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Telling Toggles

NETSUKE

In Context

Christine L. Paglia

TELLING TOGGLES: NETSUKE IN CONTEXT
This brochure accompanies an exhibition of the same name
at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art
from April 11 through June 9, 2002

COVER ILLUSTRATION
Child with Mask and Drum (Catalog 34)

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TELLING TOGGLES
NETSUKE IN CONTEXT

Christine L. Paglia

Bowdoin College Museum of Art
2002

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INTRODUCTION

Telling Toggles has been organized by Christine Paglia, Bowdoin Class of 2000, the tenth Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Curatorial Intern at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Since 1992 this enlightened program has furthered the active integration of the Museum's collection into the teaching program of the college. Like her predecessors, Christine has worked energetically to bring the multi-faceted collections to the attention of faculty across all the disciplines and has been instrumental in making hundreds of works which were not currently on view available to classes ranging from Chemistry to Classics.

Mellon Interns are invited to take advantage of their intimate familiarity with the collections by organizing an exhibition which highlights a theme or period of particular interest to them. Christine chose to bring to light the Museum's collection of nearly 100 netsuke, only a few of which are normally on view at any given time. I am grateful for her meticulous research which situates these appealing miniature sculptures in both an aesthetic and an instructive cultural context. I would also like to reiterate her thanks to Professor Clifton C. Olds, who so generously shared his knowledge of Asian art forms, contexts and traditions, as well as to Keiko Thayer for the generous loan of the kimono allowing us to demonstrate the netsuke's exact location and function.

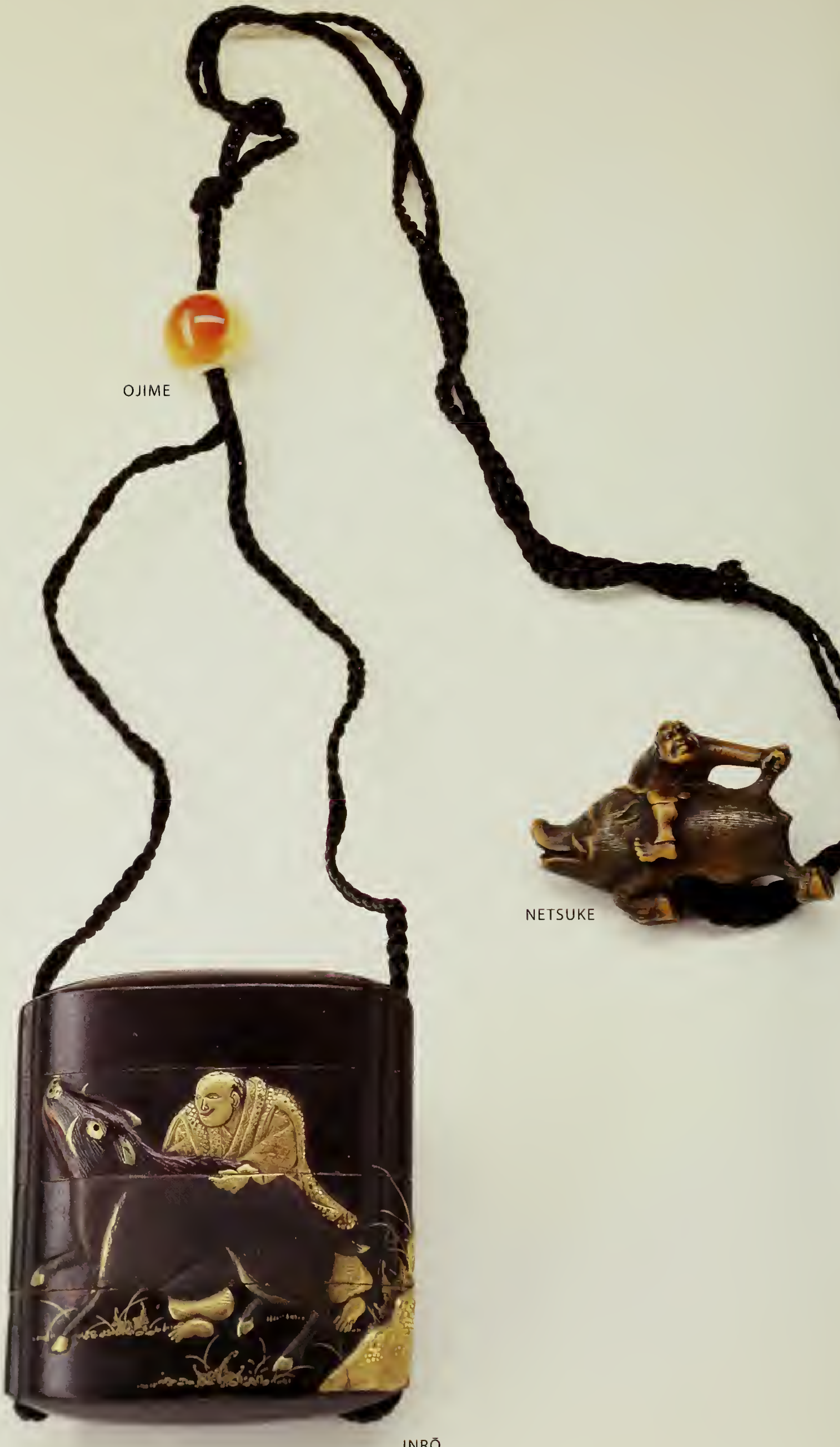
Katy Kline
Director

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to recognize a number of individuals whose time, encouragement, and expertise have been instrumental to the realization of this exhibition, and what has been an extremely rewarding internship. I am very appreciative of the continual guidance and insightful critique of the director of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Katy Kline, and curator Alison Ferris. Special thanks to the Museum staff, Suzanne K. Bergeron, Patricia L. Jenks, Laura J. Latman, Caitlin M. Nelson, Liza Nelson, José L. Ribas, and Victoria B. Wilson for their support, assistance, and friendship. I sincerely thank Clifton C. Olds for his guidance on matters of Japanese art and culture, as well as Joe Earle, David P. Becker for his helpful advice and support, and especially Keiko Thayer for agreeing to lend from her private collection for the exhibition. This publication would not have been possible without the editing of Lucie G. Teegarden, the photography of Dennis Griggs, and the design of Mahan Graphics, and for their work I am most grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for the generous financial support of this exhibition and internship.

Christine L. Paglia, '00
Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Intern


OJIME
NETSUKE
INRŌ

A netsuke is a miniature work of sculpture designed as a toggle and counterweight to attach small objects and containers to the sash of traditional Japanese clothing. Netsuke flourished as an art form during the Edo period (1603–1868) in Japan. With their related accoutrements, netsuke served the same purpose as pockets in Western dress. Growing increasingly intricate and refined over the course of the Edo, they became precious art objects that crossed aesthetics with utility. Though small, netsuke tell fascinating tales of history, folklore, literature, and everyday life; collectively, they portray the ideas and beliefs of the Japanese people prior to the emergence of modern Japan. In a period defined both by peace and a repressive military government, netsuke proliferated as unobtrusive symbols of social change.

Netsuke are most commonly carved in the round of ivory or wood, and measure between one and one-half and six inches at their broadest. They were worn with the *kosode* (which later came to be called the *kimono*), a long, wide-sleeved robe secured with the *obi*, or sash. Though the kosode was stylistically similar across social classes, male and female styles differed significantly, and only specific groups wore netsuke with the kosode. The woman's kosode was marked by a very wide obi tied in elaborate knots, that itself could cost more than the robe (cat. 86). The obi's great width made sitting difficult, but did allow for storage of small items underneath. The man's kosode (cat. 1) sometimes incorporated several components, and had a narrow sash tied low on the waist; the costume as a whole lacked storage capacities. In response, small pouches, purses, and carrying cases were developed to be attached to the obi by a silk cord. Different types were created to carry specific items: a multi-tiered case called an *inrō*, the *dōran* (tobacco pouch), *kiseru-zutsu* (pipe case), and *kinchaku* (money pouch). The inrō (cat. 2) emerged as one of the most prominent of the various types of *sagemono* ("things that are suspended from the sash"), thought to have "commenced existence as a carrying case for personal seals essential to one's legality in society and later . . . used as a portable small medicine case."[1] A sagemono incorporates two connecting holes forming a channel called the *himotōshi*, through which a silk cord is threaded to attach the sagemono to the obi. After they feed out of the container the two ends of the cord then converge at the *ojime*, a small tightening bead (cat. 2, 54, 66); they are then tucked under the obi from the bottom. The cords emerge over the top of the obi and feed through the netsuke's own himotōshi, knotting together at the end. The netsuke then rests at the top of the obi, acting as a toggle and counterweight that prevents the sagemono from falling to the ground.

