



STEVE SLY

JAPANESE WORKS OF ART

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE
AUTUMN 2023



STEVE SLY
JAPANESE WORKS OF ART

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE
AUTUMN 2023

Cover detail
PLATE 6
LARGE SILK TEXTILE
Subject - Goose in flight
Company - Benten Goshi Kaisha



MASTERPIECE



t. +44 (0)7774 635918
e. steve@steveslyjapaneseart.com
www.steveslyjapaneseart.com



INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that the finest Japanese works of art destined for national and international expositions during the mid to latter years of that magical Meiji period (1868-1912), literally wowed the audience as well as propelling the artisans of the previously isolated group of islands that make up Japan, onto the world stage.

Indeed, a century and a half later Japanese art aficionados and avid collectors continue to be captivated as market fresh pieces surface from old collections, museum archives and auction houses around the globe, albeit at a much slower pace than in decades past.

This small selection demonstrates this continuing phenomenon. From the miniature gold wired cloisonne enamel scent bottle at plate 1, manufactured by arguably the greatest enamellist of the period, the Imperial artist Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927),

recently discovered in a USA collection, to the majestic bronze hawk okimono at plate 9, chiselled by the well recorded metal carving master, Sano Takachika, that recently arrived from a European collection.

Onto the showstopper at plate 7, the remarkable monumental scale elephant and tiger okimono, once again crafted by Takachika. This dramatic sculpture has resided on display in the main hall of a Dutch Museum for over 50 years where it survived Nazi occupation, it is subsequently bought to market for the first time in almost a century of Dutch family ownership.

I hope that you enjoy this hand-picked selection of just some of my favourite finds of 2023 as much as I have enjoyed the thrill of sourcing, researching and presenting them to you.

Best Wishes
Steve

“Just when you think the best has surely passed us by, along comes a masterpiece that has not surfaced for decades, if ever at all.”

PRICE GUIDE



Up to £15,000



£15,000 - £30,000



£30,000 - £50,000



In excess of £50,000

1

ENAMEL SCENT BOTTLE

Artist - Namikawa Yasuyuki

A fine quality gold wire cloisonne enamel scent bottle by the Imperial artist Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927). On this occasion Namikawa has manufactured a scent bottle of rounded form with opposing panels, the first panel depicts an exotic bird carrying a floral sprig in its mouth, the bird finely rendered in solid gold wire upon a buff coloured ground, the reverse depicts a gold wired butterfly in flight amidst a striking colourful garden scene set upon a pale yellow ground, the panels surrounded by more typical floral brocades, the underside is signed Namikawa Kyoto.

Literature:

Namikawa Yasuyuki (並川靖之) was among the most celebrated Japanese enamellers of the Meiji period, together with Namikawa Sosuke (no relation) they became the most famous cloisonne artists of the 1890 to 1915 period, a time known as

the “golden age” of Japanese enamels. Between 1875 and 1915 Yasuyuki won prizes at 51 national and international exhibitions, including at world's fairs. His pieces now form part of many of the major recorded Japanese works of art collections and can also be viewed in museums throughout the world.

Provenance:

USA Collection

Condition report:

Fine condition throughout

Approximate sizes:

Height: 2 3/8" 6 cm

Width: 2" 5 cm

Depth: 3/4" 1.7 cm





2

CLOISONNE ENAMEL VASE

Artist - Namikawa Yasuyuki

A fine quality cloisonné enamel vase manufactured by the Imperial artist Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927). On this example Yasuyuki has worked butterflies in flight above iris and wild chrysanthemums with extensive use of silver and gilt wires contrasted upon a dark blue ground. The shoulders of the vase are decorated with vivid shield shaped floral motifs beneath a tall slender neck decorated with chrysanthemums within geometric lozenges. The rims are manufactured in silver with the all-important silver seal set within the base, translating to Kyoto Namikawa, an increasingly scarce piece of enamel from this most highly revered enamellist.

Artist Literature:

See plate I

Provenance:

USA Collection.

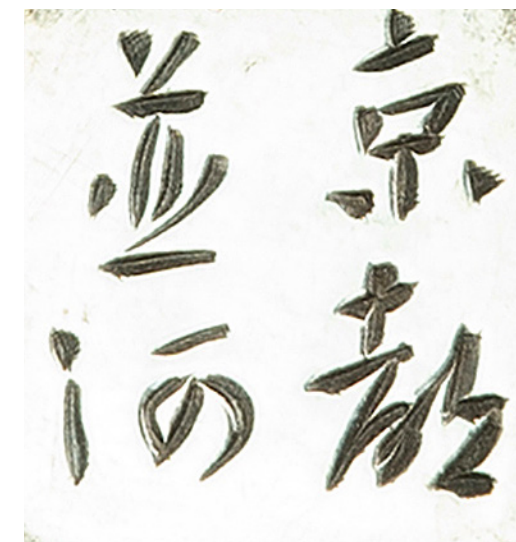
Condition report:

Fine condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Height: 4 1/2" 11.5 cm

Diameter: 1 7/8" 4.7 cm



CLOISONNE ENAMEL VASE

Artist - Namikawa Yasuyuki

As part of our Japanese works of art collection we are delighted to offer this striking Meiji Period 1868-1912, cloisonne enamel vase by the Imperial artist Namikawa Yasuyuki. The tall slender tapering vase is finely worked with a multitude of floral roundels, scrolling vines and butterflies in flight upon multi coloured vertical panels, the panels bordered in black enamel s between the formal geometric floral neck and foot bands, the rim and base formed from silver with the artists silver seal to the underside translating to read “Kyoto Namikawa”. Whilst the vase stands perfectly stable, it has probably remained in such wonderful condition due to the protection afforded by being housed in its original wooden cradle. An increasingly rare masterpiece of Meiji period enamel by arguably the greatest and most highly coveted artist of that golden period, Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927).

