

28.09.2012 – 04.02.2013

JAPAN – FRAGILITY OF EXISTENCE

Masterpieces from the Genzo Hattori Collection



Katsushika Hokusai
Under a Wave off Kanagawa (Detail),
from the series: 36 Views of Mount Fuji, c. 1830
Private Collection



IKEGAMI Shuho, Hinazuru-Sanbanso
© Hattori Collection

JAPAN – FRAGILITY OF BEING

MASTERPIECES FROM THE GENZO HATTORI COLLECTION

*Complemented by color woodcuts from the Leopold Collection II
and comparative examples of fin-de-siècle art*

Leopold Museum, Vienna, 28th of September 2012 to 4th of February 2013

In the autumn of 2012, the exhibition »Japan – The Fragility of Being« will for the first time show a representative selection of around 50 masterful examples of traditional Japanese ink painting (Sumi-e) and calligraphy (Shodō) from the Genzo Hattori Collection. Owned by Genzo Hattori's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Toyoko Hattori, this private collection includes works from the 12th to the 20th century. The works from this extraordinary collection, which have never been publicly displayed before, will be complemented by previously unseen Japanese color woodcuts dating from the 17th to the 20th century from the Leopold Collection II.

THE HATTORI FAMILY

The son of the founder of the SEIKO Company, Genzo Hattori (1888-1963) was an entrepreneur with a penchant for and an extensive knowledge of Japanese art, who built up a comprehensive collection throughout his life. After Genzo Hattori's death in 1963, the collection was passed down to his three sons and was maintained by Seizaburo Hattori, who was the most interested in art and culture among the three brothers.

In 1977 he moved to Vienna with his family, where he died 15 years later in 1992. Since then, the collection has been looked after by his widow, Mrs. Toyoko Hattori, a solo violinist, who has dedicated her entire life to promoting cultural exchange and friendly ties between Austria and Japan through music. A recipient of the Austrian Cross of Honor for Arts and Science and of the Order of Merit for Services Rendered to the Republic of Austria, she has lived in Vienna for 34 years.



ANDO HIROSHIGE
Beating Laundry at the Mishima River
in Settsu Province, from the series:
The Six Jade Rivers in Different Provinces, 1857
Leopold Collection II

THE FRAGILITY OF BEING – A SUBJECT OF POIGNANT RELEVANCE

The exhibition's overall theme »The Fragility of Being« has gained tragic poignancy following the devastating earthquake in Japan last March, but is also a fundamental aspect of Japanese ideology. This unique worldview has been shaped for centuries by the experience of the frailty of human existence due to natural disasters and civil wars and by the fragility of psychological life as expressed in the long-standing Japanese tradition of demonic and ghostly phenomena. In accordance with this ideology, the Buddhist religion, which was adopted from China, underlines the transience of all beings and teaches that humans should strive towards attaining a more stable spiritual existence, described as »Nothing« in Zen, which can only be reached by overcoming the fragile, unstable self.

FRAGILE WORLDS ON SCROLL PAINTINGS AND FOLDING SCREENS

The main aim of this exhibition featuring high quality scroll paintings and folding screens from eight centuries is not to trace a chronological art-historical development, but rather to render this unique ideology based on the »Fragility of Being« visible to audiences. Another reason for this approach is that, while the various artistic themes and techniques usually follow a stringent succession in European art history, they tend to coexist in Japanese art.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FAR EASTERN AND EUROPEAN ART

The presentation also serves to highlight the main difference between the Far Eastern and European concepts of art. While European art focuses on the (human) figure and thus on the hermeneutics of seeing, Japanese art is more concerned with the comprehensive meaning of (empty) space and thus with the inward hermeneutics of feeling.