Only certain members of Edo-period society collected and wore netsuke. The typical netsuke owner was a prosperous male merchant living in an urban area. Peasants wore simple, rustic netsuke, but would not have worn the artistic incarnations that rose as status symbols. Women generally lacked the social freedom that might necessitate carrying sagemono on a daily basis, and the storage capacities of a woman's kosode also made netsuke unnecessary. The government forbade samurai to smoke tobacco, which was a major impetus for the production of netsuke and sagemono, and samurai thus had little call for either accoutrement.

Inrō Showing Kintarō Fighting a Wild Boar

Nitta no Shiro Defeating a Wild Boar

The netsuke, ojime, and inrō with cord would have been assembled together on occasion due to their common themes.
Catalog 2, 54

The rise of netsuke was not solely due to a lack of pockets. The intelligent designs and often amazing intricacy achieved by Japanese netsuke makers surpassed the functional purpose of the toggles. Their status as art objects set them apart from otherwise comparable devices worn in other Asian and African cultures, most notably in China. Beginning as simple toggles created with a functional purpose in mind, netsuke evolved to become luxury items in Edo-period Japan. "Netsuke were never, strictly speaking, necessary or practical: they should be viewed primarily as fashion accessories and cultural artifacts, rather than mere mechanical toggles that somehow transmuted into 'works of art'," states Joe Earle (in the recent exhibition catalogue from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Earle points out that sagemono could just as easily have been attached by tying the silk cords around the sash while hiding the knot behind.[2] Hence, while netsuke were useful and practical, they were not absolutely necessary.

The museum has replaced costume as the common venue for netsuke display, providing at best an artificial re-creation of the original experience of netsuke. The contextual difference inherent to viewing netsuke outside of the time and place for which they were created, in a public institution rather than an intimate domestic setting, alters the experience of contemporary viewers, as does our limited ability to appreciate their tactility. With these challenges in mind, this exhibition aims to reendow netsuke with their rich historical and cultural significance.

HISTORY, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE

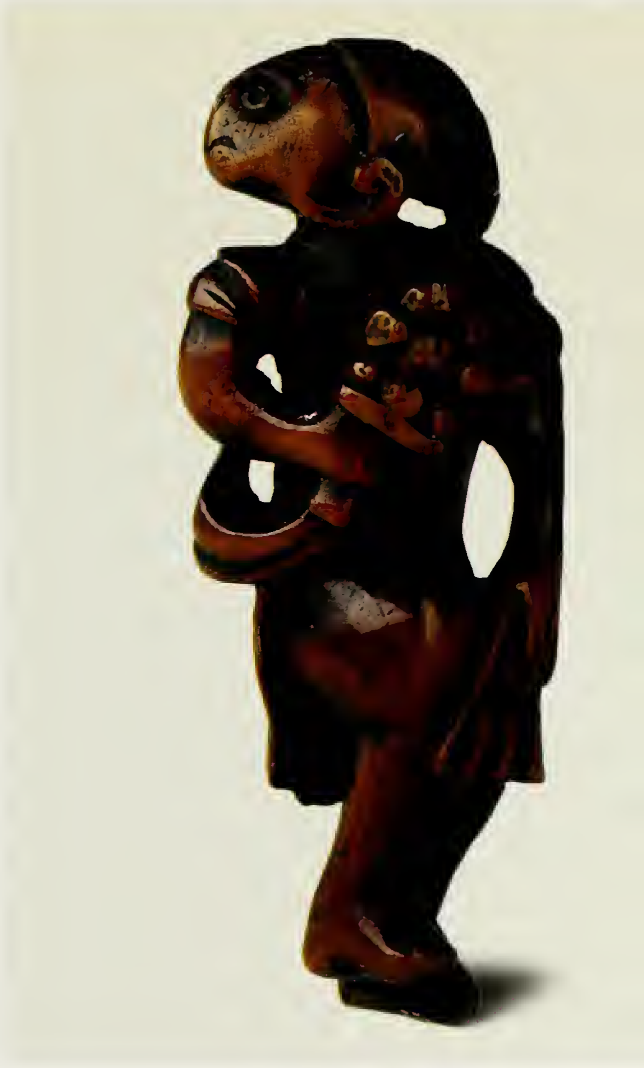
At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) rose to power as the *shōgun*, the supreme military ruler of Japan, ending a century of unrest and civil war during which various samurai families feuded for control of the country. Tokugawa moved the capital to Edo (modern-day Tokyo), beginning what came to be called the Edo period (1603–1868), the longest era of peace and prosperity in Japanese history. Isolationism (*sakoku*) and Confucianism characterized the rigid, repressive governance of the Tokugawa shogunate. Sakoku arose from the desire to abolish Christianity from the country; a violent inquisition to drive out the influence of Catholic missionaries from Spain and Portugal ensued, though paradoxically, Protestant Dutch traders were permitted at the same time to conduct business in the port city of Nagasaki. Consequently, the Dutch (referred to generically as "foreigners") became a popular subject for netsuke makers (cat. 28, 29). China's shared adherence to Confucianism made that country a prominent exception to sakoku, assuring the inspiration and influence of Chinese models for netsuke makers.

Confucianism justified the maintenance of the hierarchy of Edo-period society that consisted of (in descending order) the samurai, farmer, craftsman/artisan, and merchant. The shogunate issued countless edicts and decrees that defined specific standards for each segment of society encompassing religion, clothing, behavior, and appearance. The hierarchical order stemmed from (1) the noble bloodlines of the samurai and their social function as warriors; (2) the farmers' production of rice (which was at times used as currency); (3) the production of utilitarian objects by craftspeople; and (4) the perception of merchants as social parasites who did little for the common good. The centuries of peace and isolation during the Edo period set the stage for redefinitions of social roles, redistribution of wealth, and shifts in cultural influence. Many samurai became unemployed; while a few retained positions of power, others took up new careers, and still others banded together in groups of violent outlaws. The class to experience the most significant changes was the *chōnin* class of urban dwellers, primarily composed of merchants. Many experienced unprecedented prosperity, often due to high interest loans to struggling samurai. The shogunate strictly regulated the display of wealth amidst chōnin to uphold the caste system: ". . . none of their wealth could buy them status, and the system placed severe limits on the ways in which they could express themselves or spend their money. Ostentation—anything that gave the appearance of setting them above their superiors—was strictly forbidden."[3] As small, inconspicuous luxury items that were skillfully crafted from lavish materials, netsuke and sagemono provided the perfect outlet for the subtle outward display of wealth among chōnin.

