

We would like to thank the many people who visit our official Instagram and Facebook pages. This year we are planning to renew our official website. With this renewal, we will open a website that Netsuke fans can enjoy from various perspectives such as art, architecture, history and culture. For that purpose, since last September we have been in discussions with Sagawa Printing and SP Media Tech as supporters of our museum. Specifically, a virtual museum incorporating the latest technology and new design shall be

opened. Although various technical issues need to be resolved, we are working to convey the appeal of netsuke art to those who have difficulty visiting the museum due to the COVID-19 calamity. We are also preparing to offer the information about monthly special exhibitions, the results of the museum's own research and the profiles of contemporary netsuke artists. We hope you will enjoy the virtual museum on our website when it is completed, as you can view it on your smartphone or tablet PC.

The forefront of Netsuke research The true appeal of contemporary Netsuke

Tadakumo Onishi, Curator

In the Genroku period (1688-1704), Netsuke had risen to the stature of a "tool indicating social status" for chonin townspeople mainly in Kyoto and Osaka. However, the first mention of the word Netsuke can be found earlier in the kanazoshi book "Takaragura" (The Treasure House) by haiku poet Yamamoto Motochika, in the 11th year of the Kanbun period (1671).

In the book, Motochika spoke of his feelings towards Netsuke as follows. "Casting my eyes upon the workmanship of a Netsuke piece, though it is only about eight centimeters in size, when observing the design, there is an incredible depth, and I feel immensely attracted to it." As expressed so clearly in this statement, from the eve before it fully manifested all the way up to the present, this "immense attraction" is the most important point in Netsuke, above all else. That feeling of being immensely attracted is an intellectual enthrallment to the work that has been created. Or, put another way, it is the feeling of being pulled in by the design,

composition, and artistry instilled in the work. However, while this is made possible by the hand of the creator, it is not possible without the persistent existence up to the point of completion of the patron, who is simultaneously the user, viewer, and requesting buyer of the work. The unique creative vision of the creator at times attempts to transcend the borders of the Netsuke format. And what holds this vision in check within the bounds of the Netsuke framework and encourages that creativity to work its magic strictly within that realm is the sharp aesthetic eye of the patron. It is the unceasing tug-of-war between the creativity of the creator and aesthetic eye of the patron that elevates Netsuke to the height of "igniting immense attraction". The passion of the creators and patrons towards these works is what causes the wear and tear that accompanies the unique "nare" effect of Netsuke (a treasured weathered appearance, appreciated in Japanese Netsuke culture, that adds to its atmospheric value)

Special Exhibition July to September 2022

"Welcome to Biological Paradise Created by Netsuke"

7 "Netsuke Aquarium"
■ July 1 (Fri) to 31 (Sun)

8 "Netsuke Zoo"
■ August 2 (Tue) to 31 (Wed)

9 "Netsuke Botanical Garden"
■ September 1 (Thu) to 30 (Fri)

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.



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The only contemporary netsuke art museum in the world Special Exhibitions of Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Fine Art or Craft? "Secrets of Netsuke" The Greatest Mystery of Japanese Sculpture

Netsuke combines both the sophisticated sense of fine-arts aesthetics and the intensely honed craftsmanship of Netsuke artists, and exists at the crossroads between fine art and craft. At its basic essence, the Netsuke is a fastener for sagemono objects hung from the waist, such as small inro containers. Strapping and hanging items from the waist is a practice seen in cultures around the world, but there are no other examples of decorative objects on par with the sculpture achieved in the Netsuke tradition. Netsuke is an artistic craft unique to Japan.

In an Edo era text published in 1781, 57 famous Netsuke artists were featured. The text records many different types of artisans participating in the process, including Buddha statue sculptors, Noh play mask

carvers, painters, lacquerware crafters, and metalwork artisans. This is evidence that Netsuke involves every type of Japanese sculpture and craftsmanship.

Because of this, from the Meiji era onward, Netsuke has garnered immense praise in the West as well as a unique Japanese form of sculpture. The question of why this form of craft arose only in Japan is the greatest mystery of Japanese sculpture.

Is it fine art or craft? Netsuke art has been passed down to the present day while easily transcending those boundaries, and contemporary Netsuke artists are expanding the field of production with new attempts. In order to explore the mystery of Netsuke, this exhibit introduces works with a spotlight on detailed technique.



Promotional poster

4 Gorgeous and Delicate Microcosms

Special Exhibition in April

“Brilliant Challenges of Goldsmithing and Inlaying”

■ April 1 (Fri) to 30 (Sat)

Zogan (Japanese inlay art) and goldsmithing are techniques used in netsuke production, in which different materials are combined. In Japan, goldsmithing was used in the production of sword accessories, and during the Edo period, it reached the highest level of technique in the world. Later, Western jewelry and ornaments production methods were introduced. Those methods have been applied to contemporary netsuke by artists who entered into netsuke field.