Artist Literature:

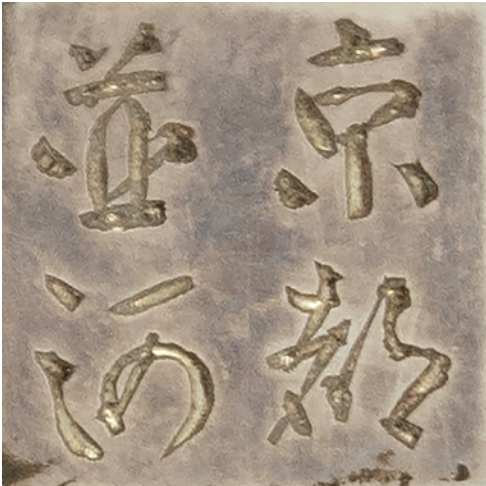
See plate I.

Condition report:

Lovely untouched condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Height:	6 1/4"	16 cm
Width:	2 3/4"	7 cm
Height inc stand:	6 7/8"	17.5 cm





4

CLOISONNE ENAMEL VASE

Artist - Namikawa Yasuyuki

As part of our Japanese works of art collection we are delighted to offer this most exquisite cloisonné enamel bottle vase manufactured by the imperial artist Namikawa Yasuyuki (1845-1927), in this instance Yasuyuki has crafted a little jewel of a vase with extensive use of gold wires to the neck and shoulders as well as the underside borders, the shoulders decorated with imperial chrysanthemum amidst scrolling flora with the slender neck and base decorated with hanabishi shippo borders in multicolour cloisons. The main globular body finely decorated with butterflies amidst scrolling foliage all worked in silver wires upon a vibrant turquoise ground, the neck and foot rims finished in gilt bronze with a silver tablet recessed beneath the base signed Kyoto Namikawa.

Artist Literature:

See plate I

Provenance:

USA Private collection.

Condition report:

Fine condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Height:	3 3/4"	9.5 cm
Diameter:	2"	5 cm



5

WOOD & LACQUER INCENSE BURNER

Subject - Smoking Man

Artist - Koreharu

As part of our Japanese works of art exhibition we are delighted to offer this quite magical Meiji Period 1868-1912 mixed media study of a woodcutter at rest, the fully signed okimono is actually designed to be a functional yet fun incense burner, the quite charming character sits upon his faggots of freshly cut wood clearly enjoying whatever he is smoking in his large opium pipe, the faggots and base carved from wood in fine detail, his body similarly carved from a native wood with his clothing lacquered in multi coloured tones. The limbs and smoking related implements as well as his head and facial features have been painstakingly carved from boxwood in the finest detail, his aged face inset with glass eyes truly paints a picture of a weary man enjoying his moment at rest, the figure itself lifts from the faggots of wood to reveal a metal receptacle in which to burn the incense, the vapours escaping from the woodcutters gaping mouth to resemble smoke from his pipe. A very rare and enchanting mixed media okimono that would grace any collection and certainly bring a smile to your face as intended when manufactured during that magical Meiji Period, artist signed within a silver seal and inscribed into the lacquer base.

Condition report:

Very fine condition with minimal age-related wear to the lacquer.

Approximate sizes:

Height:	13.5"	34.5 cm
Width:	12.5"	31.5 cm
Depth:	7.5"	19 cm



6

LARGE SILK TEXTILE

Subject - Goose in flight

Company - Benten Goshi Kaisha

Attributed - Iida Shinshichi III- IV

A very fine framed silk textile, the Kyoto school artist has rendered a large-scale textile of a goose in flight above a lakeside setting, the vibrantly coloured goose apparently coming in to land upon a lake surrounded by finely stitched rushes and ferns, the geese neck stretching as its eyes look for the perfect landing spot, the birds feathers and facial features beautifully hand stitched to an exacting standard of workmanship. The artist has signed this charming textile in a large stitched seal that simply translates as "Benten Kyoto" The textile is complete within its original silk backed black lacquer glazed frame, it was not unusual for such large textiles to be removed from the frames and rolled up for transportation overseas.



Provenance:

This large and imposing textile was hanging in an old baronial house in the south of Germany.

Literature:

The name on the seal, Benten, does not lead us to the name of a particular embroiderer and is more widely recognised as the name of the Goddess of music and arts, one of the seven lucky Gods of Japan. However, further extensive research on this textile leads us to a company formed in Kyoto in 1898 by the name of Benten Goshi Kaisha, a limited partnership formed between embroidery houses and other traders, apparently partly funded by the Kyoto hotel group and in particular the largest hotel in Kyoto at that time The Yaamirou hotel, commonly referred to as the Yaami, the company was set up at an initial cost of 250,000 Jpy. It is evident that our seal Benten Kyoto is representing this company.

It would make sense that the finest artisans needed exclusive access to the wealthiest tourists, and in turn the hotels could harness these tourists for longer stays and certainly more profitable visits, especially if between them they had guides working on commission bringing the visitors to the hotel where traders selling and generally promoting the wares of Kyoto from within their building presumably worked on a profit share basis, a kind of closed shop cartel that benefited the tour guides, the hotel group, the Benten company and the Kyoto economy as a whole.

One of the best known and most powerful Kyoto based embroidery companies was the Takashimaya company, then headed up by the third generation sons Shinshichi III & IV alongside Utako, the daughter of Shinshichi I.