Even with increasing prosperity, chōnin could never achieve social and political power, though they did become influential patrons and consumers of art in what became a substantive popular culture in Japan, called the *Ukiyo*, or Floating World. Based originally on a Buddhist concept, Ukiyo emerged as a way of life that focused on the appreciation of transient pleasures, encompassing the arts, theater, storytelling, music, and the world of geisha and prostitutes. The famous *Ukiyo Monogatari* (Tales of the Floating World, c. 1691) by Asai Ryoi describes its essence as ". . . living for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves, singing songs, drinking wine and diverting ourselves just in floating . . . refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current. . . ."[4] Ukiyo emphasized a sense of style that could be carefully learned, but not bought or inherited. Likewise, netsuke required learning for full appreciation, and held the power to subtly ascribe interests and attributes to the wearer through subject matter; for example, an obscure or learned literary reference would reflect the owner's sophistication. As a popular art form that appealed to both common and elite segments of urban society, netsuke occupied an unusual status: "They were 'popular' items, to be sure, but not in the conventional sense. Theirs was a kind of learned popularity that appealed, we may speculate, to the escapist instincts of a small segment of . . . the elite."[5]

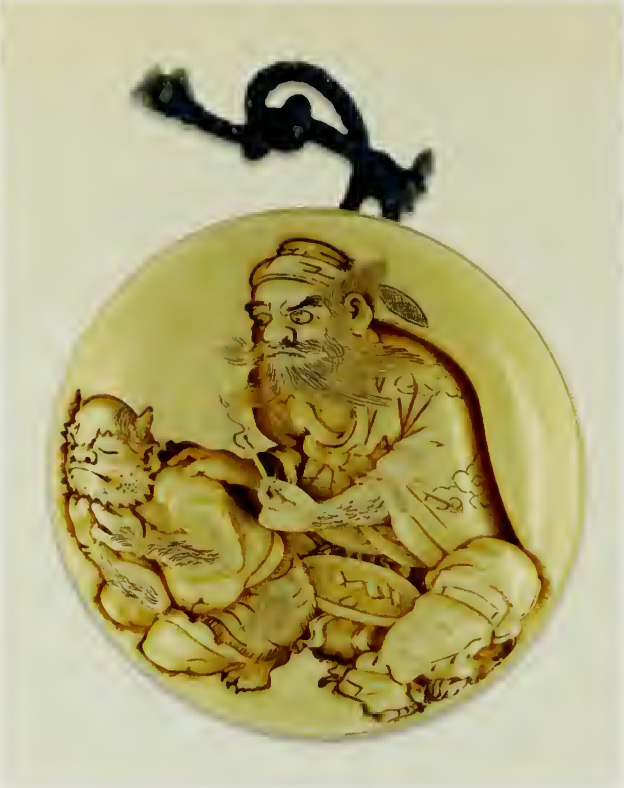
Tengu Dancing

Tengu are forest dwellers of Japanese folklore with bird-like beaks. Catalog 43



TYPES OF NETSUKE

Several formal variations of netsuke arose, all functioning similarly as toggles. Among the earliest are *sashi*, slender, elongated forms that are strong and functional as they rest perpendicular to the obi. Sashi measure between 5 and 7 inches in length, and are usually made of bone, wood, bamboo, or ivory. While the exhibition does not include any netsuke strictly defined as sashi, the *Tengu Dancing* (cat. 43) is reminiscent of a sashi in size and form.



Shōki Subduing a Demon (Oni), a manjū netsuke. Catalog 53

Manjū netsuke (cat. 53, 55, 56) developed later than sashi, and share the same name as the Japanese cakes that they resemble. Lacking protrusions, they are highly functional. The most common manjū is an ivory disc about two-and-one-half inches in diameter and half an inch thick that can be concave, convex, or flat on one or both sides. Manjū are also made of wood, lacquer, and metal, and the shape sometimes varies to oval and rectangular forms. Some are plain and unadorned, while others, like *Shōki Subduing a Demon*, are intricately carved.

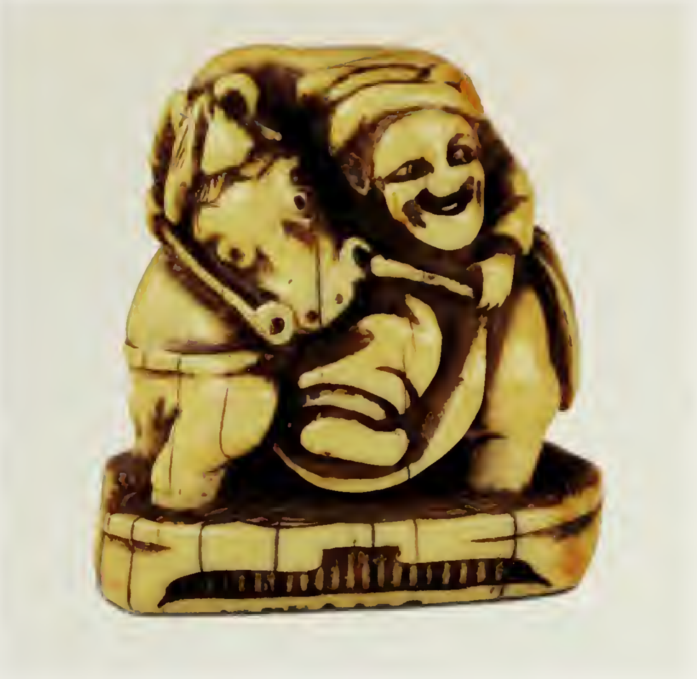
Katabori, or figural netsuke, are the most widely produced and well-known, and represent the majority of netsuke in this exhibition. Katabori emerged later than sashi and manjū and are easily identified, though greatly varied. "Katabori may be realistically or imaginatively carved, may be large or small, may be of any one of a dozen or more materials, may represent animate or inanimate objects; but essentially they are miniature reproductions of physical forms, either natural . . . or artifical. . . ."[6] Most katabori do not exceed two to three inches at their widest point, and being carved in the round, they often encompass minute and charming details. For example, the subject's gleeful expression becomes visible upon rotating the *Child with Mask and Drum* (cat. 34), and the *Clam Shell/ Sleeping Bird* (cat. 6) demonstrates the ingenuity of carving in the round.

Some netsuke makers further extended practicality and utility as they concealed small knives, seals, sundials, abacuses, lighters, and ashtrays in what were sometimes called "trick netsuke." The added functions hark back to early netsuke being made from Chinese seals that were used with red ink as signatures on letters, writings, and prints in China and Japan. Himotōshi would be drilled through seals so that they functioned as netsuke as well. The netsuke *Two Foreign Merchants with Horse* (cat. 28) is a Japanese seal with remnants of red ink, displaying noticeable wear, with surface smoothness created from years of handling that subtly alters the details. The owner could have conveniently carried writing implements and supplies in an inrō with the netsuke to sign letters and documents.

MATERIALS

The first netsuke were made from naturally found objects such as small gourds or pieces of wood or shell with himotōshi drilled through them. The etymology of the word *netsuke* has been connected to these early materials: "It is generally thought that the earliest sash toggles were pieces of root wood given the literal meaning of the term netsuke (ne = root, tsuke = attach, fix). . . ."[7] Essentially any material that could be worked to an appropriate size and shape and sufficiently resist the friction of everyday wear could be, and was, acceptably used by netsuke makers. This indiscriminate attitude was linked to the general scarcity of resources and to the self-sufficiency that resulted from international isolation. Netsuke were made from such woods as boxwood, cypress, conifer, and cherry, as well as from horn, bone, tiger and bear teeth, stag antler, amber, jade, coral, porcelain, lacquer, metal, glass, peach pits, hollowed walnut shells, seeds, and even coconut shells. The favoring of natural materials stems from Shinto, the native Japanese religion, which sanctifies nature and natural products (though Chinese works demonstrate the same tendency).

While in use, a netsuke was exposed to significant friction from rubbing against the garment of the owner and from the hands of connoisseurs. Many carvers chose materials (like ivory and boxwood) that were hard enough to resist wear that would alter the original design, whereas others strategically planned for erosion from the outset. For example, "Yoshimura Shuzan made netsuke of old *hinoki* wood decorated with colors. When the colors fall off by the rubbing of the hand, and the wood is worn smooth and roundish, the pieces look all the more exquisite and fascinating. There were not a few netsuke makers who purposely used such comparatively soft material . . . anticipating the effect to be produced by natural wear."[8] One of the older netsuke in the Bowdoin collection, *Demon Dancing* (cat. 44), appears to be made of softwood like hinoki (cypress) and exhibits this kind of wear.



