

現代根付

宗

Contemporary Netsuke
Newsletter

Salon

Issue. 04

SPRING ~SUMMER

Special Exhibition
April – June

Major Theme

How Netsuke Was Born
“Shapes of
Netsuke”

4 April 1(Thu) to 30(Fri)
“Attractive Motion”
exhibition

5 May 1(Sat) to 30(Sun)
“Gush of Passion”
exhibition

6 June 1(Tue) to 30(Wed)
“Limitless Imagination”
exhibition

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- Frontier Research Today
- 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

What is the attraction of netsuke?

Many people pay attention to novel motifs, tasteful designs, or the style of each artist, however at this exhibition, we will focus on the "shapes" of netsuke themselves.

In the first place, what is the typical shape of netsuke?

It is the fruit of 400 years of ingenuity and technique from the birth of netsuke. We can find universal aesthetic principles there.

It is generally said that shape with no protrusions would be good, because netsuke has a history of development as a practical product. But netsuke artists have repeatedly

challenged to create visually appealing works, rather than just making round works.

As a result, netsuke's unique modeling style has been created, which is frontal from every aspect. Constraints as utility goods brought about innovation in modeling, and sculpture art unique to the world was born. We believe it is no exaggeration to say that the ultimate goal of all crafts is netsuke.

With the cooperation of contemporary netsuke artists, we will examine the shape of netsuke works and highlight the essence of three-dimensional modeling.

宗 Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum Exhibition Highlights

4 “Attractive Motion” exhibition

This exhibition features artists exploring composition to create intuitive and attractive netsuke works. We introduce works that express <Movement> by composition and contrast.



【Fujitsubo (Tale of Genji)】
Kukan (1968~) H3.9cm



【Guts Ishimatsu the Boxer】
Itaro (1961~) H3.7cm



【Shi Jin】
Tetsuro (1960~) H4.9cm

5 “Gush of Passion” exhibition

We exhibit works which artists have tried to express not only the shapes but also the essences of subjects or the feelings of artists themselves with elaborate craftsmanship.



【Catnap】
Tanetoshi (1932~) H3.6cm



【Dahlia】
Tadamine (1947~) H2.0cm



【Gingko】
Taisei (1953~) H1.4cm

6 “Limitless Imagination” exhibition

An artist's talent is usually demonstrated in the way how to embody an unrealistic idea. The unpredictable combinations of common motifs bring surprises and discoveries to viewers.



【Dream of Flying】
Akira (1949~) H4.1cm



【Duet】
Yoka (1968~) H2.9cm



【Mermaid】
Kiho (1957~) H5.0cm

宗 Letter from Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Director Kinoshita accepts "9th Mizuki Jugodo Award"



Named after a local intellectual culture icon who lived in Yamatokoriyama City in Nara Prefecture, the "Mizuki Jugodo Award" honors individuals who have contributed to society by collecting a wide range of cultural materials and conducting historical and scholarly research. Yamatokoriyama City selected Netsuke Art Museum Director Kinoshita as an award recipient, and held an award ceremony for the "9th Mizuki Jugodo Awards" at the DMG Mori Yamato Koriyamajo Hall in Yamatokoriyama on February 1. The artistic and scholarly activities of "inheriting and expanding Netsuke culture" and "Netsuke collecting, storage, display, and research" that we have engaged in as our fundamental mission since our inception were regarded with high praise.

The award ceremony was held at a reduced scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and started with a congratulatory address from Yamatokoriyama Mayor Ueda with the words, "I am looking forward to the further development of Netsuke as a part of Japanese culture." Also, Nara Prefectural Library and Information Center Director Minoru Senda, who served as the

Selection Committee Head for the awards, spoke on how our achievements in contributing to the inheritance and transmission of the Netsuke tradition and the popularization of the Netsuke culture were the reason we were selected for an award.

Upon hearing their remarks, Director Kinoshita spoke on his aspirations for the future, stating, "While encouraging the activities of Netsuke artists, I wish to also continue pursuing the cultural and artistic value and significance of Netsuke and cement Netsuke art into an unwavering art form as a cultural property unique to Japan."

Together with the award ceremony, a commemorative exhibition was held at Koriyamajo Hall from January 28 to February 4. We exhibited 43 pieces from our collection for the general public to enjoy. We also donated all of the illustrated records we have published to the Yamatokoriyama City Library, which is located in Koriyamajo Hall.

The Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum will continue to provide an arena for richly talented Netsuke artists to be active and teach even more people about the wonder of Netsuke.

宗 The forefront of Netsuke research

Ihara Saikaku's ukiyo-bon (floating world books) were extremely popular during the Genroku era (1688–1704), and if you open one of them, you are greeted at almost every turn with just how much Netsuke works were familiar to chonin (the "townspeople" merchant and artisan class) as *seken dougu* (tools of the world) in Osaka and Kyoto. But you need not turn to fictional stories alone, for Genroku era lifestyles were pictorially illustrated in "Jinrin Kinmo Zui" (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Humanity, 1690), which tells us that "detailed horn work" artisans in temple areas and various other locations also crafted Netsuke as well. When considered from this angle, we can see that Netsuke transcend the domain of a niche group of dedicated fans, and indeed were instead a phenomenon within Genroku culture that expanded throughout the chonin lifestyle.