It is recorded in: Threads of Silk and Gold, ornamental textiles from Meiji Japan, Hiroko T. McDermott and Dr Clare Pollard of the Ashmolean museum, Oxford, that during this turbulent period of the Meiji restoration the Takashimaya premises had burnt down. Thankfully the stock was in a fireproof store and was salvaged, this enabled Shinshichi II his wife Utako and the next generation of five sons to continue trading, perhaps this fire triggered their investment into the incorporation of the Benten Goshi Kaisha company, in conjunction with the Kyoto hotel group and other selected Kyoto traders. It would seem a perfect scenario, as this would have provided the Takashimaya company with immediate access to highly desirable premises as well as to wealthy tourists. However, it is also recorded in the Kyoto hotel archives that the Yaamirou hotel sadly suffered from a devastating fire on the 25th March 1899, when it burnt to the ground.

We cannot be certain of the timings or the collaboration, if any, and it is possible that these unfortunate events were years apart, and under different generations of the Shinshichi dynasty.

What we can say with a degree of certainty after further research of the Kyoto hotel group archive records, is that following this devastating fire some of the most powerful Kyoto businesses and traders submitted a business plan to the mayor of Kyoto to rebuild the Yaamirou. Among the most prominent names recorded in that application was Iida Shinshichi of the Takashimaya company. By 1900, the Takashimaya which was headed by Iida Shinshichi III and IV opened its Yokohama Office in Benten Street (Benten dori).

Given this documented evidence and the plotted history of the company it seems very likely that Shinshichi III (1859-1944) was trading at the hotel as part of the Benten Goshi Kaisha company prior to that devastating fire, and certainly was instrumental in the plans to rebuild the Yaami.

As such I feel confident that this huge scale textile of such superb artistry was likely manufactured by the house of Takashimaya, under the supervision of Iida Shinshichi III or IV in around 1898-1900.

The design work of geese in landscape was possibly by Takeuchi Seiho (1864-1942). He was in time to become one of the most respected Nihonga genre painters based in Kyoto, like Watanabe Seitei (1851-1918), Mochizuki Gyokuzan (1834-1913) and others who often painted swimming ducks and flying geese. Takeuchi Seiho was appointed as a chief designer for the Takashimaya in 1889.

Condition report:

Very good condition and vibrant colours.

Approximate sizes:

Overall Height:	82 1/2"	210 cm
Overall Width:	61 1/2"	156 cm
Textile Height:	66"	168 cm
Textile Width:	43 3/4"	111 cm



MONUMENTAL BRONZE OKIMONO

Subject - Elephant & Tigers

Artist - Sano Takachika

As part of our Japanese works of art exhibition we are delighted to offer this magnificent huge scale Meiji Period 1868-1912 bronze elephant and tiger group by the leading 19th century metalworker Sano Takachika. This monumental scale group has certainly retained the quality associated with this artist, so much so it was accepted as a long-term exhibit at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. The artist has captured the often-seen image of an Asian elephant being attacked and seemingly fending off a marauding troop of tigers, in this particular instance one tiger is pinned beneath the elephants foot as it rears up in an attempt to overthrow the others. The sheer scale of this group is something to behold and unlike anything we have encountered in a lifetime of handling Japanese art. The group stands upon its original hardwood base that has been carefully carved to safely locate this incredibly heavy bronze study, artist signed in a seal to the underside that translates to read "made in Yokohama great Japan by Sano Takachika". There seems little doubt that an okimono of this scale was destined for one of the major exhibitions around the turn of the century, possibly Paris 1900, our research is still ongoing to trace the first 30 years of its life.



Provenance:

A family file that accompanies the group records the elephant in a 1927 black and white image in the offices of the owner Joseph Albertus Houtzager 1883-1961, how long the owner had the group prior to that image is unknown at this time, however it stayed in the same family for around 100 years until our recent acquisition in 2023.

In 1934, Mr Houtzager loaned the group to the Royal Tropical Museum on a long term basis, see the archive black and white image in the main hall. Upon his death in 1961 the group passed title to his daughter Dr Maria Elizabeth Houtzager 1907-2001 and her siblings, whilst remaining on museum display. It is interesting to note that his daughter Maria was a curator at the central museum of Utrecht prior to being promoted to director from 1951-1972.

In the 1980's the family offered the giant beast for sale, firstly to the Tropenmuseum, who sadly could not accept the offer, secondly an invitation to sell at Christies was explored, as is so often the case, the auction could not agree values for estimate with the family members. As such in 1983 the elephant returned to the family ownership, presumably at one of the siblings homes, until the passing of Dr Maria in Dec 2021. The notes suggest that Dr Maria affectionately referred to the elephant as her "beastie" and it is therefore fair to assume she probably housed it during the period 1983-2021.

Literature:

A few major examples of work by this artist are recorded in well known worldwide collections. Two examples can be found in the Khalili collection, Meiji No Takara Treasures of Imperial Japan. Metalwork volume II, plate 120 displays a hawk Koro on a perch and plate 121 shows a very similar decorated pigeon Koro on a stand. The volume also suggests a snake and eagle Koro on a tree trunk is recorded in the well-known collection of Michael Tomkinson at plate 72.

The artist Sano Takachika was a master of hammering, metal carving and chiselling and a recorded member of the Tokyo Chokokai (Tokyo association of carvers and sculptors). He is known to have exhibited at many of the expositions of the period including the Japan art society spring exhibition of 1894 where he exhibited gold and silver figures of a heron and a crow.

