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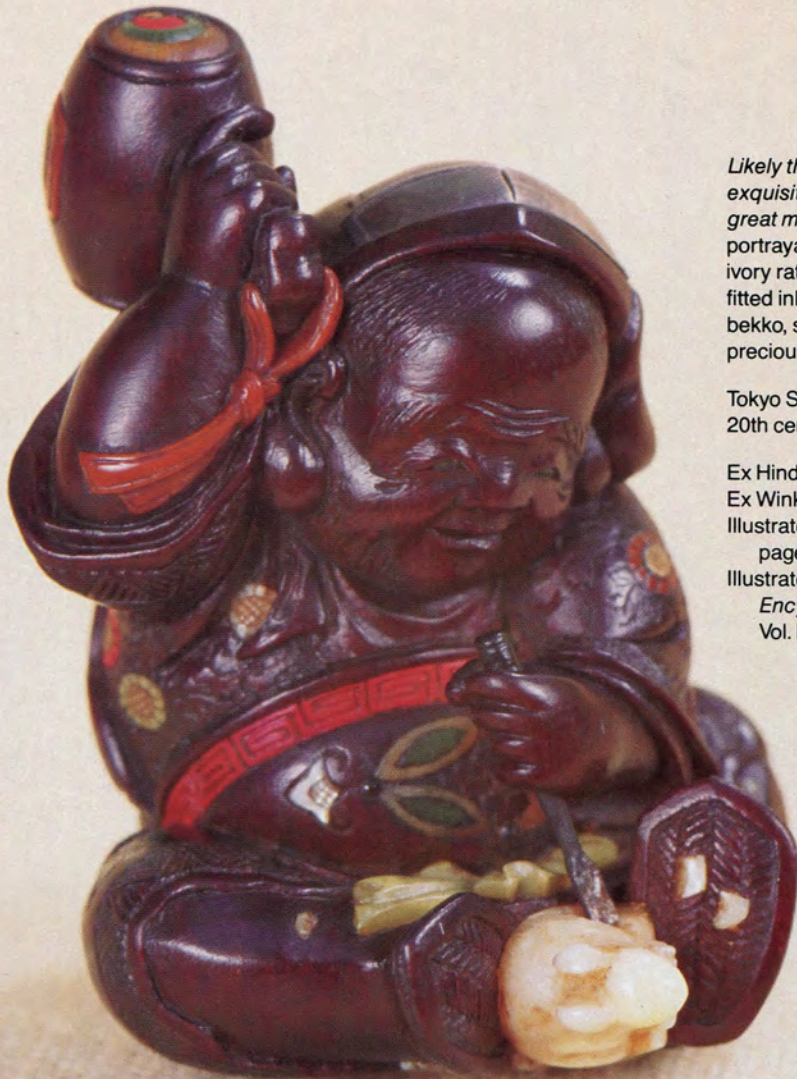
# NETSUKE KENKYUKAI

Study Journal

Volume 2, Number 4, 1982







*Likely the most ornate and exquisitely inlaid netsuke by the great master, Tokoku. This superb portrayal of Daikoku sculpting an ivory rat displays a myriad of perfectly fitted inlays in lacquer, horn, pearl, bekkō, stained ivory, aogai and other precious materials.*

Tokyo School, late 19th to early 20th century

Ex Hindson Collection

Ex Winkworth Collection

Illustrated in Davey's *Netsuke*  
page 163 number 489.

Illustrated in *The Connoisseur  
Encyclopedia of Antiques*  
Vol. II, 1955

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# NETSUKE KENKYUKAI

Study Journal

Volume 2, No. 4 December 1982

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### Cover Description

We are soliciting responses from our readers concerning this netsuke. See Q & A Forum. Photography by Michael B. Glass.

### Table of Contents

The Cover .....	3
From Your Editor .....	4
President's Message .....	4
Membership Corner .....	4
Letters .....	5
Q & A Forum .....	6
Staghorn Figure Netsuke <i>by Dr. Jay E. Hopkins</i> .....	7
Portrait of a Collector—Virginia Atchley <i>by Joy Epstein</i> .....	17
Random Thoughts on Netsuke Aesthetics <i>by Raymond Bushell</i> ...	23
The 1893 Auction Catalog of Dr. J. D. C. Titsingh <i>by Mary Camper-Titsingh</i> .....	31



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Netsuke Kenkyukai Society is a non-profit organization. The purpose of the Society, as stated in its By-Laws, is to promote the study of netsuke and their related appurtenances, the artists who created them and the society from which they evolved. Such study is accomplished through conventions, exhibits, lectures, workshops and the dissemination of written materials, photographs and its Study Journal, published four times a year.

Submission of articles and materials for consideration for publication in the Study Journal are solicited at the submitter's risk. Send to Netsuke Kenkyukai Study Journal, c/o Robert L. McGowen, 2400 First National Tower, Tulsa, OK 74103, U.S.A.

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Additional copies of this Journal may be ordered from the above P.O. Box address at a price of U.S. \$10.00 each.



## FROM YOUR EDITOR



Robert L. McGowen

**W**ITH this issue we conclude Volume 2 of your Study Journal. The four issues in 1982 represent a greatly expanded product, but more importantly, their contents have been of great quality and scholarship. This has been possible only by reason of the fine response we have had to our re-

quests for articles. When I first took over as editor, I was concerned regarding our ability to obtain suitable materials. My concern now is one of scheduling – an embarrassment of riches and truly a high-grade worry.

Don't get me wrong, we still desire and need your contributions!

A personal note: During the Kurstin Exhibit at Yale University, I shared a cab from the railroad station which led to my meeting Mary Camper-Titsing and then touring the exhibit with her. That introduction led to her article in this issue. I find it fascinating that her 18th C. ancestor was a collector of "contemporary" netsuke. This kind of chance encounter is but another reward of netsuke collecting. One is always surprised where new knowledge may be gained.

Robert L. McGowen  
Editor

## MEMBERSHIP CORNER



Adele Murphy

**I**T was thrilling to meet so many members, new as well as old, while attending the Netsuke Dealers Convention in New York City. We appreciate the words of encouragement that were given to us regarding the continued success of Netsuke Kenkyukai. Your moral and financial support are needed if we are to continue to grow.

As indicated in prior issues, we have decided to adjust the rates for membership to help meet the financial needs of our organization. Effective October 1, 1982 our yearly membership dues were increased to:

North America . . . . \$46.00

Outside

North America . . . . \$54.00

The above rates include airmail shipment of the Study Journal. A letter explaining the increase will be sent to you on your renewal date. I am sure you will agree that the new rate is still quite a bargain.

At this time we have available the March, June and September 1982 issues of the Study Journal at \$8.00 per issue. These back issues would make a wonderful gift for a friend. Contact me if you are interested in ordering any of the Journals.

With your continued support I feel confident that 1983 will be the most successful year in our organization's history.

*Adele Murphy*

Adele Murphy  
Membership Chairman

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



James Hume

**A** special message to our advertisers...Effective January 1, 1983 our advertising rates will be increased by an average of about 17%, for color and black & white.

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Now that 1982 is drawing to a close we can look back with a tre-

mendous amount of pride in what we have accomplished in the past year. Your organization has more than doubled in size this year and we are planning for a substantial increase in size next year. We have exceeded our objectives with respect to the Study Journal and continue to strive for improvements in future issues.

Special thanks go to our editor, Bob McGowen, who has slaved tirelessly in making this Journal happen, for you.

We hope this issue finds you happy and healthy and we look forward to serving your interests in 1983.

Best wishes for the Holiday Season and Happy Collecting!

*James*  
James Hume



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## LETTERS

---

I thank the readers of the *Study Journal* for teaching me more about the Ono No Komachi. However, the current issue (Vol. 2, No. 3) poses a new question. In "Kokusai and His World," Paul Moss writes that "likely pupils" of *Tokoku* include *Kokoku*, *Sokoku*, and *Yukoku*. May I nominate *Minkoku* as another likely pupil?

Aside from George Lazarnick's photograph of a lion dancer with *Minkoku*'s signature (*Netsuke and Inro Artists*, p. 767), there is no record of this carver. Lazarnick commented, "I am sure this is by a pupil of *Tokoku* - same style in the use of inlays, etc." Has anyone else seen netsuke that might establish this *Minkoku* as another pupil of *Tokoku*?

Isabel Cunningham  
Annapolis, Md.

George Lazarnick replies:

My illustration of a child in a *shishimai* mask on page 767 of my N&IA is signed with a different *Min* (K299 with Radical 96 on the left) than the recorded netsuke artist, *Minkoku*. I don't know where Mrs. Cunningham got what she quotes me as saying. I can't justify any connection between this carver, hitherto unrecorded, and *Tokoku*.

George Lazarnick  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I would like to make the following observations concerning James Hume's article in Vol. 2, No. 3 of the *Study Journal*.

The questions presented in the case of Mrs. Smith, like all legal questions, are not answerable as black or white but rather in varying shades of grey. We do not conclude that Mr. Jones necessarily had better title than Mrs. Smith. Assuming that Mrs. Smith acts *promptly* she well might be able to recover netsuke 3 from Mr. Jones. That is, Mr. Jones would then have recourse to

Dealer Y and/or the museum. Mrs. Smith originally got good title to the third netsuke since it was not stolen and was purchased by her through a dealer entrusted with it for that purpose (or perhaps owned by the dealer). She, in turn, never entrusted the netsuke to anyone. It was taken from her by force of arms. Uniform Commercial Code 2-403 is designed to allocate the risk of loss between two innocent parties. The entruster loses due to having knowledge of the possibility of an unauthorized sale and for having been able to prevent the risk. Mrs. Smith does not qualify as either and may well have a better title than Mr. Jones, assuming she does not wait too long to act and become guilty of what is known as "laches." Her voluntary transfer, which is the hallmark of UCC 2-403 (or voluntary inaction-acquiescence) has not occurred.

