

News Release

Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art

With thanks to the continuing generosity of the Toshiba Corporation

Opening 4 November 2015

#vamJapan

Highlights

Long sword with scabbard, blade about 1400; scabbard and fittings, 1750–1800



From 1185–1868, Japan was ruled by the warrior class known as the samurai. The sword was both their indispensable weapon and symbol of authority. The

Japanese perfected the art of forging steel to create deadly efficient weapons that combined beauty with function. This sword with a deeply curved blade has a tempered edge of stylised clove buds. It was worn with the cutting edge facing downwards and used principally when fighting on horseback. This blade is one of the oldest within the V&A's Japanese holdings and is signed with the maker's name: 'Morimitsu of Osafune in Bizen'. It was slightly shortened when remounted in the 18th century.

The Mazarin Chest, 1640–43



When the Europeans came to Japan in the mid-1500s they were immediately attracted by the lustre and decorative brilliance of objects made from lacquer (*urushi*). The Japanese soon began to produce lacquer items for export but copying European shapes. This great treasure of the V&A's Japanese collection is one of the most important

pieces of Japanese export lacquer ever made. It was shipped to Europe by the Dutch East India Company in 1643. Its first owner was the French statesman and Catholic cardinal Jules Mazarin.

Tankard in European shape, 1680–1700



As Chinese porcelain became temporarily unavailable following the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644, Europe turned to Japan as an alternative provider. Japan accordingly increased its output of porcelain, with much of it aimed at the export market and often made in shapes copying European ceramics. This porcelain tankard made in the Arita kilns and fitted with German silver mounts resembles salt-glazed stoneware originals popular in northern Europe at the time.

Kimono for a young woman, 1800-40



A vibrant fashion culture existed in the dynamic urban centres of Edo period (1615-1868) Japan. This satin silk kimono would have been a very extravagant garment. The long swinging sleeves (*furiwake*) indicate that it was worn by a young woman, probably the daughter of a wealthy merchant. Red, symbolising youth and glamour, was an expensive dye, while the tie-dyeing (*shibori*) technique used to create the pattern was highly labour-intensive.

Figure of a samurai dressed in armour, suit of armour about 1800; figure and stool about 1860



This suit of armour mounted on a life-size human figure has a hammered iron breastplate decorated with a Buddhist deity attacking a demon. The high-quality mail is complemented by fine textiles. The crest on the helmet is an articulated iron dragonfly with movable wings. The life-size figure with its highly realistic features is known as an *iki-ningyō* (living doll). These figures were used both in Japan and at international exhibitions abroad, particularly in the late 19th century, where they featured in dioramas depicting Japanese daily life and scenes from the historical past.

*Woman at a mirror, woodblock print from the series *Edo Beauties* by Kikukawa Eizan, about 1820*



Kikukawa Eizan (1787-1867) produced many superior prints of beautiful women. Some scholars have suggested that this series *Edo Beauties* takes the 11th century Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji* as its theme. The woman depicted here with a side comb in her hair is poised, perhaps about to apply her makeup. On the mirror stand lies a packet of face powder.

Carved wood netsuke in the form of a tightly curled rat, 1850-1900



Because the kimono did not allow for pockets, from the late 16th century onwards Japanese men used netsuke to suspend various pouches and containers from their sashes by a silk cord. Netsuke presented an ideal opportunity to showcase inventive decoration. The accessory form evolved into miniature works of art, such as this carved wooden example of a tightly curled rat.

Vase with handles, 1875



This porcelain vase combines a number of features and motifs designed to appeal to western taste at a period when Japonisme, the fashion for all things Japanese, was at its height. The style and imagery of the central panels are similar to illustrations in Japanese woodblock-printed books, which were much admired in the West during the late 19th century. The vase was made in Kyoto and is marked 'Made by Kanzan' for the Kanzan workshop.

Women's kimono, 1930-40



The early 20th century saw the introduction of new textile techniques in Japan which speeded up traditional dyeing methods. The patterning on this meisen silk kimono was created using chemical dyes that were stencil-printed on to the warp (longitudinal) and weft (horizontal) threads prior to weaving. This method allowed for the creation of bold, colourful images which often reflected Western artistic styles. The fast flowing forms of these abstract motifs echo the rhythms of busy modern city.

Kimono for a young boy, ca. 1937



During the 1930s, kimono for young boys were often patterned with images celebrating modern life. This printed wool garment commemorates the first aeroplane flight from Japan to Europe. The 'Kamikaze-go' flew from Tokyo to London, landing at Croydon airport on 9 April 1937. The kimono is decorated with images of Mount Fuji, Tower Bridge, the aeroplane and the route it took.

Untitled sculpture, by Yagi Kazuo, 1958-59



Yagi Kazuo (1918–79) was one of the founders of the influential avant-garde ceramics group the Sōdeisha. Established in Kyoto in 1948, it set out to expand the horizons of ceramics 'beyond the limited intentions formerly espoused by people working as potters'. Early work by the group shocked critics by deconstructing the vessel. This unglazed stoneware piece dates from shortly after Yagi began making abstract sculptural forms.

