

The forefront of Netsuke research

The true delight of contemporary Netsuke

Tadakumo Onishi, Curator

The Seishu Netsuke Art Museum Director hesitated in answering an interview question. What the interviewer had sprung on the Director was a term that expresses an attractiveness unique to Netsuke: rokumen shomen (front-face on all six sides). This rokumen shomen is a characteristic specific to Netsuke, in which a Netsuke work can be viewed from any angle and still possess the fully fleshed-out feel of looking at the finely finished front of the piece, both in terms of design and technique. I felt that this slight pause of the Director harbored within it the core essence of aspects such as crafts and performance arts which relate to the tradition encompassing Netsuke. By which I mean, for example, while the facial expression of a rabbit shaped by a craftsman is the expression of the design of the artisan, the Netsuke artist, it is also trajectory of the negotiations between the artisan and the patron, who desires the Netsuke. The artisan is constantly examining how he can satisfy the patron, and polishing his technique to that end. And the patron will use his or her own keen aesthetic sense to advise the artisan on the work to make the finished piece all the better. This never ceasing interplay between the skill of the artisan and aesthetic appreciation of the patron, this

back-and-forth between their intense desires, can sometimes birth an unexpected harmony, and can sometimes form an artwork that exceeds all dreams and expectations.

The Director's face relaxed into a smile as he told the interviewer, "Well, you see, I have known this artist since he was young." Because the Director was comparing this current iteration with all of the Netsuke artist's past thrusts and parries around the concept of "beauty", and with the many Netsuke pieces the artist has created along his path, the Director could feel just how much it is a culmination piece that is imbued with a new value and form not present in any of the past attempts. And I personally received the impression that it was his desire to make sure his words did not merely reflect the surface-level characteristics of the piece that caused the hesitation. Even just one simple rabbit face is ultimately an intricate collaboration between the artisan and patron, and I feel that in this, one can see the true delight that is unique to contemporary Netsuke, which is generated by the blending of the dynamism of creation enveloped in tradition together with the construction of a new value and form.

Special Exhibition
for January to March 2022

Impressive Works by Contemporary Netsuke Artists

- 1 Skillful Carving Technique
Special Exhibition "Mori TETSURO"
■ January 6 (Thu) to 30 (Sun)
- 2 Modesty and Nostalgia
Special Exhibition "Kudo DOSAI"
■ February 1 (Tue) to 27 (Sun)
- 3 Never Ending Stories
Special Exhibition "Tagami TOSHI"
■ March 1 (Tue) to 31 (Thu)

We are posting the latest information and images of the Museum on Twitter and Instagram. We hope you to follow us.

- Awarded 9th Mizuki Jugodo Prize from Yamato Koriyama City, Nara Prefecture
- Featured in the February issue of Katei-gaho
- Featured in the NHK TV program "The Mark of Beauty"



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.



AUTUMN ~WINTER Issue. 06

[Index]

- Exhibition Highlights
- Frontier Research Today
- Letter from Museum
- Netsuke Artist's Talk

[Publisher]

Public Interest Incorporated Foundation
Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum
46-1 Mibukayougosho-cho
Nakagyo-ku Kyoto 604-8811 Japan
Phone: +81-75-802-7000
www.netsuke.jp/



The only contemporary netsuke art museum in the world

Special Exhibitions of Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Netsuke Japan's Pride "Sophisticated Distinction"

This exhibit introduces the most recent developments in Netsuke, born from amidst the inheritance of Japanese culture and innovation.

Looking back, kabuki-odori dancing that garnered popularity in Kyoto in the late 16th century is thought to have been performed wearing unconventional and flamboyant garb, attaching many ornaments around the waist, and danced in accompaniment with song and words. These elements grew into the later art forms of kabuki, Netsuke, and popular music

This occurred against a backdrop of peace brought by the Tokugawa shogunate, which resulted in common folk like farmers and townspeople also extoling the joys of prosperity, instead of just the warrior class as before.

The representative locations for this were the yuri pleasure districts and the shibaimachi theater districts.

In a yukaku pleasure district, there were no delineations between the warrior class and chonin townsperson class. A unique social circle that transcended the boundaries of a simple red-light district was formed based on the "distinction" of taste and education. And from here, Japanese cultural elements such as art, literature, and performance art bloomed. Netsuke was also displayed and examined in these sorts of places.

Current netsuke artists have added their own new interpretations in an attempt to explain the beauty of kabuki and the Japanese ballad, which have carried on age-old Japanese traditions.

Promotional poster

10 ■ October 1(Fri) to 31(Sun)

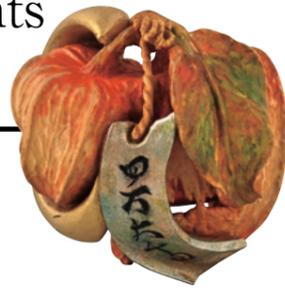
Chic, dandy, and seductive
Special Exhibition “Ko-uta”

Ko-uta is a ballad sung to the accompaniment of the shamisen that has developed over a long period of time, and was perfected by Kiyomoto O-yo, a woman in the late Edo period. Since it was developed as music to be played and sung in a small space, the strings are plucked with fingernails rather than a plectrum. The short lyrics are filled with a sense of the season and delicate emotions like haiku and tanka. In this exhibition, netsuke artists challenged the difficult task of visualizing the world of the ko-uta lyrics. Enjoy the brilliant ideas and skills of each artist.



[Down and Out]
ITARO (1961~) H6.0cm

The motif of this netsuke is a ko-uta describing a scene from a famous play. The son of a merchant family falls in love with a beautiful prostitute and is disowned by his family. He still can't give up love and goes to the brothel to meet her under the cold weather, wearing a poor paper kimono.



