

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL



ISSUE NO. 5 MAY, 1981

SOME NETSUKE DESERVE A PEDESTAL



A splendid wood netsuke of a seated kirin by the rare Tamba School artist, **Toyohide**. 1½" high. Illustrated in Hurtig's **Masterpieces of Netsuke Art**, Number 32. Ex-Atchley Collection.

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NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



STUDY JOURNAL FIFTH EDITION

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention in August is an excellent opportunity for collectors all over the world to participate in the best educational program available on netsuke. There will be workshops, slide reviews, netsuke exhibits, a Sotheby auction, and dealers from all over the world.

It's very important that if you are planning to attend the convention you send your registration fee and hotel deposit as soon as possible so that we can properly accommodate everyone; there are still plenty of rooms available.

Many thanks to the contributors to the Journal to date. We've had a terrific response from all the readers. This is your Journal . . . it's one of the few sources that we have to learn more about the world of netsuke. So, if you are an aspiring writer, and have an article somewhere in the back of your mind, write it! You'll not only allow others to benefit from your research and knowledge, but it permits us to know each other better. Try it, you'll like it!

DISPLAY YOUR NETSUKE

At the last Los Angeles Netsuke Meeting, I displayed some of my netsuke on solid lucite round rods. There have been so many requests as to where they can be purchased, it was suggested I pass the information on to all our members.

Call or write: Plastic Mart, 2101 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405, U.S.A., Telephone (213) 451-1701

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The rods are 2" in diameter and can be cut in any height. I suggest combinations of 3", 6" and 8" tall for best display.

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A BIT OF HUMOR

Exact reprint of an advertisement in a fashion catalogue

A stunning "NECKLACE WITH AN IVORY NUTCHKE," each one hand carved in the Orient and signed by the artist, each with a revolving face within the head. 30" necklace of wood beads and black onyx. \$185.00.



THE COVER: Fierce Warrior's head in a helmet, unsigned, wood.

NEWS of MEETINGS

NEWS FROM L.A. GROUP:

Preparations for the convention in August are in full swing. One of the fun chores of selecting approximately 150 outstanding netsuke from Southern California collections went to Virginia Atchley's committee. These special netsuke will be exhibited at the L.A. County Museum of Art for three months. Everyone at the convention will be bused to the opening night exhibition at the museum.

CHICAGO NEWS:

March 19th meeting Jack Rotman concluded his thorough exposition of the dynamic Kyoto school, summing up the characteristics with information authored by Burt Krouner.

April 16th the subject for the meeting was Creepers... Crawlers... Hoppers, e.g. The Iwami school. Fifteen to twenty minutes were devoted to signature study. Sam Felton, Maurie Fry and Norman Sandfield were the signature mentors with books, suggestions and experience to help. With much fun, occasional triumph and some good-humored frustration, they tried to read signatures on netsuke distributed during the meeting, and agreed the effort was worth... the effort.

HONOLULU NEWS:

Oriental Treasures and Points West is having a Netsuke Seminar at Sea January 23-30, 1982. It will be held aboard the cruise ship and should be GREAT FUN!

Contemporary Netsuke News Notes

by
Miriam Kinsey

Word has been received confirming an earlier report that Mr. S. Sunamoto, the Tokyo netsuke and ivory dealer, is bringing his famous carver Ryushi to the Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention in Los Angeles next August. For months Ryushi has been working long hours to complete an impressive netsuke exhibit for the Convention.

Many collectors who own Ryushi netsuke but have never met him will be pleased to know he will be featured in three work shops to be conducted by Miriam Kinsey. This will be Ryushi's first trip outside of Japan and he is most anxious to meet Western netsuke collectors who are familiar with his work.

While Ryushi is best known for his elegant, beautiful women, his exhibit will emphasize his great versatility in designs as well as in techniques. But whether he draws from children's folk tales, from Kabuki or legen-

dary stories, or from Heian Court and Tales of Genji, his netsuke are flawlessly executed and in a class by themselves.

Sad news of the recent passing of Shogetsu, born Kikuo Amano, has reached Western collectors. He was born in 1888 and was still carving almost to the end of his life. His netsuke are easily recognizable by their skillfully etched, decorative patterns and beautiful finish. His subjects came from the life and customs of his people: a puppeteer, a mother and child, a man tending his bonsai.

While trying to depict the dancer changing masks, the fox who turns into a woman, or good-and-evil often represented by Okame and Hannya, Shogetsu developed the reversible face technique. In later years it was copied by less skilled artists in netsuke of poorer quality but difficult and intricate workmanship was involved in Shogetsu's concept.

Among Shogetsu's survivors is his carver-son Yasuo, known as Shofu Amano, who is especially known for his okimono and who spends time teaching carving skills to Shogetsu's grandsons.

Shogetsu was one of that small band of fine netsuke carvers who kept the art alive during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century when the image of "modern" netsuke was distorted by quick, cheap imitations that were being produced for export as the era of Western netsuke collecting was beginning.

An exhibit of the art of Kodo Okuda will open at the Anchorage (Alaska) Historical and Fine Arts Museum May 10th and will be a highlight of the Festival of the Arts, an annual affair which has attracted nation-wide attention.

Netsuke Kenkyukai members who attended the Minneapolis Convention will recall the Kodo exhibit which included pieces showing his skill as a lacquer artist as well as a sculptor. His "Fallen Leaf" attracted great attention and since that time he has done ten more "Fallen Leaves". This set has caused excitement among artists and art critics in Japan and will be featured in the Anchorage exhibit in addition to lacquer screens, okimono, gosu, netsuke and ojime.

Kodo and his wife Yukie will attend the opening of the exhibit and will be accompanied from Tokyo to Anchorage by Mrs. Betty Dore, a Netsuke Kenkyukai member from the Bay area. The exhibit will continue from May 10th to May 24th.



NETSUKE KENKYUKAI



PROUDLY ANNOUNCES

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A Tale of Two Cities — Updated

by
Richard R. Silverman

In the summer of 1974 while browsing in my favorite antique store in Toledo, Ohio, my home-town, I came upon a superb full face of a "fierce warrior." The price was reasonable. There was a piece of paper stuffed into the hollowed-out head but aside from the fact that the hand-writing did not seem to be that of a modern-day American, it really said nothing of value to help identify the piece.

At summer's end I returned to Japan, and while going through my Behrens' Collection, Part I, I noticed the photo of netsuke #40, Plate II. The description reads: "Fierce warrior's head in a helmet, carved with dragon, tiger, bamboo and plum tree in relief, the hachimanza inlaid. The hair represented by a coating of black lacquer. Ex-Bing Collection."

The photo shows only the front view of the netsuke but from the description it was obvious to me that the netsuke was actually two separate pieces. My head did have a black lacquer coating to represent the hair. With the help of a high powered magnifying glass it was very clear to me that my head was the Behrens' piece sans helmet. Could there have been a similar head? Certainly! But the number of hair-line strokes in both eyebrows were the same in the photo and on my piece. Any doubt I had was gone; but where was the helmet and why were they separated?

On December 1, 1913 this lot from the Behrens' collection was sold for £4/2.6 — a good price since the highest price paid in the sale was £20. It must also be remembered that the piece was still considered nothing more than a mask. But what a mask!

Ever since that day in 1974 I have always wondered if the helmet still existed and, if so, why it wasn't still with the head. I may never be able to answer why and how the pieces got separated, but last summer while enjoying my new home in Los Angeles I was shown a superb helmet by a London dealer who was passing through town. He had bought it for a goodly sum from a "runner" on the East Coast of America. There was nothing else he could tell me and he had no idea that it was only part of a netsuke. Actually both pieces could stand on their own (although the inside of the helmet really isn't finished to the perfection of the outside), but together they surely are one of the world's great netsuke. The himotoshi runs through the back of both pieces which keeps them together. The back of the helmet fits the description in the Behrens' catalogue perfectly and the hachimanza is inlaid (in stag antler of a rare color).

I guess it was truly meant for me to reunite the two pieces of this netsuke after what I assume was a long separation. Should anyone be able to help fill in more details of where these pieces were between 1914 and 1974/1980 I would be most grateful.



The boxwood has a fine patina and could be a late 18th Century model although I feel it most likely was carved in the early 19th Century. I have no idea as to who might have been the carver; the piece stands on its own. A signature would not enhance its greatness.

The netsuke will be shown in the first major foreign exhibition of netsuke in Japan opening on May 1, 1981. I have been told that it will surely be back in Los Angeles in time for the exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum in connection with the Kenkyukai Convention in August.

TOKOKU, THE MASTER OF INLAY

by Bill Weneker

This article came about as I was endeavoring to catalogue as many of Tokoku's works as possible. Since I do not have the vast resources of netsuke as, for example, Bernard Hurtig and Raymond Bushell, my research has been done through books and pictures from dealers, collectors, auction houses and, of course, my vast collection of Tokoku, which now nears the staggering number of two!

Considering the fact that Tokoku, whose full name according to F. Meinertzhagen is Suzuki Fuzui Bairiu Embroku, and according to Bauer is Susuki Tetsuguro, was self-taught and has a list of students after him who continued his style, I feel he created a new school.

Born in Honjo, Tokyo in 1846, he began carving at 29 years old. He copied Meikeisai Hojitsu at first. He then became proficient at his art and taught Kokoku and probably Sokoku. He also influenced Yoshihide. Certainly his influence is still felt through works of Akihide and Hidiyuki.

He is best known for combining materials in the same netsuke, using woods of many kinds, ivory, horn, lacquer, pottery, mother of pearl, and precious metals — gold, silver, etc.

It is true that inlays had been used, particularly for the eyes, by earlier carvers; but never before had this technique developed with such a variety of materials and with such skill. He avoided cheapening his work by not overdoing his use of inlays. Some of his most masterful carvings have only ivory inlay eyes (Buddah Carver). Only when his subject called for it did he make full use of his repertoire of inlays (Shishimai dancer — not shown)

Tokoku signed his pieces in various ways — Tokoku, Bairiusai Tokoku, Fuzui Tokoku, and Bairiu, in formal 'Soshō' or 'Tenshō' characters. He commonly used an inset tablet of gold, silver, or red lacquer. On several netsuke he put the date he carved the piece. Buddah Carver reads Rokuji Shi Sai Tokoku to (carved by Tokoku at 64 years) with seal Bairyu.

Tokoku's subject matter is endless — religious articles, seals, shishi, tennin, gourds, Bukkan Zenshi, Fukurokuju, plants, snails, Daruma, Rakan, Noh actor, Hotei, cicada, Shoki and oni sake drinker, monk, ape and snake, octopus, Buddhist, Urashimo Taro, children, Daikoku, Jurojin, lady, dancer, magnolia tree, mushroom, badger, owl, kappa, severed head, wasp nest, etc.

Meinertzhagen's card photographed in INCS, 6/3 p. 16, which stated "some 40 netsuke have been recorded bearing the signature 'Tokoku' of which about a half dozen of inferior workmanship are copies, also three silver lacquered 'inro' have been recorded, a 'Tonkotsu' tobacco pipe. Further he is said to have carved pipe cases."

To date I have catalogued almost 90 netsuke by Tokoku. In viewing collections I have seen four inro both gold and silver that were magnificent: although one recorded in Mr. Bushell's Inro handbook is signed

1922. Since Tokoku supposedly died in 1913, this piece was probably by Tokoku II, or the death date is wrong.

Another conflicting example is illustrated in the Tokoku carving of a sake vendor holding a sheaf of advertisements. The advertisements bear the date of Tempo 12 (corresponding with the year 1841). An article in "Japan Magazine", March 1910 gives Tokoku's birthdate as 1846. One can speculate that his birthdate is incorrect or "that the above date must be taken simply as an indication of the artists consummate interest in detail rather than a work date for the piece." (Quote from Sotheby Parke Bernet auction catalog, January 8, 1981, Honolulu.)

Tokoku seemed to work earlier in the Asakusa style, making pipe cases, tonkotsu (tobacco pipes) and manju in stag antler exhibit III definitely similar to Rensai and kokusai. Many of these were signed 'to'.

One collector even sent me a picture of a 'Tomobako' (Netsuke Box) supposed to be Tokoku's (not shown).

Many people criticize his works as not the true netsuke, gaudy for Japanese taste, strictly for Western export. To this I say look to your great collectors — Meinertzhagen, Bauer, Bushell, etc.

You will find Tokoku, his style unavoidably recognized, his subjects tantalizing and his appeal world wide. His prices at sales auctions compare to other great Netsukeshi. Thank you, Tokoku.



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MONKEY



BOY WITH PUPPY

EDIE KURSTIN IN L.A.

by
Beulah M. Behrman

At our October 24th 1980 meeting the L.A. group was given a special treat. Literally two speakers at one time. The first was Edie Kurstin the netsuke expert to whom we were privileged to listen and to learn. For the knowledgeable, it was a chance to refresh memories on many aspects of netsuke art. Knowledge that had perhaps been filed away in a remote mental index. The second speaker was Edie Kurstin the traveler and adventurer. Her enthusiasm was infectious and many of us left that meeting eager for our own trip to Japan and similar experiences hunting netsuke.

The talk started with an attempt to answer the questions most often asked.

1. How do the Japanese keep their collections?

Very private — very discreet, never out on view. Wrapped carefully and placed in small boxes inside of other small boxes labeled with the carvers name and identifying information. Then into other larger boxes, to the ultimate stage, a plain wrapper for secrecy. The reasons are both practical and disciplinary. The practical is easiest for us to comprehend, taxes! Japanese death duties are extremely high. As people get older they are very aware that any show of wealth could bring the tax man swooping down upon their families.

The disciplinary is not quite as comprehensible to "Geigin". To display ones treasures would be ostentatious. It would be a dishonor to the owner and he would lose face. They are not even shown to friends. Only on very special occasions, birthdays, New Year's or particular anniversaries does the possessor himself view them. The anticipation of seeing them again is regarded as a very great pleasure. The plain outside wrapper conceals the jewel inside to be viewed by his eyes only.

One old gentlemen in his eighties or nineties has a superb collection which he limits to one hundred netsuke. He always disposes of one if he acquires another and always improves the quality. He has shown his collection just three times. Once to dealers from Kyoto and twice to Edie.

There are marked differences in collecting. Many subjects exported to the European and American markets either have never been seen by the Japanese, or so much time has elapsed that the Japanese have forgotten they ever existed. An excellent example is Tomotaka. In Japan they collect his figures and were amazed to find he had also made animals, all apparently traded out of the country.

Then too, differences and similarities co-exist. For example, Zeshin's lacquerware. This artist is highly regarded in both countries. Ritsuo, a lacquer and inro artist highly esteemed in the western world is not so in Japan.

In lacquerware the Japanese prefer either highly

showy pieces with much silver and gilt or extremely plain work. They have little use for the vast in-between area that most westerners prefer. In the same way, trick netsuke are intriguing to the Japanese, and by and large, of not much importance to us. We will look first at the artists rendition and skill as a craftsman, they will be drawn to the trick and only after a thorough examination of that will they turn their attention to the workmanship. Example: The Tokoku group, Figure 119 on Pg. 113 of Edie and Joe Kurstin's book "Real and Imaginary Beings", the God Hotei with a child on his back is balancing on one foot.

Japanese NEVER oil their netsuke. Even Raymond Bushell will not. It is almost impossible to take some netsuke back to Japan to sell because they have been oiled. We have to oil most netsuke because of climate differences. Ours does not have the same moisture content and so the chance that the netsuke will crack.

The reason for not oiling lies with the artist. He carved, stained, and polished his work in such a manner as to build into the piece its highs and lows. To oil them is to take away the artists intent. It is considered sacrilegious.

Buying In Japan:

Remember, you are always a "Geigin". In other times this meant barbarian. Today Geigin means foreigner. An almost pitying expression really meaning "poor you", you were not lucky enough to be born a Japanese. Geigin are constantly being tested. The Japanese play games to see how far you may have come towards being civilized. The many cups of tea you must drink before one or two things will come down. The many hours you must sit through while everything except netsuke are discussed. One mailman had Edie and her interpreter go out to a back shed at midnight to admire every old black pot he owned, then traipsed over to his rice fields to admire them and next exclaim over his chickens and rabbits. Next into the house to examine each room, meet his wife and drink more tea. All this while he was being solicitous of the fact they had not eaten, had a two hour ride back and that it was now one in the morning. Patience comes in many forms and each cupboard had still to be opened and each item admired before they could get down to the business they'd come about. Only then did he pull out a few things always leaving the anticipating buyer with the hopes of more.

A typical example of such transactions — just as you are leaving and after you've asked if he has anything more, your host, most reluctantly will suddenly come up with some story.

He would like to ask your advice on something. A friend owes him a great deal of money and is unable, at this time, to repay him. The friend has offered a

Eddie Kurstin In L.A.

(continued from page 7)

number of netsuke as collateral. Should he take some and reduce the debt? Could you see them? Sure, they're his friends, right. He pulls them out and they are absolutely superb. One is a Kokei tiger, one a Kokei tiger and young, and another a Kokei boar which is almost unknown. Fantastic subject. He wants to give his friend a fair price. What does Eddie think a fair price should be? Dilemma! Too low and she will lose face. Too high and he will feel she knows something he doesn't, so his price will move up. It must be right on. Also, she knows he will not sell this time but also will not sell to anyone else. He would not do that. It will be there when she returns or he would not have shown it to her. Happy conclusion, she is right on. She knows the market well enough in Japan and elsewhere so her find is safe and will await her return.

There are many such incidents. The Eta village where it is necessary to climb up into a loft over and over again for one or two pieces at a time. The dealer who can not part with one of his zodiac animals because it is his wife's, or his son's, year of: i.e., the year of the horse, the ram, the snake, etc. And so the games go on and on and the testing is never done. You may not know what that test is but when everyone suddenly stands up you know whether or not you've past it.

Then there is the gentleman who is aware that his job would be jeopardized if it were known he deals in netsuke. He has worked as manager of a shop for almost two decades. He makes his purchases legitimately thru his place of employment. Yet, if it were to be known that he re-sells, he too would lose face. The two of you must play the foreign agent game of intrigue. Meet in dark alleys and side streets with blinking car lights for identification. Should you meet in public never let it be known you have ever set eyes on each other before.

Writing to all your sources in advance of your visit to inform them of the impending trip is a No No. Thru experience you find they have borrowed from each other and the merchandise has passed like a daisy chain from one to the other up the proverbial ladder until the price becomes astronomical.

2. Next Eddie spoke about stag antler, not horn. Horn is a misnomer. Antler is a bone exactly like an internal bone but it grows outside. Actually it is a continuation of the head bone and grows from a little knob. As it grows it develops a covering of a light furry skin known as the velvet. At the beginning there is no coronet. Running on the sides of the antler under the velvet are indentations or ridges. These ridges carry the blood supply to nourish the antler as it grows. Most species drop their antlers each year. In order to achieve this the coronet will start to grow around the base of the antler at the forehead, constricting the

blood supply, eventually closing it off. First to go is the velvet and then the antler (bone). Certain species do not shed their antlers and so, each year there is an antler cutting ceremony dating back to an old sacred Shinto religious ceremony. This is particularly true at Nara. After the cutting a new antler will grow.

Antler is a very difficult material to work with, more so than ivory. Some are very tiny and white. Some have a tremendous amount of marrow and are very brittle. It chips easily and is quite porous. Many 18th century figures had holes where the marrow had been removed, which were plugged and carved.

Stag is not generally used today except to fake old pieces. Two glaring exceptions are a contemporary German carver and the well known English artist Michael Birch. Michael has pointed out the best areas to carve. The point close in to the coronet (forehead) and at the antlers branching areas. In generations past the antler was so plentiful that in all likelihood it was disdained as too common a material to use for carving. However, when it was used, it was mostly for carving Quan Yu figures during the early 18th century in Nagasaki. Not until the 19th century with the advent of Kokusai and the other Asakusa school artists did stag antler carving become a fine art. Besides netsuke it was used for pipe cases. Often the bottoms of the articles were left quite rough so that shavings could be taken for medicinal purposes.

3. What makes a netsuke important?

The rarity of subject matter for an artist can increase a netsuke's value; the personality of a piece, and does it "turn on" the collector.

4. Has the netsuke stood the test of time?

After over a hundred years most collectors consider Masanao of Kyoto and Kaigyokusai great artists.

5. Does provenance increase the value of a netsuke?

Of two equally carved netsuke, the one with provenance is more valuable. We pay for the privilege of tracing the ownership through various well known collections. This sometimes helps to authenticate a netsuke.

6. Is the price of one school's netsuke more than another?

Yes, we do pay more for a netsuke if the school or artist is in vogue. However, the test of time has shown what schools have been considered great for many, many years.

7. When is damage acceptable?

This is very subjective in that every collector has a different feeling about the condition of his netsuke. To pass up a one of a kind, great netsuke with damage that is repairable would be poor judgement.

8. Should a netsuke be restored and repaired?

A skillful repair which goes undetected is of very little importance. However, a poor repair is almost worse than none. It has been said that almost all old netsuke have been repaired at one time or another.

A netsuke that has a great deal of wear is like a faded photograph, when you have difficulty in seeing what was carved, it has less value.

In Los Angeles: Important Netsuke, Lacquer and Inro



Extremely rare ivory study of a dog by Harutada.

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Saturday, August 22 at 11 am (to coincide with the Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention)

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