattva, Edo period (1615-1868), mid/late 18th century, gilt wood. Museum purchase, funds provided by friends of the Harn Museum and the Robert H and Kathleen M Axline Acquisition Endowment. Photo: Randy Batista  
Imaging scan of Bodhisattva, Edo period (1615-1868), mid/late 18th century, gilt wood. Image courtesy of UF Health Shands Radiology



An 18th-century bodhisattva sculpture has an unusual combination of attributes – including four heads (the fourth is implied), eight arms, the prayer *mudra*, full robe and a metal headdress. Upon first consultation with Japanese Buddhist sculpture scholars hailing from Japan and United States, this work was identified as the Fukukenjaku Kannon, which is the most widely worshipped of the bodhisattvas. Kannon is the Japanese name for Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion and the earliest to appear in Buddhist literature. *Fukukenjaku* means 'never empty lasso', which refers to the coil of rope the Kannon uses to catch straying souls and lead them to salvation.

The Harn recently partnered with University of Florida (UF) Health Shands Arts in Medicine to conduct a radiological exam, using X-ray and CT scan images, in order to learn more. The X-ray images show evidence of how the sculpture was constructed, altered and repaired. While the more roughly hewn nails and staples attach the lowest set of arms, machine-produced nails seen in the lotus base are the result of repairs, most likely in the early 20th century. Additional repairs with

metal rods (indicated by the bright white on the X-ray), can be seen in the fingers on the lower set of hands and in the three-pronged staff in the top right hand.

Further examination of the CT scans are needed, but preliminary findings indicate that the sculpture was constructed with many different pieces of wood, which supports a composite figure hypothesis. There is a possibility that the bodhisattva originally consisted of the figure with the two arms (the hands in prayer), and that additional sets of arms were



Tray with white bird by Namikawa Sosuke (1847-1910) and Watanabe Shotei (1851-1918), circa 1895-1905, Meiji period (1868-1912), cloisonné enamels. Museum purchase, gift of Dr and Mrs David A Cofrin. Photo: Randy Batista

added over time. Additional study and comparable studies of other multi-armed figures is also needed in order to confirm these findings. These imaging studies, along with the inherent simultaneous nature of a multi-armed figure, have generated a new line of questioning to give a more nuanced and critical picture of the production and history of this many-faceted object.

**Circular Time and Transience.** Among the works on view, a number embody that aspect of time that has to do with becoming and departing. The cyclical passing of the seasons are celebrated for their beauty and inherent ephemerality, as in the blooming cherry blossom associated with the spring. The concept of transience, a basic principle of Buddhist philosophy, has an important place in Japanese living traditions.

A subtle moment in time is captured in the Meiji painting *Thrush on a Snowy Branch* by Watanabe Shotei (1851-1918). Watanabe was well-known for blending Western realism with the delicate colours and washes of the Kikuchi Yosai School, and introduced a new approach to traditional Japanese bird-and-flower painting (*kachoga*). While the bird



Thrush on Snowy Branch by Watanabe Shotei (1851-1918), circa 1890s, Meiji period (1868-1912), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk. Museum purchase, gift of private donors. Photo: Randy Batista

appears very still and full of potential energy, close observation reveals that just as it has landed the snow has been shaken off the branch. The contrast between the realism of its gaze and the abstraction of the tree give the impression of suddenness of the bird's arrival. A lifelong resident of Tokyo, Watanabe studied art under Kikuchi Yosai (1788-1878), a forward-thinking teacher who drew inspiration from the Kano, Nanga, and Shijo Schools as well as from Western traditions. As a young artist, Watanabe travelled to Europe and America where he absorbed more artistic influences. He attended the 1878 International Exhibition in Paris and was awarded a bronze medal. Following his return to Japan, Watanabe distinguished himself as a specialist in bird-and-flower images. Watanabe Shotei worked collaboratively with artists from a variety of disciplines to spread the popularity of his elegant bird-and-flower designs. During the 1880s and 1890s, several artists experimented with new techniques for creating 'wireless' *cloisonné* in which the seams between colours were no longer separated by wires. Foremost among these innovative

