The fantastic ojime above represent the absolute finest in Japanese metalwork miniatures. These beloved mischief makers, a clambering oni by Somin and a naughty Okame by Haruaki, were created by two important artists at the height of their abilities.

The prankster oni can be up to no good as he ascends a pillar, no doubt on the watch for Shoki. His crisp bronze form reveals marvelous hand-worked details of facial expression, well-defined ribs and vertebrae, and engraved hair. Gold inlay forms his horns, breeches (with shakudo inlay forming the tiger stripes), anklets and wristlets. Yokoya Sōmin (b. 1795) of the famed Goto school has proudly engraved his name on the base of the pillar, which measure only 2.5 cm in height.

Our favorite mischief makers...

The ribald Okame at right is lavishly formed of solid gold. Her tiny kimono is detailed with many of the takaramono (treasures of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune). She holds a silver-tied woven bronze jar, a comical expression contemplating mischievous plans, all this on a measurement of only 2 cm. Haruaki (1787-1850) of Edo was prized as a court artist to the Tokugawa Shogunate, receiving the highest honorific title of Hōgen. The base of the kimono bears his engraved signature, surrounded with the inner kimono worked in the time-honored design of seigaiha (stylized wave motif).

Please contact Orientations Gallery to view truly magical miniature details on ojime, netsuke, inro, and other antique Japanese masterpieces.
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International
Netsuke Society
Journal

Volume 30, Number 3
Fall 2010

Contents

2 President’s Letter
2 Exhibition
4 Chapters
10 Letters
12 Questions & Answers
   Yukari Yoshida and Joseph Kurstin
15 The Netsuke of Anraku
   Rosemary Bandini
22 Masasada (Masakazu)
   Jay Hopkins
27 Choun: Legend and Netsuke
   Eberhard Schmidt-Böthelt
28 Netsuke Basics from A to Z
   Christine Drosse
40 Excavated from daimyō graves, inrō by
   Tsuchida Sōetsu and Tōyō, Part I
   Else and Heinz Kress
50 Auctions, Eldreds
   Ed McNiff
53 Book Review
   The Rabbit with Amber Eyes
   Adornment in Clay: Ceramic Netsuke from the
   Richard R. Silverman Collection
57 Memoriam
57 Calendar
58 Membership Form
59 Index of Advertisers
59 Back Issues

Cover:
As we approach the end of 2010 the plans for the 2011 INS Beverly Hills Convention are almost complete. Bonhams has generously agreed to sponsor our welcoming reception on Friday evening, May 20. The Convention program will begin on Saturday morning, May 2 at 9:00 am, ending with the farewell banquet and fun auction on May 25. I apologize that in the Summer Journal I had the dates as May 21-26.

We have a great program scheduled which will include at least five lectures and the opportunity to attend eight to ten workshops, as well as visit the Bushell netsuke collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The dealers’ exhibition and special exhibition from the Richard Silverman collection will be housed in the Royal Suite, which will be open to attendees every afternoon.

Enclosed in this Journal is the Convention brochure showing the daily schedule and registration details. We encourage you to register as soon as possible so that we can complete the finite details. The Four Seasons Beverly Wilshire Hotel has blocked a group of rooms and is offering attendees a very special rate of $295 a night.

By the time this issue reaches you, I will have attended the London Netsuke Symposium in early November and the first auction of the Wrangham collection. We will be reporting on these events in the Winter Journal for those who were unable to travel to London.

Again, I urge you to mark your calendars for the May 2011 Convention and not miss out on a great netsuke event in sunny California.

Marsha Vargas Handley
mvargas@xanadugallery.us

Exhibition

Iris Rubinfield and Norman L. Sandfield celebrate with Richard R. Silverman (center) at the reception for the opening of the exhibit: Life in Miniature: Ceramic Netsuke from the Silverman Collection, which runs from October 1, 2010 to February 27, 2011 at the Toledo Museum of Art; and the release of the companion book, Adornment in Clay: Ceramic Netsuke from the Richard R. Silverman Collection (exhibition details on p. 11 this issue; book review p. 55).
BEVERLY HILLS 2011
International Netsuke Society Convention
May 20-25, 2011

Mark Your Calendar
Join the Hares

Don’t be left behind,
Register Now!

Welcoming Reception, Lectures & Workshops
Fabulous Bushell Collection of Netsuke

Complete schedule of events in the enclosed brochure.
On May 16, eight core members of the Japan chapter gathered at the Tobacco and Salt Museum of Shibuya, Tokyo. The curator of the museum, Mr. Yushi Tanida, graciously hosted the meeting and gave a lecture. Based on the current exhibition titled “The Netherlands and Japan, from Rembrandt to von Siebold,” he talked about the Japan-Dutch relations via Nagasaki and Dejima during the Edo period. He illustrated that the trade influenced many fields of both countries, including arts and crafts. For instance, Rembrandt used Japanese paper for some of his etched prints, while a Japanese sword guard with VOC monogram was made possibly in Hizen province (i.e., present Nagasaki and Saga prefectures).

During lunch at a nearby Chinese restaurant, we asked Mr. Tanida a number of questions about his lecture and his specialized field (tobacco and tobacco paraphernalia). We also shared our own knowledge on those subjects. Then we went back to the museum and viewed the exhibition. The lecture and subsequent conversations boosted our appreciation and understanding of the historic objects on display.
Horses of a Different Color

From Minko of Tsu to Bishu of Tokyo
From the Late 18th Century to the Late 20th Century
From the Darkest Wood to the Whitest Ivory,
The Beauty of the Beasts Shine Through.

This reclining horse, with its double-inlaid eyes and wizened expression, the beautifully detailed hair of mane and tail, the finely incised body contours are enhanced by the sleekness of the polished ebony. Signed on the underside, “Minko” with kakihan. Width 4.2 cm (1¾ in.) Early Edo period, late 18th century.

This horse ("The Pegasus") has double-inlaid eyes and a wild demeanor as he surrounds himself with magnificently feathered wings. A feeling of graceful movement is evident with the left foreleg raised toward a powerful head with a striking mane. Signed inconspicuously on the lower tail, “Bishu”. Height 6 cm (2⅜ in.) Showa, late 20th century.

“Exhibiting at the
2011 International Netsuke Society Convention in Los Angeles”

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SAN FRANCISCO

Our local chapter meeting was held October 10 in a San Francisco landmark called the “Archbishop’s Mansion,” which was built in 1904 for San Francisco’s second Archbishop, Patrick Riordan, who played an important role in the city’s history. We were the guest of Jonathan Shannon and Jeffrey Ross, current owners of the home, who were instrumental in making renovations and having the building designated as a San Francisco historic landmark. It seemed only fitting for our first meeting in this 106-year-old building that our guest speaker was to be Paul Moss, who would give us a talk about Sydney L. Moss’s celebrating its Centenary. Paul’s and his son Oliver’s arrival was greeted by a fly over of the Navy’s Blue Angels. They were also here for Fleet Week.

Fourteen of our members gathered in the beautiful dinning room where we first viewed Paul’s most recent publication, *This Single Feather of Auspicious Light: Old Chinese Painting and Calligraphy*, an extraordinary publication which can be seen in our group photo taken by member Robert Lee. After the viewing, Paul then gave a two-hour Power Point presentation on a large screen of The Centenary show, and another new show “They Are All Fire and Every One Doth Shine: Inro, Pipecases and Netsuke from the Elly Nordskog Collection,” who had exceptional taste in Japanese lacquer, which included several important works by Ogawa Haritsu, known as Ritsuo, (1663–1747). The meeting ended with Paul and Oliver passing around some wonderful netsuke for viewing, along with some fine inro from our member Steve Koppich. Our hosts, Jonathan and Jeffrey, who are also collectors of fine inro, then conducted a tour for members of the mansion, pointing out an original chandelier, along with one from the set of “Gone With the Wind,” a gilded mirror formally owned by Mary Todd Lincoln and a player piano owned by Noel Coward. The afternoon ended with thoughtful discussions over a glass of wine of the wonders seen this day.
“Poppy Maiden”

“This carving depicts a girl on the verge of becoming a woman. Made from stag antler, she shyly holds her hand up to her mouth while the flower is about to burst from the swollen bud. Despite her modesty, she unconsciously wiggles provocatively. She poses in her bare feet. The himotoshi is formed by the leaf at the back.”

Guy Shaw
Contemporary. Height: 3 3/4 inches.

Netsuke carved by

Guy Shaw

P.O. Box 324, Pompton Lakes, New Jersey 07442  Tel/Fax: (973) 616-2988
E-mail: netsuke@takaraasianart.com  Website: www.takaraasianart.com
To be exhibited November 1st to 30th 2010 and to be published in a fully illustrated catalogue with essays and commentaries brimming with new information derived from original research.

The exhibition consists of paintings, many with associations with the theme of Chinese Confucianism in Japanese society, sculpture, lacquer, netsuke, pipe-case and pouch sets, tonkotsu tobacco-containers and a contemporary uchikake kimono covered in calligraphy. There is a strong emphasis on the literally poetic content of the works of art involved, and a particular theme is the work of Ogawa Haritsu (Ritsuō, 1663 - 1747) as painter, sculptor, lacquerer and inlayer, and his legacy as expressed in the work of artists such as Mochizuki Hanzan and Hasegawa Ikko.

Mochizuki HANZAN (1743 ? - 1790 ?)
A cypress wood - hinoki or sugi - kashibako (a box for sweets), lacquered and inlaid with a green and orange nō theatre curtain flapping on its rope
Diameter: 5 ¼ in, 13.3 cm

Elaine Ehrenkranz, Miami FL
Elly Nordskog, Thousand Oaks CA
Mochizuki HANZAN (1743 ? - 1790 ?)
A rare portable sake flask in the form of an outsized inrō, boldly inlaid and lacquered with a design of a Komodo dragon
Sealed beneath: Hanzan
Height: 5 5/16 in, 14.1 cm

Vicomte de Sartigues, Paris
Demaree and Dorothy Bess, Asheville NC
Charles A. Greenfield, New York
Blue Kirchhoff, San Francisco CA

Mochizuki HANZAN (1743 ? - 1790 ?)
A rare pottery incense burner decorated with a riverside profusion of mizu-bashō [water plantain] and reeds, the shibuichi cover pierced with a continuous design of the artist’s name, Hanzan, four times in stylised seal characters
Sealed: Hanzan
Diameter: 3 ⅜ in, 7.8 cm

Dr. Edmund Lewis, Chicago
Letters

Recently I had the pleasure of having Hiroshi Sato, Consul General of Japan, and his wife Yoko as guests in my home to see my collection of netsuke, inro, and okimono. They were very pleased to see the work of Japanese masters so well cared for in a private collection.