[Festival Day of Senso-ji]
AKIRA (1949~) H3.9cm

It is said that worshiping at Sensoji Temple on July 10, the festival day, has the same effect as worshiping there for 46,000 days. The heroine of this ko-uta buys a ground cherry at the fair in the temple and prays to be reunited with her loved one.



[Two of Us]
MOTOMASA (1976~) H2.8cm

Forbidden love makes lovers' hearts burn because it is a secret between them. The lovers seem to be wondering where their love will lead them.

Letter from
Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Gallery Talk was
successfully held

On the afternoon of July 22, we held a gallery talk by a netsuke artist Oikawa Kukan. A group of art lovers, who have been visiting various museums monthly, attended this gallery talk. The attendees were very interested in the conversation with Kukan and fired questions at him. With showing his sketches to the attendees, Kukan explained the intention and creative process of a work, besides he demonstrated carving. The attendees seemed to be much satisfied with the content of the talk. Although



the program was originally scheduled for two hours (one hour for the talk and one hour for viewing the exhibition), it actually lasted for three and a half hours.

In addition to collecting, storing, exhibiting, and researching, we will be conducting activities to "collaborate" with people, such as gallery talks and appreciation education, while taking all possible measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

11 ■ November 2(Tue) to 30(Tue)

Jamboree of New Masterpieces
Special Exhibition
“Supreme Selection”

The "tradition" of netsuke, which has lasted for about four centuries, and the "innovation" explored by contemporary netsuke artists sometimes conflict, and sometimes merge to refine their works. On the two-dimensional axis of "tradition" and "innovation," excellent works are created every year. We have established the Golden Netsuke Awards to encourage the positive challenges of contemporary netsuke artists, and awards outstanding works.



THE GOLDEN NETSUKE AWARDS
GRAND PRIX

[For Japan]
MASAYUKI (1954~) H3.7cm

The torch was lit in Olympia, Greece, and is now being carried to Japan, the host country of the Olympic Games, by a hikyaku (express messenger). The fire of the torch is inlaid with amber to create a luster.



THE GOLDEN NETSUKE AWARDS
GRAND PRIX

[Touring Actor]
KUKAN (1968~) H5.9cm

A young girl applauds from the audience a handsome leading actor of a traveling theater company. The actor smiles and strikes a pose towards her. What will become of their love story?



THE GOLDEN NETSUKE AWARDS
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

[Kisshoten]
TETSURO (1960~) H5.3cm

Making full use of delicate carving knife technique, the artist carved out Kisshoten, the goddess of happiness, beauty, and wealth. The gem on the left palm and the unique pose of the right hand are her characteristics. Those are the symbols believed to make people's wishes come true.



THE GOLDEN NETSUKE AWARDS
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

[Phoenix]
HIDEAKI (1979~) H7.8cm

Wishing for the rebirth of the world struck by COVID-19, the artist has created a phoenix that is said to live forever netsuke. He chose deer antlers as material because they are shed and regrown every year.



THE GOLDEN NETSUKE AWARDS
CHAIRMAN'S AWARD

[COVID-19 Extermination]
ZANMAI (1967~) H5.3cm

Acala is a wrathful deity in Buddhism who catches and destroys disease. The artist embodied the coronavirus that is defeated by Acala.

12 ■ December 1(Wed) to 29(Wed)

Flamboyant and Exaggerated,
but Full of Humanity
Special Exhibition “Kabuki”

In Kyoto around 1600, a woman named Okuni performed a dance characterized by eccentric costumes and gestures. That is the origin of Kabuki. Kabuki is registered as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO as a traditional performing art unique to Japan. This exhibition introduces netsuke based on famous Kabuki works.



[Narukami]
YOKA (1968~) H9.3cm

Narukami is the story of a monk who, angered by the unfairness of the imperial court and sealed rain dragons in a waterfall to prevent rain from falling. The artist skillfully expresses the most symbolic scenes of this play.



[Kabuki Face]
TOUN (1960~) H3.3cm

Kabuki actors use the unique stage makeup since the Edo period. It consists of brightly colored patterns over a white foundation. The colors symbolize role in a drama. Red represents a hero, blue is used for a villain and brown indicates a monster or demon.



[Kagami-jishi]
KIHO (1957~) H4.5cm

"Kagami-jishi" is a masterpiece of Kabuki dance created in the Meiji period. It is a very difficult dance because an actor acts a pretty female servant in the first half and a heroic lion in the latter half. The artist made the full use of his inlay technique to depict "the shaking of the mane", which is the most spectacular scene of this dance.

On the occasion of the 8th Golden Netsuke Award Ceremony

Tradition is sometimes defined as "the spiritual and cultural heritage of a group of people, historically formed and handed down from generation to generation." Tradition has the effect of strengthening the solidarity of a group. Netsuke have vividly colored the spirituality of the Japanese people throughout history and have made our lives tasteful and pleasurable. However, with the westernization in the Meiji era, many netsuke were exported overseas. After that, a few artists narrowly kept the tradition of netsuke alive. In the 1970s there was a movement to revive netsuke with a more contemporary sense, and the number of netsuke artists gradually increased.

I founded this museum in 2007 with the hope of preserving netsuke in

Kyoto where the art style was born. Contemporary artists are always looking for new methods to create netsuke. By ambitiously taking on challenging works, they are developing new horizons while respecting the traditions fostered over history. Our museum is building a database of each artist so that the history of netsuke creation can be traced.

In order to encourage and honor promising netsuke artists, the museum has held the Golden Netsuke Awards ceremony to award them prizes since 2014. It was a difficult task to choose the winners from excellent new works of the year. Please appreciate this year's winners and nominees.

KINOSHITA Muneaki
Director
Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum