REAL AND IMAGINARY BEINGS
This catalogue accompanies an exhibition held at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut between February 28 and April 12, 1980.

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Few museums in Japan or the West have collected or exhibited netsuke. Only informed connoisseurs and passionate collectors have appreciated the beauty, wit, and meaning of this miniature art form. We are grateful to Edith and Joseph Kurstin for making accessible to a general audience their collection of exemplary pieces from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. This publication and the concurrent exhibition were conceived for three reasons: to celebrate the Kurstin collection, to promote a deeper understanding of the cultural context and artistic vitality of netsuke, and to explore the richness of the Japanese imagination, its preoccupations both real and imaginary. The catalogue was written by Barbra Teri Okada in collaboration with Mary Gardner Neill, our curator of Oriental art, who was also responsible for the logistical arrangements for the show and for its beautiful presentation.

Alan Shestack, Director
Yale University Art Gallery

The authors would like to express their thanks to their many colleagues and friends who have contributed to this project: Alan Shestack, Director of the Yale University Art Gallery, for his support of our undertaking; Klaus Gemming for his elegant book design; Joseph Szaszfai for his excellent photographs; Bill Moreland for the composition of the signature pages; Emiko Staubitz, Emiko Takeda and Ishizawa Masao, Director of the Yamato Bunkakan Museum, and especially the honorable Hozen Seki, Director of the Buddhist Academy, for translation and interpretation of inscriptions; Martha Achilles and Ellie Tejirian for typing the manuscript; and Deborah Berman, Constance O’Connell, and Loretta Staples for invaluable attention to the myriad detail of the exhibition. In addition, Robert Soule and his staff have provided us with yet another skillful and meticulous installation, and Peter Neill, our editor, has provoked us toward standards of language and content that we, no doubt, have not attained.

We are also indebted to three distinguished connoisseurs of netsuke: Tys Volker, author of the informative The Animal in Far Eastern Art;
Raymond Bushell, author of *Collectors' Netsuke*; and, of course, Neil Davey, author of *Netsuke*, whose lucid remarks introduce this volume.

Ultimately, however, we owe this opportunity to make some small contribution to netsuke scholarship to Joseph and Edith Kurstin. Their vigorous search for fine netsuke has inspired this project, and their knowledge, friendship, and generosity have contributed to its success.

Barbra Teri Okada
Mary Gardner Neill
COLLECTORS OF ART are of various types: some exhibit a brief infatuation for the field in which they have chosen to collect, quickly tiring of their acquisitions; others, perhaps even more fickle, collect purely for investment, whether or not they admit to it; still others develop a strong liking, even a love, for the works of art they have acquired, but keep them purely for decoration and visual enjoyment. A few, however, start slowly, collecting in a methodical manner, and over the years, through close study of their acquisitions, eventually become authorities, not only on their own collection, but on other works in and around the field of their interest.

In the early days of collecting netsuke and related art forms, such collectors as W. L. Behrens, Henri Joly, Harry Seymour Trower, and Michael Tomkinson built up enormous troves of seemingly countless netsuke, ojime, inro, tsuba, kozuka and other miniature Japanese art forms. They studied these objects closely and became experts on their subjects. Eventually, their collections were passed on to others. Most fell into the hands of the infatuated, the investor, and the pure admirer. Some are in the vaults of museums, where, in most cases, they are shown to the public only occasionally. Relatively few have found their way into the hands of the true collector.

Whereas in the past, large collections were popular, the trend nowadays is towards a small but choice collection, each item carefully selected, any slightly substandard piece replaced with a finer example whenever possible.

Joe and Edie Kurstin embody this trend towards greater discrimination. From small beginnings, they discovered netsuke and began forming a collection, with no formal knowledge, but with keen intuition and taste. Joe, being a noted ophthalmic surgeon, was captivated by the intricate delicacy of the works. Edie, on the other hand, was intrigued by their history and symbolism.

While Joe’s work has, of necessity, taken up much of his time, Edie has spent a large amount of hers traveling—around America; to Europe; and, in recent years, to Japan, the original source of netsuke. Joe has been able to make some of these trips, and together they have traced the accepted authorities, asked the right questions, and increased their own knowledge to the degree that they can now be called authorities in their own right.
Unlike the earlier collectors, they have not gone in for quantity, but have carefully chosen each piece, with much deliberation, always bearing in mind the criteria for selecting a fine netsuke.

The collection, as it stands today, well represents the various schools of netsukeshi, ranging from the well known artists from Osaka and Kyoto, such as Mitsuhiro, Kaigyokusai, Tomotada, and Masanao, through the wood carvers of the Nagoya region, and including supreme examples from the distant seaboard province of Iwami. Also represented are a group of 20th century carvers' works. As a whole, the collection displays a very wide range of styles and techniques.

I am pleased that the Kurstins have generously decided to lend their collection for exhibition, making public the fruits of their perseverance and study. All students of netsuke should take this opportunity to witness netsuke and the art of collecting at its finest.

Neil K. Davey

London, September 1979
The word "sculpture" did not enter the Japanese language until the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth century. Before that time, all carved objects were termed horimono, and no distinction was made as to size, subject matter, or purpose. It was only after contact with the West that words such as art (geijutsu), fine art (bijutsu), crafts (kōgei), and sculpture (chōkoku) emerged in the language. This does not mean, however, that the Japanese, like all cultures, did not have the need to express themselves in three-dimensional objects. What we Westerners consider sculpture existed in Japan from the earliest times, despite the lack of a terminology to distinguish it from other forms of artistic expression.

From ancient times the Japanese people have believed strongly in the creation of their culture by the gods. The first known sculptural forms seem to have had religious or proto-religious significance; their precise meaning, however, remains uncertain. Small clay figurines known as dogū, made in the Jōmon Period (8000 B.C.–250 B.C.), appear to represent the female form, and were probably fertility images or pregnancy charms. No further development in figural representation can be documented until the appearance of hanwa about A.D. 500. These figures, which continued to be made until the advent of Buddhism in the sixth century A.D., were sculptured terracotta representations of architectural, animal, and finally human forms, found in or near burial sites, and are also thought by scholars to be of ritual significance.

Shinto, "The Way of the Gods," is the indigenous religion of Japan. Its cosmological myths were recorded for the first time during the eighth century in the Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters), and in the Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan). Essentially animistic in nature, Shinto has been described as "a combination of nature worship and ancestor cult," a recognition of the divine in all aspects of the external, physical world. Early Shinto art was limited to objects, such as swords and mirrors, which were considered to contain the kami of the person or thing to which they were ascribed.

Like the religion itself, all Shinto art is centered upon the concept of kami, a term that may loosely be translated as 'deity.' The Japanese kami are beyond numbering, for in Shinto belief any person—living or dead—and any object
or place possessing a numinous or transcendent quality may be considered a deity.  

Buddhism, an Indian religion brought to Japan via Korea, provided the Japanese with the concept of anthropomorphic representation. Its pantheon was rich in Hindu imagery, with innumerable tales of saints, angels, devils and images of hell, derived from Vedic and Sanskrit literature. Following its introduction, Shinto artists began to depict *kami* in figurative form. The earliest Shinto sculpture dates from the mid-eighth century, and was already heavily influenced by Buddhist traditions, subject matter, and iconography. However, it never developed as an independent art form, separate from Buddhist overtones, largely because of the essentially intangible nature of its subject and of the religion itself.

The impact of Buddhism on Japan was intensified from the seventh century on by increasing contact with China, whose religious sculpture and paintings appealed to Japanese sensibilities. Buddhist sculpture was conceptual in its imagery, representing idealized concepts rather than real persons. With Buddhism came the concept of moral judgment not found in Shinto. Since no fundamental theological conflict existed between the two religions, it was not difficult for Buddhist thought and values to be accepted, indeed superimposed upon the older indigenous religion. For about two hundred years, then, during the Asuka (552–645) and Nara (646–794) periods, Buddhist statuary reflected the styles of the Wei, Sui, and T’ang dynasties of China rather than Japanese traditions. During this time, sculptors experimented in various media, borrowing heavily from Chinese techniques, particularly for work in bronze. This work was hidden away in temples where it was available only to the aristocracy and the priesthood. Thus, the first forms of sculpture in Japan began to evolve in isolation from the masses, patronized by the imperial family and the upper class.

In the ninth century, Shingon, or “The True Word,” an esoteric (*mikkyō*) form of Buddhism, was introduced into Japan by Kūkai (also known as Kōbō Daishi, 774–835), a gifted Buddhist monk who became an important motivating force in the development of new sculptural imagery. In China, Shingon (Chinese: *Chen-yen* or *Mi-chiao*) had traditionally been expressed in two forms of *mandala*, which were
graphic representations of the two Buddhist worlds. In Japan, Kūkai transformed one of these *mandala*—the Kongōkai Mandala (Diamond Circle)—into three-dimensional form. During the Heian period (794–1185), religious sculpture was still patronized exclusively by the aristocracy, and Shingon appealed to this elite because of its emphasis on secrecy and symbolism.

These Shingon sculptures, clothed in bright colors and exotic in form, were a true artistic innovation. Due to the wealth and aesthetic sensibilities of the aristocratic court, religious sculpture rapidly became more ornate in its surface decoration. Yet at no time were these images considered for their purely artistic qualities. The materials used for sculpture and the sculptor’s tools had religious implications and spiritual purposes. A Shinto ceremony was always performed before a sculptor began a carving. The same attitude affected the artist’s approach to the material being used. For example, when a large Buddhist carving was contemplated, a Shinto ceremony was attached to the felling of the tree to be used for the sculpture. Wood was the preferred material for Japanese sculpture because it was a living material and possessed *kami*. Thus, man and his tools, the creative process, and the created object were integrated into a specific religious context.

Contact with China also exposed the Japanese to two other Chinese philosophical systems, Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism, a code of morality based on filial piety and altruistic righteousness, concerned itself with the practicalities of daily life. Tao, literally “the Way,” was a philosophy based on the idea of following nature and its ways which easily harmonized with Shinto. The Taoist who attained a union with nature was called a *sennin*, or “man of the mountain,” and was considered immortal. These two rich traditions added immensely to the reservoirs of tales, adventures, fantasies, and moral instructions which were the frequent subjects of Japanese artists.

Toward the end of the twelfth century, the Heian aristocracy came into conflict with the new warrior class called samurai. Two major clans, the Minamoto and the Taira, clashed in a struggle for supremacy. When it was over, formal imperial rule of Japan came to an end, and the imperial family retired to an enclosed compound in Kyoto. The soldier-ruler Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199) became the first shogun. This struggle, too, supplied numerous heroic tales which were told over and
over again in the next centuries, blending historical fact and imagination. These were also added to the national literature from which the netsuke carver took his inspiration.

In the Kamakura period (1185–1392), realism became predominant. Portrait sculpture of Zen masters, though religious in content, became secular in form; the representation of living persons replaced earlier idealized images of the various aspects of Buddha. Temple guardian figures were now depicted in motion, contrasting with the stiff, formal postures of earlier figures. Clothes swung away from the body in swift, strong movement. Eyes glared, and muscles were tensed. Realism became so pronounced that veins and arteries were frequently carved in relief on the surface of the sculpture, and glass was inserted in the eyes to give a more life-like quality. Sculpture became alive with a new vitality, reflecting the robust nature of the samurai temperament. The Kamakura period is considered by most Japanese art historians to be the zenith of Japanese sculpture.

After the fourteenth century, Buddhist sculpture began to decline. In the Muromachi period (1392–1573), many carvers turned their attention to such secular sources as the Noh, a dance-drama which utilized wooden masks to communicate subtle emotional nuance. In the succeeding Momoyama period (1573–1615), noted for its monumental architecture, carvers were commissioned to decorate the paneling and lattice-work (rama) of such warlords’ strongholds as Oda Nobunaga’s (1532–1582) castle in Azuchi, Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s (1536–1598) castle in Osaka, and Tokugawa Ieyasu’s (1542–1616) castle town at Edo. The subject matter was drawn principally from Chinese designs and legends, so that by the beginning of the Edo period, the development of a purely secular sculptural art form was already established.

THE EDO PERIOD

The Edo period (1615–1867) was one of the most vital in the history of Japan. For the first time, the country became united under a strong central government without the disruption of war or foreign influence. Until this period, Japan had been composed of domains (han) ruled by regional administrators (daimyō) whose allegiance to the central government varied with the times. In 1603, Tokugawa Ieyasu “created a
machinery of controls which institutionalized the supremacy of the shogun in all areas of government and national life.” The Tokugawa shogunate lasted until the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

All members of Japanese society were assigned places in the social hierarchy: the samurai, including the daimyō at the top, followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants. A strict neo-Confucian code of behavior was established to maintain order and to control those who might summon sufficient military or financial power to threaten the central authority. The family was central to this code and was responsible for the actions of all individuals within it. The commune was accountable to the town or village for the behavior of its families, the towns and villages were accountable to the province (han), and the han were accountable ultimately to the shogun, creating a social hierarchy that extended through the entire society. Thus, the individual was defined by ancestry, family name, lord, and nation. Obedience, fulfillment of duty, and continuous submission to authority inhibited any sense of self or behavior other than as prescribed by the neo-Confucian laws.

Most of these laws governed private conduct, dress, and restrictions on marriage, but the edict of “alternative residence” revolutionized the internal economic structure of the country, encouraging a shift of wealth from the upper to the middle class. The edict enjoined the daimyō to build a residence in Edo within view of the shogun. They were able to visit their home domains only every six months, while their wives and children remained in the capital as virtual hostages. Those daimyō who lived far from Edo returned home only every other year. Approximately two hundred and fifty daimyō with full retinue travelled the roads to and from Edo, and the constant strain of financing these elaborate entourages stimulated the economy while simultaneously draining the resources of potential revolutionaries. By the middle of the seventeenth century, this redistribution of wealth had produced a large middle class of artisans and merchants (chōnin), who began to supplant the samurai as purveyors of artistic taste.

The daimyō owned all the land and subsidized their own armies. With the establishment of a prolonged peace, however, these large armies were no longer necessary, and thousands of soldiers were left without employment. Because, as samurai they were unable to work at other economically productive occupations, the government assumed

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**Fig. 3. Netsuke.** Black painted metal counterweight in shape of tassel, which serves as flint. **Sagemono.** Black and gold lacquered gunpowder flask.
their support at a subsistence level through stipends—grants of rice which could be converted into cash. The samurai looked upon these financial transactions as beneath their dignity; such matters as buying, selling, and storage of commodities, then, were relegated to the merchants who made their fortunes through manipulation of this market. While the samurai gradually adapted to their new role as administrators, they nevertheless became increasingly dependent on the merchants for the execution of their financial affairs.

Christianity was introduced into Japan by Portuguese traders in the mid-sixteenth century. As the Tokugawa government demanded absolute loyalty to the state, a Christian’s loyalty to God became an inevitable source of conflict. Edicts proscribing the practice of Christianity were put forward as early as the 1590s. In 1636, the Japanese government, fearing this subversive foreign influence, abolished Christianity altogether, and banished the Portuguese. The construction of ships capable of overseas travel was forbidden, and all foreigners were excluded except those Dutch and Chinese traders permitted to live on Deshima Island in Nagasaki Bay.

The Tokugawa government also introduced controls over these classical art forms patronized by the aristocracy: the Noh theatre, the Kanō school of painting, and Buddhist art. Ultimately, artistic expression stagnated, and these forms were robbed of their ability to reflect or comment upon the changes in society occurring at the time. Bored samurai, as well as wealthy merchants, sought new creative activity. A group of what were termed “non-classical” art forms developed, and it was only when the government began to perceive these, too, as a threat that it began their censure as well.

During this period, Osaka became the center of commerce. Because of its remoteness from the seat of government, the new artistic tastes of the country were also centered there. Novels and dramas depicting the life of the merchant class originated in this city. The commercial class became an enthusiastic audience for new forms of theatre, jōruri (dramatic recitals accompanied by music) and Kabuki, which quickly replaced the classical Noh as the center of the theatrical movement. Kabuki eventually became a most important influence on the fashions of the day. After the rebuilding of Edo following the great fire of 1657, drama flourished, particularly in the Yoshiwara, the entertainment and
brothel district, and was therefore a direct influence upon the development of netsuke.

The desire for ostentation on the part of the newly rich middle class encouraged new styles of painting. Sotatsu (?–1643), Soetsu (1688–1704), and Korin (1658–1716) were primary proponents of the Rimpa school of painting, with its emphasis on bright, bold color on magnificent gold or silver leaf ground. Swords and sword fittings, no longer necessary for war, became more decorative and ornate. Simple designs were replaced by intricate scenes of Taoist legends and folk tales. Gold and other precious metals became fashionable, and a samurai's wealth could be judged by the outward elegance of his sword, its fittings, and its lacquered sheath.6

In the early eighteenth century, the Tokugawa government extended its control and censorship in an attempt to curb these excesses. According to the Japanese scholar Anesaki, "the refinement of the latter part of the Tokugawa regime was an anomalous product of artificial restraint imposed by the government upon the aesthetic and pleasure-seeking temperament of the age."7 The stricter sumptuary laws caused the emergence of more subtle art forms, exquisite decoration on a miniature scale that concealed signs of wealth from government spies on the lookout for aberrant behavior exemplified by ostentatious display.8

THE IMPACT OF TOBACCO

Tobacco was brought to Japan by the Portuguese at the end of the sixteenth century. Smoking quickly spread. All classes of society enjoyed tobacco at home, and smoking sets decorated in lacquer became common. In 1609, the shogunate, convinced that the habit was both unseemly and unsanitary, passed stringent laws forbidding its use. The laws proved unenforceable, however, and smoking continued in the geisha quarters as well as in private homes.

During the next eighty years, smoking was periodically banned, until the reign of the eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune (1677–1751; r. 1716–1745), when the laws were repealed and the cultivation of tobacco was encouraged in order to stimulate the economy. Thereafter, smoking in public became increasingly popular, and many objects appeared which served to carry tobacco.
The traditional dress of Japan, the kimono, worn by both men and women, had no pockets except deep sleeves in which only the lightest objects could be carried. Therefore, a method for hanging objects from the sash (obi) of the kimono was devised (Figs. 1, 2). In earlier times, objects such as a gunpowder holder were attached to a counterweight—a flint, for example (Fig. 3), wedged between the body and the kimono-sash. The counterweight was not seen, and was purely functional.

The earliest method of suspending objects from the belt was by a large ring called the obiguruwa, as seen in the last section of the Kabuki Sketchbook Scroll, (Fig. 4). In this scroll, which dates from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the actress Okuni appears at center stage wearing a narrow obi threaded through a large ring or circlet, to which an inro (originally a seal and paste container, but later popular as a medicine carrier), a money purse (kinchaku), and a small gourd, among other items, have been attached. This link style must have proved too cumbersome for common use, however, as no further records of its appearance are extant.

Shortly afterwards, a disk or wheel-shaped object, probably of ivory, came into use. Originally known as the obiguruma, it was intended for use with the inro and kinchaku. An excellent example of this ensemble is illustrated on a panel of the Matsu-ura screens, which date from the second quarter of the seventeenth century (Fig. 5). This disk soon acquired a center peg which allowed the cord’s knot to be hidden (Fig. 6). Today, this style is called manju netsuke, named after the shape of the annual New Year’s rice cake.

From these manju netsuke, as well as other types of netsuke, portable containers (sagemono) were suspended by a cord. All sagemono had two openings through which the ends of the cord were passed, then threaded through a large, single-holed slide fastener (ojime) and the two cord openings (himotoshi) in the netsuke. The cord between the ojime and the netsuke was hidden by the obi.

Sometime during the latter half of the seventeenth century, netsuke, usually of wood or ivory and sculpted in figural form, became fashionable. In The Life of an Amorous Man, published in 1682, Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693) wrote: “Dangling from his sash was a tiny wood carving inlaid with agate.” Elsewhere, Ihara describes the small window of a second-hand shop, noting that it contained “an old sword guard and its
nails, a braid of Haori coat, a paper fan, and a *karashishi netsuke.*” Such references suggest that by the end of the seventeenth century, *netsuke* carved in the round (*katabori netsuke*) had been effectively introduced (Figs. 7, 8).

Thus, when the tobacco edicts were repealed in 1716, carved *netsuke* had come into use, and the stage was set for their development as the vehicle for sculptural expression in the remainder of the Edo period. The samurai, still forbidden to smoke in public, carried their tobacco and pipe in a small sack attached to a rope strung around their shoulders and hung inside the sleeves of the kimono. Merchants, wishing to imitate the samurai’s use of *inrō* and to display their wealth, developed a tobacco ensemble which resembled the *inrō* ensemble. Prints from the time depict theatrical scenes in which the actors are smoking and wearing these ensembles on stage. Tobacco also became an integral part of a business meeting; its enjoyment became as ritualistic as drinking tea. The pipe was lit, a few leisurely puffs taken, then the bowl emptied and the pipe replaced in its holder (Figs. 2, 9). As in the aristocratic tea ceremony, each element of the tobacco ensemble was examined and admired, with particular emphasis on the artistry of the *netsuke,* much like the attention given to the tea bowl. By the middle of the eighteenth century, then, the *netsuke* was the object of serious appreciation.

**EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NETSUKE**

The earliest known text dealing specifically with *netsuke* is the seventh volume of the *Sōkenkishō,* a partially illustrated book privately published by the connoisseur-collector Inaba Tsurya (Shineimon) of Osaka in 1781. This volume lists fifty-seven artists by name, as well as giving a compendium of critical observations, and suggests that these first documented *netsuke* artists originally worked in other sculptural forms. Some were Buddhist artisans; some were carvers of masks for theatre performance; others created architectural pieces, such as transom carvings known as *rama.* Most were accustomed to working in a larger format, and apparently turned to the new, smaller art form as a diversion, or an alternative means to earn a living.

Early *netsuke* were usually large, highly animated, and unsigned, their design characteristics derived primarily from their creators’ per-
sonalities, training, and geographical origins. Netsuke created by Osaka artists, for example, reflected the independence and vitality of an active commercial center. Kyoto artists such as Tomotada (no. 16) were more restrained in their interpretations, as befitted artists surrounded by the atmosphere of the old imperial city. The work of Edo artists such as Miwa (no. 20) evinced the constraints imposed by the proximity of the shogunal court. Artists from the remote southwestern province of Iwami were preoccupied by naturalism, portraying local subjects in materials indigenous to the area.

Four major characteristics emerge from an examination of the diversity of these early styles. First, the cord openings (himotoshi) were usually of uneven size, one disproportionately large to hide the knot, thus giving the sculpture the appearance of uninterrupted surface. The larger opening was usually placed in between an animal’s hind quarters or under a figure’s outer garment. If no cord openings were to be seen, the cord was usually threaded and knotted within natural apertures.

The second consistent factor in netsuke of this period was their size. Earlier pieces were large in comparison to later ones. Third, the artist concentrated on how he made his statement, on design and motif rather than on technique. With no established tradition to follow, the artist was able to allow his imagination to run free.

Finally, these early netsuke concentrated on Chinese mythological beasts derived from Buddhist or Taoist legend. Among the first such beasts to be used were the tiger, symbol of the male principle; the shishi, or karashishi (Chinese: shih-tzu), a cross between a dog and a stylized lion; the kirin (Chinese: ch‘i-lin), a creature resembling a unicorn; the dragon (Chinese: lung); and the baku, known as the eater of bad dreams. Zodiac animals were also popular. The Japanese believed strongly in the connection between the psychological attributes of an individual and those of the animals symbolizing the year of his birth. All these creations were strong, spirited figures of the imagination.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, certain other technical factors, less obvious but equally consistent, became apparent. New material, staining, and the occasional use of inlay became evident. Wood and ivory were the earliest materials used to create netsuke, and both were stained to varying degrees for aesthetic purposes. Inlay was used only sparingly for dramatic effect. Umimatsu—sea pine, a natural coral
that ranged in color from black to dark red—was the first inlay material used, principally as inset eyes, an influence of a similar technique in larger sculpture from the Kamakura period. Black sea coral was also added as buttons on clothes, especially on ivory netsuke depicting foreigners. Materials were combined with one another for dramatic effect—for example, ivory used as inlay in wood (no. 20).

**EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY NETSUKE**

As an object of both art and fashion, netsuke were particularly subject to shifts in popular taste, and by the first half of the nineteenth century, a change in style appeared. Early characterizations based on legends, such as the Tekkai Sennin (no. 26) were replaced by smaller, more compact and complicated interpretations of Zen characters such as Kanzan and Jittoku (no. 91). Japanese folk heroes supplanted a fading interest in Buddhist and Taoist figures. Groups of two or more figures with definite relationships appeared. The style shifted from inspired renditions of imaginary beings and zodiac figures to more naturalistic portrayals of real animals.

By the nineteenth century, literacy had become widespread among members of the merchant class, and netsuke subject matter was increasingly drawn from printed sources such as the Manga, by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), published in Tokyo between 1814 and 1834. This multi-volumed, illustrated book was a compendium of sketches by this skilled artist of innumerable animals, insects, flowers, and figures from life and legend (Fig. 10).

The surfaces of most netsuke became increasingly embellished with complicated combinations of symbolic designs. Plain, one-piece manjū netsuke, usually of ivory, which afforded two surfaces for shallow carving in relief, became popular. Animals were seldom carved in this format, but scenes and figures could be easily illustrated, as on a two-panel screen.

Signatures, which had begun to appear on netsuke by the end of the eighteenth century, also became prevalent. “Schools” developed, and disciples carried on their masters’ styles and techniques. Teaching was achieved through imitation, with no intention of inspiring individuality of style. Thus, many great students could and did reproduce their teachers’ style exactly, and, when a pupil produced a superb copy, the
The master might sign the work himself as an indication that the pupil was near his own level of accomplishment. This method of teaching, common to all the arts of Japan, permitted a nascent art form to evolve its own tradition.

The artistic aspect of the tradition was based on the subjective appeal of a style which would enhance the wearer's appearance as well as reflect his psyche or aesthetic sense. But, more importantly, the tradition paralleled changes in the aesthetic values of the time. The influence of the painter Maruyama Okyo (1733–1795), for example, with his use of such western techniques as perspective, had its effect on other art forms. In netsuke, soft outlines hardened, size was reduced, and realism became the conventional style. Innovation was limited to imaginative technique, a broadened sense of subject, and ever more complicated decorative motifs (Fig. 11). Netsuke were at the height of their popularity and artistic achievement. If the eighteenth century represents the unfettered origins of the sculptural form, then the first half of the nineteenth century reveals its full maturation, although some spiritual qualities had become lost in the transition. Indeed, shortly thereafter netsuke began to decline.

LATE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY NETSUKE

Commodore Perry entered Japan in 1853, opening the country to direct western influence for the first time in over two hundred years. The Tokugawa shogunate fell, and the Meiji Restoration was officially instituted in 1868. These dramatic events touched all aspects of Japanese life and culture. An almost immediate change in attitude and dress became evident, first in Tokyo, then in Osaka and other cities where there was direct contact with the West. By the 1880s, many of the upper class urban dwellers and government officials in Japan had begun to wear western-style clothing, although this new style was not as quickly adopted in smaller cities and towns. Because of this change in style of dress, the demand for netsuke in Japan was sharply reduced.

It was a period of cultural confusion. Traditional art forms became stagnant, questioned, and bereft of inspiration. Netsuke were no exception. Artists sought individuality of style in extravagant techniques, utilizing unusual combinations of media, and abandoning all pretense
of traditional refinement. Fortunately for the netsuke artists of the time, however, the West fell in love with these "charming" depictions of foreign culture, and, by the 1870s, there was a sudden new demand for these sculptures. Meiji netsuke artists began catering to what they thought would appeal to Western taste. As there was now little pride in tradition, they made their wares for export, not realizing that the Europeans were captivated by the novelty of the pre-Meiji subject matter. Ironically, the resulting poor artistic quality led to lessened interest in the West. A few artisans, however, did emerge in the early Meiji period and continued to produce sophisticated and refined sculpture, without regard to function—although cord openings were preserved as a vestige of tradition. The mundane, carved with extraordinary technical skill, became their subject matter. Still, by the early twentieth century, foreign demand for netsuke had nearly disappeared. Due to the language difficulty, lack of research material, and a misconception as to the place of netsuke in Japanese culture shared by both Japanese and Westerners alike, the form gradually diminished.

AN APPRECIATION

Appreciation of netsuke has been limited, first by their diminutive size and utilitarian purpose. For the Japanese, they were essentially an item of dress, appreciated for their technique and subject, but never elevated to the level of fine art. As Langdon Warner writes, "The Oriental craftsman is known, by every testimony—history, tradition and example—to be unconscious of any standard of judgment on his work of art other than that his subject be obvious at first sight and, secondly, that he must give you his utmost technical skill."

Secondly, netsuke were patronized by the emerging middle class, and, as such, developed apart from shoga, meaning calligraphy and painting, the more traditional art forms derived from the Chinese, supported by imperial and aristocratic patrons. Although the earlier forms of what is now considered sculpture—including Buddhist statuary, Noh masks, and architectural friezes—were produced under such patronage, the aristocracy never accepted them as classical forms. Thus, "... to the Japanese of the pre-Meiji period, the work of a painter, a maker of Buddhist images and an architect were not considered really related; each object
served a different function and the fact that they were part of a great realm called ‘art’ would have been incomprehensible.”

The fundamental elitism of Japanese society was responsible for the undervaluing of many such forms of popular art which emerged during the pre-Meiji period. Japanese prints are a case in point. Colorful, as accessible and abundant as netsuke, they were similarly dismissed as commercial art of insignificant value. Primarily because of subject matter—actors, courtesans, famous sights and scenes illustrative of history and legend—the art form was belittled until the West began to appreciate its artistic value.

The West brought a comparable attitude to Japan. For the Europeans, the very accessibility of netsuke classified them as craft, and, when netsuke did achieve some popularity and became an export item, the quality concurrently diminished and traditional designs were sacrificed to the uninformed demands of foreign taste.

These misunderstandings have prevailed and been assimilated into the conventional judgments of both Japanese and Western art history. It is time, however, to re-evaluate netsuke in terms of their original format and historical context as well as the larger notion of what is called fine art.

First, netsuke had their beginning in the subject matter and techniques of traditional sculpture. On both counts, netsuke fit clearly within the evolution of Japanese values as reflected by religious, economic, and social changes of the period. Second, netsuke symbolized the immense vitality of the commercial world that began to develop, indeed flourish, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These small carvings embody not only the wealth of middle class patrons but also their deeper concerns, their attitudes toward themselves, sex, death, the supernatural, and numerous other aspects. Third, by so doing, netsuke recreate in sculptural form the “national literature” of Japan, that is, “a combination of themes, heroes and heroines, predicaments, ethical dilemmas, resolutions, and emotional attitudes which are, as a composite, unique to a nation, and cross all class lines to reflect the psychological make-up of the society.” Fourth, netsuke reveal many traditional elements of the Japanese aesthetic, the preoccupation with simplicity, asymmetry, effects of light and color, identification with nature, and the transitory aspect of beauty and life. They attain this achievement in myriad forms
and styles, each piece judged on its level of sophistication and refinement. The Kurstin collection exemplifies this achievement and is persuasive for the acceptance of netsuke as works of art of the highest quality. Here before you, then, stands a true evocation of the Japanese sense of the real and imaginary.

NOTES

5. Samurai was a term applied to any military man, from the wealthiest aristocrat to the lowliest foot soldier.
6. Many elaborate sheaths housed a wooden blade. As the samurai needed money, they would sell the enclosed blade with no one the wiser.
8. Ibid., p. 159.
9. Ichitaro Kondō, Japanese Genre Painting: The Lively Art of Renaissance Japan, translated by Ray Andrew Miller (Rutland and Tokyo, 1961), p. 110. Kabuki was originated in 1603 by a dancing girl sometimes known as Izumo o Kuni, traditionally a former Shinto priestess. Women were outlawed from the stage in 1629, so it is possible to date early Kabuki depictions by the sex of the dancers portrayed.
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Eighteenth Century *Netsuke*
**Shokuin**

The *shokuin*, a mythological beast derived from the Chinese red dragon, has the head of a man and the elongated body of a snake. The opening of its eyes determines the alternation of day and night; its breath heralds the coming of winter. Thus, this demonic creature controls both the diurnal cycle and the changing of the seasons.

Here, theme and sculptural form interrelate. The piece reveals the tension of metamorphosis from man to beast and yet retains symmetry and balance. The powerful curves of the body reinforce the fierce aspect of the human face with its open mouth and glaring eyes. Flames, or fire-markings, a design element associated with supernatural beings, decorate the lower body and provide the transition from the belly to haunches and hoofed feet. The tail twists around the figured back to where it becomes the body of a snake which, in turn, rises and wraps itself around the right arm of the beast. The extraordinary power of this *shokuin* lies in this overt evocation of the interaction between real and imaginary.

The artist also employs an interesting lacquer technique. After the wood was carved, it was coated with an underlayer of black lacquer, then a thicker layer of brilliant red lacquer was applied over the black. In this piece, the surface was dulled in some places by the application of antique gold. This technique originated prior to the fifteenth century and was called *negoro*. Time, or the artist, has erased some of the red lacquer surface of this example, allowing the underlying black to show. The interplay of color was intended to enhance the otherworldly aspect of the work.

An artist’s signature appears between the fire-markings and the snake on the creature’s rear leg. The first character of the name, unfortunately, has been vandalized, rubbed out and replaced by an incised character of a different name. A definitive attribution is thus impossible; however, the last character of the signature corresponds to the last character of the name Shūzan.

Hōgen Yoshimura Shūzan was one of the great masters of *netsuke* carving; stylistically, this piece is compatible with what little is known of his work. In terms of configuration and dramatic power, this *shokuin* bears a striking resemblance to the *kirin* in the collection of Cornelius Van S. Roosevelt, though the two differ in technique. The Roosevelt *kirin*, like the majority of credible Shūzan attributions, is executed in Japanese cypress (*hinoki*) and painted, while the Kurstin *shokuin* is lacquered. Further, because of his reputation as a painter of the Kanō school, Shūzan...
is said never to have signed his netsuke. Nevertheless, the style of carving of this shokuin agrees with serious Shūzan attributions and, as such, may well be the work of his or a follower’s hand. It represents an excellent example of the expressiveness of early netsuke and the imaginative translation of a legendary character into a compelling sculptural form.

Wood, negoro lacquer with gold.  
18th century.  
Signed: Ichizan or Issan.  
Dimensions: 10 cm. x 5.2 cm. x 2.5 cm.²  
Provenance: W. W. Winkworth, Dorothy Bess, Charles A. Greenfield.  
Published: Time (October 30, 1972), p. 31; Stern, The Magnificent Three, pl. 50; Hurtig, Masterpieces of Netsuke Art, p. 73, no. 232.³  
Notes: 1. Raymond Bushell, Collectors’ Netsuke (New York and Tokyo, 1971), p. 26, pl. 4. 2. Measurements are given in centimeters; height, width and depth as worn. 3. Only those sources which illustrate the pieces are listed.

2 Kirin

Like the shokuin, the kirin is a composite beast. According to legend, it has the head of a dragon with a single horn, the body of a stag, the legs and hooves of a horse, and the tail of an ox or lion. The kirin corresponds to the Chinese ch‘i-lin, symbol of the unity of the masculine (ch‘i) and the feminine (lin). A voiceless being who lives a solitary existence, the kirin embodies the virtues of goodness and grace. In order to avoid injury to any living creature, it moves with deliberateness and exaggerated delicacy. Its appearance is believed to presage the coming of a great sage or ruler. In the legends of China and Japan, there are innumerable variations of this fantastic animal.

Although painters infrequently depicted the kirin, it was a favorite subject of the netsuke artist. This example in wood is a classic rendition. The
vertical composition blends the upraised head, horn, mane, and tail into a single, fluent line. The incised scale pattern and spiral whorls texture the body and contrast with the smooth, muscular surface of the legs. The feeling is both graceful and dynamic, a successful integration of the creature’s legendary characteristics with the demands of three-dimensional form.

Wood.

18th century.

Unsigned.

Dimensions: 9 cm. × 3.3 cm. × 1.5 cm.

Provenance: A. E. Tebbutt.

3 Hakutaku

The affinity between this and the previous piece is obvious. Both depict kirin or a type of kirin in a seated position. Both are executed on a relatively large scale for netsuke, an indication of their coincident eighteenth century dates. Although supposedly voiceless, both seem to be emitting sound. It is this posture, perhaps an allusion to the Zen allegory of a “voiceless call,” that gives both pieces their poignant animation.

Unlike other types of kirin, the hakutaku has the head and paws of a shishi (see no. 4). Spiral whorls, accentuated by a light stain, form the mane and tail and frame the upturned head, emphasizing the hakutaku’s kinship to the furred dog or lion as opposed to the scaly dragon. Worn fire-markings and long strands of hair reinforce the verticality of the piece. The unknown artist has combined the quality and color of the ivory with simple carving technique—the skillfully articulated ribs, for example—to create a piece of elegant proportion and implicit naturalism.

Ivory.

18th century.

Unsigned.

Dimensions: 9.9 cm. × 2.8 cm. × 1.5 cm.
This netsuke, one of the finest in the collection, is signed and firmly attributed to the artist Garaku. The Sōkenkishō states that “Garaku’s other name is Risuke. He is a disciple of Tawaraya Dembei and clever at carving netsuke. Tawaraya Dembei was himself a follower of Kanjūrō.” Apparently, in Garaku’s time, schools of netsuke carvers wherein pupils took their master’s name had not yet appeared. Dembei, Kanjūrō, and Garaku were from Osaka and some stylistic similarity most probably existed between their carvings but, unfortunately, only Garaku’s work has survived, of which this is an example of superior quality.

The shishi, sometimes referred to as a Fu dog, combines the features of a dog and stylized lion. It symbolizes ferocity, courage, and fortitude. Legend tells of mothers testing their cubs’ strength by throwing them off high places, those returning considered sufficiently stalwart to be a member of the breed. The male is often depicted with his mouth open, an expression of the first Sanskrit vowel Aum, while the female has her mouth closed, an expression of the last vowel Um; as a pair, they represent the beginning and end of Buddhist teachings.

In this netsuke, a male with a ball or “jewel of wisdom” in his mouth, is accompanied by a cub. This unusual interpretation may represent the completion of trial by survival; the father seems both proud and protective as the cub clambers for his attention. The statuesque form bespeaks power. The forms are well-balanced, and carved detail is overall subordinate to the solidity of the piece.

The exceptional quality of the ivory, as well as its mass, suggest that Garaku made this netsuke for a wealthy patron. Age has generated natural cracks in the ivory, enhancing, however inadvertently, the texture of the piece. The back of the shishi is a deep yellow. The change in coloration may have been caused either by exposure to the sun, the back being shaded from the bleaching light by the kimono, or by the back being carved closer to the pale yellow inner core of the ivory, or a combination of the two. Frequent handling has worn some of the surface elements of the design and generated a rich patina. This netsuke combines the best qualities of the art form: sculptural achievement, natural material, and appreciation betrayed by use.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Garaku.
Dimensions: 9.5 cm. × 5.5 cm. × 3 cm.
5 *Shishi Scratching His Ear*

Among the few works which are generally accepted as the genuine works of Garaku, this rendition of a *shishi*, in comparison to the *Shishi with Cub* (no. 4), is small in size and self-contained, suggestive of the direction in which the netsuke tradition was to develop in the nineteenth century. As such, the piece may have been carved toward the end of Garaku’s career. This whimsical interpretation shows a *shishi* scratching his ear and reveals the humor and sense of the absurd often found in netsuke.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Garaku.
Dimensions: 3.2 cm. × 4.5 cm. × 3 cm.

6 *Shishi and Ball*

The *shishi* possesses strong Buddhist associations. In Buddhist art, the lion often acts as the vehicle for deities, most notably Monju Bosatsu, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. The ball which the *shishi* carries in his mouth or paws was believed to be hollow, and as such, symbolized Buddhist teaching, embodying the concept of emptiness, the state of mind which precedes the attainment of wisdom.

In this piece, a *shishi* sitting upright holding a ball, the Kyoto artist Mitsuharu also used staining to emphasize modelling and texture (see no. 8). The dark stain, punctuated by smooth areas of white ivory, sharpens the lines, accentuating the high quality of the carving. The *shishi*’s head is turned, glancing over his shoulder, while his four sharp-clawed paws grasp the ball. The torsion of the animal’s body reinforces the ferocity of his facial expression.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Mitsuharu.
Dimensions: 5.2 cm. × 3.5 cm. × 3.5 cm.

7 *Shishi on Ball*

This netsuke, by an unknown artist, also depicts a *shishi* and ball. In contrast to the even pro-
portions of the previous version (no. 6), this piece appears top-heavy, the massive head of the shishi dominating the lower body and ball. Layered masses of curls form a thick mantle, falling from forehead to shoulders. The ball is subordinate to this sculptural form, almost inconsequential.

A comparison of the two shishi and ball illustrate the importance of the artist’s choice of material. While ivory affords the artist greater potential in terms of sharp detail and the interplay of light and dark, wood has a deep patina and a subtle mellowness, qualities which are evident in this piece.

Wood.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 5.5 cm. x 3 cm. x 3 cm.

8 Shishi Stretching

Here, the unknown artist takes full advantage of an horizontal format, capturing the indomitable spirit and strength of the shishi. The facial expression and posture, particularly the two extended right legs, imply motion; it is as if the shishi is momentarily arrested in mid-action.