Two Foreign Merchants with Horse, netsuke made from signature stamp (on bottom); the second merchant is visible from the other side. Catalog 28

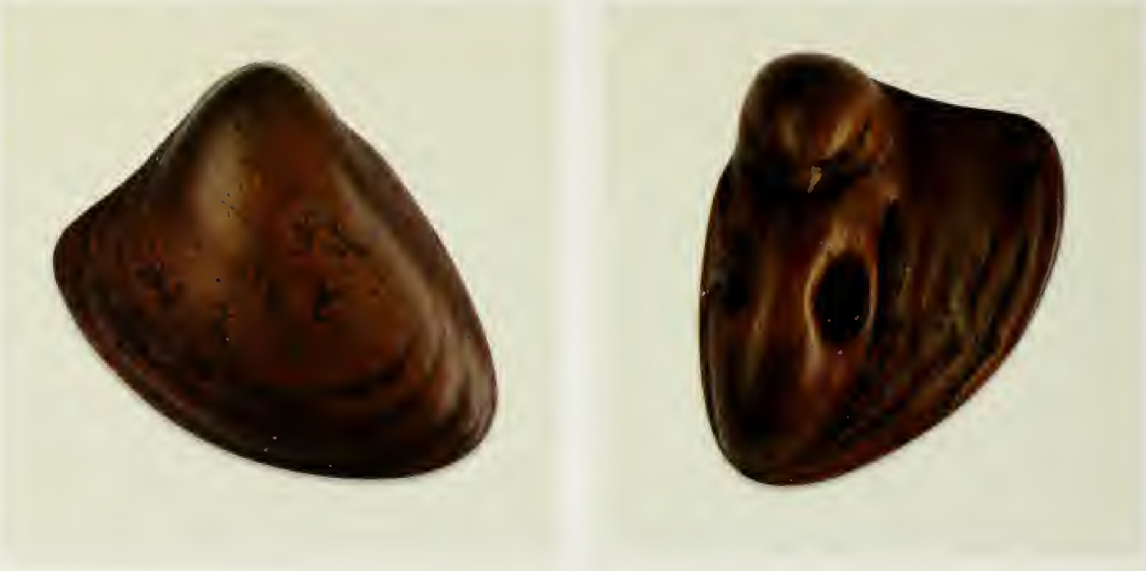
Valued for its durability and luxuriousness, ivory became one of the most popular materials among netsuke carvers and collectors. The scarcity of ivory presented a challenge to netsuke makers, as it is not native to Japan. Ivory and bone were taken from the tusks of elephants, walrus, narwhal, and sperm whale, and were also in demand for the production of the *samisen,* a popular stringed instrument (cat. 48, 49 show demons playing the samisen). It was frequently the case that the pyramidal ends of the tusks rejected by samisen makers were all that was available to netsuke carvers, who then had to creatively grapple with inherent limitations of size and shape. One of the smallest netsuke in the exhibition, a diminutive ivory depicting two frogs belly-to-belly, could have easily been carved from the end of a tusk (cat. 10).

FORMAL AND TECHNICAL CONCERNS

The absence of an academic tradition gave netsuke carvers a degree of creative freedom; originality was valued as much as technical skill, and either could establish a carver's career. The functionality of netsuke heightened the importance of design, and with that prominence came certain constraints. A netsuke had to be large enough to serve as a counterweight, but small enough not to be burdensome. Designs ideally avoided protruding parts that might catch on the fabric of the garment or be susceptible to breakage. A carver had to intelligently incorporate the himotōshi, which was often thoughtfully placed so the netsuke would rest at an appropriate angle. The himotōshi also had to be unobtrusive, and would often be integrated into the depiction of the subject itself, for example, within the openings between a rabbit's legs. Finally, the best carvers created netsuke that could stand upright on their own, so they could be displayed both on and off the cord.

The seemingly impossible intricacy of many netsuke required days to months of patient, painstaking work that presented continual challenges of eyestrain and physical tension. Some particularly wondrous examples of intricacy depict individual hairs or feathers of animals, as in *Monkey with Turtle* (cat. 12). However, an intricate carving style was not the only approach to making netsuke, and admittedly could not be applied well to some materials. One distinctive technique called "one-stroke carving" involved a sketch-like idiom of shallow, abbreviated carving, suggesting details, rather than showing every hair or feather (cat. 82). "The effect is rather rustic, as though someone had casually whittled a small figure out of a piece of soft wood that happened to be lying close . . . this effect was carefully contrived, and some outstanding carvers made netsuke in this style."[9] The tactility of netsuke was one of their most important attributes; being suspended at hand-level, a pleasingly shaped netsuke could be repetitively and meditatively fondled. The visually simple designs of some netsuke that verged on abstraction seem to reflect the carver's awareness of tactile appeal. The realistically carved *Chestnut* (cat. 26), and the clever *Clam Shell/ Sleeping Bird* (cat. 6), for example, are designs that address tactile as much as visual engagement.

Evidence suggests that some carvers worked from woodblock illustrations in books intended to instruct amateur painters or educate about topics like Chinese deities and folklore.[10] While this sort of image-borrowing may detract from the originality of netsuke, carvers still grappled with the challenge of translating a two-dimensional image to a handheld, functional, three-dimensional object. For artists who created new designs, stylistic and thematic variation was encouraged and embraced, further enriching the genre.

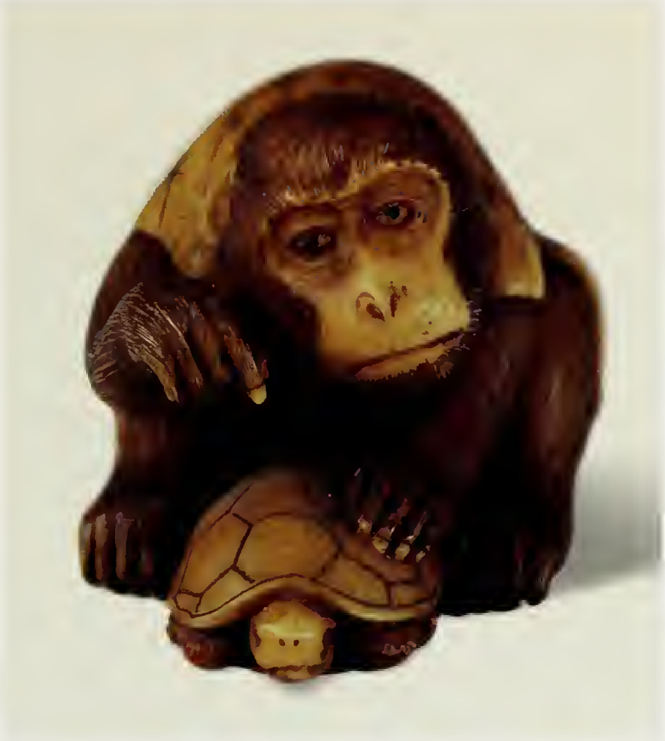


Clam Shell/ Sleeping Bird, shown here on both sides. Catalog 6

THE SUBJECTS OF NETSUKE

The variety in netsuke subject matter rivals the great array of materials used to make them. Common subjects are drawn from the legends, myths, folklore, and history of China and Japan; Buddhist, Shinto, and Taoist themes; *Nōh* and *Kabuki* theater traditions; as well as literature, nature, and everyday life. The exhibition represents many of these themes. An understanding of subject matter can lead to subtle and valuable insights into the Japanese psyche and the predominant beliefs and cultural influences of the Edo period. A sampling of common subjects represented in the exhibition follows.