Consul General Sato was familiar with the legends behind some of the netsuke but had never seen them up close, only in museums. He was very pleased to learn some of the history of netsuke and to know that Americans appreciated the arts of Japan. He attached an ensemble to his belt, remarking that this was the first time he had worn an inro with netsuke. Yoko is an outstanding artist in her own right and shared with me some of the beautiful origami she had made.

I told him of the INS and the interest in netsuke around the world, and he expressed appreciation and admiration for those interested in studying and preserving the arts of Japan.

It is interesting that many Japanese are just now becoming aware of the amazing legacy of their netsukes.

Spencer Thorton
sthorton@biosyntrx.com
Life in Miniature
Ceramic Netsuke from the Silverman Collection

Opens October 1, 2010

Visit this free exhibition and purchase the companion catalog, Adornment in Clay.


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Q: I have a few hundred netsuke in my collection, varying in price (value?) from a few dollars to thousands. Some are by highly rated netsuke-shi; most are by unknowns (at least to me). Some are high quality; most are only fair; and some are obviously poor copies. I don’t know the provenance of a single one.

I am puzzled by the value placed on provenance. I remember an auction about thirty years ago where a rat group signed by the Nagoya artist Ikkan was described as “loaded with provenance. Ex Winkworth, De’Ath, Meinertzhagen, and Hindson.” In another, a kagamibuta was described as “with a provenance galore. Ex-Isobel Sharpe, W. C. Hope, M. Tomkinson, W. Adam, L. Behrens, F. Meinertzhagen and M. T. Hindson collections.”

Does the fact that a known collector owned the netsuke make it better or more valuable? If these netsuke are so good, why were they not kept, but sold repeatedly by knowledgeable people? It reminds me of today’s auctions of ordinary things owned by celebrities: because a celebrity owned it, the price at auction went sky high.

I believe that a netsuke should stand on its own merits and that knowing who the artist was or period carved is more important than the person who subsequently owned it.

Spencer Thornton

A: A netsuke, or any work of art, MUST stand ONLY on its own merits, beauty, and quality. No extraneous factors will change or inflate that quality or beauty or its merits, either by ownership of famous collectors or with illustrations or discussion in important publications.

In the case of works of art such as netsuke, provenance—from the French word provenir (to come from, the origin or source)—means the history of ownership, along with its appearance in publications as illustrations or discussions. Pedigree would be an additional word: “being of noble ancestry” or “a line of ancestral noble lineage.” Provenance or pedigree is the life story of a netsuke and its journey through the world, after its birth from the hands of a netsuke-shi.

There was no provenance in Japan, probably due to the Japanese penchant for anonymity. Provenance in Japanese works of art began in the mid-nineteenth century as Japan was opening to the Western world and Japanese works of art passed into ownership in Western cultures.

The provenance of fine works of art may assume great importance, but it does NOT change the quality or beauty of the work of art itself. However, the QUALITY OF THE PROVENANCE of a work of art may make a considerable difference in its price or its desirability to collectors. Acquisition by a succession of prominent collectors is a comforting assurance of authenticity and quality, and publication and illustration may lend an aura of excellence. Collectors are happy and proud to own a prestigious netsuke. There is nothing wrong with this, as great provenance helps to establish a netsuke as far
as desirability, authenticity, interest, and its status in the collections of past owners. Impressive pedigree or illustrious provenance of an important work of art can make a considerable difference in its selling price in the market. This is affected by the status of past collectors who owned the netsuke and where it has been photographed and discussed in important publications, such as Weber’s *Koji Hoten* or in Joly’s *Legend in Japanese Art*.

Factors that influence a premium price may be a select netsuke, or a signature, but also provenance, illustration, and reference. The additional money paid for pedigree, however, may make this premium a very good investment in the future. Beauty and quality may be found by the knowledgeable collector in a netsuke without provenance or one without signature, at a lower price.

Not all pedigreed or “provenanced” netsuke meet expectations of merit and quality and beauty. Mistakes may be made by any collector, and these may be perpetuated by provenance and pedigree, just as quality may be perpetuated.

Personally, I find pedigree of great importance when I consider adding a piece to my collection. The illustrious past collectors who formed fabulous and legendary collections had the opportunity to see many treasures and to pick the best of those. They studied carefully and had a great “eye” for a special piece. Passed on to other great collectors, these netsuke also became famous and sought after. I believe the astute collector must look carefully at any provenanced netsuke for the special qualities that these previous collectors found and thus added the piece to their collections, illustrating them and writing of them, perpetuating their feelings for others to understand and enjoy. I have many provenanced netsuke in my own collection, but I have many more non-provenanced pieces that are certainly of as good quality and beauty, and I treasure them just as much. When a provenanced piece is offered to me, I look at it carefully because many other serious collectors thought it good enough to be added
to their famous collections, and I wish to see what merits they saw in the particular piece. But in the end I always judge for myself if the netsuke holds the quality and qualities that would make me add it to my collection.

We must eventually pass on our treasures to others, as time will end all collections. We are only the temporary custodians and must pass on our treasures after careful preservation. Illness, death, or financial problems will cause the selling of a netsuke or a whole collection. Some donate their collections to a museum, thus decreasing the number in circulation for the rest of the collecting world.

Illustrated here are two excellent Hindson pieces with great provenance and two almost identical pieces with no provenance, showing that quality and beauty may come with or without pedigree. The quality of the two netsuke without pedigree is certainly equal or better than the provenanced pieces, yet the price differential was certainly worthwhile. Train your eye and become an experienced and knowledgeable collector and one can make a great collection...with or without provenance.
The netsuke carver Shukosai Anraku presents a bit of a mystery to collectors. His output is relatively large, but biographical details are scant. Reikichi simply lists the details as “Middle. Ivory. Human figures and animals.” Neil Davey, working from M. T. Hindson’s notes, gives a little more information. Detailing Anraku’s work as being from the Osaka school, mid 19th century, Davey notes, “Worked mainly in ivory, the style closely resembling that of his master Doraku.”

A more expansive account is to be found in Frederick Meinertzhagen’s card index held at the British Museum. As such it is perhaps worth including it here:

ANRAKU(-SAI), SHUKOSAI
Pupil of Doraku.
Among his pupils were Anrakusai Kuninobu and Anrakusai Mitsukuni, and perhaps also the better known Kokeisai Sansho.* Others believed to have been pupils include Kwaraku, Sanraku, Sansui and Tsunekazu.
(*Meinertzhagen also accredits other artists as possibly being teachers of Sansho, but offers no convincing backup for any these claims.)

The last four carvers listed as his pupils are relatively unknown names. A few examples of their work are illustrated in George Lazarnick’s Meinertzhagen Card Index (MCI), most notably netsuke by Karaku. It is clear that Meinertzhagen had some difficulty reading the signatures, initially putting them down as To-raku before scoring them out in favour of Brockhaus’s reading of Karaku. A handwritten note added to one card illustrating a carving of a boy pulling an enormous mokugyo records that a similar model by Anraku is in the W.W.Winkworth collection.

Both Meinertzhagen and Davey state that Anraku was the pupil of Doraku. Meinertzhagen places Doraku amongst the three principal carvers of the 19th century Osaka school, after Kaigyokusai and Mitsuhiro. Doraku’s netsuke are clearly more influenced by those of Mitsuhiro than Kaigyokusai, albeit they are clearly his own individual designs. He makes some use of the brown stain used by Mitsuhiro, much reviled by Anne Hull Grundy. Writing in The Antique Collector in 1961, she declares, “Also, Mitsuhiro had much to answer for, although he had managed to control his staining, yet later-on other innumerable fussy carvings made for export were stained a horrible diarrhoea colour.” Anraku also made use of this unloved stain, particularly in his later work.
Although recorded as Doraku’s pupil, Anraku’s work displays great originality, and he is by no means a copyist. That Doraku was his teacher appears to be received information, based on the research of some early writers on netsuke, notably Ueda Reikichi and Meinertzhagen. A study of his body of work, however, seems to suggest that this may be inaccurate, possibly leading to different conclusions as to his position among 19th century Osaka carvers.

Throughout his work there seem to have been certain topics that fascinated him, resulting in several variations on the same theme, almost as if he was challenged to develop an idea to its maximum. One such group of netsuke is a series of ox and boy, referring to the Zen allegory of attaining knowledge. The Zen tradition has ten stages, the early ones referring to the pursuit of the ox, then its capture. The Anraku series of netsuke, such as those illustrated here (Figure 1), show the boy in harmony with the animal as he relaxes on its back with his flute. At one with the beast, he has reached the state of enlightenment known as nirvana. Raymond Bushell, whose collection included several works by Anraku, had two of this theme. One is housed in his bequest to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; another was offered for sale at Christie’s in New York in 1991. All are presented on a rectangular base, most with a key-fret design around the edge. The example offered at Christie’s, and illustrated in Lazarnick on page 295, has the inscription Kaei yo-nen kichi jitsu Shukosai Anraku kore (Made by Shukosai Anraku on a good day in the fourth year of Kaei (1851).) This helps us to date these models to the artist’s early career. The work is attractive and accomplished, the animal’s delicately carved limbs and detailed hairwork perhaps suggesting the influence of Kaigyokusai’s earlier animal netsuke, something which did not feature in Anraku’s main body of work.

One of these accomplished carvings being dated 1851, it would seem improbable to date Anraku’s output to 1850–1880, unless his earlier years had been spent carving in an atelier for a master. A netsuke of a boar encircled by a snake (Figure 3) in fact looks earlier than any recorded work by Doraku. The mellow colour of the ivory and the wear to the hairwork add to the sense of age on this piece, but it is a “classical” model, showing little of the quirkiness associated with the other 19th century masters from Osaka. Like the oxen and models of horses and boars (cf. Meinertzhagen Card Index), the creature’s limbs are delicately modelled, one forelimb daintily bent at the knee.
The signature, in a double-incised rectangular reserve, is unusual, but a similar one can be found on his model of a storyteller illustrated on page 6 of the MCI and on a karashishi on page 4. The signatures are quite formal, lacking the elan of his other work. Another notable classical netsuke signed in this way, within the rectangular reserve, can be seen in the Carré collection sold at Eskenazi in London (Eskenazi, Japanese netsuke from the Carré collection, June 1993, pp. 123 and 184, no 138). The signatures of the ox and boy groups are also neat and restrained, contained within the double-incised border of the whole rectangular base.

All of these examples show a carver who has achieved mastery of his art. The example of the dragon in conch shell (Figure 4) can easily be classified as one of his great works. Given the dated example of the ox and boy, together with the comparable style and signatures of the boar and snake, and together with the carvings illustrated in the MCI, it would be plausible to suggest the years of his accomplished output may well predate 1850. This also raises a question mark over the assertion that he was a pupil of Doraku.