Condition report:

The group is in fantastic age-related condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

- Overall Length: 66 3/4" 169.5 cm (48 1/2" 123 cm the bronze)
- Overall Height: 52 1/2" 133.5 cm (43 1/2" 110 cm the bronze)
- Overall Depth: 35 1/2" 90 cm (inc tusks)
- Weight: 185 kg Approx



Preparing themselves to be as strong as the elephant. The committee of HOCRA Holland, from left to right Messrs. J. P. Gravesteyn, G. Verwoest, H. Voormey, J. W. A. Westerhoven and T. H. Osse.

20 Sept 1961



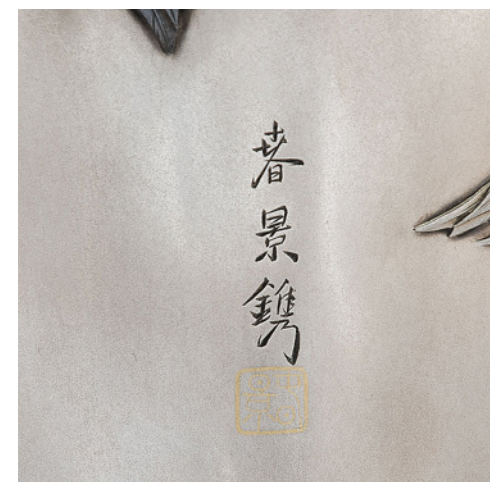
8

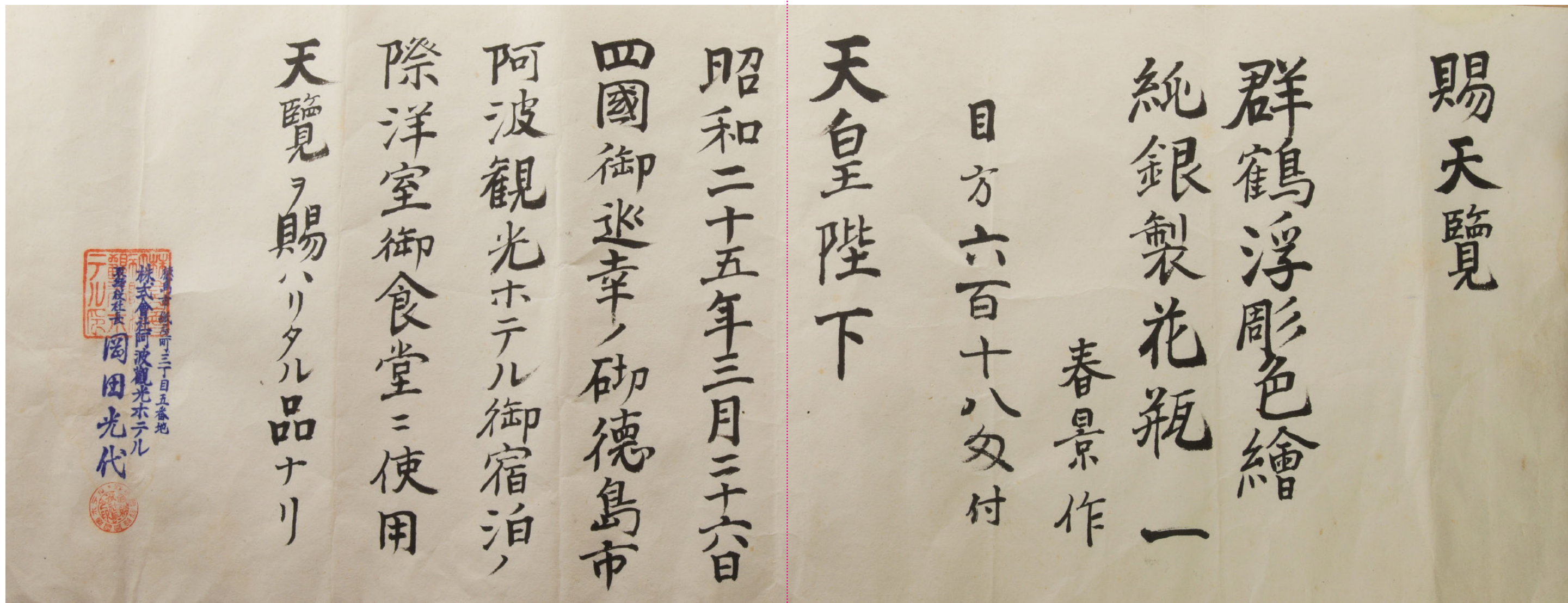
LARGE SILVER VASE

Subject - Cranes

Artist - Ota Harukage

As part of our Japanese works of art exhibition we are delighted to offer this large scale exceptional quality Taisho period 1912-1926, pure silver and mixed metal vase by the well recorded artist Ota Harukage also known as Ota Shunkei, born 1889 and recorded as working in Tokyo. On this occasion the artist was retained by the Mitsukoshi company, a firm founded in 1905 as commissioning agents and retailers with a department store. The Mitsukoshi seal is impressed into the base of the vase alongside the Jungin pure silver mark. The artist has manufactured a large scale very heavy silver vase decorated throughout with scenes of mixed metal Manchurian cranes, the cranes also formed from silver as well as other precious alloys including shakudo, shibuichi and gold. One of the main scenes unusually depicts a crane drying and preening its extended wings, this charming scene surrounded by further studies of cranes at play and at rest. The artist has signed the vase with a finely chiselled signature above a gold seal. The vase comes complete with a delightful hardwood display stand as well as its original tomobako storage box, enclosed is a certificate that carries a very interesting story of the vases loan as an Imperial exhibit in 1950. Quite simply a beautiful piece of Japanese metalwork that was clearly deemed worthy of exhibition to an Emperor.