Zogan production in Japan began in the middle of the 8th century. The technique was later used in various kinds of crafts including netsuke. In the Meiji era, works made with a method called Shibayama Zogan were exported and highly valued in Europe and the United States. The method has been passed down to contemporary netsuke.



〔 Cat in Bush 〕
HIROMITSU (1954~) H4.2cm
Grass pattern is arranged in openwork on all sides, and the cat stands out against dull silver color.

〔 Flower basket 〕
TERUO (1936~) H5.1cm
Decorative effect is enhanced by the technique of carving out several natural materials and inlaying them on the base wood sterically.

〔 Stay-at-home Cat 〕
MANSEI (1975~) H5.3cm
The theme of this work is the self-restraint to stay home due to COVID-19. The Cat's PC is removable.

〔 Apple 〕
AKIRA (1949~) H3.9cm
Based on the unique idea of using emerald for inedible seeds, the artist's metal carving technique is fully demonstrated.

〔 Gecko 〕
TOUN (1960~) H4.3cm
The gecko is looking for food, while the grasshopper is hiding on the back side to avoid being seen. The different textures of each create a striking contrast.

5 Beautiful decoration with Maki-e and Raden

Special Exhibition in May

“Elegant Taste of Japanese Lacquer Art”

■ May 1 (Sun) to 31 (Tue)

Lacquerware with urushi has been called “Japanese” lacquerware in English, because it has developed in a very unique way only in Japan. Urushi is well suited to the warm and humid environment of Japan, and has been used since the early Jomon period (11,000 years ago).

The lacquering techniques have been utilized for netsuke and intro since the Edo period. Urushi is characterized by its beautiful surface, on which gorgeous decorations such as mother-of-pearl inlays and maki-e were favored by the feudal lords. Some netsuke artists have further developed traditional techniques, such as carving lacquer coating to create three-dimensional effects, or processing lumps of multi-colored lacquer.



〔 Lakeside 〕
MASAYUKI (1954~) H3.6cm
Ripples of water are made by brushes, and a dragonfly perched on a reed leaf is represented by mother-of-pearl inlay.

〔 Eagle Flying over the Waves 〕
KOSEI (1972~) H5.2cm
The unique property of lacquer is utilized to decorate a natural turquoise. The patches on the stone are made to look like a rough sea, creating a sense of grandeur.

〔 Ume Blossoms 〕
TOMOE (1972~) H2.9cm
This work is made by carving the entire surface of a lump of urushi lacquer that has been thickly coated with several layers of red and green colored lacquer.

〔 Shadow Play 〕
SHOYO (1947~) H3.9cm
Based on a shadow picture by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, a famous ukiyo-e artist, Shoyo carved this on boxwood and colored it with lacquer.

〔 Swallowtail 〕
KINUYO (1959~) H4.4cm
The artist created a fantastic swallowtail butterfly drifting precariously by making use of a Maki-e method with gold powders.

6 Realistic sculptures created with the supreme technique

Special Exhibition in June

“Elaborate Techniques and Bold Designs”

■ June 1 (Wed) to 30 (Thu)

It is a thrilling process to carve an elaborate art work out of a lump of material, and the dynamism of the work created from hard material by advanced technique gives a strong impression to viewers. It is not too much to say that the appeal of netsuke lies in elaborate shaping techniques and bold design. The history of Japanese sculpture began in the 6th century, evolving into craft art in the Edo period (17th century) and then into abstractionism in the 20th century. The highlight of this exhibition is how the history is reflected in the works of contemporary netsuke artists. We will also focus on the dyeing techniques that enhance the modeling, and introduce traditional dyeing techniques using vegetable dyes and mineral pigments.



〔 Jakuchu 〕
ITARO (1961~) H5.9cm
Jakuchu was an outstanding painter in the Edo period. What is the rooster, his favorite motif, whispering to him?

〔 Guan Yu 〕
TETSURO (1960~) H5.5cm
This work is characterized by its well-proportioned figure and realistic depiction. The shape of radiating out from the face, gives a heroic impression to viewers.

〔 Wetland 〕
IKKU (1949~) H5.3cm
A story is contained in the simple spindle shape. It is a typical work of contemporary netsuke that finds beauty in abstracted forms.

〔 imaginative Boys Expedition Team 〕
KUKAN (1968~) H3.8cm
The complex composition is well organized into a shape typical of Netsuke. The meaningful gazes of the three boys and the dog make viewers imagine some kind of story.

〔 Lunar Eclipse 〕
IPPYU (1970~) H3.4cm
The blue tiger is the earth that is about to swallow the moon. The tiger is made of ivory dyed with indigo and then carved to show the white base.