Real and mythical animals constitute a broad category of popular subjects, and overlap with the series of zodiacal animals. Mythical animals include Japanese unicorns called *kirin*, and the *shishi*, a mythical lion of Chinese origin (cat. 69). The fox (cat. 18, 19) and badger (cat. 20) are prevalent in netsuke; both are associated with trickery, danger, and deceit, and are believed to possess the power to change forms. The fox and monkey are messengers of Shinto deities, and the monkey is associated with longevity, along with the crane and tortoise (cat. 11–15, 93). The carp often symbolizes love, as the emotion and fish share the same word (*koi*) in Japanese, and many artists would exploit the pun.



Monkey with Turtle
Catalog 12

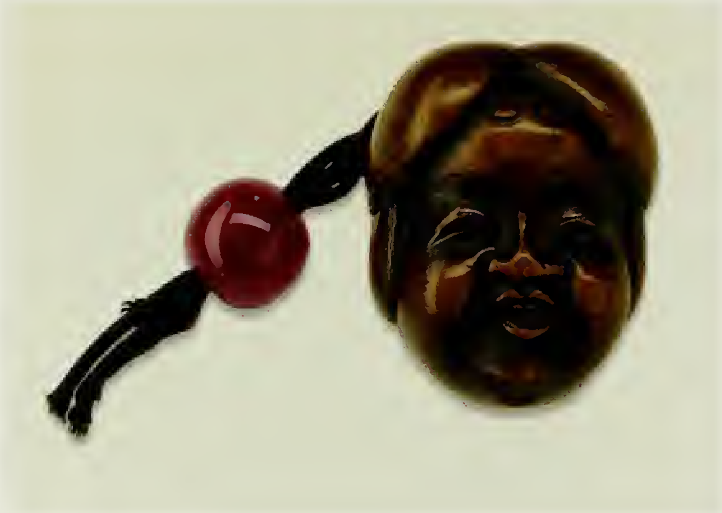
Oni (demons) are frequently depicted with horns and sharp teeth, compact muscular bodies, and tight tiger skin pants (cat. 44–49). Oni are often partnered with their nemesis, *Shōki the Demon Queller* (cat. 51–53), a legendary figure derived from a dream of the Chinese Emperor Minghuang (8th century A.D.). Reportedly *Zhongkui*, or *Shōki*, as he is called in Japan, appeared to the emperor in a dream, explaining that in life he was a poor student who failed his state exams. After he killed himself, his funeral was so kind and moving that Shōki set forth in gratitude to quell and banish demons. Oni usually are not dangerous but are reputed to steal things and hide them, accounting for misplaced objects. Some are more treacherously described as the attendants of *Emma-Ō*, the judge of Hell. On New Year's Day people throw white beans to scare away oni, as depicted in *Demons (Oni) Coming Out of Box* (cat. 45).

Fukurokuju is one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune of Japanese folklore, associated with good fortune and longevity. Often accompanied by a crane, long-tailed tortoise, deer, staff, scroll, or sacred gem, his "lofty bald head makes him an attractive bait for merriment with the netsuke carvers,"[11] as in the *Scene of Phallic Worship* (cat. 61) in which his tall head is the object of adoration.

Hotei is an obese man with a bag full of gifts, often surrounded by children (cat. 62, 63). Over the years his personage has merged with that of *Miroku*, or *Maitreya*, the Buddha of the Future.

Rakan, emaciated male figures depicted in seated meditative poses "are Buddhist saints who have completely freed themselves of all earthly desires and possessions"[12] (cat. 39).

Sennin are historical personalities of Chinese origin who possess magical and supernatural powers. They play ". . . a part in the mystic scenes of Buddhism and Taoism and are described as beings who enjoy rest . . . in the solitude of mountains for a hundred thousand years, after the lapse of which time they again enter the circle of transmigration."[13] *Gama Sennin*, identified by the three-legged toad that sits atop his shoulder, is capable of exhaling his spirit to roam away from his lifeless body; at one point his spirit inhabited the body of the toad (cat. 59, 60). *Kinkō Sennin* rides a carp with a scroll in his hands, having emerged from beneath the sea following an invitation from the King of the Fishes (cat. 57, 58).



Mask of Okame,
with cord and ojime
Catalog 66

Mask netsuke (cat. 64–72) were modeled after life-size versions used in the *Nōh* and *Kabuki* theater, as well as celebratory masks. Humans, deities, and demons are all included, sometimes with multiple masks in a single netsuke (cat. 70–72). The *Mask of Okame* (cat. 66) depicts the Shinto goddess of fun and folly, recognizable by her chubby cheeks, cheerful smile, and the two spots on her forehead. Her fame comes from luring *Amaterasu*, the Sun Goddess, out of the seclusion of a cave to which the goddess retreated after being violated; Okame performed a sultry dance outside the cave that evoked laughter among the other gods, in turn bringing Amaterasu out of the cave with curiosity. In another of her exploits, Okame attempted to seduce *Raiden*, the god of Thunder (identifiable by his drums) by inviting him to join her in a bath (cat. 41).

Kintarō is an orphan child of Japanese folklore with superhuman powers who lives in the forests and mountains with his foster mother (cat. 2, 38). "Deploying his prodigious strength, Kintarō fought wild animals . . . and then made friends with them. With a huge axe, his attribute, he felled entire trees to provide firewood for his foster-mother."[14]

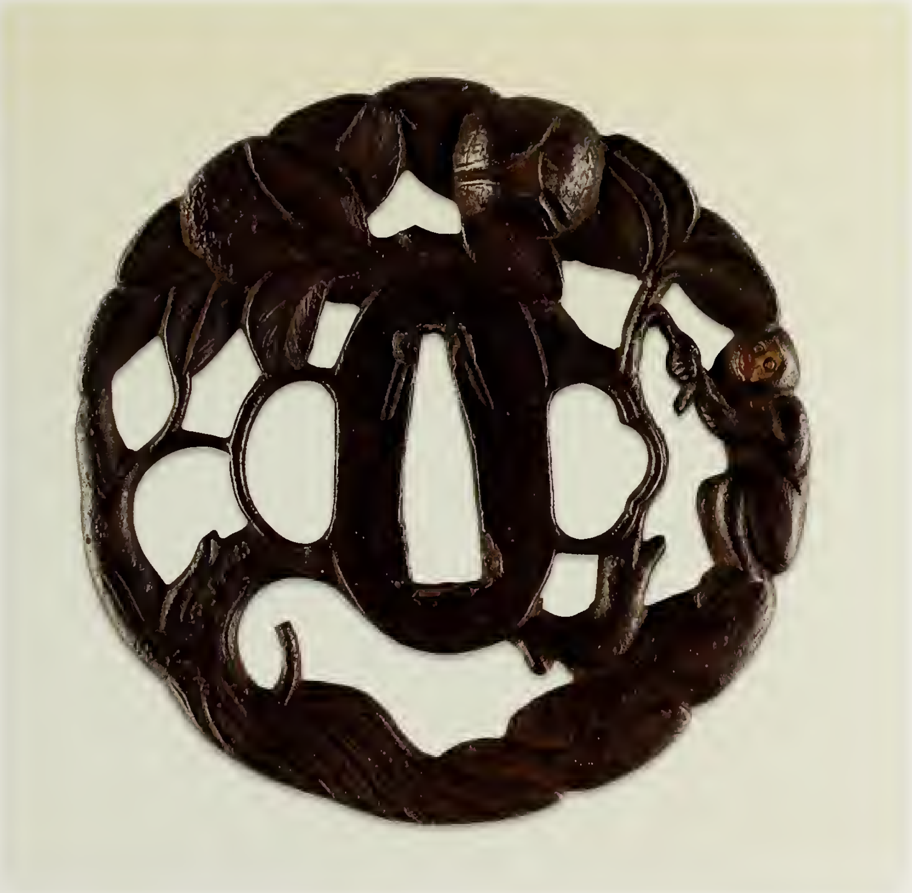
Nitta no Shiro was an employee of the first shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo, and the subject of a minor incident of Japanese legend that took place at a boar hunt. "Nitta sought to demonstrate his valor by riding a boar backward and killing it in his master's presence. Unfortunately, the boar was actually a mountain *kami* (Shinto deity), and Nitta fell under a curse," that caused Minamoto to suspect him of disloyalty[15] (cat. 54).

