

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL



ISSUE NO. 3 OCTOBER, 1980



The two most expensive horses, ounce for ounce in thoroughbred history! They were bred in the hills of Kyoto, Japan by the famed netsuke artist, Okatomo in the eighteenth century. The mare set every price record for netsuke at auction and private trade these past few years only to be outdone by the stallion earlier this spring at the Sotheby Handicap in London. Reunited for the first time in over a hundred years, the stallion reclining in the warm Hawaiian sand and his adoring mare, make for the perfect breeding pair.



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ORIENTAL TREASURES AND POINTS WEST

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NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL THIRD EDITION

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Victor E. Israel

I know you're out there, I can hear you breathing! The Netsuke Kenyukai Study Journal is your journal. It's for the members benefit. If you have the urge to write an article about your favorite carver, or would like to ask questions or make suggestions, or send pictures, please do so, as it is information that Kenkyukai members all over the world would find interesting.

FUN FOR ALL

The Netsuke Kenyukai Convention to be held August 19-23, 1981 at Beverly Hills, California, has already shown signs that it may be one of the largest to date. Early reservations are imperative as dinner reservations must be made for our "Evening at the Theatre", which starts with the dinner at the award winning Yamato Restaurant followed by a play at Century City's Shubert Theater.

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CONTEMPORARY CORNER

At the N.K. Convention, Miriam and Bob Kinset introduced Kodo Okuda and his charming wife, Yukie.

Kodo was born in Tokyo in 1940. His works have been selected for the "National Crafts Exhibition" in 1969, 1973, and was awarded the "Grand Prix" and Excellence of Craftsmanship in 1977. Kodo has excelled in his interpretation of nature as a painter, sculptor, and lacquer artist.

This Netsuke and Ojime are his delicately carved paintings expressed in ivory.

Kodo has written me and expressed his thanks to those members of Netsuke Kenyukai who received him so graciously in Minneapolis. He also wishes to write and thank each collector who would correspond with him. (His letters are beautiful, and often a poem in themselves).

Write: Kodo Okuda

1-645 Hukushima Iwamamachi
Nishih Baragigun Ibaragiken
Japan

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WHAT TO COLLECT

Collecting itself can be an art; if treated as such, regardless of what is being collected, the degree of pleasure, knowledge, comradery and remuneration which follow can never be measured in dollars and cents . . . However, it sure feels good to know that you collected wisely and that OTHERS appreciate your choice, for which they pay you a handsome profit!

After reading the article *An Interview With Isador Chait* later in this issue on page 8, I was struck by the importance of its message to Netsuke collectors, both old and new.

THE COVER: Ashinaga and Tenaga **Signed:** Hojitsu 3 3/8" Tall

NEWS of MEETINGS

NEWS FROM THE L.A. GROUP:

August 15th was their 9th meeting. It was held at the Beverly Hills Tennis Club and featured "An Evening with Richard Silverman". Seventy-five (75) members attended! A copy of his talk is included in this issue.

CHICAGO NEWS:

August 19th meeting was honored with Fred Chavez, the noted beadologist from California, who started with a fine slide presentation on ojime. Then the members were privileged to handle and discuss at length nearly 100 fine examples of ojime that ranged in materials from wood, ivory, and glass, to various metals including gold. Many of the ojime were valued over \$1,000.

September 18th meeting was titled, "Back to Basics - Collecting vs. Commercial". In the absence of President Maurie Fry, Norman Sandfield conducted the meeting. Covered was how to judge the carver's skill, what to look for, faked patina, poor himotoshi, etc. Norman will be conducting a six week course at the Francis Parker School on Netsuke. For information on time and scheduling call (312) 549-0172.

HAWAII NEWS:

Busy, Busy, Busy . . . Convention time getting closer: January 6-13, 1981. I hear the Sales Catalogue is a real beauty.

NEWS FROM JAPAN:

**The November/December issue of Arts of Asia will be an all-Japan issue. Among other articles dealing with the arts of Japan there will be the following.

1. **The Japanese Pipe Case** by *Raymond Bushell*. It will be illustrated with 50 pipe cases in color. The article is probably the first publication on this subject.
2. **Netsuke and the Soken Kisho** by *Misao Mikoshiba* and *Raymond Bushell*. The article is profusely illustrated. It is a companion piece to the article on ojime appearing in Arts of Asia, July/August 1979.
3. **More Mythological Animals in Netsuke**, Arts of Asia, March/April 1976.

NEWS FROM CONNECTICUT:

An autumn Netsuke Seminar will be held October 17-19, 1980 at the Showboat Inn on Greenwich Harbor in Connecticut. Further news next issue.

Betty Killam has been giving a series of seminars on Saturday afternoons from 2 to 4 p.m. once a month this last year. October's seminar is on Snuff Bottles. November 15th Seminar is: The Imps and Holy People of Oriental Lore. For information call (203) 526-2967.

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THE AUCTIONS

In the past, Los Angeles has not had many memorable moments at the Sotheby Parke Bernet netsuke auctions. However, with the increased local interest, better netsuke are starting to surface. At the last auction a Toyomas boar brought over \$20,000.

Netsuke are already being put aside and promised by major collectors for the Sotheby auction to be held during the 1981 Kenkyukai Convention.

October 23rd, 1980 will have many good netsuke up for gavel. Peter Malone who heads the Oriental Arts Department has submitted some fine photos which I felt would show the improvement in quality netsuke available.

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A NEW PUBLICATION **CONTRASTING STYLES**

*A Loan Exhibition of Netsuke
and Kizeruzutsu*

*Compiled by The London Netsuke Committee:
Luigi Bandini, Richard Barker, Neil K. Davey,
Paul Moss, Jens Salen-Rasmussen, and
William H. Tilley.*

This catalogue will be of great interest to collectors and admirers of Netsuke and Kizeruzutsu. Arranged in "schools", it places the Osaka School first as the earliest known artists, followed by the Kyoto School and through to contemporary English carvers. There is a wide selection of carvings demonstrating personal style and technique and the work of a few netsukeshi working at different times has been compared. Illustrations are produced lifesize, their signatures enlarged for clarity.

Size: 25cm x 18cm, 79 pages, 160 black and white illustrations. ISBN 0-903697-09-2. Published May 1980. Paperback \$6.50 (plus \$1.50 postage)

ROGER G. SAWERS PUBLISHING
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THE AUCTIONS



Wood study of a Boar
Signed in reserve: Kaigyoku Motomeuzu



Ivory netsuke of a Shishi
18th Century, Signed: Gyoku



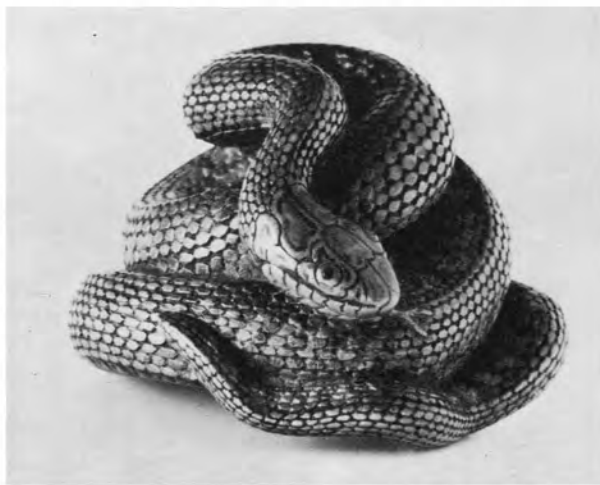
Tsu School ebony model of Recumbent Horse
Late 18th Century, Signed: Minko with Kakiehan.



Tsu School ebony model of an ox
Late 19th Century, Signed: Minko with Kakiehan.



Yamada School wood study of a Tiger
Early 19th Century, Signed: Masanao.



Hida School, wood study of a coiled snake
19th Century, Signed: Sukenaga.

"Greatness is a Carving — not a name nor a price tag."

By Richard Silverman

Richard Silverman attended the Toledo Museum of Art for 10 years and has lived in the Orient since 1962 as Director General of the Ministry of Education in Bangkok, Thailand. He has also been Professor of English at the College of Law in Tokyo and has authored many articles on art.

Richard's personal collection is very extensive and he has conducted work shops at 3 London conventions and is currently the unofficial advisor to the Japanese Department of Sotheby Parke Bernet.

Richard presented the L.A. group with the following talk and brought a few hundred netsuke for all to see.

Greatness is a relative term and a subjective one at that. There is also an impermanence as to what one considers great today versus yesterday or tomorrow. Since the field of arts' standards are relative and subjective I have been freed to set up my own rules to prove my point. But my standards for greatness of carving are of a more objective nature — they are based on the tens of thousands of netsuke I have handled and studied.

I simply wish to prove to you that neither a famous signature nor a large price tag should be the criteria for collecting netsuke. Similarly, provenance is an enhancement which can easily make a netsuke very overpriced but in no way makes it a better piece. I, personally, do own many pieces from great collections of the past but please remember that for the most part my collection has been formed directly in Japan where provenance is of little importance or such a well-guarded secret that it is impossible to know who owned the piece before. The Japanese are not interested in these facts and in many cases some of the world's greatest netsuke have been in private Japanese collections since they were carved and thus have never been seen, written about nor photographed in the past. This surely cannot negate their greatness. We in the West tend to be too impressed with the "fame" of the art



Everyone having a good time.

and are skeptical when a great piece appears from nowhere and nothing is known of it. This may have some bearing on Western art but it surely should be of little importance in the field of Asian art where objects are continually being excavated or quietly put up for sale for the first time.

Documentation of Western art has been carefully recorded for the most part but unfortunately this is not the case of Asian art and so the guidelines we use for buying Western art are not necessarily valid when one buys Asian art.

The rules I will use are quite simple. No piece from the 18th Century up to the moderns is signed. A few of them can easily be attributed to a famous carver but the pieces were not sold to me nor priced as being done by a certain carver. I have also included 2 great netsuke that were sold as unsigned when in fact they were signed. Only after I bought them did I discover they were signed.

The problem of fake signatures must also be taken into account. It is a well known fact that in the Orient many artists signed the name of their more famous master or other great artists. This was not necessarily done to cheat or deceive a prospective buyer. So long as you know the signature is not authentic and the price asked is not based on the master's work it should



President Hugh Friedman introduces Richard Silverman.

not matter. All that is important is that the carving has great merit on its own. I have included a very fine carving which was certainly not done by the carver whose signature is inscribed. There was no attempt made to make the signature look authentic nor to give the piece an aged look. The price paid was based purely on the carving as if it had no signature.

The moderns present another problem. All of them are signed so I have arbitrarily limited myself to all living artists excluding Masatosmi, and the recently deceased Ichiro, Sosui and Shoko whose fame and standards of excellence are very well documented. None of the moderns whom I will discuss were ever written about before my Arts of Asia article in May 1974 and half of them were literally unknown three years ago. Naturally some of them have achieved fame in the past few years, i.e. Kangyoku, Bishu and Hideyuki, but within the larger netsuke collecting world they are not well known nor would many people buy them strictly for their name.

The most difficult criteria left is price. It is well known that great old pieces can command \$50,000 while moderns have been sold for \$10,000. I have limited myself to old pieces that cost no more than \$5,000 and moderns that cost no more than \$3,000 although most of these in both categories cost between \$1,000 - \$2,000.

The present day values of these pieces is not the question. Many are worth 5-10 times what I paid for them; some have increased little in value and I'm sure that there are pieces which anyone of you might consider over-priced at my cost. Since I do not buy for investment I am not concerned with current values. The point is simply to buy a carving of merit; the signature and price tag are not the criteria to be used.

Great authentic signatures can be found on lesser pieces which brings up a very great problem upon which many experts will not agree. I have seen many 2nd rate paintings and works of art by top-ranked artists. None will ever dispute their authenticity. But in the netsuke world this does not seem to be the case. If a given netsuke does not show the superior skill or proper staining, subject matter and in some cases material usually attributed to the artist, then the piece is considered to be a fake or "school of" even though the signature and age leave little doubt as to the authenticity. I strongly disagree with this way of judging netsuke. No artists standard of excellence is consistently high but in the netsuke field it is required by many leading authorities. I know of no other art field which requires such strict standards for judging authenticity.

Just because some dealers or collectors has truly over-paid for a piece need not mean that the next buyer should or must pay more. Conversely a piece that I bought for \$100 may not be worth the \$1000 I think it is worth and wish to sell it for. Someone might think it is worth even more while others wouldn't consider it at \$50.



There are a myriad of factors that go into the value of a piece from both the buyers and sellers point of view. I'm simply stating that you cannot equate price and greatness; one must weigh and discern values. "You only get what you pay for" is not the way to buy. It is a two-sided coin and the reverse can be just as valid. Your chances of buying a \$1000 netsuke for \$100 today aren't very likely but then I've seen \$1000 netsuke that aren't worth more than \$100. By watching the large auction houses (which is probably the best indicator of true market value) and checking with many reputable dealers and knowledgeable collectors are the best ways to know what a fair price should be.

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by Masatoshi

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YOUR FAVORITE NETSUKE

By Miriam Kinsey

A "favorite" netsuke is one which gives you particular pleasure at a certain period in your life. It often has nostalgic or romantic connotations or is based on a familiar story or legend. It may be a piece you have coveted for years and the successful culmination of your quest may be the reason for its being a current favorite. To the knowledgeable student, the composition and workmanship, or the provenance, may be overriding criteria. Whatever the reason, or combination of reasons, the artist brings to you in a "favorite" netsuke something you need or to which you can happily relate.

As years go by, the quality of a collection usually improves and sometimes a collecting bent will veer off into a highly specialized area with resultant changes in your "favorite" list. But always there will be old favorites as well as newer ones. Recently my husband, Bob, and I looked over a list of fifty of our favorite netsuke which we had selected a decade ago. Today, less than ten of that original group would be included among our fifty current favorites.



Several years ago when Kangyoku, Bishu and Hideyuki (three of Japan's leading netsuke carvers) were house-guesting with us, Bob brought out for display all of the netsuke carved by them which we owned. We had close to forty-five Kangyokus, ranging from his first piece - a small tiger he carved at fifteen - to his current master-pieces. While we didn't have as many Bishus or Hideyukis, their netsuke also represented different periods in their artistic development. The three young carvers studied the display with great concentration and fascination. We then suggested that each select his number one, two and three favorites from his own netsuke and also from the

groups of his fellow carvers. Since the three of them share similar backgrounds, training and artistic heritage, we expected similar results. Such was not the case. There was virtually no agreement on the choice of their own or each other's. And Bob and I disagreed with all of them.

Kangyoku had chosen as his first favorite a very simple, quiet lady-bug. Evidently, his choice was based on the quality of the ivory as he had told Bob for years before that his lady-bug in a Tokyo netsuke exhibit was carved from the finest piece of ivory he had ever seen. His second choice was a wild figment of his imagination which he called "Snow Rabbit." This piece, incidentally, was the choice from our whole collection of the well-known British collector, Ted Wrangham. Kangyoku's third choice was a puppy scratching his ear.

Bishu's first choice was a floppy-eared rabbit which we liked the least of his pieces. This netsuke, and two or three other rabbits with somewhat similar surrealist treatment, had been inspired by his memory of playing with rabbits in a field when he was a child. His second



choice was the Alighting Swan which is on the paper cover of my book. Of this netsuke Michael Birch said: "The Alighting Swan epitomizes deceptive simplicity, impeccable design and beautiful composition. It is a design which is true to the scale of a netsuke and, in my opinion, ranks equal to Mitsuhiro's crane." Bishu's third choice was a stylized hawk.



In spite of the fact that Hideyuki was currently choosing most of his designs from the floral area, he chose a Daruma as his "number one." This was one of his first pieces carved from wood and was decorated with lacquer and inlay. His second choice was also wood Ainu Fisherman. Lastly, he chose an ivory plum blossom. Evidently, all the years he was carving beautiful flower netsuke he had a talent predilection for figures because today he is producing large, bold figure netsuke.

Regardless of why a certain netsuke evokes in you happy, responsive emotions, cherish your "favorite" and enjoy it as though you had made an exciting discovery.



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- Netsuke exhibit at the beautiful LA County Museum of Art
- Auction by Sotheby Parke Bernet
- Theater and dinner parties
- Etc, Etc., Etc.

Write for Registration Information

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AN INTERVIEW WITH ISADORE CHAIT

By James Normile

Extracts Reprinted with consent from Architectural Digest, March 1980

Far East meets Far West at the I. M. Chait Gallery, a treasure house of fine Oriental antiquities in Santa Monica, California. There Isadore Chait, specialist in Oriental sculpture and expert in gemology, has developed a world-wide reputation among museums and collectors, and is frequently consulted by both groups for authentication, market values and appraisals.

"My clients are remarkable," says the soft-spoken Mr. Chait. "They aren't curio hunters, but people of serious mind: museum curators, seasoned collectors and, bless them, enthusiastic beginners. It's difficult to say which are the most fascinating.

"It is an honor to be able to offer museums top-quality material worthy of their holdings."

"It's also a joy to work with seasoned and sophisticated collectors," he adds. "They know what they are looking for to fill out their collections. Words of mine are unnecessary, because fine art objects have a quality that is their own silent salesman."

As for the beginning collectors, "Their enthusiasm is infectious," says Mr. Chait. "While I love their warm impetuosity, I suggest restraint. Often new collectors have more love and appreciation than resources, to lavish on the Oriental arts. They hunt for bargains — no fault in that — at small auctions, at house or garage sales, even through newspaper advertisements. Regrettably, they acquire a lot of things that are interesting, certainly, but comparatively worthless.

"When neophytes come into my gallery, I say to them: Do yourself and me a favor. Let me show you what I have to offer. Let me tell you the fine points of the worth, aesthetically and otherwise. Then, please go to as many other galleries and shops as you can. Be critical. Look sharply at the quality and prices of pieces similar to those I have shown you; spend your time before you spend your money. Buy from reputable dealers who stand behind their merchandise, who give absolute guarantees of genuineness.

"Above all, buy quality, no matter how humble a piece may appear," he says firmly. "It is far better to have one, two, or three superb pieces in your collection. A roomful of second-rate also-rans will have cost you as much as, if not more than, a few select pieces you will always be proud of."

Mr. Chait also discusses the basic question that even the most sensitive and knowledgeable collector asks: Will my collection increase in value? "In other words, is it a good investment? 'Investment,' in this instance, is a catch-all word that doesn't mean very much. Art objects are collected primarily for their aesthetic values."

However, for collectors who are concerned about dollar increment, Isadore Chait suggests two ways to build an investment. "First, buy only the finest pieces available — the *creme de la creme* — if you can afford them. Collectors all over the world will always be searching out the choice, the rare, the one-of-a-kind. The realities of diminishing supply and increasing demand inevitably will force prices upward.

"Second, the wise investment buyer buys low. This sounds hard-nosed, crass, certainly insensitive, when we are talking about objects whose beauty is priceless. However, comparable fine pieces may vary in price from one dealer to another," warns Mr. Chait. "There is no 'blue book' — no ready market quotations — on art objects. To find a good buy, the collector needs to develop a sensitive fingertip awareness of the world market, and a sense of quality — that rare virtue which is sharpened by wide experience and inborn good taste."

In addition to showing and selling valuable Oriental antiques, the I. M. Chait Gallery, as a member of several well-known appraisal associations in the United States, offers appraisal services to both museums and private collectors. "Appraisals can bring heartbreaks," Mr. Chait admits. "It's no fun at all to have to tell people who bring in objects for appraisal that what has cost them an enormous sum is not what it is supposed to be; that their 'Oriental antique' is almost as new as a loaf of freshly baked bread."

While there are many dealers who sell genuine antiques, representing them accurately and pricing them fairly, Mr. Chait points out that "there are many more who are unethical: those who unload third-rate material on the unsuspecting public at ballooning prices; and those who sell new *cloissone* as old; recently worked ivories as old; serpentine carvings as jade; and imitation porcelains as antique."

Finally, if the rare and superb classics of the Oriental arts are so hard to find and so competitively priced, what remains for the new enthusiast to collect? Isadore Chait replies: "Still within range of the average collector are Chinese and especially, Japanese, art objects dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until recently, these categories were underrated by scholars and collectors as not having the dignity of great age. Nonetheless, pieces from these 'late' periods display traditional beauty and masterly craftsmanship — qualities that make them collectable. Age or rarity alone is no guarantee of beauty. I hardly need mention that many Imari, Kutani, Satsuma and other Japanese porcelains of the nineteenth century are as beautiful, in their distinctive ways, as their ancient counterparts."



Ivory netsuke model of a snarling tiger
Signed *Otoman*
Hakata School, mid-19th century



ESKENAZI

Oriental Art

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Duveen collection
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Illustrated
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N.K. Davey, 'Netsuke', 1974, number 814.
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