

The forefront of Netsuke research

# "Kyoto and the genesis of the fastener"

Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum  
Curator  
Kosuke (Tadakumo) Onishi

Two possibilities can be hypothesized for the formation of the fastener (the forerunner of the Netsuke). The first possibility is one of natural genesis, in which fasteners developed from rocks and wood fragments. The other is the possibility, which we have mainly considered in the past, is that they were artificially invented. Comparing several pictorial historic sources of the same era in which fasteners started being depicted, we can visualize the class of wearer who hung sagemono items from their belts using fasteners.

The class of wearer who attached these sagemono on their person was, as discussed previously, the kabukimono who bedeviled the Kyoto city streets in those days with odd customs and behavior. And of course, it is also well known that the kabuki odori dance, the predecessor of the traditional Japanese performing art of kabuki, arose in the Shijogawara area against the backdrop of the conditions of those times. Both were felt by the city to be odd and

unorthodox at the time. What appeared (was visually depicted) here as one of the flamboyant pieces of attire worn by the kabukimono was the small ring-shaped device for hanging sagemono items, which we call the fastener. If we think along these lines, it is possible to assign the role of motherland to the genesis of the fastener as actually befitting this place that either accepted or excluded the kabukimono, but ultimately gave structure to the kabuki spirit. In other words, if it is true that it was not in Sakai or Osaka, or even the city of Edo (modern day Tokyo) which was newly emerging at that time, but instead here in Kyoto where these kabukimono acted as they pleased, and that the location of Kyoto was essential for their genesis, then just as the kabuki odori dance could not have emerged without the culture and atmosphere of Kyoto, it would not be farfetched to think that this city of Kyoto was also deeply connected to the genesis of the fastener as one possible symbol of the kabukimono.

## Letter from Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Our museum has been giving gallery talks to reserved groups of visitors, but for the first time, we held a project in tie-up with a hotel to offer a special experience. In advance, we prepared deer antlers that were shaped into square and round tags and dyed red. At the workshop, guests carved designs on them using an engraving knife.

After welcoming the guests, Mr. Kukan Oikawa, a netsuke artist, began his talk on how to enjoy netsuke. Guests were able to hold in their hands the netsuke created by Mr. Kukan. In addition, Mr. Kosuke Onishi, a netsuke researcher

and general manager of Sagawa Printing's Mecenat Project, spoke passionately about the history of netsuke and the significance of this cultural activity. In the workshop that followed, guests concentrated on their creations, carving family crests, cherry blossoms, and cat designs using unfamiliar carving knives. Finally, guests were invited to view the netsuke exhibit and the samurai residence. As they left, guests held their memorable pieces in their hands and said, "That was fun." We, the organizers of the event, were very happy to hear their comments.



## Special Exhibition for July to September 2024

A play on words to be enjoyed with netsuke.  
"Netsuke enhanced by words"

7 "Japanese word-chain game by netsuke"  
July 2(Tue) - 31(Wed)

8 "SNS Netsuke Championship"  
August 1(Thu) - 31(Sat)

9 "Netsuke reframed in rhetori"  
September 1(Sun) - 29(Sun)

We are posting the latest information and images of the Museum on Twitter and Instagram. We hope you to follow us.

-Awarded 9th Mizuki Jugodo Prize from Yamato Koriyama City, Nara Prefecture

-Featured in the February issue of Katei-gaho

-Featured in the NHK TV program "The Mark of Beauty"

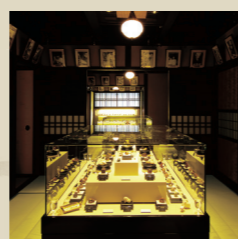


Official Website→



## Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

Contemporary Netsuke is the essence of Japanese aesthetics and craftsmanship. Many artists are creating netsuke works with adding new tastes. Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum is a museum that specializes in contemporary netsuke. We systematically collect, store, research and disclose documents and materials. Contemporary netsuke reflect social situation, technological progress and people's tastes of each era. Our mission is to contribute to the advancement of culture by researching contemporary netsuke from various viewpoints to investigate the characteristics of Japanese art.



As a leading company in the fields of printing and information processing, Sagawa Printing Co., Ltd. is supporting the Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum with the aim of passing Japanese culture to the next generation and developing global art.



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The only contemporary netsuke art museum in the world

## Special Exhibitions of Kyoto Seishu Netsuke Art Museum

# Fearless, pompous, so funny. "Cool appearance of Netsuke"

It is said that the face is a mirror that reflects emotions. Just by looking at a person's facial expression, we can sense what kind of emotion he or she is feeling.

Netsuke are also carved with expressive faces, eloquently conveying feelings of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. Even within the limited size of a netsuke, the face fearlessly asserts

itself, giving it the cool appearance. This issue features exhibitions that focus on such "faces."

Since the word "face" refers not only to a person but also to a representative of an organization or culture, we will introduce the faces of Eastern and Western culture, focusing on the Kyoto metropolis and Edo (Tokyo).

大胆不敵、だから面白い。  
根付の面構え展

Fearless, pompous, so funny  
"Cool appearance of Netsuke"

4月『顔、かお、貌展』"Individual unique, diverse Netsuke"  
4月2日(火)~30日(火) | April 2(Tue) - 30(Tue)

5月『はんなりと雅展』"Refined and Elegant Netsuke"  
5月1日(水)~31日(金) | May 1(Wed) - 31(Fri)

6月『粋と洒落展』"Smart and Stylish Netsuke"  
6月1日(土)~30日(日) | June 1(Sat) - 30(Sun)

京都 清宗根付館  
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Promotional poster



**4** The first point of the netsuke is the face.

Special Exhibition in April  
**“Individual, unique, diverse Netsuke”**

■ April 2(Tue) - 30(Tue)

Since ancient times, it has been believed that the face has mysterious spiritual powers, such as the ability to identify and personalize an individual, or to inhabit a deity by wearing a mask during rituals.

Faces are the first point of interest in netsuke. Netsuke are also characterized by the lively expressions they give not only to people, but also to animals and inorganic objects.



〔 Laughing Hell King 〕  
 KUKAN (1968~)  
 H4.4cm  
 Enma, the king of hell, always looks horrified, but here he is laughing hysterically.



〔 Throwing Persimmons 〕  
 ZANMAI (1967~)  
 H3.8cm  
 The work features a monkey throwing a persimmon. His bashful face is a highlight of the work.



〔 Dreaming drunk man 〕  
 IPPU (1970~)  
 H2.5cm  
 Surrounded by items associated with his hometown, the man is in a good mood and drunk.



〔 Perfect Crime 〕  
 YUKO (1952~)  
 H3.3cm  
 A legless ghost leaves no trace when it steals. A face satisfied with having committed the perfect crime.



〔 Ebisu 〕  
 AYA (1949~)  
 H4.0cm  
 Ebisu is a Japanese god who brings prosperity to business. His laughing face brings even more blessings.

**5** Beauty nurtured by 1,200 years of history.

Special Exhibition in May  
**“Refined and Elegant Netsuke”**

■ February 1(Thu) - 29(Thu)

During the Heian period (794-1185), an elegant dynastic culture blossomed around the emperor and aristocrats. In the early Edo period (1603-1867), the original form of netsuke was used in Kabuki dances with gorgeous costumes in the capital of Kyoto, and later netsuke became the face of urban culture as ornaments for intellectuals. The people of Kyoto developed a lustrous and graceful sense of beauty.



〔 Hagoromo 〕  
 ISSHU (1917~)  
 H5.4cm  
 Noh plays truly symbolize the elegance of Kyoto. Among them, "Hagoromo" is one of the most spectacular.



〔 Thinking of Him 〕  
 RYUSHI (1934~)  
 H5.0cm  
 A woman with washed out hair. She is having feelings for a letter from a man she is in love with.



〔 Fox Pretending To Be a Tea Master 〕  
 TOUN (1968~)  
 H3.3cm  
 There is a story in Kyoto that an old fox disguised himself as a master of the tea ceremony.



〔 At Ichiriki-cyaya 〕  
 YOKA (1968~)  
 H5.6cm  
 Chushingura" is a famous Japanese tale of revenge by loyal samurai. The protagonist received a secret letter!



〔 Gion Song 〕  
 DOSAI (1950~)  
 H6.3cm  
 Maiko is a symbol of Kyoto culture. The beautiful four seasons are carved into patterns on her kimono.

**6** Edo's common people's culture with vigor and grace

Special Exhibition in June  
**“Smart and Stylish Netsuke”**

■ June 1(Sat) - 30(Sun)

During the Edo period (1603-1867), the city of Edo was influenced by the culture of Kyoto in the earlier period, but as the city developed and the townspeople rose to prominence, they created their own unique culture. The common people of Edo preferred a humane culture rooted in their own lives. With the refined tastes of the cities, netsuke also began to elaborate on witty designs and techniques with less flamboyance.



〔 Candle Spinner 〕  
 AKIRA (1949~)  
 H7.1cm  
 A figure skating piece. A spin that opens the legs more than 180 degrees and a pun on candles.



〔 Stylish Young Man 〕  
 TETSURO (1960~)  
 H6.0cm  
 The town of Edo had a high percentage of men, and gradually the men's aesthetic sense of stylishness grew.



〔 Sukeroku 〕  
 MEIKAN (1936~)  
 H5.9cm  
 Sukeroku" is a popular Kabuki play. The spirit of chivalry and the sophisticated mannerisms are "chic" itself.



〔 Happy Octopus 〕  
 KIHU (1957~)  
 H2.8cm  
 Tako (octopus) is connected to "many blessings," and the sucker attracts both good luck and fortune.



〔 Guardian Child 〕  
 ITARO (1961~)  
 H3.7cm  
 Edo was a town that quickly recovered from fires. The secret may have been thanks to this guardian child.