Literature:

The artist is recorded at page 620 of the Tokyo dictionary of metalworkers (Wakayama Takeshi kinko jiten) he has various other works recorded including a bronze vase decorated with pine trees by the sea, now housed in the Tokyo art museum.

The inscription on the tomobako in this instance is best translated as "Sterling silver, a flower vessel, decorated with the design of a group of cranes in colour, made by Harukage (also pronounced Shunkei), Tokyo".

The most interesting certificate enclosed describes an account from an exhibition which may be translated as "This is to attest that the item was inspected by the Emperor (Showa Emperor). The honoured item viewed by the emperor. A vase made in jungin (lit. "pure silver", which means sterling silver), with the design of a group of cranes decorated in relief and colour (ukibori and iroe), made by Harukage. The weight of the item: 618 monme in Japanese weight measurements (2317.5 gram = 2.317 kg; 1 monme is 3.75 grams in weight).

天皇陛下

目方六百十八匁付

春景作

群鶴浮彫色繪
純銀製花瓶一

賜天覽

On the 26th March, Showa 25 (1950), the Emperor stayed at the Awa Kanko Hotel in Tokushima City, during the Imperial tour of the Shikoku Island. This vase was displayed and inspected by the emperor in the dining room of the suit of rooms where he stayed. With the seal of President of the hotel, Mrs Okada Mitsuyo, Awa Kanko Hotel Corporation, Kamiya-machi 3 chome 5, Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture.

Provenance:

Japanese collection.

Condition report:

Lovely age related condition with minimal signs of wear.

Approximate sizes:

Height of vase:	14"	35.5 cm
Height inc stand:	15 3/4"	40 cm
Diameter:	7 1/8"	18 cm
Weight:	74 1/2 oz	2317 grams

9

BRONZE HAWK OKIMONO

Artist - Sano Takachika

As part of our Japanese works of art collection we are delighted to offer this majestic Meiji Period (1868-1912) bronze hawk artist signed by the highly regarded metalworker Sano Takachika. This magical bird of prey has been captured in a most powerful pose perched upon a craggy cliff edge carved from a rustic hardwood. Its menacing gilt and shakudo eyes seem captivated by the quarry below, the birds razor sharp beak and talons contrast the exceptionally fine bronze feather details. This large scale hawk is artist signed within a silver seal to the underside by one of the luminary metalworkers of the period, Sano Takachika.

Artist Literature:

See plate 7.

Condition report:

Fine condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Overall Height:	31"	79 cm
Overall Width:	16"	41 cm
Overall Depth:	9"	23 cm
The Hawk:	15"	38 cm in length beak to tail.



10
SILVER HAWK OKIMONO

Artist - Juiedo

Company - Musashiya (Ozeki)

A scarce pure silver okimono of a hawk, artist signed Juiedo for the highly regarded Musashiya company operated by Ozeki Yahei. On this occasion the artist has captured this handsome bird of prey landing upon a rocky outcrop with both wings partially open, the interesting craggy base carved from a natural burr hardwood. The artist Juiedo has picked out the razor-sharp beak and talons in shakudo with the finely detailed legs in gilt, the hawks eyes are again picked out in gilt and shakudo to menacing effect. The underside of the tail feathers bears two silver tablets, one signed by the artist and the other by arguably the most famous and highly revered retailer of the Meiji Period, Ozeki Yahei's Musashiya company. Pure silver hawks are very scarce particularly carrying such an important signature as that of Ozeki's company.

Literature:

The Musashiya company, operated by Ozeki Yahei and his son Sadajiro were perhaps the most successful of the concerns selling high-quality decorative art during the Meiji Period. Originally a dealer in pipes, Ozeki Yahei set up the Yokohama branch at 66 Main Street, probably under the management of his son Ozeki Sadajiro.

In 1877, both father and son exhibited commissioned pieces under their separate names in the first Naikoku Kangyo Hakurankai (National Industrial Exposition). By 1880 the company is recorded as employing twenty-four people and dealing in enamels, bronzes, ivory, crystal, carvings, pins, fans, hard-stones, tortoiseshell, lacquer and a variety of ceramics.

Condition report:

Fine condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Height: 9 3/4" 25 cm

Length: 12" 30 cm

Depth: 11" 28 cm





11 INCENSE BURNER

Artist - Seki Yoshihira

As part of our Japanese works of art collection we are delighted to offer this most complex breathtaking quality incense burner manufactured by an artist recorded as working in Takaoka city between 1875-1900. The tall koro stands upon a bronze hexagonal base, each leg carved as mythical beasts, the shaped feet further inlaid with decoration formed from sheets of shakudo and gold of a gauge rarely encountered, these were expensive materials even at that time.

The top of the base gives rise to carved waves upon which three tall slender legs support the vessel above. These complex shaped legs rise as phoenix carrying pendants in their beaks and are once again sumptuously onlaid with shakudo, gold and silver. The globular body is inlaid with pairs of birds amidst swags and garlands of gold, silver and shakudo interspersed with a central band of opposing serpents formed from shibuichi. The koro houses a pair of winged phoenix as handles each carrying tied shakudo garlands. The lid of the koro is a work of art decorated with formal geometric bands of gold and shakudo surmounted by a shibuichi exotic bird of extraordinary quality. Finally, as the artists swansong, the inside of the lid bears a lavish solid shakudo seal inlaid with a gold wire signature, this further use of such expensive materials is a clear demonstration of how highly regarded this item was and likely reflects the importance of its intended recipient.

