



根付研究會

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI

Study Journal

Volume 3, Number 1, 1983





THE AMA AND THE SQUID

Price: \$250,000.00

for the discriminating connoisseur



Bernard Hurtig's
oriental treasures and points west

Post Office Box 10698, Honolulu, Hawaii 96816

NETSUKE KENKYUKAI

Study Journal

Volume 3, Number 1 March 1983



Cover Description
Oshidori (duck).
Signed: Mitsuhiro.
Collection of Virginia Atchley.

Table of Contents

The Cover	3
From Your Editor	4
President's Message	4
Convention Corner	5
Q & A Forum	6
Membership Corner	7
Letters	7
Mitsuhiro, Copies and Fakes by <i>Virginia G. Atchley</i>	8
New York 1982 Convention by <i>Katherine E. Eisner</i>	16
Great Signed Netsuke By The Top Carvers Need Not Cost A Fortune by <i>Richard Silverman</i>	18
Portrait of a Collector by <i>Joy Epstein</i>	23
Two Sôko Netsuke in the Shôko Sketch Book by <i>Raymond Bushell</i>	31
A Separate View by <i>Robert L. McGowen</i>	34

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.

Copyright© 1983, Netsuke Kenkyukai Society, Post Office Box 845, Shelton, Connecticut 06484, U.S.A.

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



Editor: Robert L. McGowen
Production Manager: Dori Kohlberg
Art Director: Marla Itzkowitz
Photographic Consultant: Michael B. Glass
Advertising Manager: James Hume
Publisher: Michael B. Glass & Associates

FROM YOUR EDITOR



**Robert L.
McGowen**

WHEN I first started practicing law some 35 years ago, I was appalled at the relative lack of written materials which existed in certain areas, particularly securities law and in oil and gas taxation. The knowledge was hidden in the heads of a few experts and a neophyte like me

found it difficult to find suitable discussions of problems and issues. Fortunately, the voids in legal literature have since been filled with extensive and knowledgeable treatises, articles, seminar proceedings, etc.

I found a somewhat similar dearth when I first became interested in netsuke a decade ago. Although publications in recent years have added greatly to our netsuke knowledge and some sharing of expertise, it is my belief that there is still much which should be forthcoming. Your Study Journal is designed to provide an avenue for knowledgeable collectors in passing on and sharing their knowledge and expertise.

I confess this is a plea for submission of more articles of depth

and scholarship. We believe that in the past year we have had a number of such articles, an example of which is Virginia Atchley's presentation on *Mitsuhiro* in this issue. Similarly, Raymond Bushell (who is probably the most prolific and generous of all in the dissemination of his knowledge) is sharing with us in this issue and, in issues to come, incidental "pieces of information" which he has acquired in a lifetime of netsuke study, all of which cry for publication.

Many of our readers should appreciate their responsibility for like written contributions. I am confident they will.

Robert L. McGowen
Editor

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**James
Hume**

BY now you will have received my recent letter concerning our Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention scheduled for September 19 - 23 in Washington, D.C. The word is out that this will be the best convention ever and will be attended by many members from Japan and Europe, several of whom have

already confirmed they are coming. In this issue you can see we have added a Convention Corner which will give our Convention Chairman, James Newton, a means to communicate to you the latest information about the convention. Plan to come — this will be the most exciting and rewarding netsuke happening in recent years with an excellent program for beginners and advanced collectors alike.

For those of you who have not yet met James I offer you the following biography:

James R Newton

James "Jim" Newton came into Netsuke collecting through the "back door." He is founder and past-president of the Potomac Bonsai Association, and it was at a meeting of a Virginia affiliate club that he saw and handled his first netsuke, shown as part of a program on other Japanese cultural art work.

While he still cultivates about 20 bonsai, the miniature sculptures have, he readily admits, captured his fascination almost completely.

Jim is no stranger to convention operation. He's worked for more than 25 years in the Air Force public relations field, 20 of them here in the Washington metropolitan area. He retired from active military service in 1964 after more than 20 years in uniform, and has been working for the government as a civilian ever since. Conferences and conventions are his beat.

Falling in love with the Orient during a tour of duty in Japan and the Philippines, he has kept up an intense personal interest in learning about Japanese culture. This led him into bonsai, where his professional skills were tapped to be coordinator of the unique American Bonsai Society/Bonsai Clubs International Convention in the nation's capi-

continued next page

CONVENTION CORNER



Jim
Newton

Since *kenkyukai* means study group, collectors, hobbyists, and dealers will find an educational atmosphere at the 1983 Netsuke Kenkyukai Convention, coming September 19 through 22 at the luxurious L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington, D.C. There will be something for everyone, and a plan for how all this will be presented to you.

At least 12 "around the table and hands-on" workshops will be presented plus several concurrent lectures and possibly certain "one time" events. A scheduling matrix is being developed to permit you to plan ahead and attend the events of your choice.

In response to numerous previous convention-goer suggestions, the number attending each workshop will be strictly controlled. This will avoid the confusion that can creep into uncontrolled attendance around a workshop table. Everyone confirmed for a workshop will thus be guaranteed a place from which they can see and easily handle pieces being studied.

You should have received President James Hume's February letter in which he explains the advantage of early registration. Preference in workshops and events is one advantage. Here's a preview of some of the subjects which will be covered:

- *Japanese Lacquering Techniques* - This presentation by an accomplished lacquer artist will offer something of interest for everyone from the beginner to the advanced collector. You will have the opportunity to see not only how lacquer art is produced but also the materials and the tools which are employed.

- *Appreciation of Lacquer Art* - An internationally known expert collector of lacquer will cover interesting aspects of lacquer collecting including netsuke, inro and boxes. Fine examples of art will be available for all to see.

- *Materials from Which Netsuke were Made* - This most informative subject will be covered by an accomplished expert in materials and promises to be most interesting. You will have an opportunity to handle unusual and rare netsuke made of material you may see here for the first time.

- *Erotic Aspects of Japanese Art* - A subject often misunderstood and misinterpreted by Western Civilization. See this subject from the eyes of the Japanese and gain an insight into this aspect of Japanese culture. Full of surprises, extremely infor-

mative and at times — most amusing.

- *A Study of Early Elephant Ivory Netsuke* - Early pieces of the 17th and 18th C. will be studied for an in-depth understanding of identifying and dating these early pieces. Superb examples will be available for handling and enjoyment.

- *Netsuke Basics for the New and "Used" Collector* - A "must" workshop for the novice collector. Learn how to get the most out of collecting. The subject matter will range from the basics which every collector should know to subjects of interest even for the experienced collector. Netsuke for study will range from "Hong Kong" to masterpieces.

The foregoing is only a sample of the program we have in store for you. In a few weeks you will be receiving more information in the mail concerning the program, registrations, reservations, etc. As soon as costs of accommodation and the convention registration fee are known, they will be communicated to you. Our plan is to give you detailed information, months in advance, to allow you every opportunity to plan ahead for these exciting events. The June issue will contain a detailed program of events.

As they say, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

Jim Newton
Convention Chairman

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *continued*

tal during the 1976 Bicentennial Year. He wrapped the convention around the United States acceptance of 53 masterpiece bonsai donated by the Nippon Bonsai Society in commemoration of our 200th Birthday. The trees are on permanent display

at the National Arboretum in Washington.

Jim currently is Secretary of the Washington chapter of NK, and edits their quarterly *Washington Netsuke Kenkyukai News*. He is a graduate of the University of the Philippines (BA, '57)

and The American University (MA, Public Relations, '64). He and wife Marge live in Vienna, Virginia.


James Hume

Q & A FORUM

OUR efforts at the Q & A Forum seem destined for failure. With but few questions and only limited answers, it appears that this department will, at most, appear only occasionally, absent contributions by our readers (which we know are significant in quality and quantity if only time were taken by the readers to mail us their inquiries and responses).

* * * * *

In our December 1982 issue the identity of the cover figure was asked. Our faithful contributor, Raymond Bushell, writes:

"I am inclined to believe that it is a representation of the Taoist saint, Chinnan. Chinnan was a *sennin* as shown by his apron of mugwort leaves. He was of beggarly appearance and was invariably associated with a dragon. The legend is that during his travels he came upon a village suffering from the famine of an endless draught. Chinnan thrust his staff into a huge mound of dried mud in which the Rain Dragon lay concealed, forcing the beast to bring forth a bountiful downpour on the parched land."

Richard Silverman agrees, stating:

"I can only assume that the figure is that of Chinnan Sennin. It surely has to be a *sennin* with the attribute of a dragon. From the photo I could not hazard a guess of attribution, but then my favorite carver has always been 'Unsigned and/or Unknown.'"

* * * * *

In our last issue Paul Moss asked for solution of the riddle which he believed appears on the kettle netsuke by *Kokusai*. Michael and Lucy Foster have provided us with an interpretation by Shinzo Shibata:

"I have duly received your letter and the photos of the *Kokusai* netsuke. It is very interesting as it carries one of the peculiar qualities of our netsuke. The carver seems to be speaking to you through his netsuke.

It was not so difficult to read the objects carved on the netsuke, but when it came to the interpretation, it was rather complicated and seemed to have two counter-acting faces. It depended on which side of the netsuke to start reading from. Let us begin from the obverse side, after reading the riddle.