If, as the article presupposes, Mrs. Smith does not have the right to reclaim the netsuke from Mr. Jones, she would then have an excellent cause of action against the museum for the loss sustained by her (but not if in fact she was entitled to the netsuke back from Mr. Jones thereby leaving Mr. Jones with the cause of action against the museum).

The problem is how to measure the loss sustained. It should be based upon the fair market value of the netsuke in question. If in fact it had a fair market value of \$9,000.00, she should be entitled to that amount as damages, notwithstanding the fact that the museum sold it for only \$1,800.00. If in fact it was worth less than \$9,000.00, then her damages would be so limited. The question would then be how it was possible for Mrs. Smith to pay \$9,000.00 for the netsuke in question and the museum subsequently sell it for \$1,800.00 in a subsequent sale. Perhaps the difference results from

a touch of unreality in the example cited.

If it was worth reasonably close to \$9,000.00, that is what the museum should have sold it for and be liable to Mrs. Smith for that amount. In fact the sale for \$1,800.00 to Mr. Jones under those circumstances would in itself be suspect.

As a practical matter Mrs. Smith should also join Dealer X in the action and in some way get him to defend the \$9,000.00 price that she paid for it. She should play him off against the museum. This is more strategy than legality, but very often the strategy of the situation is more important to making a recovery. Perhaps even Dealer Y should be named as a defendant in the action Mrs. Smith could bring. If Mr. Jones were to be the loser, he would bring his action against Dealer Y and the museum.

Along the way James raises the question: "Does the bona fide purchaser for value law adequately protect all parties?" The answer is, of course not, that it is not intended to protect *all* parties. It is not possible to protect all parties. What it is intended to do is to prevent loss for the party least culpable or least negligent in a given situation and attempts to direct the loss at the party using the least care.

James reaches the conclusion at the end of the article that "an owner entrusting his goods to an individual does not risk the possibility of losing his title when such individual sells the goods to a bona fide purchaser." I do not believe that a general conclusion can be accepted on this question. He does not risk the loss of losing title merely by entrusting goods to a non-dealer. However, there could well be circumstances involved with such entrusting which would lead to a conclusion that the entruster has lost title to a bona fide purchaser, both as a result of UCC and as a result of common law estoppel.

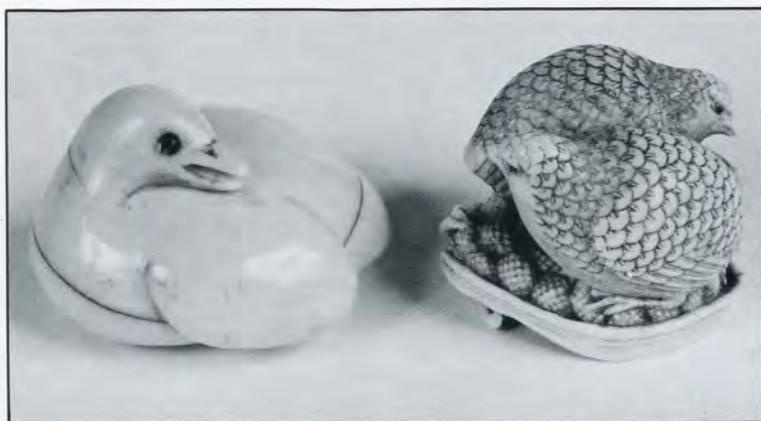
Edward Flower  
Attorney at Law  
Bay Shore, N. Y.



THE Q & A Forum is intended to be a regular feature of your Journal, wherein readers have the opportunity to ask or suggest questions and, more importantly, provide answers or viewpoints. The responses will be assembled, reviewed and finally treated by a panel of advisors consisting of Sharen T. Chappell, Richard R. Silverman and Denis Szeszler. While recognizing that some questions may have simple answers, many will require a fuller treatment and there may be differing views and no absolute truths. The success of this department will depend on the contributions which our readers provide to the dialogue.

We find in our collection, two *Okatomo* bird netsuke of wildly contrasting styles:

One is a wonderfully smooth-surfaced, stylized single bird with strong tactile appeal; the other, the well-known pair of quail-on-millet, richly detailed for the delight of the eye.



## Q & A Forum

1. Could such different carvings both be by the hand of perception of the same *Okatomo*?

2. If so, which represents the earlier and which the later style of this artist's professional development?

3. Might this difference simply reflect the artist's response to changing tastes of the Japanese netsuke consumer market of the times?

4. Finally, does the Forum find, from either their own personal experience, or their dealer contact with the wider world of collectors, that the sequential progression from one style to another, referred to in questions #2 and #3 above, also tends to characterize the evolution in preferences in netsuke styles over the lifetime of most contemporary collectors?

Michael and Lucy Foster  
Portland, Oregon

## The Cover

Do any of our readers have ideas concerning the figure pictured actual size on the front cover of this issue?

The ferocity of the facial expression and the power and movement of the dragon wrapped around from back to front, combined with a very high order of carving technique make this an outstanding example of some artist's work. As the piece is unsigned we don't know for certain who may have carved this unusual netsuke.



Can this piece be attributed to one of the known master carvers or is it simply an outstanding example of an unknown artist's work? Can any of our netsuke detectives help us out?

I enclose photos of a *Kokusai* netsuke in staghorn, slightly translucent, which was included in my exhibition *Eccentrics in Netsuke* in October. It came from the Dr. Jay Hopkins collection. I think that I have partially deciphered its meaning, but that *Kokusai*, in his whimsically awkward way, intended it all

Q & A, see page 20





WITH the notable exception of the fine staghorn creations of the Asakusashool (*Kokusai, Rensai, Masayuki, et al.*) which are already well recognized and have received adequate press, staghorn figure netsuke remain an under-recognized and relatively unappreciated (and thus inexpensive) group of netsuke. I happen to feel the Asakusa pieces are superb and original creations but will omit them from this discussion in order to concentrate on other staghorn figural pieces.

Staghorn is the common or popular name for deer antler. It is really a misnomer as staghorn is not true horn. Horn is a modification of the outer or skin layer; such as hair, nails, etc. Antler is an external outgrowth from bone, and so the properties and character are very similar to bone. As a matter of fact, it may be quite difficult to tell the two apart and probably a number of netsuke are misidentified as to the material. Fig. 1 is an early bone *oni* mask.

Male deer grow antlers beginning in the second year. The antlers progressively enlarge and add tynes (points) yearly up to an age of ten years, after which they tend to become smaller. Deer shed their

## Staghorn Figure Netsuke

by Dr. Jay E. Hopkins



Fig. 1. Bone *oni* mask.

antlers yearly in the early spring. Thus carvers could obtain the material from animals killed by hunters or from antlers they have found in the woods, although the latter do not last long as they are eaten by rodents for their salt. Domesticated deer herds would provide a yearly supply.

The only living portion of the antler is the "velvet" covering which carries the blood vessels and nutrients. When growth (usually late summer or fall) is complete an enlargement ("coronet") develops at the base, choking off the circulation and the velvet is shed.

Staghorn provided a readily available and inexpensive carving medium, but the material presented a number of problems for the carver. First were the limitations presented by the size and shape of the material itself. Secondly, much of the core of the antler is of porous, spongy cancellous material unsuitable for carving. As an aside this latter characteristic usually allows for identification of the material as somewhere on the piece can be found the telltale pitting or pock-marking and/or a separate plug may be found where the artist filled the porous center with a separate piece of antler. Finally, the material itself is very dense (much more so than ivory or wood) and difficult to carve. Modern-day carvers state they commonly break knives or working tools while working with the material.

Artists working in ivory or wood could start with an idea and a block of material relatively easy to carve,

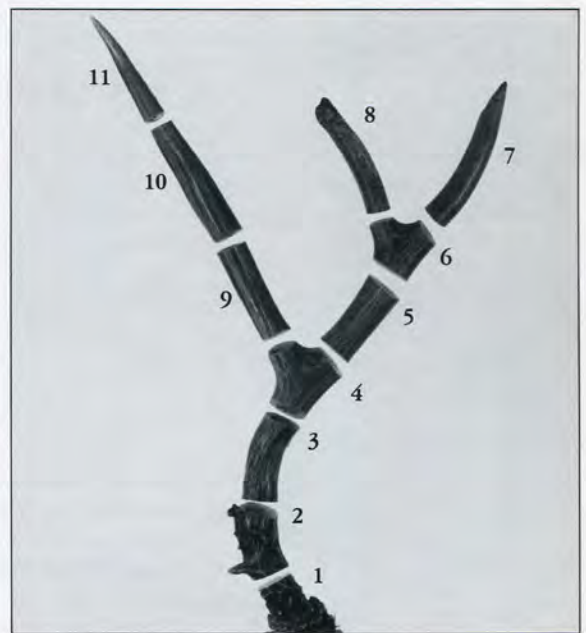


Fig. 2. Deer antlers one whole and one sectional.





Fig. 3. Kappa or *bakemono* with natural hair from coronet.

whereas the staghorn carver started with elongated, fairly straight tubes or flat solid pieces (branch points) and fashioned their creations from that point. As we will discuss later, it is the carver's ability to deal with each of these problems that determines the success of the piece. Recognizing this helps us to appreciate that the few real staghorn masterpieces are truly remarkable creations.

Looking at the cut up antler compared with a whole antler allows us to recognize the origin of the various types of staghorn pieces (Fig. 2).



Fig. 4. Stylized *shishi* signed *Rensai*.

The Kappa with the hair (Fig. 3), comes from the base or coronet (No. 1 in Fig. 2). *Manju*, *ryusa*, or flat solid pieces, typical of the Asakusa carvers (Fig. 4) come from the base or branch points where the material is densest (Nos. 4 and 6 in Fig. 2). Tall figures, *sashi* pieces (Fig. 5) and pipe cases come from the long central positions (Nos. 9, 10, 11 in Fig. 2). The terminal types are sometimes used for standing figures and for plugs.