Another subject that seems to have fascinated Anraku is that of Daruma, and several versions exist. Most usually found is the humorous depiction of the Buddhist patriarch, typically styled like a toy, completely wrapped in his robe with just his dismayed face showing. The doleful features have large sad eyes inlaid with horn and a nose with big flaring nostrils accentuated with the use of black stain. The robes are gathered neatly in front, covering his hands, while the smooth rounded base gives it the impression of a round-bottomed daruma.
doll, alluding to the maxim “fall over seven times, get up eight times.” The first example (Figure 5) is by Anraku. The lugubrious eyes, with their heavy eyebrows, look up to the left, while the huge nostrils flare like two black tunnels. Figure 6 is by Mitsuhiro, a model of which several examples by him are known.

Clearly Anraku got his inspiration from Mitsuhiro, but he has treated the subject with an even greater degree of cartoon-like humour. Mitsuhiro’s model is carved as smooth and round as an egg, the folds of the robe falling to the side, while Anraku has used his signature dark stain to emphasise the neatly gathered folds at the front. The perfection of Mitsuhiro’s flawlessly smooth curves, as Paul Moss points out, are an indication of the mastery of his carving. This is not to diminish his comic sense in his treatment of his subject, the downward sweeping line formed by the robe under the forlorn eyes suggesting a downturned mouth and bulging chin.

The second example (Figure 7) moves a little away from the stylised pose. Here the Daruma is seen yawning hugely; his head has emerged from his robes and displays his stubbled chin. This recalls the standing Daruma by Mitsuhiro (Figure 8) illustrated in S. L. Moss’s Japanese Netsuke Serious Art, no 47.

Two further netsuke by Mitsuhiro, which are held in the Raymond and Frances Bushell bequest at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, bear comparison with these examples. The first is a daruma-like Fukurokuju floating on a cloud (Figure 9). He makes another play on this model by creating a “daruma doll” octopus (Figure 10). His humour, as ever, is elegant and exquisite; the creature’s tentacles and its suckers merely suggested by slight folds and bulges.

The signatures of the two Anraku examples shown as Figures 11 and 12 yield more information. The first, carefully incised, bears the date Kaei 3 on a good day 1850, the earliest known dated example of his work. The second (Figure 12) carries a seal under the signature Anraku, also reading Anraku. This huge seal, boldly placed, is perhaps the most beautiful part of the netsuke and very much calls to mind the same device used on the netsuke of Mitsuhiro, here more flamboyantly employed by Anraku.
Advancing beyond the daruma-doll design, the following examples show the artist expanding on his theme. First is a Daruma doll lying on the ring which would secure his *kesa* robe and a *hossu*, used to flick away the dust of temporal life (Figure 13). The second shows the patriarch sleeping soundly with his head resting on his upturned alms bowl, which he uses for a pillow (Figure 14). He sleeps blissfully, his mouth open, so that we can almost hear him snore. The humour of all Anraku’s interpretations is apparent.

The use of smooth ivory, sometimes with brownish stain, and the accentuation of details, together with the use of a seal signature as a feature, are all reminiscent of the work of Mitsuhiro.

The more one looks at Anraku’s work, the clearer his link to Mitsuhiro becomes.

The deceptively simple carving of a stirrup, its shape alluding to that of a duck (Figure 15), was most likely inspired by the Mitsuhiro netsuke of the same subject that is illustrated in Lazarnick’s *Netsuke & Inro Artists* on page 777. It also provides a testament to the fact that Anraku was a technically accomplished carver who did not rely solely on humour to produce desirable netsuke.

Mitsuhiro is known to have died in 1875, but the later carvings of Anraku seem to have moved away from Mitsuhiro’s style of carving to bolder and more individual subject matters. He showed a particular interest in subjects of legend and daring deeds, which may well have reflected the more commercial aspect of netsuke carving after the opening up of Japan around 1868. Foreign visitors brought with them a new market for all craftsmen of the day, while western clothes began to change the role of netsuke in everyday life.

Anraku’s lifetime output was large and all netsuke cannot be covered here. Two examples, however, merit a closer look.

This bold and powerful netsuke depicts an actor in a role (Figure 16). The facial features are exaggerated with a prominent chin, cheeks and nose, the eyebrows and beard stained black and the fierce eyes inlaid with horn. The subject was identified by colleagues in the print field as Benkei from his ruffian-like features and towel knotted
around his head together with his formal kamishimo and long hakama trousers of a courtier. Originally from the bunraku puppet play Gosho zakura horikawa no youchi, it was adapted in 1762 as a kabuki production in Osaka. It shows a less well-known episode in the life of Benkei, known as Benkei joshi (Benkei’s secret daughter).

The story centres around Yoritomo, leader of the Genji clan, whose younger brother, Yoshitsune (Benkei’s master), is married to Kyo-no-Kimi, a samurai daughter of the Taira clan. Suspecting Yoshitsune might defect and fight against him, Yoritomo demands that Benkei bring him the head of Kyo-no-Kimi as proof of his loyalty. Obliged to obey, Benkei goes to the house where his master’s wife is staying and tells the owner of the house, Jiju Taro, the nature of his terrible mission.

Both agree that they cannot kill the master’s wife and decide that a substitute must be found. They withdraw to discuss the matter, leaving a lady-in-waiting on the stage alone. She is joined by her mother, Osawa. Jiju Taro re-enters the room and asks the girl if she would offer her head in the stead of her mistress, which the wretched girl dutifully agrees to do. Her mother, Osawa, protests that her daughter cannot die until she has met her father. Eighteen years earlier she had spent a night of passion with a man without seeing his face. As the moon rose they heard voices and her lover fled, leaving behind just a torn red sleeve, and it was on this night that her daughter had been conceived. Undeterred by this tale, Jiju Taro draws his sword and lunges at the girl who is backed into a screen by her mother, only to be stabbed from behind through the screen. As she lies dying Benkei enters the room with his bloody sword, showing the other red sleeve that his mother had sewn into his robe. The tragic girl dies without knowing her own father had killed her, and Benkei declares he could never have done it if he had met her as his daughter—and cries for the first time in his life. Perhaps this scene shows Benkei listening behind the screen, preparing himself for his terrible deed.

Anraku’s masterpiece, perhaps, is his carving of Kyumonju Shishin from the Suikoden series that was sold at Sotheby’s in New York in 1999 for the aggregate price of
$19,550, which may well still be a record for this artist (Figure 17).

The conclusion of this look at Anraku’s netsuke seems to identify him primarily as a follower of Mitsuhiro, who more likely worked alongside Doraku. By 1850, when he first dates a netsuke, Anraku was clearly already an accomplished carver, though when he began signing in his own name is not clear. His confidence and individuality are reflected in his work. Towards his later years, most likely as a result of the changing commercial influences of a Japan opened up to western trade, his subjects became more detailed and dramatic. That growing commercialism should not, however, detract from his merit as a skilled and individual carver whose work deserves a second look.
Masasada (Masakazu)

Jay Hopkins
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Next in my small series of rarely seen and under-appreciated artists, we will consider a man whom I have known as Masasada. I have been told that the more correct reading of this signature is Masakazu.¹ This was also noted by Lazarnick,² but since I have always known him as Masasada, and if the reader will humor me, I will continue to use that name in this article. Moreover, this will allow us to distinguish our man from the myriad (at least ten) other carvers who also use the name Masakazu but with the more common kanji.

I initially became aware of this carver when I first obtained my copy of the Meinertzhagen Card Index (MCI) and, as I am sure was true for many collectors going through this two volume treasure house of information, it was an extraordinary experience. There were revelations on almost every page, and it was a distinct pleasure and quite instructive experience to see multiple pieces by the same artists grouped together and augmented by the author’s brilliant insights. In the process, I occasionally encountered an artist totally unknown to me but whose work captured my imagination. Masasada was one of those artists, and I distinctly remember the page in the MCI³ where three pieces by this artist were depicted. I remember thinking at the time that this is a very unusual and appealing artist and that I would love to actually see his work in person. I had my opportunity years later when the wonderful shishi pictured in the bottom right of page 430 (Figure 1) came available at a European auction and I was the successful bidder. It is a wonderful little carving, very original and innovative (Figure 2), depicting a shishi in richly stained and polished boxwood. The shishi is probably the most common animal form in the netsuke world, but our man has managed to come up with a very original version. The shishi stands with his feet together and his head turned back to create the necessary compactness. The piece is powerfully

¹. Yukari Yoshida. Personal communication
². George Lazarnick, editor. Meinertzhagen Card Index, p. 430
³. Ibid, p. 430
framed by flamboyant curls in the tail and mane, and the face demonstrates the usual power and strength of the beast. The backbone and ribs are clearly delineated. There is the usual loose ball in the mouth. Perhaps the most innovative feature is the artist’s use of ivory-inlaid claws for the paws (Figure 2d), thus creating a very distinctive and appealing form. My good friend Teddy Hahn calls the piece “toenails.”

For a long time that was the only piece by Masasada that I had knowingly seen. But then a little over a year ago I came into the possession of the crouching Raiden (bottom left, p. 430) (Figure 3). Again, this is a very distinctive depiction of a subject that is occasionally seen. The figure is carved in deeply stained boxwood. He is depicted with his thunder drum on his back, squatting and holding his wooden geta in his hands. His left foot and right hand cover one geta while the other is held in his left hand. (I have always thought that the effect of Raiden holding his geta in front of him is to create thunder, as he is the storm god.) There is strong musculature and well-defined anatomy. Again,
our artist shows his originality with a very animated face highlighted by ivory-inlaid teeth, fangs, horns, and black horn-inlaid eye pupils and studs on the drum. Despite the powerful muscular body and robust subject matter, the artist gives his Raiden a somewhat “Sad Sack” look that adds a humorous touch.

The question of design models or inspiration for netsuke carvers has long been pondered. The marvelous research team of Heinz and Else Kress has long been successful at discovering design motifs for inro from early and obscure Chinese and, rarely, Japanese sources. The same cannot be said to be true in the netsuke world. With the exception of a few design books done by the artists themselves (probably to be used by the workshop), very little has been discovered. Perhaps the inspiration for Masasada’s carvings came from the world of *otsu-e* (folk paintings dating as far back as the 17th century). Figure 4 shows an early 18th century *otsu-e*, which is described as a “praying devil” or *Oni no Nembutsu*. The impressive dentition of a full set of teeth augmented by two large fangs is common in *otsu-e*, but very rare in netsuke. Our Masasada Raiden in Figure 3 possesses this very set. Moreover, our next piece (Figure 5) appears to be the same or similar “praying devil” depicted in the *otsu-e* painting. Finally, both “good” and “evil” spirits are common subject matter for *otsu-e*. Good spirits are commonly depicted as *tengu*, the subject matter of our last two netsuke (Figures 6 and 7).