The Riddle - Obverse side

The carver made a kettle shape, as already noted by your friend, and in order to be sure that you become aware of this shape, he placed the '*kiri mon*' in the top band with the ground in '*arare*' (pellet-like ground). It was because such decoration was very common with a kettle. Formal '*kiri*' crest is not necessary, and most often it is designed fancier and sometimes two '*kiri*' are intertwined.

Anyway, the idea was for you to note that it was a kettle, in Japanese, '*kama*.'

The circular object is a pair of rings which is used to carry the kettle around. This kettle does not show the catches for the rings to go through. It is, nevertheless, a ring, in Japanese, '*wa*' or '*kan*.'

Then comes the syllable '*nu*' in '*hiragana*.' All these put together will read, '*Kama wa nu*,' translated as, 'I don't care,' or 'alright,' or 'no worry' etc. basically meaning, 'to allow or to permit something.'

The Riddle - Reverse side

The carver depicted a '*kiseru*' and gave other characters which

your friend had correctly read. The missing character is the '*sōsho*' style of '*ame*' rain. Thus, they will read as, '*kiseru no ame ka?*'

'*Ame*' can be used in the same sense as in English, to denote something is continuous. In the present case, '*kiseru no ame*,' will be 'a shower of *kiseru* smoking.' Chain smoking.

Interpretation - Reading from the obverse side

A man is resting by the roadside. He is a heavy smoker, and naturally reaches out for the tobacco pouch hanging from his side. He sees the netsuke telling him, 'It's alright, no worry.' He fills his '*kiseru*' (pipe) with his tobacco, lights it and after a puff or two, blows out or knocks out the yet burning ashes into the ash tray — the opening at the top of the netsuke — because he needs the fire to light his second filling.

After puffing away the second filling contentedly, he looks at his netsuke. It is now telling him, 'Is it going to be a shower of *kiseru* smoking?' What will he say? What will he do?

Interpretation - Reading from the reverse side

A man wishing to smoke sees his netsuke, as he reaches out for his tobacco pouch. The netsuke is asking, 'Is it going to be a shower of *kiseru* smoking, a chain smoking?'

He hesitates and fumbling the netsuke, he sees it again. This time saying, 'Alright, no worry.' What will he say? What will he do?

This netsuke is very cleverly schemed, and the person, who reads what it says, is left to make his free response."

MEMBERSHIP CORNER



**Adele
Murphy**

I would like to ask for your cooperation in regard to renewing your Netsuke Kenkyukai membership. It would be considerable savings for the organization if everyone would respond promptly after you have received your notice in the mail. By doing

so, it would eliminate my sending you a second and third reminder. Please make an extra effort to cooperate, especially those members living outside the U.S.A. Don't forget to return your new membership form with your payment.

We continue to need your support in recruiting, Dealers sponsoring new members and using the old membership forms, will need to change the fees from \$40 to \$46 for North America, and from \$46 to \$54 outside North America.

We are pleased with virtually 100% renewal response and hope

that you will continue to give us your support.

As soon as we have processed every member's renewal on the renewal form asking for permission to publish information, we will produce a membership roster on those who gave us their O.K. We expect this to be available at the September Convention in Washington.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adele Murphy".

**Adele Murphy
Membership Chairman**

LETTERS

As a relative newcomer to the world of netsuke I was more than delighted to be introduced to your organization by Mrs. Betty Leavitt who was kind enough to take the time to provide some valuable advice to a neophyte. Although I have received two copies of the Study Journal I feel I have gained some insights that should help me in the future.

My collection at this time is extremely small but growing slowly. My library, however, is beginning to overflow its bounds which brings me to a point I and many like me have discovered, namely that you can never have enough reference material. Fortunately the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts has an excellent selection of books on netsuke as well as many other forms of Oriental arts and culture. The Museum also has a fairly large collection of netsuke - over 600 pieces - on display and I would recommend to anyone visiting the area not to miss seeing it. The Museum has also published a catalog, "Netsuke - The Collection of the

Peabody Museum of Salem" compiled by Lisa A. Edwards and Margie M. Krebs. The catalog is well done with excellent photography and a short but informative introduction. The address, in case any of your readers would be interested in obtaining a copy is:

Peabody Museum of Salem
Essex St.,
Salem, Massachusetts 01970

In the Vol. 2, No. 2 Study Journal Robert L. McGowen brings out a point about prices that I'm sure has been of concern to many like myself who are just beginning to collect. Perhaps some of your readers who have encountered problems in this area might like to comment. I do feel though that maintaining the art journal concept is the best way to go.

Since my first purchase of a netsuke I have been trying to find an answer to the question of how to identify the artist if the piece is unsigned?

In closing I hope the Netsuke Kenkyukai continues to grow and that the Study Journal main-

tains it's level of excellence.

*P.J. McCloskey
Marblehead, Mass*

Congratulations on the new look! And the fine editorial content!

In the role of editor, I hope you will be able to reduce the frequency of references to *Reikichi* as the author of the handbook, or the bible for collectors, masterfully put together by Raymond Bushell. Mr. *Ueda*, for that is his family name, must turn over in his grave every time an author assumes familiarity that not even his friends, neighbors, colleagues, school classmates would have used to his face. Some might have addressed him as "*Uedakun*", but only his siblings or parents could refer to him as *Reikichi* without being disrespectful.

*David Mowry
Washington, D.C.*

cont'd page 31

MITSUHIRO, COPIES AND FAKES

Virginia G. Atchley

*This article is based on a lecture given by the author
at the Netsuke and Sagemono Symposium
in Cologne, Germany, September 1982.*

THAT is an all-encompassing title, and I hope the reader will not expect that from now on he will be able to distinguish precisely and at a quick glance the genuine from the spurious. It isn't nearly that simple, of course. But from a long study of as many netsuke signed *Mitsuhiro* as I could bring within my purview I believe there are certain definite and telltale hallmarks of the real *Mitsuhiro*. If all or some of them are missing, one may question.

Let's first of all dispose of outright fakes. A fake piece is one that is being passed off as the work of another man, with that man's signature. In *Mitsuhiro's* case almost all the deliberate fakes were made either late in his life or after he died. There is a lot of stuff on the market today signed *Mitsuhiro* that is totally unlike anything he or his pupils ever thought of, and some of it is pretty awful. Even a neophyte

can spot fairly soon these obvious fakes with the *Mitsuhiro* signature.

A much different matter, and herein lies the crux of this discussion, is that of copies. There are two kinds of copiers of netsuke. There are those who copy another artist's model almost identically, for the good and simple reason that the model proved to be a popular one, but put their own name on it. In this category we think of the followers of *Mitsuhiro* who copied his loquats, his pottery-style Hoteis, his seated cranes, his Darumas, and so on, but affixed their own names. The best of these also created designs of their own: *Mitsusada*, *Masa-hiro*, *Mitsushige*, *Mitsutama* and others. We have nothing to do with them in this article. There is obviously no question of fraud in their case. The second kind of copiers are those who copy not only the models but also the signature of the master, and these are the ones we are concerned

with. There is usually no question of fraud or fake with these copiers either: they were pupils and associates of the master, they could be many or few, related to him or not, they might extend to several generations. It was by common consent that they used the identical *chomei* or art signature. Also, it may well have been with *Mitsuhiro*, as we know it was with *Minko* and *Kaigyokusai*, that when a pupil did a good carving, *Mitsuhiro* signed it. If so, this might account for the fact that a very good *Mitsuhiro* signature sometimes appears on what we think is inferior work.

Confronted as we are by the double jeopardy of the undocumented history of netsuke and the demand for authenticity, it has become fashionable of late to seek a way out of the dilemma by saying that there were, say "two or more *Mitsuhiros*" or "It is fairly certain now that there were two fine artists named



Fig. 1



Fig. 3A



Fig. 2A



Fig. 4A

Tomotada".¹ Maybe. It is an interesting hypothesis but, so far as I am aware, no more than that.

Nonetheless some effort must be made to determine authenticity, and the meat of this discussion is to try to distinguish between those pieces signed *Mitsuhiro* that are probably genuine and those that may be good enough in themselves and in the master's style but doubtfully done by him. As might be expected, this is a distinction very difficult to make with certain pieces, and in such cases perhaps it doesn't matter that much anyway: Quality can always be enjoyed, and it must always be kept in mind that a good part of the enjoyment of netsuke is subjective anyhow.

A brief review of what little we know of *Mitsuhiro* the man may be helpful at this juncture.

Born in 1810 in Onomichi, a small town between Kyoto and Osaka, he was sent to the latter

city by his parents when he was 17, as apprentice to the master of a shop that specialized in making plectrums and selling ivory. There he learned the art of ivory carving from working on small pieces of waste ivory. This undoubtedly accounts for the astonishingly large number of his ivory *ojime*. Of this period of his life he himself wrote:

"I found my master and learned my skills from him. This was my desire, to carve ivory and to make it into designs from my past experience in figures, animals, birds, fish, insects, flora, and even house furniture. It was only necessary that the design be interesting and in good taste."

Apparently he was not a strong man. When he was about 48 illness forced him to return to his home in Onomichi. Recovering some time later, he resumed carving until he died in 1875 at the age of 66. *Mitsuhiro* loved

poetry, especially the *waka* form, and he composed his own poems, sometimes incising them on netsuke. From this, it is fair to assume that he was a sensitive man, instinctively responsive to beauty, and so developed his own personal approach to the carving of netsuke, with the special qualities that mark his work.

