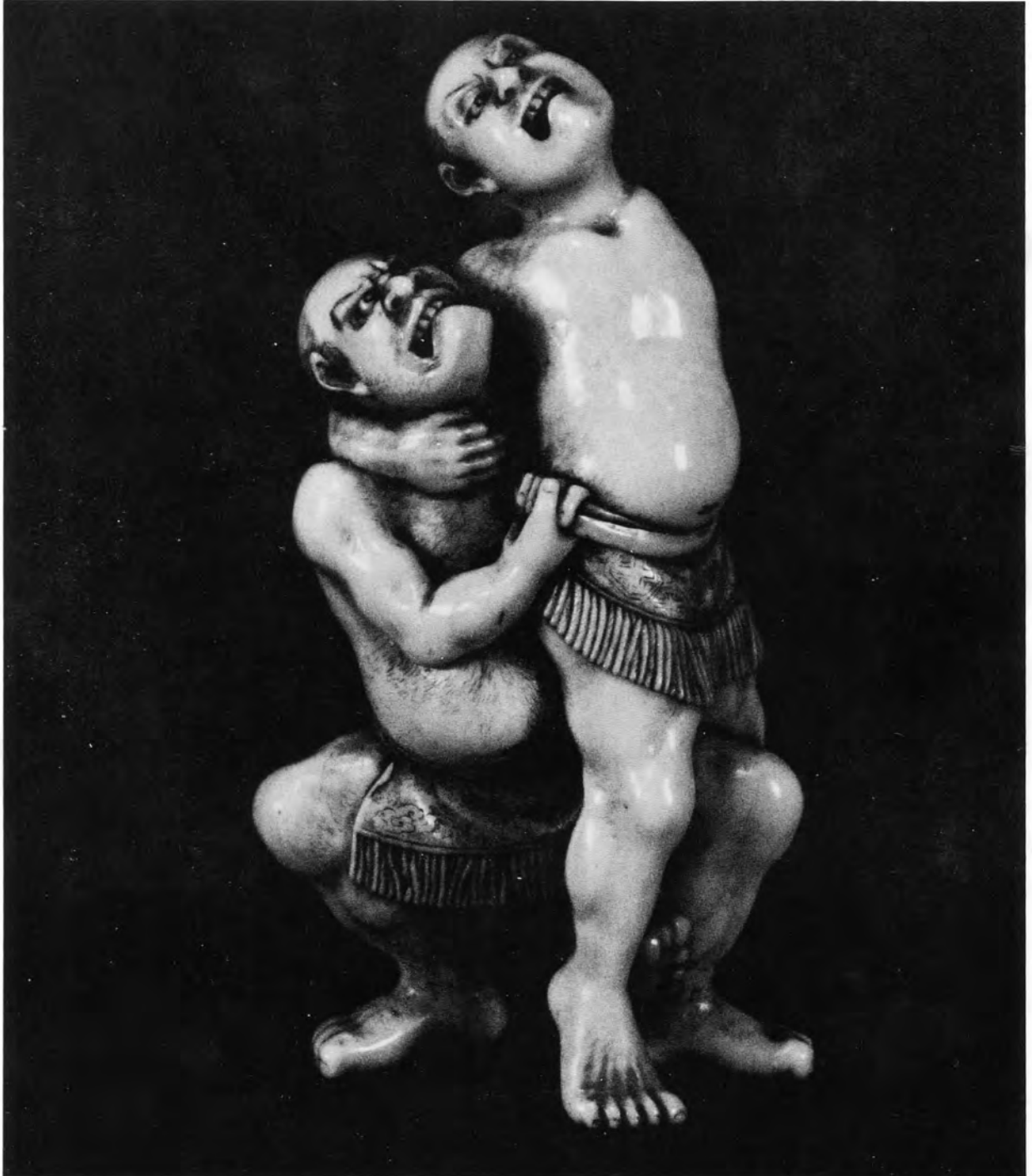


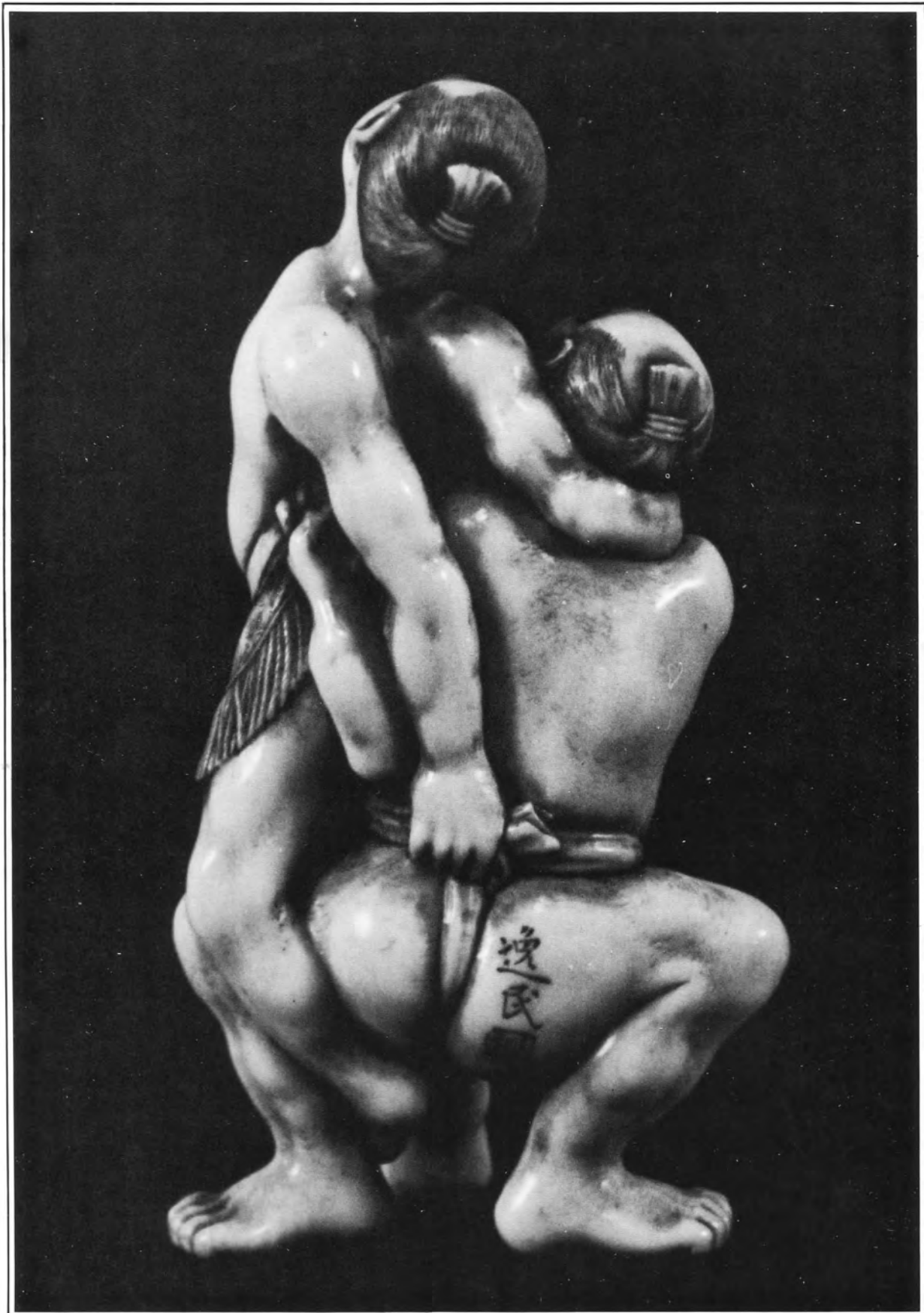
NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL



ISSUE NO. 2 JULY, 1980



Cover: Wrestlers
Signed: Itsumin 3-1/8" Tall

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL
SECOND EDITION

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI, P.O. BOX 825, LA MIRADA, CA 90637

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Victor E. Israel

Much has happened since the last Study Journal. The London Convention has come and gone. History was made at Sotheby's Auction on May 29th when the Recumbent Stallion by Okatomo sold for \$59,000 or £25,000 (this doesn't include the premium charged to the buyer). This is a new record high for a Netsuke sold at an auction.

Bernard Hurtig of Oriental Treasures prevailed after some heated bidding. Now that Oriental Treasures has the two Okatomo horses, it was suggested that colors should be selected for their silks with the new addition to the stables. **Point of interest:** if these prices seem staggering, almost double this amount has already been paid for a single Netsuke in a private sale!

This issue of the Journal will feature highlights of information from the London Convention.

Most outstanding in my estimation, was the exhibition of 160 Netsuke and Kizeruzutsu (the case or holder for the Japanese tobacco pipe, or kizeru). The exhibit was titled "Contrasting Styles" and featured Netsuke selected by the London Netsuke Committee from various private English collections.

After the third viewing, there was still much to be learned as the exhibition was composed of a number of works by each artist.

The Netsuke were grouped into schools. When viewing a number of carvings by the same artist, we can see a wide range in quality and creativity.

It becomes evident that even great artists are not always at their best and also, lesser artists can sometimes create a masterpiece. My favorite in order of sheer viewing pleasure:



1. The "Meinertzhagen" Kirin was raw power and creativity from all angles. I had the pleasure of holding it and it seemed to writhe in my hands, movement flowing from every portion of this classical unsigned masterpiece.



Gama Sennin with Basket of Peaches
Signed Masaka
Ivory, the eye pupils inlaid
19th century

2. Kihoda Masaka carved in the later part of the 19th century. There was only one of his Netsuke on exhibit. A large ivory Gama Sennin, straining to hold a basket of peaches on one shoulder and of course two frogs crawling out. The balance and accuracy of detail in this powerful figure places it in the exceptional 5% to 8% of outstanding Netsuke a Netsukeshi carves.
3. There were many third choices: the bold running boar with snake, in wood, signed Toyomasa at age 69. The horse about to rise, ivory, by Masanao, etc., etc., etc.

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ANYONE RECEIVING A DAMAGED STUDY JOURNAL BINDER DUE TO BEING MAULED IN THE MAILS, PLEASE WRITE AND A NEW ONE WILL BE SENT TO REPLACE IT.

Letters from the Members

WANTED: 18th century or early 19th century Dutchman - preferably ivory. Send pictures, prices, etc. to:
James and Charlotte Hume
P.O. Box 411
Woodbury, NY 11797

Don't forget the want ads! Remember, if you want to sell your Netsuke, send pictures (black and white reproduce best) with pertinent information. (See Want Ads First Study Journal).

Please send any questions you may want answered, also news and articles.

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NEWS of MEETINGS

NEWS FROM THE L.A. GROUP:

Make reservations for Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention in 1981 as soon as possible. The average L.A. meeting has an attendance of 50 to 60 members. So it is important for those who live locally and don't need a room, to make reservations to attend convention events and workshops.



Yours truly viewing Zodiac exhibit at Bauer Museum.

HAWAII NEWS:

Helen Hurtig, our attractive editor of the INCS Journal, suggests that all those planning to go to the Hawaii Convention January 6-13, 1981, make plane reservations now due to holiday traffic.

CHICAGO NEWS:

Guest speaker Norman Sandfield gave a report on the London Convention.

HOUSTON NEWS:

Paul Goodman attended London Convention and spoke of monthly meetings and good group back home.

MIAMI NEWS:

A group of 20 members enjoyed Sachi Frey's lecture, "The Netsuke—Its Function and Cultural Significance." Sachi also attended the London Convention.

COLONE NEWS:

Trudel Klefisch spoke to London group of "Arts of Edo Period" exhibition this autumn in London at the Royal Academy with pieces to come from all over the world.

GENEVA NEWS:

Bauer Museum showing Netsuke from Bauer collection. A call prior to visit will possibly help in seeing portion of exhibit not displayed. Phone (Geneva) 461729.

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THE AUCTIONS

There are still bargains left at the auctions — regardless of what some dealers and collectors say. They come small and large, wood and ivory, and often with good provenance. The key is seeing and handling the Netsuke prior to the sale. Some dealers go back two or three times to reevaluate their choices.



