

The Audacious Eye: Japanese Art from the Clark Collections

October 6, 2013 through January 12, 2014



Suzuki Kiitsu, Japanese, 1796–1858, *Shō-Kannon*, 19th century, ink, color, and gold on silk; hanging scroll, The John R. Van Derlip Fund; purchase from the collection of Elizabeth and Willard Clark 2013.31.33

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This fall, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) will celebrate the acquisition of the Clark Collections of Japanese Art with the special exhibition “The Audacious Eye: Japanese Art from the Clark Collections.” Opening October 6, 2013, the exhibition presents 120 highlights showcasing 1,200 years of Japanese art from the 8th century to the present. This is the first in a series of exhibitions featuring the Clark Collections and emphasizing the richness of the MIA’s Japanese collection— one of the finest in the nation.

Bill and Libby Clark began collecting Japanese art in 1978, and in 1995 founded the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, a nonprofit museum, near their home in central California. Between the museum and their private collection, they eventually amassed 1,700 works of art, from paintings to woodblock prints, ceramics to textiles, wood sculptures to works of bamboo and lacquer ware.

The Clark Collections reflect the scope of Japanese art in all its polarities—restrained and exuberant, humorous and resolute, conventional and eccentric—derived from a long history of combining native and imported ideas and aesthetics. Since the late 19th century, collectors from Western countries, captivated by the various motifs, media, and expressions of Japanese art, embarked on amassing impressive collections for their curiosity and pleasure. Bill and Libby Clark are firmly placed in this tradition and succeeded in assembling one of the finest collections of Japanese art in private hands.

“Bill did not follow market trends or restrict himself to a specific medium, time period, artist, or motif,” says Andreas Marks, curator of Japanese and Korean Art at the MIA and director

of the Clark Center at the MIA. “He freed himself to collect whatever he liked, whatever caught his audacious eye, and he strove to find strange, peculiar, curious, intriguing works that ‘spoke to him.’”

Testifying to his idiosyncratic collecting, the works range from the 13th-century wood sculpture of Daiitoku Myoo, the Buddhist Wisdom King of Awe-Inspiring Power, to a pair of 20th-century six-panel folding screens by Mano Kyotei (1874–1934), showing the Gods of Thunder, Wind, and Rain on silver ground.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

The exhibition is divided into eight sections, starting with **Visualizing Buddhist Faith**, a series of sculptures and paintings from the 8th to the 14th century. It was a period of revitalization of Buddhist art, as new subjects and techniques broadened the genre along with the audience. These works are unique products of medieval Japan, and invaluable for observing the country’s changing tides of religious belief.

Chinese Influence: 15th to 16th Century explores Japan’s unabashed embrace of Chinese ink painting. The austerity of the form appealed to the Confucian values of directness, modesty, and restraint, while Chinese subjects, such as the hawk depicted in a superb ink painting by Kanō Yukinobu (1513–73), spoke to the unity of martial prowess and aesthetic discernment that the Japanese warrior class pursued.

Diversification in the 17th Century showcases the booming arts of the Edo period (1603–1868). The relative peace and stability of the era supported the emergence of an educated, cultured, and affluent audience, including commoners, whose patronage helped the arts flourish and spread into a number of distinct movements.

Idiosyncrasies of the 18th Century presents some of the period’s most celebrated eccentric artists, including Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–95), Nagasawa Rosetsu (1747–99), Soga Shōhaku (1730–81), and Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800). Famed for their individualistic styles, these artists broke with the mainstream and embarked on unconventional, bold ideas.

Assimilating the Exotic in the 19th Century shows how Japanese artists came under the influence of art from mainland Asia and the West despite contact with foreign countries



Kanō Yukinobu, Japanese, 1643–82, *Hawk*, 16th century, ink on paper; hanging scroll, gift of the Clark Center for Japanese Arts and Culture 2013.29.93

being strictly limited during the Edo period. Some, such as Tani Bunchō (1763–1840) and Suzuki Kiitsu (1796–1858), experimented with Western techniques like single-point perspective. Others, including Kiitsu and Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1821), looked to the past to create fresh interpretations of Japan’s decorative heritage.

Tradition and Modernity in the Late 19th Century tracks the revival of older themes in painting at a time when Japan was both rapidly modernizing and looking back fondly to its own heritage.

Novel Expressions in the First Half of the 20th Century covers the exciting period of travel and exchange before World War II, when Japanese artists were granted unprecedented access to diverse influences that soon appeared in their own work, including Western realism.

The final section, Contemporary Visions of the Last 15 Years, brings things up to the present with largely three-dimensional works created by living artists who have reinvigorated established art forms.

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ABOUT THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), home to one of the finest encyclopedic art collections in the country, houses more than 80,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history. Highlights of the permanent collection include European masterworks by Rembrandt, Poussin, and van Gogh; modern and contemporary painting and sculpture by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Stella, and Close; as well as internationally significant collections of prints and drawings, decorative arts, Modernist design, photographs, textiles, and Asian, African, and Native American art. General admission is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. Museum hours: Sunday, 11 A.M.–5 P.M.; Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Thursday, 10 A.M.–9 P.M.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3000 or visit www.artsmia.org.