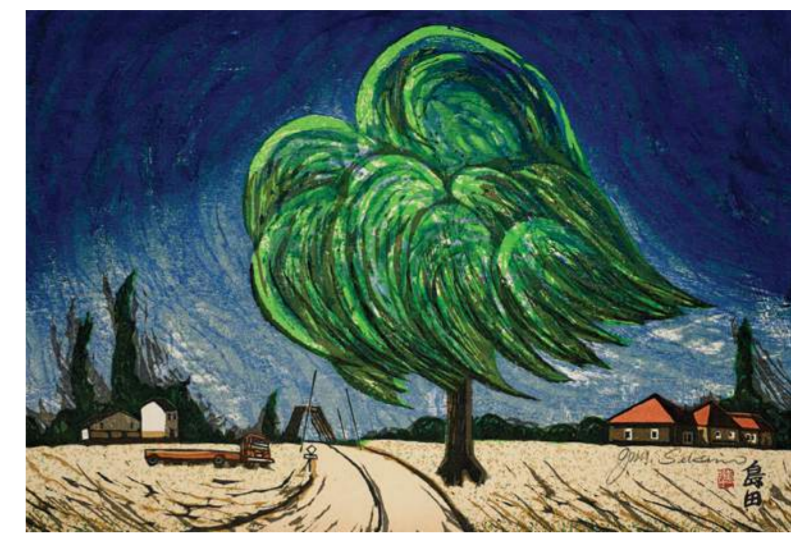
Landscape (1926), detail, by Ishiyama Taihaku (1893-1961), Showa era (1926-1989), handscroll, sumi ink and mica on silk. Museum purchase, funds provided by the Robert H. and Kathleen M Axline Acquisition Endowment

(1909-1942). Composed, yet awkward, a contemporary Japanese woman appears to stand off to one side counterbalanced with a variety of imposing objects. In a departure from more traditional Japanese painting, the artist fills the background with lamps, ceramics, and architectural features that contrast with the stillness of the figure.

Traditional artistic techniques have also been reinterpreted by artists who have the ability to embody the past, embrace the



Angela (1940) by Saeiki Shunko (1909-1942), painting on paper in mineral pigments and sumi ink, 235.3 x 155.7 cm. Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A Cofrin Acquisition Endowment



Shimada: Lone Road (1974), from The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road by Sekino Jun'ichiro (1914-1988). Museum purchase, funds provided by Maggi McKay in honour of David Cofrin and Mickey Singer; Robert H and Kathleen M Axline Acquisition Endowment; The David A Cofrin Fund for Asian Art; friends of the Harn Museum; and by exchange, gift of Dr and Mrs David A Cofrin. Photo: Randy Batista

present, and even anticipate the future. Between 1959 and 1974, Sekino Jun'ichiro (1914-1988) created a new version of the print series *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road*. Famously illustrated by 19th-century wood-cut masters of the Utagawa school, Sekino re-interpreted the 53 designated stations of the pre-modern road which connected the political capital of Edo with the imperial city of Tokyo. Sekino researched the history of the series and tried to revitalise the famous 19th-century scenes from a modern perspective.

Sekino was also very skilled at portraiture, having an eye for psychological subtlety and the technical skill to achieve precision and depth. However, you would be hard-pressed to find many figures in his Tokaido series. The absence and/or anonymity of people in his compositions is striking. In *Shimada: Lone Road, April 1974*, a lone tree stands in the foreground and the only evidence of human occupation

is a far-off house and perhaps an abandoned vehicle.

**Our Time.** This brings us to the now. Although Sekino Jun'ichiro did not live to experience the Covid-19 pandemic, his Tokaido series prints reflect an isolation and loneliness that many of the globe's inhabitants can relate to now. Originally, the exhibition included plans for many public programmes and in-gallery experiences. With the onset of the pandemic, plans at the museum had to adapt – as they did in museums everywhere. The Harn Creatives-in-Residence also adapted.

Inspired by the themes in *Tempus Fugit* and Ishiyama Taihaku's handscroll *Landscape* (1926), 2019-2020 Composer-in-Residence Jordan Alexander Key (PhD candidate in composition at UF) composed *Verses from the Scroll of Sondering* (2020) for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion. In his piece, Jordan explores the concept of 'sonder', the realisation that each individual has their own inner life

that cannot be fully understood by others – as if we each carry our own individual handscrolls of our journey in life that is slowly unrolled one section at a time. His composition also references French composer Olivier Messiaen's (1908-1992) *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941), echoing the artistic exchange of Japanese artists travelling to France in the early 1900s to study Western-style painting and sculpture. Instead of a live performance at the museum, *Verses from the Scroll of Sondering* was recorded in a studio by Bold City Contemporary Ensemble. The recording is available through the Harn's mobile app in a programme called *SoundSpot*, which also features the work of other composers and poets who have worked with the museum collections.

