

## Special Exhibition

'Earthy Branches,  
in and out of Japan'

The earthy branches are familiar to Japanese people. In ancient China, the celestial sphere was divided into twelve parts which represented time and direction. It is the beginning of the oriental zodiac. It had nothing to do with animals in the beginning. Animals have been used as the symbols since about 200 BC. The symbols of the earthly branches are different by country.

Some countries adopted the cats instead of the rabbit.

『Dream on Christmas Eve』

Itaro (1961~) H3.8cm

Santa Claus is very busy on Christmas Eve, so he asks a cat to help.



『Insomniac Night』

Shigejo (1963~) H4.2cm

Count clouds around the moon instead of sheep, so you will fall asleep.

『Cats in Love』

Motomasa (1976~) H2.3cm

"Cats in love" is one of early spring features and a favorite motif of many haiku poets.



## 宗 The forefront of Netsuke research

From the end of the shogunate through the early Meiji era, within the tide of haibutsu kishaku (the advocating of expelling Buddhism from Japan), traditional Japanese art (craftwork) was in a state of decline. However, right around 1877 (10th year of the Meiji Era) that decline suddenly revolved into a dramatic upswing instead. So, what exactly happened in that period of time? Regarding the factors that generated this sudden change, I want to paint the story in broad strokes based on discussion from Tsunemichi Kambayashi. And this is also because the path of this reform revolving around Japanese art can serve as a mirror for further enhancing the cultural and artistic value of the modern Netsuke, our field of expertise.

Actually, until encountering the modern Western world, there was neither a concept nor a term for "art" or "art object" in Japan. Originally, the phrase that most corresponded to that was shoga kotto, a catch-all phrase for antiques and antique tools that

literally translates as calligraphy, painting, and antiques. However, there was no real correspondence between Western "art" and traditional Japanese shoga kotto, and even ukiyo-e as the progenitor of Japonisme was nothing more than a consumable product for people of the time. Furthermore, Netsuke works as well were favoured by foreigners as small sculptures, which was completely removed from their original purpose. However, these separations and troubles started their path to resolution in a certain lecture. In fact, this one lecture awakened people involved in art to the awareness of asking, "What is art?" The individual who gave this lecture was the internationally hired professor Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) from the US. In the lecture, the discussion included the new "aesthetics" that undeviatingly transcribed Western humanities which had interpreted shoga kotto as "art" based on the standards of a cultured nation, and Fenollosa criticized the then-popular realism current as something that confused

science for art and completely lacked the core of fine art. He also declared that what makes art "art" is the "ideality," or the "artistic quality" behind the work.

Therein, I feel that the question of whether modern Netsuke is infused by those kinds of "ideas" and fundamental questions revolving around "beauty" are currently being thrust once again onto the world of Netsuke. I would like to submit a new paper in the future on the theme of "ideas" as the fundamental cornerstone of "fine art."

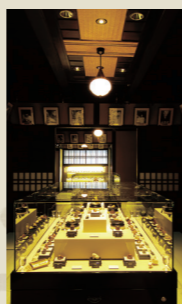
Tadakumo Onishi, Curator

<Recommended reading and bibliography>

Tsunemichi Kambayashi, "The East against the West - The Fine Arts Theory of Okakura Kakuzo" in "The Birth of Modern Japanese Aesthetics", Kodansha, 2006  
Tsunemichi Kambayashi, "Art and Aesthetics" in "LOTUS" (The Fenollosa Society of Japan Journal), No. 31, 2011  
Seiichi Yamaguchi, "Early Art Lectures and 'Art Truths'" in "Ernest Francisco Fenollosa: A Life Devoted to the Advocacy of Japanese Culture", Vol. 1, Sanseido, 1982

## Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Contemporary Netsuke is the essence of Japanese aesthetics and craftsmanship. Many artists are creating netsuke works with adding new tastes. Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum is a museum that specializes in contemporary netsuke. We systematically collect, store, research and disclose documents and materials. Contemporary netsuke reflect social situation, technological progress and people's tastes of each era. Our mission is to contribute to the advancement of culture by researching contemporary netsuke from various viewpoints to investigate the characteristics of Japanese art.



As a leading company in the fields of printing and information processing, Sagawa Printing Co., Ltd. is supporting the Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum with the aim of passing Japanese culture to the next generation and developing global art.



現代根付

宗

Contemporary Netsuke  
Newsletter

Salon

Issue. 02

AUTUMN~WINTER

Special Exhibition  
October - December

Major Theme

Going back to  
the basics will  
bring us  
brilliant harvest10 October 1(Thu) to 31(Sat)  
Special Exhibition 'Hikyaku'11 November 1(Sun) to 30(Mon)  
\*Closed on November 10 (Tue)  
The Late Autumn Exhibition  
'Supreme Selection'12 December 1(Tue) to 29(Tue)  
Special Exhibition 'Earthy  
Branches in and out of Japan'

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- Letter from Museum
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- Frontier Research Today

Publisher

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The only contemporary netsuke art museum in the world

Special Exhibitions of  
Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

This year, the world was forced to change by the threat of coronavirus. We have considered what we should do in this desolated situation. Consequently, we have chosen "back to the basics" as the major theme of the exhibitions from October to December.

