

SECTION 1

Exhibit No.1-No.30

The Beauty of Kana: Classical Calligraphy of the 11th Century

Japan did not have a native writing system in ancient times, so it used written characters imported from China to represent the sounds of the Japanese language. This phonetic writing system, known as *kana*, developed in tandem with the rise of Japanese-style *waka* poetry. Since *kana* was mainly used by women, who wrote down *waka* poetry and other things with it, it was also called *onnade*, or women's writing. *Kana* was brushed in a uniquely Japanese style, in fine, cursive, connecting lines. The refined beauty of *kana* was perfected in the 11th century, especially in manuscripts of the *Kokin wakashū* imperial poetry anthology, such as the “Kōyagire” and “Sekido” versions, where the minimal inflection of line and flowing, unbroken brushstrokes form a perfect harmony with the negative space.

FEATURE COLUMN

Calligraphers Transmitting Tradition

Kohitsu—literally “old brushwork”—is a term used to refer to calligraphies by people of old, but in a narrower sense, it refers specifically to manuscripts of poetry anthologies and other literary works produced from the Heian period to the middle of the Kamakura period. Although the creators of many of these old calligraphies from the Kamakura period and earlier were unknown, they were later identified as being famous poets and calligraphers, such as Ki no Tsurayuki or Fujiwara no Yukinari, by appraisers known as *kohitsu-mi* who were in charge of authenticating calligraphy for those in power from the time of Toyotomi rule beginning in the mid-1580s and onward. However, these appraisers had no objective basis for their assessments, but rather distinguished exceptional works by assigning the names of famous calligraphers to them, thereby devising a kind of grading system.

Although the identities of calligraphers of some *kohitsu* have been determined from colophons or historical documents, the majority of them are still unidentified. The attributions made by the *kohitsu-mi* appraisers, although not directly verifiable, did, to a certain extent, identify stylistic categories and could be considered the genesis of calligraphic research. As a result, even today, many unknown calligraphers' works are identified as “attributed to” the calligraphers named by these *kohitsu-mi* appraisers.

SECTION 2

Exhibit No.31-No.45

The Sesonji School

The branch of the Fujiwara family that began with Fujiwara no Yukinari (972–1027), one of the three great calligraphers of the Heian period, and continued with second-generation Yukitsune, third-generation Korefusa, fourth-generation Sadazane, and fifth-generation Sadanobu, is known as the Sesonji family. The name was adopted during the Kamakura period by the eighth-generation head of the family, Yuki Yoshi, from the name of the family temple. The family served as secretaries for the imperial court and their calligraphic lineage later became known as the Sesonji school. However, the school does not have a single unified style, rather each individual developed a personal style that was ahead of its time. This school formed the backbone of calligraphic arts in the 11th and 12th centuries.

SECTION 3

Exhibit No.46-No.72

Increasing Variety in Kana Calligraphy: The Beauty of Kohitsu in the 12th and 13th Centuries

In the 12th century, a number of diverse and distinctive *kana* styles appeared one after another. The calligraphy of imperial regent (*kanpaku*) Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1097–1164), was known as the Hosshōji school because he resided at Hosshōji temple in the eastern district of Kyoto. His vigorous and dignified style of calligraphy was enjoyed at the time as a “modern style,” and influenced many other skilled calligraphers as it developed. Among the noted calligraphers of the Hosshōji school were Fujiwara no Norinaga (1109–80), who inscribed the “Imaki-gire” fragment from the *Kokin wakashū* poetry collection and the text of the “Takekawa” and “Hashihime” chapters of the National Treasure *The Tale of Genji Illustrated Scrolls*, and Kujō Kanezane, Tadamichi's third son. Other important schools of calligraphy also appeared, including the leading school of calligraphy in the Kamakura period, the Gokyōgoku school of Gokyōgoku Yoshitsune (1169–1206), who was the second son of Kanezane, as well as the Kuzei-in school of Yoshitsune's son, Kujō Noriie (1194–1255).

Also, scholars Fujiwara no Toshinari (1114–1204) and his son Sadaie (1162–1241), who established their own style of calligraphy and greatly influenced later generations, are also indispensable in understanding the development of calligraphy from the 12th century onward.

SECTION 4

Exhibit No.73-No.83

Shinkan: Imperial Calligraphies

Shinkan is the term for documents written by the emperor himself. The emperors of the late Kamakura to Nanbokuchō periods in particular developed an elegant style of calligraphy, which was known as *shinkan'yō* (imperial style) in later periods. However, this too was not a uniform style of calligraphy, but varied from emperor to emperor.

Emperors Gotoba (1180–1239), Gofukakusa (1243–1304), Fushimi (1265–1317), and others are well known for their calligraphy and Emperor Fushimi in particular is known to have collected and copied masterpieces of the past, including works by Fujiwara no Yukinari and others famous calligraphers of the Heian period, as well as calligraphers of the Sesonji school. The historical record *Masukagami* recounts that Fushimi was one of the best calligraphers of the Kamakura period, surpassing even Fujiwara no Yukinari.

SECTION 5

Exhibit No.84-No.89

Old Sutra Copies

With the arrival of Buddhism to Japan, court nobles became devout followers and copied many sutras. The Lotus Sutra's “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” chapter states that reading, recitation, and copying will bring the practitioner great merit, so one of the main objectives in copying sutras was this act of accumulating merit. In the 8th century, sutra copying for the protection of the state became a national project, and in the mid-Heian period, with the spread of belief in *mappō*, the age of degeneration of the Buddhist Law, copying sutras became popular as a means of achieving rebirth in the Pure Land Paradise.

Sutra texts were copied on purple or navy blue colored papers, or on papers covered with picture sketches or sprinkled with flecks of gold or silver leaf. No expense was spared, from the material of the rollers around which the scrolls were wound, to the decorations on the boxes in which the sutras were stored.

The calligraphic style of sutras brushed by professional sutra copyists and noted calligraphers gradually shifted from the severe style of the Nara period to a more elegant, Japanese-influenced style. Like the old calligraphies, these sutra copies were considered objects of aesthetic appreciation in themselves, and old sutras copies mounted as hanging scrolls or pasted into copy books were known as *kyō-gire*, or “sutra fragments.”

SECTION 6

Exhibit No.90

Bokuseki Calligraphy of Buddhist monk

FOR PRELIMINARY KNOWLEDGE

手鑑

Tekagami: Album of exemplary calligraphy

During the Momoyama and early Edo period (late 16th to 17th C.), the court nobles, warrior lords (daimyo), and even upper-class citizens liked to collect beautiful calligraphic works and to put them into a handy album. These albums were called *Tekagami* (lit. “mirror of hands”), and were appreciated as exemplars for practicing calligraphy. Because these albums were created by cutting the original scrolls or books and separating pieces of poems, sutras, etc. from them, numerous fragments of classic calligraphy called *Kohitsu-gire* (fragments of classic calligraphy) were produced.

Tekagami was edited with a great respect and sense of reminiscence to the classic calligraphy, and combined various calligraphy fragments such as letters, sutras, or books of a particular house, etc. The particular style is considered to be created towards the end of the Muromachi period, and during the rule by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) *Tekagami* was adopted as an ornament to receive Shogun’s visit. Creating *Tekagami* became very much popular thereafter.

In this exhibition, we will show 5 important *tekagami* albums from among many of our *tekagami* collections.

鳳凰台

Hō’ōdai (“stand of phoenix”),
Nara-Edo period, 7-16th c.
Donated by the Okaya Family in 1965.

The Okaya Family is a wealthy merchant house in Nagoya since the Edo period. Sōjun, the 6th generation head of the Okaya Family, compiled this *tekagami* by collecting and arranging the pieces of classic calligraphy. It consists of a total 133 pieces of classic calligraphy including very famous ones.

玉海

Gyokukai (“sea of jewels”), album of two volumes.
Nara-Edo period, 8-17th C.

Consisting of two volumes, *Gyokukai* has distinctive quality suitable to be owned by daimyo. A total of 193 pieces and 185 pieces of fragments are mounted respectively in the 2 volumes.

藁叢

Kōsō (“Straws and grasses”), album of two volumes.
Nara-Edo period, 8-17th c.
Donated by the Okaya Family in 1965.

Originally, this album consisted of 3 volumes. A total of 59 pieces and 64 pieces of fragments are mounted respectively in the extant two volumes, *Ten* (“heaven”) and *Jin* (“human being”).

霜のふり葉

Shimonofuriha (“Leaves with frosts”),
Nara-Edo period, 8-17th c.

The year in which this album was produced is considered to be the mid-Edo period, since the landscape painting in the endpaper is by Kanō Tsunenobu (1636-1713). A total of 175 pieces of fragments are mounted in this album.

蓬左

Hōsa,
Nara-Edo period, 8-17th c.

This album is considered to be compiled in the beginning of the Edo period, and has been handed down in the Owari Tokugawa Family. The name of “Hōsa” (as in the “Hōsa Library”) was given in recent years. A total of 134 pieces of fragments are mounted in this album.

FOR PRELIMINARY KNOWLEDGE

料紙

Ryōshi, decorative paper

Ryōshi was specially ordered for doing calligraphy. Ornamented with a myriad of techniques, these papers beautifully capture a distinctly Japanese aesthetic. Many are dyed in rich greens, blues, reds and purples (*somegami* 染紙); some with billowing cloud patterns (*uchigumorigami* 打曇紙, *tobikumo* 飛雲); others have been printed with woodblock patterns in color of mica (*karakami* 唐紙) or in glossy rubbed wax (*rōsen* 蠟燭); still others dazzle the eyes with sprinkled flecks of gold and silver (*kirihaku* 切箔, *noge* 野毛, *sunago* 砂子); yet others have swirling marbled patterns (*suminagashi* 墨流し); or pictorial underpaintings (*shita-e* 下絵). In the gorgeous decorations of these papers used for writing calligraphy samplers or sutras, an ancient grace lies concentrated. The design interplay between papers and what is brushed on them brings into play a uniquely Japanese sense of beauty that reaches beyond the Chinese fusion of painting and calligraphy. Finally, these papers are not simply beautiful in their own right, but reflect the aesthetic tastes of the times in which they were made, of the people who created them, and of those who wrote on them.



© The Tokugawa Art Museum
1017 Tokugawa-cho, Higashi-ku,
Nagoya, 461-0023
TEL: 052-935-6262 / FAX: 052-935-6261

Thematic Exhibition Captivating *Kohitsu*

January 4 (Thu.) - 28 (Sun.), 2024
The Hōsa Bunko Galleries

INTRODUCTION

Kohitsu literally translates as “old brushwork,” and refers generally to calligraphy by people of classical times, but in a narrower sense it refers specifically to poetry anthologies and other literary works written by courtiers of the Heian and Kamakura periods.

In the late Muromachi period, these writings were frequently separated into individual pages or even into fragments of just a few lines each, which were remounted as hanging scrolls for decorating tearoom alcoves or assembled as albums of calligraphy samples in different hands. Elegant calligraphic works inscribed on decorative papers reflecting sophisticated aristocratic tastes were particularly sought after by many of the feudal lords of the Edo period.

The Tokugawa Art Museum collection includes masterful examples of Heian-period *kohitsu* calligraphies passed down in the Owari Tokugawa family, including the poetry anthology “Shigeyuki-shū”, “Meikakashū-gire” and as well as the recently donated “Ishiyama-gire” and “Sekido-bon-Kokin-wakashū-gire”, which form the core of this exhibition.

In addition, this exhibition will feature for the first time a collection of 20 pieces of calligraphy from the former collection of Dr. Junzo and Chiyoko Teshigawara, which were the most recent acquisition of the Tokugawa Art Museum collection this year.