• Until 27 February, 2022, Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, [harn.ufl.edu/tempusfugit](http://harn.ufl.edu/tempusfugit)  
Allysa B Peyton is the Assistant Curator of Asian Art at the Samuel P Harn Museum of Art. *Tempus Fugit: Time Flies* is made possible by the Quinn Family Charitable Foundation, the Japan Foundation New York, and the Cofrin Curator of Asian Art Endowment. Curated by Jason Steuber and Allysa B Peyton

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# EXHIBITIONS

## ONE HUNDRED ASPECTS OF THE MOON

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892) is considered the last great woodblock-print master of the *ukiyo-e* tradition, and *100 Aspects of the Moon* (1885-1892) is regarded as his greatest achievement. The series brings to life the history and mythology of ancient Japan. In all 100 prints the moon figures prominently. Sometimes clearly visible in the design and sometimes referred to in the beautiful poems in the text cartouche.

In his early days, Yoshitoshi's style was clearly influenced by his master, the famous Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861). Over the years, he created his own style, in which he was able to display his diverse oeuvre with expressions of emotion in an imaginative way. On the other hand Yoshitoshi is also known for his designs of bloody and violent scenes. With his distinctive style of dramatic lines and gorgeous colours he was soon recognised by his contemporaries as the greatest of his time.

Yoshitoshi grew up in a period of political tension. At risk of colonisation by Western powers, Japan had to modernise after being cut off from the outside world for centuries. The transition from the old feudal time to the new government took place in 1868 when Yoshitoshi was 29 years old – and it affected society in many ways.

Politics, science, philosophy, military and technology even aesthetic ideas and fashion were taken over from the Western world. Although Yoshitoshi was interested in this, he was concerned about the government abandoning Japanese culture and traditions. In his moon series, which was designed during this period, he therefore goes back to the traditional Japanese culture, folklore and literature, so important to many at the time.

The subjects of the prints vary from well-known historical figures from the past, such as the novelist and court lady Murasaki Shikibu and *samurai* warlords like Takeda Shingen (1521-1573)



The Heian Poet Fujiwara Yasumasa Playing the Flute by Moonlight, Subduing the Bandit Yasusuke with His Music (1883) by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, colour woodcut on three panels (triptych)

and Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) to mythological creatures, as well as scenes from Japanese theatre.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is the triptych entitled *The Heian Poet Fujiwara Yasumasa Playing the Flute by Moonlight*, which is considered to be Yoshitoshi's ultimate masterpiece. In this print we see the aristocrat

and Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) to mythological creatures, as well as scenes from Japanese theatre. One of the highlights of the exhibition is the triptych entitled *The Heian Poet Fujiwara Yasumasa Playing the Flute by Moonlight*, which is considered to be Yoshitoshi's ultimate masterpiece. In this print we see the aristocrat

exhibition features other objects such as *netsuke*, metalwork, and lacquerware from the museum's own holdings, all related to the Japanese moon-culture. This particular series is very popular among collectors, however, it rarely happens that a complete set in an excellent condition is brought together for viewing.

The set on show at The Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne is one of the finest known in the world and currently kept in the collection of the Japanese print museum Nihon no Hanga in Amsterdam. Until 27 June, 2021, at Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne, museum-fuer-ostasiatische-kunst.de



Arrival of the Three Kings (1966) by Watanabe Sadao (1913-1996), stencil print with brushed pigments on paper. Gift of David P. Eller

## TREASURE FROM THE IMPERIAL PALACE

In 2019, with the enthronement of the emperor and empress, Japan formally entered into the new Reiwa era. This special exhibition commemorates this celebratory occasion with works from the ancient capital of Kyoto, home to Japan's rich imperial court culture and also features masterworks from the Museum of Imperial Collections, the Sannomaru Shozokan. The works of art in the Museum of the Imperial Collections were acquired through various channels, as the imperial family accumulated objects gradually over successive generations of emperors.

Though diverse in provenance, the masterpieces of painting and calligraphy in the imperial holdings include both objects owned and used by the court up through the Edo period (1603-1868), as well as works presented for collection by the imperial household since the Meiji period (1868-1912).

Part I of the exhibition introduces these works in four sections: *The Power of Calligraphy, Stories Spun in Pictures, Admiration for Chinese Painting*, and *The Flowering of Early Modern Painting*. From the renowned ancient Chinese calligrapher Wang Xizhi (303-361) to the master calligraphers in Japanese period (794-1185) and famous historical figures in Japanese society, the calligraphers' writings reveal not only the meaning of the words, but also the character of the person holding the brush.