WORKS OF THE KANO FAMILY

Particularly stunning examples of Japanese art hail from the Kano family – Kanô Tanyu (Kyoto 1602-1674 Edo/modern-day Tokyo) and Kanô Tsunenobu (Kyoto 1636-1713 Edo/modern-day Tokyo). But the exhibition also features some wonderful works from the 19th and even the 20th century which illustrate how the spiritual Japanese tradition effortlessly found its way into modernity – sometimes also in a humorous manner, as shown by the travel diary Okamoto Ippei (Hakodate 1886-1948 ?) carried by the spirit of Zen humor.

THE JAPANESE WAY OF LIFE AND CONCEPT OF ART

Visitors to the exhibition are given a deeper understanding of Far Eastern art, and particularly of Japanese art, by exploring the following themes:

- introspection: mei-sou
- living according to nature: shiki oriori no kurashi
- spiritual intuition to see the essence of things: zen
- Buddha: hotoke
- »pure heart«: kiyoi
- lightness and humor: karui
- internal transformation within a conventional outer shell:
kuuki no sanagi (air puppet, Murakami)
- solitude, seclusion, dissolution of the self: sabishii
- energetic life, vitality: ki



MUSO SOSEKI, »Gi-Chiku«
© Hattori Collection

NOTABLE CALLIGRAPHIES

Particularly noteworthy from an art historical perspective are the calligraphies of the first Tokugawa shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), of his predecessor, the famous general and promoter of the arts Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), and of his brother Toyotomi Hideyori (1593-1615), as well as a letter by Ashikaga Tadayoshi (1306-1352) of the Ashikaga shogun family and a document by a member of an earlier famous samurai family, Taira Mitsumori (1172-1229). Other notable calligraphies include examples from the area of Zen Buddhism by Kobori Sochu, Jakushitsu Genko (14th century) and others, an elegant work hailing from the 12th century by Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204) as well as a particularly valuable 12th century sutra scripture of the Hoke-kyō, the famous Lotus Sutra (sutra being a Buddhist doctrine) with golden letters featuring a depiction of Buddhist heaven in gold on the first sheet of the scroll.

CONNECTION TO THE LEOPOLD MUSEUM: JAPONISM AND THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE ART ON THE SECESSION

The connection between Japanese art and the Leopold Museum with its focus on the period of »Vienna around 1900« becomes apparent through comparative examples from the Leopold Collection, which will enter into a direct dialogue with the Japanese artworks. It is widely known that the exponents of Jugendstil and the Secessionist movement were greatly inspired by Far Eastern art and adopted many of its hallmarks, such as vertical formats, flatness instead of three-dimensionality, accentuated contours, asymmetry, areas left blank, the importance of ornaments and a closer connection to artisan craftwork. Thus, the exhibition shows the basis for the emergence of Japonism around 1900.

COLOR WOODCUTS FROM THE LEOPOLD COLLECTION II

An even closer connection between the Leopold Museum and Japanese art is revealed by the inclusion of color woodcuts from the Leopold Collection II. Eminent examples of this art movement, which has proved highly influential in Europe, are being chosen for the exhibition from the several hundred woodcuts comprised within the collection. They are selected based on their art historical and artistic importance and their relevance to the exhibition's overall theme »The Fragility of Being«. Thus, the chosen examples predominantly include depictions of natural disasters, such as Katsushika Hokusai's (1760-1849) famous Great Wave, of civil wars and ghostly and demonic apparitions, as well as highly erotic scenes, so-called shunga.

LEE UFAN PROJECT

The Leopold Museum plans to include into the presentation an installation by the world-renowned Korean-born artist Lee Ufan (born 1936) inspired by Far Eastern esthetics and Zen Buddhism, which would set the tone for the exhibition. Lee Ufan, who just had a solo exhibition at New York's Guggenheim Museum and to whom an entire museum has been dedicated in Japan, bridges the gap between Korea and Japan, two nations which share a close connection in art, despite having been painfully divided by history. Whether this project can indeed be realized with the aid of sponsors remains to be seen at this point.

Exhibition curator: Diethard Leopold