

[Summer Special Exhibition]

Equipment and Attire of the Samurai Warrior

# The Beauty of Japanese Armor



July 27 (Sat.) - September 16 (Mon.), 2024

Original Wing of the Tokugawa Art Museum

## Introduction

Among armor from all over the world and of all ages, Japanese armor is renowned for being created with an emphasis on beauty and brilliance. Ōyoroï armor, which first appeared in the Heian period, was meant for use on the battlefield, but was influenced by classical court culture and “layered color” combinations and was decorated with cords dyed in dazzling colors. Though armor of the Warring States period intended for foot soldiers prioritized functionality and simple designs, armor was decorated brightly to be eye catching on the battlefield and unique and unusual designs were often adopted to pray for success in battle.

This exhibition presents the great variety of decoration in Japanese armor as well as the study and reproduction of medieval armor that flourished at the end of the Edo period.

## Chapter 1

Exhibit No. 1 - No. 4

### Classical Armaments

The history of armor in Japan stretches back to the Yayoi period, prior to the mid-3rd century. At this time armor construction was influenced by the Chinese continent and “mokkō,” or lamellar body armor, were constructed from small wooden plates connected by leather ties. With the introduction of iron in the Kofun period (late 3rd century to the end of the 6th century) to the Nara period (8th century), construction of armor continued to draw from continental influence and armor called *tankō*, armor protecting the lower torso, and *keikō*, which covered the upper chest as well, were constructed using sheets of iron and leather. The *keikō* is believed to be the original form of the *ōyoroï* utilized in later periods.

From the end of the Heian period (mid-11th century), armor changed due to the evolving technology of warfare and weapons, producing armor that is uniquely Japanese, including the four major types of *ōyoroï*, *dōmaru*, *haramaki*, and the *tōsei gusoku*.

## Chapter 2

Exhibit No. 5 - No. 21

### Development of the Ōyoroï, Dōmaru, and Haramaki

With the rise of the samurai during the mid Heian period (mid-11th century), the scale of battle grew, and armor and swords evolved to uniquely Japanese styles.

The “*ōyoroï*” armor was mainly used by cavalry after the late Heian period but was only used by the most elite horsemen. As samurai were battling on horseback, the *ōyoroï* was not designed for maneuverability, the armor is large and thick, and fully encloses the torso. On the other hand, the *dōmaru*, armor used by foot soldiers and low to mid-ranking samurai, was designed to be flexible and for soldiers to easily move. There is an opening on the right side of the torso for the soldier to put on the armor.

Cavalry battles were phased out after the Nanbokuchō period (mid-14th century) and though the *ōyoroï* was no longer used in practice, these pieces were treasured as family heirlooms or dedicated to shrines and temples. At this time, high-ranking samurai wore *dōmaru* armor equipped with helmets and large sleeves and mid to low-ranking samurai used *haramaki* that had a closing on the center back.

## Chapter 3

Exhibit No. 22 - No. 43

### Warring States Period: Modern Armor (Tōsei-gusoku)

In the Warring States period (1467-1590), firearms were incorporated into warfare on a large scale and the very concept of battle was changed, battles of unprecedented size unfolded. Along with the use of traditional armor, the *dōmaru*, the increased use of firearms required enhancements in the defensive capabilities of armor as well as production efficiency. This resulted in the appearance of the *tōsei-gusoku*, so called “modern armor.” *Tōsei-gusoku* included faceplates, gauntlets, sleeves, shields, and shin guards, leaving no part of the body vulnerable. Moreover, coordinating design between all parts of the armor fostered a sense of solidarity between the wearers. Helmets also became popular, with rounded shapes such as “*zunari*” and peach-shapes called “*momonari*.” These helmets were designed to deflect the impact of bullets and spears.

In *ōyoroï* and *dōmaru* of previous ages the key design elements were color and decoration, including brightly colored threads, painted leather with images of Japanese deities, Buddhas, and divine beasts, and intricately carved decorative metal fittings. After the Warring States period, *tōsei-gusoku* were primarily decorated with unusual shapes and eye-catching designs, including “unconventional helmets” decorated with a variety of motifs including household objects, plants, animals, or the Japanese deities and Buddhas worshipped by the wearer.

## Chapter 4

Exhibit No. 44 - No. 72

### Edo Period Peacetime and Armor

After the Siege of Osaka began in Keichō year 19 (1614) and the Shimabara Rebellion in Kan’ei year 14 (1637), largescale battles disappeared and a period of peace began, decreasing the need for armor. However, in the Edo period, feudal lords called daimyō had armor made by official armorers in the name of maintaining emergency preparedness and for ceremonial use. These pieces were mainly used at yearly celebrations including the unveiling of armor, an auspicious New Year’s ceremony, and during the *tango no sekku*, or boy’s festival, ceremonies to ward off evil spirits from young boys. The armor was also used at a young man’s “first armor wearing,” held between the ages of 12 to 16. Armor was displayed as a symbol of the family’s standing. Rather than being practical, armor during this period was made with an emphasis on its splendor and grandeur, as it was worthy of the honor of the samurai class.

## Chapter 5

Exhibit No. 73 - No. 83

### Ceremonial Armor

The magnificently crafted *ōyoroï* armor was worn by high-ranking samurai and was therefore called “*shikishō no yoroï*” meaning formal armor. After the ages when *ōyoroï* was used in actual warfare, these pieces were treasured by warrior families or dedicated to shrines and temples.

Though warriors during the Warring States period (1467-1590) wore modern armor (*tōsei-gusoku*) for the most part, these warriors were often depicted in portraits and painted battle scenes in styles reminiscent of medieval warriors from the Genpei wars. Warriors were depicted in formal armor in these paintings to display the stature of their families and their dignity.

Moreover, even in *ukiyo-e* pictures popular with townspeople, warriors of the Warring States period were depicted wearing *ōyoroï*, raising both the townspeople’s interest in and fascination with *ōyoroï*.

## Chapter 6

Exhibit No. 84 - No. 91

### Restoration and Research of Medieval Armor

Armor made during the Edo period, 1603-1868, including *ōyoroï*, *dōmaru* and *haramaki* were called “retro-style armor.” Kokugaku, the study of national history and narrative, flourished in the mid-Edo period and medieval armor became the focus of study by connoisseurs. One of the first to take an interest in medieval armor was the scholar Arai Hakuseki (1657-1725), who published the *Honchō gunki kō*, Thoughts on Japanese Military Equipment, a compendium of the evolution of armor from the ancient period to the current day, in the first year of Genbun (1736). Afterwards, Ise Sadatake (1718-1784), a shogunate retainer, published the *Gun’yōki*, Record of Martial Goods, and Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1829), a member of the shogun’s council of elders, published the *Shūkojishshu*, Compiled Antiquities in Ten Categories. Many further books on medieval armor were also published. Amidst this boom of interest in armor, daimyō families had many reproduction *ōyoroï* manufactured. “Retro-style armor” has very little practical use and was produced with the intent of creating beautiful pieces that highlight the craftsmanship of metalwork, dyeing and weaving, leatherwork, and lacquering used to adorn the armor.



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