The Christi Auction was first and seemed rather low key and slow moving, although there were many good buys.

The Sotheby Auction the following day, by contrast, was brisk and interesting under the excellent gavel of Neil Davey.

The selection of Netsuke available was very good in that there were often two or three by each important artist.

Humor was provided when Neil Davey admonished the dealers for fondling the Shunga Netsuke they were examining.

The surprise of the auction came when a rare silver lacquered Inro by Koma Kansai (not Kami Kaze) sold for over \$27,000 and another by the same artist for \$22,000!! And finally, a Zeshin Inro sold for \$20,230.

§ § §



Kyoto school
foreigner
holding shawl
18th century

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THE NETSUKE CONNEXION

By Michael Birch

Ladies and gentlemen

You will have the rare and delightful opportunity during the course of this week of seeing and occasionally of acquiring some of the most exquisite objects ever made by human beings. These objects are NETSUKE and INRO — and they are frequently described as works of ART.

I shall be talking about netsuke and about art — and I shall submit to you an unusual and perhaps even bizarre — though entirely logical conclusion. But before I do so I shall have to sever the NETSUKE CONNEXION with the CORD and the KIMONO — and present netsuke in a different context from the one you are familiar with as collectors. I start with the meaning of the word:

The reading for the Chinese Characters for ne-tsu-ke means: SMALL OBJECT FOR ADORNMENT — which is too broad a description. In the Dictionary of Classical Japanese, the Netsuke is defined as: A SMALL HANGING OBJECT — an inadequate definition, to say the least. The best definition is ROOT ATTACHMENT — this much more vividly takes us back to the true origins of netsuke — an OBJET TROUVÉ — a randomly found object which acquires a new quality through discovery by a human being.

Now, if we describe Netsuke as works of art then we must define what we mean by art. The Oxford Dictionary says that art is: HUMAN SKILL AS OPPOSED TO NATURE, which I take to mean: made by human beings as opposed to occurring in nature. That is a good simple definition and a surprisingly accurate one.

The false notion that art is something which exists in its own right is a 17th century European invention. It arose mainly from the desire to elevate art to a spiritual status above mere skillful execution — it

merely succeeded in adapting art to people's tastes rather than serving their needs. It is this confusing and untenable creed which a high-priesthood of artists and dealers still preach at the altar of FINE ART — they divorced ART and CRAFT on the grounds of incompatibility. But this notion is irrational and unproven, because there is no difference in essence between art and craft. The simple truth is that ART IS A FUNDAMENTAL AND CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF INTUITIVE SELF-EXPRESSION — IRRESPECTIVE OF QUALITY. In other words: everything human beings do can be described as art, providing it is not ultimately destructive: the only qualification is that some do it more skillfully than others. The Japanese did not make a distinction between ART and LIVING. I don't believe the word art, in the Western sense, exists in the Japanese language. The closest they get to it is probably the word KATACHI which covers Form, Design, Function and Serenity — it suggests that art is synonymous with living and indivisible from function. The Japanese have never even seen art and mass production as mutually exclusive.

Seen in the context of art as I have just outlined, we are now able to take the view that the primary function of netsuke, right from their improvised beginnings, was as a medium for self-expression — and that the now obsolete utilitarian function as toggles was always secondary and incidental. It follows that the word netsuke can now be used accurately in its broad generic sense: a root, or a small gourd, or a seashell — a small found object — either simply pierced or elaborately carved. It can evolve quite naturally as an art form with the intriguing potential scope for a fascinating new range of uses. After all, many a traditional netsuke doubled as a penknife, compass, abacus, ashtray, sundial, whistle, firefly cage!



The obsolete netsuke connexion has been severed, and future functions or uses are simply waiting to be applied. You can see the direction in which I am heading — but before reaching the conclusion I referred to earlier, I must briefly place netsuke in their historical and social context.