Literature:

When studying the extensive use of the expensive materials together with the outstanding workmanship, it is my firm belief that this koro was either destined for one of the major late 19th century expositions or commissioned for a wealthy or high ranking dignitary, the research continues. Rarely do we witness such meticulous attention to every minute detail, there is no doubting this tour de force of Meiji Period metalwork would have taken hundreds of hours to manufacture.

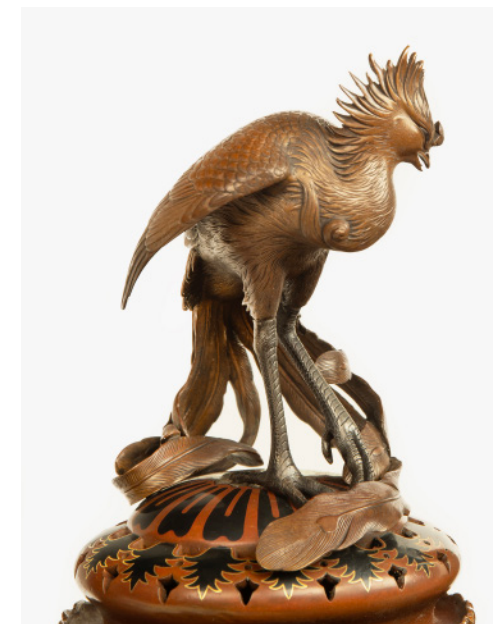
The Artist Seki Yoshihira is recorded on page 89 of the Toso Kinko Jiten (Japanese language), by Wakayama Takeshi, as "Surname Seki, resident of Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture, Meiji Period". He is also recorded In the Robert Haynes: the index of Japanese sword fittings and artists: Yoshihira, H 11568.0. family name: Seki worked in Takaoka City, Toyama prefecture, active 1875-1900.

Condition report:

Excellent condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Height: 20 1/2" 52 cm
Width: 8" 20 cm
Depth: 6 1/4" 16 cm



12
SILVER OKIMONO

Artist - Kihara Hoshu
Company - Ozeki

As part of our Japanese works of art collection we are delighted to offer this enchanting high quality pure silver and mixed metal okimono individually artist signed and further sealed by the highly acclaimed Ozeki company. This large scale sculpture depicts a majestic pair of pure silver Manchurian cranes upon a rocky outcrop within a lively waterway, the rock work formed as green patinated bronze upon a heavily cast pure silver base, the rock further highlighted with gold encrustations. The silver base has been finely carved to replicate turbulent crashing waves upon the rocks and is signed to the underside with the coveted Ozeki seal. Each crane has been painstakingly carved from pure silver with contrasting shakudo tail feathers and mixed metal extremities, the birds individually artist signed Hoshu, referring to an artist named Kihara Hoshu. Upon the rocky outcrop crawl a pair of minogame (long tailed turtles) each manufactured from shibuichi with gold decorated tails, an absolute joy of extreme high quality as you would expect from arguably the most notable retailers of the Meiji Period, Ozeki Yahei and his son Ozeki Sadajiro.

Literature:
The artist Hoshu was a member of the Tokyo carvers association and is recorded as actively taking part and winning medals at national exhibitions between 1897-1909, his exhibits primarily recorded as birds.

Ozeki Yahei 大関弥兵衛 was especially well known in the west as a broker for the highest quality metalwork objects. Ozeki commissioned works from such leading metalworkers as;
Unno Moritoshi 海野盛寿,
Yamada Motonobu 山田元信,
Kaneyasu Masatoshi 兼康正寿,
Ikeda Minkoku 池田民国
- all of which appeared in exhibitions under the brand name Ozeki 大関.

Condition report:
Fine condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:
Height: 18" 46 cm
Width: 15" 38 cm
Depth: 10 1/2" 26.5 cm





SHIBUICHI DRAGON OKIMONO

Artist - Kazumi

A very rare exceptional quality Meiji Period shibuichi okimono of a writhing dragon resting a large glass sphere upon his back, the sphere representing the flaming pearl. This rare example is formed from heavily cast shibuichi finely chiselled in exquisite detail, the dragons eyes rendered in gilt and shakudo detail for menacing effect, the underside is equally finely detailed and carries a shaped silver tablet artist signed Sanmi saku, which translates to read Kazumi, a fabulous okimono ideal for display to great effect on your shelf, side table or desk space, a superb example of this mythical creature ever popular with Asian art buyers.

**Literature:**

Kazumi the alternate name of Gyokuryuken Sanmi was a well recorded Meiji period artist making all manner of okimono in silver and bronze, whilst seemingly specializing in dragons. One particular silver dragon okimono by Kazumi realised an eye watering \$128,000 in Bonhams New York sale of March 2013.

In 2020 vision of an enlightened ruler, plate 20, we featured a pair of silver entwined dragons by the artist Kazumi also known as Gyokuryuken Sanmi, these have now found their way into a USA collection, we also featured a cast silver incense burner of a Shi Shi dog - plate 26.

In 2020 Vision vol II we featured an exquisite cast bronze dragon okimono by this artist which now resides in a US clients metalwork collection.

I have not managed to trace a shibuichi example in any of the major collections.

Provenance:

UK private collection.