What are those qualities? First, I think, comes simplicity. I have never seen a netsuke by him that could be called fussy. His lines are clean. They flow. Many of his subjects are simple too: a node of bamboo (Fig. 1), a tea bowl, a seated bird (Fig. 2A). He had an innate gift of being able to look at nature and people with affectionate empathy and get their essence in his designs. Sometimes he made no attempt to carve detail at all, trusting entirely to line and finish (Fig. 3A). But when he chose, each least detail is lovingly, realistically, and skillfully attended to (Fig. 4A, also shown



Fig. 5A



Fig. 5B



Fig. 15A



Fig. 15B

on the cover of this issue of the Study Journal, is a fine example of simplicity of design and minutely detailed feather work). And always there is warmth and grace and a nice balancing of line and mass and curve into a satisfying, understated whole.

Another characteristic of *Mitsuhiro's* unique style is the finish. His ivory finish is more lustrous, more creamy than any other I know. It has the translucency of porcelain, the gloss of enamel. He stained his ivory, rarely leaving it white, his most characteristic stain being clear and light-colored — a creamy yellow or amber. There are those who believe this is the only stain of a genuine *Mitsuhiro*, that deeper hues are suspect. I myself conjecture that he experimented with stain and that the shade of the stain in and of itself is an unreliable criterion for authenticity or lack of it. To me, the warm rich high polish is a more indisputable trademark. The same careful finish shows on the fewer wood netsuke *Mitsuhiro* made (see Fig. 5A; also Fig. 15A, a simple wood *tonkotsu* with the signa-

ture, Fig. 15B, almost hidden inside).

Sometimes, like *Zeshin* with lacquer, he deliberately treated his material to look like another: ebony to look like iron, ivory to resemble stone or pottery (Fig. 6A), lacquered wood to appear as ceramic or porcelain. For examples of some of these, see Raymond Bushell's *Collectors' Netsuke*, pp. 96 - 99, especially Figs. 126, 131, 132.

We have now mentioned *Mitsuhiro's* simplicity with its accompanying delicate grace, and his finishing techniques. There are other characteristics that set him apart. One is his frequent and superb use of, and evident pleasure in the cut-engraving techniques, specifically what the Japanese call *katakiribori* which is engraving varied in width and depth and cut at a slant like brushstrokes, and *kebori*, which is fine-line even-stroke engraving usually done with a rat's tooth. Both techniques are difficult to do well. He was a master with them (as, again, was *Zeshin*) and apparently started this style of carving in his apprentice days as

evidenced by his *manju* and *ojime*.

These incised carvings, like his occasional cross-hatching and fine stippling, were usually black stained, and were rarely, if ever, copied. For examples, see Figs. 7A, 8, 9, 10A.

Closely allied to this mastery of fine-cut engraving is the lilting grace of *Mitsuhiro's* signature, which with its delicate lines and bold seal is justly famous (see, for example, Figs. 1, 7B, 9, 10B, 11, and compare the calligraphy of these pieces with the signature in Fig. 17B, on a piece so poorly carved I would call it a fake). The interesting thing is that the simpler the netsuke, the more dramatic the signature. You find this so often that it must have been deliberate. I have yet to see the simplest *Mitsuhiro ojime* that isn't graced with an exquisite signature complete with *kakihan* or seal (Figs. 7B and 11). This is equally true of the engraved netsuke (Figs. 8, 9, 10B). Conversely, with his more ambitious pieces in the round, he is often content to sign with the simple two-character "*Mitsuhiro*"



Fig. 7A



Fig. 8



Fig. 7B



Fig. 9



Fig. 17A



Fig. 10A



Fig. 10B



Fig. 17B



Fig. 11

Fig. 14A



Fig. 12



Fig. 14B



Fig. 13



Wood Shoki & Oni
Signed: *Kaisen*
Ex-collection Mary Louise O'Brien
\$700.00

HARTMAN RARE ART

Oriental Antiques, Fine Arts & Jewelry
Fairmont Hotel — Dallas, Texas 75201
(214) 748-3847
New York Palm Beach

Visit our new Jade Room



Fig. 2B



Fig. 3B



Fig. 4B



Fig. 6B



Fig. 6A

as evidenced by the netsuke shown in Figs. 2B, 4B, 5B, 12, 13 and 14. It seems to be a kind of *quid pro quo*, a nice balancing of values like his balancing of line and mass. Or it could simply be that in his earlier days he was practicing his signature, with seals and *kakihan*, like mad on the *ojime* and engraved netsuke.² Sometimes *Mitsuhiro* included his family name, *Ohara*, with his signature (Fig. 3B), more rarely another name, *Sessado*. Many of his netsuke show the *Ohara* seal (Figs. 1, 6B, 9, 10B and 15B). Seven different *kakihan* appear on pieces with *Mitsuhiro*'s signature, and while it is doubtful that he himself used all of them (very probably not), judging from the quality of the work, he surely used three: those shown in Figs. 8, 7B, and 11, and the one known as the "running boar" *kakihan* which he apparently used only with his full name, *Ohara Mitsuhiro* (Fig. 3B). He may well have used the "elephant" *kakihan* also (Fig. 6B). This netsuke is an imitation of a pottery model of *Hotei*, laughing and holding a *uchiwa*. The ivory is stained to

look like glazed ceramic, the piece is hollow, and the mould marks are clearly delineated. There are several of these simulated pottery *Hotei*s signed *Mitsuhiro*. How many of them were actually done by him, it is hard to say without examining them all at once, and how many bear the elephant *kakihan*, I do not know. For further discussions of *Mitsuhiro*'s *kakihan* and seals, see George Lazarnick, *Netsuke and Inro Artists*, Vol. 1, pp. 775-776.

Thus far I have discussed and illustrated those pieces (with the possible exception of Fig. 6, as just noted) which I consider genuine *Mitsuhiro* and which I think would be generally accepted as such by knowledgeable collectors. Now we move into questionable areas.

The most controversial *Mitsuhiro* subjects are loquats (*biwa*) and seated cranes. For reasons which I fail to fathom (I find them boring) *Mitsuhiro* loquats are so numerous that they must have been very popular and much in demand. The simplicity of the subject is entirely in keeping with *Mitsuhiro*'s style and I have seen

perhaps two that are carved and polished with a graceful elegance that I am happy to ascribe to him. But most of the loquats that crop up regularly and sometimes flood the auction market are not inspiring, the work of copiers and followers who have jumped on a lucrative bandwagon.

It is the seated cranes that really raise the hackles and the blood pressure of collectors when it comes to assessing the genuineness of an individual piece. Acrimony runs high at times, and agreement is seldom reached. Neil Davey commented about the cranes "...a number of which are known to have been carved by *Mitsuhiro* and also by a number of copyists" in his *Netsuke* book, 1974, page 44, Lot 92. Raymond Bushell casts a jaundiced eye on most of the cranes he has seen that have been accepted by others as authentic — see, for example, his letter referred to in Footnote 2 of this article, where, among other things, he points out that of the total of 260 designs described in *Mitsuhiro*'s manuscript, *Takarabukuro*, (quoted from above, page 9) he fails to mention the



Fig. 16A



Fig. 16B

crane in his long list of birds.

Common sense would seem to indicate that *Mitsuhiro* must have carved at least one seated crane, which was so appealing to his clientele that lesser carvers were quick to follow suit. If he did indeed initiate the seated crane model, and I believe he did, the one shown in Fig 12 (signed simply *Mitsuhiro*) is a good candidate for the real thing. The lines are fluid, the eyes are neatly inset, the detail work is limited to the tail and a few neck feathers, the back view is as graceful as the front, the finish is lustrous, the stain is light caramel. (Oddly, the signature is on the front, just above the outline of the folded legs.) Someone has objected to the "awkward" curve of the neck, but a visit to the zoo makes evident that cranes assuredly do loop their long necks in just such a fashion.

But few of the "*Mitsuhiro* cranes" are as good as this one. Most are heavier with unneeded embellishments. The collector, confronted with one of these netsuke, will have to summon his best taste and judgement in assessing its desirability for addition to his collection.

Figs. 16 and 17 were done by other hands than *Mitsuhiro*'s. The tail feathers of the duck in Fig. 16A and the cross hatching on the little fish in his beak are routinely etched, and the bulbous horn eyes are rather crudely inlaid. Note too the stolidness of

the signature on the backside (Fig. 16B) and the stiffness of the folded legs as compared with those of the *oshidori* in Fig. 4B. This netsuke could be labeled a fake, but I am inclined to be charitable and call it the product of one of *Mitsuhiro*'s lesser followers.

Figure 17, however, invites little charity. Although (as always) it is difficult to determine from a photograph, the piece is an uninspired 20th century netsuke of two diving girls plying their trade. The details of the girls' bodies and the *awabi* shells they are gathering are indifferently carved, the finish of the ivory is flat, and the signature in the unwonted ellipse is rigid. In short, not a single characteristic typical of *Mitsuhiro* is in evidence.

A dramatic way to appreciate the difference between spurious and genuine is to compare these two netsuke with those shown, for example, in Figs. 13 and 14. The photographer of Fig. 13 cannot convey its lush deep amber surface, but the dynamic thrust of Chokwaro's horse as he squishes his way out of the ripe gourd is evident, as is the beautifully modelled figure of the bland, plump Okame. (Figs. 14A and B) loosely draped in her richly embroidered kimono.

Enough. These niceties and refinements, important as they are in determining validity, are extremely difficult to establish through the media of words and black-and-white photographs. But

I choose to hope that some of the points made in this article will be helpful and that the reader may feel he can now look at *Mitsuhiro* with fresh insights and increased confidence.