A couple of very early types are recognized. First are the silk seals which are said to date from the 17th C. and are often grotesque heads of a foreigner on a base (for the seal), as in Fig. 6. Occasionally, a tall figure showing signs of great age comes to light. As is true with the early ivory or wood tall figures these are usually larger than their later counterparts and the dress is strongly Chinese in character. The Kwanyu in Fig. 7 is really a good early example demonstrating that with age staghorn can develop patina and colorings unsurpassed by ivory or wood for its depth and interest.

Japanese literature states that the "Dutchmen" or foreigners were some of the earliest figure netsuke and were produced in the vicinity of Nagasaki and sold as souvenirs to the Japanese visiting to get a look at these "strange creatures". I'm certainly not able to comment on that, but most of the staghorn Dutchmen I've seen appear to date from the early 19th C.

Far and away the largest number of staghorn netsuke are a group of standing figures usually *sennin* (Fig. 8), one of the seven gods, foreigners, etc. These pieces are repetitive, crudely carved with little artistic merit and probably responsible for the low esteem given most staghorn pieces. It has been postulated that these folk-art pieces suggest the occasional product of a working man. There are such recognized pieces but the large number of staghorn figures carved with great similarity would mitigate against this. These are the organized output of a group of artisans.



Fig. 5. Kappa with natural hair. *Sashi* type netsuke.



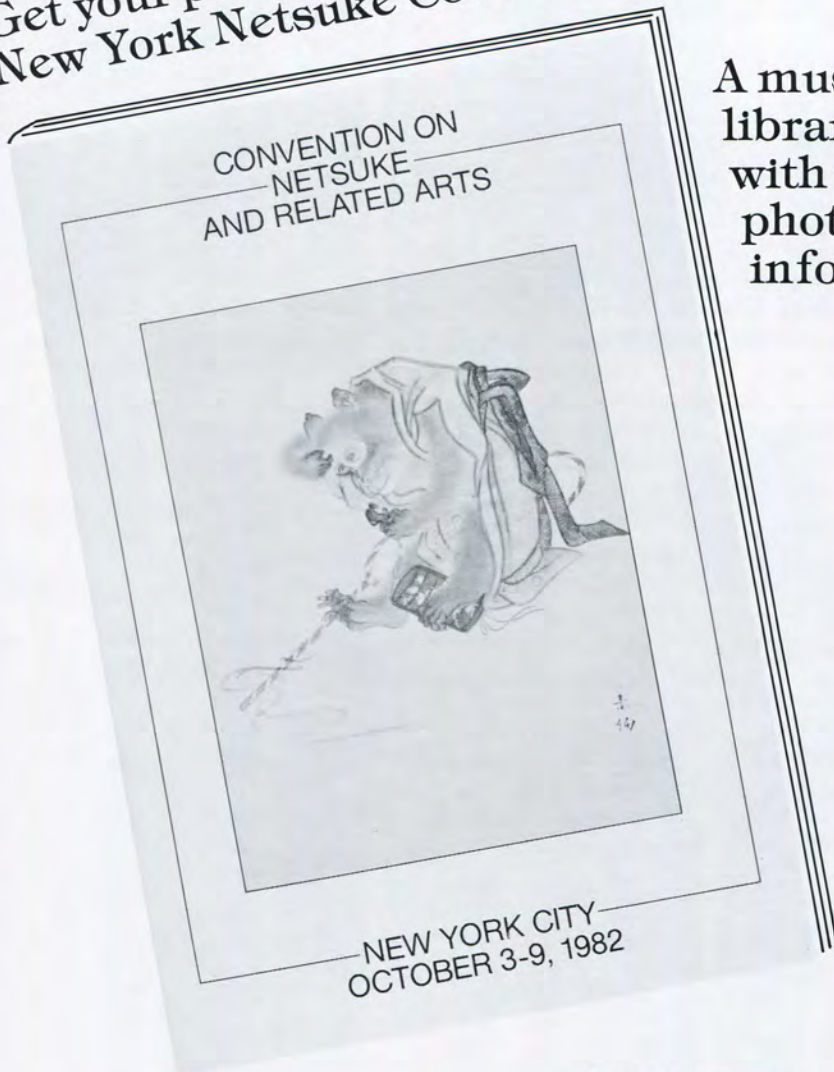


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Fig. 6. Silk seal.



Fig. 7. Early Kwanyu.



Fig. 8. Crude *sennin*.



Fig. 9. Seibo Sennin in staghorn and ivory with appropriate section of antler.





When in Japan I was told that these were souvenir pieces for the Japanese as they traveled, visited shrines or attended festivals. Possibly so, but they were probably also less expensive, utilitarian netsuke for the working man. They certainly were not commercial export pieces made for Western trade, and thus at least have the merit that age, utility and authenticity imparts.

Intermixed in this large group are a number of pieces of better quali-



Fig. 10. Kanza.



Fig. 11. Okame.

ty. The subject matter tends to be similar but more varied. These include a number of *sennin*, gods, foreigners, etc. but in the better pieces the artists tend to branch out into other areas of folklore (particularly early Chinese figures – Kwanyu, Shoki, Kanza, Daruma, etc.)

What makes these pieces better? Obviously the quality of carving and degree of finishing is far superior. The details are much more carefully and deeply cut and the pieces have a finished or polished look. These pieces in fact may be mistaken for ivory. But several other factors also set these apart and if we go back over original lists of problems that the material presents to the carver, these factors become apparent.

First, the density of the material makes carving much more difficult and arduous. Therefore, a piece that shows a great deal of carefully carved detail and particularly a great deal of depth and undercutting represents a significant effort on the part of the artist.

Secondly, the material presents limitations in size and shape. An artist may carefully and skillfully carve a figure but the piece may still remain stiff and uninteresting. The ultimate achievement is to carve a piece that has so much flow and dynamics that the original shape of the material is not apparent.



Fig. 12. Daruma crossing the ocean on a reed and section of antler.

Finally, staghorn has a porous core that is not very suitable for carving. This is sometimes dealt with by using plugs (useful in identifying material). These plugs are other pieces of staghorn but can be quite unsightly.

Some artists have the ability or take the time to disguise cleverly the plugs or on occasion to use them to enhance the piece. Moreover most pieces of staghorn will have other areas of porous or graining surfaces that can detract from the piece. The successful artists chose relatively solid pieces of material and then carved the figure in such a manner to keep these surfaces hidden or unnoticeable. The ultimate achievement comes when the artist can use this surface to enhance the piece such as in the famous rat on fruit of Virginia Atchley (Study Journal Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 10, Fig. 5) or the *koro* (incense burner) where this surface greatly resembles a burned or corroded surface of the containers.

Considering the above factors, let's look at a group of figures. First are three single standing figures, Seibo Sennin (Fig. 9), a basket of peaches with a Kanza with scroll (Fig. 10) and a coy, probably *shunga* Okame (Fig. 11). All have fairly nicely carved details and finish when compared with other staghorn pieces. (Comparisons with wood or ivory are not appro-



priate.) But the original shape and size of the material create somewhat still, lifeless figures. The material surface is solid and the plugs are not overly apparent. Seibo Sennin (Fig. 9) is shown with an appropriate section of antler and is compared with an ivory carving of the same subject and approximately the same age. Note how much more undercut and detailed the ivory piece is despite similar quality of carving. The staghorn piece represents a far more arduous undertaking than the same subject in ivory. Seibo's top plug is hidden in the hairdo and the feet are solid. Kanzan does have a noticeable plug in his head but the bottom plug is disguised in the feet as it is with the Okame. The next pieces depict Daruma crossing the ocean on a reed (Fig. 12), and a parody of Hotei depicted as a common porter (Fig. 13). In the first piece the artist took a curved section of antler and carved the piece to suggest robes flowing in the breeze. With the Hotei piece, besides the pleasing humor of a god in a less than god-like pose, the top plug is formed by the large bag and the bottom is the entire leg section. Two more figures show an early Kwanyu (Fig. 14) and a Nio or wrestler (Fig. 15). Kwanyu's plug is disguised in his helmet and the limits of shape are obscured by a



Fig. 13. Hotei as a porter.



Fig. 14. Kwanyu.

great amount of detail. The plug of the Nio blends into a bald head and enhances the ferocity. The artist creates "movement" with the position of the arms and legs by choosing a section that flares to a branch point. The last two figures are of two Shokis. The first piece is Shoki with an *oni* screen or shield (Fig. 16). One supposes he is using this to sneak up on his prey but with the facial expression and his past history one can almost sense the futility in the effort. The next is a more typical Shoki holding an *oni* by the foot (Fig. 17). Both pieces are probably carved from the forked section with the figure of Shoki coming from one branch of the fork and the shield or *oni* from the other. The top plugs are disguised within Shoki's helmet or headgear. The pieces have quality, flow, humor and finesse and represent a significant achievement in a difficult medium.

In addition to the figural pieces, there are a group of staghorn animals. Perhaps these are the poor man's answer to the Kyoto school animals carved in ivory or wood. The subject matter is often similar. The Asakusa carvers created some fabulous animal carvings, both



Fig. 15. Nio or wrestler.



Fig. 16. Shoki with *oni* shield.



Fig. 17. Shoki with captured *oni*.





A fine ivory netsuke of a cockerel perched on a drum. The cockerel's eyes and the studs on the drum are inlaid. Signed *Yoshitomo*; 6cms; late 18th century.

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Fig. 18. Staghorn animals.

realistic and fantastic, but as mentioned above these are omitted from this discourse. The pieces pictured in Fig. 18 show a group of monkeys with one of the babies forming the plug, a typical recumbent oxen with the plug disguised in the folds of the rope and a typical puppy with awabi shell carved from an archaic or fossilized piece of material. The latter certainly creates a striking coloration and patina but its extreme density must have presented great carving problems. A significant step up in quality is represented by the fierce open mouth *shishi* (Fig. 19) and the elegant seated *kirin* (Fig. 20).

A final consideration is the origin of these pieces and I must begin by admitting that I don't know but

several thoughts suggest themselves. Aging characteristics, wear, size and subject matter would suggest the majority of these pieces are from the 18th C. A few pieces suggest an even earlier origin. Are better quality pieces the occasional product of the more famous carvers of the time who usually worked with ivory or wood? Possibly, but I do not think so. It is always a temptation to attribute a nice piece to a recognized and respected artist, but if this were so, I think that an occasional signed piece would surface. The subject matter and carving styles suggest the work as having been done in the large centers such as Kyoto and Tokyo (as possibly Osaka) in the 18th C. The better quality pieces probably represent

the occasional inspired or patronized effort by one of the large group of artisans or perhaps the product of the most gifted or skilled. Evidence suggests that these artisans in the 17th and 18th C. probably worked in more than one material (ivory, wood, and staghorn) and probably did supply the netsuke to the masses. Perhaps in Tokyo, the Asakusa school could have been the mid-19th C. offshoot from this earlier group of artisans.

The purpose of this article has been to present a group of netsuke that have received very little attention and are felt to be under appreciated and probably under valued. At a time when the most publicity is given to the record breakers and attention is continuously focused on "investment quality pieces," the collector of modest means or a collector more interested in collecting for fun rather than for investment may feel left out. Raymond Bushell and others have often talked about the types of netsuke that are not in vogue but which, if carefully selected, can make a very interesting, authentic and nice quality collection at a more reasonable price. I feel that staghorn figures fit into this category and have tried to give some insight into looking at and evaluating these pieces. This article is far from complete and I welcome any further information, thoughts, or corrections pertaining to the subject. I would also like to thank a number of fellow collectors who have generously allowed me to borrow, study and have their pieces photographed to be included in this article.

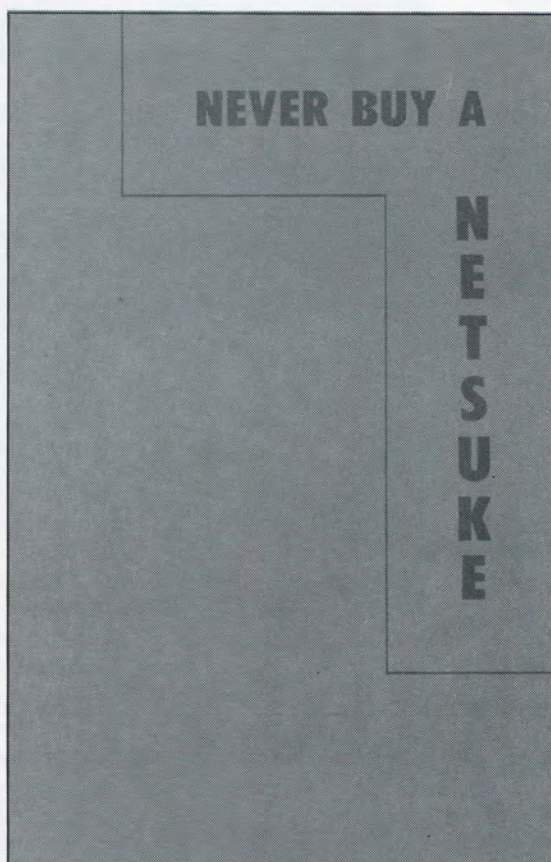


Fig. 19. *Shishi*.



Fig. 20. *Kirin*.





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## Armed Robbery - August 13, 1982

On August 13, 1982, The Oriental Corner was robbed at gunpoint by a man who took 105 netsuke and *inro* plus other Oriental antiques and jewelry. The items listed below are some of the pieces taken in this robbery. Should you have any information regarding these pieces, please call Marsha Vargas collect at (415) 941-3207.

1. Ivory netsuke of a fishergirl standing holding a clam shell. Unsigned. 18th C.
2. Wooden netsuke of a skull with snake signed *Masanao* (Yamada). 19th C. (Illustrated INCS Journal September 1982)
3. Wooden netsuke of a tiger signed *Kokei*. Ca. 1800 (Illustrated Netsuke Kenkyukai Journal March 1982)
4. Wooden netsuke of two bamboo shoots signed with *kakihan*. 19th C.
5. Four case brown lacquer *inro* with gold lacquer, mother-of-pearl and metal butterflies. Metal *ojime* with a snail. 19th C. Unsigned.
6. Four case gold lacquer *inro* with a rooster and hen design signed *Koma Kyukaku saku*. Amber *ojime*. 19th C.
7. Gold lacquer *manju* with Shibayama mother-of-pearl rabbit and flowers signed in mother-of-pearl reserve *Shibayama saku*. Late 19th C.
8. Red lacquered wooden *okimono* of a standing Daruma with ivory face, feet and hands signed *Chikusai*.
9. Ivory netsuke of a reclining ox signed *Toyomasa*. 18th C.
10. Ivory netsuke of a reclining ox signed *Tomotada*. Ca. 1800.
11. Ivory *okimono* of a samurai killing an eagle. Unsigned, 19th C.
12. Four case ivory *inro* with gold lacquer design of a woman, matching *ojime* and *manju*. Unsigned. 19th C.
13. Four case ivory and Shibayama *inro* with a flower cart and bird/floral design *ojime* and matching *manju*. Signed with *inro Shibayama* and on the *manju Masayuki* 19th C.
14. Wooden netsuke of a monkey looking out of a pumpkin signed *Kunimitsu*. 19th C.
15. Ivory netsuke of a *karako* carrying a gourd on one shoulder signed *Tomochika*. 19th C.
16. Ivory netsuke of *Ono-no-komachi* seated on a grave post inscribed *Chi*. 19th C. (Illustrated in Lazarnick)

## The Oriental Corner



Wooden netsuke of a reclining horse signed *Masakatsu*, Yamada School, late 19th Century. Length 5.8 cm; height 4.5 cm.



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**I**F you are fortunate enough to be in attendance when Virginia Atchley lectures at a Netsuke Convention, you are in for a treat. This lady makes listening easy with her beautifully structured sentences delivered in a soft, but positive manner. She is charming and poised and oh! so knowledgeable. She invites questions from the audience and handles them professionally. Those truly seeking information are rewarded with comprehensive answers that may contain stimulating challenges to the asker, directing him to further research of his own. As for the interrogator who is really only interested in the sound of his own voice (alas, there are a few), he is subtly interrupted and smoothly invited to see her after the lecture. She commands respect immediately with her informed manner. If this should happen to be your first introduction to Mrs. Atchley, it is possible that a couple of quick thoughts would dominate your impressions: she is probably a college professor, and there is no way one would walk up to this gal with a "Hi Ya! Ginny!" Or, so it seemed at my first encounter which was one of observation. Virginia was conducting a workshop at a Netsuke Convention. It was an inspiring experience. Her knowledge and presentation quickly captivated her audience. They listened attentively as she verbally moved them along effortlessly through her

---

## Portrait of a Collector

VIRGINIA ATCHLEY

by Joy Epstein

---



discourse. It wasn't until several days later that I happened into one of the hotel rooms to find about ten persons in conversation. All were seated on chairs or the sofa, except one individual, who was happily deposited on the floor. I looked at the scene and looked again. My eyes refused to believe what they were seeing – but there she was, Virginia

Atchley, sitting not so regally on the carpet, having a wonderful time "talking shop." Somehow, thought I, college professors do not sit on floors! And so, I had my second introduction, this time to Virginia Atchley the person – warm, sincere, and an animated conversationalist, wonderfully interested in others' views. "Hello Virginia," – the reality.

Looking back on those early impressions several years later, it became apparent that the initial images were true as far as they went, but time was required to bring into focus the complete picture of this remarkable lady. What was missing from my memory photo was a recording of the famous Atchley smile. One may not be aware of this characteristic at first, but over a period of time it emerges as dominant. It is always there – friendly, soft, welcoming, and it is more than facial, it is actually a part of the voice and the personality. It is really wonderful. Someday, I hope to view Virginia's family photo album for a picture of Virginia, the girl. I'm sure that smile was there from the beginning.

Those beginnings were a long way from California, the Atchleys' home for the last twenty-eight years. Virginia was born and grew up in Lynn, Massachusetts. Colleges were attended in the same geographical area, beginning at



Ikkyo.



Horse.



Smith College and transferring to Simmons College in Boston, from which she graduated in 1942. It was the time of the Second World War, and the United States was struggling in its war efforts around the world. It seemed that everyone was engaged in some war endeavor. The spirit of the country was united – every person wanted to make a contribution. For Virginia this required a complete change of locale. She moved from Massachusetts to California where she accepted a job as assistant to the Director at the Division of War Research in San Diego. And, what a lucky move it was, for it was there that she met her future husband, Ray Atchley, who was involved in experimental work for the United States government, administered through the University of California. Ray, a graduate of M.I.T. with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, had come to San Diego to head a government war project developing decoys for submarines. The young inventor (who in later years would manufacture some of his own inventions) found himself working in the same lab with Virginia. A friendship quickly developed and, as Virginia so succinctly states, “in 1946, at the completion of the war project, we were quietly married in San Diego. We

returned to Boston – Ray to further work at M.I.T., and myself to editorial work at Harvard.” They remained there until 1951 at which time Ray accepted another assignment which started them on the road back to California. The journey had a detour of three years in Tulsa, Oklahoma, but finally culminated in Los Angeles in 1954. They have lived in California ever since.

The ties “back east” remained strong. It was during a trip to Boston in August of 1963 that Virginia, visiting with one of her friends, was first introduced to netsuke. The friend had begun a collection and had acquired about thirty pieces. Virginia’s interest and enthusiasm was immediate and resulted in an introduction to a Boston dealer from whom she made her first purchases. Could that dealer ever have imagined that those two netsuke he sold that day would be the beginning of a famous collection? And does Virginia remember her first purchase after almost twenty years? Unlike one collector who recently told me he has had so many love affairs (with netsuke, of course) that he could not remember his first one, Virginia instantly recalls her first two gems – or so they seemed to her at the time.

One netsuke was a whimsical rat chewing hungrily on a piece of meat. This wooden piece was in sharp contrast to the ivory figures of the second netsuke; a very happy Fukurokuju with a little boy shaving his hair. The little rat and the laughing Fukurokuju found a home in California. Unfortunately, rats tend to roam and Virginia’s moved on to another collector, but the Atchleys still have the Fukurokuju and Virginia feels it will always be in their collection. It is a very special piece.

Virginia and Ray’s involvement with netsuke was immediate. As a young couple, they could afford several pieces at a time with netsuke prices relatively inexpensive in the mid-1960’s. Collecting without requiring a major financial investment was not difficult then, because as Virginia points out, “Netsuke prices didn’t reach the four-figure stage until the famous Hindson Sales in 1967 and 1968.” As a beginning collector, Virginia had a natural tendency for the very old pieces, but her tastes changed a great deal over the years, evolving and expanding with the acquisition of knowledge about the subject. Her motto, “Be Informed,” has led to enormously enlarged dimensions. Today, she believes that,



*Mitsubiro*; Virginia Atchley’s favorite.



*Kaigyokusai*; Ray Atchley’s favorite.



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"The best collections have variety from every age." She and Ray buy for their own collection with this in mind. She is constantly on the lookout for the rare and unusual. I once saw several of her friends viewing some fine *inro* at a showing. One piece stood out from the others, not for its value, but for its obvious different quality. They each examined the piece and finally one said, "This is a Virginia piece." When I asked why, they explained that it would take someone with her knowledge to appreciate the intrinsic value. They were right. When Virginia saw the piece, sometime later, she promptly decided to add it to her collection. She still seeks works by her favorite artists, *Toyomasa, Masanao* of Kyoto and *Mitsuhiro* (probably her all time favorite), along with the large, old, unsigned 18th C. sculptures. Finding those pieces with patina and age, "add a good deal to the satisfying quality of netsuke."

The Atchleys have quite similar tastes when it comes to netsuke and *inro* selection. While they have no set rules about what gets added to the collection, Ray usually defers to Virginia's taste, although Virginia will not buy anything that Ray is negative about. He has always been most supportive of her abilities, and while he rarely attends Netsuke Conventions, he does have a real feeling for this art form and truly enjoys their collection. Their daughter, Susan, is also a devotee having grown up with netsuke as most children do with "stuffed teddy bears." But, it is Virginia who is the true collector, never tiring in her quest for knowledge, always eagerly searching for new sources of learning. This love of netsuke has led to an outstanding collection of several hundred pieces. While this is not an unusually large collection, it has reached the point where it satisfies the Atchleys. It has been culled and refined over the years with many pieces being sold as Virginia's and Ray's tastes developed. In a recent interesting conversation with Virginia, she revealed how her preferences for

netsuke have altered. She describes herself as a "purist" in her beginning phase of collecting, dedicated to acquiring only those specimens that fit the description of what a netsuke should be – it even had "to feel just right." For a long time the Atchley's collection was lacking in pieces of the *So* School, for example. They were reluctant to purchase from this category reasoning that they were not true netsuke. Virginia recalls appreciating that they were "marvelously carved," but not truly functional, having been made primarily for display. She has also been influenced by what she refers to as "waves of style." "For example," says Virginia, "popularity of netsuke varies with the times. Animals are the hottest subject in netsuke now, but legends and people were the most sought-after subjects prior to the Trower Collection Sale in 1913." Virginia suggests that another case in point would be the Iwami School pieces, certainly not highly thought of until about fifteen years ago. Now, they are very much in vogue. "Today," says Virginia, "I have finally gotten my taste where I want it." She appreciates those sculptures that are well done, regardless of the current vogue, and collects not for investment, but for beauty and appeal.

Virginia's interest in *inro* is also strong. She came to this area later than to netsuke, but she is a recognized authority in both fields today. She is much in demand as a guest speaker for museums, special groups, colleges, and conventions. Although she attempts to limit these speaking engagements to California, she has on many occasions lectured in other states, mainly in the northwestern part of the country. Virginia is also a respected author. She has contributed many fine articles on netsuke and lacquers to various periodicals. When her by-line appears, the informed reader knows he can look forward to excellent journalism.

Virginia Atchley – a talented lady – a collector's collector!



Q & A, from page 6

to be a riddle, and so I wonder if any of your devious readers might be able to explain it.

The form is of an iron kettle for the tea ceremony, possibly of imperial origin, given the *mon* on the top band. Then on the front, carved in relief, are what appears to be a design based on link sausages or donuts. It is possible that the one on the right may be two rings used for supporting *chawan* (tea bowls) in tea ceremony. Could the object on the left be intended as coils of ash from an incense stick? A clue is given on the back, where there are incised a tobacco pipe and three *hiragana* syllables; *no* (possessive particle), another syllable which I can't make sense out of, and *ka*, which is an exclamatory particle. It seems to me that the pipe (*kiseru*) is intended as a visual riddle, as in those riddles where we have the picture of an eye for "I", or maybe a picture of a swelling toe and another of a flower for "cornflour". At this point one realises that the left-hand element on the front can be read as the *hiragana* syllable *nu*. I don't think the donuts are meant as a syllable; maybe they're another play on words? Can anybody work out if in fact the whole thing is a riddle, and if so does it mean "Donut tap your old pipe out in my imperial kettle?" Is this an indication of *Kokusai's* sense of humour, bloody-mindedness or senile dementia? Yours in mystification.

Paul Moss  
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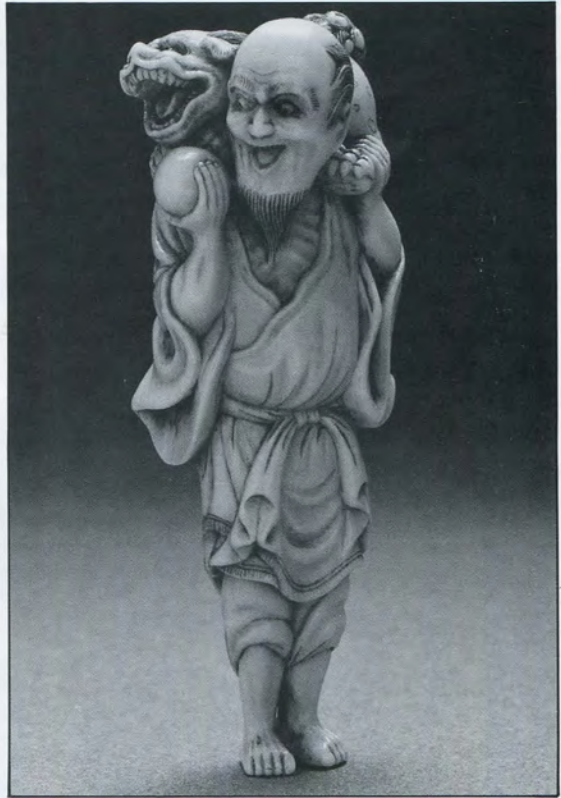
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Ivory netsuke of male and female  
rabbits in affectionate pose, eyes  
inlaid with horn and coral.

Mid 19th C. Style of *Rantei*.



I LIKE Virginia Atchley's article in the *Netsuke Kenkyukai Study Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, for two main reasons. One, her approach is purely aesthetic. Two, the simple joy of collecting, unburdened by signature, provenance and price, bubbles up throughout the article.

Other recent attempts at an aesthetic approach were less successful. The size of a netsuke should not be confused with the power of its portrayal. A netsuke ought not be so small that its elements do not register easily on the eye, nor so large that it cannot function, but within these limits, size and power are different, distinct qualities. A small netsuke may be more dramatic, may show more emotion and movement, than a large netsuke which is static or commonplace. All netsuke are miniature. If size were the equivalent of power no netsuke could qualify as great art.

The smaller, lighter, often more elegant, netsuke are the natural companions of the *inro* just as the larger and heavier netsuke are the natural companions of the pouch. As *inro* grow in popularity the demand will increase for the more

## Random Thoughts on Netsuke Aesthetics

by Raymond Bushell



Fig. 1. delicate netsuke that accord with lacquer.

The distinction between original creation and current condition should not be blurred in the explanation of a price difference. Original creation is the work of the carver; condition is the result of handling by others. Wear and effacement exert a reasonable affect on aesthetic appeal, and hence on valuation. But where two netsuke signed by the same carver are substantially identical, the poor condition of the one is not the fault of the carver but of subsequent handlers. The comparison then is not between a good netsuke and a bad one, but between a netsuke in good condition and a netsuke in poor condition. The price difference should be attributed to condition, where it belongs, rather than to the quality of the carving.

I continue to find some of my best netsuke among dealers who are anything but wealthy. (See *Netsuke Trends Chronicle*, The Crystal Ball) Their good taste, diligence, and excellent reputations enable them to secure fine netsuke on trust, if not by purchase. A few

dealers remain poor because they lack the audacity to ask maximum prices or lack the promotional wizardry that transforms geese into swans. One of the most endearing dealers I know, a Japanese, said, "If I have to pay a high price I ask you a high price but if I get a bargain you get a bargain." This respected and trusted dealer will never be rich but he has turned up as many fine netsuke as any dealer I know.

Some few dealers are inclined to disparage netsuke that were sold by their competitors. The practice is shortsighted. It prejudices collectors, especially those fledglings who have not yet gained the confidence to fly on their own wings. When the dealer on the right says genuine and the dealer on the left says fake, the net result may not be to demolish the one dealer or to elevate the other, but to destroy a potential collector in the bud.

A dealer may be entitled to criticize the netsuke a collector purchased elsewhere but only if his criticism is well supported by substantive evidence. The criticism should be objective and judicious, and voiced solely for the benefit of



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.





Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.

the collector. To paraphrase Virginia Atchley's quotation of Thomas Hoving, "If an expert says an object is genuine when it is a fake he commits an error, but if he says an object is a fake when it is genuine he commits a *sin*." The dealer who, when asked his reasons for denigrating a netsuke, retreats behind the cop-out, "It's a matter of taste," exposes the feebleness and paucity of his expertise.