Then shortly thereafter, much to my surprise, the third piece from that page surfaced (described in the *MCI* as “oni bozu” or oni priest). It became available at a Christie’s–South Kensington auction. Because of a small glitch I was not successful at the auction but was fortunate enough to obtain the piece at a later date. In the *MCI* he is described as “Oni bozu” or an oni posing as a priest. In Edmunds, they are described as “begging monks” holding the tablets recording the names of the dead or an account book listing donations to temples. Here the oni is depicted holding an account book in one hand; his large straw hat, strung over his back, is held in the other hand. Instead of

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5. Ibid, p. 230
7. Else Kress. Personal communication
the tiger skin pants we normally see, this oni has a tiger skin cloak and the face has this same Sad Sack countenance. Again, inlays are beautifully used for effect; here we have ivory fangs and pewter eyes and horns. Both of these latter inlays have probably been replaced, but they are effective and were present some sixty years ago when Meinertzhagen made his card.

To my continued astonishment, a very short time later a hatching tengu signed Masasada came up at a European auction (Figure 6). It had very distinctive cracks in the egg and the very unusual feature of the toes of one foot seen poking through a hole in the egg. I was not successful in my bid, but it did allow me to identify an unsigned piece that I already owned (Figure 7), again of a hatching tengu in boxwood but this time with a very original and possibly unique form of an additional smaller egg hatching a baby tengu. My piece is unsigned, but when one compares the cracks in the egg and the very distinctive protrusion of toes through a small hole in the egg, the attribution is quite believable. Moreover, the treatment of the face and wing of the tengu is quite similar.

Thus, after a long dry spell when I had despaired of ever seeing another piece by the artist, a group of pieces surfaced in short order, which allows us to study the work of the artist. I don’t believe he was a truly gifted artist, but what he lacks in technical fineness, to me, he more than makes up in conceptual originality and whimsical humor. Despite the fact that his works are not uncommon subjects, he manages to come up with an original twist that makes the pieces his own. They are very distinctive in their details, and I think a little bit of study should allow us to recognize the hand of this artist in other unsigned pieces.

A final question would arise as to where and when he carved. I think a good case can be made for a Tamba origin. He uses the same kanji for “Masa” that Toyomasa (and very few others) uses. The hatching tengu is a very common Tamba model. The himotoshi (paired, middle-sized, and asymmetric) are similar to but slightly larger than those usually

![5. Standing oni with account book, 5.6 cm (h)](image)

![6a. Hatching tengu. Courtesy Lempertz Auction, December 2009, lot 870](image)

![6b. Signature on tengu](image)
used by the Toyomasa carvers. I think it is possible that he could predate Toyomasa who allegedly began carving in 1804\(^8\) and assumed the art name Toyomasa in 1809 at age 37.\(^9\) To me it’s easy to see his eye inlays being refined by Toyomasa to the classic golden brown horn and black pupils that are so distinctive for this school. I fully admit that this is total speculation. It is also quite possible that Masasada could be a contemporary of Toyomasa or even from a totally different district. Moreover, the distinct similarities noted with otsu-e are fascinating and probably deserve further exploration, whether the inspiration was from otsu-e themselves or from the same creative tradition that inspired otsu-e. To me, Masasada is a very innovative and creative artist, well worth studying, and I will look forward to further insights by other collectors or interested parties. •

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On Tuesday, November 6, 2007, at Bonhams, London, where Susannah Yip had recently been appointed head of the Japanese Art Department, Neil Davey conducted his first auction at Bonhams. The sale was very enjoyable. My first successful bid was for Lot 82, an ivory tennin signed Masatsugu.

My excitement increased when Lot 113 was offered: two early 19th century wood figures. The subject of the first was Choun with Ryubi’s son Ato in his arms, signed Masatomo. The second was a very large unsigned shishi. I felt very fortunate to acquire this lot.

Like many Japanese subjects, Choun had his origins in Chinese history. He was born around 168 A.D. in Zhending. His Chinese name was Zhao Yun or Chao, and his honorific name was Zilong. He was a general at the time of the Three Kingdoms. He began his military career in 191 A.D. as commander of a small militia, but he transferred his allegiance to Liu Bei who held the rank of major general under Gongsun Zan. Liu Bei made Zhao Yun, who excelled as a horseman, commander of several thousand cavalrmen. In this position he fought for Liu Bei in the battle of Bowang against forces commanded by a general of Cao Cao.

The most important event in the life of Zhao was the Battle of Changban where he rescued the family of Liu Bei and was promoted to General of the Standard. There is a painting in the Summer Palace in Beijing depicting Zhao Yun on a white horse at the Battle of Changban. A novel, Romance of the Kingdom by Luo Guanzhong, gives a detailed description of the exploits of Zhao Yun during the Battle of Changban and his remarkable rescue of the wife and son of Liu Bei.

My netsuke depicting Choun is rounded, with a diameter of 6 cm. The piece is darkly stained, with the more exposed areas showing the lighter color of the wood. The warrior, his horse, and the waves through which he is leaping are finely-carved, as are his helmet and full armor. With his left hand, he clutches the baby to his breast, and in his right hand he holds a halberd. The saddle and stirrups with the rider’s shoes are also finely detailed. There is even a design on the reins and a little ensign on the halberd. The tail of the horse amid the waves completes the rounded effect of this katabori netsuke.

There are some six cavities in the figure that might have been utilized as himotoshi. All protruding points in the netsuke show evidence of wear, including Choun’s face, the horse’s nose and legs, and the armor in which the horse is clad. I have never before seen a netsuke depicting so complete a figure of a warrior and horse struggling through waves.

In an oval reserve on the backside, the signature Masatomo appears in an oval reserve. It only remains to determine which Masatomo carved this notable netsuke and where he might have lived.
The two primary nuts used by netsuke carvers were walnut (Jp. *kurumi*) and vegetable ivory. Though it is unclear why artists chose to work in these materials, one can reasonably assume that some of the factors that led to the use of antler, narwhal, and other unusual materials might also have prompted them to explore the use of nuts. The challenge of creating a netsuke from a material that posed limitations on the carver may have appealed to some. Others may have relished the opportunity to create a work from a less commonly utilized material. Tagua may have been seen as exotic, much like other imported goods and materials. As is the case with narwhal, many netsuke made of nut shells and most pre-contemporary netsuke made of vegetable ivory exhibit remnants of the textured outer surface by which the material can be identified. (Figures 1 and 2)

Unlike Kokusai who gained fame for his creative use of antler or artists of the Iwami region who were known for their use of boar tusks, there were no carvers who specialized in walnut or vegetable ivory netsuke *per se*. Reikichi mentions only three as having worked with nuts—Chikusen,
A fine ivory netsuke of a baying goat  
Signed Mitsuharu, late 18th century  
4.8 cm high

XANADU GALLERY
Marsha Vargas Handley

Black persimmon netsuke of a boar signed Minko  
18th century. Length: 1-7/8” (4.8 cm)

140 Maiden Lane, San Francisco, CA 94108 USA  
Tel: 415.392.9999 / Fax 415.984.5856  
mvargas@xanadugallery.us
To be exhibited November 1st to 30th 2010 and to be published in a larger than usual fully illustrated catalogue, “They are all fire, and Every One Doth Shine”, approximately 440 pages.

**Shibata ZESHIN (1807–1891)**
A 4-case *kinji* ground inrō, a large *ishime* maple leaf to the face, the reverse with a maple seedling and three ants
Scratched rat’s tooth signature beneath: Zeshin, *circa* 1870
Height: 2 15/16 in, 7.4 cm.


The ojime is of amber with a fossilised ant inclusion, applied with three more recent gold lacquer ants
SHŪRAKU
An ivory netsuke of an ascetic, or drunkard, or actor, or crane-dancer, or foreigner, or any combination of the above. Scratched signature on the back of the loincloth: Shūraku,
circa 1870
Height: 4 ½ in, 11.4 cm
Illustrated: George Lazarnick, “Netsuke & Inro Artists and How to Read Their Signatures”, p. 1010.

ISSEKI (mid to late nineteenth century)
A woven rattan musozutsu pipe case inlaid in multiple inlays with a fox scholar seated at his desk by a window, studying. Gold mount
Signed: Isseki, circa 1870.
Length: 8 in, 20.2 cm.
Masahide, and Suikoku—though he fails to specify what kind of nuts each used.\(^1\) Carvers known to have produced a noteworthy body of work in walnut shell include Seimin, Kōzan, and Hidari Issan. Numerous nutshell carvings are likewise signed Kokusui and Masanao. (Figure 3)

Frederick Meinertzhagen seems to have done some research on nuts used in netsuke. In addition to listing walnut or vegetable ivory among the materials used by a number of carvers, he offers some interesting thoughts regarding a few netsuke carved from vegetable ivory.\(^2\) Though some of his attributions are questionable and at times inconsistent, his notes are among the most thorough attempts at providing netsuke collectors with information on this little understood category of netsuke production.

In contrast to Meinertzhagen’s apparent interest in these carvings, netsuke created from walnut shells have not been highly regarded by collectors; nor have they been given equal treatment by dealers and auction houses as compared to works in ivory, wood, or antler. A number of factors may have contributed to this. Their size and shape, prescribed by the natural material, may have led people to perceive them as less creative or artistic. Their late date, too, may have turned some collectors away. They are also susceptible to damage, which may have placed them in the same category as ceramic netsuke, another type of netsuke that have traditionally been among the least favored by collectors.

Though the scarcity of information to be found in netsuke literature may suggest that walnut shell netsuke were rare, that was not the case. The infrequency with which collectors today encounter these works is likely due to their tendency to damage easily,
resulting in a low survival rate. Many such carvings suffered the effects of wear and use, and in damaged condition it is unlikely that collectors would have made much effort to collect or preserve them.

There are many varieties of walnuts, and discerning exactly which type of walnut shell was used in the execution of a particular netsuke is not easy. What is offered below is merely a number of reasonable options based primarily on the physical characteristics of netsuke as compared to various nut shells and the likelihood of particular types of nuts having been available to Japanese netsuke carvers in the 19th and early 20th century.

Size, shape, and shell texture are the most distinguishing clues to the type of nuts used by Japanese netsuke carvers. The availability of material, however, is another factor to be considered. It may be that carvers used whatever nuts were readily available, in which case native varieties were likely used most often. Imported nuts that a carver may have acquired periodically may account for netsuke of unusual shape or bearing uncharacteristic traits. Figure 4 shows a three-sided nut shell from which a netsuke was carved. According to Almeda Lambert’s 1899 volume on nuts, walnuts coming from South America “have three valves instead of two.”

