

現代根付

宗

Contemporary Netsuke
Newsletter

Salon

Issue. 03

WINTER~SPRING

Special Exhibition
January – March

Major Theme

Laughter brings
good luck
and
drives away evil

- 1 January 5(Tue) to 31(Sun)
Special Exhibition
'Auspicious Smiles'
- 2 February 2(Tue) to 28(Sun)
Special Exhibition
'Rakugo-like Netsuke'
- 3 March 2(Tue) to 31(Wed)
Special Exhibition
'Creepy Cute'

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- Netsuke Artist's Talk

Publisher

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The only contemporary netsuke art museum in the world

Special Exhibitions of Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Happy New Year!

At the exhibition from January to March, witty and humorous contemporary netsuke pieces will be displayed. Since ancient times in Japan, laughter has been said to bring good fortune and drive away evil. We want all visitors to laugh and be happy in 2021.

Shinto rituals that offer laughter to gods have occurred in various parts of ancient Japan and have been handed down as performing arts to

the future generations. Laughter has also played a role as a lubricant in Japanese society.

Netsuke also became popular by incorporating "laughter" in the Edo era. In the Meiji era, under the influence of Western civilization, art and laughter were distinguished. But today, various entertaining approaches are being tried in contemporary art, and the importance of "laughter" contained in netsuke is increasing.



Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Exhibition Highlights

1 January Special Exhibition 'Auspicious Smiles'

Fortune comes in by a merry gate.

In January, the auspicious laughter of gods and Buddha will be featured. In ancient Japan, magical beliefs and laughter were deeply linked, and there have been various rituals to devote laughter to god.

Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768), a Zen priest of the Edo era, used the method of "laughter" to spread the esoteric doctrine to the ordinary people. Also there are many netsuke with the motif of laughing gods and Buddha.



『The God of Happiness』
Mitsuyuki (1932~) H5.7cm



『Manzai Performer』
Hideyuki (1941~) H5.0cm

2 February Special Exhibition 'Rakugo-like Netsuke'

The witty pieces will surely make you smile.

The February exhibition will feature humorous and unique netsuke pieces. During the Edo period, kyoka and senryu (comical and satirical poem) and rakugo (comical storytelling) became popular, and at the same time netsuke artists began to create netsuke on the theme of wordplay. Even now contemporary netsuke artists also like to create netsuke on wordplay. Laughter makes us forget the boredom of everyday life and feel like escaping from common sense. It is not too much to say that the true value of netsuke lies there.



『Small Elephant
Learning Prayer』
Kiho (1957~) H4.2cm



『Stuck in Bamboo』
Kangyoku (1944~)
H6.8cm

3 March Special Exhibition 'Creepy Cute'

Something weird sometimes looks attractive.

The March exhibition will feature netsuke which expresses terrifying existence humorously. In ancient times, our ancestor lived in fear of phenomena beyond human knowledge. They have overcome fear by giving names and shapes to unknown phenomena. Similar wisdom can be found in netsuke. By illuminating the creatures of darkness such as demons and monsters with the light of laughter, artists have made them transformed into talismans for avoiding troubles. When you see such netsuke, you will feel more familiar than scary.



『Praying Devil』
Zanmai (1967~)
H4.1cm



『The Gods of Wind and
Thunder』
Tanetoshi (1947~)
H5.0cm



Letter from Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Director Muneaki Kinoshita has been selected to receive the "Mizuki Jugodo Award" sponsored by Yamatokoriyama City in Nara Prefecture. This award was created to underscore the importance of discussing history, culture, wisdom, and experience and

infusing that knowledge into future generations. This dovetails with Director Kinoshita's reason for opening the museum: "To inherit and expand Netsuke culture," and we are honored to receive recognition for all of our activities.

宗 The forefront of Netsuke research

Everyone who has ever had their hearts captured by the Netsuke has asked themselves the simple yet fundamental question, "How exactly did the Netsuke come to be?"