An instance of a common criticism of a type which is to be deplored was told to me recently by an important dealer. He had sold a netsuke to a new collector who eventually showed it to a second dealer. The second dealer said, "There is something about the piece that bothers me," and, "It doesn't look right to me," and made other remarks in the same vein. There were no explanations offered, no reasons given, nor was there any demonstration. Such vague disparagements as "No

good" and "Not right" are insidious. The first dealer has no evidence with which he can come to grips nor an enumeration of defects which he has the possibility of contradicting. The poor novice is unsettled, and to no one's advantage. The case had a fortunate ending: the dealer's offer to take back the netsuke restored the collector's confidence and he decided to keep it. But the reprehensible character of these factless disparagements is not diminished.

In three successive issues of the *INCS Journal* (Vols. 9/3, 9/4 and 10/1) Bernard Hurtig disparaged *Sosui's* simple designs on aesthetic grounds. (No one is more aware than I am of the debt netsuke owes Bernard for raising its status from minor art to major, in monetary terms, if in no other. My rebuttal has no animus beyond the scope of this article and the general benefit of placing the body of *Sosui's* work in accurate focus.) Bernard is quite

vehement. He writes that he saw *Sosui's* simple models fourteen years ago and knew at once—as he still does—that he "hated them." (*INCS Journal* 9/3) I am reminded of little Johnny's pronouncement on spinach: "I hate spinach and I'm glad I hate it because if I liked it I'd eat it and I hate it." Bernard gives no explanation for his black and white comparison: *Sosui's* *So* school netsuke are superb and costly; his simple designs are awful and almost worthless.

To begin at the beginning, I suggested to *Sosui* that he design simple subjects which would not entail numerous figures and extensive undercutting that required three of four weeks for completion. Far from abhorring the idea *Sosui* embraced it. (See *Sosui's* letter, *INCS Journal*, Vol. 5/2) Disillusionment set in when he found that designing good simple models often took as much time as carving the complicated ones, his familiar *tours de force*.



Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.





A powerful, late 18th century, Kyoto school ivory netsuke of wonderful form and composition. This beautiful grouping of mother and young displays a rare expression of feline delight. Mint condition with slight wear and a warm patina.

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Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

For his development of simple originals *Sosui* dug into ancient Chinese pottery (Figs. 1, 2, 3), ancient Chinese bronzes (Figs. 4, 5), Japanese dolls (Fig. 6), modernism (Fig. 7), *Haniwa* (Fig. 8), ordinary single figures (Figs. 10, 11, 12), and *mosaics*—a term *Sosui* liked to use for his combined materials and inlays (Figs. 13A and B, 14, 15). None of these innovations will be found in the product of the *So* School. *Sosui's* endeavors with new models did not exceed twenty percent of his total body of work. The balance comprised his customary complicated *So* School models.

*Sosui* also embraced my suggestion that he find new designs for his

complicated *tours de force* instead of frequently repeating old models like his blind men on a raft (Fig. 16). During this period he carved some original *tours de force* like Figs. 17, 18, 19 and others illustrated in my *Collectors' Netsuke*.

What are the pluses and minuses of *Sosui's* simple models? What might have prejudiced Bernard Hurtig against them? An artist's endeavors with new designs, new techniques and new media are aspects of his striving for fresh expression. The goal is praiseworthy in itself and merits a fair viewing.

Many netsuke subjects are Chinese in origin but they have been so thoroughly "Japanized"



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13A.



Fig. 13B.





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"L'ao T'se Riding the Unicorn," 19th century, ivory with silver horn, unsigned.



that we regard them as Japanese subjects. Gama Sennin and Hotei are examples. Figs. 1, 2 and 3 are almost exact replicas of the Chinese originals. These subjects were never adopted by Japanese artists and modified through the years with Japanese character and spirit. *Sosui* did not "Japanize" them. They are still Chinese in character. Perhaps this is the aspect that jars Bernard's sensibilities.

The same criticism does not apply to Figs. 4 and 5. *Sosui* adapted and modified the original Chinese bronze designs to insure good netsuke. For example, he shortened the legs of the bird and double inlaid the eyes. In Fig. 7

*Sosui* may be charged with artiness and contrivance, a frequent result among contemporary carvers of overstriving for a stunning effect. In Fig. 8 *Sosui* succeeded eminently in conveying a concentrated religious intensity. Figs. 6 and 9 are unusual Japanese subjects which he cleverly designed as fine netsuke. Figs. 10, 11 and 12 may be judged comparatively with representations of the same subjects by other carvers. Figs. 13A and B, 14 and 15 are inlays or combined materials which *Sosui* particularly relished carving. Although all *Sosui's* mosaic netsuke resulted from my original suggestion, Fig. 15 filled a special request of Mrs. Abram Gercik for a

birthday present for her husband.

No one can reasonably maintain that all an artist's efforts are successful, or that any artist is always his best. But it is rash for a dealer to make a blanket condemnation of a substantial portion of a fine carver's output and to prophesy a decreasing valuation by the marketplace. The effect of the prophecy is insidious for it tends to be self-fulfilling, given the dealer's potent price-setting influence and the insecurity of the majority of collectors. I declare for a fair, albeit subjective, valuation of *Sosui's* simple designs on aesthetic grounds alone.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.

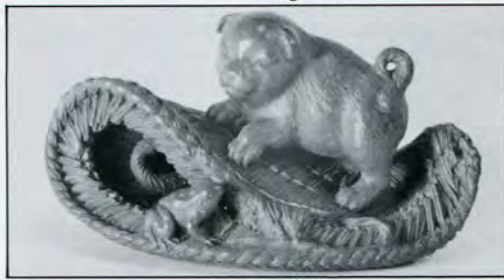


Fig. 19.



A few months ago Willi Bosshard showed Parry Hill, Johnny Johnstone, Grant Taylor, and me a *Tomotada kirin* he had recently acquired. It was quite similar to the Hindson *Tomotada kirin* illustrated in *Collectors' Netsuke*. We compared it with the four *kirin* marked "A", "B", "C" and "D".

*Kirin* "A" is signed *Yoshimasa*. It is illustrated as Fig. 194, *The Netsuke Handbook*. It is quite similar to Bosshard's *kirin* and to others signed *Tomotada*, *Okatomo* and *Yoshimasa*, though they all show minor variations in height, proportions, and crispness of carving. Had we been able to determine which of these nearly identical models was the first, the original, we could have claimed for it a well-deserved and substantial premium over all the others which followed. But lacking clairvoyance, this information is beyond us. It may be that the origi-

nator was not a *netsuke-shi* but an artist whose drawings were published in some forgotten design manual for craftsmen. Collectors must be satisfied with their version of a fine bold 18th C. ivory *kirin* in an impressive model of an uncommon subject.

*Kirin* "B" is unsigned; as are "C" and "D". It is tall, slender, beautifully proportioned. The carving is soft like wax rather than crisp like metal. Although it is the identical model as those signed *Tomotada* and *Yoshimasa* it reveals, in almost every aspect, that extra bit of artistry that marks the superior carving.

*Kirin* "C" is a slight variation on the standard model of "A" and "B". It is less placid, less statuesque, and less symmetrical. It is deeper-toned, more mobile, more bestial, and closer to breathing. It has a slight lean to the neck and a natural parting of the tail. It has individual power instead of the

uniformity of the standard model.

*Kirin* "D" was most certainly designed by the same unknown craftsman who carved the renowned Meinertzhagen *kirin*. The mouth is open with fangs threatening, the head is twisted on the body until it faces the rear, and one leg is raised to enhance the feeling of an aroused fire-breathing beast. The power of the carving is almost awesome. The carver attempted the utmost in his portrayal and succeeded. "A", "B", and "C" are fine netsuke in their own right but "D" occupies a peak. It illustrates the point that art and excellence know no limitations. Another as yet undiscovered *kirin* waiting in the wings may some day take the stage and exceed them all.

These are the main conclusions arrived at by our little group of expatriate collectors, though many other aesthetic inferences may be drawn from a comparison of the *kirin*.



Kirin A

Kirin B

Kirin C

Kirin D





Ivory study of two children riding  
stick horses. Signed *Tomochika*. \$1500.

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THE love of Japan and an interest in its people, customs and art has been a hereditary trait in my family since the late 1700s. This is attested by the pages (some of which are reproduced here) describing a netsuke collection from an 1893 auction catalog that I recently inherited along with six charming ivory netsuke. The yellowed 50-odd page catalog describes the entire collection of "L'Art Japonaise" which my father's grand-father, Dr. Jan Daniel Cornelius Titsingh (1821-1899), put up for auction sale when "he could no longer properly care for his treasures, being of advanced age and in a sad state of health." Dr. J. Titsingh was a physician who lived in the Hague, Netherlands, but it is not clear from the catalog whether the hotel "De Brakke Grond", where the auction was held on Wednesday, April 12, 1893, was in that city or in Amsterdam, the home of the auction house of Frederik Muller & Co.

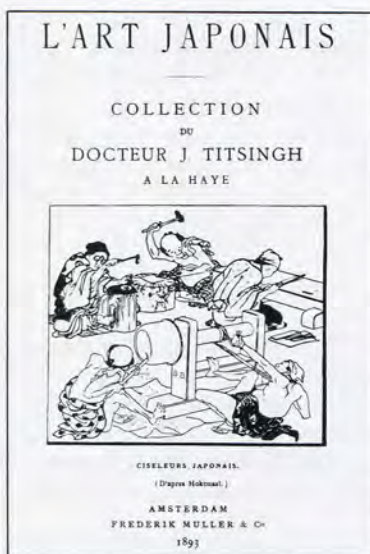
The narrative introduction to the auction catalog claims that a part of Dr. Titsingh's collection stemmed from objects assembled by Isaac Titsingh (1744-1812), whose name was not unknown to Japanophiles of the last Century.

Because they did not try to win religious converts to Christianity, only the Chinese and Dutch were permitted to trade in Japan after 1639. But even the Dutch, who were the greatest trading nation in the world in the late 17th C., were confined to a trading post on the tiny man-made island called Deshima, that jutted out into the harbor of Nagasaki. This trading post was important to the Dutch East India Company's monopoly trade in clove, mace, nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper, silk, sugar, coffee and tea from various parts of Asia.

In late 1779 Isaac Titsingh was appointed Opperhoofd (Chief Agent) of the Dutch East India Company trading post in Japan and he lived on the island of Deshima for nearly four years (November 29, 1779 to November 5, 1780 and November 24, 1781 to October 26,

# The 1893 Auction Catalog of Dr. J.D.C. Titsingh's Collection of Japanese Art

by Mary Camper - Titsingh



1783. Unlike many previous merchants, he was not merely interested in the lucrative trading opportunities offered by Japan, but was also genuinely fascinated by that country, its people and customs. His affable temperament gained him many Japanese friends, such as the stepfather of the Emperor, and he carried on an extended correspondence with many of them. Though he spoke and read Japanese, it apparently was his custom to correct the Dutch in the letters and return them to the various shoguns, *daimyo* and other Japanese personages who were his friends and were eager to learn the

difficult Dutch language! These letters, now riddled with book-worm-holes, have been preserved, and microfilmed, by the Kyoto Imperial University Library.

Because of frequent journeys to Yedo (Tokyo), to present himself at court, Isaac Titsingh was the best foreigner of that time to observe that land and its people, and he recorded much of what he learned for a book he planned to write. Alas, during a stay in Paris in 1812, he died following a short illness. (He is buried in Pere Lachaise Cemetery in that city). Many of his manuscripts, including a Dutch-Japanese dictionary, can today be found in the British Museum in London. However some of his papers were edited and published in France:

- Ceremonies useites au Japon pour les mariages et les funerailles. suivies de details sur la poudre Dosia, de la preface d'un livre de Confoutzee sur la pieté filiale; le tout traduit du japonais par feu M. Titsingh. Paris, Nepveu 1819.
- Memoires et anecdotes sur la dynastie regnante des Djogouns, souverains du Japon... Par M. Titsingh. Publie avec des notes et éclaircissements par M. Abel Remusat ... Paris: A Nepveu, 1820.
- Nipon o dai itsi ran; ou, Annales des empereurs du Japon, tr. par M. Isaac Titsingh, avec l'aide de plusieurs interpretes attaches au comptoir hollandais de Nangasaki; ouvrage rev., complete et cor. sur l'original japonais-chinois, accompagne de notes, et precede d'un AperCu de l'histoire mythologique du Japon, par M. J. Klaproth. Paris, Printed for the Oriental translation fund; etc. 1834.

The second title was translated into English as:

- Illustrations of Japan; consisting of private memoirs and anecdotes of the reigning dynasty of the Djogouns, or sovereigns of Japan; a description of the feasts and ceremonies observed throughout the year at their court... By M. Titsingh ... Tr. from French by F. Shoberl... London, 1822.



# L'ART JAPONAIS

CATALOGUE DE LA COLLECTION

DU  
Dr J. TIT SING H,

A LA HAYE



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## Art sculptural.

LES NETSKÉS.

Les netsukés sont de petites boîtes, qui, attachées à un cordonnet de soie servaient à retenir à la ceinture la boîte à médecine, la baguette à tabac, l'outil à pipe.

Il n'est pas d'objets d'art dans lesquels les Japonais aient donné plus libre carrière à leur goût inventif, à leur fantaisie. Parmi les bibelots importés en Europe après la révolution de 1868 ils ont été les premiers à conquérir la faveur du public; en peu de temps, les netsukés japonais devinrent célèbres parmi nous. Rien, en effet, n'est plus charmant, délicat et empreint. C'est un monde d'admirablement petits dont la variété dépasse ce que l'on peut imaginer.

Les beaux netsukés sont devenus à peu près introuvables. Il n'y en a plus au Japon; les meilleurs sont classés aujourd'hui dans quelques collections européennes.

L. GONSE, *L'Art Japonais*

385 *Netsuké en bois, peint et émaillé. Par SHIOUZAN.*

Vieille femme armée d'une auge à longue manche. Signé.

De toute rareté. Voici ce qu'en dit Louis GONSE: «Le plus ancien netsuké que je connaisse est en bois peint; il porte la signature d'un artiste dont le nom est célèbre, SHIOUZAN, de NARA. Il a été apporté de Kyoto avec quatre autres netsukés du même travail et de la même main, mesurant environ huit à neuf centimètres de haut et représentant des femmes. Je crois pouvoir leur assigner une ancienneté de deux cents ans.»

Hors les cinq netsukés de Shiouzan, mentionnés par GONSE et les quatre de la collection Titsingh, nous n'en connaissons point d'autres en Europe.

L'expression de cette figurine, dont la tête ne dépasse pas la dimension d'un pois, est merveilleuse. C'est aussi le cas des suivants.

It can be found in the New York Public Library Research Division.

Dr. Jan Daniel Cornelius Titsingh's claim to fame however, must rest with his Japanese art collection described in the 1893 auction catalog. Of all the listed ceramics, sculptures, woodcuts, bronzes, lacquerware and books, the catalog states that the more than fifty netsuke "are undoubtedly the most valuable (and are) the most beautiful one could wish to see". "Here is an opportunity" the introduction continues, "to obtain three netsuke carrying the signature of the celebrated Shiouzan of Nara, that are considered to be among the oldest in existence and worth their weight in gold..." The catalog has amounts penciled into the margins opposite some lots which presumably represent the prices, in Dutch florins (?), brought at the auction. These prices are shown in my translation. I would appreciate advice as to the then U.S. monetary equivalent.

I have attempted a rough translation of the French descriptions of the netsuke, but invite correction or clarification from the reader. And wouldn't it be interesting to know where these netsuke are today?

Mary Camper-Titsingh  
35 East 35 Street  
New York, N.Y. 10016

P.S. The "Camper" was added to Titsingh by my grandfather, the son of Dr. J.D.C. Titsingh and his wife, Theodora Aurelia Louise Camper (1822-1890). He apparently wished to honor his mortally ill mother who was a descendant of Petrus Camper (1722-1789), a famous Dutch naturalist who believed the orang-utang was the missing link in the theory of evolution. But that's another story.

\* \* \*

Translation of the pages devoted to the netsuke collection in the 1893 auction catalog (Guess At The Artists' Names!):

## THE NETSUKE

Netsuke are small charms which, attached to a silk string, serve to retain a medicine box, tobacco pouch or pipe case on a belt.

There are no other art objects with which the Japanese have demonstrated their inventive fancy better.

Among the many trinkets imported into Europe after the 1868 revolution (Liberal revolution against Queen Isabella of Spain ?) these were the first to excite the interest of the public; within a short time Japanese netsuke became renowned among us. Nothing actually, is more delightful, delicate or surprising. It is an extremely tiny world in which the variety exceeds the imagination.

The beautiful netsuke have become nearly impossible to find. There are no more in Japan; the best ones today are found in several European collections.

L. GONSE, *Japanese Art*



#385 *Netsuke in wood, paint and enamel. By Shiouzan.* An old woman equipped with a jug in a long sleeve. Signed. Of great scarcity. Here is what Louis Gonse said about it: "The oldest netsuke I know is of painted wood; it carries the signature of an artist with the celebrated name, *Shiouzan*, of Nara. It was brought to Kyoto with four other netsuke of the same workmanship and by the same hand. I believe they can be assigned an age of two hundred years."

Except for the five *Shiouzan* netsuke mentioned by Gonse and the four in the Titsingh collection, we do not know of any others in Europe.

The expression of this figure, with a head no larger than a pea, is wonderful. This is also the case with the following.

#386 *Netsuke in wood, paint and enamel. By Shiouzan.* Old man in ceremonial robe with a fan. Signed. Of the same quality.

#387 *Netsuke in wood, paint and enamel. By Shiouzan.* Person carrying a bottle. Signed. Same quality. The feet are damaged.

#388 *Netsuke in wood, paint and enamel.* A smiling old woman. This beautiful piece is unsigned but she resembles those of *Shiouzan's* time. f80.

#389 *Netsuke in ivory.* Group of nine masks, tied (or bound or stuck together) in both directions. Signed. Beautiful piece.

#390 *Netsuke in ivory. By Nagashisa.* Common festival or masquerade. Group of five boys, one of whom carries a mask while the others make music. Signed. f35.

#391 *Netsuke in ivory.* Man of the people, bald-headed, laughing, sitting, legs bent back. Signed. Beautiful piece.

#392 *Netsuke in ivory.* Octopus encircling a woman in its tentacles. Signed. Odd piece and very fanciful.

#393 *Netsuke in wood. Tomoitshi.* Monkey with fruit. Signed. Beautiful piece. f50.

#394 *Netsuke-button in carved ivory. Signed: Hogakou.*

#395 *Netsuke in ivory.* Sleeping knife-grinder whose merchandise is being swiped by a monkey.

#396 *Netsuke in ivory. By Tomomasa.* Kneeling boy thinking he has caught a rat which, having escaped from the rat-trap, is found on his shoulder. Signed.

#397 *Netsuke in ivory.* The same boy with his rat; at his side a woman is busy with some work. With the same signature as #405 (*Youo*). f25.

#398 *Flowerbud (or button?) carved in ivory. Signed: Kosai.*

#399 *Netsuke in wood. By Tomoitshi.* Small statue of a rat. Signed. f40.

#400 *Netsuke in ivory. By Ikosai.* Common festival. Group composed of a man carrying the mask of a legendary monster, and three children. Signed.

**Netsukés.**

39



386 *Netsuké en bois, peint et émaillé. Par SHIOUZAN.*  
Homme âgé en robe de gala, avec éventail. Signé.  
De la même qualité.

387 *Netsuké en bois, peint et émaillé. Par SHIOUZAN.*  
Personnage portant une boîte. Signé.  
Même qualité. Les pieds sont endommagés.

388 *Netsuké en bois, peint et doré.*

Vieille femme riant. Cette belle pièce ne porte point de signature, mais elle paraît remonter à l'époque de *Shiouzan*.

389 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Groupe de neuf masques, accolés dans les deux sens. — Signé.  
Belle pièce.

390 *Netsuké en ivoire. Par NAGASHISA.*

Fête populaire ou masquerade. Groupe de cinq garçons dont un porte une masque, tandis que les autres font de la musique. — Signé.

391 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Homme du peuple, chauve, riant et assis, les jambes repliées. — Signé.  
Belle pièce.

392 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Pleuvre enroulant une femme dans ses tentacules. — Signé.  
Pièce curieuse et très-fantastique.

393 *Netsuké en bois Par TOMOITSHI.*

Singe avec un fruit. — Signé.  
Belle pièce.

394 *Netsuké-bouton en ivoire sculpté. — Signé par HOGAKOU.*

395 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Gagne-petit endormi, auquel un singe dérobe ses marchandises.

**Netsukés.**

40

396 *Netsuké en ivoire. Par TOMOMASA.*

Garçon à genoux croyant avoir attrapé un rat qui, échappé de la ratière, se trouve sur son épaule. — Signé.

397 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Le même garçon avec son rat; à ses côtés une femme occupée de quelque travail.  
Avec la même signature que le n° 405.

398 *Bouton sculpté en ivoire. Signé: KOSAI.*

399 *Netsuké en bois. Par TOMOITSHI.*

Statuette de rat. — Signé.

400 *Netsuké en ivoire. Par IKOSAI.*

Fête populaire. Groupe composé d'un homme portant la masque d'un monstre légendaire, et de trois enfants. — Signé.

401 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Singe, crabe et fruit.

402 *Netsuké en ivoire Par ZENKO.*

Statuette de paysan assis. — Signé.

403 *Netsuké en ivoire.*

Deux grenouilles acrobates, l'une grimpe sur l'autre.

404 *Netsuké en ivoire. Par SHIKADO.*

Hôdi, dieu du contentement, accompagné d'un enfant. — Signé.

405 *Netsuké en ivoire Par YOUO.*

Groupe de deux guerriers en conversation. La figure embarrassée de l'un et la mine triomphante de l'autre sont pleines d'expression. — Signé.  
Avec la même signature que le n° 415.

406 *Netsuké en ivoire. Par YOUO*

Bourreau et victime.



- 407 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par IKOSAI  
Groupe de deux boulangers au travail. — Signé.
- 408 *Répétition du même sujet. Ivoire*.  
La pièce porte la même signature.
- 409 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par RIOMIN.  
Un homme avec une optique, accompagné d'un enfant. — Signé.
- 410 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par KORIN.  
Artisan assis, les jambes repliées, travaillant à un éventail. — Signé.
- 411 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par OGATOMO.  
Caille sur deux épis de blé. — Signé.
- 412 *Bouton de canne*  
Statuette de vieille sorcière.
- 413 *Netsuké en bois*.  
Statuette de vieillard accroupi.
- 414 *Netsuké en ivoire*.  
Un homme, coiffé d'un énorme chapeau, se balance sur un pied. Il tient un enfant dans ses bras. — Signé.
- 415 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par YOUNO.  
Groupe de deux chasseurs à l'ours. La queue de l'ours se termine en serpent. — Signé.
- 416 *Netsuké en ivoire*.  
Homme portant un sac et un enfant suspendus à un bâton.
- 417 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par MASANAO  
Statuette de dromadaire couché. Ton rouge. — Signé.
- 418 *Netsuké en ivoire*.  
Deux grenouilles faisant pyramide, l'une portant une fleur de lotus.
- 419 *Pièce pareille*  
Pyramide de trois grenouilles Ivoire.
- 420 *Netsuké en ivoire*.  
Paysanne assise, son parapluie sur le dos. — Signé.

- 421 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par MASAOUNSA.  
Groupe de deux lutteurs. — Signé.
- 422 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par KOSAKOU.  
Une femme attrapant une grande carpe. Ton brun. — Signé.
- 423 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par JASOUMASA.  
Un savant consultant un texte: il est accompagné d'un homme qui lui offre un don. — Signé.
- 424 *Netsuké en bois*. Par TOMAHIRA.  
Masseur aveugle appliquant la cure à un vieillard. — Signé.
- 425 *Netsuké en bois*. Par SHOUNTIO.  
Singe assis, mangeant un fruit. — Signé.
- 426 *Netsuké en bois*.  
Le dieu des orages marchant sur les flots.
- 427 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par SINJEMASA.  
Groupe composé de trois personnes; un maître d'école jouant avec deux enfants. — Signé.
- 428 *Netsuké en ivoire*. Par TADAKOSAI.  
Groupe de deux lutteurs. — Signé.  
Belle pièce.
- 429 *Netsuké en bois*.  
Groupe de neuf masques accablés dans les deux sens.
- 430 *Deux netsuké's en ivoire*.  
Chacune représente une grenouille grimpée sur un fruit de lotus et portant une feuille de la même plante.
- 431 *Netsuké en ivoire*.  
Groupe de trois personnes, dont une nage, tandis que les deux autres sont assises dans une barque. — Signé.
- 432 *Netsuké en ivoire*.  
Vieille sorcière, grimaçant.  
Belle pièce, très-curieuse.
- 433 *Netsuké en ivoire colorée*.  
Lapin se grattant le museau.

#401 *Netsuke in ivory*. Monkey, crab and fruit. f35.

#402 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Zenko. Statuette of a seated peasant. Signed. f45.

#403 *Netsuke in ivory*. Two acrobat frogs, one climbing up on the other. f25.

#404 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Shikado. Hotei, the god of happiness with a child.

#405 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Youo. Group of two warriors talking together. The embarrassment of one and the exultant expression of the other are plain to see. Signed. With the same signature as #415. f45.

#406 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Youo. Executioner and his victim. f45.

#407 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Ikosai. Group of two bakers at work. Signed.

#408 *Repetition of the same subject. Ivory*. The piece has the same signature. f25.

#409 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Riomin. A man with one "optique" (?) with a child. Signed.

#410 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Korin. Seated craftsman, legs crossed, working on a fan. Signed.

#411 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Oгатomo. Quail on two "epis" (?) of wheat. Signed. f20.

#412 "Bouton de canne" (Button of cane?) Statuette of an old witch.

#413 *Netsuke in wood*. Statuette of a crouching old man.

#414 *Netsuke in ivory*. A man wearing an enormous hat and balancing on one foot. He carries a child in his arms. Signed. f40.

#415 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Youo. Group of two bear-hunters. The tail of the bear ends in a snake. Signed. f45.

#416 *Netsuke in ivory*. Man carrying a sack and child hanging on a stick.

#417 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Masanao. Statuette of a sleeping dromedary. Red tint. Signed.

#418 *Netsuke in ivory*. Two frogs making a pyramid, one carrying a lotus blossom. f25.

#419 *Similar piece*. Pyramid of three frogs. Ivory.

#420 *Netsuke in ivory*. Seated peasant woman, an umbrella over her head. Signed. f40.

#421 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Masaounsa. Group of two wrestlers. Signed.

#422 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Kosakou. A woman catching a large fish, a carp. Brown tint. Signed.

#423 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Jasoumasa. A scholar consulting a text: with a man who offers him a gift. Signed. f30.

#424 *Netsuke in wood*. By Tomahira. Blind masseur working on an old man. Signed.

#425 *Netsuke in wood*. By Shountio. Seated monkey, eating fruit. Signed. f30.

#426 *Netsuke in wood*. The god of storms walking on the waves. f20.

#427 *Netsuke in ivory*. By Sinjemasa. Group composed of three persons; a schoolmaster playing with two children. Signed. f30.



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#431 *Netsuke in ivory*. Group of three persons, one is swimming, the other two are seated in a boat. Signed. f60.

#432 *Netsuke in ivory*. Old witch, grimacing. Beautiful piece, very interesting. f70.

#433 *Netsuke in ivory, dyed*. Rabbit scratching its snout.

#434 *Netsuke in wood*. The god of storms walking on tossing waves. Signed.

#435 *Netsuke in wood*. The god of plenty.

#436 *Two netsuke in ivory*. Statuettes of *semin* with a frog on the shoulder. Very old pieces, probably dated among original netsuke. f40.

#437 *Netsuke in ivory*. A masseur working on a woman.

#438 *Netsuke in ivory*. Two musicians. Apparently by the artist of the preceding piece.

#439 *Netsuke in ivory*. Seated bear, eating. Signed.

#440 *Netsuke in ivory*. By *Morikats*. Rabbit carrying a stick. Signed. f20.

#441 *Netsuke in ivory*. Person with a gourd, in which a mouse is nestled.

\* \* \*

#428 *Netsuke in ivory*. By *Tadakosai*. Group of two wrestlers. Signed. Beautiful piece. f60.

#429 *Netsuke in wood*. Group of nine masks facing opposite sides. f40.

#430 *Two netsuke in ivory*. Each represents a frog climbing on a lotus fruit and carrying a leaf of the same plant.

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Superb, beautifully patinated ivory netsuke of a Sennin holding a sceptre in the shape of a reishi fungus. His coat of mugwort leaves is deeply undercut, and the himotoshi are cleverly concealed in the folds of his clothing. Unsigned, 18th Century. Height 11½ cm.

The name Sennin is applied to hermits who, through withdrawal from ordinary life in the mountains, have attained supernatural powers. Since there are over 500 of them in Chinese and Japanese mythology, and many of their attributes are duplicated, it is often impossible to identify an individual Sennin.

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At some future time, Netsuke Kenkyukai would like to publish for its *MEMBERS ONLY* a membership booklet including names, contact address, telephone numbers, and special collecting interest. This would be helpful for those members who might be travelling or wish to correspond on specific subjects. For those who do not wish to give out their home address and phone number, we suggest you allow us to publish a contact address and telephone number such as your work address or P.O. Box number.

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Ivory group of wolf and monkey  
Signed: *Tomotada*  
Kyoto School, 18th century



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