¹ Davey, Neil, Sotheby London Auction Catalogue, 'Fine Japanese Works of Art', June 23-24, 1982, Page 94, Lot 390.

² In this matter of *Mitsuhiro*'s choice of signature, I find that I am at variance with Raymond Bushell. Vol. 10, No. 2, of the INCS Journal contains a highly instructive article by him called "Expertising Netsuke". In it he quotes in full a letter he wrote concerning a controversial seated crane netsuke signed *Mitsuhiro*, listing ten possible reasons why he believes the piece is not genuine. His point #8 suggests that because *Mitsuhiro* often added a *kakihan* or seal to his signature, the absence of one on this crane is a point on the curve against its authenticity.

This is the opposite of what I have said above. It is a difference that is not significant or worth belaboring, but I was curious enough to check all the *Mitsuhiro* netsuke illustrated in the various books and catalogues as well as the several pieces available to me — a scrutiny that seems generally supportive of my view, with due allowance for the inevitable exceptions that netsuke perversely strew in the path of precise scholarship. ■

JAPAN FOR YOU TODAY, YESTERDAY AND IN YOUR FUTURE

A seminar by leading authorities for the Collector, the Businessman and the Tourist, discussing aesthetics and business problems — of how to buy, when and where:

Japanese prints, paintings,
netsuke and art objects, living
in Japan and conducting business.

At the Inn in Chester

Thursday, May 19th, 1983. Late arrival.
Friday, May 20th
Saturday, May 21st
and Sunday, May 22nd, Brunch, Critique.
Registration fee \$250

For information, write to:

the Galerie
P.O. Box 308
Chester, Ct 06412
(203) 526-2967

The New Word Game
FLAM-BOOZLE
A Game for Two Players

Word Lovers,
take notice!

FLAM-BOOZLE
is here!

Contact
"Pad Games, Inc."
Box 308, Chester, Ct 06412

NEW YORK 1982 CONVENTION

Katharine E Eisner

DENIS Szeszler of the Netsuke Dealers Association, Inc. put on a very good convention in New York City. It was held at the conveniently located Westbury Hotel. From the opening cocktail party to the final Chinese dinner, everyone had a great opportunity to see and handle netsuke. There was something for every taste and pocketbook. There were receptions at Rare Art, Ronin Gallery, Sotheby's (plus an auction full of tempting pieces), and at the Japan Society, where Barbra Teri Okada gave a fine talk on the history of netsuke and told us about the Metropolitan Museum collection which was on view. She showed us a slide of a dear little wooden Kappa (her favorite) with a marvelous expression by *Shoko*, a simplified *Mitsuhiro* ivory rabbit, a *Ryusa manju* with praying mantis and flowers and a quite sympathetic wood rendition of Ono no Komachi by *Takehara Chikko* to mention only a few.

Many fine films were offered us, and we had a good range of

workshops. We could go from the "Psychology of Collecting" to the "Legal Aspects," from the "Brilliance of a Carving" to a "Demonstration of Ivory Carving and Restorations," from "Building a Library" to the various workshops on the netsuke themselves, etc.

Dr. Ruth S. Farrell gave a delightful workshop on "Japanese Textiles and The Meaning of Their Designs." She told us of her meeting with Mr. Charles Greenfield, and how the study of netsuke helped her when textiles were unavailable. She gave us a new insight into our own netsuke. I'm sure that those who attended her workshop checked their netsuke, upon their return home, for the various symbolisms mentioned in her talk. When I learned from Dr. Farrell that the color red has sexual meanings and also stands for joy, I thought of my little *Okame* netsuke showing the Goddess of Mirth dressed in a red outer kimono, and I thought how perfect!

Another thought-provoking workshop was Jerry Spiller's

"Relationship between Japanese Art and The Art Nouveau Period in Europe." We can now easily understand why so many netsuke collectors are attracted to Art Nouveau. He also had many fine examples of Art Nouveau to explain this attraction.

An extra bonus was the booklet put out by the Netsuke Dealers Association entitled "Convention on Netsuke and Related Arts" which was full of all sorts of useful information. Not only did it give us New York museum information but a "Glossary of Japanese Names and Terms" and many fine informative articles as well.

And what all of us collectors, dealers, etc. look forward to at any convention is the opportunity to greet old friends and to make new ones. We are offered fine books, catalogs and many marvelous netsuke to tempt the most discriminating collectors. What is more wonderful to a collector than to hold and appreciate these fine carvings and discuss their merits with friends. Bravo! Denis, for a fine Convention! ■



CHIKUSAI OF HAMADERA, SAKAI.

*Kazunoha, the fox wife of Abe no Yasuna, holding an
infant in her arms — later to become the astrologer
Abe no Seimei — and a brush in her mouth.*

Finely carved in boxwood and stained for effect, the eyes inlaid.
Signed: *CHIKUSAI*, in oval reserve, 2nd Half 19th century height 3.6 cms.

CONSTANTINE LTD.

P.O. Box 342, London W2 2YR, Telephone 01-723 8674

GREAT SIGNED NETSUKE BY THE TOP CARVERS NEED NOT COST A FORTUNE

Richard Silverman

OWNING great netsuke by the top carvers is a pleasure no one can deny. Of course it would be impossible to get every collector to agree on what is truly great and there might be some argument as to who the top carvers might be. To be on the safe side I have used no less an authority than Raymond Bushell and have picked eight carvers that he listed in *Collectors' Netsuke*. I also included three pieces by other carvers that many collectors consider to be among the best.

I only wish to prove, as I have tried in the past, that it is not the

price which makes a piece great and that with perseverance and a discriminating eye fine netsuke are available from many sources without paying a small fortune.

These pieces have come from dealers, collectors and auctions on three continents. There never has been, nor will there ever be, a single source from which all the great pieces come. Tokyo and London will continue to be the most important sources for a majority of the top netsuke, but I have found superb pieces in many out-of-the-way places throughout the world. Although most great netsuke are bought from dealers

and in auctions, some of my best buys have come from my fellow collectors.

The myth that collectors cull their inferior pieces and keep the best just is not true. I have bought many superior pieces from collectors and sold some of my own finest to these same people. All collectors sell. They have neither the money nor the space to keep everything. Selling is the only way one can continue buying. If one never sells he is not a collector but an "Acquiror."

I take it as a compliment when someone wishes to buy one of my netsuke. I feel no qualms in



Fig. 1. Dragon on a sea shell. Ivory. Masanao of Kyoto, 18th C. An unusual subject for this great artist. The dragon is finely carved and shows great strength. The *himotoshi* is beautifully carved. Fine patina.



Fig. 2. Rabbit. Wood with inlaid eyes, Tanaka Minko, 18th C. A large, bold female with fine eyes.



Fig. 3. Shi-shi. Wood with inlaid eyes, Garaku, 18th C. This superb carving shows the *Shi-shi* to be powerful, but with a whimsical expression.

politely asking a collector to allow me first refusal should he ever wish to sell a piece. It is rarely misunderstood and many times the netsuke is bought for much less than were it put in an auction or a dealer's showcase.

Naturally, there are true bargains to be found at any dealer's shop or in a given auction, but hype that has been given to "quality means high prices" just

is not the case. Excluding auctions where one must assume that the hammer price is indicative of a fair market value, there are many dealers who place exceedingly high prices on a given piece. Fancy advertising and a beautiful shop add to the price which one must pay. Special sale catalogues with superb color reproductions add greatly to what a piece must cost and in no way

does this make the netsuke better. It just makes it more desirable to the collector who wants to own pieces that are "famous."

To prove my point, aside from two pieces that were photographed in auction catalogues, none of the netsuke shown here were ever in an ad or a catalogue. There was no hype with any of them and yet they are top quality

Netsuke Kenkyukai Presents

Sept 19 - 23
1983



NETSUKE in the CAPITAL

L'Enfant Plaza Hotel Washington, D.C.

With a cast of authorities, experts, and — you!

Early registrants get preferential consideration
for convention activities

Send your early confirmation with \$20.00

NOW !

Photocopy the early confirmation form below and send it in to:

Netsuke Kenkyukai • P.O. Box 845 • Shelton, Connecticut 06484 • U.S.A.

Please check all that apply

- Yes, I plan to attend the convention
 - with spouse without spouse
- I would like accommodation at the convention L'Enfant Plaza Hotel
 - single double other _____
- Enclosed is my \$20.00 early confirmation deposit which will be deducted from the registration fee or fully refunded if I request it by August 15, 1983.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

ZIP _____

pieces by some of the top carvers of all time.

There are seven ivory and four wood carvings and to be fair I included five animals, four people and two objects. Six of these netsuke were bought between 1972 - 1975, and five of them were purchased between 1976 - 1981. Six came from dealers; four were bought privately and one came from an auction. Seven came from Japan; three from London; and one from the U.S.A. Six cost below \$1000 and the other five cost no more than \$5000. This can be misleading unless I state that a fair market value today would probably place six of them in the \$3000 - \$5000 range and the other five between \$6000 - \$12,000. This is the bottom line. To show which pieces cost the least and rose the most over any given period of time is not important. I am only trying to

Have
you
done
your
share?

Sign-up or
sponsor a new
member today

cover as wide a spectrum as possible as to subjects, materials, place of origin and from whom they were bought.