Toggle-like objects were in use in many countries in every continent since earliest times. They were usually just pierced stones or pieces of wood or bone — but they were also often carved in a variety of subject matter. The Chinese, and later the Japanese raised the skill in carving toggles to a very high level of craftsmanship and imaginative interpretation. The Japanese called them netsuke and their widespread use in Japan probably started in the 15th century. Over the next three centuries netsuke evolved into the most comprehensive and dynamic record of a society dominated by a conceptual view of life — a view in which humour and irony mocked authority while bowing to it — in which sex, in all its facets, was glorious and often ludicrous, but never obscene — a view in which animals and humans, plants and inanimate objects were interacting in their behaviour and disguises — where the ugly, the blind, the crippled were not shunned or feared — where death could be violent but elegant — and a view in which gods and phantoms and myths and history were fused into a stunning reality. But in 1859 Japan, with some help from Commander Perry, opened its previously closed doors to the West. Some time later, the Japanese adopted Western dress and started to smoke cigarettes — which they kept in their pockets and not suspended from their belts. The kimono was put in mothballs, and netsuke became export trinkets. From then on, the Japanese have not given much thought to netsuke, and even the word is now unfamiliar to them. In fact, most of the books currently published in Japan on the subject of Japanese National Crafts seldom make any reference at all to netsuke. Well, let us move on some 50 years to the end of World War Two where we find the West in a position to introduce certain concepts into Japan in a rather more persuasive manner than had previously been possible. One concept was POLITICAL DEMOCRACY — never quite clear to us and certainly pure Greek to the Japanese — but as a nation traditionally ready to adopt alien cults, they obligingly went along with it.

Another concept was PORNOGRAPHY, which we in the West can only grasp in terms of texture, soft or hard, but which we are unable to define objectively. It appears that the Japanese did not question the concept, they merely outlawed it. And in consequence, eroticism, which had been such a natural and often vital element in Japanese art, went out without even a bang.

The third alien concept was our old friend FINE ART. Well, the Japanese had already developed a penchant for the Old Masters and they progressed to cornering the market in Impressionist paintings and they now increasingly go along for the ride while the

Western Modern Art Machine does its number. In the field of graphic and industrial design, the continuous stream of Western products, which flowed into Japan since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, has greatly influenced the Japanese in neglecting the development of their indigenous resources in favour of assimilating Western design — often to satisfy the dictates of the export trade. The Western notions of art and craft — the West's compulsion to categorize and to apply a deadening logic to everything — have created a dichotomy for the Japanese where none existed before: Japanese tradition and Western ideology forming a two-backed beast with uneasy gait. It is not really surprising that the Japanese have become totally indifferent to, or at least unaware of netsuke. Because from their point of view, if an utilitarian object ceases to serve its functional purpose and becomes a readily marketable trinket for export — and then ceases to be even that — then it also ceases to be of interest.

What, therefore, is the future for netsuke? Are antique netsuke exclusively Western collectors curios? Are contemporary netsuke charming anachronisms which can only be produced by professional or amateur carvers with an exceptional gift for carving? Is that where it all ends?

Let me quote F.M. Jonas who, in 1928, wrote the following "The art of netsuke carving has never been the monopoly of a certain class of artisans. It was a side industry of such craftsmen as the makers of musical instruments, the carvers of wooden dolls, and even men in a higher station of life, such as dentists and artists".

The conclusion that I now submit to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that the future of netsuke lies with you, it lies with everyone — even artists and dentists — because netsuke are not only skilled carvings, they are found objects — in the traditional sense. And you are all artists! By improvising, beachcombing, using your intuition and imagination — you can discover a root, or an abacus, or a sundial, or a firefly cage or their modern equivalents, or a pebble — anything you fancy — and you can call it a netsuke quite legitimately. THE ORIGINAL OBJECT HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED BY YOUR TOUCH. You can even sign it, because you are the author of your discovery. It is through the process of self-expression that we also discover ourselves. Perhaps we may at last even succeed in introducing a truly worthwhile concept to our friends the Japanese — the concept of netsuke — a potential source of endless pleasure for everyone — a means by which the spectator becomes the originator — the concept of NETSUKES AS AN ATTITUDE OF MIND. It is the least we can try to do in return for the incalculable contribution to our pleasure and delight which earlier generations of Japanese have provided and without which we would not be gathered here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, you arrived here this morning as collectors. I hope I have convinced you that you will leave as potential creators of netsuke. Have fun. Thank you.