The physical characteristics of the walnut shell played a crucial role in carvers’ designs and the carving methods they employed. Though exceptions can be found, the shell’s hollow interior made it difficult for carvers to execute katabori netsuke and led them instead to focus on surface treatments. With its hollow center the walnut shell was naturally suited to being transformed into ryusa netsuke. Groupings of objects were a favored motif by which carvers utilized the hollow inner cavity. Masks, zodiac animals, and other items that were grouped closely together were separated by tiny spaces that added a sense of dimension to a design that was otherwise primarily a surface relief carving.

Carvers who did not take advantage of the hollow center designed their works to best employ the material in other ways. Many chose motifs ideally suited to the shape of the nut. The pointed end of the shell could serve as the beak of a bird (Figure 1) and the overall egg-like shape lent itself well to the popular motif commonly termed “rolie-polie Daruma.” (Figure 5)

In shape, the Japanese walnut (Juglans ailantifolia or J. sieboldiana) resembles a teardrop, with one end narrowing

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6. Group of Masks and Fans. Japan, 19th century. Nut shell. 1 ½ x 1 ¼ x 1 in. (3.8 x 2.9 x 2.5 cm). Gift of Jacques R. Simon. Pacific Asia Museum Collection. 2004.10.74
to a point. This natural form is often discernable in walnut shell netsuke. (Figure 6) The shell of the Japanese walnut is said to be thick, providing more sufficient material for the carver to utilize than other more thin-shelled varieties. Its shell is also less rough than that of other varieties. Moreover, as an indigenous species it would likely have been easy to acquire by carvers.

A cultivar of the Japanese walnut is the heartnut (Juglans ailantifolia var. cordiformis). Like the Japanese walnut, it has a thick shell. As its name implies, the nut and shell are shaped to varying degrees like a heart. (Figure 7) The shell is slightly flattened, giving the form a sense of front and back rather than being completely round.

The very similar reddish-brown coloring and sheen consistently found on many nut shell netsuke suggest that they may have been lacquered. Indeed, pictured in the catalog of the collection of Dr. Rino Tamanini is a netsuke catalogued as a “red-lacquered natural walnut.” I took two nutshell netsuke (Figures 1 and 4) to the head of the Objects Conservation Lab at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for examination. After viewing them under a high-powered microscope, he assured me they were not lacquered. Rather, he surmised their coloring and sheen were the result of staining and many years of handling and use. To definitively determine if any substance has been added to the surface of the carvings would entail removing a sample of the material, something we were not prepared to do.

Moving away from walnuts, Alain Ducros claims that the seed of the candlenut tree (Aleurites moluccana) was used in netsuke production. The seed of this tropical plant is very oily and when lit produces a good light. It is for this important resource that the tree
was named and which led to its widespread distribution throughout Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Pacific islands, and Hawaii. As candlenuts were an important resource in the region through which goods traveled en route to Japan, they may have been accessible to netsuke carvers via contact with foreigner traders. In contrast to nutshells that taper to a point at one end, the shape of the candlenut shell is relatively full, suggesting it may have been the material used in the making of netsuke that appear quite round in shape. Contemporary netsuke carver Anthony Towne has worked with these shells, which he says are oily, textured, and hard.6

Other tropical plants provided material suitable for carving as well. The term “vegetable ivory” is an informal categorization of numerous types of palm seeds that were used worldwide primarily during the 19th century and early 20th century in the production of small carved or turned objects, such as buttons, dice, chess pieces, and netsuke. Though some Japanese carvers produced multiple works using vegetable ivory, no carver garnered a reputation for its use. Meinertzhagen states, however, that Masaharu’s “signature is found more often than any other on netsuke carved from this substance.”7 Likewise, there exist a number of works signed Gyokkō.

In their natural state palm ivories can be easily differentiated. However, once they are carved they are often difficult or, as my research has taught me, nearly impossible to discern from one another. In netsuke literature, conflicting identifications and sparse information suggest that few collectors had a clear understanding of the different varieties of vegetable ivory. In many cases it is likely that authors simply repeated information from earlier published descriptions of vegetable ivory netsuke.

The use of different names for these palms in the regions from which these nuts originated did not make collectors’ attempts at identification any easier. Tagua is the native name given to a number of species in the genera Phytelephas and Aphandra which are indigenous to Central and South America. Corozo is a name used by local inhabitants for a number of different species from several genera that grow in Mexico and throughout Central and South America. Though the terms tagua and corozo have been used interchangeably in netsuke attributions, the two seeds do not come from the same plant. According to the native names given to various palms, none of the local populations used both terms to identify a single palm.8 The interchangeable use of the terms tagua and corozo so prevalent today may have originated with the discovery and use of these nuts by Europeans. Arriving in ships from South America, it may be that the different plants and their seeds were thought to be one and the same. The 19th century naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace records such an instance. In explaining the misnaming of various fiber-producing palms, Wallace refers to “two distinct trees producing a similar material in different localities” and continues, “the two having been brought to England under the same name and from not very distance ports of the same country, were naturally supposed to be produced by the same tree.”9

Complicating collectors’ attempts at accurate identification were repeated revisions to the information put forth by scientists. Many palms and other plants were first documented by Europeans in the 19th century. However, as research continued
throughout the 19th and 20th century (and still today), classifications of many plants and their scientific names have changed. Even today not all publications use the same names.

Vegetable ivory comes from a number of different tropical palms. The primary source of this material for carving and the manufacture of small objects was *Phytelephas macrocarpa*, a palm native to South America and known by the native inhabitants of the region principally as tagua. Another principle source of vegetable ivory are the seeds of several species of the *Metroxylon* genus. These palms can be found growing throughout Southeast Asia and on a number of islands in the Pacific, including the Caroline, Solomon, and Marshall Islands. The seed of the *Metroxylon amicarum* is most familiarly known as Caroline ivory nut. It is different from tagua.

There are no vegetable ivory producing palms native to Japan. Carvers who created netsuke from this material likely acquired it through contact with foreigners who had passed through ports that traded in such goods. A 2006 article in the journal *Environmental Archaeology* discusses palm ivory as it was used in the Netherlands from the 17th to the 20th century. The article cites numerous shipwrecks and excavations from which whole palm nuts as well as small objects made from vegetable ivory were discovered. Most of the objects unearthed date from the 18th and 19th century and were made from Central or South America species. The evidence presented suggests that palm nuts may have been acquired by some Dutch as curiosities and that the material played a role in Dutch manufacturing and trade. Considering the information put forth in this article and bearing in mind the relationship between the Dutch and Japanese, it seems plausible that some vegetable ivory made its way to Japan via the Dutch.

As is the case with walnuts, the physical characteristics of vegetable ivory played a crucial role in carvers’ designs and carving treatments. Tagua nuts have an irregularly-shaped void in the center from which cracks typically radiate. Compared to the walnut, however, there is much more solid material from which carvers tended to create solid and compact forms. The most popular of these designs were heads or faces, in particular those of Okame and Hyottoko masks. (Figure 2) Typically the face or mask is sculpted on one side with the reverse retaining the course husk of the nut.

A couple of other physical traits can be seen on most tagua netsuke. (Figure 8) These nuts vary in size and shape. They may be almost spherical, egg-shaped, or even somewhat triangular. In most cases at least one side has a flattened section which the netsuke carver invariably positioned out of view. Each tagua nut also has a small hole at its base. On many netsuke this hole has been filled. On others it has been left untouched. Some carvers used the existing hole to accommodate the cord. Though tagua limited carvers to some degree with its size, shape, and unusable center, its hardness and texture made it a good carving material. It also took stains and dyes well and could be polished to a smooth and lustrous sheen.

Tagua nut netsuke can be found in a range of hues from a light cream color reminiscent of elephant ivory to a much darker golden-brown tone. The darker color one finds with many tagua netsuke may be the result of staining or darkening with age. Additionally, not all of these nuts are white or cream-colored when they are first carved.
A wood turner who frequently uses vegetable ivory in his work informed me that he often finds, as he begins cutting into the nut, that the material is not ivory-colored but rather a darker tan color.

Though tagua seems to have been the most popular palm ivory for netsuke production, some other varieties of tropical palm seeds also appear in netsuke literature. In his card index, Meinertzhagen pictures a netsuke he describes as coquilla nut. According to the University of Melbourne’s plant names web page, coquilla nut is among the many names by which the Brazilian palm *Attalea funifera* is known. Rijkelijskhuizen and van Wijngaarden-Bakker, in their study of palm nut use in the Netherlands, note that *Attalea funifera* was “known in England under the name ‘coquilla nut.’” This same netsuke was apparently later owned by Mark Hindson and appears in Neil Davey’s catalog of that collection where it is described as “Cahoon Nut.” The cohune palm (*Attalea cohune*) is native to Southern Mexico and Central America and is called corozo by natives of the region. (Though he cites “two small cord-holes,” Davey observes that “this amusing carving is probably neither a Netsuke nor Japanese.”)

Alain Ducros mentions “another vegetable ivory, the colococcus ivory nut growing in the Far East.” *Coelococcus amicarum* and *Coelococcus carolinensis* are two previously used names for the species identified today as *Metroxylon amicarum*. The seeds of this plant produce a “hard kernel” which “has been used as a vegetable ivory for carving and to make buttons.” More commonly known as Caroline ivory nut palm, this plant grows on several islands in the Pacific and as Alain states it “is different from the Corozo.”

Betel nut is a material that appears with some frequency in descriptions of vegetable ivory netsuke. Meinertzhagen’s card index includes a netsuke made from material identified as *Phytlephas macrocarpa* with an added notation identifying it as “? betelnut.” The question mark preceding this later attribution, however, suggests that Meinertzhagen was, like so many others, unsure of the correct names of the various vegetable ivories used in netsuke. Indeed, the drawing of the netsuke being described shows a tagua rather than a betel nut carving. Betel nuts (*Areca catechu*) have a very distinctive pattern of contrasting white and rust-brown material that runs in jagged lines throughout the entire nut. (Figure 9) Today it is a popular material for beads and is frequently used by ornamental wood turners.

The use of nuts by Japanese netsuke carvers took place primarily in the 19th century. As the century progressed, however, the quality of nut shell and vegetable ivory netsuke diminished.
Japanese carvers, eager to meet the demands of a swelling tourist trade, began creating less refined and artistic carvings. Vegetable ivory was a favorite material of carvers eager to attract tourist dollars while the use of walnut shells by netsuke carvers waned during the latter part of the 19th century. The increased use of the material in creating netsuke for the tourist market gave palm ivory a reputation for being cheap. While they may have met the needs of Western souvenir-hunters these uncreative and hastily produced items fell far below the standard set by earlier highly-skilled Japanese netsuke carvers.

As the 20th century progressed, vegetable ivory found an even greater market as tourism increased and the export trade expanded and with the development of a netsuke industry outside of Japan. Carvings sold as netsuke were increasingly being produced by mass-production means using vegetable ivory as an inexpensive and readily available simulant to elephant ivory. These crude factory-generated carvings further tainted the material in the minds of true netsuke connoisseurs. Vegetable ivory was increasingly seen as suitable only for souvenirs, reproductions, or fakes.

Due no doubt to continuing restrictions on the importation and use of elephant ivory, vegetable ivory continued to be used by carvers throughout the 20th century. Modern and contemporary netsuke carvers have done much to repair vegetable ivory’s negative reputation. Figure 10 shows an atypical treatment dating from the first half of the 20th century in which vegetable and elephant ivory were combined. Examination of the piece reveals a number of qualities that suggest the carver had carefully considered both his choice of materials and how they would work together as a whole. The bowl in which the carved nut rests was carved specifically for the form that it was to hold, its shape and undulating rim precisely executed to accommodate the center carving.

The finely carved inset himotoshi is placed behind the cat’s head, fitting into the natural hollow space of the palm nut. The color contrast between the two ivories and the inlaid eyes attest to the attention to detail and skillful execution put into this carving.

The artist who carved this manjū netsuke remains anonymous, but it is clear from this example that vegetable ivory was being reconsidered by carvers producing quality netsuke. Today, a number of netsuke carvers have created miniature masterpieces of vegetable ivory that can truly make one appreciate this hitherto maligned material. Other contemporary carvers have likewise kept alive the art of carving walnut shells.

Notes
Rare triple-functions Yatate
(Yatate, ruler and tracing cord)
Metal. 23.8 cm. Meiji period.

SAGEMONOYA Yabane Co. Ltd., Yotsuya 4-28-20-704, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0004, Japan
tel: (+81) 3 3352 6286      fax: (+81) 3 3356 6581
web site: www.netsuke.com   e-mail: info@sagemonoya.jp
Excavated from *daimyō* graves, *inrō* by Tsuchida Sōetsu and Tōyō

Part I

Lecture July 2009 in New York

by Else and Heinz Kress

In 1982, some of the eighty graves in the Saikai-ji temple graveyard in Tokyo Minato-ku had to be relocated because of road construction. Among them were also the tombs of a *daimyō* family. The Saikai-ji temple was founded by the first generation of the noble MAKINO family, and the tombs of fourteen generations of this family are found there. From 1616 to 1868, the MAKINO were *daimyō* of the Nagaoka domain in Echigo Province (today part of Niigata Prefecture) in north-west Japan, facing the Sea of Japan.

When approached by a team of researchers from leading Japanese universities, the MAKINO family agreed to a project of documenting the excavation in order to learn more about Edo-period burial customs. An illustrated excavation report was then published in 1986 by the universities involved and the Minato Ward Board of Education. The book, which was not for sale, was obtained thanks to the help of KUMIKO Dōri, curator at the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, which owns the CASAL Collection, the largest collection of Japanese lacquer in the world.
Before we saw the illustrations in this MAKINO Excavation Report, we were unaware that it was the custom in Edo-period Japan to place coins as offerings in graves, together with some of the deceased’s favourite personal possessions. The practice had become so widespread that an ordinance, the Six Sen Prohibition Law (六道銭の禁止 Roku-dō-sen no kinshi), was enacted in 1742 forbidding it. This law stated that ‘the custom of placing gold, silver, or other coins into coffins as an offering has to be deemed useless. As it has become a common practice, it is henceforth the duty of temples and shrines to stop this custom.’


Zeni, or sen (one one-hundredth of a yen), was also another word for coins. In this instance, it refers to small copper coins which almost anyone could afford to place in a grave. Daimyō were supposed to support the law, but in two of the excavated graves some gold coins were found.

A surprising number of objects were discovered in the MAKINO tombs: zushi shrines, lacquer suzuribako and other boxes, mirrors in lacquer cases, tobacco pipes of silver metal, lacquer sake cups, personal utensils such as scissors and tweezers, and small cosmetic boxes originally containing rouge or ointment. Adults’ as well as children’s graves might contain dolls, either figures of musicians and dancers, or toys.

In the grave of Lord MAKINO TADAHIRO (牧野 忠寛), who died in 1766 at age twenty-five, a total of nine inro and two netsuke were found. Lord TADAHIRO had been daimyō from 1755 to 1766. By 1764, two years before his death, his health was already failing, and it is noted in the family records that he was unable to attend the shōgun’s audiences at the castle.

Today, years after the excavation, documentation, and restoration, most objects from the MAKINO daimyō graves are stored in Niigata, at the Historical Laboratory of the Nagaoka Municipal Science Museum in Nagaoka City. In 2005, we arranged to travel to Niigata together with KUMIKO DOI, who was interested in seeing the inrō and getting copies of the photographs we were taking.

From the following photographs of display cabinets placed in the lobby of the Historical Laboratory, one can see how some of the objects were exhibited when we arrived there.

Fig. 3: Glass case in the Nagaoka Municipal Science Museum. A group of seven inrō by TSUCHIDA SOETSU and TOYO from the grave of the eighth Lord MAKINO TADAHIRO, daimyō from 1755 to 1766.
These were the only objects on display. Most items are stored in boxes in acclimatized rooms. They were brought to the room where we worked and taken back immediately after we had photographed them. The curator and researcher, Mr Hiroi Tsukuru, was most kind and helpful.

A total of thirty-four items, among them nine inro, five ojime, and two netsuke were found in the grave of Lord Makino Tadahiro (1741–1766), head of the Makino family and eighth daimyō of Nagaoka domain.

Four of his inro are signed by Tsuchida Sōetsu, another three are signed by Tōyō. Their provenience assures that the signatures on these inro are genuine. Considering that until 1982 they were stored inside a grave for more than two hundred years, their condition is extremely good.

Lord Tadahiro was an illegitimate child, born of a concubine of the fifth daimyō, who had no legitimate sons, and who had resigned his position due to chronic illness. Both the sixth and the seventh daimyō had been adopted as his successors, but spent only a very short time at the Makino residence in Edo. The sixth daimyō died in 1748 at the age of nineteen, and the seventh also died very young, in 1755, at the age of twenty-one. No inro or netsuke were found in their graves.

Within three weeks of the death of the seventh daimyō, Tadahiro was officially adopted and installed as the new head of the Makino family. At the age of fourteen he became the eighth daimyō. When he suddenly rose from his previous position as an insignificant illegitimate son, he must have needed clothes and accessories befitting his new rank. One would imagine that it was difficult for a fourteen-year-old boy to adapt to this new life, to know the rules when participating in formal ceremonies or attending audiences at the castle in Edo. Nevertheless, it seems that he enjoyed his new position, at least when it came to purchasing some suitable inro.

His choice of inro indicates that he liked large patterns, colourful lacquer grounds, and showy objects with a bold decoration, all made for him by famous lacquer masters.

We shall examine the nine inro hidden from 1766 to 1982 in Lord Tadahiro’s grave, followed by similar un-excavated, non-daimyō inro found in our archives.
The first four *inrō* shown here are by Tsuchida Sōetsu.

Fig. 6: An *inrō* with a dark red lacquer ground (*urumi-nuri*), simply decorated with a bundle of edible fern sprouts in shades of gold and silver *hiramakie* and *takamakie*. Except for some small damage at the case edges and some very slight running of the silver lacquer along the perimeters of the design elements, the *inrō* is almost in mint condition. The interiors are of *nashiji* and *fundame*. Measurements: 6.6 x 7.0 x 2.3 cm

Fig. 7: Signed Tsuchida Sōetsu at the bottom in gold lacquer, with a gold lacquer *kaō*, and inscribed *Gyō-nen hachi-jū-ichi-sai* (currently eighty-one years old). (*Inrō* Archive number 19862.1004 Makino)

Fig. 8: An *inrō* with a dense *nashiji* ground, decorated in gold and silver *hiramakie* and *takamakie* with a bold design of large *kiri mon*. The base and lacquer decoration are in very good condition. Today the interiors are of brown lacquer only. Measurements: 6.4 x 7.6 x 2.0 cm

Fig. 9: This *inrō* was made one year later than the one seen in Fig. 6. It is signed Tsuchida Sōetsu at the bottom in gold lacquer, with gold lacquer *kaō*, and inscribed *Gyō-nen hachi-jū-ni-sai* (currently eighty-two years old). (*Inrō* Archive number 19862.1008 Makino)
Fig. 10: An inrō with a dark red lacquer ground, decorated in gold and silver hiramakie and takamakie with two standing cranes. The crane depicted in silver lacquer is about to peck at the ground, the other, in gold lacquer, is preening its feathers. At the legs and elsewhere the lacquer outlines are distorted, otherwise the condition of the inrō base and lacquer decoration are very good. The interiors are of nashiji and fundame. Measurements: 9.3 x 4.7 x 2.1 cm

Fig. 11: This inrō, as well as the next one, are signed Tsuchida Soetsu at the bottom in gold lacquer, with gold lacquer kaō, and inscribed Gyō-nen hachi-jū-yon-sai (currently eighty-four years old). (Inrō Archive number 19862.1010 MAKINO)

Fig. 12: An inrō with rounded top and bottom cases. The black lacquer ground is intentionally rubbed around the decorative elements and case edges and replaced with rich gyobu-nashiji. The result must have been a very clever compromise between a subdued shibui style, seemingly old and worn, and the rich gloss of gold flakes on a gold-powder ground. Three butterflies are depicted, two smaller ones flying towards each other on one side, and a large one flying up on the reverse. The outlines of the large butterfly’s wings are clearly visible, but the original inlays are lost. Red ‘guidelines’ are drawn inside the wings on the black lacquer base, indicating the precise placement of the shell inlays. The butterflies were built up in strong gold and silver hiramakie and takamakie with some gold kirikane. Except for the loss of the inlays, the condition of the inrō base and lacquer decoration are very good. The interiors are of nashiji and fundame. Measurements: 8.4 x 5.5 x 2.9 cm

Fig. 13: Signed Tsuchida Soetsu at the bottom in gold lacquer, with gold lacquer kaō, and inscribed Gyō-nen hachi-jū-yon-sai (currently eighty-four years old). (Inrō Archive number 19862.1009 MAKINO)
A number of similar inrō by Tsuchida Sōetsu are known and will be discussed later. First we shall continue with the three inrō bearing the Tōyō signature.

This inrō is not in quite as good a condition as those made by Tsuchida Sōetsu, but this may due to its chance placement inside the grave.
Sometimes a hidden meaning can be found in seemingly simple designs, but here, the absence of any further ornamentation and the large size of the rabbits indicates that this is one of the Zodiac inro that were only worn in corresponding years. Lord TADAHIRO became daimyō in 1755. He may have bought this inro in 1759, which was a Year of the Rabbit (卯). The year 1747 was also a Year of the Rabbit, but at that time he was only six, and he died in 1766, before the next Year of the Rabbit, 1771.
The simplified outlines of the birds seem very modern. They almost fill the entire surface and must have been highly visible when worn with a dark kimono. This is a type of design one would expect an actor might have worn, although a young nobleman’s inrō also could be as striking. Nothing similar by Tōyō is found in our archives.

In addition, there are the remnants of a four-case inrō having a wide, standard shape, which according to the excavation report is made of cherry bark. The unlacquered material did not survive in the grave, and today only the thick, glossy fundame interiors indicate that it once was a high-quality piece. It may have been among the inrō signed by Tōyō.

Because crayfish are quick moving, even though their backs are bent, they are emblematic of good health in old age. The inrō may have been a gift to the ailing young daimyō, expressing a wish for improved health. However, as so many others at that time and in this family, Lord TADAIHRO died quite young. Even if the unsigned inrō is less ‘exclusive’ in style and technique, it still is in extremely good condition.
Two netsuke were also found in the tomb.

Fig. 22: A manju netsuke of dark wood, described in the report as ‘lacquered’, but nevertheless partially decayed. It seems likely that it once was decorated with lacquer, but today no traces of a design remain. The interior is plain wood. (Inrō Archive number 19862.1016 Makino)
Measurements: 4.0 cm in diameter, 1.8 cm high

Fig. 23: Another manju netsuke, decorated in Kinma style with red lines on black lacquer ground. The entire surface of the lid is filled with two facing hō-ō birds floating on a background of their own curling tail feathers. The underside is decorated with various Precious Objects: a tama jewel, a circular cash, and a clove. The interiors are black lacquer. (Inrō Archive number 19862.1013 Makino)
Measurements: 4.2 cm in diameter, 2.2 cm high

It seems that some lacquer techniques were invented again and again. Just as Zeshin very successfully re-invented the combed blue waves (seigai-ha) pattern, the Kinma technique was re-invented (seventy or eighty years after Lord Tadahiro’s death) by Tamakaji Zōkoku (1806–1869), a famous lacquer master on the island of Shikoku. Already in the seventeenth century, objects featuring the Kinma technique were imported from South-East Asia and Siam (Thailand). Boxes and plates in this technique were popular with lovers of the tea ceremony. Japanese lacquer masters obviously were able to copy the style, producing such typical Japanese objects as this manju netsuke.

The present inrō and netsuke were the property of a young man who was only able to acquire and enjoy them over a very short span of time, from 1755 to 1766. Each of the inrō has such strong design that it is impossible to guess with which one of them the Kinma manju might have been worn. Perhaps he made a rather unexpected, bold combination of inrō and netsuke, or it may have matched the now rather decayed cherry bark inrō (not pictured).
Considering the highly visible designs seen on the excavated *inrō*, the *netsuke* found in the graves are surprisingly conservative and modest. As *inrō* collectors, we are familiar with depictions of netsuke from the 1781 *Sōken kishō*, as well as from some later publications. Except for these excavated netsuke, we know of no other existing ones proven to be more than two hundred years old.

It is surprising that there are no ivory netsuke or other utensils made of ivory found in any of the *Makino* *daimyō* graves. It can be assumed that ivory would have survived in surroundings in which not only human bones remained intact over the centuries, but even in two instances, human hair.

There may be reasons why the *Makino* did not use ivory. Perhaps there were some socio-political prohibitions against the wearing of imported materials. Perhaps the nobility refused to wear netsuke popular with merchants and other townspeople. Perhaps *netsuke* appropriate for a *daimyō* had to be made from Japanese materials. This might be a question for netsuke collectors to explore.

Concerning the *inrō* lacquer masters, the person of *Tsuchida Sōetsu* remains a mystery. His date of birth and death are apparently unknown as they are not stated in any of the sources consulted. The dating of the four *inrō* bearing his signature and age could otherwise be even more precise.

Japanese lacquer experts seem to agree that a *daimyō* in Edo (Tokyo) would not buy *inrō* made in Kyoto. They also are of the opinion that a *daimyō* would not consider buying an *inrō* not specially made for him. So far we have not found such statements in any books or manuscripts, although it must be stated that we are not able to read Japanese texts on Edo-period customs of the *samurai* and *daimyō*.

Assuming that the aforementioned statements and opinions are factual, then the short life-span of this young man would limit the production time of his *inrō* to the years 1755 to 1766. It also would indicate that *Tsuchida Sōetsu* was still active in Edo at the age of eighty-four (at least). Therefore, if he was eighty-four around 1766, this gives an approximate year of birth of 1680. That would mean he may have become an independent lacquer master around the end of the Genroku period (1688–1704), a time in Japan when art and luxury reached new heights, not unlike the Roaring Twenties, a time when everything seemed possible.

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In theory, August on Cape Cod is a fine time and place to have an auction in the great outdoors. And in fact that is almost always the case for the Asia Art Week sales held annually in the late summer by Eldred’s Auctioneers. This year, however, the green and white striped tent that usually provides much needed shade for the bidders was lashed by wind and rain on what felt less like August and more like a nasty day in October. That being the case, it wasn’t surprising that attendance was low with less than two dozen hearty souls present for the opening lot. Phone and internet bidding accounted for a substantial portion of the action.

On this first of five days of auctions that comprise Asian Art Week, just over four hundred and fifty lots were offered. Most were netsuke, but there was also a significant number of tobacco-related items, such as kiseru, kiseru-zutsu, and tonkotsu from a Chicago collection. Some ojime, inro, and Japanese art book lots rounded out the sale. About two thirds of the lots sold. Stated prices include a fifteen percent buyer’s premium.

Lot 113 was a depiction of a cockerel on a branch, signed Okatomo. The nicely detailed model, carved in attractive grey-toned ebony, was a solid composition that conveyed power with its body attitude and expression. Some slight overall wear added a pleasing look and feel to the finish, which helped drive the bidding to $3,220.

When it comes to agonized, grimacing expressions, Lot 128, a stone worker splitting a mill wheel, is right up there with the most frustrated of rat catchers. This 19th century ivory piece, carved by Toyohide, an artist who is known but whose work is rarely found, was an eye-catcher and just plain fun. The price of $1,840 seemed fair.

Lot 143 portrayed an ivory tiger licking a hind paw, signed Rantei. The intense, focused stare of the animal gave vigor and presence to the carving, bringing it above the level of a typical Kyoto-style model. A strong signature in an oval reserve, well-inlaid eyes, and honest wear in the right places all added to the appeal and solid $5,750 result.
Lot 159, finely carved and functionally designed with head bent back and legs folded beneath for compactness, this wonderful ivory example of an 18th century Kyoto school long-haired dog was a little gem. Its shaggy coat of heavy locks flowed like waves, and inlaid eyes added to a face that possessed both charm and intelligence. This little cutie went for $3,105.

Nagoya master Tadatoshi was best known for his sleeping shojo, but this lively wood figure, Lot 208, portraying an actor in The Dance of Ranryo, may be one of his most recognizable netsuke due to its full page illustration in The Netsuke Handbook of Ueda Reikichi, adapted by Raymond Bushell. Balanced, highly detailed, and displaying good movement, the final price of $2,070 was less than anticipated.

Lot 268, in the form of a diver clinging to an octopus partially trapped in a jar, was one of the most contested pieces of the day. The unsigned ivory study was unquestionably bold due mostly to the completely psychotic expression of the diver. Not as apparent, but equally well done, were many other details in the carving, including the textural contrast of the octopus pot and the diver’s long curly hair and emaciated rib cage. After much back and forth, a phone bidder emerged victorious with a bid of $5,463. Later, the under-bidder philosophically stated that “losing one now and then is good for the soul.” I must remember that; I usually pout and mope around for weeks.

Lot 273, a finely carved stack of tortoises, in wood, by Tomokazu was a masterful work. Despite the intricacy of the composition, the carving is still a solid, functional netsuke. Superior design, outstanding carving, and a convincing signature added up to a deserved $5,463.

One of the featured pieces of the day was Lot 280, a fine work by the celebrated Osaka artist Kaigyoku Masatsugu, depicting an ivory rabbit with amber-inlaid eyes, crouched atop a pile of “tokugusa grass.” The grass, some of which forms a natural himotoshi, is interspersed with multiple tiny sections of horn inlay, reminiscent of the “dew drops” of various materials this carver inlaid in the grasses on which his wild boars sleep. From the veins of the ears, rendered ukibori, to
its naturalistic paws, the sophistication of carving—likely done late in his career at the zenith of his ability—was apparent. It deservedly achieved the highest price of the day at $7,475.

Though not the sexiest of the bunch, Lot 419 was my personal favorite. Carved in stag antler (the crown of the antler being left intact to form the bottom of the priest’s robes) by Masayuki of Asakusa, the sleepy-eyed badger priest, seated with a mokugyo bell, had undeniable charm. Some wear was evident to the top surface, but the bottom had a deep, rich patina that was really lovely. Signed in seal form, it was a fine example of the superb simplicity typified by Asakusa artists. At $1,495 it was worth every penny and more.
Book Review

The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance
Edmund de Waal
(Published in the USA as The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family’s Century of Art and Loss, by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010)

After his great-uncle Iggie died in 1994, Edmund de Waal, a potter of some note, inherited a collection of 264 netsuke. This wonderful book, impossible to put down, is the story of their survival over 140 years, five generations, four countries and two world wars. The book is not so much about the netsuke themselves as the people who owned them, the children who played with them, the visitors who handled and admired them, the looters who overlooked them, and the author’s voyage of discovery into their origin and how they found their way to him. Part detective story, part historical novel, part travelogue, part biography, part museum and art guide, part literary legwork, the book uses the netsuke as a leitmotiv around which to hang a far broader and richer ancestral tapestry. Being an artist himself, skilled in the making of pots, sensitive to look and feel, letting things go which one has made oneself, the author is able to convey to the reader the importance of appreciation of these Japanese miniature carvings. Throughout his journey into the past to find out who his ancestors were who owned them, he provides us with tantalizing glimpses of the tactile bibelots along the way.