For Japan, surrounded by ocean on all sides, the culture brought over from the Asian continent always held great attraction. Paintings from China and Korea were not only appreciated in their own right, but they were copied and referenced by generations of artists. The Momoyama (1573-1615) and Edo (1603-1868) periods gave rise to painters of extraordinary individualism and talent. Such artists demonstrated their prowess through folding screens and massive hanging scrolls that, when put on view, had the ability to instantly transform the atmosphere of any room.

On October 22, 2019 (Reiwa 1), the enthronement ceremony for the new emperor took place with great solemnity at the Tokyo Imperial Palace. Part two of the exhibition celebrates this event. Though few people still remember it, the enthronement of the Showa Emperor in 1928 took place not in Tokyo but at the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Though that was the last time accession ceremonies took place in the ancient capital, for centuries before then life in Kyoto had centred around the emperor, punctuated by recurring rituals, festivities, and annual events. This part of the exhibition introduces daily

life in the Kyoto Imperial Palace through various works of art, offering a first-hand glimpse into a world that no longer exists today. It is divided into four themes: *Enthronement Scenes, Learning in Chinese, Creating in Japanese, Portraits of Emperors* and the *Elegance of Imperial Style*, and *The Stage for Courty Tales*.

The emperor's position has changed with the times, but the role of an elegant sovereign at the helm of Japanese culture has remained consistent throughout the ages. In this section, this regal character of the sovereign is traced through various objects including imperial portraiture and calligraphy created by past emperors. The final part of the exhibition looks at interiors of the palace. The imperial palace was the setting for courtly narrative literature such as *The Tale of Genji*. Inside was the Higiyoshi, also called the Fujitsubo – the part of the empress's quarters in the



Phoenixes and Rising Sun by Ito Jakuchu, The Museum of the Imperial Collections, Sannomaru Shozokan, on view 3 to 23 November Copyright © Kyoto National Museum. All Rights Reserved

imperial palace where the women pining for the 'Shining Genji', the Crown Prince, resided. Through sliding doors (*fusuma*), paintings, and furnishings, this part of the exhibition creates part of the inner palace – a place that was forbidden to all but a select few. Until 23 November, Kyoto National Museum, kyohaku.go.jp



Furniture from the Higiyoshi (Empress Consort's Quarters of the Imperial Palace), pillows and double-shelf cabinet with cranes holding pine branches in their beaks, Tokyo National Museum

## MASTERPIECES FROM KYOTO

The Kyoto City Kyocera Museum of Art originally opened in 1933 as the Kyoto Enthronement Memorial Museum of Art and has, for over 80 years, flourished as a leading Japanese public art museum. This inaugural exhibition, *250 Years of Kyoto Art Masterpieces*, celebrates the reopening of the renovated museum this year and is a comprehensive survey of the art created in Kyoto. It is the first time so many of the masterpieces from the museum's collection, as well as a number of works from other Japanese collections, have been exhibited together. On show are over 400 masterpieces spanning 250 years of art made in Kyoto.

The exhibition is presented in three sections, starting with the flourishing of the art scene of the late Edo period, which predates the Meiji Restoration (1868) by 100 years. *From Edo to Meiji: Embracing Modernity Artists* presents the eccentric painters such as Ito Jakuchu (1716-1800) and Soga Shohaku (1730-1781), as well as the literati tradition painter Yosa Buson (1716-1783), naturalistic painter Maruyama Okyo (1733-1795), the founder of the Shijo school of painting Goshun (1752-1811), and the individualist Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754-1799), all of whom were all active in Kyoto during the late Edo period.