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LEARNING IN LONDON



Paul Goodman considering a good Netsuke



Metal work on Netsuke - Ted Wrangham



Kooks and Krazies - Richard Silverman



Constantine & George Weil - Fun Time



Osaka and Kyoto Schools - Constantine.



Aspects of collecting - Edith Kurstin.



Carving Netsuke - David Blisset



Porcelain Netsuke - Terry Wyngrove

FROM 1980 CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITION OF GEORGE WEIL

By Douglas J. K. Wright



Oni with Toothache

Most Netsuke have a certain originality but in this example we have the ultimate. Cornelius Roosevelt, the well-known collector, requested a Netsuke to be made from an extracted Wisdom Tooth, a challenge no artist could ignore.

Carving the molar itself would have proven an even bigger challenge but what would have been left after carving would have been too miniscule. So the end result is a tooth inlaid into a Netsuke. As Weil justifiably points out — "A tooth belongs in a mouth". Such is the wisdom which has prompted this original and highly amusing study of an Oni, obviously in great physical distress. Shoko himself could not have produced such a pained look and the powerful expression has lost none of the Oni features which we have come to recognize.

CORNELIUS VAN S. ROOSEVELT
2500 QUE STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20007

12 October 1979

Mr. George Weil
Georges Weil Objets d'Art Ltd.
31 Hatton Garden
London EC1

Dear Mr. Weil:

Thank you for your letter dated 17 September that was waiting here for me when I returned last week from a SCURA diving trip to Panama, hence the delay in my reply.

Enclosed is my molar. It isn't actually a wisdom tooth, but grew up next to one. When I first looked at it, I tried to polish it up a bit but decided to do nothing until I knew if some use might be made of it. I have no idea whether or not you may find it ready to split when you work on it. To fill you in (as the molar is) on the gory details, I had it removed because of what divers call "tooth squeeze", a mildly painful feeling you experience when coming up from a deep dive if you have an air pocket under a tooth.

Somewhere about my apartment I have a steel bone plate that was inserted in my leg and later removed. Made of a very hard alloy called Vitallium, I don't feel it would be of much use in our project. It is about three inches long and a bit under $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide, with six screw holes along its length with the width increasing a bit at each hole. I can perhaps find this if its use might be indicated, however.

Last November I had to have my spine rearranged a bit and I tasked my neurosurgeon with saving as big a piece as possible, intending to send it along to Raymond Bushell in Tokyo for conversion to a netsuke or (if it were small) even an ojime. Sad to say, all that the surgeon came up with were splinters, so that project never got off the ground.

Sincerely yours,

C.V.S. Roosevelt
C.V.S. Roosevelt

P.S. Should Customs inspect this package, I wonder if I will be declared an endangered species and my Ivory subject to import controls!

Materials: Boxwood, stained

Eyes inlaid in ivory and glass
Natural wisdom tooth

Signed: G. Weil on inlaid gold plaque

Height: 5 cm

NEW CONTEMPORARY CALIFORNIA CARVER

By Beulah M. Behrman

David Carlin was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1944 to be the oldest of 3 children by capable artistic parents who encouraged artistic development from an early age.

Finishing high school he was enrolled in the Detroit School for the Society of Arts and Crafts. Fine Art and Industrial Design courses were completed during the period 1962-67.

Relocating to San Francisco and enchanted by the Netsuke of the Avery Brundage Collection, the first woodcarvings emerged from a common carving knife and white sugar pine. Small subjects, attention to detail, soft tones stained with inks and oil paints and the easily carved soft wood made these pieces the training ground for work done later in the more difficult hardwoods and ivories.



cloisonné, porcelain and cut stones. Containers, hangings, jewelry and standing sculpture in cooperation with the Catalfano family, Michelle and Jack, and porcelains with Armin Müller. Notable are the porcelain miniatures. A delicate media subject to many disasters during the working process, the character and detail is carved in the small scale and a celadon glaze used on most.