The netsuke were purchased, not one by one as most of us do these days, but as a complete collection by Charles Ephrussi, art lover, critic, and editor; a cousin of the author’s great-great-grandfather and scion of the impossibly wealthy Russian Jewish Ephrussi banking dynasty. They were bought in Paris, at the height of the love-affair with Japonisme in the 1870s and 1880s, from Philippe Sichel, an art dealer who rapaciously and vigorously hoovered up anything and everything Japanese in his travels there. (Sichel published a pamphlet about his exploits in 1883 as “Notes d’un bibeloteur au Japon,” the translation of which forms a major part of the book Plunder and Pleasure: Japanese Art in the West 1860–1930 by Max Put and published by Hotei in 2000). In the netsuke’s story in Paris we rub shoulders with more well-known collectors of Japanese artefacts, such as Edmond de Goncourt and Louis Gonse, and we learn at first hand about the owner’s arty friends who, also captured and enraptured by the Orient, held and touched these
netsuke: Renoir, Monet, Manet, Degas, Proust, Zola, Laforgue. The author writes so well and descriptively that the readers are transported to this heady life in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. They are actually there, walking the streets with their imposing architecture, listening to the gossip and intrigues in the salons, duelling with both rapiers and wit, immersed in the lives of painters and writers, helping Charles buy his copious works of art to adorn the walls of the family home, admiring the colours of the fabrics and caressing the sculptures in the corners—now all lost to the Ephrussis and their descendants, but at least preserved in museums and, no doubt, private collections around the world.

With the Japanese fad fading and Charles tiring of his collection, the netsuke were sent as a wedding present to cousin Viktor in Vienna in 1899. There they were not openly displayed for the admiration and casual fondling of fellow collectors, artists, and friends, but rather they were kept tucked away out of public view to become mere enchanting baubles for the children to play with in endless permutations of material and subject while their mother dressed for one of the endless social occasions.

It is first in Paris and then in Vienna that we gain tremendous personal insight into the circumstances surrounding the start of two world wars and the impact this had on Jewish families, particularly super-rich ones. Again, the author’s powers of story-telling, observation, and description and use of present tense enable us to actually live in Vienna in the early 1900s, learn how to bedeck ourselves in finery and participate in balls and parties as we did in Paris, enjoy life and leisure at different country residences over the years, and then act as witnesses to the haranguing of Jews, the dispersal of the family, and the later spectacular loss of wealth, and the destruction that followed at the onset of the second world war. The netsuke survived these turbulent times, smuggled out of their vitrine a few at a time by the family’s faithful old servant to be reunited with the author’s grandmother after the war and subsequently taken by great-uncle Iggie back to Japan from whence they originally came. Now they are with the author at his home in London.

Although this is not a conventional book on netsuke—their origins, uses, materials, artisans, signatures, subjects, folk tales—nor a sales catalogue (Property of a European Gentleman), it is still nevertheless a book about netsuke and thus deserving of a place on any collector’s bookshelf. It is a gripping yarn with real, fleshed-out characters. It is a fascinating, almost voyeuristic insight into the everyday lives of the members of a very old aristocratic and wealthy family, their social calendars, their spending sprees, their affairs, their trials and tribulations over two hundred years, the loss of their fortune. The netsuke are, at one and the same time, almost incidental to the story but also the major thread running through this most readable book that you never want to end. And one thing also stands out – just as in old Japan when netsuke were actually used and thus handled constantly, so throughout their time with the Ephrussi family in Paris and Vienna and now London, for over one hundred years the netsuke were still very much everyday objects to be held in the palm and stroked even if they were kept in a black vitrine with green velvet-lined shelves and mirrored back. How many collections today are similarly turned and tumbled in hands both familiar and unfamiliar?

Although some of the netsuke are described in the briefest of words, and a carver’s name such as Tomokazu is occasionally dropped here and there, they are not pictured in the book at all. To the non-collector this will not matter, except for perhaps a vague
curiosity to see what it is the author is talking about. But the netsuke collector will no doubt be disappointed that there is not more about these old original pieces brought from Japan to Paris some time in the 1870s—their carvers and schools, discussion of the signatures on those that are signed, the kinds of wood and ivory employed in their creation, the legends they represent—and that there are no photographs of them. Perhaps a detailed analysis of them should be the subject of another, more scholarly book, because at the moment they are also a lost collection to netsuke aficionados since it is unlikely that they, having been in the same family for five generations, will ever, at least in the foreseeable future, become available for sale. However, a little subsequent research reveals that a few of the netsuke are shown on the author’s website (http://www.edmunddewaal.com/theharewithambereyes.html) and a couple more can be found in the numerous reviews in the general press (accessible via the website). In addition, the website also points to two YouTube videos of the author with his collection, as well as a Guardian podcast interview plus gallery of seven of the netsuke. Despite the lack of detail and pictures of the netsuke themselves, even for the serious netsuke collector and expert this book is still very well worth reading and is, not least, a document recording impeccable provenance.

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Adornment in Clay: Ceramic Netsuke from the Richard R. Silverman Collection
By Mueller, Laura J., Toledo Museum of Art, 2010
84 pages, 226 ceramic netsuke illustrated in full color
Suggested retail price is $11.95

Published to coincide with the exhibition Life in Miniature: Ceramic Netsuke from the Silverman Collection at the Toledo Museum of Art, October 1, 2010–February 27, 2011, curated by Carolyn Putney, Curator of Asian Art at the Toledo Museum of Art.

Who knew there was so much to say about ceramic netsuke? Well, of course Richard Silverman has always known, but it took a while for his interest and knowledge to be put on paper. Initiated by the donation of all 226 of Richard’s ceramic, porcelain, pottery, etc., netsuke to the Toledo Museum of Art (TMA), Laura J. Mueller has done a study of the collection and the broader fields of Japanese ceramics and netsuke to write a most wonderful book. Before she even started writing, she and TMA curator Carolyn Putney made a trip to Richard’s home in West Hollywood to interview him about each of his pieces as they were being packed up for shipment to Toledo.
The author starts by building a logical history of netsuke, collecting netsuke, ceramic netsuke, and more, and soon arrives at the heart of the matter, Richard’s netsuke collection. Each piece is illustrated in color, sometimes as parts of a relevant group; and along with a comprehensive technical caption, each gets a full paragraph of commentary about subject, artist, kilns, and other interesting and important knowledge. Like all netsuke, each of these has its own story to tell.

The end matter of the book is equally wonderful, comprehensive, and important to the overall story: a Map of Kiln Locations; the Illustrated Checklist of all 226 Netsuke (grouped by kilns), plus eighty-nine color photographs of Seals and Signatures; Glossary; Selected Bibliography; and a comprehensive Index.

The signature section alone is worth the price of the book, as it will make identification of your ceramic netsuke and their artists so much easier. You can also use the photos in the Checklist to narrow down the possible kiln your netsuke came from, even if unsigned, by matching colors and styles.

Prior to this publication, the only book on the subject was Otto Heinrich Noetzel’s Yakimono-Netsuke: Netsuke aus Porzellan und Ton (Ceramic Netsuke), 1984, 1985 (c. 1983). Although the fifty-one illustrations are large, the German text made it inaccessible to most of us. This new book has almost five times as many netsuke and many truly greater netsuke. As with Diewuwe Eijer’s book Kagamibuta: Mirrors of Japanese Life and Legend, we learn that putting together a comprehensive group of netsuke with a concentrated focus is a worthy goal that can enhance the overall study of netsuke.

Some of Richard’s netsuke can be dated to before 1830, based on netsuke made from identical molds now housed in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands, as part of the Von Siebold collection. This is earlier than most of us have been taught.

This is a book for all collectors of netsuke, as well as for collectors of other forms of Japanese ceramics. If you cannot get to Toledo during the exhibit—and you should try—the book will offer you a pleasurable alternative. And finally, you just might be able to understand more of why Richard has had such a passion for these treasures for the last three decades.

Norman Sandfield
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Robert (Bob) Bosley Dootson (1925–2010) was born in Seattle, Washington, the son of Jay Edward and Blanche Bosley Dootson. He attended the University of Washington, graduating in 1947.

Bob lived his entire life in Seattle where he married Julia “Honey” Dootson. They were very much involved in the art community. He loved traveling the world with his wife and children, returning with treasures particularly from China and Japan. He established a small gallery for his wife at the Seattle Art Museum where he served many years on the Board of Directors. He also was on the Asian Arts Council and on the Contemporary Arts Council. He was co-owner of Dootson-Calderhead Gallery in Pioneer Square, specializing in contemporary art.

Linda Meredith and I first met Bob in 2000 when we were forming the Seattle INS chapter. He generously agreed to let us hold twice yearly meetings at his condo on First Hill Street, featuring speakers such as Neil Davey and Paul Moss. Bob had a fabulous modern art collection as well as a fine netsuke collection, half of which he displayed in his condo and the other half he gave to the Asian Art Museum. For a couple of years, we enjoyed meeting in this terrific setting. His smile and sense of humor made us all comfortable, except when the discussion turned to selling collections or bequeathing to family or to museums. Bob was a feisty advocate of donating to museums, for the sake of future generations.

At every meeting, Bob told us how much he enjoyed spending time with his children and grandchildren. We send our warmest condolences to them.

Richard Hieronymus

Memoriam

Calendar

Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Beverly Hills, CA. Co-Chairs Dr. Dimitri Tubis and David White.

**Inro Exhibition**, April 21, 2010 to January 9, 2011
Held in Tampere, Finland. There will be a poster for the exhibition, a Finish language catalogue, 368 pages in colour, and an English language catalogue, also 368 pages in colour. We hope that many of the numerous members of INS can take the opportunity to make a trip to Tampere in Finland for this occasion. Heinz and Else Kress, Liljendal, Finland.

**Life in Miniature: Ceramic Netsuke from the Silverman Collection**
October 1, 2010–February 27, 2011
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FINES.

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Correction

In the summer 2010 issue (Vol. 30/2, Q & A, p. 12, the netsuke of a goat belonging to Nigel Platt illustrated as Figure 1 is unsigned. The caption reads “signed Mitsuharu,” which is incorrect. Apologies to all for this error. Editor.

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

| Adameck's Asian Art       | 59 |
| Asiantiques               | 29 |
| Arno & Sharon Ziesnitz    | 58 |
| Denise Cohen              | 58 |
| Iwasawa Oriental Art      | 56 |
| Kanegae                   | 56 |
| Kokoro                    | 5  |
| Marsha Vargas Handley     | 29 |
| Michael R. Bernstein IBC  | 21 |
| Midori Gallery            | 49 |
| Norman L. Sandfield       | 58 |
| Norman L. Sandfield Library | 58 |
| Orientations Gallery IFC  | 60 |
| Paragon Book Gallery      | 39 |
| Sagemonoya                | 7  |
| Sharen Chappell OBC       | 8-9, 30-31 |
| Sydney L. Moss Ltd.       | 7  |
| Takara Asian Art          | 11 |
| Toledo Museum             | 11 |

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59 INTERNATIONAL NETSUKE SOCIETY JOURNAL Volume 30, Number 3
Adornment in Clay:
Ceramic Netsuke from the Richard R. Silverman Collection
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