Thus, the question is, when we wish to explore the cultural value and meaning unique to Netsuke, which blossomed within Genroku era culture, what viewpoint should we use as a roadmap? It is the discussions from Tsunemichi Kanbayashi that points us towards a helpful viewpoint. In fact, when we think about fine art and culture, what we should never forget even now is the assertion of a cultural identity that rests upon the prestige of modern Japan, made by Okakura Tenshin

(1863–1913), who worked tirelessly to promote the restoration of traditional Japanese art. Before Kakuzo compiled "Kouhon Nihon Teikoku Bijutsu Ryakushi" (A Shortened History of Japan's fine Arts (1901)), there was nothing in Japan like our modern view of art history based in a progressively developmental view of history that traces a line from ancient times to the present. Under the teachings of Japanese culture mentor Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), Kakuzo used a Hegel-oriented dialectic history as the model for art history. In this process, what Kakuzo distilled as the essence of Japanese art was the ink wash painting, the art of the Muromachi Era. And he viewed this as the apex of culture, thinking that Japanese art was from that point onward descending downwards. It should be noted that this era also birthed the elements that we consider core to traditional Japanese culture today, such as *noh* and *kyogen*, the Japanese tea ceremony, *kado* floral design, and the art of incense.

In any case, the core of these art cultures is a spiritualist stance that rejects ostentatiousness. And, the new culture that was completely unlike any previous culture, the culture that cannot be included in the tranquil *wabi-sabi* aesthetic born from that spiritual stance, is what we call chonin culture.

The performance arts and amusements that developed therein, such as playhouse theaters, red-light districts, and secret relations between men and women, went on to become pictures (*ukiyo-e* prints) and songs (*shinnai* and *hauta* music). If the spiritual stance is one side of the equation, the opposing sensual and feeling based world could be thought of as the fetal maturation that elevated Netsuke from a simple fastener to a cultural product. And perhaps it is only when casting a spotlight upon the aesthetics of such *akusho* (a space with its own norms) that the cultural aspect of Netsuke can be seen more fully.

Tadakumo Onishi, Curator

<Recommended reading and bibliography>

Tsunemichi Kanbayashi "Art Education and Japanese Traditional Culture" in "Art in Education" #837, published by Art in Education Promotion Association, 2012. Tsunemichi Kanbayashi "Art and Aesthetics" in LOTUS #31, published by The Fenollosa Society of Japan, 2011. Seiichi Yamaguchi "Fenollosa and Japanese Art" in "Fenollosa", Vol. 1, published by Sanseido, 1982. Ihara Saikaku "Nihon Eitaigura" (The Eternal Storehouse of Japan); Volume 5, 1688 (year 1 of the Genroku era). Revised by Akimasa Higashi, published by Iwanami Shoten, 1956. Author Unknown "Jinrin Kinmo Zui" (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Humanity), 1690 (year 3 of the Genroku era), translated by Haruhiko Asakura, published by Heibonsha, 1990. Author Unknown "Kouhon Nihon Teikoku Bijutsu Ryakushi" (A Shortened History of Japan's Fine Arts, Imperial Household Museum Collection Edition), published by Ryubunkan Tosho, 1916

宗 Ippu's Perspective "Touch"

Interview with Wachi Ippu a winner of the Golden Netsuke Award Grand Prix Congratulations on winning the 7th Golden Netsuke Award Grand Prix.

About the winning work "Shogun with Great Swordsmanship"

I carved the last brave figure of "Ashikaga Yoshiteru" (1536-1565), who was a shogun of the Muromachi Shogunate and also a swordsman.

He tried to regain the authority of the Muromachi Shogunate. Yoshiteru, who desperately struggled to show his will as the leader of samurai, is attractive to me.

I created this netsuke, with taking care to make his spirit be expressed on the face and posture.

How I started to create netsuke

In my twenties, I wanted to be a craftsman while I was working for a company. I was greatly inspired by an article about *inro* and *netsuke* in a magazine. Every little *netsuke* was exquisite, told each story and was based on humorous and free imagination. I intuitively got to know "This is what

I was looking for!"

I didn't have enough money to collect *netsuke*, and I couldn't find a work with my favorite design at any antique shop, so I decided to create it myself. Then I visited a *netsuke* artist in Chiba prefecture where I live, and he kindly introduced me to the *netsuke* class sponsored by the Japan Ivory Sculptors Association (currently known as Japan Hidariba Sculptors Association). I started to create *netsuke* there.



the ideal shape of netsuke

The ideal shape of *netsuke* for me is simple and fits well in anybody's palm. I believe that a *netsuke* with a shape people want to keep touching will be loved forever.

It would be better if one *netsuke* contained areas of different texture, such as well polished and finely carved. The difference in texture and appearance attracts viewers.

I also like to make use of the natural shape, color, and texture of a material itself.



Wachi Ippu

Ippu started to create *netsuke* in 1996. He prefers to create *netsuke* from a slightly different perspective than other artists. His favorite motif is imaginary creatures such as *yokai* (supernatural monsters in Japanese folklore). He focuses on expressing the inside of a subject's mind.



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

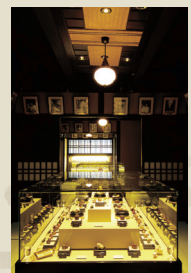
•At the entrance the museum staff would measure your body temperature by non-contact thermometer and spray alcohol on your fingers. (If your body temperature is 37.5 degrees (Celsius) or higher, you may be refused to enter)

•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.