Netsuke subjects often intermingle disparate ideological sources, while some depict everyday objects and activities whose larger significance remains elusive. The associations of some subjects with months, holidays, and seasons of the year enhanced their popularity. The Seven Gods of Good Fortune were popular at the New Year, while the appropriate subject for the Spring equinox was Shōki exorcising oni.

Symbols of long life and good fortune like the crane, tortoise, or bowl of sakē would be worn to a wedding. *Hina doll* netsuke were worn on the day of the Girls' Festival, while Japanese heroes (including Shōki) were popular choices for the Boys' Festival, and skeletons or cicada would be worn on the Buddhist All Souls Day.[16]

TSUBA: A SAMURAI PARALLEL

The Japanese sword guards called *tsuba* (cat. 88–96) underwent dramatic changes in the Edo period, reflecting the social shifts that affected all castes. Their evolution closely paralleled the development of netsuke for the chōnin, as tsuba became highly ornamental status symbols of the samurai. A tsuba is a flat piece of metal installed between the handle and blade of a sword to prevent a warrior's hand from sliding onto the blade while in combat. They were created and used by samurai for centuries previous to the Edo period. Sword manufacture declined during the Edo period, but "... the studios of decorative sword-fittings makers prospered, indicating perhaps the extent to which the sword as a fashionable accessory had replaced the sword as a weapon."[17] As fashion accessories to a functional facet of costume (the sword being comparable to sagemono), tsuba were worn with the same daily frequency as netsuke. Samurai contended with shogunate regulations on appearance and costume just as chōnin did, and were required to carry two swords while in residence at the capital, to wear swords with tsuba of a specific size, and to wear certain types of garments that would identify their status and clan. The weight of the tsuba as a status symbol was bolstered by the fact that members of other castes were forbidden to carry swords. As part of the hardware for the traditional emblem of the samurai, tsuba became



Sword Guard (Tsuba)

The monkey with peaches is a symbol of longevity. Catalog 93 diminutive and ornamental expressions of status, privilege, individuality, and taste.

ENDS AND REDEFINITIONS

The Meiji Restoration in 1868 saw Japan's return to imperial rule, marking the end of the Tokugawa shogunate and the Edo period. Emerging from international isolation, the Japanese quickly and enthusiastically adopted Western culture and particularly Western dress, first in business circles and eventually through most sectors of society. Netsuke became functionally unnecessary with the shift away from traditional dress and declined in popularity. At the same time the wearing of swords was outlawed, and tsuba also disappeared from the costume. While the habit of smoking tobacco in pipes had previously inspired the necessity of netsuke and sagemono, the introduction of cigarettes from the West around this time led to a shift away from pipes that further contributed to the decline of netsuke. Many ivory carvers who had previously made a living as netsuke makers began to make larger decorative ivories (cat. 92–96) that demonstrated their skill, and appealed to foreign markets.

No longer functioning as toggles, netsuke have become artifacts of the material culture, costume, and daily habits of a past period. Despite significant defining shifts, netsuke continue to endure. Even when seen without knowledge of subject or context they attract new viewers with their pure visual appeal. That appeal has spoken to many Western collectors, who have spread an awareness of netsuke as an art form throughout the Western world to a far greater extent than in Japan itself. Though netsuke have become obsolete through most of Japan, in some rural areas where traditional garments are still worn, new functional netsuke akin to the early rustic models are made from a piece of bamboo or root. On the basis of utility, netsuke have therefore come full circle from their humble beginnings.

NOTES

1 Harold P. Stern, *The Magnificent Three: Lacquer, Netsuke, and Tsuba. Selections from the Collection of Charles A. Greenfield* (New York: Japan Society, Inc., 1972), 10.

2 Joe Earle, *Netsuke: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Miniature Sculpture* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2001), 18.

3 Donald Jenkins with Lynn Jacobsen-Katsumoto, *The Floating World Revisited* (Portland, Oregon: Portland Art Museum, 1993), 13.

4 Gary Hickey, *Beauty and Desire in Edo Period Japan* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1998), 8.

5 Earle, 23.

6 Mary Louise O'Brien. *Netsuke: A Guide for Collectors, 10th printing* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1986), 22.

7 Patrizia Jirka-Schmitz, *Netsuke: 112 Meisterwerke/Masterpieces. The Trumpf Collection* (Stuttgart: Linden-Museum, 2000), 17.

8 Yuzuru Okada, *Netsuke: A Miniature Art of Japan*, Tourist Library: 14 (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1954), 131.

9 O'Brien, 33.

10 Earle, 23.

11 Egerton Ryerson, *The Netsuke of Japan: Legends, History, Folklore and Customs* (New York: Castle Books, 1958), 49.

12 Raymond Bushell, *The Wonderful World of Netsuke, with One Hundred Masterpieces of Miniature Sculpture*, 2nd edition (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1969), 26.

13 Ryerson, 20.

14 Jirka-Schmitz, 61

15 Earle, 176.

16 Jirka-Schmitz, 39.

17 Victor Harris and Nobuo Ogasawara, *Swords of the Samurai* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1990), 115.

FOR FURTHER READING

Joe Earle, *Netsuke: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Miniature Sculpture* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2001).

Victor Harris and Nobuo Ogasawara, *Swords of the Samurai* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1990).

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Frederick Meinertzhagen, *The Art of the Netsuke Carver* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956).

Mary Louise O'Brien, *Netsuke: A Guide for Collectors*, 10th printing (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1986).

Harold P. Stern, *The Magnificent Three: Lacquer, Netsuke, and Tsuba. Selections from the Collection of Charles A. Greenfield* (New York: Japan Society, Inc., 1972).

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Works are in the permanent collection of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art unless otherwise noted. Starred works are illustrated. Dimensions are indicated as height by width by depth.

Unless otherwise stated, all works are ivory and produced during the Edo period (1603–1868) or later by unknown Japanese artists (unless artists' names are given). Except when otherwise noted, all works were given as a generous bequest of Edward F. Moody, Class of 1903.

† Netsuke in the collection of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art about which additional information is presently unavailable.

1. Japanese, 20th century
Male style kimono and obi sash
141 x 134.5 x 8.5 cm.
(55 1/2 x 53 x 3.5 inches)
silk
Lent by Keiko Thayer

*2. *Inrō Showing Kintarō Fighting a Wild Boar*
6.9 x 6.8 x 2.5 cm.
(2 3/4 x 2 5/8 x 1 inches)
wood, lacquer
Purchased from the Houghton Collection for the College by David S. Cowles, Esq.
1909.7

NETSUKE

3. *Imaginary Beast/Horned Boar*
wood
2.8 x 4.1 x 2.2 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 5/8 x 7/8 inches)
Gift of George Warren Hammond, h 1900, and Mrs. Hammond
1898.65.1

4. Okutumi
Japanese
Quail on Millet
2.9 x 2.5 x 4.1 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 x 1 5/8 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker
1894.127

5. *Two Quails on Millet*
2.9 x 3.8 x 3 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 1/2 x 1 3/16 inches)
1958.61.33

*6. *Clam Shell / Sleeping Bird*
wood
2.9 x 4.4 x 5 cm
(1 1/8 x 1 3/4 x 2 inches)
1958.61.3

7. *Two Lizards and a Snail*
3.5 x 2.8 x 1.6 cm.
(1 3/8 x 1 1/8 x 5/8 inches)
1958.61.40

8. *Frog on a Water Well*
wood
3.4 x 2.5 x 3.8 cm.
(1 3/8 x 1 x 1 1/2 inches)
1958.61.36

9. *Frog on a Lily Pad*
1.9 x 4.4 x 3.5 cm.
(3/4 x 1 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches)
1958.61.65

10. *Two Frogs*
2.1 x 2.2 x 2.2 cm.
(13/16 x 7/8 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.60

