

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL





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.

for the discriminating connoisseur



Bernard Hurtig's
oriental treasures and points west

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NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL
FOURTH EDITION

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Victor E. Israel

Is there no end to the increasing price of netsuke? At each auction we all wait in anticipation of a new record being set. On January 3, 1981, Sotheby held it's auction at the INCS Convention IV in Honolulu; the ivory reclining horse by Kaigyokusai Masatsugu sold for an auction record high of \$78,000 (not including the 10% premium). Also, a record \$31,000 was bid for an excellent wood rat by Masanao of Kyoto. See "The Auctions" for more detailed information.

Whenever collectors gather and discuss netsuke today's prices, and investment value, divides and polarizes the group. We never tire of the same questions. I'm sure many of the collectors who've paid a high price for netsuke are still looking for assurance and confidence.

At the convention in Honolulu, the dealers saw a definite trend: the best netsuke sold first; then the good netsuke sold, and finally the surprise. The lowest priced, lesser quality netsuke weren't selling! It seems that the collectors are finally doing their homework.

Instead of buying five "beginner" netsuke most of the collectors bought one or two good pieces. This demand for better quality can only cause the prices to escalate . . . the law of supply and demand.

Another phenomena: the increase in prices has attracted an entirely new breed of collector. Look at all the new faces at your local meetings and conventions. Some of these collectors of art treasures are accustomed to seeing paintings and sculpture sell for over a million dollars!

What does it all mean? We've seen the last of "the old time collections". It's no longer economically feasible to collect hundreds or thousands of netsuke of quality as was done in the past. Large collections, when sold, will be dispersed all over the world. The United States has now taken the lead in netsuke activity.

Collections will rarely have over fifty to a hundred quality netsuke. One well known collector said ideally he would like just ten netsuke which he could upgrade when a more desirable one could be acquired.

This process of culling and reassessing is a healthy necessity for today's good active collector.

Too many times I've heard that all this money talk frightens the novice — balony — it frightens everyone. However, as we saw in Honolulu in January, there are excellent buys in all price ranges for those who've done their homework. Remember, today's high prices could be considered a bargain next year.

HELPFUL HINTS

For those members interested in current information on happenings concerning exhibitions, catalogs, symposia, universities, or new books, you can subscribe to the "Newsletter" East Asian Art & Archaeology.

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THE COVER: Boar Group Signed: Tametaka Length 2" Height 1 7/16".

LETTERS FROM THE MEMBERS

The following are excerpts from a letter I received from Kemi Eisner of Houston, Texas.

... I note that you are having a workshop "Who Dunit: Rensai/Kokusai or Kokei/Minko???" Enclosed is a slide of my tiger signed Minko. It is to be on exhibit at the Convention in Honolulu ... the signature is not in question ... Bernard Hurtig, Doug Wright and Raymond Bushell say it is a good Minko signature; however, Birnie thinks Kokei carved it while he was working for Minko. Raymond Bushell thinks Minko carved it because of the powerful paws. Doug Wright, after I told him what Birnie thought, said it was Kokei who carved it. The tiger has brass eyes. I am now having fun collecting opinions on who carved my tiger. I'll be interested to hear what you think after you see it at the convention.

When I've had a chance to see more Minko and Kokei tigers, I'll make up my own mind, but at the moment I'm undecided. It's fun to speculate about who carved it.

After seeing the tiger, my opinion is that it was carved by Kokei because of the following characteristics:

1. The face of the Kokei tiger is narrow and elongated in contrast to the chubby, rounded Minko face.
2. The brass eyes of the Kokei are narrower and more feline while the Minko eyes are almost round.
3. The brow of the Minko is larger and more protruded.
4. Although the paws are fairly large for a Kokei, the Minko's are larger and more exaggerated.
5. The pads on the underside of the Kokei's paws are long and narrow unlike the much rounder pads with distinct claws of the Minko.
6. The entire Minko tiger is more vigorously carved, rounder and "cuter".



INCS Convention IV

The Convention was sensational!

From January 6-13th, 1981, Helen Hurtig choreographed a perfect show from beginning to end at the Kahala Hilton Hotel in Honolulu.

Helen opened the activities and introduced the ever eloquent Michael Birch who spoke on "Fourteenth and twenty-first Century Netsuke". Films were shown on "Hanga, Japanese Print-Making", and "Introduction to Netsuke"; I find these a pleasant change of pace from the usual talks.

To accommodate the large convention group two large tents were added to the front of the Hurtig's home where everyone had dinner, cocktails and danced.

The star of the show, in my opinion, was the exhibition of superb netsuke from private collections called "Commanding Assemblage". All the netsuke were purchased from Oriental Treasurers in the last five years. One hundred and thirty-three netsuke were displayed in specially built, illuminated cases. This exhibition, I've been told, will be shown in future INCS Journals.

As an added treat, also on view was a collection of over twenty excellent Iwami netsuke on loan from Mr. Robert S. Huthart.

The Sotheby Parke Bernet Auction contained the finest selection of good netsuke auctioned in the United States in recent years. Howard Zar, from the New York Sotheby, is to be congratulated for a beautiful catalogue and auction. Neil Davey was the auctioneer with Howard Zar completing the last portion of the sale.

Oriental Treasures presented a memorable Jewelry Fashion Show and Luncheon. To everyone's delight, eight beautiful fashion models presented hundreds of thousands of dollars of jewelry to the rhythmic beat of disco music. Later someone wanted to order one of the models and asked how she could be shipped and if she was effected by the endangered species laws.

The workshops this year were instructive and imaginative with "pearls of wisdom" for both old and new collectors.

The workshops were:

Tell-Tale Pointers, Neil Davey and Paul Moss

A Comparative Study Between Tomotada and Okatomo, Bernard Hurtig

Hideyuki and Meikei at Work, Bernard Hurtig

Whodunit: Rensai/Kokusai or Kokei/Minko???, Victor Israel

Japanese Culture Through Netsuke, Betty Killam

Overlooked Pleasures in Netsuke Collecting, Edie Kurstin

Iwami School, Particularly Some Unrecorded Artists, George Lazarnick

Tsuji - Researching a Carver, Robert McGowen

Great Netsuke: Ride Tomorrow's Winners Today, John Poole

How To Buy a Good Netsuke on a Limited Income, Denis Szeszler

Eighteenth Century Tall Sculpture Netsuke, George Weil

A review of each of the workshops will appear in a future INCS Journal.

The convention ended in true Hawaiian fashion on the Hala Terrace of the Kahala Hilton with dinner and the traditional Danny Kaleikini Show.

HAWAIIAN HIGH JINKS



Costa's Workshop



Me, Bob Chasin, Joe Kurstin, Luigi Bandini



Meikei and Hideyuki



Edith Kurstin Workshop



Neil Davey and Paul Moss Workshop



East Meets West Hideyuki and Michael Birch



George Wiel Workshop



Bob McGowen Workshop

NEWS of MEETINGS

NEWS FROM THE L.A. GROUP:

Work, work, work, in preparation for the Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention August 19-23, at the Century Plaza Hotel. Please make reservations early.

Meeting Number 10: Edie Kurstin was our guest - **Friday, October 24, 1980.** In addition, our own Dr. Victor Israel will display some of the "superior" examples of the world's fine Netsuke. The next meeting after this will not be til after the Honolulu convention -sometime in February 1981.

Meeting Number 11:

Time:

Friday - February 20, 1981 7:00 P.M. Cocktails 7:30 P.M. Dinner

Place:

Tail O' the Cock Restaurant - 477 S. La Cienega Blvd. -L.A.

Meeting:

By popular request - A meeting by "Collectors" for "Collectors".

Trade a Netsuke "Night" - Buy a Netsuke from a collector "Night"

Join the big experiment. This meeting is intended to break all precedent, to dispel all mysteries, and to return collecting back to the art of a one on one gentlemanly game!

Netsuke, except for a few contemporary pieces, are in the hands of collectors of museums. Why accelerate prices 20% - 50% - 100% or 200% through dealers rather than trading or dealing direct?

Game Rules:

Here are the game rules for **Netsuke Poker - Table Stakes:**

1. After dinner, the tables will be cleared and set up for 10 people per table.
2. Each table will be marked as follows:
Trading \$100 to \$1500
Trading \$1500 to \$3000
Trading \$3000 and over
Selling \$100 to \$1500
Selling \$1500 to \$3000
Selling \$3000 and over
3. To sit at a **Trading Table**, you must have at least one but a limit of 4 Netsuke you are willing to trade.
4. To sit at a **Selling Table** you must have at least one but a limit of 4 Netsuke to sell. In order to buy a Netsuke, you must be willing to sell a Netsuke. If you are at a **Selling Table** you may buy or sell among yourselves or you may trade among yourselves.
5. At the end of each half hour, we will ask all activities to cease, and allow everyone to sit at a new table.
6. Everyone should come with at least one but not more than 6 Netsuke to trade or to sell.

CHICAGO NEWS:

Last Meeting: Annual party night and election of new officers.

We met at Gitanes Restaurant on North Clark Street for good food, drink and merriment. A very pleasant evening indeed, and a sincere thank you to Norman Sandfield for choosing the location and making all arrangements.

An election of officers was held. Norman Sandfield is returning as President and Susie Plouff is our new Secretary. I'm certain all of you will give them your support.

NEWS FROM JAPAN:

Tokyo Netsuke Notes - by Miriam Kinsey

With netsuke study clubs (kenkyukai) springing up all over the world, it is interesting that one of the most recent - and one of the most enthusiastic - is in Japan. Currently, there are seventy-five members who pay an initiation fee of 10,000 yen (approximately \$45.00) and annual dues of 5,000 yen. The quarterly meetings are informal and last from about ten in the morning until four in the afternoon, with a box lunch break for which the members pay 3,000 or 3,500 yen per person.

The membership and attendance include collectors, dealers and carvers. The meetings are held in Tokyo but collectors sometimes come from distances as far as Kyushu. The president is Kiichi Inagaki, a netsuke collector and lawyer from Tokyo. The treasurer is Takeshi Yamagata, a Tokyo business man and collector who handles the finances of the group and also edits the elaborate report which goes to the membership after each meeting. These reports usually contain fifteen to twenty pages and include photographs of netsuke studied at the meeting. Mrs. Wakayama, whom many Western collectors know from her long association with Asahi Art Company, is very active and one of the meetings last year was held in her home.

As at some of the Western netsuke meetings, members bring netsuke - both old and new - for display and discussion. After the lunch break, there are speeches by various members and visitors. Before the conclusion of the meeting, one of the dealers usually conducts an informal auction which includes pieces from dealers' stocks, some contemporary pieces, and some netsuke from collectors who want to sell or trade.

Some of the subjects discussed and comments by members include:

Rising value of netsuke and London auction prices. "Among foreign collectors animals are more popular than human netsuke. So when we consider netsuke as an investment, animal netsuke are recommended." Another dealer commented: "Netsuke should be valued properly and the valuation should neither be too high nor too low." "Good netsuke are said to be better investment than stocks or land, so it must not be a vain effort to raise interest in modern netsuke."

"Japan falls behind the rest of the world on the study of netsuke."

(continued on page 5)

NEWS OF MEETINGS . . .

(continued from page 4)

Fakes are discussed and one member feels Taiwan may be the root of many forgeries.

"Contemporary netsuke", comments one member, "may not be functional but are cultivating new aspects of netsuke - a new point: "If we love netsuke, we should not only search for old netsuke but also expect masterpieces in the future. This is our duty."

In a study about the rising value of netsuke, Nishizato Nobuo said in part: "There must be many netsuke enthusiasts. I think there are two important projects enthusiasts must pursue:

1. Publish a netsuke catalog and hold netsuke exhibits. Modern young people don't know netsuke. Showing netsuke is the only way to familiarize them with this art form.
2. To raise the status of netsuke. I would like to see netsuke masterpieces named as 'important cultural art objects.' **** Probably high officials are ignorant of netsuke. In order to prevent the outflow to foreign countries and to raise the domestic interest, we should make every effort to see that the system of 'important cultural art object' be applied to netsuke."

The Japan Ivory Sculptor's Association, known as J.I.S.A, which includes the majority of Japan's contemporary netsuke

carvers in its membership, will hold an exhibit at Ueno-nomori Museum in Tokyo from March 26 - April 1, 1981. Hours are from ten A.M. to five P.M. each day except April 1st when the exhibit closes at noon.

Netsuke, oimono and other works exhibited will be available for sale. It is anticipated there will be close to fifty pieces, each one numbered. A collector or buyer can purchase any number through his own dealer.

The following are some of the contemporary netsuke shown at the 3rd Exhibition of the Japanese Ivory Carving, 1980, by Japan Ivory Sculptor's Association:
No. 36 Wild Boar and Dog, by Saito-Yasufusa
No. 37 Avarice, by Saito Yasufusa
No. 38 Ainu marden and Crane, by Sakurai Hideyuki
No. 39 Women diver and octopus, by Sakurai Hideyuki
No. 40 Golden snake, by Shoji Meikan
No. 41 Auspicious brush, by Sumida Seiro
No. 42 Snake by Sumida Seiro
No. 43 Country boy, by Takahashi Shinsei

HAWAII NEWS:

Congratulations Helen Hurtig for the greatest convention to date. There was something for everyone . . . even good weather which she said she had ordered. See article and pictures on INCS Convention IV.

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NETSUKE KENKYUKAI
PROUDLY ANNOUNCES
A CONVENTION IN BEVERLY HILLS
August 19-23, 1981

Take this opportunity to enjoy Southern California's wonderful summer weather. Marvel at the world famous Century City Hotel in the Century City complex. See and do it all in this fun-filled weekend.

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

Registration Fee Per Person \$200.00
Dealer Registration Fee Per Person \$300.00
Make Check Payable to Netsuke Kenkyuka

Hotel Reservation Deposit \$75.00
Make Hotel Deposit Check to Century Plaza Hotel

Write for Registration Information
NETSUKE KENKYUKAI, P.O. Box 825, La Mirada, CA 90637



No. 38 Ainu marten and Crane, by Sakurai Hideyuki



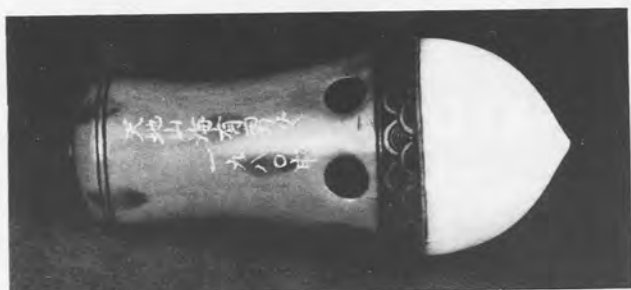
No. 37 Avarice, by Saito Yasufusa



No. 36 Wild Boar and Dog, by Saito-Yasufusa



No. 40 Golden snake, by Shoji Meikan



No. 41 Auspicious brush, by Sumida Seiro



No. 39 Women diver and octopus, by Sakurai Hideyuki



No. 43 Country boy, by Takahashi Shinsei



No. 42 Snake by Sumida Seiro



The Auctions

This auction can best be characterized by its low prices on excellent quality netsuke and the very high bids on other rare netsuke subjects.

Everyone enjoyed the pre-auction guessing game as to how much the Kaigyokusai horse would bring. The star of the show went for \$78,000, to an unknown bidder on the phone!

A rather small but excellently carved Kaigyokusai boar sold for a high \$46,000. The very large, perfect example of a Masanao of Kyoto rat brought a very high \$31,000.

Two beautiful manju, one inlaid with a shakudo bird and the other a silver dragon sold for \$1,050 and \$1,200.

The sleepers were a group of So school pieces. My favorite of these fine delicately carved netsuke was the Rashomon Demon by Gyokuso, which was the steal of the day at \$5,000! Two other Gyokusos, carved equally as good, a walking woman and monkey disguised as a woman sold for \$5,800 and \$6,800. These three were the finest examples of this carver's work I've seen and had never seen a drop of oil! A Sosui of an oarsman went to some discerning bidder at a low \$3,000 and only suffered due to its more common subject matter.

Boars continue to bring high prices as a nicely carved wood boar by Ikkei went for \$13,500.

An excellent nicely formed, long sashi style wood gourd with two wasps, sold for a low \$7,800. It was signed Ichiminsai.

A very large Sukeyuki wood study of a wasp eating fruit made a fine addition to someone's collection at a fair \$2,000.



A wood Gamma Sennin by Toyomasa, with inlaid ivory teeth, red stained ivory tongue and ivory gourd around the waist, was carved well but was somewhat small, but none the less a nice piece. It brought \$24,000.

A boxwood turtle on a lotus leaf by Chuichi was a sleeper for \$1,900. The buyer must have taken time to examine this netsuke as the catalogue picture didn't show the excellent quality.

None of the prices quoted included the 10% premium the buyer paid.

We write about the high prices because it's exciting and newsworthy; however, out of 76 netsuke offered, 54 sold for \$2,000 or less! Which only goes to show, there are still good netsuke available at modest prices from which to build a quality collection.



*Farmer's coat
and hat with
chrysanthemums by
HIDARI MASAMINE
ex: Raymond Bushell*

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So Says Stan Sheldone

A tour de force of Sosui, one of the "very best" carvers of any age and last of the So School artists, was PASSENGERS ON A FERRYBOAT. The great netsuke-shi carved several models with a variety of passengers. The boat pictured (below) is quite possibly Sosui's ultimate work. This particular vessel is made of boxwood, and measures 1 3/4 inches from bow to stern and 3/4 of an inch from starboard to port at its widest point, and hosts a rather illustrious group. We can see Fukurokujiu, one of the Shichi Fukujin (seven gods of luck) getting his head shaved by the ship's barber. Next to the Genial God of Longevity is a long tailed cat, generally thought of as possessing supernatural powers. At the bow is an individual whose identity is a mystery, but whose function is quite obvious; locating a missing contact lens. The first character depicted on the port side is the engineer/cruise director engaged in the act of propelling the craft. Standing amid-ship is the twelfth century, eight foot giant, Benkei, carrying the bell of Miidera.

It seems that during a period of idleness, Benkei thought he might liven things up by stealing the bell from the monastery of Miidera and trade it in for a bowl of soup.* Alongside of Benkei, in the Chinese outfit and carrying a sack over his shoulder, is another of the Shichi Fukujin, whom I believe to be Daikoku. The next portside character is an Oni with an Elms bow. This Oni might possibly be Shiro, an employee of the Devil, whose "contract" is to get rid of Daikoku. Or—this Oni might be around to relieve Benkei of carrying the thousand pound bell, since according to legend, the bell is often shown as being carried over the waves by Oni. It is my personal opinion, however, that this mischievous creature is merely assisting guy in the front to find his contact. The character sitting at the stern is yet another mystery to me. He appears to be samurai carrying a falcon on high arm.

As you can probably tell by now, identification and analysis of Netsuke subject matter is an exacting science of which undoubtedly I am an "expert" (an expert!???) After all, there is no doubt that the large headed gentleman is Fukurokujiv and not Jurojin. — or are they both one in the same, and that the prosperous looking person with the sack is not Daikoku, but a traveling Chinese merchant, or it is Daikoku, the seated Samurai is really Ebisu without his beard, and the long tailed cat is a short haired dog, and that . . . etc, etc.

Obviously, the description is partially a "put on", and I am as much of an expert as my short haired dog at home. But one thing that I am sure of is — after inspection, fondling, caressing, and loving this piece, there is truly no doubt that this is one of the greatest works by one of the greatest Netsuke-Shi of all time. The carving is so delicate and precise that it wouldn't surprise me that high powered microscope could count the fleas on the cat's back.

* According to Joli, **Legend in Japanese Art** - When Benkei reached Hiteisan, he made "such noise with the bell for a whole night that the Abbot beseeched him to return it, and he did so, on condition of his being given as much Miso soup as he could swallow. . . ."



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Ivory netsuke, model of a
reclining ox, signed Kwaigyokusai
with seal Masatsugu.



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