The piece is expertly carved. The staining technique also allows the artist to create a lively interplay of light and shadow without deep cuts into the ivory. One type of stain was made by boiling yasha, a kind of berry or nut, in water. Finished carvings were immersed in this or similar mixtures for varying lengths of time, then dried slowly, then polished. In the eighteenth century, this technique was used sparingly; however, in the following century, it became increasingly prominent, if not overused.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3 cm. x 6 cm. x 5.5 cm.
Two Oni as Acrobats

The oni is a mischievous imp or devil with the following attributes: one or two horns, a menacing, humanoid face, fangs instead of teeth, the body of a child, and hands and feet with claws instead of fingers and toes. Oni play a prominent role in Japanese mythology and are frequently depicted by the netsuke carver playing pranks or being subdued by Shōki, the demon queller (see no. 28).

This netsuke depicts two oni, masterfully carved from a single piece of ivory. The flat, rounded oni on the bottom is wearing the costume and mask of Shishi mai, the lion dance traditionally performed on New Year's Day. The arms, legs, and claws of the oni are apparent only on the underside of the piece, a distortion of perspective which occurs often in netsuke. Above, the second oni arches in a backbend, a two-piece acrobat's costume revealing his body's tension. The artist deftly integrates this complex composition, the curve of the acrobat's body echoed in the curls of the shishi's fur and the tightness of the acrobat's dress continued in the cloth tied around the bottom oni's loins. The smoothness of the ivory and the round shape give this piece a satisfying tactility. Little is known about the artist, Gechu; however, among the few works attributed to his hand, this is one of the finest.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Gechu.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. x 4 cm. x 3.5 cm.

10 Coiled Dragon

The dragon is a mythical creature which has excited man's imagination in many places and times. In the East, despite a sometimes ferocious demeanor, the dragon is considered an auspicious,
even benevolent, creature. Associated with winds, mist, clouds, and fire, he embodies the constant renewal of the universe, the mysterious regenerative powers of creation. In Japan, the dragon is one of the twelve signs of the zodiac.

Here the artist combines structural elements to evoke variable light and shadow. Scales, waves, and flames add to the surface complexity of the piece. The appearance is intricate; however, the composition is one of subtle simplicity, relying upon the suggestion of concentric coils to reveal the being's power and spirit. No himotoshi were required as the cord could be strung through the dragon's body, thus making function an integral part of the sculptural form. (See also cover ill.)

Ivory.
18th century.

Unsigned.
Dimensions: 5 cm. × 5.5 cm. × 2 cm.
Provenance: Dr. G. Scott.

11 Dragon in Flight

Eighteenth century prints show portable pipe cases or writing utensils (yatate) of this type thrust between the belt and the body, with pouches or other objects attached. This slender form is known as sashi ("thrust between") netsuke. The style never became fashionable, however, because it permitted the suspended objects to dangle freely, causing discomfort to the wearer.

A remarkable aspect of this piece is the use of material and staining. The artist has carved with
the grain, then applied and partially rubbed stain into the ivory, resulting in tonal variations which add to the feeling of graceful forward movement. Here again, the cord could be threaded through the interstices between the dragon’s feet and body, thus eliminating the need for himotoshi and avoiding any interruption of the composition.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 15 cm. × 2.5 cm. × 1.3 cm.

12 Crouching Baku

The baku, an eater of bad dreams, is another fabulous beast from the Japanese imagination. Most references describe this creature as having the elongated nose of an elephant, the body of a horse or lion (shishi), and clawed feet. The Chinese character for baku is often painted on headrests to prevent nightmares. In Shinto, the baku is referred to as Shirokina Kami and is used as a talisman against the plague.

The hunched shoulders, rounded body, and skulking expression of the piece all suggest menace. Arched eyebrows frame eyes inlaid with deep pink coral, eyes which face in different directions to detect any approaching oneiric conception. The unnatural paleness of the ivory gives the carving an almost spectral quality.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4 cm. × 4.2 cm. × 2.6 cm.
Provenance: Egerton Ryerson Collection.
Published: Ryerson, The Netsuke of Japan, pl. 25, no. 4.
IN COMPARISON to Crouching Baku (no. 12), this rendition of the *baku* places greater emphasis on elements of surface design, for example, the elaborate fire-markings used to delineate the twisted aspect of the body. Here the expression is far less menacing, almost whimsical with its distended nose, open mouth, and incredulous eyes. The incised mane and tail encircle the body and are incorporated into patterned circles, a technical device used by *netsuke* artists to suggest the fleshy parts of animals. Stain enhances the tactile quality of the incised lines, further emphasizing surface over composition.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 6.5 cm. x 3 cm. x 2.8 cm.
According to legend, the health of the twelfth century Emperor Narikito Konoe was adversely affected by the presence of the nuye, a strange beast with the head of a monkey, the body of a badger, the feet of a tiger, and a tail in the form of a snake, who prowled the roof of the palace at night, singing like a bird. One evening the archer-poet Minamoto Yorimasa and his retainer are said to have shot the nuye which, as it fell to the ground, fatally bit the retainer. The Emperor’s health improved and Yorimasa was duly rewarded.

A rounded, compact sculpture, this nuye reveals little malevolence. The eyes, inlaid with black sea coral (umimatsu), have a doleful look and confirm the creature’s cowering aspect. Snake scales and tiger stripes are expertly carved and stained, identifying the other animal elements of this hybrid beast and enhancing the charm of the piece.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. x 4.2 cm. x 2.8 cm.

This tiger by Tametaka, a carver from Nagoya, resembles the Nuye (no. 14) in terms of its rounded composition; however, in this case the piece is carved in wood, not ivory, and the animal is real, not imaginary. Its dominant characteristic is a powerful, expressive head, which, as it turns, twists the animal’s body into a tight coil. Vitality is conveyed through the realistic definition of the bared teeth, curved spine, and striped pattern of the tiger’s fur. A rich red-brown color is achieved by the application of dark stain to light boxwood.

While tigers were not native to Japan, the Japanese became familiar with them through Chinese art and legend. In Chinese cosmology, the tiger is the counterpart of the dragon. The Green Dragon of the East symbolizes the male principle; the White Tiger of the West represents the female principle. When the dragon manifests himself, clouds gather; when the tiger appears, the wind blows. Like the dragon, the tiger is a sign of the zodiac. During the second half of the
eighteenth century, animal netsuke of the signs of the zodiac became the fashion. A merchant would own at least the animal representing the sign under which he was born. Even today, great importance is attached in Japan to one's sign and associated characteristics.

Wood.
18th century.
Signed: Tametaka.
Dimensions: 4.2 cm. × 4.5 cm. × 3.7 cm.

16 Tiger and Cub

Legend tells of a tigress with three cubs, two of which were well-behaved, but the third so unmanageable that, if left alone with a sibling, he might devour it. The mother wished to cross a river, however, she feared to leave the ill-behaved cub alone with either of the others. Therefore, she took him over first, then returned for the second cub. When she returned for the third, she took the troublemaker with her, thus never leaving him alone with either of the other two. This netsuke evokes the fable, the tigress encircling the troublesome cub with her body, observing him sadly. From the underside of the mother's body, it is apparent that she is nursing three cubs, a clue to the identification of the legend. The cub stands on his hind legs, resting his forepaws on his mother's back. There is definite potential for mischief in his expression.

The piece is signed by Tomotada, an artist known for his renditions of animals with thick brows and eyes of black coral (umimatsu). The smooth areas of white ivory punctuated by the lightly stained stripes and detailing, as well as the inlaid eyes, are reminiscent of the Nuye (no. 14).

Tomotada, together with Okatomo and Masanao (see no. 17), was among the great netsuke carvers of eighteenth century Kyoto. Although the three artists were contemporaries, no records survive to link their lives or styles. The Sōkenkishō documents the fact that even before the turn of the nineteenth century, the work of Tomotada was admired and imitated. Despite the existence of such copies, this netsuke exhibits the stylistic features and consistently high quality of an original.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Tomotada.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. × 4.6 cm. × 4 cm.

17 Boar and Young

The boar, like the tiger and dragon, constitutes one of the twelve animals of the Oriental zodiac. Wild boars were found in the western provinces of Japan and admired by the Japanese for their fortitude and perseverance. Once a boar charges, he is not easily distracted, nor does he retreat. The boar is also found in Shinto legends.

This piece by Masanao, the Kyoto master, suggests calm and relaxation, as if the pair were
safe within their den. The circular composition conveys the warm feeling of identity between mother and young. Three horizontal cracks, a testimony of age, cut across the etched hair of the boars’ hide, while the inlaid red and black eyes lend a lifelike quality to the piece. The strength and originality of this piece are found in its striking naturalism.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Masanao.
Dimensions: 2.1 cm. × 5.2 cm. × 3.6 cm.
Published: Bushell, Collectors’ Netsuke, p. 30.

18 Reclining Horse

A SIMILAR NATURALISM distinguishes this diminutive horse sculpted by Minko, a carver from Tsu in Mie province. The smooth surface of the black wood contrasts with the deep relief of the thick mane and long tail. The composition and carving are pleasingly simple and straightforward. A touch of red pigment colors the nostrils; the eyes are made of brass, inlaid with black coral and outlined in red.

Specific types of Noh masks have eyes of brass (see no. 21); actors in Kabuki theatre commonly use red make-up to outline the eyes. These facts suggest the influence of the theatre on netsuke subjects, an influence that was to become more direct and widespread in the nineteenth century. Minko enjoyed high public esteem perhaps because of his incorporation of these devices into his art.

Wood.
18th century.
Signed: Minko, with kakihan.¹
Dimensions: 2.8 cm. × 4 cm. × 2.5 cm.
Note: ¹ The Japanese term kakihan refers to the artist’s mark or stylized signature.
Onna Daruma

Minko's imaginative use of diverse materials is best seen in this unusual composition. The slender female form is wrapped in a cloak of wood. The grain textures and models the form, a natural knot in the wood suggesting the arms and hands beneath the garment. A charming face of ivory peaks out from the enfolding cloak and is balanced by the light-colored staghorn feet on which the figure stands. The textural contrast of the varied materials enhances the appeal and tactile quality of the piece.

Onna Daruma, or Woman Daruma, is an amusing subject. Daruma is the abbreviation for Bodaidaruma, the Japanese name of Bodhidharma, who, according to tradition, was the founder of Zen Buddhism. In search of enlightenment, he meditated for nine years without breaking his concentration. The portrayal of a female dressed in Daruma's cloak jokingly implies the unlikelihood of a woman maintaining silence for a comparable period of time. Netsuke were frequently used to satirize women and Zen Buddhism, a religion of the aristocracy.

WOOD, IVORY, STAG ANTLER.
18TH CENTURY.
SIGNED: Minko, with artist's seal.
DIMENSIONS: 12.6 CM. X 2.5 CM. X 2.5 CM.
PROVENANCE: W. W. Winkworth, Dorothy Bess, Charles A. Greenfield.
PUBLISHED: Boger, Traditional Arts of Japan, p. 190, pl. 23; Stern, The Magnificent Three, pp. 97, 108, no. 46; Hurtig, Masterpieces of Netsuke Art, p. 70, no. 216.

Dried Fish

Miwa, an early Edo artist, also experimented with interesting combinations of materials. Here, the artist employed ivory to render the exposed bones and fine teeth of a dried fish. The whiteness of
the ivory stands out against the rich, dark patination of the wood. The angular planes of the fish’s cheek and gill and the rippled edge of its upper back lend plasticity to an almost two-dimensional form.

The fascination of this piece lies, in part, in its grotesqueness; however, to the Japanese, the dried fish is propitious, a symbol of good fortune and prosperity. Fish, of course, is a main staple of the Japanese diet. Upon festive occasions, gifts are often accompanied by a fish wrapped in bamboo leaves. This piece is one of the earliest known netsuke in the form of a fish; for a later example, see Dried Fish (no. 121).

Wood and ivory.
18th century.
Signed: Miwa.
Dimensions: 12.6 cm. x 2.8 cm. x 1.3 cm.
Provenance: W. L. Behrens, W. W. Winkworth, Dorothy Bess, Charles A. Greenfield.
Published: Hurtig, Masterpieces of Netsuke Art, p. 70, no. 219.

21 Mask of Beshimi

In the aristocratic Noh theatre, carved wooden masks covered the actors’ faces, each mask the subtle expression of an emotion or mood appropriate to a role. Once established, the forms and techniques of Noh masks varied little. The Deme family was one of the most celebrated schools of mask carvers. Deme Yeiman (Genri Yoshimitsu, d. 1705) appears to have been the first member of the family to carve masks in the form of netsuke. Deme Uman (Genri Sukemitsu, active ca. 1750–1800), the grandson of Deme Yeiman, signed this mask netsuke with his name and “First under Heaven,” an honorable title bestowed on the lineage in the early Tokugawa period.

This mask of Beshimi, an evil apparition, possesses the same plastic quality as the larger Noh masks. For example, in typical Beshimi masks, brass eyes often enhanced the otherworldly quality of these supernatural beings by reflecting the candlelight on the stage. The netsuke artist retains the convention.

Wood.
18th century.
Signed: Deme Uman, ten-ka-ichi.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. x 4 cm. x 2.8 cm.

22 Mask of Hyottoko

KYŌGEN, literally “wild words,” are light farces performed as comic interludes between the more
serious Noh plays. Three Noh plays and two Kyōgen usually constitute one program. These comedies grew out of oral, popular traditions. Although Kyōgen originated in the fourteenth century, it was not recognized as a literary genre prior to the seventeenth century.

Only a small percentage of Kyōgen parts—mostly non-human characters—require masks. This netsuke represents a free interpretation of the Hyottoko mask worn by a figure known as the octopus-man, who is characterized by an exaggerated pursed mouth. The character tako (octopus) is appropriately inscribed on the back of the netsuke.

As mask netsuke became increasingly popular, carvers elaborated on theatrical forms. Whereas the Mask of Beshimi (no. 21) relates directly to its larger counterpart, this mask is an elaboration of the tradition of the Hyottoko visage. The uneven surface of the forehead, stylized curls, deeply furrowed brow, ivory eyes, and snout-like mouth are the carver’s invention and contribute to the humor of the piece. Such mask netsuke must have had a ready audience among avid theatre-goers.

Wood.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 5 cm. × 3.6 cm. × 2.5 cm.

23 Noh Dancer

India, China, and Japan share this legendary story: One day a fisherman discovers a lovely feathered robe (hagoromo) hanging on a tree and decides to take it to his wife. Then he hears the voice of an angel begging him to leave the robe. He does so and in appreciation, she performs a
celestial dance for him before taking flight. This story was incorporated into the repertoire of the Noh theatre in the early fifteenth century.

This netsuke depicts the dancing angel, her right arm and foot slightly raised, the folds of her robe swirling around the left side of her body. Long ribbons attached to her headdress fall down her back over the elaborate wings of her costume. The artist used the ittobori style, or “single-knife-stroke” technique, to carve the figure, then sealed the wood before painting the polychrome and gold designs. The red lips add a light touch of color to the natural wood of the face.

Although the piece is signed Shūzan, the artist’s name is Kurobei. Kurobei signed his netsuke with that name because of his admiration for Hōgen Yoshimura Shūzan (see no. 1). The Sōkenkishō indicates that Kurobei lived in the poor Nagamachi area of Osaka; therefore, he is often referred to disdainfully as Nagamachi Shūzan to distinguish him from the wealthier master-carver. Kurobei applied color to all his pieces and executed a number of netsuke on the hagoromo theme, each, however, exhibiting subtle differences in posture and expression.

Polychromed wood.
18th century.
Signed: Shūzan.
Dimensions: 5 cm. × 4 cm. × 2 cm.

24 Mermaid with Shell

In Japan, women dive for abalone and pearls and many legends associate women with the sea. Here, a mermaid, or ningyo, reclines gracefully, resting her chest on a spiral shell grasped firmly in her hands. Her elbows are held against her sides and locks of hair stream down her back. The smooth, round planes of her face and back are juxtaposed with the texturing of the lower half of her body. Integration of human and animal features is achieved through the fluent lines of the horizontal composition and the fullness of the form.

Two himotoshi, one large and one small, are carved into the underside of the figure. The large cord opening is wide and deep so as to accommodate the knot of the cord, thus concealing it from view. Such an arrangement was characteristic of eighteenth century netsuke; nineteenth century netsuke, on the other hand, usually displayed two small cord openings of equal size.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 7.5 cm. × 5.1 cm. × 3 cm.

25 Rakan with Shishi

Rakan (Chinese: lohan, Sanskrit: arhat) are members of the Buddhist pantheon, beings who
attain enlightenment through their own efforts and are unconcerned with the enlightenment of others. In Chinese and Japanese art, *rakan* are usually depicted as ascetics or holy men with fantastic, often grotesque, Indian features, a reflection of the Indian origin of Buddhism.

This forcefully carved figure exhibits the characteristic features of a *rakan*. A simple, monastic garment is draped over one shoulder. Long eyebrows frame the eyes and cheeks, prominent ears emphasize the width of the head, lightly incised lines suggest hair and beard. The glaring eyes and furrowed brows give the impression of ferocity; however, the *shishi* gripped by the *rakan*’s muscular arms parodies the face of his captor, adding a touch of humor to an otherwise foreboding encounter.

A striking resemblance exists between this *netsuke* and one in the Jaehne Collection of the Newark Museum. In the Newark piece, the *rakan*’s mouth is open and the *shishi*’s closed; here the opposite is true. In Buddhist temples, a pair of guardian figures stood on either side of the main door, one with his mouth open to signify overt power, the other with his mouth closed to suggest latent power. It is possible that the two *netsuke*, this piece and the one in Newark, were the work of one artist and originally comprised a pair.¹

Wood.  
18th century.  
Unsigned.  
Dimensions: 13.3 cm. × 5 cm. × 5 cm.  

26 **Tekkai Sennin**

The Eight Immortals of Chinese Taoism are frequently confused with Buddhist *rakans* (*no. 25*) because both appear as ascetics or holy men.
This figure, however, can confidently be identified as Tekkai (Chinese: Li T'ieh-kuai), one of the Chinese immortals or sennin. Tekkai Sennin wears the garb of an ascetic, here a robe of leaves, and a gourd hangs from his waist. The upward gaze of the eyes indicates that he is blowing his spirit heavenward. According to legend, Tekkai left his earthbound body to visit the celestial realms, but upon this return, his former body was not to be found; therefore, he entered the dead body of an old man.

This figure reveals the sculptor's sensitivity to subject and material. Dark shadows, the result of staining, sharpen the articulation of the emaciated body, particularly the bones of the chest and feet, creating an affinity between the human form and the twisted staff on which he leans. The natural flow of the drapery and luminous quality of the wood seem to accentuate the gentle, otherworldly nature of the immortal.

Wood.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 16 cm. x 3.8 cm. x 2.7 cm.

27 Kiyohime Enraged

In Japan, the ivory tusk of the narwhal is considered to have medicinal qualities; prized and expensive, it was rarely available to the netsuke artist. Narwhal ivory can be easily differentiated from other types of ivory by its rich, glossy sheen.

This artist appears to have modelled the face of Kiyohime after the Hannya mask used in the Noh play, Dōjō-ji. The story tells of a monk who innocently befriended Kiyohime, an innkeeper's daughter. She pursued him so insistently that he was forced to take refuge under the massive bell of Dōjō-ji, the Buddhist temple where he resided. With great passion, Kiyohime flung herself against the bell and was instantaneously transformed into an imaginary being. The Kiyohime portrayed in this netsuke has the grimacing face of a jealous woman, two horns, clawed hands, and the body of a snake which twice encircles the bell.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.6 cm. x 2.9 cm. x 3.1 cm.

28 Shōki and Oni

Shōki (Chinese: Chung K'uei), the demon queller, occupies a prominent place among the mythical characters of Chinese origin who popu-
late the Japanese imagination. Chinese legend states that the T'ang Emperor Ming-huang (reigned 713–756) dreamed of an ill-behaved demon wreaking havoc in the palace. An imposing figure dressed in the robes of an impoverished official intervened and rid the Emperor of the menace. In response to the Emperor's questions, the heroic figure identified himself as a man who had committed suicide after being denied first place at the civil service examinations, an honor which he rightfully deserved. Subsequently, the Emperor granted him an imperial burial and, in return, Shōki vowed to protect the Emperor from the evil beings of the underworld.

Here Shōki appears ready to draw his sword and destroy the demon which he has subdued. With his full beard and windswept hair, Shōki is the embodiment of heroic strength. The vigorous carving and selective detailing—for example, the cloud motifs which pattern the figure's robe—testify to the skill of this well-known artist.

Wood.
18th century.
Signed: Minkoku.
Dimensions: 7.8 cm. x 5 cm. x 2.2 cm.

29 Nitta and the Boar

In 1193, the Shogun Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199) gathered the feudal lords loyal to him for a hunting party in celebration of his victory over the Taira clan. During the festivities, a wounded boar is said to have charged in the direction of the shogun; however, Tadatsune, otherwise known as Nitta no Shiro, a samurai in the service of the shogun, intervened by leaping off his horse and killing the dangerous animal.