11. Chi, U I
Japanese
Turtle
wood
2.3 x 4 x 5.5 cm.
(7/8 x 1 9/16 x 2 3/16 inches)
1958.61.47

*12. *Monkey with Turtle*
2.5 x 2.5 x 4.1 cm.
(1 x 1 x 1 5/8 inches)
Gift of Walter G. Davis
1954.25

13. *Monkey on Mushroom*
2.7 x 3.9 x 4.4 cm.
(1 1/16 x 1 9/16 x 1 3/4 inches)
1958.61.20

14. *Man with Monkey on Back*
hornbill
5.4 x 3.3 x 2.5 cm.
(2 1/8 x 1 5/16 x 1 inches)
1958.61.54

15. *Monkey Using a Chestnut as a Knapsack*
2.5 x 2.8 x 2.8 cm.
(1 x 1 1/8 x 1 1/8 inches)
1958.61.76

16. *Two Mice on a Shell*
2.4 x 4.1 x 3.5 cm.
(15/16 x 1 5/8 x 1 3/8 inches)
Gift of Miss Margaret Folger
1966.56.2

†17. *Two Rats*
3.2 x 3.5 x 3.2 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 3/8 x 1 1/4 inches)

18. *Fox*
5 x 3 x 5.5 cm.
(2 x 1 1/8 x 15/16 inches)
1958.61.67

19. *Fox Priest with Kneeling Man*
5.8 x 3.8 x 3 cm.
(2 5/16 x 1 1/2 x 1 3/16 inches)
1958.61.23

20. *Man with Badger in His Pot*
tea-stained ivory
4.4 x 4.1 x 4.3 cm.
(1 3/4 x 1 5/8 x 1 11/16 inches)
1958.61.44

21. *Wolf Chewing a Skull*
tea-stained ivory
3.5 x 3.2 x 3 cm.
(1 3/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 3/ 16 inches)
1958.61.43

22. *Two Puppies*
2.8 x 3.7 x 2.5 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 7/16 x 1 inches)
Gift of Walter G. Davis
1954.26

23. *Two Men with Bear in Landscape*
3.7 x 3.2 x 2.5 cm.
(1 7/16 x 1 1/4 x 1 inches)
1958.61.70

24. *Clam Shell*
2.5 x 5 x 3.8 cm.
(1 x 2 x 1 1/2 inches)
1958.61.19

25. *Two Nut Pods*
wood
2.1 x 4.2 x 2.5 cm.
(13/16 x 1 5/8 x 1 inches)
1958.61.35

26. *Chestnut*
wood
3.2 x 4.3 x 2.8 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 11/16 x 1 1/8 inches)
1958.61.37

27. *Skull*
tea-stained ivory
2 x 2.5 x 3 cm.
(3/4 x 1 x 1 1/8 inches)
1958.61.64

*28. *Two Foreign Merchants with Horse*
3.2 x 3.7 x 2.5 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 7/16 x 1 inches)
1958.61.25

29. *Foreigner Carrying Treasure on Shoulder*
7 x 2.8 x 2.7 cm.
(2 3/4 x 1 1/8 x 1 1/16 inches)
1958.61.49

30. *Boy Playing Drum*
4.1 x 3.2 x 4.2 cm.
(1 5/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 11/16 inches)
Gift of George Warren Hammond, h 1900, and Mrs. Hammond
1898.65.2

31. *Child Playing with Dog*
3.2 x 4.1 x 2.7 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 5/8 x 1 1/16 inches)
Gift of George Warren Hammond, h 1900, and Mrs. Hammond
1898.65.4

32. *Man Carrying Child on Back*
5.8 x 3.9 x 2.2 cm.
(2 5/16 x 1 9/16 x 7/8 inches)
Gift of George Warren Hammond, h 1900, and Mrs. Hammond
1898.65.5

33. *Boy and Toy*
4.2 x 3.5 x 1.7 cm.
(1 5/8 x 1 3/8 x 11/16 inches)
Gift of George Warren Hammond, h 1900, and Mrs. Hammond
1898.65.7

*34. *Child with Mask and Drum*
3.2 x 2.8 x 2.5 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 1/8 x 1 inches)
Gift of Walter G. Davis
1954.24

35. *Woman Carrying Child on Back*
black tea stained ivory
3.8 x 3.8 x 2.4 cm.
(1 1/2 x 1 1/2 x 15/16 inches)
Gift of Walter G. Davis
1954.27

36. *Child with Hobby Horse*
5 x 2.5 x 2 cm.
(2 x 1 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.61

37. *Child in Basket Carrier*
6 x 2.5 x 1.7 cm.
(2 5/16 x 1 x 1/2 inches)
1958.61.69

38. *Woman Combing Orphan's Hair (Kintaro)*
wood
4.8 x 2.5 x 3.2 cm.
(1 7/8 x 1 x 1 1/4 inches)
1958.61.77

39. *Rakan*
4.9 x 3.7 x 2.5 cm.
(1 15/16 x 1 1/2 x 1 inches)
Gift of George Warren Hammond, h 1900, and Mrs. Hammond
1898.65.6

40. Chi, U I
Japanese
Thunder God (Raiden)
wood
3.5 x 3.2 x 3.5 cm.
(1 3/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 3/8 inches)
1958.61.4

41. *Raiden and Okame in Wash Basin*
wood
3.7 x 4.2 x 4 cm
(1 7/16 x 1 5/8 x 1 1/2 inches)
1958.61.52

42. *Sleeping Shōjō*
wood
3.5 x 3 x 3.5 cm.
(1 3/8 x 1 3/16 x 1 3/8 inches)
1958.61.6

*43. *Tengu Dancing*
wood
9.4 x 3.8 x 2.6 cm
(3 11/16 x 1 1/2 x 1 1/16 inches)
1958.61.16

44. *Demon Dancing*
painted wood
7 x 3.7 x 2.9 cm.
(2 3/4 x 1 7/16 x 1 1/4 inches)
1958.61.51

45. *Demons (Oni) Coming Out of Box*
wood, ivory, and onyx
2.8 x 3 x 3.8 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 3/16 x 1 1/2 inches)
1958.61.5

46. *Demon Stopping General from Killing Self*
3.2 x 4 x 2.2 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 9/16 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.18

47. Shun-pa
Japanese
Demons (Oni) Stealing a Purse
3 x 3.8 x 3.5 cm.
(1 3/16 x 1 1/2 x 1 3/8 inches)
Gift of Miss Margaret Folger
1966.56.1

48. *Demon (Oni) Entertainers*
3.7 x 4.1 x 2.2 cm.
(1 1/2 x 1 5/8 x 7/8 inches)
Gift of Miss Margaret Folger
1966.56.3

†49. *Two Demon (Oni) Entertainers with Man*
3.2 x 4.5 x 3.3 cm.
(1 1/4 x 1 3/4 x 1 5/16 inches)

50. *Watanabe Carrying the Arm of a Demon*
4.7 x 2.7 x 2.2 cm.
(1 7/8 x 1 1/16 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.50

51. *Shōki the Demon Queller*
6.3 x 3 x 1.9 cm.
(2 1/2 x 1 1/8 x 3/4 inches)
1958.61.14

52. *Shōki the Demon Queller*
4.8 x 2.5 x 2 cm.
(1 7/8 x 1 x 3/4 inches)
1958.61.75

*53. *Shōki Subduing a Demon (Oni)*
ivory "manjū"
4.2 x 4.5 x 2 cm.
(1 5/8 x 1 3/4 x 3/4 inches)
1958.61.27

*54. *Nitta no Shiro Defeating a Wild Boar*
wood
3.2 x 5.7 x 2.8 cm.
(1 1/2 x 2 1/4 x 1 1/8 inches)
1958.61.10

55. *Oniwaka Killing a Giant Carp*
ivory "manjū"
5.2 x 5.3 x 1.8 cm.
(2 1/16 x 2 1/8 x 3/4 inches)
1958.61.26