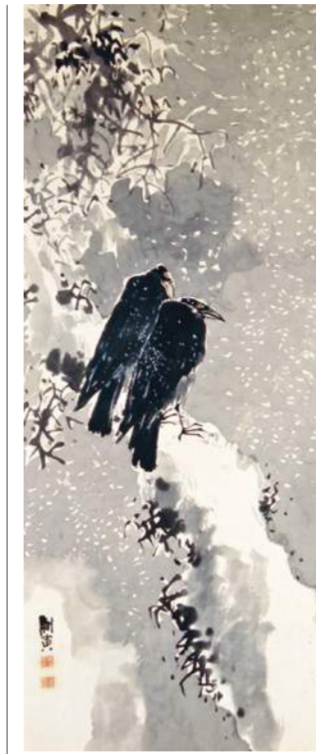
This section presents an overview of a new age of art and craftwork found in the Edo period that runs through to the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912). In the second section, *From Meiji to Showa – The Golden Age of Kyoto Painting*, the attention is turned to the innovation found in the genre of Japanese-style painting. The formation of the Kyoto Gadan group of painters, with Takeuchi Seiho (1864-1942) as a central figure, and The National Creative Painting Association (Kokuga Sosaku Kyokai) ushered in a golden age of Kyoto painting. Asai Chu (1856-1907) established a Western-style painting school in late Meiji period in Kyoto and embraced foreign influences in the field of craftwork. Kamisaka Sekka (1864-1942) was instrumental in the Taisho period in promoting Japanese design and paving the way for the development of craftworks as art. Other highlights include works from Uemura Shoen, Tsuchida Bakusen, and Murakami Kagaku, all of whom enriched the Kyoto art scene alongside their Tokyo counterparts from the Meiji through to the Showa



Vase with plum blossoms (1902-1907) by Asai Chu, collection of Museum and Archives, Kyoto Institute of Technology



Oharame (Woman Peddlers from Ohara), 1927, by Tsuchida Bakusen, collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto



Kite and Crows by Yosa Buson, Edo period, collection of Kitamura Museum, Important Cultural Property, on view until 9 November

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(1926-1989) periods. The final section looks at post-war and contemporary *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) painters, innovators who carried on the traditions of the past into modern times, including Ono Chikkyo, Fukuda Heihachiro, Domoto Insho, and Ikeda Yoson. Showing alongside the paintings are artefacts made by craftsmen from the period, as well as Western-style painters and sculptors with works spanning from the Meiji period to the present. In this section, *From Post-war to Today – to the Future*, are Japanese traditional painting, craftwork, and calligraphy – all these genres and traditions were questioned during the turbulence of the immediate post-war period. The section also explores the contemporary art trends that began to emerge from the 1960s onwards. At this time, new organisations were formed by Japanese-style painters seeking new expression in this genre. It was a time of change: in the field of craftwork, objects without practical use were created and promoted; Western-style painting often became orientated to social themes; and calligraphy tended to move towards abstract art. From this turbulence and questioning, contemporary movements were born and continue to influence contemporary art in Japan today.

The exhibition schedule was originally disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, although the content of the opening exhibition had to be revised in response to Covid-19, the reorganised exhibition features works carefully selected to maintain the original exhibition objectives. Until 6 December, 2020, Kyoto City Kyocera Museum, Kyoto, kyocity-kyocera.museum

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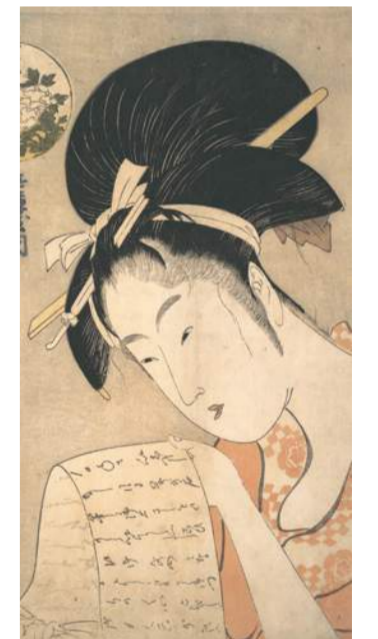
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## CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK

In September, Christie's series of Asian Art Week sales achieved a total of \$82,830,875 with 90% by value, 84% sold by lot. The top lot of the week was a grey schist triad of Buddha Shakyamuni that sold for \$6,630,000, setting the world auction record for a Gandharan work of art. Other notable results included a woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave*, which achieved \$1,110,000 and set the record for the print by the artist (see cover story in this issue), and a bronze figure of Shiva Tripuravijaya, from South India, circa 1050, that sold for \$4,350,000, establishing the record for a South Indian sculpture. Other top lots included an important painting by Tyeb Mehta, *Untitled*, from 1974, that sold for \$1,110,000; and a Northern Qi grey limestone figure of Buddha from China that realized \$2,550,000.



Grey schist relief triad of Buddha Shakyamuni with Bodhisattvas, Gandhara, dated inscription to year 5, 3rd/4th century, sold for \$6,630,000, producing a record for a Gandharan work of art at auction



Bronze figure of Shiva Tripuravijaya, South India, Chola period, circa 1050, which sold for \$4,350,000, creating an auction record for a South Indian sculpture



Damascus tiles, Olympia Auctions, in November

## ISLAMIC TILES

A selection of largely Damascus tiles from a private European collector is being sold by auction this November in London – mainly acquired from auctions and antique dealers in London and Paris over the decade between 1997-2008.

Most are from Damascus and form a comprehensive archive of the range of designs produced in Ottoman Syria from the mid-16th to early 18th centuries. The collection consists of 40 lots with the high estimate for the group being £60,000.

Damascus tiles during the Ottoman period took their cue from the ceramics produced in the imperial workshops in Iznik, in Western Anatolia, but are characterised by their different colour palette, with fresh greens and blues, and more free flowing and informal expression of the standard Ottoman motifs.

The expert in charge, Arthur Milner, has also published a book on the subject, *Damascus Tiles*, published in 2015.

● 18 November, Olympia Auctions, London, olympiaauctions.com

## SOTHEBY'S HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, Sotheby's autumn series in October totalled HK\$3.35 billion/\$432 million and sold 87% by lot. In the Modern Art sales Sanyu's *Fleurs dans un pot bleu et blanc* sold for HK\$87 million, followed by Sanyu's *Niu* at HK\$169 million and Wu Guangzhong's *Scenery of Northern China*, which fetched HK\$151 million. Zhang Xiaogang's *The Dark Trilogy: Fear, Meditation, Sorrow* led the offerings from the Johnson Chang collection, realizing HK\$54.9 million.

In what may be the longest bidding war in auction history, extending beyond 75 minutes with more than 100 bids, a rare imperial scroll, *Five Drunken Princes Returning on Horseback*, by Yuan-dynasty master Ren Renfa, sold for HK\$306.6 million / US\$39.6 million – well above its high estimate – to the Long Museum in Shanghai. The sum establishes the scroll as the most valuable work sold at auction in Asia in 2020, and the most valuable Chinese ink painting sold by Sotheby's Hong Kong.



Fleurs dans un pot bleu et blanc by Sanyu, sold for HK\$168,671,000, Sotheby's Hong Kong



Large pair of huanghuali square-corner display cabinets, Wanliu, 17th century, sold for HK\$57,218,000, over 10 times the pre-sale estimate, Sotheby's Hong Kong



Scenery of Northern China by Wu Guangzhong, sold for HK\$151,436,000, Sotheby's Hong Kong



Five Drunken Princes Returning on Horseback (detail) by Yuan-dynasty master Ren Renfa, late 13th/early 14th century, sold for HK\$306.6 million, acquired by the Long Museum in Shanghai

## CHINESE &amp; HIMALAYAN TEXTILES

## Jacqueline Simcox, Asian Art in London

During Asian Art in London, Jacqueline Simcox is offering a selection of Chinese and Himalayan textiles, including a yak wool costume for a Tibetan woman, composed of vibrantly coloured stripes in red, blue, purple and yellow; and three silk meditation panels of finely embroidered squares with Buddhist themes, set within wide blue borders. From China, are two export bed covers: an 18th-century embroidered yellow silk (a forbidden colour only achieved through bribery), and a 19th-century sky blue cover with superb provenance back to the English owner who commissioned it. Also on offer is a large painting on deerskin with ladies at scholarly pursuits flanked by *feng buang*, emblems of summer.

● Until 7 November at 7 Ryder Street, St James, London, jacquelinesimcox.com



Yak wool costume for a Tibetan woman, Zanskar, Ladakh, 20th century, length 132 cm



Blue silk export bed cover, made for John Reeves, 1774-1856, Chief Inspector of Tea for the East India Company, Canton, circa 1820

## MISHIMA KIMIYO

Sokyo Lisbon inaugural exhibition in its new Lisbon gallery is by the well-known Japanese ceramicist Mishima Kimiyo (b 1932). It is her first solo exhibition in a gallery in Europe. Included in the show are works from different stages of her career starting from 1969. She is best known for creating highly realistic versions of 'breakable printed matter' in ceramic such as newspapers, comic books, and boxes out of clay. Mishima began her artistic career as a painter in the early 1960s, then started working in ceramics in 1971.

● Until 12 December, Sokyo Lisbon, sokyol Lisbon.com



Comic Book 20-S3 (2020) by Mishima Kimiyo, silkscreen and hand-painted on ceramic, 15 x 18 x 13 cm

## Hong Kong Fair

## FINE ART ASIA

Originally scheduled for October, the fair is now being held from 27 to 30 November with the preview on 26 November. As usual, galleries will offer a selection of ceramics, furniture, textiles, modern and contemporary art, as well as ink art. In light of the continued unprecedented challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic this year, Fine Art Asia 2020 will focus more on Hong Kong's galleries and art institutions with the intention of presenting a home-grown but diverse art fair to the public. At the same time, both of their online and offline activities will keep the fair connected with worldwide audience.

● From 27 - 30 November, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, fineartasia.com



Chakrasamvara Mandala, atelier of Zanabazar, Mongolia, mid-17th/early 18th century, gilt copper alloy with pigment, height 32 cm, Rossi & Rossi, London/Hong Kong

## Islamic Arts Diary

By Lucien de Guise

## UNITING A DIVIDED CITY

At first it seemed like a worrying announcement: 'Sotheby's to sell select works from the LA Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, Jerusalem'. Islamic-art collections are rarely de-accessioned. Many years ago I remember the (by coincidence) LA County Museum offloading a lot of its Islamic stock onto the market. Interest in the field was high and prices went higher. The situation is different today, with a depressed market and smaller museums fighting for survival.

The LA Mayer is one that we should all hope pulls through. It was founded less than 50 years ago and is one of those rare examples of cross-cultural understanding that continues to thrive in Israel. Jerusalem, in particular, needs the healing power of this museum with its fascinating history and openness to dialogue that brings peoples and faiths together. It is unique among dedicated Islamic-art venues in also having one of the world's top watch collections under the same roof. The reason is the rather extraordinary family that founded this oasis of culture. The woman who conceived the idea was Vera Salomons, whose great-uncle had created a sensation in 19th-century England by becoming London's first Jewish Lord Mayor. Vera's father happened to have the greatest collection of timepieces by one of the greatest watchmakers of

all time, AL Breguet, while her own interest was in achieving harmony between the Jewish and Arab peoples of the Middle East. She used the services of the legendary Professor Richard Ettinghausen to build a collection of Islamic art worthy of a museum in the holy city of Jerusalem. To make things more complicated, it was named in honour of Vera's university professor, LA Mayer. The director of the museum is the first Arab to head a museum in Israel. Nadim Sheiban put some of my fears for the future to rest in his statement about the sale, which took place on 27 October: 'The LA Mayer Museum is not only a repository for extraordinary works of art, it is also a place that can, through its collection and the spirit of its founding principles, make a meaningful difference to the communities around it. These sales will allow us to continue our efforts to help build bridges between those in the region, with proceeds enabling us to expand our educational programmes while at the same time ensuring the long-term future of the institution'.

It seems that the museum does have a future and that the works being sold are duplicates, or held in storage. They are not of outstanding financial value, but much more importantly they give a tremendous overview of the Islamic world. One small disappointment is that although the Sotheby's press release gives credit to this world extending from 'Spain to Malaysia' there is not anything from East or Southeast



Japanese gold and lacquer plaque depicting the Ka'aba, made for the 18th-century export market, Sotheby's. Below: Kashan pottery figurine of a camel and rider, from 12th-13th century Persia, Sotheby's



Asia. It is understandable that the LA Mayer should focus on the core of the Islamic world, but maybe new acquisitions could be from China, or the Malay Archipelago?

Among the most intriguing lots in the auction is from Japan. This is not a land with much of a tradition in the field, but this object was intended for the export market. The small plaque provides a fascinating look at the Ka'aba in Mecca – all in the classic Japanese *makie* technique. The views of pilgrims prostrating themselves and other aspects of prayer would be more palatable to non-Muslim art



From the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a blossom-tree carpet fragment, Sotheby's

lovers. It was indeed in the collection of Baron van Reede (1757-1802), chief merchant of the Dutch East India Company, apparently given to him by the Sultan of Jogjakarta, who in turn seems to have used European prints to commission lacquer works in Japan. It is a very international story and confirms the growing interest that the West had in Muslim culture during the 18th century.

Also in the Mayer sale are objects from such core centres as Iran. Especially charming is a turquoise ceramic figure of a camel ridden by a drummer. Zoomorphic pottery of this sort was common in Kashan, and this one brims with vitality. Its purpose is less apparent. This one might have been a child's toy, although a rather fragile one. At least it is still whole. A carpet in the sale is just a fragment but it is from what has suddenly become a region on the brink of war. Although it is only 140 x 130 centimetres, the 18th-century 'Karabakh' blossom-tree carpet is a gorgeous reminder of the different cultures that have co-existed in the Caucasus.