At the October exhibition, we will pay attention to Hikyaku the express messenger in the Edo period as the root of logistics and tele-communication.

At the November exhibition, through the winners and candidates of the Golden

Netsuke Awards we will look back on the purpose of the establishment of the museum, which is to "encourage contemporary netsuke artists".

At the December exhibition, we will focus on the oriental zodiac, which is one of the basis for Japanese and Asian people to grasp the passage of time.

In this newsletter, we introduce the architecture of this museum, which is the home of contemporary netsuke works, and "Frontier Research Today" look back on the Meiji era, when craft and fine art separate out in Japan.

## 宗 Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum Exhibition Highlights

- 10 October Special Exhibition 'Hikyaku'  
Proud hikyaku with honest hearts conveyed the spirit of the times.
- 11 November The Late Autumn Exhibition 'Supreme Selection'  
The winners and candidates of the golden netsuke awards will be gathered.
- 12 December Special Exhibition 'Earthy Branches in and out of Japan'  
Animals of oriental zodiac signs will be invited from Japan and overseas.

## 宗 Letter from Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

The exhibit building is the only old samurai house still  
existing in the rakuchu area

Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum is located in Mibu.

It is known for being home to the Mibu Goshi, who were samurai warriors that became farmers during the Edo period. The building is said to have been constructed in 1820. As one of the few remaining buildings in Kyoto with a shikidai platform entrance, the museum is a precious artifact in and of itself. The Bunka-Bunsei period (1804-1830) overlaps with the peak of netsuke culture, and the museum building was constructed in that same general era, making it a remaining witness to the netsuke history.

The shikidai platform entrance, thought to have been reserved for formally receiving guests of great honor, evokes a character typical to a house owned by a member of the warrior samurai class.

The building is currently designated by Kyoto City as a Tangible Cultural Property, but excessive deterioration and repeated repairs necessitated various restrictions on the renovation work. Therein, renovation work focused on maximizing the original Edo period construction and included a bevy of restorations in order to support the functionality of a museum, from flooring reinforcement to widespread renovation construction. We used the fittings and original materials as much as possible and preserved everything possible from the original era.

And regarding the interior and garden landscaping as well, our goal was to exude a traditional Kyoto aesthetic. To that end, we employed the best in modern artisan skill, made thorough use of a craftsmanship level ideal for an old samurai house that imparts an Edo period ambiance, and actualized an exhibition space like no other in the world. This space brings the feel of the old Edo period to the modern world while also doubling as a refined, modern atmosphere as well.

The aspect that especially drew our attention was the lighting. One of the major differences between living in the Edo period and anywhere from the Meiji period onward was the eventual popularization of electric lighting. Thus, the reason we focused on lighting was because Edo period houses did not have the kind of lighting that was sufficient for exhibitions due to their dimness. We used illumination fixtures from the Meiji period to restore the feeling of a traditional building as much as possible.



Front entrance



Before disassembly After completion

## What's New

Visit the museum official sites of Facebook and Instagram for the latest information about our museum and images of netsuke works. We look forward to your feedback.

Official  
Website

## Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

At the entrance the museum staff would measure your body temperature by non-contact thermometer and spray alcohol on your fingers. (If your body temperature is 37.5 degrees (Celsius) or higher, you may be refused to enter)

We would ask you to write down your full name and address when entering the museum, as a countermeasure in the event that visitors or staff members were found to be a carrier.  
Please wear a mask inside the museum.

## Special Exhibition 'Hikyaku'

The transportation and communication systems in the Edo period were supported by hikyaku (express messengers) who ran naked with their full strength on main roads. They carried packages and letters faithfully, not to disobey clients' trust.

Netsuke artists have succeeded in reviving the brave figures and honest hearts of hikyaku by utilizing their sensibility and technique.



『Joy of Hikyaku』  
Kukan (1968~) H3.7cm

The responsibility given to hikyaku is big and the labor is hard. The artist carved a hikyaku taking a smoke after work. There is a sense of accomplishment on his happy face.

『Courier of Auspicious Things』  
Toshi (1957~) H3.9cm

The artist depicted a hikyaku who is carrying many auspicious things including an owl, a beckoning cat, a sea bream, a mouse, a gourd, a flower of morning glory, a gecko, Daruma, a rabbit, and a swallow.