Portable transistor radio, TR 610, designed and manufactured by Sony, 1958



Japan's international reputation post-World War II owes much to its success in manufacturing electronic products. In 1958, the Tokyo Telecommunications Company adopted the name 'Sony'. This radio was launched in the same year, and was Sony's first major export. It represents an early stage in the company's development of miniaturised audio equipment, following the production of the first pocket radio in 1957. The simple design was very popular – Sony produced almost half a million sets in four different colours. Its slim, tapered shape fits comfortably into the hand.

***Ordeal by Roses*, no.32 by Eikoh Hosoe, 1961**



Japanese photographer and filmmaker Eikoh Hosoe (b. 1933) emerged during the artistically experimental era of post-World War II Japan. He is known for his psychologically charged images that explore subjects such as death, erotic obsession and irrationality. The model for this darkly erotic

image was the celebrated Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima.

Videosphere television set and alarm clock by JVC, designed 1970; manufactured 1974



This TV set and alarm clock in the shape of an astronaut's helmet was designed the year after the first moon-landing. Space Age and Pop Art aesthetics had a major influence on consumer products in Japan, especially those aimed at the youth market. The VHS format (Video Home System) was only introduced in 1977, so despite its name, the *Videosphere* was not a video player.

***Lips* by Daido Moriyama, 1980**



This image taken from a street poster is typical of photographer Daido Moriyama's (b. 1938) bold renditions of light, dark and shadow. His work reflects the tensions between tradition and modernity in the increasingly consumerist society of post-World War II Japan. By focusing on a pair of female lips taken from an advertisement, Moriyama underlines both the power of desire and the

commodification of women.

***Cabinet de Curiosité* by Shirō Kuramata, 1989**



Shirō Kuramata's celebrated *Cabinet de Curiosité* is the product of the conceptual concerns he shared with the European design community during the latter part of his career. Kuramata (1934 - 91) was one of the first Japanese designers to understand design not just as a way of producing utilitarian items, but as a means of creating sculptural objects imbued with complex narratives and meanings. He progressed from being classified as a Modernist designer to that of Postmodernist and was one of the driving forces in the formation of the Memphis design collective. This piece represents his longstanding fascination with plastics.

***Origin part I: Join* folding screen, designed by BCXSY; made by Seihachi Tanaka, 2010**



This cypress wood screen was created by the Amsterdam-based design studio BCXSY in collaboration with the Japanese master-joiner Seihachi Tanaka. Tanaka makes screens in which geometric arrangements of wooden struts are interlocked within a frame. By using shapes and planes not usually found in traditional Japanese screens, BCXSY's innovative design draws attention to Seihachi Tanaka's exceptional craftsmanship.

***Sweet Lolita ensemble* by Baby, the Stars Shine Bright, 2011-12**



The cult of the cute (kawaii) became popular in Japan in the 1970s. Initially a fad among young girls, it now crosses generations, and even the sexes. The way in which cuteness has fed into popular culture can be seen through its influence on street style, including the hyper-feminine 'Lolita' look complete with saccharine colour palette, copious use of ruffles, frills and elaborate accessories. This outfit by brand Baby, the Stars Shine Bright consists of a pinafore dress worn with bloomers, double petticoats and a lace-trimmed, puffed-sleeve blouse. The shape of the dress, tea party print, clock and playing card motifs all reference Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

***Heel-less shoes* by Noritaka Tatehana, 2014**



These gravity-defying shoes are inspired by the vertiginously tall geta worn by courtesans in Edo period (1615 - 1868) Japan. At the same time as referencing historical Japanese dress, Noritaka Tatehana (b. 1985) uses traditional materials and techniques to create his shoes, as seen in this pair which has recently been acquired by the V&A. A trained dyer and weaver, Tatehana hand-crafts each pair himself in his studio in Tokyo.

Hello Kitty rice-cooker, Sakar International, Inc., 2014



Hello Kitty is the ultimate symbol of Japanese cute and an international icon. She was launched in 1974 by Sanrio, originally for pre-adolescent girls. Now adored by all age groups, she features on a wide range of consumer goods, including domestic appliances such as this rice-cooker. The use of saccharine colours and the customisation of consumer products such as this are prime indicators of the extent to which Japanese cuteness has fed into popular culture.

Dress from the 132 5. collection by Issey Miyake, 2015



Issey Miyake's (b. 1938) 132 5. range of women's wear explores the multiple dimensions of clothing using the concept of origami as a starting-point. Created using computer software, each piece starts as a single sheet of fabric folded into a flat geometric shape. When lifted from the centre, it opens up in a series of origami-like folds to form a cascading three-dimensional structure. The fifth dimension is achieved when the garment is worn and brought to life by the wearer. This dress has been acquired especially for the reopening of the Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

- The Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art is FREE admission
- The lead curator of the gallery is Rupert Faulkner, Senior Curator of Japan at the V&A
- The gallery was originally designed by Paul Williams of Stanton Williams Architects
- An accompanying book *Japanese Art and Design*, edited by Gregory Irvine is available from the V&A shop (V&A Publishing, £25)
- The V&A is open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday

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About the Toshiba Corporation

Since 1986, the Toshiba Corporation has provided continued sponsorship to the V&A with its ongoing support for both the Toshiba Gallery and related projects, to help ensure that the collections are researched, conserved and displayed to the highest standards.

For further PRESS information about the Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk. A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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