● Sotheby's Select Works from the LA Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, was held on 27 October, 2020

## FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

From one rather bountiful extreme of the Islamic world, we travel to a less forgiving location with the eye-opening works of Tewodros Hagos. An exhibition that recently closed at the Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in Southwest London was the grittiest view of migrants adrift that I have seen since the photograph of the Syrian boy Alan Kurdi washed up on Turkish beach five years ago. These paintings by an Ethiopian artist show the plight of all refugees as they take on the Mediterranean in its fiercest manifestation. There are no beaches crowded with masked sunbathers desperate for a tan to show off back home. Instead it is weather-scarred souls desperate to escape from the Horn of Africa.

According to the artist: "Throughout the last decade, the whole world has witnessed the news and stories of migration atrocities on nearly a day-to-day basis, but as we are bombarded with imagery, it risks becoming normalised when, in fact, it remains one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. The question is: how long will we watch this human tragedy?"

The answer would be 'not much longer' – if more politicians had been among the buyers of his paintings. I cannot see them hanging on the walls of the Home Office or in the offices of any other decision-makers though. They are as raw and uncomfortable as the artist intended them to be. There is no shock effect, just faces that look battered by all of life's adversities and are expecting



Journey (9) by Tewodros Hagos, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 210 cm

more of the same. Whether shrouded by the life jackets that now litter the Mediterranean or by metallic trauma blankets, Hagos' subjects are real and considerably more dignified than the people who regularly turn them away.

The exhibition title *Desperate*



Journey (17) by Tewodros Hagos, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 cm

*Journey* tackles themes of voyeurism as well as misfortune. Hagos also addresses the 'othering' of these victims. It is a term I do not agree with where Orientalist paintings are concerned, but I can see the artist's point with the current journalistic imagery that surrounds us. His subjects are individuals, not numbers. They all have stories to tell. For the first time, his paintings bring these human statistics to life. They also show the devastating beauty and danger of nature. His image of an overcrowded boat against the most intimidating marine background seems more real than the countless photographs that I've seen. Seeing this mass of humanity bobbing and spilling amid the vastness of a storm-swollen sea brings to mind John Donne's timeless words on no man being an island.

● Tewodros Hagos, *Desperate Journey* was at the Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (Wandsworth) London in October



Indonesian Village Life by Sudjana Kerton (1922-94), oil on canvas, recently fetched more than US\$1 million at auction, also at Sotheby's Hong Kong in October

## RURAL HARMONY

On the subject of Southeast Asia, it is good to see the region's artists doing well in Hong Kong if not anywhere else in the world. Sudjana Kerton's *Indonesian Village Life* recently fetched more than US\$1 million at auction, also at Sotheby's. This is top tier pricing for the Malay Archipelago. If it had not been painted by a local artist, this idyllic scene might have been considered a pastiche. As he was a fervent nationalist in the fight against Dutch colonialism, the artist was anything but an apologist for the gentle view of life projected in this painting. He was, in fact, a great proponent of hard work – resisting the Western stereotypes of the time.

Painting in the early 1960s, Sudjana Kerton created the theme of Java brimming with vigour and activity as represented in rural scenes. He revisited this later in his career after he had returned to Indonesia from the US. Acquired by

the original owners when he was working in America, the present lot has been held in private hands since then. With its engaging pictorial language, the subject-matter and vibrant palette capture the sheer richness of the artist's motherland. A multitude of villagers of all ages pepper the work as they perform their tasks while peacefully coexisting with the local fauna. It is a hymn to ecology as well as to Indonesia's sometimes fractious multiculturalism. More than anything, the painting absorbs the viewer in its rich palette. The yellow hues of harvest, the lush greens and different *batik* patterns on the human subjects show a multifaceted ecosystem meticulously painted. It rejoices in the coexistence of human beings among each other and within their natural habitat. Nostalgic even then, perhaps, but still relevant today.

# ASIAN ART IN COLOGNE



A selection of Tibetan bronzes from the important collection of Leopold Strasser (1919-2010), Munich



A large figure of Kannon Bosatsu Japan, Edo period. H 81.5 cm  
Prov.: Private collection, Germany



A gilt-bronze figure of Shakyamuni China, 17th/18th C. H 50 cm  
Prov.: Private collection, Switzerland



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