56. *Oniwaka Killing a Giant Carp*
buffalo horn "manjū"
4.2 x 4.3 x 1.5 cm.
(1 5/8 x 1 5/8 x 5/8 inches)
1958.61.7

57. *Kinkō Sennin Riding a Carp*
ivory, darkened with green tea
3.5 x 5 x 2.6 cm.
(1 3/8 x 2 x 1 1/16 inches)
1958.61.22

58. *Kinkō Sennin Riding a Carp*
wood
3.3 x 4 x 2.1 cm.
(1 5/16 x 1 9/16 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.73

59. *Gama Sennin*
4 x 5.4 x 3.7 cm.
(1 9/16 x 2 1/8 x 1 5/16 inches)
1958.61.17

60. *Gama Sennin*
3.6 x 3.5 x 2.5 cm.
(1 7/16 x 1 3/8 x 1 inches)
1958.61.32

61. *Scene of Phallic Worship/Fukurokuju*
wood
2.8 x 3.1 x 3.6 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 7/16 inches)
1958.61.48

62. *Hotei Resting on His Sack*
4 x 3.5 x 3 cm.
(1 9/16 x 1 3/8 x 1 1/8 inches)
1958.61.21

63. *Hotei*
4.7 x 3.6 x 2.5 cm.
(1 7/8 x 1 3/8 x 1 inches)
1958.61.30

64. *Scowling Mask*
wood
5.1 x 4.1 x 3 cm.
(2 x 1 5/8 x 1 3/16 inches)
1958.61.1

65. *Mask of a Female Demon (Hannya)*
3.8 x 2.5 x 1.6 cm.
(1 1/2 x 1 x 5/8 inches)
1958.61.68

*66. *Mask of Okame*
wood with silk cord and bead
5.3 x 4.2 x 3.6 cm.
(2 1/8 x 1 5/8 x 1 1/2 inches)
1958.61.39

67. *Male Mask*
wood
5.8 x 4 x 3.5 cm.
(2 1/4 x 1 9/16 x 1 3/8 inches)
1958.61.8

68. *Male Mask*
wood
4.5 x 4 x 2.8 cm.
(1 3/4 x 1 1/2 x 15/16 inches)
1958.61.72

69. *Lion Mask*
2.8 x 4.2 x 4.5 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 5/8 x 1 7/8 inches)
1958.61.58

70. *Three Masks*
4.3 x 3.6 x 2.3 cm.
(1 3/4 x 1 7/16 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.63

71. *Seven Masks*
wood
3.6 x 3.5 x 2.3 cm.
(1 7/16 x 1 3/8 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.42

72. *Cluster of "Nōh" Masks*
3.7 x 3.3 x 2.7 cm.
(1 1/2 x 1 1/4 x 1 1/16 inches)
1958.61.41

73. *Decorative Scroll*
5.3 x 3.2 x 2.7 cm.
(2 1/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 1/16 inches)
1958.61.24

74. *Standing Man*
jade/jadeite
5.2 x 2.6 x 2 cm.
(2 1/16 x 1 1/16 x 3/4 inches)
1958.61.15

75. *Crouching Man*
2.2 x 3.6 x 2.2 cm.
(7/8 x 1 7/16 x 7/8 inches)
Gift of Walter G. Davis
1954.023

76. *Man Leaning on Box*
wood
3.8 x 3.2 x 1.9 cm.
(1 1/2 x 1 1/4 x 3/4 inches)
1958.61.9

77. *Man Pushing a Barrel*
wood
4.4 x 4 x 2.2 cm.
(1 3/4 x 1 9/16 x 7/8 inches)
1958.61.2

78. *Man Using Tool on Circular Stone*
wood
4 x 3 x 4.3 cm.
(1 9/16 x 1 3/16 x 1 11/16 inches)
1958.61.38

79. *Man Holding Mask*
4 x 3.2 x 2.5 cm.
(1 5/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 inches)
1958.61.62

80. *Man with Drum on His Head*
6 x 2.5 x 1.7 cm.
(2 1/2 x 1 x 5/8 inches)
1958.61.71

81. *Two Men Arm Wrestling*
2.9 x 4.5 x 3.3 cm.
(1 1/8 x 1 3/4 x 1 5/16 inches)
1958.61.28

82. *Man with Child in a Sack*
wood
3.9 x 4 x 4 cm.
(1 1/2 x 1 9/16 x 1 9/16 inches)
1958.61.59

LATER IVORIES

83. *Produce Peddler and Young Assistant*
11.1 x 14.2 x 12 cm.
(4 3/16 x 5 5/16 x 4 3/4 inches)
Bequest of Dr. Louis Clinton Hatch,
Class of 1895
1932.5.24

84. *Sakē Drinker*
5.7 x 3.2 x 3.8 cm.
(2 1/4 x 1 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches)
1958.61.57

85. Kicho
Japanese, late 19th-early 20th century
Scene of Family Selling Noodles
3 x 5.1 x 2.8 cm.
(1 3/16 x 2 x 1 1/8 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and
Mary Sophia Walker
1894.130

86. *Box Cover with Two Geishas*
16.2 x 9.8 x 1.3 cm.
(6 1/2 x 3 15/16 x 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Dr. Louis Clinton Hatch,
Class of 1895
1932.5.29

87. *Dollmaker*
11.2 x 8.8 x 5.1 cm.
(4 3/16 x 3 1/2 x 2 inches)
Bequest of Dr. Louis Clinton Hatch,
Class of 1895
1932.5.16

TSUBA AND SWORDS

88. *Sword Guard (Tsuba)*
brass
7.9 x 7.7 x 0.7 cm.
(3 1/16 x 3 x 1/4 inches)
1958.61.13

89. Umetada
Japanese, 19th century
Sword Guard (Tsuba)
iron
8.5 x 8 x 0.5 cm.
(3 3/16 x 3 1/16 x 3/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker
1904.83.1

90. *Sword Guard (Tsuba)*
copper
7.2 x 6.6 x 0.6 cm.
(2 7/8 x 2 5/8 x 1/4 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and
Mary Sophia Walker
1894.93

91. *Sword Guard (Tsuba)*
(Crescent Moon with Chrysanthemums)
copper alloy
9 x 8 x 0.3 cm.
(3 1/2 x 3 1/16 x 1/8 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and
Mary Sophia Walker
1894.94

92. Soten School
Japanese, 19th century
Sword Guard (Tsuba)
(Two Samurai with Horse)
iron
7.3 x 6.8 x 0.7 cm.
(2 7/8 x 2 3/4 x 1/4 inches)
Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker
1904.83.3

*93. *Sword Guard (Tsuba)*
(Monkey with Peaches)
iron
8.5 x 7.7 x 0.7 cm.
(3 3/16 x 3 x 5/16 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and
Mary Sophia Walker
1894.92

94. Michinoku
Japanese, 19th century
Sword Guard (Tsuba)
iron, brass
7.6 x 7.4 x 0.5 cm.
(3 x 2 15/16 x 3/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker
1904.83.10

95. *Sword Guard (Tsuba)*
(Birds with Waves)
sentoku alloy
6.4 x 5 x 0.7 cm. (2 1/2 x 2 x 1/4 inches)
Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker
1904.83.6

96. Jakushi
Japanese, 19th century
Sword Guard (Tsuba)
(Seven Sages in Bamboo Grove)
iron
8.6 x 7.8 x 0.5 cm.
(3 3/16 x 3 1/16 x 3/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker
1904.83.9

97. Kyushu School
Japanese, 17th century
Tanto
Metal, lacquer
32.38 cm. (12 3/4 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet and
Sophia Walker
1894.99.1

98. *Tanto*
Metal, lacquer
30.8 cm. (12 1/8 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet and
Sophia Walker
1894.99.3

99. *Tanto*
Metal, lacquer
25.4 cm. (10 inches)
Gift of the Misses Harriet and
Sophia Walker
1894.99.4

BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

BRUNSWICK, MAINE