The pioneering figure in the pursuit of this question was Takeuchi Kyuichi (also known as Takenouchi Hisakazu, 1857-1916). His career started in the then-popular ivory sculpture field of Netsuke production. He went on to serve as the first sculpture professor at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and as an Imperial Household Artist, becoming a prominent figure in the world of sculpture and an important contributor to Japanese art. Takeuchi explained that the earliest example of Netsuke usage was in the Ashikaga period, where it grew from the custom of hanging multiple keys in a single bundle from the waist, and was similar in configuration to the itoin seal. The itoin seal was a type of cast metal seal from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) that featured many different sculptures serving as the seal handle. Later, based on the "Jiseki Gakko(1722)" text that looks back on the establishment of the Tokugawa clan and urban customs in the early Edo period, Netsuke collector and independent scholar Ueda Reikichi (-1945) argued that Netsuke were used in the Toyotomi era (1585-16039) and started as gourd bottles. It should be noted that in addition to adding depth to Takeuchi's viewpoint, Ueda's

research also provides the historical trail and characteristics for up to 1,300 Netsuke sculptors and points to fundamental texts regarding Netsuke, making it the mainstream in Netsuke research to this day.

There were no subsequent attempts to explore this line of query for many years until Arakawa Kazuhiro launched a new journey into research and explanation as an intellectual response to the new opportunity for the world of Netsuke presented by the modern Netsuke genre. Arakawa criticized the research to date as making guesses about the origins of Netsuke from the assumption that Netsuke would have been absolutely necessary for any kind of hanging item. His assertion was that the origins of Netsuke were closely connected with the small inro case. Furthermore, he used pictorial materials to indicate that the original shape of the Netsuke, which had been the subject of assertions up to that point, was actually a ring shaped device, and he explained it was used somewhere around 1615. The evolution of the Netsuke shape was now understood as something that happened in relation to changes in the obi (a wrapped belt or cord that keeps the kimono from opening up) on which the Netsuke were mounted. This was also the first empirical evidence criticizing the previously accepted natural-development oriented theory of the

Netsuke which imagined it developing from a natural object into an artificially crafted object.

This sums up the general outline tracing the origins of the Netsuke. Incidentally, if I were asked my own opinion, I would have to say that I agree with Arakawa that the original shape of the Netsuke was a ring-like appliance. Therein, from the next installment onward, I would like to explore new possibilities in the birth of the Netsuke that are different from the above-mentioned views. In short, I believe there is a large disconnection between this ring shaped "tomegu" (clasp) device and the Netsuke. In other words, I would like to clarify the historicity of the tomegu and Netsuke, in which the tomegu can be thought of as coming into being and the Netsuke as being more actively created.

Tadakumo Onishi, Curator

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宗 Toun's Perspective 'Art Style of Netsuke'

Interview with Shishido Toun a winner of the 7th Golden Netsuke Award

Congratulations to Mr. Shishido Toun for receiving the award.
The award-winning work 'Express Messenger Is Running'

This work was created in 2019 toward the Tokyo Olympic Games scheduled in 2020. As skateboarding has been added to the Olympic program specifically for Tokyo, I came up with the idea of connecting a traditional Japanese hikyaku (express messenger) with a modern skateboarder. So I have carved a hikyaku who worked on a skateboard.



The First Impression of Netsuke

I used to be involved in jewellery production. In the process of jewellery processing, the back side of precious metal is usually scraped so that brooches and earrings do not become too heavy. Consequently, when viewed from the front, the designs of jewelleries tend to be flat. On the other hand, the netsuke would be enjoyable from any angle. I was much impressed when I saw netsuke at first.

In the field of jewellery production, the duties of designers and carvers are clearly separated, however I can do everything by myself in netsuke production. It is very attractive to me.

The Art Style of Netsuke

The urge to create netsuke is my starting point. I like the feel of netsuke, especially when placed on the palm of my hand. Netsuke has a unique art style, which is to be beautiful and comfortable when you wear it. There is no limit to the size of the sculpture, and you can make it as



large as you like, however the true charm of netsuke is how to condense the massiveness.

The Basics of Creation

In my case, netsuke production consists of four basic processes: idea, design, story, and craftsmanship. Netsuke is not merely a miniature sculpture. It needs the meaning of existence as a netsuke and the comfortable touch.

Shishido Toun

In 1997, Toun began creating netsuke. His favorite motifs are animals plants and inanimate objects. He has demonstrated excellent talent in works that anthropomorphize or deform such non-humans.



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.

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.