When netsuke artists interpreted legends and history, they frequently reversed the roles of the participants; for example, Shōki was often the victim, not the master, of the impish oni. In other cases, such as this piece, the outcome of the confrontation is ambiguous. Here, the boar has bitten off Nitta's right leg and the red tint of
blood is seen on the boar's face and haunches. Nevertheless, Nitta's face bespeaks courage and determination, suggesting the hero's indomitable will. The realistic texturing and staining of the ivory, as well as the expert carving of the intertwined forms, add to the dramatic impact of the piece.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.2 cm. x 6 cm. x 3 cm.

30 Dutchman Holding Crane

In eighteenth century Japan, Europeans were described as imaginary beings with "cat's-eyes, huge noses, red hair and shrike's-tongues." While the Japanese of the period admired Chinese culture, they considered these "southern barbarians" ignorant and uncultured. Fearing political subversion, the government confined the Dutch merchants to the small island of Deshima in Nagasaki harbor. The only opportunity most Japanese had to glimpse the Europeans was during the annual visit of the Dutch East India Company representative to the shogun in Edo, present-day Tokyo. Thus, foreigners remained, for the most part, mysterious beings and objects of curiosity.

This slender ivory figure portrays the Japanese image of the foreigner. The nose is disproportionately large and flat, and the attenuated body gives the impression of height. Furthermore, the round hat, long coat, pantaloons, and lacquered stockings suggest a fascination with the strange European style of dress.

The charm of the netsuke lies not only in the elegance and skill of the carving, but also in the correspondence between the crane and the Dutchman. An exotic creature like the foreigner, the bird has a prominent nose, beady eyes, and long legs. Perhaps the auspicious nature of the crane, a symbol of good fortune and longevity, was intended to neutralize the negative influence of the unknown.

Ivory.
18th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: h. 13.8 cm.
Provenance: Frederick Meinertzhagen, J. A. Fairley, Isabel Sharpe, M. T. Hindson.
Published: Davey, Netsuke, p. 345, no. 1042.

31 Dutchman Holding Small Dog

In comparison to the former example, Dutchman Holding Crane (no. 30), this Dutchman is whimsical, almost comical. The artist draws attention to the bemused expression on the figure's face by limiting detail to the simple design and texturing on the shoes, the five raised black buttons of the coat, and the small dog cradled in the man's right arm. The naive manner in which the dog is depicted indicates that he, like his master, is an unfamiliar subject.

Extant works by Jōbun indicate that he preferred to work in lightly stained boxwood. Here, the smooth, polished surface of the wood is in keeping with the pleasing simplicity of the piece. Even the dark spot appears to be a fortuitous accident.

Wood.
18th century.
Signed: Jōbun.
Dimensions: 9.4 cm. x 2 cm. x 1.5 cm.
Provenance: Richards Collection, Charles A. Greenfield.
Published: Bushell, Collectors' Netsuke, p. 64, no. 72; Stern, The Magnificent Three, p. 96, no. 37; Hurtig, Masterpieces of Netsuke Art, p. 75, no. 251.
This superb piece was carved by Seiyōdo Tomiharu (1723–1811), also known as Shimizu Iwao, the founder of the Iwami school of netsuke artists. Tomiharu, his daughter Bunshōjo (1764–1838), his grandson Gansui (1809–1848), and his pupils all worked in what was then known as Iwami province, thus the name of the school. Iwami was remote from the urban centers of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo, an isolation which accounts for the continuity and distinctive style of the art of the Iwami carvers.

These artists employed unusual materials and techniques. Tomiharu carved this chestnut from buffalo horn and attached a tortoise shell snail. In contrast to the translucence of the snail, the nut gives the impression of smooth, dark wood. The rendition of both subjects is convincing. Furthermore, the choice of subject matter epitomizes the Iwami artist's preference for simple animal and plant forms.

The microscopic inscription on the top of the nut is also remarkable. These characters are not incised into the horn, but rather stand in relief (ukibori). The artist appears to have applied several coats of lacquer and written the inscription on its surface. The lacquer surrounding the fine lines of the written characters was then depressed with the rounded head of a small tool, leaving the inscription raised. A second method is also possible. The artist may have first written the lines in wax, then immersed the netsuke in a pickling solution to soften the surface of the surrounding area so that it could be easily carved away.

Buffalo horn and tortoise shell.
18th century.

Signed: Sekishū Kawaigawa Seiyōdo sei Tomiharu chōkoku no Tenmei tsuchinoe saru toshi nari. Translation: Carved by Seiyōdo Tomiharu in the year 1788 (on the banks of) the Kawai River in Sekishū (Iwami).

Dimensions: 3.5 cm. × 3.5 cm. × 2.5 cm.
Tomiharu and his followers took advantage of the wild boars indigenous to the Iwami region, using the ivory of the tusks for netsuke. The triangular, curved tusk provided an interesting but demanding artistic format. To prepare a tusk, the exterior was scraped and cleaned, removing an outer skin. Then the nerve inside the tusk was extracted, leaving the interior hollow. As the sides of this tusk were carved down, an insect was modelled in deep relief. The artist completed the piece by writing an inscription beneath the insect and drilling cord openings into the long, thin backside of the tusk.

Insects were a frequent subject for this format. Here Tomiharu has depicted a centipede which, with its multiplicity of legs, winds its way toward the point of the tusk. The sinuous body softens the ridge of the tusk, while the tiny characters of a three-line inscription, darkened with ink and placed at the wide end of the tusk, delicately balance the composition. Iwami artists display a particular fondness for long inscriptions, often recording the date and place where the netsuke was carved, as well as their age and name. This school, therefore, is comparatively well-documented.

Ivory.
18th century.
Signed, also two artist’s seals: Iwami shū Kawaigawa Seiyōdo Tomiharu kyōen roku-jū go sei kanji chōkoku Kansei hinoe tatsu no aki nari. Translation: Carved by Seiyōdo Tomiharu (in the vicinity of) the Kawai River in Iwami Province last year (1795) when he was sixty-five years of age; (inscribed) in the fall of 1796. Dimensions: 10.5 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 1 cm.

34 Frog

The most salient feature of the art of the Iwami school is a reflective preoccupation with the natural world. Unlike the urban masters who were immersed in Chinese learning and Japanese history and legend, these rural artists drew their subject matter directly from nature. Tomiharu captures the uneven texture of a frog’s skin and the bulge of his eyes with extraordinary realism, an accomplishment based on keen, firsthand observation.

Wood.
18th century.
Signed: Tomiharu.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. x 3 cm. x 2 cm.
35 *Cicada on Rock*

Although early records concerning the life and art of Tomiaki are lacking, the *netsuke* associated with his name reveal a close stylistic relationship with the work of the Iwami school. Moreover, the name Tomiaki may be meaningful. *Tomi* is the same character used by Tomiharu; however, instead of *haru* (spring), this artist uses *aki* (autumn). It is possible that Tomiaki was a pupil of Tomiharu, the dominant figure of the Iwami school.

This cicada is alert and poised, as if he would take flight at the least provocation. The artist sharply delineates the wings and adds three silver pins between the eyes to highlight the head. One unusual feature of this piece is the fact that the inscription reads from left to right; customarily, Japanese is written from right to left.

Wood.

18th century.


Dimensions: 6.1 cm. x 2.5 cm. x 2.3 cm.

36 *Frog*

This frog by Gohō is massive in comparison to the frog by Tomiharu (no. 34). It has the size and appearance of a live frog, eyes and mouth strongly delineated, expression suggesting smug contentment. On the underside, the long toes of the feet frame the two large characters of the inscription and two cord openings.

Precisely how the Iwami artist created the relief effect known as *ukibori* is still conjecture. Several theories have been proposed. According to Raymond Bushell, “The Iwami artists... used a metal instrument with a tiny rounded point. They did not cut away the material but
depressed it by squeezing down with the rounded point to form the characters. At this stage, the inscription appeared below the surface of the surrounding material. The second step was to plane the surrounding material down to the level of the surface with nothing raised and nothing depressed. The third step was a simple immersion in water. The squeezed or contracted wood swelled higher than the untouched surrounding material and raised the characters to bloom in lovely mystery. . . . The same process was used for such raised features as warts on frogs, ridges on snails, pimples on fruit, and veins on leaves."

A second explanation is suggested by analogy with the sophisticated techniques of the Japanese metal workers. Artisans of the Edo period who fashioned sword fittings employed a punch to create the tiny dots of a “fish-roe” ground. When the punch, a tool with multiple small holes surrounded by sharp edges, was impressed into soft metal which had been heated to a specific temperature, it produced an area of minute raised dots or “blisters.” Gohō may have used a comparable technique to texture the frog’s skin. After immersion in water, the wood, like soft metal, would respond to the impression of such a tool. When the surface was thoroughly dry, it was reworked. Here, the “fish-roe” texture is heightened by the application of stain.

Wood.
18th/19th century.
Signed: Gohō.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. x 6.5 cm. x 5.3 cm.

37 Lizard on Mushroom

Gohō is an enigmatic figure. There are no written records to substantiate his association with the circle of Tomiharu; however, examples of his work, such as this sensitive rendering of a lizard
curled on the top of a mushroom, are allied in subject matter and style with those of Tomiharu and the artists of the Iwami school. Gohō accommodates the slender body of the lizard to the circular head of the mushroom which provides an interesting format for the netsuke. The tail curls and the toes splay, as the lizard attentively watches for any sign of danger. The artist has further enlivened the lizard by using black coral for its eyes and reproducing the “fish-roe” texture of its skin with an *ukibori* technique (see no. 36). Note also the texturing of the gills and twisted stem on the underside of the mushroom. The piece is a distillation of the natural world.

Wood.
19th century.
Dimensions: 5.7 cm. × 5.7 cm. × 3 cm.

**38 Spider on Tusk**

KAMMAN (1795–1859), otherwise known as Tsuramichi Kamman, was an Iwami artist;¹ he was quite young, however, to have been a pupil of Tomiharu, since the master died in 1810 or 1811. Nevertheless, he exhibits a similar aesthetic sensibility and skill. Just as Tomiharu depicted the attenuated form of a centipede on the long tusk (no. 33), Kamman appropriately selected the broad-bodied spider for the wide tusk, carving it in strong relief. Again, the calligraphy complements the carving. The seven characters, arranged in a single vertical line, are large, stylized, and colored a deep black to balance the forceful modelling of the spider. Here, the varied coloration of the ivory and its high gloss further enhance the beauty of the piece, testifying to the elegance of boar’s tusk as an artistic medium.
Ivory.
19th century.
Signed, also kakihan: Iwami kuni Kamman tō.
Translation: Carved by Kamman of Iwami.
Dimensions: 9.8 cm. × 2.6 cm. × 1.3 cm.

39 Frog and Insect on Rock

This piece, also by Kamman, combines function and artistic design. Although it is the work of an Iwami netsuke artist, properly speaking it is not a netsuke. The hard, white stone probably was used as a tool for scraping and polishing softer materials, such as boar’s tusks, as they were fashioned into netsuke. The stone fits comfortably into the hand, allowing the artist to grasp it firmly and use the flat bottom as a plane. The smooth underside and rounded edges of the carving suggest repeated use.

Here again, naturalistic implications distinguish the piece. The bug edges closer to the frog, implying the possibility of a confrontation; still, the moment depicted is a tranquil one. Branches and leaves, carved in low relief, suggest a predictable environment for the subject. As in superior netsuke by Iwami artists, skill and imagination are extended through simple, natural forms.

Stone.
19th century.
Dimensions: 4.1 cm. × 5.5 cm. × 3.5 cm.
Early Nineteenth Century *Netsuke*
40 *Kirin at Rest*

**Toyomasa (1773–1856)** figures prominently among the *netsuke* artists of the early nineteenth century. In addition to being a professional carver, he was known for his *waka* and *haiku* poetry and for his flower arrangements. A native of Tamba, a mountainous province to the northwest of Kyoto, he preferred to carve *netsuke* in wood, often using tortoise shell inlay for eyes. His son, often referred to as Hidari Toyomasa because he was a left-handed carver, also signed his *netsuke* Toyomasa, making it difficult to distinguish between the work of father and son. The works attributed to them deal in large part with Shinto, Buddhist, or Taoist themes; however, they rarely depicted *kirin* at rest.

This *kirin*, signed Toyomasa, rests lightly on slender hoofed legs tucked under to provide openings through which the cord could be strung. The bulging amber-colored eyes, the horn arching back over the curls of the mane, the long whiskers, and the scaled body, all stress the dragon component of this legendary animal. The texturing of the piece is also extremely effective, the head stippled, the mane and tail carved in deep relief, the scales of the body sharply delineated. The coloring confirms the texture, stain darkening the scales to obdurate hardness, the natural brown of the wood softening the whorls of fur.

**Wood.**
19th century.
Signed: Toyomasa.
Dimensions: 3.7 cm. x 4.2 cm. x 2.8 cm.
Provenance: W. L. Behrens Collection.
Published: Joly, *W. L. Behrens Collection*, pl. 68, no. 5199.

41 **Shishi Shaped as an Incense Burner**

The masterful carving, rich lustre of the dark wood, and prominent tortoise shell eyes make this a superior piece. The body of the
diminutive shishi, a mythical lion-dog with Buddhist associations, conforms to the shape of the monumental bronze incense burners found in Buddhist temples. The appealing creature stands gazing upwards, while its thick mane of tightly coiled curls falls in a mantle, covering its back. Its full chest and lower body are smoothly polished, the only details being a curl on the back of each leg and the sharp, pointed toes of its feet.

Although the piece is unsigned, it may tentatively be attributed to Toyomasa (see nos. 40, 45, 66, 69). The high quality of the carving, effective contrast of smooth and textured surfaces, and the particular hue of the stain suggest Toyomasa.

Many early nineteenth century carvers preferred to use boxwood, a light-colored hardwood, and each artist or school developed its own stains. One final hallmark of the Toyomasa style seen here is the translucent tortoise shell inlay that makes the eyes of this small imaginary beast shine with vitality.

Wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.2 cm. x 2 cm. x 2.2 cm.

42 Portrait of a Tengu

THE PEOPLE of the Japanese countryside, particularly huntsmen and woodcutters, venerated tengu, deities of the mountains and forest who, endowed with supernatural strength, fiercely protected the solitude and tranquility of their habitat. There are two basic types of tengu: the konoha tengu with a disproportionately long human nose and the karasu tengu, or crow tengu, which has the short, strong beak of a crow. Tengu were often thought to assume the shape of a yamabushi, a mountain priest, and, at night, to gather in mountain clearings where they reveled, becoming drunk by eating a species of mushroom.

This karasu tengu, dressed in the garb of a yamabushi, stands frowning and self-absorbed, his two wings folded across his chest. The sharp beak, beady inlaid eyes, protruding claws, and tightly curled toes identify his bird form, while his long hair, black coral hat, cloak, and britches suggest the human component. The artist skillfully alternates textured and smooth surfaces, the stain and finish once again resembling the work of the Toyomasa school.

Wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 5.4 cm. x 2 cm. x 3 cm.
43 King of the Tengu

Manjū is a generic term used to describe netsuke which are shaped like a New Year’s rice cake; one form of manjū netsuke is the kagamibuta, or encased mirror, so named because of its resemblance to the small Chinese bronze mirrors. In this example, the metal disk constitutes the kagami, or mirror, and the ivory, the buta or bowl. The cord is threaded through a single opening in the back of the ivory buta, then knotted to the back of the metal disk. When the cord is pulled taut, the metal disk is held firmly in its ivory case and the knot is concealed inside the bowl.

Artisans who specialized in metalwork fashioned this type of netsuke, employing the same techniques they used for sword guards and metal clasps (kanamono). The artist first laid out the composition in repoussé, hammering the metal disk on the reverse side; then, turning it over, he completed the design. Often metal inlays were added to color parts of the composition. For example, in this piece, akagane (copper alloy) creates the dull red-brown of the figure’s robe. Gold, silver, and shibuichi (copper silver alloy) highlight other details of the composition.

This kagamibuta, a fine example of metalwork in the collection, depicts Dai Tengu Sōjōbō, the King of the Tengu, with his full beard, holding a puppet in his hand. The puppet most likely represents Yoshitsune, the twelfth century warrior. According to legend, Yoshitsune, as a child, would sneak out of the Kurama yama monastery at night to study the martial arts under the tutelage of the King of the Tengu. Here, the head of the Dai Tengu dominates the composition, Yoshitsune being but a small toy in his hand. The piece is strongly modelled and well finished, the only weakness being the delineation of the left hand.

Metal and ivory.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: diameter 4.5 cm.

44 Tengu Emerging from an Egg

Supposedly, the Dutch who lived on Deshima, the island in Nagasaki bay, imported ostrich eggs, an act which inadvertently strengthened the Japanese belief in tengu eggs. A more likely reason for the popularity of the tengu and egg theme (tengu no tamago) in netsuke carving is the legend of Sakatashume no Kintoki, also called Kintaro, golden son, who, as a child of the mountains, amused himself by raiding tengu nests, stealing the eggs, and eating the newly hatched tengu. Undoubtedly, the rich imagery of the mountain deity, half bird and half human, and the sculptural shape of the egg accounted, in part, for the appeal of the subject.

Here, the tengu wrests his body from the
confines of the egg, tearing at the shell with his pointed beak and human hands. Cracks in the shell foreshadow its complete shattering. The details of the tengu’s head, feathered wings, and hands are beautifully carved. The light stain of the wood further enhances the piece, the only touch of color being the green inlaid eyes which intensify the creature’s power and ferocity.

It is reported that in July 1860, Mizuno, the Lord of Dewa, issued an official order to the tengu to stay away from the Nikko Shrine on the occasion of the shogun’s visit, a fact suggesting that tengu had become more real than imaginary for the Japanese.¹

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Bokugyōken.
Dimensions: 4 cm. × 4 cm. × 3 cm.


The monkey and the tengu, both forest dwellers, were natural adversaries. These two netsuke, depicting a struggle for supremacy, provide a revealing comparison of the styles of two different periods. The piece above was carved by the Tamba artist Toyomasa and is quite a rare example of his work in ivory. The tengu emerges from the shell, his left foot planted firmly on the ground, glaring ferociously at the monkey who has dared to disturb his egg. The monkey is at a clear disadvantage beneath his attacker’s spread wingspan. The piece is carved in fine detail, black ink texturing the monkey’s fur and each feather of the tengu’s wings.

The wood netsuke below is signed by Bazan (1833–1897), a skilled carver who studied in Edo
but, as a mature artist, worked in Gifu, a city located between Nagoya and Osaka in southern Honshu. In contrast to Toyomasa, Bazan portrays the monkey as dominant, holding the egg between his feet and grasping the frightened tengu within. The monkey, however, looks away from his adversary, lessening the urgency of the confrontation. The egg and the animal’s curved body create a pleasing, circular composition, linked by wings and arms. The realistic detail here is far more complex than the earlier piece, the staining more subtle and less reliant on strong contrast.

The tension and drama of Toyomasa’s conception is characteristic of eighteenth and early nineteenth century netsuke by master-carvers. The strongly modelled forms have an expressive force which is not present in many later pieces. In Bazan’s rendition, executed later in the nineteenth century, greater emphasis is placed on the perfection of technical achievement—the carving, staining, and finishing of the piece. The round shape and finely detailed surface are indicative of the direction in which netsuke developed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

45
Ivory.
Early 19th century.
Signed: Toyomasa.
Dimensions: 2.5 cm. x 4 cm. x 2.5 cm.
Provenance: Charles A. Greenfield.

46
Wood.
Late 19th century.
Signed: Bazan.
Dimensions: 3 cm. x 4 cm. x 3.1 cm.
Provenance: Charles A. Greenfield.

47 Kappa Emerging from a Clam

Only in the nineteenth century did the kappa, a water sprite with the body of a tortoise, limbs of a frog, and head of a monkey, become a favorite subject of netsuke carvers. These imaginary creatures were thought to be evil and to attack humans, and yet parents still frequently used them to threaten ill-behaved children. It is said, should you meet a kappa, you must bow; the kappa will return the honor, spilling from the depression in his head the fluid that is his source of strength and supernatural power. Thus the kappa’s ferocity is not so great that it cannot be rendered harmless by a genteel gesture. In this netsuke, a kappa is portrayed as an ingenuous creature with a facial expression half fierce, half
innocent. An amphibian, the kappa is associated with the clam and is often depicted attempting to free its toes from a tightly closed clamshell, a subject apparently appreciated for its sexual suggestiveness.

The clamshell is an extraordinary piece of sculpture. The concentric circles of the wood grain are perfectly suited to the tapering of the shell. The point where the two shell halves are joined has an almost abstract sculptural elegance. The style of carving and color of the stain argue that the piece is the work of an early nineteenth century carver contemporary with Toyomasa, perhaps the master himself or one of his prominent pupils.

Wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3.6 cm. x 4.5 cm. x 3.8 cm.
Provenance: W. L. Behrens.
Published: Joly, W. L. Behrens Collection, pl. 70, no. 5416.

48 Kappa in a Stream

The refined technique of the Edo period metalworker is evident in this kagamibuta netsuke which depicts a kappa cooling himself in a stream. In a manner similar to The King of the Tengu (no. 43), the metal disk was first worked from the back, using a repoussé technique to model the kappa in deep relief; then the disk was turned over and finished. Gold inlay was used to highlight the animal’s eyes and to create the S-shaped water motif, a familiar design component of Rimpa school painting and other Japanese art forms. The swirling stream appears to be painted but consists of thin sheets of gold and gold wire set into grooves in the metal disk and hammered flat. Six scattered pebbles, simple encrustations, break the regularity of the current. The artist’s signature is incised just to the left of the kappa’s nose. The disk is set into wood which, by virtue of texture, contrasts with the coolness of the metal.

Metal and wood.
19th century.
Signed: Toshinobu.
Dimensions: diameter 4.2 cm.
In Japan, the fox (kitsune) is commonly associated with Inari, the deity who presides over the harvest of the rice crop. The fox is also thought to be demonical, to play evil pranks on the unwary and to be able to assume disguises—a bewitching female, for example, who artfully seduces her victims. Partly in jest, the great general Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) humbly addressed a letter to the King of the Foxes, demanding the punishment of a fox who had taken possession of a female member of his retinue. Reportedly, the letter is preserved in the great temple of Todai-ji in Nara.¹

This ivory rendition of a fox in the guise of a woman has a sinister quality. Head bent to one side, mouth half open in a coy smile, hands demurely resting on the staff, these features betray the animal’s uncanny ability to assume human form. The dark robe, textured and stained with ink, gives added prominence to the ghostly white of the fox’s face, the hands, and the cowl which conceals its true identity.

Ivory.  
Early 19th century.  
Unsigned.  
Dimensions: 9.5 cm. x 2.8 cm. x 1.8 cm.  

Badger Changeling

Like the fox, the badger (tanuki) is thought to possess the power of transformation. On moonlit nights, he masquerades as a mendicant priest, gleefully waylaying unsuspecting travelers and seducing young girls. Because of his cunning, the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) was called the “old badger” (furui tanuki).

Here, the anonymous artist portrays the moment of transformation from animal to human.
form. The integrity of the two halves is carefully maintained: one human foot and one animal paw and tail, half a wide-sleeved priest’s robe and half a cloak of worm-eaten leaves, half the face of a smiling old man and half the whiskered, sly-eyed beast. The transition is smooth; only the lack of symmetry in the face belies the bifurcated character of the figure. The carver sculpted the piece so as to take advantage of the beauty of the natural wood, the lines of the grain modelling and patterning the surface. Note the circular pattern of the grain on the sleeve of tanuki’s right arm. Every detail is well-executed in this rendition of a creature at once real and imaginary.

Wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 8.8 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 3 cm.
Provenance: W. L. Behrens, W. W. Winkworth, Dorothy Bess, Charles A. Greenfield.
Published: Stern, Birds, Beasts, Blossoms, and Bugs, p. 174, no. 109.

51 Bat on a Tile

In China, the bat symbolizes prosperity, happiness, and longevity. The Chinese character for bat is a homophone of the Chinese character signifying good fortune; although written differently, both are pronounced fu. In later Chinese art, the bat is a ubiquitous decorative motif; however, in Japanese art, it is less prevalent, occurring primarily in netsuke and the decorative arts.

Some netsuke artists focused on a limited number of themes. Horaku, for example, concentrated on bats and architectural subjects; this piece is representative of his style. The small creature relaxes, resting his head on the fragment of a roof tile. The bat’s fur is lightly defined, the small eyes inlaid, the ears shaped like shells. The long right wing extends parallel to the side of the
51

Bat on a Tile

In this piece, the artist fashioned a netsuke out of stag antler, depicting a bat on one side, and on the reverse, a magical fungus known as reishi (Chinese: ling-ch'ih). According to Taoist legend, this type of fungus, when eaten, bestows long life. As in the previous example (Bat on a Tile, no. 51), the face of the bat is benign, giving the animal a domesticated air. The wings swirl, creating a flat, circular composition, the curled wing tips and head of the bat joining the edges of the fungus design carved on the underside. The interstices provide natural openings for the cord, thus alleviating the need for himotoshi.

In Japan, stag antler was a material infrequently used in fine netsuke before the Meiji period; in the Shinto religion, deer were sacred. As an artistic medium, stag antler is also brittle and difficult to work. The interior is porous and the exterior often marred by irregularities or uneven coloration. The netsuke carver had to carefully select a piece of antler and to adapt his conception to the form suggested by the material. Here, the porous areas of the antler mottle the body of the bat and create a dark, shadowed interior.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Signed: Horaku.
Dimensions: 3.1 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 2 cm.

52

Bat

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Stag antler.
19th century.
Signed: Horaku.
Dimensions: 3.1 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 2 cm.

53

Group of Clams

Small clams, known as hamaguri, are found along the coast of Japan and are frequently used in Japanese cuisine, for example, to flavor a soup. Here, the clams are asymmetrically arranged one on top of the other as if found at the shore. This netsuke was carved from a single block of light boxwood, then scored to reproduce the grooves of
the shells. The dark stain and texture of the curved ridges are juxtaposed with the smooth ends where the top and bottom parts of the shell join. The addition of a thin band of gesso to separate the textured and smooth surfaces of the shells heightens the realism.

Although Sari also carved animal netsuke, he is best known for his renditions of mollusks. Unlike most netsuke artists who signed their names in regular script (kaisho), Sari preferred to write in the more abbreviated and flowing cursive script (sōsho) as seen in the signature on this piece.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Sari.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. x 4 cm. x 3.7 cm.

54 Dog at Rest

Although fragile and easily damaged, porcelain netsuke were produced in the nineteenth century. This dog, modelled in white porcelain, is of exceptionally high quality. The face, with its inlaid eyes, is alert and expressive. The head and body of the dog are composed of a series of harmonious curves integrated by the white glaze and uniform detailing of the dog’s fur. The piece is simple and elegant.

This type of porcelain was produced by the Hirado kilns, outside Nagasaki, on the island of Kyushu. Many of the objects produced here in the eighteenth century were made specifically for the Lord of Hirado. This porcelain dog was probably the work of a Hirado potter and may have been intended for a member of the local nobility.

Many small porcelains were made as ornaments and later drilled to imitate netsuke for the export market. However, in this example, the neutral glaze runs into the uneven cord openings in the underside of the dog confirming the fact that the piece was conceived as a netsuke.

Porcelain.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 2.4 cm. x 4.6 cm. x 3.8 cm.

55 Dromedary

The camel is not indigenous to Japan; however, in 1821 the Dutch imported two camels
which were subsequently exhibited in Edo and Osaka where they created considerable excitement. Unfortunately, the camels failed to adapt to the change in climate and died. Bukindo, the Nagasaki publisher, issued a print commemorating the arrival of the two camels. If the artist who fashioned this netsuke did not have an opportunity to see the strange animals, he most likely based his carving on a Nagasaki print which depicted camels as one aspect of the bizarre lifestyle of foreigners.

This rendition betrays the artist's unfamiliarity with the beast. Clearly a camel, still the long tail, bird-like beak, and fur matted like feathers reveal the artist's confusion. Nevertheless, the tilt of the head and neck and the bright, inlaid eyes animate this exotic creature, giving it great charm.

Wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 2.5 cm.
Provenance: M. M. Hepworth, M. T. Hindson.
Published: Davey, Netsuke, p. 380, pl. 1138.

56 Sitting Horse

The mythological origins of the Japanese people are embodied in the Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times), a compendium of stories from the oral tradition. The horse appears in several passages of the Nihongi. In one episode, Susano-o annoys his sister by setting free the horses of heaven and allowing them to lie down in her rice fields. A second passage relates the birth of Prince Shōtoku (572-621) in the imperial stables, thus his name Umayado, meaning stabledoor. The Kasira gaki, another early text, tells of the horse entering the world possessing the essence of fire. White horses are sacred to the gods of Japan, particularly the sun goddess Amaterasu and the emperor of Japan, her descendant, who traditionally rides on a white steed.

Not surprisingly, the horse, as a noble beast and sign of the zodiac, was frequently portrayed in netsuke. (For another eighteenth-century example, see Miwa's Reclining Horse [no. 18].) Here, the horse, carved in ivory, sits in an unusual position, its head sharply turned, eyes looking up and back, haunches raised off the ground, tail arched. The artist applied a dark stain to emphasize the horse’s eyes, mouth, and stylized mane which falls in heavy tresses over its neck. The style of carving is reminiscent of the work of Kyoto artists of the late eighteenth century.

Ivory.
18th/19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 6.5 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 2.6 cm.
Provenance: Lord Gretton.

57 Rolling Horse

A feeling of joy and freedom emanates from this more diminutive and delicately pro-
portioned horse. In comparison to Sitting Horse (no. 56), this animal is carved in a naturalistic manner, as if rolling in a grassy field, scratching its back, mouth open in an expression of delight. Again, patina and dark yellow colorations in the ivory are used to advantage. Although the carver did not sign his name, this piece is comparable in style of carving to Mitsuhiro’s Horse Emerging from a Gourd (no. 99). Gamboling horses, such as this one, embodied the free spirit of the noble man enjoying his leisure while awaiting the call to duty.

Ivory.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. × 1.8 cm. × 2.8 cm.

58 Monkey Gnawing Fruit

The monkey, a sign of the zodiac, was a favorite of the storytellers and netsuke carvers. Not only was its supple body suited to creating the rounded form of a netsuke, but the monkey’s predeliction for imitating and mocking its human counterparts, even their sexual behavior, gave it added appeal. Long before the Tokugawa period, monkey-showmen (sarumawashi) roamed the Japanese countryside, providing a constant source of entertainment for the simple folk.¹

Tomokazu, a Gifu artist whose work was in popular demand in Kyoto, specialized in humorous monkeys (nos. 58, 59). This rendition is representative. The monkey’s eyes, made of inlaid tortoiseshell, are characteristically crossed. Leaves, fruit, and twigs are interwoven with the monkey’s hands and feet to create an intricate composition.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Tomokazu.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. × 3.7 cm. × 3 cm.
Note: ¹ Tys Volker, The Animal in Far Eastern Art, p. 119.
59 Monkey with Mask from Shishi-mai

The mischievousness and anthropomorphic nature of the monkey made it compelling subject matter for the netsuke artist. In this piece, a monkey parodies Shishi-mai, the lion dance which was performed as part of the New Year festivities to exorcise evil and to begin the new year under auspicious influence. Here, the monkey pulls the patterned costume over her head and around her seated body with one hand, while the other hand manipulates the lion’s head. The monkey’s mouth is open and her eyes are crossed. In response to the mock ferocity of the shishi mask, the monkey’s face expresses mock terror. The piece is signed Tomokazu, and stylistically it corresponds to Monkey Gnawing Fruit (no. 58).

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Tomokazu.
Dimensions: 3 cm. × 3.5 cm. × 2.5 cm.

60 Double-faced Monkey Mask

By the mid-nineteenth century, many mask netsuke were no longer directly related to the theatre. One new type to evolve was the double-faced mask in which the carver cleverly integrated the features of two beings. Here is the bright-eyed face of a smiling monkey; however, turned upside down the mask is transformed into the plaintive visage of an old man, perhaps a monkey-showman (sarumawashi). This type of mask netsuke was a popular diversion, a visual pun, a play on form.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Hidemasa.
Dimensions: 4 cm. × 3.7 cm. × 2.5 cm.
61 Struggling Monkey and Octopus

RYŪJIN, the Dragon King of the Sea, being ill, consulted his physician, an octopus. The octopus announced the ailment could be cured only by eating the liver of a live monkey. This ivory *netsuke* most probably refers to this legend.

Gyokusen, a little-known artist, carved the two intertwined forms in an horizontal composition delineated by the monkey’s outstretched arms. The octopus stares intently at his opponent; the monkey, however, turns his face upward and smiles with an air of bemusement. A small seashell is adhered to the octopus’s back. Translucent eyes of pale green stone enliven both animals and add a touch of brilliance to the cream-colored ivory.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Gyokusen.
Dimensions: 3.1 cm. × 5.1 cm. × 2.5 cm.
Provenance: T. Tsuruoka, Charles A. Greenfield.
Published: Hurtig, *Masterpieces of Netsuke Art*, p. 70, no. 218.

62 Reclining Ox

This reclining ox, signed by Tomokazu, agrees in terms of style with his two monkeys previously discussed (nos. 58, 59). Characteristically, he uses repeated parallel strokes of a fine tool to texture the hide. The sharp articulation of the ox’s curved spine, ribs, and neck, as well as the pale yellow inset eyes, suggest the artist’s realistic intent. The horns arch above the eyes, framing the placid face. The animal’s body is compacted into a smooth, round shape appropriate for a *netsuke*.

The ox, like the monkey, was a sign of the zodiac. As a draft animal, it embodied agriculture and plenty. Small images of oxen were often
worn as amulets by merchants to ensure continued prosperity.\(^1\) Furthermore, the ox and its herdsman was a recurrent theme in Zen Buddhist art, the “Ten Oxherding Songs” being a metaphor for the various stages or degrees of enlightenment. In the teachings of the Zen masters, the search for Buddhahood was once compared to the paradox of looking for an ox while riding on its back.\(^2\) The netsuke artist left the meaning of such an animal open to interpretation; it was at once a humble beast, talisman, and the vehicle for deeper spiritual meaning.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Tomokazu.
Dimensions: 2.1 cm. × 4.5 cm. × 3 cm.

**63 Monkey and Goat**

The goat and the monkey are the eighth and ninth signs of the Sino-Japanese zodiac. The monkey inhabited the islands of Japan in small numbers. Sheep and goats were imported from China and Europe, and, as such, never gained prominence in Japanese art or legend.

Here, the goat reclines, his body curved, his legs gathered beneath him. The artist employed a brown-black stain on the face and long tufts of hair which amply cover the animal’s body. A wide-eyed monkey, dressed in a short jacket, playfully clings to the goat’s back. A single peach is stuck in his belt, a reference to the Chinese legend of the monkey who stole the fruits of immortality from Heaven. The exploits of the monkey, known in Japan as Songoku, are celebrated in the Chinese novel, *Monkey* or *The Journey to the West*.

Ivory.
Early 19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.4 cm. × 4.5 cm. × 2.4 cm.

**64 Rat Couple**

A Japanese legend relates that, when Buddha called the animals to him for a special occasion,
the rat was the first to come. The animal, as such, became the first sign of the zodiac. It is also the messenger of Daikoku, the god of wealth. The rat’s ability to accumulate and hoard riches made him a favorite of the merchant class who patronized the netsuke artists. Ikkan, who was born in Nagoya, carved animal and figure netsuke but in his late years focused upon this singular subject. His signature appears on this appealing rendition of a rat couple, male and female.

The artist’s empathy with his subject is apparent. The two animals are simply rendered, the supple curves of their bodies conforming to the desired roundness and smoothness of a fine nineteenth century piece. The varying tones of the light wood not only color the small ears, noses, and feet, but also soften the dark stain of the animals’ hair. The shining black coral used for the eyes gives them an alert, inquisitive expression. The couple, huddled together, embodies warmth and affection.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Ikkan.
Dimensions: 2.8 cm. x 3.7 cm. x 3.5 cm.

65 Koma-inu

The rich purple glaze which covers this porcelain koma-inu is reminiscent of the eggplant color associated with old Kutani ware; however, the potter’s seal, impressed into the bottom of the piece, identifies it as the work of an early nineteenth century governor of Nishihama in Wakayama-ken. Apparently, the governor often made ceramics when he was not occupied with administrative duties. He preferred to spend his leisure time associating with such noted potters as Eiraku Hozen (1795–1854) whom he invited to gatherings in his famous garden during the Bunka (1804–1817), Bunsei (1818–1824), and
Tempō (1830–1843) periods. Few ceramic netsuke bear a potter’s mark, thus the governor’s seal distinguishes this piece.

The animal sits in the posture of the legendary koma-inu, the Korean dogs or lion-dogs, who ferociously guard the entrance to Japanese shrines and temples. His head is raised, his mouth open, almost smiling, and his teeth are bared. In order to preserve a smooth surface and compact shape, the artist used the horns and tail to create curvilinear designs on the dog’s back.

Porcelain.
19th century.
Signed in seal form: Kairakuen.
Dimensions: 3.4 cm. × 4.5 cm. × 2.4 cm.

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**66 Portrait of a Snail**

This piece is an excellent example of the Japanese sculptor’s ability to reproduce artistically and accurately the forms of nature. The snail emerges from the protective confines of his hard shell, antennae clinging to its surface and foot flowing gracefully down the back of the shell. A “fish-roe” ground of raised dots (ukibori) textures the soft body of the snail and contrasts with the curvilinear patterning of the shell spiral. By standing the shell on end and depicting the creature as larger than life, the artist enhances the sculptural quality of the piece.

The use of an ukibori technique is very rarely seen in Toyomasa’s netsuke (nos. 40, 45, 69). If the piece were not signed, it would probably be attributed to an artist of the Iwami school because of its striking resemblance to the work of such Iwami masters as Gohō (nos. 36, 37). However, Toyomasa resided in Tamba, only about one hundred miles distant from Iwami, and as this piece suggests, it is likely that he was familiar with the netsuke of the Iwami school, many of which used a ukibori technique in naturalistic representations of insects, small animals, and plants.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Tamba Sasayama jū Toyomasa roku-jū-ni-sei tsukuru. Translation: Made by Toyomasa, sixty-two years old, a resident of Sasayama, Tamba (province).
Dimensions: 4.2 cm. × 4 cm. × 3 cm.
Note: 1. For a similar piece by an Iwami artist, see Tomihara’s snail, illustrated in Bushell, Collectors’ Netsuke, p. 57, pl. 52.

67 Snail on Mushrooms

As the double signature indicates, these mushrooms teeming with small forms of life is the collaborative work of two artists: Oju and Gambun. Oju first carved the form of the mushrooms, staining and finishing the bamboo in a realistic manner. Gambun, a recognized netsuke artist, then ornamented the surface with small pieces of gold and silver alloy and with spiders, grubs, and ants—fine sculptural inlays which were his specialty. The top of the mushrooms is further enhanced by the curved form of a snail carved out of bone and dulled with lacquer, leaving only the apex of the spiral shell as a highlight. On the twisted stem of the mushrooms, the metal artist placed his signature on an inlaid metal tablet, while the carver incised his name in the wood, each suggesting the part which he had played in this joint artistic endeavor.

Wood with metal inlay.
19th century.
Signed: (metal tablet) Gambun tsukuru; Translation: Made by Gambun. (carved in wood) Oju tō; Translation: Carved by Oju.
Dimensions: 3.8 cm. × 4.1 cm. × 2.5 cm.

68 Snake Encircling Gourd

Vegetables or vegetables combined with animals also provided the netsuke artist with simple, natural forms which could readily be observed and interpreted with the carver’s knife. Here, Sukenaga, an artist from Hida province in central Honshu, beautifully modelled a gourd and snake in the wood of the yew tree (ichii), a tree which grew in large forests in his native region. The color and fine grain of the hard wood enhance the lightly corrugated surface of the gourd. The treatment of the snake, by contrast, is precisely detailed, the diamond-shaped scales and mottled black and brown patterns reproducing the texture and coloring of a snake’s skin.

In Japan, rich symbolism and legend surrounds the image of the snake. In addition to being one of the twelve animals of the zodiac, the snake, like the dragon, figures prominently in the meta-
morphosis of human and animal forms, for example, in the legend of Kiyohime (see no. 27).

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Sukenaga.
Dimensions: 3.6 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 3.7 cm.

69 Sparrow in Flight

The sparrow (suzume) is a beloved bird in Japan, signifying friendship and, to the farmer, industriousness. The bird, with its spontaneous, spirited flight, is likened to the Buddhist ideal of the individual freed from the concerns of the mundane world. In this context, the death of a sparrow embodies the final attainment, Nirvana. On a more popular level, some human souls are thought to transmigrate into the body of a sparrow.

Toyomasa (1773–1856) carved this sparrow out of wood, his preferred material. Linear detail is limited to the feathers of the bird’s wing tips and tail; the body is rounded, the head and breast conforming to the circular grain in the wood.

The sitting position and full breast resemble the conventionalized form of the “inflated sparrow” (fukura suzume), which is a popular children’s toy and a design element used in mon, or family crests.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Toyomasa.
Dimensions: 4.9 cm x 4 cm. x 2.5 cm.