Defining the most recent work is the emphasis placed on choosing a subject and its need to give a greater meaning than portraiture. Illustrations of double meaning, humor and an interplay of the scales of objects determine the impact of such small sculpture. Time, the largest part of the pieces creation, allows only so much extra curricular activity and the research of ideas occupies most of that.



Although a theme may be repeated, each piece is a new or evolved idea, felt to be a necessary stimulation for the 'self taught' artist dealing with such a tedious form.

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Drawing from familiarity with both the European 'quick sketch' styles and the very finished quality of the oriental work, the western heritage of the artist is worked in the scale of the more eastern format.

Many pieces were done for fairs, galleries and private commissions as the craft has always been the sole support of the artist.

A variety of collaborations have been tried. Pieces were done with the mixed medias of wood, silver, gold,



THE 1980 LONDON NETSUKE CONVENTION

By Dr. Paul B. Stidham

The 3rd London Netsuke Convention was held from May 24th thru the 30th at Quaglino's, a centrally located hotel near Picadilly and within walking distance of most out-of-hotel functions. The Convention was organized by the London netsuke dealers and auctioneers, headed by Neil Davey of Sotheby's, who did an outstanding job of keeping the functions on schedule. Approximately 135 people registered with Europeans in the majority. A number of American and European dealers attended, all with choice displays at the rear of the ballroom where the meetings were held.

Mornings were taken up with formal lectures and workshops while afternoons were free for visiting dealers or indulging one's own fancies. The weather was pleasant with very little rain. A get-together cocktail party was held the evening of the opening day, May 24th. The next day, Sunday, we could visit the Victoria and Albert Museum for an exhibition "Japan Style" in addition to a large part of their collection of netsuke and inro; or the British Museum where part of the Hull-Grundy collection of netsuke, ojime, and inro were on exhibit. That evening an exhibition was held at the Sidney Moss Gallery.

The convention proper started on Monday morning with a lecture by the talented and always-entertaining Michael Birch on "The Netsuke Connexion." Other lecturers during the week were Dr. Oliver Impey of the Ashmolean Museum who spoke on "The Influence of Japanese Art on the West"; B. W. Robinson, Keeper Emeritus at the Victoria and Albert Museum, whose subject was "Men and Beasts."

W. H. Tilley talked on "A Japanese Experience," and the final lecture was by George Weil: "The Sculptor's Viewpoint." Michael Birch held an exhibition of his latest creations at Quaglino's, and George Weil showed his most recent carvings at Douglas Wright's Gallery on Curzon Street.

Workshops were as follows:

Contrasting Styles Exhibition by Luigi Bandini.

First Impressions by Richard Barker and David McFarlane.

Carving Netsuke by David Blissett.

The Wood Carvers by Sharen Chappell.

Repairing Netsuke by Geoffrey Cooke.

Lesser Known Fields of Japanese Art by Michael Dean.

Early European Collections by Trudel Klefisch, which concerned what remains of the Brockhaus collection.

Tokyo school Netsuke by Paul Moss.

Osaka and Kyoto Schools by Costa Panayotodis.

Pipe Cases by Jens Rasmussen.

Kooks and Krazies by Richard Silverman.

Collecting on a Small Budget by Denis Szeszler.

Porcelain Netsuke by Terry Wingrove.

Metalwork on Netsuke by Ted Wrangham.

An exhibition, "Contrasting Styles," was held in a room adjacent to the ballroom for which a wide variety of netsuke, inro, and pipe cases were on loan from English collectors.

Exhibitions were also held by Eskenazi, Ltd., which included netsuke by Michael Webb; Spink and Son, Ltd.; and S. Marchant and Son, Ltd. Costa and Maureen Panayotodis of Constantines, Ltd. held an elaborate buffet dinner in connection with their exhibition at The Eccentric Club.

Auctions were held by Sotheby's and by Christie's.

The convention closed on Friday evening with an excellent dinner at Gino's in Richmond, west of London. The entire restaurant was taken over for our group.

Finally, I think this was the best of the three London conventions and a good time was had by all.

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NETSUKE KENKYUKAI CONVENTION

August 19-23, 1981
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