Condition report:

Exceptional condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:

Height:	6"	15 cm (inc sphere)
Length:	8"	20 cm
Depth:	6 1/2"	16.5 cm

14
DAMASCENED IRON BOX

Subject - Kyoto Temple Scenes
Artist - Okuno Company

We are delighted to offer this exquisite iron box and cover of lobed rounded form manufactured in Kyoto by the Okuno company, a contemporary of the well know Komai company. This jewel of a box is decorated to the lid with images of temples of Kyoto worked in typical nunome-zogan within a floral vignette bordered with silver wire. The lobed shaped sides are worked in an assortment of complex diaper patterns, whilst lifting the lid reveals a sumptuous gilt lined interior. If that was not enough painstaking workmanship to satisfy most collectors, the underside of this box reveals a sensational silver wired floral brocade surrounding the gold signature seal, only the Japanese craftsmen of the Meiji period would consider going to such extremes on the underside, why? because they could. The seal being that of the Okuno company of Kyoto.

Literature:
See: The Nasser D Khalili collections Metalwork Volume I, Plate 31, for a further example of work by the Okuno Company. According to the editorial it is thought that a family member, possibly the sister of Komai Otojiro may have opened this company as a direct competitor of the more widely recognised Komai Company. When studying the workmanship and artistry against many comparisons of Komai's finest work you can see how this scenario would seem very plausible, in fact removing the signature from this box would lead many Japanese metalwork collectors to conclude this work as that of the Komai Company, perhaps it was, and just under a different family brand, our research continues.

Condition report:
Lovely condition.

Approximate sizes:
Height: 1 1/8" 3 cm
Diameter: 3" 7.6 cm



15
IRON WALL PANEL

Subject - Silk Production
Artist - Komai Company of Kyoto

As part of our Japanese works of art collection we are delighted to offer this large-scale early Meiji period (1868-1912) iron wall panel, manufactured by the highly regarded Komai company of Kyoto during their earlier period of production, in around 1880. The heavy gauge iron panel is finely detailed with multiple mixed metals worked as characters within and around buildings in landscape settings, the resulting picture portraying the rather interesting and historically significant story of Japanese silk production (see literature). The landscapes and buildings are painstakingly carved into the iron plate then brought to life with mixed alloys including silver, shibuichi and shakudo plus the significant use of lavish gold detailing in typical Komai style. This historically important panel is housed within a Japanese black lacquered frame of the period and is signed to the rear within a six character seal, this translates as “Kyoto Ju Komai Sei” or made by Komai of Kyoto.

Literature:
As stated, this opulent mixed metal decorated panel records the important history of traditional silk manufacture in Japan during the 19th century, a manufacturing process that was first brought to Japan as early as the 4th century, most likely from China. The everyday scenes portrayed in this work appear to include picking leaves from the mulberry bushes which were required to feed the silkworms, the drying process of the worms into cocoons, the dying and further drying of the silk, until finally the spinning process can begin to produce valuable yarns. This industry literally exploded during the Meiji Period with government sponsorship of basically anybody that had some land to farm, traditional farmers and landowners were given silkworms and taught how to farm them. This significant promotion of the silk industry soon resulted in a quantity and quality of silk that eventually surpassed the centuries old demand for Chinese silk, a silk that was at one time restricted for Imperial wear, such was its prized value. At one point during the latter part of the 19th century Japan's silk output accounted for around 80% of the country's exports, thus was the significance of this commodity to the Japanese economy, and in particular the rural farming industry.

Provenance:
USA Collection.

Condition report:
Lovely condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:
Height: 19 1/2" 49.5 cm
Width: 17" 43 cm
Panel: 16 1/8" 41 cm x 14 1/8" 36 cm





16

SILVER & SHIBUICHI VASES

Attributed - Hasegawa Issei

As part of our Japanese works of art exhibition I am delighted to offer this exceptional quality pair of Meiji Period 1868-1912 mixed metal vases. The vases are formed from pure silver with each vase housing four shield shaped shibuichi panels, these panels decorated in fine quality mixed metals including shakudo, silver and gold. The highly skilled artist has gone to extraordinary lengths to manufacture these vases in such complex fashion, the blackened silver bodies rise and taper from the platform base with the inset shibuichi panels formed to curve within their individual gilt frames, this unusual form gives rise to a slight convex effect as well as an appealing softened angled aspect, presumably intended to allow the display of four panels at once. Each of the designs are painstakingly crafted as individual scenes of birds in flight or at rest within native flora, each panel an intricate work of art.

The necks and bases are further decorated with conforming gold floral swags with the inner linings of these heavy gauge vases manufactured from pure silver.

Once again a Japanese artisan has frustrated us by not leaving his signature, perhaps on this occasion, as in many instances, the wealthy recipient or commissioning agent wanted them unsigned, we will never know for sure. What is sure is that this fine pair of vases will stand up to the scrutiny of the most fastidious collectors of Japanese metalwork of the period.

Attribution:
Having researched and handled many examples of mixed metal wares of this period and in particular artists excelling in the primary use of silver and shibuichi, it leads me to come up with two possible names that I would feel comfortable in attributing these vases to. Naturally there are other possibilities and my opinion is for guidance only.

The first was a master at decorating small silver vessels with tranquil scenes as well as box lids with shibuichi panels often drawn in this style, that artist was Sato Kazuhide, his work can be found in many leading collections, his best known work, possibly a silver chicken koro.

However, I am going to stick my neck out and plump for another artist excelling in exactly this type and quality of works, his name Hasegawa Issei.

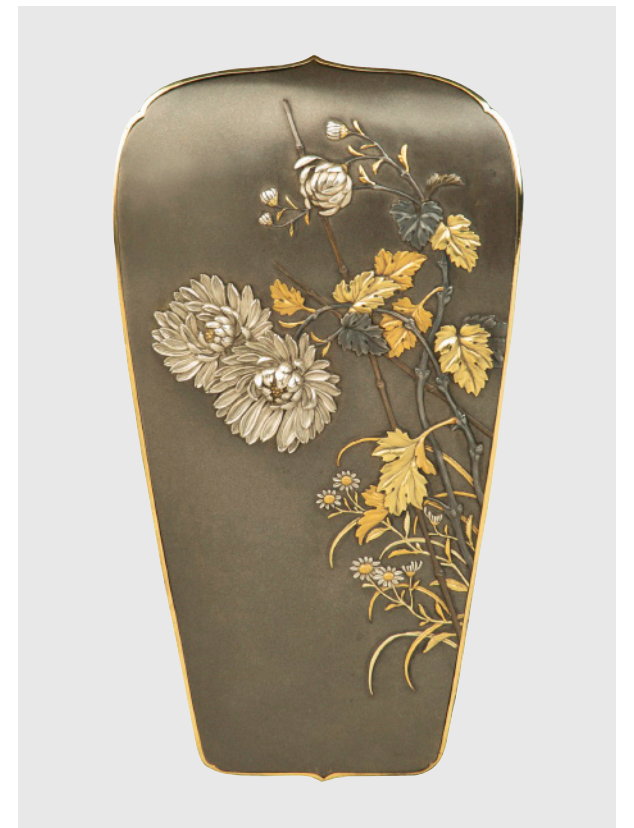
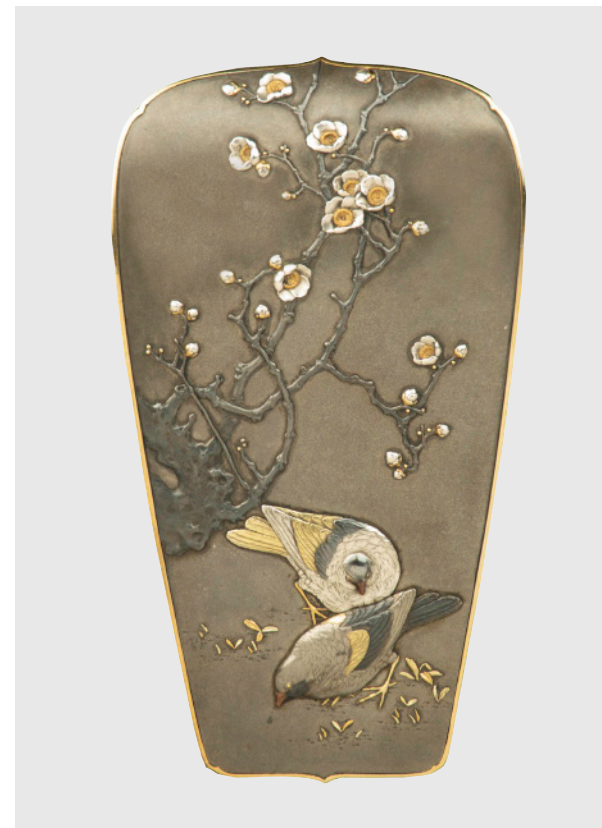
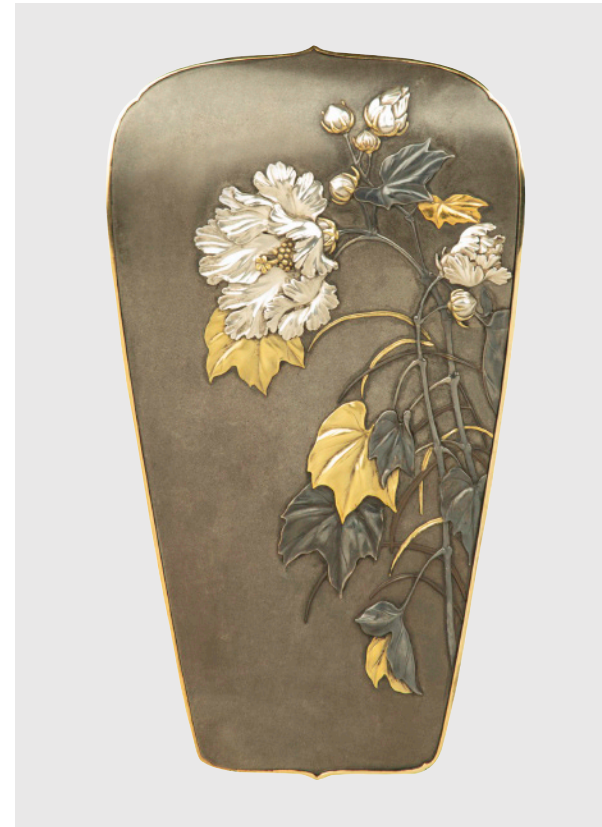
Hasegawa Issei, art name Gyokutosai worked in Asakusa Tokyo, he exhibited at the Chicago columbia exposition 1893, Liège exposition 1905 he exhibited a crystal ball on a metal base, and at the Paris exposition 1900 he exhibited a silver vase, incense burner and a bird subject okimono.

The Kyoto Sannenzaka museum has several works by the artist. The Khalili collection has two works by the artist reproduced in The Meiji no Takara, Metalwork Part I – plate 66, and Part II – plate 130. In 2020 Vision of an enlightened ruler Vol I – Plate 17 we exhibited a very similar decorated silver & shibuichi vase by this artist, now residing in a USA collection.



Condition Report:
Lovely condition throughout.

Approximate sizes:
Height: 9 1/2" 24 cm
Width: 4" 10.2 cm
Weight: 3028 gms





Photography – Emma Van Lindholm
Research & translations – Mieko Gray
Design – Steve Hayes



STEVE SLY
JAPANESE WORKS OF ART

t. +44 (0)7774 635918
e. steve@steveslyjapaneseart.com
www.steveslyjapaneseart.com