70 Sparrow at Rest

Here, the little-known master Mitsushige reduced the sparrow to a simple, abstract form. The head is turned, the beak echoing the sharp point of the closed wing tips and tail, while the curve of the neck, breast, and wings create a single fluent movement. The smooth, round planes reveal the beauty of the wood grain. Again, detailing is minimal. Incised lines suggest parallel rows of feathers on the edge of the wings and tail, and two webbed feet are carved into the center of the bottom. The simplification of the natural form and advantageous use of the natural wood
give the piece an understated elegance, a contemporary look.

Wood. 19th century.
Signed: Mitsushige.
Dimensions: 3 cm. x 5 cm. x 2.5 cm.

71 Spider and Fly

The hako or “covered box” style of netsuke was popular with lacquer artists who made inrō, the small, tiered cases to which netsuke were attached. This stag antler hako netsuke is signed by Koma Bunsai, a member of the highly reputed Koma school of lacquer artists. Bunsai also studied under the guidance of Tani Buncho (1763-1840), a versatile painter and popular teacher. This scene of a spider approaching a fly trapped in his web evinces the artist’s painterly skill. Each part of the asymmetrical composition is well executed in gold, black, or red lacquer. A dark, porous area in the stag antler balances the composition and provides a textured background for the confrontation. The scene is realistic, the intricate lacquer work that of a master craftsman. Such netsuke were often used as medicinal containers.

Stag antler and lacquer. 19th century.
Signed: Koma Bunsai.
Dimensions: diameter 3.5 cm.; depth 1 cm.

72 Tiger and Cub

Here, a mother tiger stands protectively over her nursing cub, wrapping her tail around the young one affectionately. The artist has stylized the tigers’ stripes, creating repeated linear designs which cover the animals’ bodies and texture the surface. Instead of modelling the shoulder bones and haunches of the mother tiger, the carver incised spiral whorls to unify the patterned surfaces. The mouth of the beast is open, baring her sharp fangs; however, the upturned eyes soften the expression on the face of the beast, suggests mock ferocity. If this piece is placed beside the more realistic and powerful Snarling Tiger (no. 15) or the beetle-browed Tiger and Cub (no. 16), the comparison reveals the wide range of styles
used by netsuke carvers in the rendition of a single theme—the tiger.

Wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3.4 cm. x 4.2 cm. x 3.2 cm.

73 Tortoise at Rest

This turtle is a superior example of Tomokazu's work. The tortoise watches cautiously, its head and clawed feet drawn within its hard, protective shell. The artist smoothly sculpted the shell, repeatedly staining, wiping, and polishing the wood in order to bring out rich color and texture. The crenulated edge of the carapace, curled up in front and down in the back, softens the contours, its thinness contributing to the delicacy of the piece.

Tactility is an important aspect of netsuke, objects meant to be handled and touched. A netsuke like the Tomokazu tortoise was highly admired, a pleasure to both eye and hand.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed, Tomokazu.
Dimensions: 4 cm. x 5.2 cm. x 2.5 cm.
Provenance: F. Meinertzhagen, M. T. Hindson.
Published: Meinertzhagen, The Art of the Netsuke Carver, pl. 7, no. 60; Davey, Netsuke, p. 252, no. 716.

74 Tortoise

This tortoise by Hidari Issan differs markedly in style from Tortoise at Rest (no. 73). Here, the piece is stained solid black, its surface heavily textured. Brass insets outline the eyes; the extended head and feet suggest motion. The wood is skillfully carved and polished to a high lustre.

The tortoise is emblematic of longevity and
the tranquility of old age. It is often seen in the company of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune. Like the crane, also a symbol of long life, the tortoise is an attribute of Fukurokuju, the god whose name translates good luck, high salary, long life. When the tortoise is entwined by a snake, it becomes the Dark Warrior of the North, a directional symbol, and the attribute of Bishamon, the god of strength. In Taoist mythology, the crane represents the celestial principle, the tortoise the terrestrial principle.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Hidari Issan, with kakan.
Dimensions: 4.6 cm. x 2.9 cm. x 1.7 cm.

75 *Wasp in a Pear*

A small group of early nineteenth century artists delighted in lifelike representations of wasps eating vegetables and fruits. Little is known about them beyond their names; however, their work is so similar in style that a close association between them is probable. This *Wasp in a Pear* bears Kogetsu’s signature, yet it could well be the work of Sangetsu, another prominent wasp carver. Whatever the wasp symbolized is now unknown.

This piece is an excellent example of the general style. The composition is carved from a single block of wood, the wasp placed within a deep hollow of the pear. The wasp’s lifelike appearance is achieved by the large unimatsu eyes, as well as the detailed modelling of the body, the spread wings and legs. The artist used ukibori dots in relief to texture the skin of the pear. The high gloss of the pear’s skin and wasp is contrasted with the dull finish of the interior. The fragile stem and irregular worm holes further enhance the realism of the piece.

Wood.

81

76 *Endō Moritō Holding the Bell*

The twelfth century samurai Endō Moritō loved the wife of another man and, when she rebuffed his advances, threatened to kill her entire family unless she agreed to the murder of her husband. On the appointed night, Moritō entered her house and beheaded the figure asleep in bed, only to discover that the faithful wife had sacrificed herself. Repentant, Moritō became a monk, retired to the mountains of Oki, and,
beneath the sacred Nachi waterfall, prayed naked for twenty-one days, clenching a bell between his teeth.

In this large manjū netsuke, the figure of Moritō fills the circular format. Moritō's head, shoulder, and leg form a vertical axis which stabilizes the composition. While his garment billows to one side, echoing the directional pull of the eyes and foot, his arm and chest pull vigorously in the opposite direction, acting as a counterbalance. The depiction is in the style of ukiyo-e, "pictures of the floating world," the Japanese prints and paintings by Edo artists, such as Hokusai, which were contemporaneous with netsuke carving.

Many late eighteenth and early nineteenth century carvers chose the manjū format to illustrate legends. The artist could continue the composition on the reverse, although here the only decorative elements on the back are the artist's signature and a sacred Shinto rope of flax pendants.

Signed: Ikkōsai.  
Dimensions: diameter 6.5 cm., depth 2 cm.

77 Susano-o Mikoto and the Dragon

This more conventional manjū is smaller than the larger variety and does not have a button in the center, only a single cord opening in the back. By the eighteenth century, artists had developed this format for lacquered wood netsuke which they created to accompany inrō. They preferred round lacquered netsuke because, in contrast to the large pieces of carved ivory, these were light and would not damage the fragile inrō. This type of two-piece manjū netsuke was first carved in ivory around the turn of the nineteenth century.

This piece is an exquisite rendition of an ancient Japanese legend in which the Shinto god Susano-o slays the vicious dragon, Yamato no orochi, and finds a sword concealed in the dragon's tail. Susano-o presented the sword to his sister Amaterasu, the sun goddess. Henceforth, the sword became part of the regalia of the Japanese imperial family.

As in Endō Moritō Holding the Bell (no. 76), the style of pictorial representation reflects the influence of ukiyo-e; however, here, the scene is more finely detailed. Susano-o's sword and the eye of the dragon are heightened by white inlaid mother-of-pearl, while Susano-o's hat, sash tie, and the borders of his sleeve are embellished with varying tones of brown inlaid tortoise shell. The artist effectively composed the scene so as to intensify the drama. As Susano-o, his sword drawn, pushes up his right sleeve, the dragon, his talons bared, glares at him; the confrontation is centered on the axis of their regard.

Signed: Moritoshi, with kakihan.  
Dimensions: diameter 5 cm., depth 2 cm.
Published: Joly, The H. Seymour Trower Collection, pl. 3, no. 372; Davey, Netsuke, p. 158, no. 413.

78 *Busho Killing the Tiger*

After 1806, the year in which Bakin Kyokutei (1767–1848) translated the novel *Suikoden* (Chinese: *Shui-hu ch’uan*) from the Chinese into Japanese, the exploits of the one hundred and eight heroes further enriched the subject matter of netsuke. In one of the celebrated episodes, Busho (Chinese: Wen-hsiao) kills a tiger with one blow of his fist. In this piece, Busho has wrestled the tiger to the ground. Straddling the beast, he raises his powerful fist to deliver the mortal blow.

The rich coloration of the piece heightens its power. Busho, dressed Chinese style, is stained a light orange-brown, while black ink against the white ivory ground patterns the tiger’s fur. The inside of the tiger’s mouth is a pale pink, its eyes inlaid with tortoise shell. After the first quarter of the nineteenth century, most netsuke artists signed their names in an obvious fashion. Here, however, the artist integrates the two characters of his name into the designs on the back of Busho’s garment.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Otoman.
Dimensions: 4 cm. x 3.5 cm. x 3 cm.

79 *Shōki Wrestling a Shishi*

This skilfully carved piece depicting Shōki, the demon queller (see no. 28), wrestling a *shishi*, or lion-dog, captures an instant of their encounter.

In contrast to the previous piece, the artist here preferred the interplay of black and white to strong polychrome staining. Color is limited to the deep pink stones of the *shishi’s* eyes. Shōki’s origins are evident in his manner of dress; the Chinese
hat and robe are lightly patterned in contrast to the heavy texturing and staining of the shishi’s thick fur. It is interesting to note that most Chinese and Japanese paintings which portray Shōki, the demon queller, are similarly executed in black and white.

Ivory.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3.4 cm. × 3.7 cm. × 3 cm.

80 Ono no Komachi

The poetess Ono no Komachi (fl. ca. 850), a celebrated beauty and gifted writer of the Heian period (784–1185), became the subject of many legends, in part, because of her intense passion which she expressed so skillfully in her poetry.

Edo period artists, both ukiyo-e print designers and netsuke carvers, popularized the Seven Scenes from the Life of Komachi. This anonymous artist used a triangular composition and rich wood, stained and polished, to render the seventh and final scene of the poetess’s life. Komachi is depicted seated on a wooden post or temporary grave marker (sotoba), theoretically repenting her part in the death of her lover, Fukakusa no Shōshō. Her worm-eaten straw hat, coat of leaves, baskets, and gnarled walking stick suggest the life of an impoverished mendicant, while her emaciated body and wrinkled face have no trace of youthful beauty.

The piece brings to mind a poem by Komachi in the Kokinshū, or Collection of Ancient and Modern Times, an anthology completed in the early tenth century. The poem is reflective, echoing the Buddhist idea of the transitory nature of human life. Komachi writes:

80 Ono no Komachi
The cherry blossoms
Have passed away, their color lost,
While to no avail
Age takes my beauty as it falls
In the long rain of my regret.\(^1\)

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**81 Demon Couple Embracing**

This demon couple, engaged in intimate conversation, embodies the light, whimsical character of *netsuke*. The husband, cranium elongated and ears pointed, smiles jovially at his wife seated beside him. She stares up into his eyes with an equally amused expression. One scholar has suggested that this is a caricature of Raijin, the thunder god, whose wife is berating him for keeping ungodly hours.

The artist, Hōjitsu, carved their heads and her claw out of boxwood (*tsuge*), but used cypress (*hinoki*), a soft-grained wood, for the bodies of the two figures. The smooth, polished surfaces of the heads are juxtaposed with the flat, angular planes of their kimono created by *ittobori*, or single-knife-stroke carving. This contrast was further heightened by red, green, and white pigments which colored the garments; however, only faint traces of the polychrome remain.

A Tokyo artist, Hōjitsu (d. 1876) was a samurai in the service of the shogun and a carver patronized by nobility. He founded a famous school of *netsuke* carvers in which the art was passed down from master to pupil for at least five successive generations. His influence extended to the Sō school which was founded by Josō Miyazaki (1855–1920) and which included Sōko
Morita (1879–1942; no. 133), Gyokusō (1879–1944; no. 132), and Sōsui (1911–1975) who, unfortunately, had no successors. To be able to trace this lineage back one hundred years is exceptional.

Wood. 19th century.
Signed: Hōjitsu.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. x 4.4 cm. x 2.6 cm.
Published: Joly, W. L. Behrens Collection, p. 16, no. 394; Davey, Netsuke, p. 150, no. 446.

82 Bugaku Helmet

This netsuke has the distinctive configuration of a tortikabuto, or chicken helmet, traditionally worn by dancers of Bugaku, a courtly form of musical entertainment imported from China as early as the seventh century. These dancers move with stately grace, handsomely attired, their heads covered by large paper hats decorated with brocade and lined with scarlet silk. This fine ivory carving, with its scalloped edge and selective staining, captures the elegance of Bugaku, an abstract and highly sophisticated theatrical form.

Ivory. 19th century.
Signed: Masachika.
Dimensions: 6.5 cm. x 6 cm. x 3 cm.
Provenance: Guest, M. T. Hindson.
Published: Davey, Netsuke, p. 143, no. 428.

83 Courtesan and Attendant/Kabuki Actors

Here, the gracefully curved figure of a courtesan, her obi tied in front, affectionately leans toward her young attendant. A motif of flowers and
butterflies ornaments the woman's garment, while the girl is dressed in a plain kimono, her obi fastened in the back. The two ivory figures, accentuated by a dark stain, have a sense of fragility. These figures could also be interpreted as two female impersonators of the Kabuki theatre. Although originated by women, Kabuki was restricted to male performers after 1629 by government decree. Certain actors, noted for their feminine beauty and behavior, specialized in female roles and achieved great fame. The masculine features of the larger figure support this interpretation.

Ivory. 19th century. Unsigned. Dimensions: 6 cm. x 4.5 cm. x 1.5 cm.

**84 Farmer Dreaming of Sake**

Nineteenth century netsuke carvers were more interested in depicting the simple folk of the Japanese countryside than their predecessors. Free of symbolic content, these subjects have a refreshing immediacy and directness. One can easily empathize with this farmer absorbed in his dream. He is a delightfully animated figure, knees bent and a wrinkled garment belted with rope tied loosely around his body. While one hand pillows his head, the other holds a sheaf of newly harvested rice from which sake will be made. Skillfully carved in wood, the figure has an irresistible charm.

Wood. 19th century. Unsigned. Dimensions: 3.2 cm. x 6.5 cm. x 2.5 cm.

**85 Couple Seated on Brazier**

This long, slender netsuke portrays a woman warming herself on a hibachi on one side, and, on the other, a man in a similar posture. The two complementary figures are minimally modelled and detailed, giving the wood a smooth, sculptural beauty. A single, incised vertical line defines the curve of the man's back, while several horizontal strokes suggest the folds and sash of the woman's robe. Her head is covered by a plain cloth, her kimono open, suggestively revealing a bare shoulder. The contours of the arms and legs of the figures are carved more deeply, giving the piece greater dimensionality. The turned heads alleviate the need for facial features, their absence enhancing the fluent lines of the piece. Both the flat, narrow format and two-sided composition are unusual.

Wood. 19th century. Unsigned. Dimensions: 12 cm. x 2.6 cm. x .8 cm.
The Buddhist paradise is populated with tennin, or angelic beings (Sanskrit: *apsaras*, Chinese: *t'ien-jen*)—dancers, musicians, and other members of the heavenly retinue. In Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Buddhist art, these celestials descend, their scarves softly billowing behind them.

Here, the tennin is aloft on scroll-shaped clouds, her body curving gracefully in a circular composition. The angelic face peers above the stem of a lotus bud which she holds in her hands. The long curls of her hair echo the swirling clouds, their linear patterns blending with the outstretched wings. The skirt of the celestial’s robe and her feet are swept to the side as if she were in flight. The artist’s choice of material—stag antler derived from the antler of the sacred deer—reinforces the efficacy of this religious talisman.

*Stag antler.*  
19th century.  
*Signed*: Ren.  
*Dimensions*: 3.5 cm. × 4.1 cm. × 1.7 cm.
BODHIDHARMA, or Daruma, the semi-legendary founder and first patriarch of Zen Buddhism, traveled from India to China in the early sixth century to teach the doctrine of meditation. According to one legend, after Daruma failed to gain the support of the southern Chinese ruler of Liang, he crossed the Yangtze River on a reed and proceeded north to the state of Wei where he meditated at the Shao-lin temple for nine years. Such miraculous adventures were generated in China in the late twelfth century in order to enhance Bodhidharma’s image in the minds of Zen adherents. Soon thereafter, this theme became a popular subject with Chinese and Japanese painters.

This Daruma balances on an imaginary reed, the contours of his body softened by the folds of his robe and hood framing his face. The exposed chest with ribs, hair, and belly, as well as the dour expression, are features traditionally associated with this type of Daruma. The distinctive feature of this piece, however, is its gesture, the outstretched left arm which may once have held a staff.

The surface of the antler, especially the back of the figure, appears thickly glazed. The variegated tones of brown were created either by immersing the piece in *yasha* (see no. 8) or some other mixture for a prolonged period of time, or by staining in the smoke of a wood fire.

Stag antler.
19th century.
 Unsigned.
Dimensions: 10.3 cm. x 4.5 cm. x 2 cm.

According to later Japanese folklore, Daruma fell asleep after nine years of meditation. When he awoke, furious with himself, he cut off his eyelids and threw them on the ground where they grew into tea plants, tea being an antidote for sleep. Yet another Daruma story relates that his eyelids, arms, and legs atrophied from the long inactivity and completely disappeared.
Here, Daruma, having just awakened, expresses extreme anguish, his face contorted into a look of agony. The hooked cloak envelops his triangular form, the open front revealing a plump belly and breasts. Ivory earrings, a reminder of his Indian origins, contrast with the dark, smooth wood. The cord openings are lined with ivory to protect the wood from the wear of the cord.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Shūmin.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. × 4.2 cm. × 3.2 cm.

89 Trick Daruma

Daruma was frequently depicted as a whimsical figure, a favorite subject of both netsuke carver and toymaker. This trick Daruma has a lever in his back which, when depressed, rotates his eyes and extends his tongue. The lever is set into a separate piece of wood which also contains the signature and the himotoshi. The smooth, round form, stained and polished to a high sheen, is pleasing to both eye and hand.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Gyokumin.
Dimensions: 5.5 cm. × 4 cm. × 2.2 cm.

90 Toy Daruma

In this piece, a manjū netsuke made of pottery, Daruma's body is reduced to a simple circle and covered with a soft red glaze. The unglazed face,
with its large Indian features—long ear lobes, thick eyebrows, and round upturned eyes—has an irresistible appeal. Such netsuke are the counterparts of red toy Daruma, the good luck symbols which are still sold today in Japan on festive occasions in the immediate vicinity of temples and shrines.

Pottery.
19th century.
Signed: Chusai.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. x 3.6 cm. x 1.8 cm.

91 Kanzan and Jittoku

This ivory piece depicts two legendary eccentrics of Chinese origin: Kanzan (Chinese: Hanshan), the Taoist poet-recluse of Cold Mountain, and his inseparable companion Jittoku (Chinese: Shih-te), a Buddhist monk who worked in the kitchen of Kuo-ch'ing-ssu monastery. According to legend, Jittoku would feed the leftovers from the kitchen to Kanzan, who roamed the halls of the monastery, laughing. The two gentle immortals seem always oblivious to worldly concerns. Although the figures have early Taoist and Buddhist associations, they became most popular after being incorporated into the Zen pantheon.

Here, Jittoku, holding a broom, leans over the seated Kanzan and smiles blissfully, while Kanzan, holding a scroll, looks up at his friend and laughs. The artist, Hidemasa, enlarged the figures’ heads and hands for emphasis, only lightly decorating the robes which cover their rounded forms. The warmth and good humor of the two figures suffuses the piece.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Hidemasa.
Dimensions: 4.2 cm. x 3.7 cm. x 2.6 cm.
Provenance: Marcus Huish, W. L. Behrens.
Published: Joly, W. L. Behrens Collection, pl. 46, no. 3485.
92 Buddhist Whisk

Sessai, a carver patronized by the daimyō of the Echizen clan, was granted the title hokkyō, an honor first bestowed on priests and later on Buddhist sculptors and painters. Netsuke by this artist are quite rare. This Buddhist whisk (Sanskrit: chauri, Japanese: hossu), a symbol of priestly authority, attests to Sessai’s skill. He composed the piece so as to create a subtle interaction between the short, straight handle and the long, flowing hairs of the whisk tail. Stain darkens the deeply incised grooves of the whisk tail, while the surfaces which stand in relief are polished a lustrous dark red.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Sessai.
Dimensions: 15.2 cm. × 3.2 cm. × 1.6 cm.

93 Head of Rakan

This kagamibuta (see no. 43) by the metal artist Shūraku frames a forceful rendition of the bust of a rakan (Sanskrit: arhat, see no. 25). The head displays features associated by the Japanese with an Indian sage or holy man: broad shaven cranium, pronounced nose, long eyebrows, distended ear lobes with earrings, and the tight, stylized curls of the hair, mustache, and beard. The frowning expression on the face suggests that this rakan may in reality be Daruma. The disk or mirror (kagami) is made of copper silver alloy (shibuichi), highlighted with gold inlay for the eyes, earring, beads, and collar of the robe. The composition is bold, the head filling the circular format; the detailing reveals the high quality of the metalwork.

Metal and wood.
19th century.
Signed: Shūraku.
Dimensions: diameter 4.2 cm., depth 1 cm.
94 Sansukumi

In the fable of Sansukumi (the three which fascinate each other), the toad eats the snail, the snake eats the toad, and the slime of the snail kills the snake. Stylistically, this piece corresponds to the other Sukenaga in the collection, Snake Encircling Gourd (no. 68). However, here, instead of contrasting smooth and textured surfaces, the artist has evenly textured the piece and concentrated on the complexity of form. This piece was conceived in the round and must be viewed from all sides in order to be fully appreciated. This piece is an exceptionally fine example of Sukenaga’s work.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Sukenaga.
Dimensions: 4 cm. x 3.2 cm. x 3 cm.
Published: Davey, Netsuke, p. 258, no. 732.

95 Frogs Ringing Gong in a Skull

The principle of ritualistic and honorable death was fundamental to the Bushido code and thus an inherent part of a samurai’s mental and physical discipline. Only through rigorous training could the warrior fulfill his responsibilities and live an honorable life. Beneath this heightened awareness of existence lay a fundamental understanding and acceptance of death. The skeleton and skull were recurrent images in the art of the netsuke carver.

The symbolism of this wooden skull is complex, combining Shinto and Buddhist as well as secular motifs. Two minute frogs sit within the eye sockets of the skull, busily ringing a black Shinto or Buddhist gong (mokugyo, “wooden fish”), typically beaten during religious rites to
summon the spirits and awaken the soul of the believer. A black venomous snake (*mamushi*) crawls out of the left ear socket, its long body encircling the top of the skull. Ironically, when the body of a dead *mamushi* is immersed in alcohol, it has a potent healing power; however, here, the live snake foreshadows imminent death. A small Buddhist whisk (*hossu*) decorates the back of the skull. Such symbols add intricate detail and bright color to the smoothly hewn wood of the skull as well as reinforcing the *netsuke*’s theme.

Wood.
19th century.
Signed: Shūzan, with *kakihan*.
Dimensions: 4 cm. × 3.4 cm. × 3.6 cm.

96 *Skull Covered by Lotus*

Like *Frogs Ringing Gong in a Skull* (no. 95), this piece expresses the Japanese fascination with the macabre. The artist fashioned the skull in iron, then refined the piece with gold inlay in the form of a lotus. The composition is unusual: the lotus flower and stem cling to the right side of the skull, while the veined leaves of the lotus partially cover the surface and left eye. Each part of the golden lotus is carefully textured, enhancing the elegance and reflective quality of the piece. This is an extremely rare example of Ryushinshi’s work.

Iron with gold inlay.
97 Dragon Emerging from a Gong

Carved from light-colored stag antler, the form of a dragon-like creature here twists and turns, echoing the shape of the handle of a temple gong (mokugyo). Such gongs were struck with a stick to arouse the believer’s spirit and keep it alert, thus they were made to resemble fish, crocodiles, or dragons—sea creatures believed never to sleep.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4 cm. x 4 cm. x 1.5 cm.

98 Otafuku Catching a Rat

The Japanese predilection for combining the humorous and the sensual is reflected in netsuke, particularly depictions known as Okame and Otafuku, popular manifestations of Uzume no Mikoto. According to legend, the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu, disgusted with the vexatious behavior of her brother Susano-o, retreated to a cave, throwing the world into darkness. Despite the entreaties of the other gods and goddesses, she refused to leave. However, when her attendant Uzume no Mikoto danced and her clothes fell off, the hilarity of the dieties was so great that Amaterasu, overcome by curiosity, came out of her hideaway. Henceforth, Uzume became the embodiment of mirth, folly, and wantonness.

In this whimsical interpretation, the full-bodied Otafuku looks up gleefully, sticking out her tongue in delight as she grasps a rat beneath her skirts. The form of Otafuku is well-modelled,
the striations in the ivory accentuating her round limbs and fat cheeks. In order to emphasize her sensual pleasure, the artist carved a small moveable tongue. Although some may consider such netsuke to be lewd, they directly convey the sexuality, vitality, and wit of the Tokugawa period. Most erotic netsuke are not signed.

Ivory.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. × 3.2 cm. × 3.2 cm.

99 Horse Emerging from a Gourd

Ohara Mitsuhiro (1810–1875) was among the most distinguished netsuke artists of the mid-nineteenth century. A native of Onomichi, near Hiroshima, Mitsuhiro went to Osaka at the age of seventeen and worked there until 1857 when, at the age of forty-eight, he returned to Onomichi. He died in 1875. His workbooks which describe his netsuke piece by piece are still extant; one of them was exhibited in the Onomichi City Museum in 1978. In addition to being a highly imaginative carver, he was also a poet.

This piece refers to the legend of Chōkwarō (Chinese: Chang Kuo-lao), one of the Eight Taoist Immortals believed to have lived in the seventh and eighth centuries. He possessed a gourd from which he could conjure a marvelous horse capable of traveling infinite distances in a single day. He would drip water or spit into the gourd and the horse would emerge. This story is the source of the proverb “Hyotan kara koma,” “A colt from a gourd, a very unexpected event.”

Here, Mitsuhiro has omitted the figure of Chōkwarō. The miniature horse is captured on the verge of freeing himself from the confines of the gourd. His finely carved head leans forward, his forefeet are planted on the torn edge of the gourd, his hind legs are bent, ready for the final leap—all this in contrast to the beautifully rounded simplicity of the gourd. The uniform patina of the ivory gives the piece added refinement.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Mitsuhiro.
Dimensions: 4.5 cm. × 3.2 cm. × 3.2 cm.
Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century *Netsuke*
Kappa, the legendary river-child of Japanese origin (no. 47), dwells with the turtle in the watery depths and is frequently depicted either with the shell of a turtle on its back, or perched on a turtle, its webbed feet holding fast to the carapace. The ivory piece above is signed Masakazu. There are several artists by this name, two of whom lived during the Meiji period. It is not clear which Masakazu executed this piece.

The ivory kappa, with its glowering amber-colored eyes and ingenuous frown, crouches on the dome of the turtle’s back. Instead of the usual depression in its head, the kappa possesses hair which is parted in the center and flows in long strands around its shoulders. The animal’s body is textured to give the impression of rough, reptilian skin, while the long toes of the feet are pointed, the lines of the webbing blending in with the strongly delineated markings of the turtle’s shell. The edge of the carapace is subtly modulated—the front and side turn up, the back down. Beneath the edge of its shell, the turtle’s head peers to the side, executed in bold relief and eyes inlaid with shiny black coral.

The Kappa on a Turtle below, finely carved in wood, bears a striking resemblance to this Masakazu netsuke. This rendition is signed by Tadakazu (Chuichi), an artist from Osaka who died in Manchuria toward the end of the Taisho period (1912–1926) and thus belonged to the following generation of netsuke artists. The strong similarity between the two pieces suggests that Tadakazu admired the older artist’s work and modelled his carving after it. Naturally, the use of wood demanded certain modifications, primarily heavier texturing and staining and lighter translucent inset of yellow tortoise shell eyes. In addition, Tadakazu’s kappa and turtle are slightly more elongated and the kappa’s fangs are placed closer to the corners of its mouth. The differences, however, are incidental in comparison to the expressive likeness. For example, note that both kappa are depicted without the depression in the center of the head. The artists’ names also imply a close relationship. Masakazu and Tadakazu end with the same character, suggesting the possibility that Tadakazu might have studied with his precursor.

100  Kappa on a Turtle

101  Kappa on a Turtle

KOMIN preferred to work on a small scale and often embellished his netsuke with colorful encrustations. Here, a kappa, wearing a turtle’s carapace on his back, has caught his foot in a clamshell. His humanoid face is contorted into an expression of pain and fright. His eyes are made of colored mica inlay, the irregularly spaced teeth of ivory. Shell encrustations also ornament the clam. This humorous depiction suggests that the kappa, an amorous creature, is being punished for his passions, a warning to young men that it is not always easy to liberate oneself from love, once involved.

102  Kappa on a Clam

Wood.

19th century.

Signed: Komin.

Dimensions: 2.7 cm × 2.8 cm × 2.6 cm.
102

105

103  **Kappa on a Cucumber**

*Not only* were *kappa* celebrated for their ability to seduce young girls, they were also creatures with a passion for cucumbers. It was said that in areas where *kappas* were thought to be prevalent, offerings of cucumbers were made at harvest time to placate these creatures in the hope that they would not interfere in human affairs.

This *netsuke* carved from stag antler, depicts an appealing *kappa* embracing a cucumber, and is shaped like a *harikata*, or courtesan's toy. Although unsigned, this piece may be the work of a school of Meiji carvers who preferred to carve stag antler and were located in the Asakusa district of Tokyo, in close proximity to the Yoshiwara entertainment district.

*Stag antler.*
*19th century.*
*Unsigned.*
*Dimensions: 14.6 cm. × 1.7 cm. × 1.6 cm.*
104 Kappa Clutching a Fish

This kappa was carved during the second half of the nineteenth century; however, in terms of size and weight, the netsuke is unusually large. The top of the kappa's head, believed to contain the fluid which endows the creature with its supernatural strength, is enlarged, resembling a mushroom-shaped hat. The devilish face is animated by large eyes with black coral pupils glancing to the side and a smile which reaches almost ear-to-ear. In addition to two long fangs, he possesses human teeth. The kappa clutches a fish in his arms, perhaps a recent catch upon which he plans to dine. The anonymous artist stained and polished the stag antler, giving it the appearance of a rich red-brown wood with a high sheen.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 13.6 cm. x 5 cm. x 4.5 cm.

105 Seated Kappa

NAKAJIMA KOZO (1852–1934), better known by his artistic name Takamura Kōun, was born into a family related to the daimyō of Inshu. At the age of twelve, he was apprenticed to Takamura Tōun, a sculptor of Buddhist images who later adopted him and gave him his artistic name. While trained in the art of cloisonné, Kōun later concentrated solely on sculpture in wood. He was appointed a professor at the Tokyo Art School, founded in 1889, and a member of the Imperial Art Committee. In the early twentieth century, Kōun was recognized not only as an artist, but also as a foremost critic of sculpture and the art of wood carving.

This rendition of a seated kappa reveals Kōun's sensitivity to the natural properties of wood. In place of elaborate inlays, he adopts a direct, simple style, using only a light stain to bring out the wood grain. The kappa is seated cross-legged on a rock or round pedestal, its face expressive of smug self-satisfaction. The artist no doubt intended this carving to be a satiric comment on his fellow man.

Wood.
19th/20th century.
Signed: Kōun.
Dimensions: 3.3 cm. x 2.3 cm. x 2.5 cm.
**106 Chinese Boy Holding Game Cocks**

Selecting a fine piece of ivory, this anonymous artist created a lively rendition of a Chinese boy carrying two game cocks. Clutching one cock under his left arm, he grasps the other firmly by its tail feathers, the feet of the chicken resting on the boy's outstretched foot. The boy's stance is dynamic, his glance and the folds of his entertainer's costume reinforcing the direction of compositional movement. The smooth, round head is well-modelled, the smiling face skillfully detailed. Over his baggy pants, the boy wears a long, textured vest of fur or heavy wool which is broken only by the curve of his long braid. The cocks, a symbol of valor, appear alert and ready for battle. Cock fighting was a popular pastime throughout the Far East.

Ivory.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 5 cm. x 4 cm. x 3 cm.

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**107 Fukusuke with Dog**

Fukusuke is an affable, dwarf-like character with a bald head and broad shoulders who is often displayed outside Japanese restaurants and shops, beckoning potential customers to enter. In this netsuke, made of lacquered wood, Fukusuke holds the paws of a small dog which, like his master, appears well-fed. The dog and figure are covered with colored lacquer, the gunmetal grey setting off the red and gold of the patterned robe. The artist brightened the dark red robe with traditional designs executed in gold lacquer work (makie). The small gold purse on the figure's left side pulls out, revealing the cord. Understandably, the charm and decorative beauty of this type of netsuke directly appealed to the Western eye.
Lacquered wood.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 4.8 cm. x 3.2 cm. x 3.3 cm.

108 Skull

In comparison to Frogs Ringing Gong in Skull (no. 95) or Skull Covered by Lotus (no. 96), pieces with religious overtones, this white ivory skull, signed Shōkin, is stark, realistic, and devoid of ornamentation. Fine black lines mark the anatomical divisions of the cranium, and the ivory of the crown is realistically textured. The ivory is hollowed out, making reinforcement of the fragile cord openings necessary.

It is based on precise anatomical studies which became more readily available as a result of Japan’s opening to the West. Prior to the Meiji restoration, studies of anatomy were limited primarily to the eta class of outcasts whose job it was to perform dissections, butcher animals, and undertake other menial tasks which were considered contrary to Buddhist teaching.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Shōkin.
Dimensions: 3.1 cm. x 3.8 cm. x 2.6 cm.

109 Demon Mask

In the late nineteenth century, netsuke carvers began to focus on unusual materials and techniques. Rare types of ivory became popular—hornbill ivory, for example, which comes from the casque covering the front of the skull of a helmeted hornbill, a large bird indigenous to Indonesia. Hornbill ivory has a brilliant orange-red exterior and a pale yellow interior. Westerners, in particular, appreciated its distinctive coloring and exotic origin.
In this mask *netsuke*, the artist used the natural orange-red of the hornbill to color a band of striated hair which curves across the top of the mask, framing the face. A touch of red also remains on the nose and right eyebrow. The red hair suggests Shōjō, the drunkard, a monkey-like mythical being whose long red hair is said to make a fine dye. The configuration of the face, however—it's round protruding eyes, broad nose, and open mouth with fangs and teeth—resembles Noh masks worn by legendary, demonic beings. The fierce expression is enhanced not only by the bright hue of red, but also by the contrasting, unpolished ivory which accentuates the deep carving of the eyes, nose, and mouth.

*Hornbill ivory.*
*19th century.*
*Signed:* Ono Ryōmin, with kakihan.
*Dimensions:* 4.5 cm. × 4 cm. × 1.5 cm.
*Provenance:* Henry Reiss.
*Published:* Joly and Tomei, *Japanese Art and Handicraft, the Red Cross Exhibition*, p. 45, no. 153.

**110 Noh and Kyōgen Mask Cluster**

In this construction of expressive faces, the *netsuke* artist clustered eight Noh and Kyōgen mask types, four to a side. The side illustrated includes a full-faced female called Otafuku, the epitome of the ugly wife; a grimacing demon or *oni*; a smiling man; and a *usobuki* or whistler. On the reverse, there are masks of a female ghost known as Hannya, a fat Okame, a smiling man, and another supernatural creature. The Noh or Kyōgen actor skillfully manipulates such masks to convey the expressive subtleties of a dramatic role. In this piece, the *netsuke* artist cast each mask in silver, adding light touches of gold and copper red to accent the horns, eyes, and mouths. He then composed the piece, juxtaposing the comic and demonic.

*Silver alloy.*
*19th century.*
*Signed:* Shunmyō.
*Dimensions:* 3.9 cm. × 3.7 cm. × 2.3 cm.
111 Quail and Millet

In Japan, the quail and millet are a poetic image, a symbol of autumn. Here, the plump bird delicately holds a stalk of millet in its small beak. Weighted down by the head of grain, the stalk bends, harmoniously echoing the curves of the quail’s round form. The fine patterns of the bird’s feathers are beautifully etched and stained a deep grey. The body is stained a rich yellow-brown hue. The artist subtly enhanced the piece through the use of relief. The leaves folding over the bird’s back and curling under its body are deeply cut, while the tiny wing and tail feathers rise just above the smooth, polished surface. The style of carving, stain, and polish are representative of the work of Mitsusada, an artist who was closely associated with Ohara Mitsuhiro (no. 99). This piece is notable for its aesthetic refinement and technical perfection.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Mitsusada.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. x 3.2 cm. x 2.7 cm.

112 Cicada

Kaigyokusai Masatsugu (1813–1892) was one of the great netsuke artists of the nineteenth century. He was a native of Osaka and appears to have been largely self-taught. It is said that before Kaigyokusai carved, he frequently sketched multiple views of a piece, an approach which suggests the influence of Western artists. Since he was a man of some means, he could afford superior materials, carefully selecting a choice piece of ivory, wood, amber, or whatever material he desired for a particular piece. The four Kaigyokusai pieces in the Kurstin collection (nos. 112–115) reflect this artist’s discriminating eye and his unrelenting search for perfection.

A tentative chronology of Kaigyokusai’s netsuke can be established on the basis of signature. Early in his career, he preferred the name Masatsugu, then, at about the age of twenty, he changed to Kaigyokudō, a signature which he used for approximately ten years. From thirty to fifty years of age, he signed himself Kaigyoku, and finally, after fifty, Kaigyokusai. While this is only a rough chronology, it provides a useful means of approaching the artist’s work and defining his style.

This ivory cicada, signed Masatsugu, attests to Kaigyokusai’s high level of skill at the outset of his career. Every aspect of the insect is beautifully carved, particularly the delicate, laced wings. Dark brown stain accentuates their linear patterns and enhances the three-dimensionality of the form. The artist attentively detailed the underside of the cicada’s body and its feet clinging to a small branch. According to Tys Volker, the cicada and tree branch signified “humaneness, a noble and pure aspiration.”

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Furthermore, the cicada, an insect which emerges from the chrysalis and is “reborn,” was a symbol of longevity and the afterlife. Thus, netsuke in the form of cicadas were worn specially during the Festival of the Dead (July 13–16) at which time insects of this type were not to be harmed. This cicada, an early work, foreshadows the sophistication of Kaigyokusai’s later netsuke.

Ivory.
19th century.
Signed: Masatsugu.
Dimensions: 5.8 cm. x 2.7 cm. x 2 cm.
Provenance: Charles A. Greenfield.


113 *Chrysanthemum*

The beauty of the chrysanthemum, a flower of autumn, is deeply appreciated by the Japanese. A sixteen-petaled chrysanthemum is emblazoned on a crest (mon) of the Japanese Imperial family and, as such, it has become a symbol of Japan.

In this amber example, Kaigyokusai captured the essence of the flower. The composition is asymmetrical, the individually carved petals delicately overlapping one another and converging at a point slightly off center. The artist’s technical skill is evident in his masterful handling of the amber, a friable material which is difficult to carve. Characteristically, Kaigyokusai’s thoughtful choice of material adds color and fragility to this exquisite floral sculpture. The signature, Kaigyoku, suggests that he executed the piece in the mid-nineteenth century, when he was in his thirties or forties.

Amber.
19th century.
Signed: Kaigyoku.
Dimensions: 5.8 cm. x 2.7 cm. x 2 cm.
Provenance: Charles A. Greenfield.
Published: Boger, The Traditional Arts of Japan, p. 270; Stern, The Magnificent Three, p. 112, no. 128; Stern, Birds, Beasts, Blossoms, and Bugs, p. 177, no. 116; Hurtig, Masterpieces of Netsuke Art, p. 74, no. 236.

114 Bean with Beetle Catch

Here, in a work from his later years, Kaigyokusai transformed a simple pole bean into an elegant container, perhaps intended to hold a small roll of paper and a brush, a type of netsuke known as a yatate. The piece evinces Kaigyokusai’s sensitivity to the natural beauty of wood, the only embellishment being a superb black and gold lacquer beetle which, when pressed, releases the container’s lid. Vines and leaves, carved in relief, entwine the bean, flowing gracefully around the pod in harmony with its curvilinear shape and enhancing the smooth, polished finish of the boxwood. Unlike most netsuke carvers, Kaigyokusai studied calligraphy, the art of writing; his signature and seal, as well as his skillful carving, contribute to the aesthetic refinement of this piece.

Wood and lacquer.
19th century.
Signed: Kaigyokusai, with seal.
Dimensions: 17.4 cm. × 4.1 cm. × 2.8 cm.

115 Octopus on Nut

Like the Bean with Beetle Catch (no. 114), this octopus and nut served as an attractive container (sage mono). The octopus, carved in narwhal ivory, lifts off the palm nut, permitting small objects to be stored in the hollow, gilded interior. The cord is strung through the octopus’s coiled tentacles, then attached on the inside of the nut.
Pieces of this type represent the successful integration of art and utility.

Kaigyokusai purposely employed narwhal ivory to reproduce the high sheen of an octopus's smooth, wet skin and to provide a strong contrast with the dark, textured exterior of the nut. The octopus sits on top of the nut, its tentacles curled around its body. The bright inlaid eyes enliven the sculptural form of this appealing sea creature. Despite the diversity of these four Kaigyokusai pieces (nos. 112-115), they are allied by the quality of carving, material, and sophistication of taste.

Ivory and wood.
19th century.
Signed: Kaigyokusai, with seal.
Dimensions: 6.4 cm. x 4.8 cm. x 3.4 cm.
Provenance: Ueda Reikichi.
Published: Ueda, Shumi no Netsuke, no. 99.

116 Noh Actor

Morikawa Toen (1820–1894) was a master-carver patronized not only by the daimyō of Tosa, who was at that time the magistrate of Nara, but also by the Imperial family who commissioned him to reproduce ancient wood sculpture of the Nara area. His last great work, a rendition of a deer, was exhibited at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1892 and is now in the collection of the Japanese Imperial Household. In addition to being a talented wood sculptor, he was also an accomplished actor, performing before the Imperial family in 1854.

This piece exemplifies Toen’s adept use of ittobori, or “single-knife-stroke” carving. Here, the flat strokes of the carver’s knife replicate the stiff folds of the priest’s black robe and his brown and gold hat. The angular planes of the sorrowful face, a stylized mask, are also skillfully rendered. In contrast to the rough-hewn carving in the figure, the white rosary is finely detailed. Although Sukenaga is said to have introduced ittobori into netsuke carving in the late eighteenth century, its popularity among netsuke artists was limited, the style being associated primarily with folk art (mingei). Toen, however, exploited the potential of this direct method of cutting to sculpt simple, expressive figures, Nara dolls (ningyō) and figure netsuke, such as this actor-priest.

Wood.
19th century.
117 Snail on Fungus

Little is known about the life of Suzuki Tōkoku, another reputed netsuke artist of the Meiji period. He was born in Tokyo and, like Kaigyokusai, appears to have been self-taught. Ueda Reikichi recorded the fact that Tōkoku opened a school for carvers in Tokyo in 1862. He also noted that more than one artist, probably three different carvers, signed themselves Tōkoku. Although various criteria have been proposed, there does not appear to be any reliable means of differentiating between their work.

This rendition of a snail on the top of a fungus (reishi) symbolizes longevity and displays Tōkoku’s ingenuity and skill. The underside of the fungus is finely stippled and lightly stained, the color and texture suggesting orange peel. Although carved out of the same piece of boxwood, the artist has stained the top of the fungus black in order to provide a contrast with the orange underside. The stem, also stained black, bends and twists, creating natural openings for the cord and giving added dimension to the piece.

It is not these formal properties, however, which distinguish Tōkoku’s work, but rather the artful use of inlay. Here, a snail, its head and body made of ivory and its shell of tortoise, is set into the black fungus. Upon closer examination, a tiny metal ant is also visible in the vicinity of the snail’s head. These intricate details which Tōkoku created out of various materials are a delight to the viewer, permitting him to discover gradually the subtleties of the piece.

Wood with ivory, shell, and metal inlay.
19th century.
Signed: Tōkoku; seal: Baifu.
Dimensions: 3 cm. × 4.1 cm. × 2 cm.

118 Octopus in Pot

In Japan, the octopus (tako) is known as the priest of the sea (umi bozu), its body resembling the shaven head of a priest, its tentacles wavering like a priest’s robe. This sea creature also symbolizes offspring, thus happiness, and industriousness. In addition, the meat of the octopus, often eaten raw, is considered a delicacy. Narrow earthenware jars (tsubo) are used to catch octopuses. Attracted to the pot, a dark refuge, the octopus enters, but once inside, he cannot extricate himself. The haiku poem which Tōkoku inscribed on this netsuke speaks of the octopus’s plight:

The evening moon knows
the octopus’s dream of a haven will fade.

The inscription is carved around the small
wooden pot in elegant cursive script (sōsho), a reflection of the artist’s aesthetic sophistication.

Although the jar is made of wood, Tōkoku carefully incised cord markings, giving the impression of an earthenware pot. The fragility of the piece is further enhanced by light touches of color inlay: ivory barnacles, malachite green moss, and minute white stone florets. An extraordinary ivory octopus lies entrapped in the pot, helpless, body resting on the jar’s bottom, tentacles conforming to its sides. The skin of the octopus’s body and tentacles are skillfully textured, the mouth highlighted with red, the two glowing eyes inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Tōkoku’s netsuke are distinguished by their diminutive size, intricacy, and precise execution.

Wood with ivory and stone inlay.
19th century.
Signed: Tōkoku; seal: Bairyū.
Dimensions: 3.5 cm. x 2.1 cm. x 2.2 cm.

HOTEI (Chinese: Pu-tai), one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, is easily identified by his jovial face, rotund body, and shoulder sack. According to tradition, Pu-tai was the nickname of Ch’i-tz’u (d. ca. 905), a Chinese monk who roamed the countryside, speaking incomprehensibly. In later times, he was believed to be an incarnation of Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. In later Japanese art, Hotei came to symbolize material wealth, the contents of his bag arousing the curiosity and greed of the young. Thus, he is often depicted with children gathering around him, or, as is this piece, with a child on his back.

Here, Hotei dances joyfully. Balancing on one foot as if his body were weightless, his figure appears to levitate. The piece is exquisitely sculpted in the round, every detail executed with precision. Tōkoku’s extraordinary mastery of
mosaic inlay is evident in the child’s ivory head and hands, Hotei’s green-stained ivory sash, and of course, his fan, a mosaic of white ivory, red lacquer, and blue stone, all of which complement the rich, dark patina of the wood. The expert carving and colorful detailing distinguish this piece as a superior example of Tōkoku’s work.

Wood with ivory, lacquer, and stone inlay. 
19th century. 
Signed: Tōkoku; seal: Bairyū. 
Dimensions: 4.4 cm. x 3.2 cm. x 2.8 cm.

**Bugaku Masks**

One of the most frequently performed Bugaku dances recounts the heroic tales of the Chinese prince of Ranryō (Chinese: Lan-ling). Opinions differ as to origin and meaning. According to one interpretation, the dance was created to celebrate the victories of the Prince of Ranryō who possessed a face of such exceptional beauty that, in battle, he covered it with a mask so as not to distract his soldiers. The performance of the
dance is believed to promote peace and prosperity. As the dragon on top of the mask suggests, a close connection between Ranryō-ō and the dragon king or water dragon god also exists. The dance is frequently performed to summon rain or prevent floods.

These two mask netsuke, carved in cypress (hinoki), correspond in every detail to Ryō-ō masks of the Kamakura period (1185-1333), thus reflecting Tessai’s close study of ancient masks and his ability to preserve the stylistic integrity and intricacy of the original. The Ryō-ō dancer, dressed in a richly patterned brocade robe and holding a long staff, wears a mask distinguished by prominent eyes, a long pointed nose, profuse wrinkles, and a winged dragon astride the crown. The two mask netsuke represent the two basic types of Ryō-ō masks: in the mask on the left (no. 120a), the dragon spreads his wings, the feathers forming a helmet; in the mask on the right (no. 120b), the dragon’s wings are closed, his ferocious face dominating the top of the mask. The faces of all Ryō-ō masks are painted gold, a color symbolizing imperial authority, while the dragons are colored a brilliant red and green. The delicate mouths of the mask netsuke do not move; however, they retain the distinctive shape of the “dangling jaws” of the larger Bugaku masks. Tessai’s exquisite netsuke vividly evoke in miniature the classical art of the Japanese mask carver.

Lacquered wood.
19th/20th century.
Signed: a) Tessai, with kakihan; b) Kyō hitsu saku.
Dimensions: a) 3 cm. × 2.6 cm. × 2.5 cm.; b) 3.5 cm. × 2.6 cm. × 2 cm.
121  *Dried Fish*

Here, Tessai has created a realistic representation of a dried fish in tortoise shell, brushing the scales with gold lacquer to reproduce the iridescence of a fish's skin. Whereas Miwa's *Dried Fish* (no. 20) is characterized by the strong contrast between ivory and wood, Tessai's rendition, carved out of tortoise and heightened by gold, has a shimmering translucence, suggesting the importance of the artist's choice of material in achieving a specific expressive effect. The artist's signature is written along the fish's spine near the back of its head.

- Tortoise shell.
- 19th/20th century.
- *Signed:* Tessai, with *kakihan*.
- *Dimensions:* 15.4 cm. × 3.6 cm. × 1.3 cm.

122  *Monkey Sashi*

Ozaki Sozo (1861–1911), the father of the famous novelist Ozaki Koyo, is best known by his artistic or studio name, Kokusai. He evolved an innovative style which is closely associated with the use of stag antler. Kokusai worked almost exclusively in antler, popularizing this durable and comparatively inexpensive material. Unlike ivory which offers the artist a hard, fine-grained medium, antler is usually carved near the brow or the joinings of the branches to the main stem where the bone is comparatively solid. Needless to say, the shape of these sections imposes severe limitations on the carver, who must adapt his design to the distinctive configurations and coloring of each piece of antler.¹

This monkey testifies to Kokusai's imaginative...
response to such limitations. The monkey’s head was carved close to the base, the legs and outstretched arm corresponding to the two branches of the V-shaped antler. The reticulated grooves which texture the monkey’s back were made by blood vessels which once gave life to the outer skin or velvet of the antler. Kokusai used the darker-toned antler to describe a mask around the monkey’s eyes and to shadow its arms and legs, giving the effect of a strongly modelled form.

This is an obi hasami. Although worn thrust under the obi or sash like a sashi netsuke, the obi hasami differs from the straight sashi because it has a hooked bottom which pinches the lower edge of the obi, firmly securing the netsuke. In this case, the monkey’s head and arms were visible above the obi, the small feet emerging at its lower edge. The hand of the monkey’s outstretched arm probably held a cord from which objects were suspended. The monkey’s arms—one extended to the side, the other raised to scratch his head—balance his elongated legs and heighten his perplexed expression. The result is a piece of great charm.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Signed in seal form: Koku.
Dimensions: 10.9 cm. x 6 cm. x 3 cm.

123 Mythological Animal Sashi

Kokusai favored traditional themes of Chinese origin. This piece, presumably a shishi, or perhaps a dragon, holding a ball in its mouth, is an obi hasami of stag antler. The netsuke was worn inside the obi, the curved bottom latching onto the lower edge of the obi, or sash. The distinctive color of the antler was achieved by applying a greenish stain. The definition is sharp, the dark antler accentuating the large, open mouth. The cord of the sagemono was strung either through the animal’s mouth or through the stylized legs which are curled tight against his body. Such unusual interpretations are characteristic of Kokusai’s imagination.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Signed in seal form: Koku.
Dimensions: 10.9 cm. x 1.5 cm. x 2.4 cm.

124 Shishi Sashi

In contrast to the two previous pieces by Kokusai, both obi hasami, this shishi is a straight sashi netsuke. Here, only the elegantly carved head of the mythical animal was visible, peering over the upper edge of the obi. Kokusai deeply carved the stag antler, creating a strong interplay of light and dark and enhancing the perfect symmetry of the shishi head. The animal’s mouth provides openings for the cord as does the inverted heart-shaped perforation near the lower edge of the piece.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Signed in seal form: Kokusai.
Dimensions: 12.7 cm. x 2.9 cm. x 2.5 cm.

125 Pipe Holder

In this reticulated pipe holder, a three-part fungus comprises the ornamental motif for the open fretwork of the bottom half of the piece. The graceful forms of the fungus reach upward toward a humorous shishi face whose large mouth holds a ball and provides openings through which the cord of a tobacco pouch could be strung. The top half consists of a fabulous bird flying amid
stylized clouds, again carved in open fretwork. The curvilinear designs evince the strength and confidence of Kokusai's carving and create a functional object of artistic beauty. Both the fungus (reishi) and the bird (hōō) symbolize longevity, immortality, and happiness, suggesting that the holder was also worn as a talisman.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Signed in seal form: square seal: Koku; round seal unidentified.
Dimensions: 21 cm. × 2.6 cm. × 2.7 cm.
THIS CRAB grasping a fruit in its claws may allude to the battle between the monkey and the crab. A monkey once met a crab and exchanged his persimmon-stone for a rice-cake. The monkey immediately ate the cake, while the crab, a creature with foresight, planted the stone which soon grew into a fruit-bearing tree. Since the crab could not climb, he enlisted the monkey to pick the persimmons for him. The mischievous monkey, however, devoured his fill of fruit, threw the stones at the crab, and then filled his clothes with persimmons. Cleverly, the crab inveigled the monkey to demonstrate his ability by descending head first. When the persimmons rolled out of the monkey's clothes, the crab gathered them and took refuge in his hole. The story continues, the crab always emerging as the victor over the short-sighted, impudent simian.

Kokusai endlessly played on the form of the character koku, which comprises the first part of his artistic name. Almost invariably, the form of the character can be detected, ingeniously hidden within the design of his netsuke. In this case, the
entire piece constitutes the artist’s signature, 
Koku, leaving no doubt as to correct attribution.

Stag antler.
19th century.
Unsigned.
Dimensions: 3.3 cm. x 4.2 cm. x 1.3 cm.
Note: 1. Tys Volker, The Animal in Far Eastern Art, p. 36.

127 Badger

The art of netsuke carving has been explored by a small number of Westerners, including Michael Birch, an English artist who, like Kokusai, has a predilection for stag antler. He carved this charming badger (tanuki; see also no. 50) out of the coronet of a stag antler. Before the stag sheds his antlers, a circular ridge of new bone with a crenulated edge grows at the base of the antlers to constrict the bloodvessels. Here, the coronet regally enfolds the small creature cut from its interior. Mr. Birch employed black lacquer to describe the markings of the badger’s head. In addition, he added to the appeal of the piece by carving a tiny ojime, or slide fastener, to match. While such pieces are obviously not meant to be worn, they reflect the enthusiastic reception which this art form, undervalued in Japan, received in the Western hemisphere.

Stag antler.
20th century.
Signed with initials: M.B.
Dimensions: 2.6 cm. x 4.4 cm. x 4 cm.

128 Boy Holding a Toy Daruma

Kokeisai Sanshō (1871–1936), who was born in Osaka and apprenticed to the netsuke carver
Dōshō (1828–1885; see Fig. 2, p. 14), worked primarily in wood, carving relatively large figures with expressive, often humorous, faces. Here, Sanshō captured the Japanese child’s delight in the Daruma doll. The boy looks upward, laughing, while the diminutive Daruma scowls, his face made of ivory inlay. Sanshō’s skillful use of color inlay is evident in the figure of the boy: his green-stained ivory collar, the pale pink stone squares patterning his pants, and the multicolored fan of tortoise shell and mother-of-pearl which hangs from the child’s waist. The artist expertly carved the figure, particularly the rhythmic folds of the drapery, and then polished it. Understandably, Sanshō is famous for such genre pieces.

Wood.
19th/20th century.
Signed: Sanshō, with kakihan.
Dimensions: 6.9 cm. × 2.6 cm. × 2.2 cm.
Provenance: Seymour Trower.

129 Mitsume Kozō

Bakemono—goblins or apparitions—are semi-human creatures endowed with legs and clawed feet. One of the most popular is Mitsume Kozō, the “three-eyed priest,” a frightful figure with a hairy face and a third eye staring out from the center of his forehead.

Here, poised on one leg, Mitsume dances, raising a clawed foot and two clawed hands in the air. His round hat hangs over his shoulders, exposing his pointed head and elfish ears, downturned mouth, long hairy beard, and three haunting green eyes. “Beware of fire,” a message inscribed on this type of tobacco pouch, reinforces the demonic creature’s evil intent.

This portrait is a fine example of Sanshō’s art. The exaggerated face, naturalistic rendering of the robe, and the light orange-brown stain on boxwood, as well as the light touches of inlay, are all characteristic of his style.

Wood.
19th/20th century.
Signed: Sanshō.
Dimensions: 6.3 cm. × 2.6 cm. × 2.9 cm.
Provenance: Seymour Trower.
Published: Joly, The Seymour Trower Collection, pl. 9, no. 247.
Note: 1. According to Ueda, “pouches made of a
special material similar to leather popularly known as kappa enjoy a wide distribution. The trademark for kappa, ‘watch out for fire,’ is known everywhere.”


130 Comic Mask

Although the artist’s mark (kakihan) on this mask netsuke has yet to be identified, the subject matter and style of the piece suggest Sanshō or one of his immediate followers. Sanshō had a strong predilection for exaggerated comic faces of this type. Furthermore, the light orange hue of the stain and strong carving are suggestive of his work (Cf. nos. 128, 129). While the mask bears a general resemblance to comic Kyōgen masks, it does not appear to be an accurate copy of a theatrical mask, but rather a humorous invention of the carver’s imagination.

Wood.
19th/20th century.
Signed: unidentified kakihan.
Dimensions: 3.7 cm. x 3.3 cm. x 2.6 cm.

131 Basket of Clams

This basket of clams carved by the Osaka artist Miyagi Chokusai (b. 1877) reflects the twentieth century artist’s increasing preoccupation with pure realism. Using a single piece of boxwood, Chokusai attentively carved and stained each element of the composition: the weave of the basket, its lashed rim, the dull interior, the polished exterior, even the holes in the bottom of the basket painstakingly described. Likewise, the stain of the clams varies from black to tan to white, these natural colors contributing to the simplicity and beauty of the piece. This is a rare example of Chokusai’s work in wood.

Wood.
19th/20th century.
Signed: Chokusai.
Dimensions: 4.2 cm. x 4 cm. x 1.4 cm.

132 Spider in Cage

Here, the technical virtuosity of the netsuke carver reaches a new height. While earlier artists invented ingenious techniques, such as
ukibori (nos. 36, 37, 66) or inlay (nos. 20, 67), later artists sought to possess and tame nature through the precision of their carving, often working on an extremely reduced scale. Twentieth century artists, like Gyokusō (1879–1942) and Gyokusō (no. 133), also exhibit a fascination with natural images which embody the fleeting quality of beauty, life, and art.

In this piece, a spider is trapped within a small cage. A decorative cord with tassels, wrapped around the cage, ends in an ornamental bow on top of the finely executed enclosure. The domesticated spider climbs in the corner, its form barely visible through the narrow bars. Precisely how the artist carved the tiny insect within the intricate cage out of a single piece of wood is not known. Perhaps he simply imagined it there.

Wood.
Early 20th century.

Signed: Gyokusō, with seal.
Dimensions: 3.2 cm. × 3.2 cm. × 2.4 cm.

133 Plum Blossom and Bud

Sōko Morita (1879–1942) belonged to the Sō school of netsuke carvers founded by Josō (1855–1910). Sōko studied under Josō's guidance for fourteen years during which time he befriended Gyokusō (no. 132), also a Josō apprentice. The two became lifelong associates. Sōko Morita had many pupils and is generally recognized as the last great teacher of the traditional art of netsuke carving. Gyokusō's son, Sōsui (1911–1972), was among Sōko's most talented pupils; upon his death in 1972, the distinguished lineage of Sō school carvers came to an end.

Sōko's floral subjects included cherry, plum, and tea blossoms. This plum blossom and bud, delicately carved in ivory, is exquisite. The five scalloped petals of the flower form an irregular shell containing a multitude of fine, intertwined stamens. The simplicity of the solid exterior subtly contrasts with the intricacy of its shadowed interior.

The fragility of this piece implies that it was not created for daily use, but rather as a work of art. This netsuke is divorced from function, thus disdain for it as a fashion accessory is no longer a valid argument against its appreciation as sculpture. By Sōko's time, netsuke were sculpture to be admired primarily for their beauty and artistic value.

Ivory.
Early 20th century.
Signed: Sōko.
Dimensions: 3 cm. × 4 cm. × 1.5 cm.
A Glossary of Japanese Terms

akagane: copper alloy which, when “pickled” by chemical means, turns copper-red.

daimyō: feudal lord.

hako netsuke: netsuke in the form of a covered box.

himotoshi: openings or channels through which a cord is strung.

hinoki: Japanese cypress tree, cypress wood.

horimono: carved or engraved object.

ichii: yew tree, yew wood.

inrō: medicine or seal case of multiple compartments, attached by a cord to a netsuke.

ittobori: single-knife stroke carving, creates flat angular planes.

kagamibuta: type of netsuke; metal disk set into a shallow, round bowl which is usually made of ivory, metal, or wood.

kakihan: artist's mark or stylized signature.

kanamono: ornamental metal fitting.

kinchaku: purse or money pouch.

kiseru: tobacco pipe.

makie: gold lacquer work.

manju: type of netsuke in the shape of a flat, round New Year's rice-cake or bun.

netsuke: small sculptural object, or toggle, usually worn to balance objects hung from the sash of the kimono.

obi: sash or belt of the kimono.

obi hasami: type of elongated netsuke worn inside the obi which, unlike the straight sashi netsuke, has a hooked bottom, the hook pinching the lower edge of the obi.

ojime: bead-like slide fastener.

sagemono: hanging object, object suspended from the obi.

samurai: warrior.

sashi: type of elongated netsuke thrust inside the obi.

shibuichi: copper and silver alloy which, when “pickled” by chemical means, turns a dark gray.

tsuge: box tree, boxwood.

umimatsu: sea coral or sea pine, ranging in color from deep pink to brown to jet black.

ukibori: relief effect similar in appearance to embossing.

yatate: portable container for writing implements.
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Real and Imaginary Beings

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