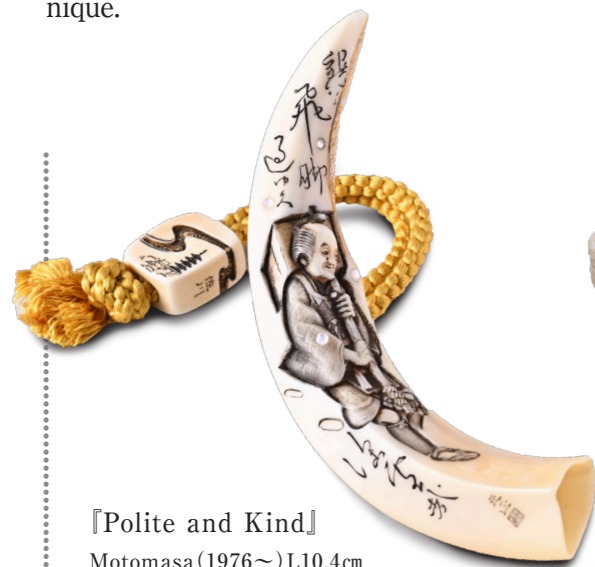
『History of Hikyaku: Future』  
Yuko (1952~) H2.7cm

The artist imagined the future Hikyaku. This netsuke represents a robot who is delivering packages by a drone. He may deliver not only packages but also love and sincerity.



『Young Hikyaku』  
Taisei (1953~) H4.0cm

A young hikyaku boy is running with a lunch box wrapped around his waist. By combining the figure with a wheel of a cart, this work has been finished in a suitable shape for a netsuke.



『Polite and Kind』  
Motomasa (1976~) L10.4cm

The idea of this netsuke is derived from a haiku by Buson a famous poet in the Edo era. A hikyaku who is running in the heavy snow is carved. The result of the artist's research on Iwami netsuke is utilized in this work.

## The makoto (honesty) of hikyaku couriers

Hikyaku were traditional couriers usually imagined today as being clad in a harakake apron and loincloth, carrying a box on a stick propped on a shoulder and running to-and-fro at breakneck speed delivering things like confidential correspondence, cash, money orders, and goods. The question is, why did they successfully complete their jobs without stealing the items they were entrusted with or being late to deliver them? If you dig deeper into this level of service, which we all take for granted at first thought, the real truth of our existence

as human beings comes into view. Ultimately, without "trust" in human relationships, we cannot successfully interact and conduct our affairs. However, unless you go even further and denounce even the mere possibility of violating that "trust" and return to the roots of trust relationships, there can be no action. Tetsuro Watsuji (1889-1960) saw makoto (honesty) in this unification of ethics through that denouncing. And if that is the case, then the symbol that is ideal for this concept of makoto is the very image of the hikyaku couriers.



The image is used by courtesy of Ōta Memorial Museum of Art.

## The Late Autumn Exhibition 'Supreme Selection'

Contemporary netsuke artists are trying to capture this era by studying both transient and everlasting things. Innovative works can be created by reviewing and comprehending traditional culture. In order to develop contemporary netsuke art by encouraging artists who have created outstanding works in every respect, we have established the Golden Netsuke Awards.



『Shogun with Great Swordsmanship』  
Ippu (1970~) H4.7cm

Ashikaga Yoshiteru is a general of the Muromachi Shogunate. He was called a swordsman general because he learned the swordsmanship from a master swordsman named Tsukahara bokuden. The flames burning from the feet represent the pride of a member of Ashikaga family.



AWARD  
of  
EXCELLENCE  
THE  
GOLDEN  
NETSUKE  
AWARDS

『Fearful Spirit』  
Kukan (1968~) H5.4cm

The idea of this netsuke is derived from "Rokujo no Miyasundokoro (Lady Rokujo)" in the Tale of Genji. The artist carved the wandering spirit of Lady Rokujo which appeared in front of Hikaru Genji the hero of the tale.



AWARD  
of  
EXCELLENCE  
THE  
GOLDEN  
NETSUKE  
AWARDS

『Encounter』  
Taisei (1953~) H3.6cm

The ganto is a lantern in the Edo period. A candle is always upright by means of a special mechanism, and a flame does not go out no matter which direction a ganto is oriented. The flame may be the fire of love that makes beetles fall in love.



CHAIRMAN'S  
AWARD  
THE  
GOLDEN  
NETSUKE  
AWARDS

『Scent of Spring』  
Tanetoshi (1947~) H6.0cm

Inspired by erotic ukiyo-e, the artist carved couples of cats, octopuses, box pillows and ornamental hairpins as metaphors of love affair. The butterfly and skull represent languor after the pleasure of love.

Grand  
Prix  
THE  
GOLDEN  
NETSUKE  
AWARDS



『Express Messenger Is Running』  
Toun (1960~) H2.8cm

The artist has skillfully fused old and modern culture. This old fashioned hikyaku is holding an Olympic torch and riding on a skateboard. The whole shape is slanted to express speedy motion.

## The Purpose of Golden Netsuke Awards

As an old poem says "we were born to play (Ryojinhisho)", our daily life is overflowing with playfulness. Playful mind has vividly colored Japanese culture and spiritual nature. Netsuke evolved with the sense of fun in the Edo period. However, many splendid netsuke pieces flew out of Japan after the Meiji era. So we opened the museum in 2007 in Kyoto

with the hope to preserve netsuke as a valuable Japanese culture. We established the Golden Netsuke Awards in 2014 in order to commend excellent works and encourage netsuke artists. In the late autumn exhibition, we will display all of the award-winners and candidates. Please enjoy the masterpieces full of the sense of fun.



**Muneaki Kinoshita**  
Director  
Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum