

CHRISTIE'S

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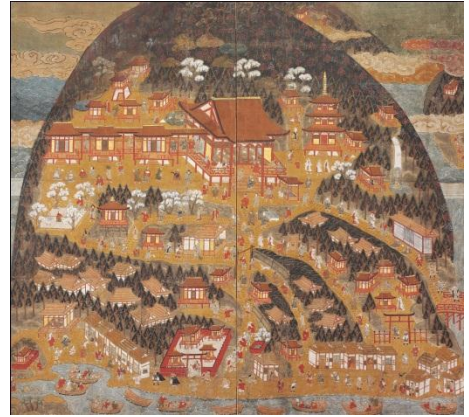
ASOBI: INGENIOUS CREATIVITY JAPANESE WORKS OF ART FROM ANTIQUITY TO CONTEMPORARY At Christie's in October 2014



South Kensington – Christie's is pleased to announce the second annual sale of *Asobi: Ingenious Creativity - Japanese Works of Art from Antiquity to Contemporary* at South Kensington on 15 October 2014, during Frieze week. From its inception to the present day, there is a *joie de vivre* that runs through Japanese culture and is apparent throughout the visual arts. *Asobi gokoro*, or 'the playful heart' manifests itself in an endless play with form, from wilful distortion to tongue-in-cheek humour; light-hearted treatment of serious themes to the juxtaposition of unexpected elements. The leitmotif of the sale, *Asobi* connects prehistoric ceramics, 16th/17th century screens and 20th century avant-garde painting, photobooks and photographs. Comprising over 170 lots of fine Japanese art which highlight the visual appeal, accessibility and relevance of Japanese art to contemporary collecting tastes, this dynamic sale is led by a magnificent panel by Shibata Zeshin (1807 - 1891), which is the only exhibition panel of this scale to come to auction (estimate: £600,000-800,000, *illustrated above*). Presenting a rich and varied array of opportunities for established and new collectors, with estimates ranging from £800 up to £800,000, the sale is expected to realise in the region of £4 million. A selection of highlights will go on view first at Christie's King Street on 2 and 3 October, followed by the full pre-sale exhibition at Christie's South Kensington from 11 to 14 October.

ANTIQUITY

A leading highlight in the sale is **an important two-fold screen depicting the *Chomeiji Sankei mandara* [Chomeiji Temple Pilgrimage Mandala], 16th century**, which would have been used by priests for the guidance and instruction of pilgrims to the temple (estimate: £500,000-700,000, *illustrated right*). Offered from *The Property of a Swiss Collector*, this screen is the oldest known version of the Chomeiji pilgrim mandala dating from the early 16th century, and would have been carried on lecture tours to raise funds for re-building the temple following the fire of 1516. It draws attention to the history of the temple, both factual and legendary, and tells the extent to which Shinto underlies so much of Japanese art. At present in a private collection, it is probably the only such screen that will ever be available on the world art market.



Dating to the Kofun Period (6th – 7th century) comes **a *Haniwa* model of a horse** which is offered from a collection which was formed in the 1960s (estimate: £40,000-60,000, *illustrated left*). *Haniwa* are low-fired ceramic sculptures which are found buried within earthen mounds and are supposed to have been associated with ritual practices. This *Haniwa* horse was excavated in the Namegata region, Ibaraki prefecture. Demand for such examples is strong, with the inaugural Asobi sale in 2013 seeing a similar example far exceeding its presale estimate.

MOMOYAMA - MEIJI PERIOD



The star lot of the sale **a magnificent panel by Shibata Zeshin** (1807 - 1891) (estimate: £600,000-800,000, *illustrated left and on page 1*), it has exceptional provenance having been in the collection of Lord Iwasaki Yanosuke (1851-1908). The panel was exhibited at *Dai san kai Naikoku Kangyo Hakurankai* [the Third Domestic Industrial Exposition], Ueno, Tokyo in 1890 where it won *Myogi Itto Sho* [the First Prize for Exquisite Technique]. The framed wood panel decorated in gold, silver and red in various lacquer techniques including *sabiage*, *hiramaki-e*, *togidashi-e* and *takamaki-e* on a black lacquer ground depicts a pair of *Ise Ebi* [spiny lobsters] scrambling onto a rocky outcrop beneath waves breaking against the shore. Signed *Gyonen Hachijuni o Koma Zeshin* [An old man in his 82nd year, Koma Zeshin], Meiji 21st year (1888), the long-lived lacquer artist Shibata Zeshin (1807 - 1891) was one of the elite group of craftsmen schooled in the fashions of the Edo period who made the leap from a largely feudal society into the Age of Enlightenment and Westernization in Japan in the Meiji era (1868 -1912). The panel shows the range of Zeshin's masterly lacquer techniques and his sense of vibrancy and movement, giving life both to the lobsters and the sea itself. A similar example with lobsters was bought by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Economy, Trade and Industry in 1888, and exhibited at the Exposition Universelle de Paris in 1889, receiving the Gold Medal. Zeshin became a prolific painter of popular subjects and was hugely admired by the townsfolk in Edo and Meiji period Japan. His light-hearted and vivid, yet

technically brilliant depictions of nature, daily life and mythological legends were among the earliest art to find favour in the West following the Imperial Restoration.

A rare late 16th- early 17th century Shino *choshi* [ewer] decorated with willow, bamboo and maple, which would have been used in the Tea Ceremony is expected to realise between £160,000-180,000. The wood box is sealed *Hanzo'un*, the seal of Kato Masayoshi (1854-1923), a well-known politician and vice president of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha Line (a shipping company known as “Nihon Yusen”), who was an important tea ware collector. The present example has been greatly admired and illustrated in a number of specialist Japanese publications, and the well-known Western book by Soame Jenyns, previously keeper of the Japanese section of the British Museum. The design of willow and other stylized floral motifs is in keeping with the high ideals of simple elegance of the early military Tea Masters, and perfectly fits with the natural shape of this tour de force of Japanese pottery.



MODERN/ CONTEMPORARY



Modern and contemporary highlights range from an untitled oil on canvas from 1965 by **Kazuo Shiraga** (estimate: £150,000-200,000, *illustrated left*) to *Work, "No"*, 1970 by Sadamasa Motonaga (estimate: £20,000-30,000). Kazuo Shiraga joined Gutai in 1955 and is arguably internationally the group's most well-known member. He initially studied *nihonga*, followed by *yoga* [western-style] painting, before taking up oil painting. He is renowned for using his body to paint, and started experimenting by applying paint with his fingers and hands and then moving to his feet. Taking this rejection of conventionalism even further, during his iconic performance painting, *Challenging Mud* (1955), he dressed only in a pair of white shorts, dove into and wrestled with a large pile of mud mixed with stone and cement. The resultant mass was then left where it lay for the duration of the 1st Gutai Art Exhibition at the Ohara Kaikan in Tokyo. In 1971 Shiraga became a monk of the Tendai sect, but continued producing foot paintings, which became more lyrical as a result of his Buddhist learning.



Also a Gutai member from 1955, in 1966 Motonaga was invited by the Japan Society to take up a year-long residency program in New York. While there, he began experimenting with airbrushing techniques which had a dramatic impact on his style. His previous amorphous poured canvases changed into more defined shapes with hard edges, playful colour and gradation allowed by the new technique. Two comparable works to that by Motonaga are in the collections of The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan.

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