What constitutes a masterpiece is subjective. A superb large 18th C. animal is not necessarily a finer carving than a smaller 19th C. figure or a 20th C. So School flower. Just as all the world's greatest paintings are neither large nor from a certain century, so the world's greatest netsuke can be early or late, large or small. It is all a matter of your own personal taste and how you look at and relate to a piece. The final arbiter should be you and not a salesman. You must live with your collection. Today's iconoclast can easily be tomorrow's respected collector. Listen to the experts be they dealers, auctioneers or your fellow collectors, but the final decision should be yours alone.



RONIN GALLERY

605 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022
(212) 688-0188



17th thru 20th Century Netsuke

• woodblock prints • inro • tsuba

Entire collections bought and sold.

Because of our location in the center of the world art market, wonderful and unique collections come our way. Should you like to be informed of our new acquisitions, please fill out the coupon below.

RONIN GALLERY, 605 Madison Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10022
Yes, I want to be on your netsuke mailing list.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____



Norman L. Sandfield

Fine Antique &
Contemporary Netsuke

Phone (312) 327-1733
P.O. Box 11238
Chicago, Illinois 60611

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





Fig. 4



Fig. 9



Fig. 7



Fig. 5



Fig. 8



Fig. 6



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Fig. 4. Dragon in the clouds. Wood with inlaid eye. Toyomasa 18th/19th C. A forceful rendition of this often repeated subject. Superb reticulation.

Fig. 5. Dutchman. Ivory. Okakoto (pupil of Okatomo) early 19th C. An unusual subject with fine detail.

Fig. 6. Stone Lifter. Wood with inlaid eye and teeth. Hara Shumin early 19th C. One of the two best renditions of this often repeated subject, which is usually very boring at best. A very strong piece with superb details. Both himotoshi are ringed in ivory.

(Editor's Note: For a very different interpretation of this subject, see the Meinerthagen card reproduced under Jobun in Lazarnick, Netsuke & Inro Artists, p 533.)

Fig. 7. Ikkaku Sennin. Ivory. Hidemasa. Early 19th C. A very fine example with excellent details and a natural himotoshi.

Fig. 8. Courtier. Ivory with inlaid eyes, Shuosai Mid-19th C. One of this rare artist's finest carvings. There is great movement and it balances beautifully on tatami. The himotoshi runs through the folds of the kimono.

Fig. 9. Onigawara Roof-tile. Ivory with inlaid eyes. Ryukosai Jugyoku Mid-19th C. One of the finest of this often repeated subject. Exquisite detailing on both the front and back. The dark stain is very effective and highlights the glass and lacquered eyes.

Fig. 10. Ghost of Oiwa Lantern, Ivory with inlaid eyes. Mitsuhiro Mid-19th C. A very fine rendition

with superb staining. It is fully hollowed with the candle intact. A beautiful calligraphic inscription is on the back of the lantern. Many copies are made of this using two fitted pieces, but this is one single piece.

Fig. 11. Lunar Hare. Ivory with inlaid eye. Kaigyokusai Mid-19th C. A very fine ryusa manju. The clouds are reticulated throughout.

All eleven pieces are beautifully signed and their authenticity is without question. The Garaku, Minko and Okakoto were exhibited last year in the exhibition of major American collectors in Japan, and the Kaigyokusai was exhibited last year at the Los Angeles Country Museum. ■

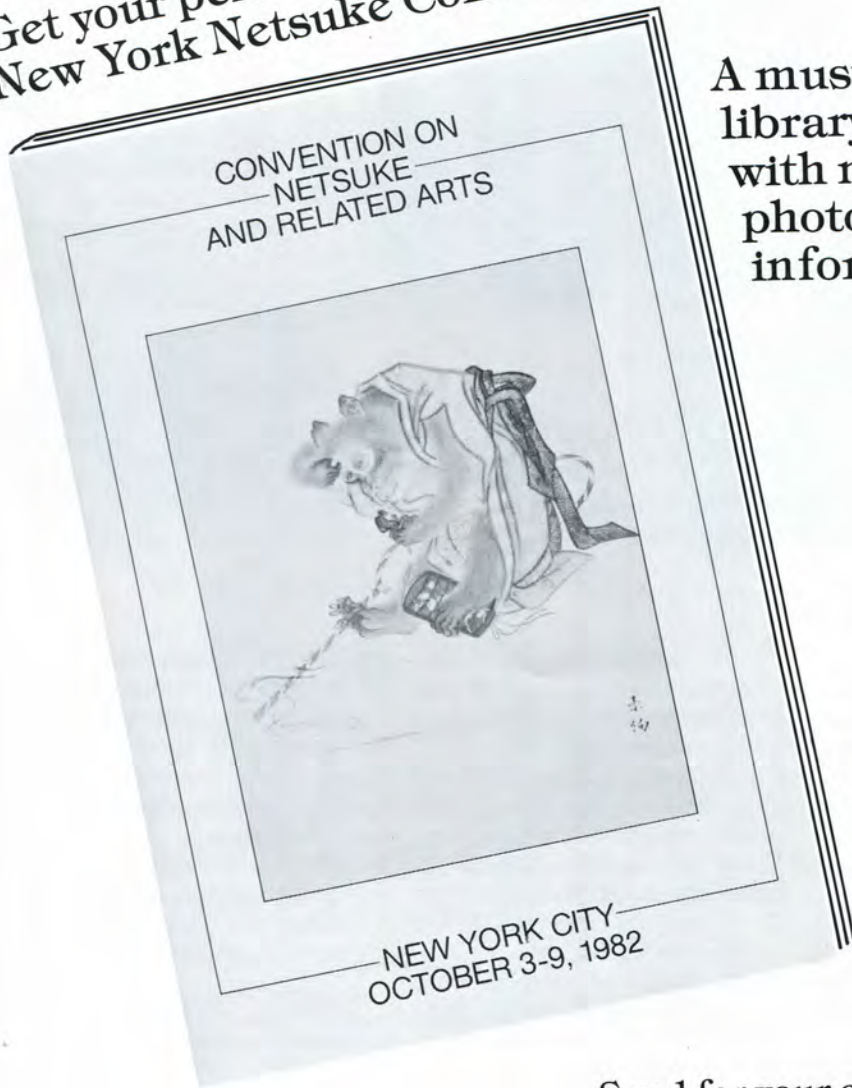


Netsuke Dealers Association, Inc.

The International Association of the Finest Dealers in the Field

SPECIAL OFFER!

Get your personal copy of the program of the
New York Netsuke Collectors' Convention



A must for every
library - 42 pages
with netsuke
photographs and
informative articles.

**ONLY
\$6.00**

Plus postage & handling
\$1.00 North America
\$2.50 Overseas

Send for your copy today! to:

Netsuke Dealers Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 714

New York, N.Y. 10028

PORTRAIT OF A COLLECTOR

Joy Epstein

WILLIAM (WILLI) BOSSHARD

SHOULD Lee A. Iacocca fail to solve Chrysler Motors' problems, the Board of Directors ought to turn to a gentleman by the name of William G. Bosshard. This dynamic forty-six year old executive has already established himself in the corporate world and seems headed for the top Executive Suites. When one meets Mr. Bosshard, you know you are in the presence of authority. Adjectives, such as knowledgeable, competent, creative, spring to mind. It is the kind of authoritative intelligence that shapes corporate destinies, affects world trade, and determines interlocking economic growth in countries around the globe. It is possible to meet Mr. Bosshard in any number of international cities — New York, Zurich, Los Angeles, Caracas, Honolulu, Paris, London, Tokyo — especially if a Netsuke Convention is in session, for you see, Willi is a netsuke collector par excellence. Whenever possible, he combines business with viewing, even if he is only able to stay for a day or two. He is a "convention goer" which is fortunate for the netsuke world which requires this type of energetic force to spread the word about convention' advantages, and interest

those persons unfamiliar with netsuke magic.

William G. Bosshard was born July 20, 1936 in Ruti, near Zurich, Switzerland, into a family very much interested in the arts. His mother delved in many areas with emphasis on the Persian arts, while his father's favorite



was a fine stamp collection. He grew up in Zurich and had the benefits of that city's famous educational system. By age twenty he was a college graduate with a background in business and accounting, along with the amazing ability to speak four languages

fluently: German, Italian, French, and English - Spanish, Portugese, and Japanese followed later. He had first considered the field of medicine at his mother's strong urging, but healing individuals was not nearly as appealing as administering to corporate ailments. He went right from college to his first job as a management trainee for a pharmaceutical company. The two year stay was a good warm up for the opportunity that came to join Nestle S.A., the world's largest food company, whose corporate headquarters were, and still are, in the small city of Vevey, on the shores of Lake Geneva. It was there, in 1958, that young William began an amazing career that started in Switzerland and took William literally around the world and to the discovery of netsuke. (It should be stated here the Mr. Bosshard's first name depends on where he happens to be in his travels. In French speaking countries it is "Guillaume," in England and the United States it is "Bill" or "William," but to his Swiss and Netsuke friends it is "Willi," the appropriate reference for this article).

1960 found Willi on his way to Caracas, Venezuela, as assistant head accountant for the nestle operations there. He spent

three and a half years in South America and then returned to Switzerland where he was next assigned to the Zone Management for the Far East, more precisely as assistant to the General Manager for all Far East Operations. In this new capacity, he was put in charge of the Nestle markets in Vietnam and Japan. Willi claims, with a twinkle in his blue eyes, that he inherited Vietnam because he was the only person in the Far East Zone Management who spoke French at that time! The new appointment resulted in several trips to the Orient from 1963 through 1966. This much traveled bachelor, with a liking for Oriental art in general, Japanese prints and screens in particular, found he had time for short excursions into the Japanese provinces. It was on a long business trip, in early 1965, that he consciously saw his first netsuke. It happened while on a search for prints in Kyoto that he came across what seemed to him "cute" little carvings in Y. Tsuruki's gallery. However, he certainly didn't think that the asking price for the two zodiac pieces he saw that day, was cute! In fact, 20,000 yen (\$55.00 at that time) per piece, was "flabbergasting." Nevertheless, he was so taken with netsuke that he purchased one of the ivory zodiac carvings signed *Masatsugu*, and an ivory puppy.

Two years were to go by before Willi and netsuke found each other again. But this time they formed a partnership that was binding. In January, 1967, Willi was assigned to Japan where he headed a new division for Nestle in Kobe, one of the country's main seaports. He started their Food Service Division for hotels, restaurants and vending machines. This promotion required a change of address and home became Kobe, where he still resides.

When Willi purchased his first netsuke, he was not really into the Japanese zodiac and its

symbolism. Today, he feels it must have been prophetic when he bought as his first netsuke the zodiac theme which featured the central carving of a tiny rat sitting on a sturdy horse. It just had to be his destiny when Willi, birth year of the "rat," met Ursula (Uschi for short) Bergmann in 1965 and discovered her birth year to be that of the horse! "Probably because I am born in a "rat" year, dealers believed that I was collecting nothing but rodents. They offered me all kinds of rats on a continuous basis and I own at present quite a number of them." Uschi was a laboratory researcher from Kempten in Bavaria, Germany, working at Nestle's Central Research Facilities in Switzerland. This fact was not known to Willi when he attended an all day tennis competition followed by a Swiss style wine and cheese party, a bachelor's paradise of twenty-four young women and only six men! But after meeting Uschi that day, Willi's bachelor days started rapidly drawing to a close. They were married in 1968 and today are parents of a nine year old son. And they are a united family when it comes to netsuke collecting. Uschi appreciates the art form and has a small *ojime* collection of her own, while their son, Nicolas, is the proud possessor of five netsuke (how many nine year olds can say that?). Young Nicolas frequently accompanies his father to his bank, where most of their netsuke are kept, and he always checks to see that his five adored netsuke are in good order when the safe is opened. Father Willi is rightfully pleased with his son's interest, and it makes collecting even more enjoyable.

Willi has been involved with netsuke for eighteen years, and in retrospect sees that his tastes and goals for collecting have not changed much. Firstly, he began as a collector overwhelmingly drawn to animal sculpture, and

still gives this category first preference. Within the framework of animal portrayal, he decidedly prefers those pieces with "power and strength." The smaller and more delicate works of the 19th Century, especially "people," are not as appealing, though adequately represented. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that his collection is comprised of more than 60% animal subjects. Secondly, Willi is devoted to ivory netsuke as the preferred material, While he certainly never looks only for ivory sculptures, his collection which initially was over 90% in that medium, now shows a pretty even balance. And thirdly, from the beginning, Willi found himself searching for the "exceptional, one of a kind netsuke that rarely exists." This is indeed a difficult goal to pursue when one seeks antique Japanese works of art. Historically, Japanese culture highly favored the artist who excelled in reproducing his environment accurately. Originality, in the sense of a unique creation, was not encouraged. And when one recalls that Japan was closed to the influences of western civilization in the 17th, 18th, and most of the 19th Centuries (the latter two the golden age of netsuke achievement), it becomes understandable that the Japanese artists developed an undiluted form of expression. In the field of netsuke this produced artists who most often carved over and over again the same theme, "only sometimes adding an endearing detail," suggests Willi. In fact, many artists of renown were noted for their ability to specialize in specific subjects (*Minko* tigers, *Masanao* sparrows, etc.). Knowing this, Willi finds the search for originality even more challenging. Of course, one of a kind pieces do exist and he thinks he has uncovered a few. His prize pieces are a powerful wood tiger by Toyomasa, the only one known to exist by this artist to

An 18th century ivory netsuke of the mystic Baku, seated with upturned trunk and symbolic flames, definitively attributed to *Mitsuharu*. Here the artist has achieved a marvelous fleshy feel to the piece by the use of circular patterns of tufted fur across the strong twisted body. The ivory is beautifully patinated with an overall glow.

Provenance:

Dr. Joseph Kurstin Collection

Exhibited:

Yale University Art Gallery

Published:

Yale University Art Gallery & Arts
of Asia



MIDORI GALLERY INC.

Mayfair-in-the-Grove
3390 Mary Street, Penthouse Level
Coconut Grove, Miami, Florida 33133
(305) 443-3399





Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 3



Fig. 1

date with ivory teeth (Fig. 1 - "Boxwood model of a tiger, signed *Toyomasa*. The eyes are inlaid with translucent horn with black pupils: the eyeteeth are inlaid in ivory. Late 18th C."), the other a superbly rendered ivory tiger by *Otoman* (Fig. 2 - "Ivory model of a fiercely snarling tiger, signed *Otoman*. The feline has put up its back and twists his head to the right, the powerful tail flowing beautifully for compactness. The eyes are inlaid, and traces of red paint are seen in the mouth. Probably the finest *Otoman* now known. 19th C.").

Willi enjoys living in Japan. As a resident for many years, he has developed an intimate knowledge of the Japanese people and their culture and has come to appreciate the contemporary netsuke artists. As a beginning collector, he had a limited knowledge of netsuke artists, but once he started collecting in earnest, he made it his business not only to be informed but also to read signatures and inscriptions. However, it wasn't until he had lived in Japan several years and made the acquaintance of a few of the netsuke carvers that he realized many of those who chose a career

in this field usually faced a rather bleak financial future. In years past, in order to survive, some gifted artists had been forced to accept commissions from dealers with the understanding that they agree to sign famous names to their own works. The usual fee was about \$15.00 a carving. But from this survival work came some truly wonderful netsuke. Among Willi's first purchases was one such piece (the previously mentioned zodiac netsuke) which he owned several years before becoming convinced the signature was wrong. He started studying the piece carefully and finally came to the conclusion that it was done by a living carver. With the help of dealers, he sought out the artist who did acknowledge the netsuke. He removed the fake signature, and at long last the carving received its rightful authorship.

As a collector living in Japan, the question most frequently asked of Willi is if he is still able to find outstanding netsuke there. He promptly replies, "Yes, with a qualification." The prospective buyer must first establish a kind of relationship with the dealer. He found, in the mid 1960's,

when he first began visiting the Japanese antique shops, that he was shown many netsuke, but never the best pieces. Time was required to become an accepted collector, trusted customer, and sometimes, good friend. In some cases, this is still the case today "though the scarcity of good-pieces, the high cost of money, and not least the passing away of such illustrious dealers as Imai Kenzo, Kaneko Sukekazu, Ouchi Yasushi, Tsuruki Yoshimatsu and Yamada Katsu has had its profound impact on these practices of old," said Willi. And unlike the current prevailing thought that all of Japan's finest treasures have long since found their way to foreign shores, Willi feels that occasional great netsuke are still to be discovered there. For examples: Fig. 3. -"Boartusk with a dragon, signed *Kanman* with seal (not seen elsewhere). The inscription reads: *Tempo Hachi Hinoto Tori Roku Gatsu Hi Kanman To + seal* — carved by *Kanman* of Iwami Province (now Shimane Prefecture) on a June day in Tempo 8, year of the cock. June 1837." Fig. 4 -"Two ivory netsuke depicting Nitta no Shiro killing the boar. Both

cont'd page 38

E.T. — THE NETSUKE

(*actually, TEKkan the netsuke shi*)

You've **WEPT** into your popcorn at the movie.

You've **WISHED** the interminable T.V. ads would end.

You've **WASTED** your money on all the T-shirts, key-rings and alien masks for your kids.

Now **WEAR** The Obi-Hasami.

Height: 5¾ inches

Early twentieth century

Inscribed "The real taste of masterly knowledge"

For another fine obi-hasami by Tekkan, the pupil of Kano Tessai, see Eccentrics in Netsuke, Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1982, No. 114.

THE FUNGUS OF THE FUTURE.

Available at a friendly
London netsuke dealer
near you soon!



Sydney L. Moss Ltd.

Oriental Art

51 Brook Street, London W1Y1AU
Tel: 01-629 4670. 01-493 7374
Cables: Eselem London W1



EHRENKRANZ & EPSTEIN INC.

DEALING EXCLUSIVELY IN FINE NETSUKE, INRO & OJIME



A large exciting lacquer inro for a sumo wrestler depicting Raiden on thunder clouds. Signed: *Nakagawa* with a seal *Kakihan*. Late 18th century. Height: 4"



NETSUKE KENKYUKAI

Membership Form

Enclosed is my payment for membership in **NETSUKE KENKYUKAI** for one year including the **Study Journal**. Please make check payable to: Netsuke Kenkyukai
P.O. Box 845
Shelton, Connecticut 06484
U.S.A.

- New Application
- Renewal
- \$46 (North America)
- \$54 (Outside North America)

Only checks drawn on a U.S.A. bank can be accepted.

Introduced By: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: () _____ () _____
WORK HOME

SPECIAL NOTICE

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.

Please help us to help other collectors!

Yes, I agree to have you release *TO MEMBERS ONLY* the following contact address and telephone number(s).

Address: _____

Telephone: () _____ () _____
WORK HOME

My special interests are: _____

Unique Asakusa school netsuke and sagemono combination: the stag-antler manju, carved in low relief with a dragon, is connected by an articulated stag-antler chain to a fruitwood sagemono carved with stylized floral designs. It opens to reveal a traveling shrine, composed of three intricately carved Buddhas, and a superbly lacquered *tennin* flying through the clouds on the inside of the cover. Asakusa district of Tokyo, mid-19th Century.



LENGTH 7¼ INCHES, WIDTH 3¾ INCHES.



Denis Szeszler
ANTIQUE ORIENTAL ART
 New York City—By Appointment
 P.O. Box 714, New York, N.Y. 10028
 (212) 427-4682



TWO SŌKO NETSUKE IN THE SHŌKO SKETCH BOOK

Raymond Bushell

SHŌKO was one of four or five students of Sōko Morita, who was one of the foremost carvers of those associated with the Taisho Period (1912-1926). Shōko, who was born in 1915, was ill all his life and died in 1969. Ueda Reikichi tells us that Shōko began his training with Sōko at age 15, becoming his star pupil.

I visited Shōko's widow seeking information about her husband's life and work. The visit provided a windfall. Shōko kept a Sketch Book, something I did not suspect. She permitted me to borrow and copy it. All the sketches were Shōko's netsuke designs except for two drawings which were real-life copies of netsuke created by his master Sōko. One was a Nio Weaving a Straw Sandal (*waraji*) (Sketch I), the other Nio and Oni celebrating the Festival of the Dead (*O-Bon*) (Sketch II). Sōko's signature is clearly shown in the two

sketches. There is no doubt that these were student sketches for they include notations about measurements (in the old units of *sun*, *bu* and *ri*) and carving reminders.

The Shōko Sketch Book with the two Sōko netsuke was a double thrill for me. First, the thrill of discovering its existence, and second, the thrill of owning both Sōko netsuke that were models for the Shōko sketches. Figure III A, B, C and Figure IV A, B. Note the exactness of the sketches with the netsuke, for example the underside of the straw sandal in Sketch I and Figure III C.

Why had student Shōko copied only these two of the many models that master Sōko created? The answer must be surmised, but one fact stands out. Sōko signed these netsuke on inlaid gold tablets, an indication that he regarded them as his masterpieces. I am aware of no more than three or four net-

suke that Sōko honored with his gold metal signature. The Nio and Oni is a fabulous feat of intricate carving. The model was hardly attempted by his followers and then with only limited success.

On the other hand the Nio Weaving Straw Sandal is a common model carved more than once by most of his followers. The quality gulf, however, between master and pupil — at least in this instance — is very great.

Sketch Books are a primary source of information about *netsuke-shi*. We are indebted to Mary Hillier for her discovery of the sketch book of *Kagetoshi* and the book of *Sessai* designs in the library of the British Museum and to Bernard Hurtig for the sketch book of *Shinzan Masanao*. Sketch Books tend to be overlooked as trivia but more of them may be waiting to inform us about important netsuke matters when they are discovered.

cont'd on page 32

LETTERS *continued from page 7*

Travel is one of life's greatest joys. To travel with specific sites and persons to meet along the way adds stupendously to the enjoyment of the experience.

Let me add three displays I know you will thoroughly relish in seeing.

From my friend, Elsa Casal, I have received this infatuating news:

"The Osaka City purchased the Netsuke Collection — 750 pieces, which is the biggest in Japan owned by a museum. It has caused quite a sensation."

Another highlight to be excited about is the collection in the Kerkyra Museum of Asian Art on an island on the West Coast of Greece. This museum has a fine collection of netsuke on display. Its curator of antiquities, Aglaia Karamanou, is now classifying this collection. Will you please share with her any literature, catalogs, or data on netsuke that you may have available? She is in desperate need and truly worthy of your helpful encouragement.

Eureka! The prestigious Met-

ropoitan Museum has at long last placed some of its precious netsuke on display. They are in a case in the northeast corner on the balcony just over the main entrance.

Heartiest appreciation to you fine fellow members who have aided me with my search for data on erotic netsuke. The hunt continues. Please do not be backward in coming forward with your information.

Lawrence E. Gichner
Washington, D.C.



Sketch I



Sketch I

Sketch II



Sketch II





Fig. IIIA



Fig. IIIB

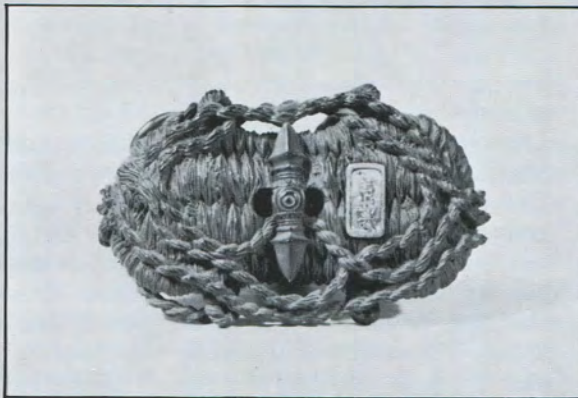


Fig. IIIC

Fig. IVA



Fig. IVB



A SEPARATE VIEW

Robert L. McGowen

BEHOLD the typical netsuke collector at an auction preview: Catalogue in hand, Clyde Collector, after first checking the price estimate, asks for Lot 1 and (a) immediately picks it up, (b) turns it over, (c) looks knowingly but askance at the signature, and/or (d) checks it for damage or repair, usually with his magnifying glass, or if he is a real "expert," with his jeweler's *loupe* (the middle French meaning of which, interestingly, is "imperfect gem"), (e) demonstrates his experience by enfold-ing it in his balled fist and (f) scribbles some notation in his catalogue, which if not meaningless at the time, probably has lost all meaning by the time of the sale. Returning the netsuke, Clyde then proceeds to Lot 2 and repeats the ritual, steps (a) through (f). If a fine netsuke is out of his price range he may skip over it, losing one of those infrequent opportunities to admire a masterpiece.¹

¹ Although I have broken Clyde's movements into six separate steps, in actuality steps (a), (b), (c) and (d) are done in a graceful single movement whereby the netsuke is overturned as it is swept toward the eyes, thereby assuring that the first close-up view will always be the bottom side.

When looking over a dealer's offerings at a convention, Clyde Collector scans the satin-lined compartments of the Samsonite brief case, reaching hither and yon for this or that netsuke, checking the price tag (surreptitiously if someone is watching and, if caught, flipping the tag over and remarking how much he likes or dislikes that carver.) Occasionally his hand may drift back several times to particular pieces for another look. After fifteen to twenty minutes of such serious study, Clyde (unless a drink is offered) hurries on to the suite of the next dealer. All in all it is remindful of a Saturday afternoon at Bloomingdale's or Saks.

Similar observations may be made about the trip to a museum or other display held in conjunction with a convention. Overtime herded on a bus, and almost always at the dinner hour, a hundred or more hungry collectors descend on the display cases, each jostling for a position, peering over another's ear or under a chin, reluctant to tarry long over a particular netsuke because of the press of the line behind. And besides, we must get on to that sumptuous buffet (and free booze) before it is picked over. A few wiser heads manage to return

to the gallery at a later time for a more leisurely appreciation.

This satirical description of Clyde and his fellows is perhaps partly autobiographical, but, as a viewer of viewers, I have noted that, with singular exceptions, it fits most.

Contrast the above to Donald Mendelson's description of his magnificent squid and *ama*, pictured on the cover of and described by him in the *International Netsuke Collector's Society Journal*, Volume 6, No. 4:

"... we all have one we love best. Mine and my wife's is the 'Ama and Squid' from the Hindson Collection, unsigned and quite well known. This piece has everything a great sculpture should have and does it all within the confines of being a true, great netsuke. It has patina, it has size, it has force (there follows a rapturous description). *Giuseppe Eskenazi and I have looked at it on a table at his office and just stared at it for minutes, thinking what a great sculpture it is.* Regardless of netsuke, this is one of the great sculptures of the world in my humble opinion. I know of no sculpture outside of Michelangelo's great 'Moses' or

'David' or the 'Pieta' that stirs one as much as this elegant piece. In modern sculpture I have seen nothing to compare it to. This is the type of piece you want to be careful custodian of so that the next generation can see it intact."

We "just stared at it for minutes, thinking what a great sculpture it is." Do you do that?

George Weil recounts a similar experience. On "an unsuspecting walk in the West End of London" one day, he glimpsed out of the corner of his eye, in the window of a non-specialist in netsuke, his gorgeous ivory figure of Gama Sennin, by *Masaka*. (Illustrated in INCS Journal, Volume 2, No. 3 at page 24). Halting in his tracks, he entered the shop (with great nonchalance and casual air, I'm sure) and being fortunate enough to have sufficient cash in his pocket for its bargain price, he quickly consummated the purchase and went directly — coincidentally — to Eskenazi's shop where he,

with Guiseppe Eskenazi, quietly admired the work (while resisting Eskenazi's blandishments for a quick profit).

Sometime ago, our Philbrook Museum here in Tulsa exhibited a collection from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Entitled "Corot to Braque" the 69 paintings included representative examples of the 19th and early 20th C. French artists, from the Barbizon School through the Impressionists and into Cubism, with single or only a few of the works of each painter. It was a very fine show.

Several months later, while on a business trip to New York, I visited the Metropolitan Museum to view the outstanding display of lacquer selections from the collection of Charles Greenfield. Having some extra time, and with the Philbrook - Boston Museum exhibit in recent memory, I moved to the gallery where hang literally hundreds of Impressionists, with dozens of examples by each principal

artist, in many cases different renditions of the same scene. Without denigrating the fineness of the Metropolitan collection, I found the experience less exhilarating than the Boston Museum exhibition at Philbrook. The more limited examples in Tulsa were striking; the Metropolitan display was "too much of a muchness." It was closely akin to wolfing down a gourmet feast in gourmand fashion, leaving oneself uncomfortably satiated and unable to savor or remember the delicate and delicious flavors of each dish. Waite Phillips, a Tulsa oilman who gave us his mansion for the Philbrook Museum had an epigram — "Every virtue becomes a vice from overindulgence."

Do you sometimes have these same feelings at the end of a convention? My heart gladdens at these infrequent (for me) opportunities to view so many netsuke — including many outstanding ones — and I wouldn't exchange the convention expe-

Barry Davies ORIENTAL ART

E14/17 Grays Mews
1-7 Davies Mews London W1
Telephone 01-408 0207



Ivory Netsuke of a seated puppy, paw on large ball, mouth open. Signed: Dosho.

This amusing rendition alludes to the puppy's desire to be a Shi Shi, where he obviously wants to have a ball in his mouth.

rience for the world, but after a while, the netsuke sort of start "running together." One can't see the trees for the forest. It's a Hobson's choice.

Friends, these are not trinkets. They are works of art and I find it somewhat disturbing at times to see us act as if we were in the produce department at the local Safeway, squeezing the tomatoes and picking over the potatoes. A netsuke needs to be set aside and "just stared at" and quietly studied and admired - a separate view.

I am intrigued with the thought of a museum displaying a "single" netsuke, spotlighted in a free standing case!

Our Philbrook Museum also had a loan exhibit of 74 Roman sculptures from the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California. (Having willed his huge estate to the Museum, Mr. Getty is the largest patron of the arts since

the Medicis. However, as Mr. Getty stated some years ago when told he was the world's first billionaire, "A billion dollars doesn't go as far these days as it used to!"). The Curator from the Getty museum offered some sound advice. Visit the exhibit initially and pick out twelve in particular. Return later and study just that dozen selections. Then pick out another twelve and repeat the close study. And so on.

I am told that generally a Japanese lover of this art does not keep his netsuke on display but brings them out one by one for his visitor to study and admire. Granted that comparisons are helpful and that it is easier to separate the wheat from the chaff and that superior netsuke will leap out from among the many in the dealer's box, I suggest that a separate view is much superior. And besides, why condemn carving A because of its juxtaposition

next to a finer carving B? There is much to be learned and appreciated in even the least.

Having once "isolated" the netsuke, neither should one start with its dissection. Its greatness is in its totality. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Would you view a painting by swooping down upon it to look for a tear in the canvas or an overpainting of some small area? You do not start with an examination of the brush or knife strokes. On visiting the Museum of Modern Art would you commence admiring Christina's World by first closely examining the fine-lined treatment Wyeth used in depicting the grass in the field?

We concentrate far too much on the details of a netsuke and what a shame it is that damage, repair and signature have been accorded such great emphasis. Creativity is the *sin qua non* of art, not the skill of execution.



Warren Imports

Far East Fine Arts



HARUMITSU

LAGUNA BEACH
1910 South Coast Highway
(714) 494-0150

Write for our new FINE ARTS COLOR BROCHURE
WARREN IMPORTS FAR EAST FINE ARTS,
P.O. BOX 325 LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA 92652

PALM SPRINGS
166 N. Palm Canyon Drive
(714) 325-1070

House of Crispo

Specializing in Oriental Art

425 Cannery Row
Monterey, Ca. 93940
(408) 373-8467

The Best of the Past
Enhances the Present
Enriches the Future



*Rat with young resting on treasure bag
Ivory eyes inlaid.
Signed: Murata Itsumin*

Design is far more important than craftsmanship. Why are collectors so myopic? (I sometimes think that from the way we look at netsuke we must think that they were designed to be hung on the forehead from a headband rather than atop an *obi*). Just appreciate the netsuke for its beauty — for art's sake alone. Make an aesthetic appraisal. Note your first emotional response. Then, perhaps, try to get in the carver's mind. What statement is he making? What is his purpose? What subject or legend or story or symbolism? Judge its age, the period, the school. Note the style. Evaluate the design and the creativity and originality reflected in the carving. Are there clever manners in which a difficult problem is handled to maintain functionality without impairment of the beauty? Then — and only then — move to technical

skill in the execution — the detail.

Come with me now to the 1981 INCS Convention in Honolulu where I witnessed an exemplary form of connoisseurship. A group of Japanese were previewing the Sotheby sale. First they briefly studied the catalogue² and discussed the subject among themselves. As they did this, they glanced occasionally at the netsuke while it still rested in the display case. Then they requested

² Sidney Ashkenazie tells us that he previews a sale *without* taking his catalogue, checking his selections and judgements only thereafter. While most of us lack sufficient self-confidence for this, what a fine way that is to free us from the bias of catalogue descriptions (and pricing)! And selection would be based on what appeals to the viewer alone.

the particular Lot. Rather than grabbing it immediately, they allowed the netsuke to remain on the velvet pad atop the display counter, while admiring it in its solitary splendor. Perhaps this was merely good manners, but only thereafter did one of the group pick it up. Instead of immediately rolling it over, she held it in her open palm for closer appreciation by all. They then passed the work among them for detailed examination, all the while exchanging observations. Returning it to the countertop, one final viewing was given before they signaled its return to the case.

Granted that there are many of us and so little time for each, I found this manner of viewing to be one I hope to emulate henceforth. So, collectors beware and dealers be patient, for I shall not be hurried. ■

unsigned with a deep, rich patina. The netsuke on the left shows heavier signs of wear and is less well carved, probably an earlier effort of the work of a less accomplished sculptor. 18th C." Fig. 5 - "Boxwood model of a reclining goat, signed Tomokazu. Eyes inlaid, beard realistically flowing down onto the main body. A superb carving by the famous Nagoya artist. The horns and hooves are treated with a kind of lacquer to give them the appearance of natural horn. This piece was especially commissioned for the Daimyo of Mino (now Gifu Prefecture) — thus the extra effort 19th C."

Willi continues enthusiastically in his search for fine netsuke and the next masterpiece. He is also a warm host to those persons interested in discussing and viewing netsuke art. And to the readers of Netsuke Kenkyukai Study Journal, Willi hereby extends a most cordial invitation, "Any serious collector is

always welcome to see my collection." He does request advance notice as he travels extensively, but a letter to W.G. Bosshard, P.O. Box 207, KOBE PORT 651-01, Japan, might result in an unforgettable experience. Not only is Willi's collection outstanding, but his knowledge and fabulous sense of humor guarantee a memorable visit. And don't be surprised if he should relate netsuke episodes without happy endings, for Willi, like most collectors has had his disappoint-

ments with collecting. The worst experience was the loss of an important piece a dealer had promised to sell to him. Instead, the dealer sold it to another collector, and for a much larger sum than their agreed upon price. But, seasoned executive that he is, Willi knows that every deal doesn't fly. For those who climb the corporate ladder, the percentage of winners is all that counts. And when it comes to percentages, Willi G. Bosshard is an unqualified success! ■



Fig. 5

The Oriental Corner



Wooden netsuke of a fish head with a rope through the mouth. Signed: "Isshinsai" (Masanao), 18th Century Height 3.8 cm.



395 Main Street
Los Altos, California
USA 94022

Tel: (415) 941-3207



LAST MINUTE NEWS

Over 125 people have already sent in their early confirmation forms and money.

This promises to be a record breaking convention.

Make sure that you get your choice of workshops to attend. Send in your early registration form TODAY!

Photocopy the form on page 19 and mail it NOW!

Kurstin / Chappell

fine netsuke, inro, lacquer ware and pipe cases

Unmistakably Jōbun !

Whimsical rendition of a Dutchman cradling a puppy in the crook of his elbow. His facial expression reflects his bewilderment with the spot on his coat, a natural knot in the wood obviously worked in by the gifted artist to amuse and suggest the dilemma of holding an untrained baby, be it human or animal. Patinated Boxwood.

Signed: *Jōbun*
18th Century.



Provenance:

Ex: Richards Collection
Ex: Greenfield Collection

Published:

Bushell,
Collectors' Netsuke,
p. 64, no. 72.
Stern,
The Magnificent Three,
p. 96, no. 37.
Hurtig,
Masterpieces of Netsuke Art,
p. 73, no. 231.
Okada,
Real and Imaginary Beings,
p. 52, no. 31.

Exhibited:

Yale University Art Gallery
Feb 28 - Apr 12, 1980
New Haven, Conn.

It seems possible that the 19th century Osaka artist, Sanshō, was influenced by the droll creativity of Jōbun.

Beauty Endures...

Edle Kurstin

63 Valerian Ct. — Rockville, Md. 20852
301-984-3207

Sharen Chappell

P.O. Box 2091 — No. St. Paul, Mn. 55109
612-777-8910



Ivory group of cow and calf. *Unsigned.*
Japan, Kyoto School, 18th century.



ESKENAZI

Oriental Art

Foxglove House
(opposite Old Bond Street)
166 Piccadilly
London W1V 9DE
Telephone: 01-493 5464/5
Cables: Eskenazi London W1

15 Via Montenapoleone
Milan
Telephone: 70 00 22