



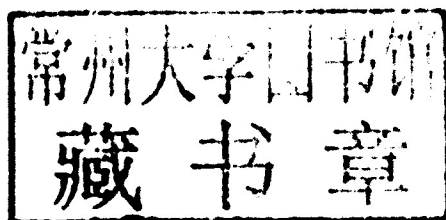
Elegant Perfection

Masterpieces of Courtly and Religious Art
from the Tokyo National Museum

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

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The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
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Forewords

It is a great pleasure to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the opening of the newly dedicated Arts of Japan Gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

The Tokyo National Museum was established in 1872 and is the largest museum in Japan, with a collection currently totaling about 113,000 items and a site comprising six exhibition gallery buildings and a Research and Information Center. The museum's activities focus on acquisitions, preservation, research, exhibitions, and dissemination of its collections, which consist of cultural properties primarily from Japan and surrounding Asian countries. We welcome more than one million visitors annually, of which approximately 10 percent are visitors from abroad. As a result, contributing to awareness of Japanese cultural arts overseas is of profound importance to us.

With the inaugural exhibition *Elegant Perfection: Masterpieces of Courtly and Religious Art from the Tokyo National Museum*, we welcome you to enjoy a selection of superb examples of Japanese aristocratic and Buddhist art that reflect an aesthetic tradition that can be traced back to ancient times, including the National Treasure *Man'yōshū*, vol. 9 (Takamatsunomiya version), a masterwork of calligraphy.

Many Japanese art objects, such as certain paintings and textiles, cannot be exhibited for extended periods for conservation reasons due to the fragility of their materials. For this Arts of Japan Gallery, we have selected a number of ceramics, metalworks, and other objects that can endure prolonged exposure, and are pleased to offer them for a two-year loan period. This is the first time a group of works from the Tokyo National Museum collection will be exhibited for such an extended period in the United States.

We hope that by providing visitors an opportunity for firsthand experience of Japanese art, the Arts of Japan Gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will deepen understanding of Japanese culture abroad and become a new center of cultural exchange between Japan and the United States.

Zeniya Masami
Executive Director
Tokyo National Museum

Japanese culture goes back more than five thousand years. Yet despite its origins in antiquity, Japan is a nation of the future. This duality of yesterday and tomorrow is what makes Japan a unique place in the world. In Japan, ancient landmarks stand tranquilly among imposing skyscrapers. Early customs continue to take place against the backdrop of the world's most advanced technologies. With one of the largest and most powerful economies in the world, and as a center of international activity, Japan has been able to embrace its traditions while finding its place in the larger global, political, diplomatic, and economic arenas.

Japan's complex identity is reflected in the diverse works chosen for display in the new Arts of Japan Gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). The works in the gallery range from Neolithic to contemporary art, demonstrating the rich culture of Japan across generations. Through the Portal Project, a contemporary artist will create a site-specific installation that will stand beside both modern and ancient masterpieces. The gallery will thus be a reflection of Japan's dynamic and multifaceted character.

Over the past thirty years, the MFAH's collection of Japanese art has continued to increase with the addition of such important works as a figure of the Amida Buddha and a *haniwa* warrior. As the museum's holdings have grown, so have its local and international relationships. The MFAH's partnership with the Tokyo National Museum will bring national treasures to Houston. These objects will illuminate visitors with the beauty and artistry of Japan's ancient culture. We are so pleased to be working with the Tokyo National Museum to show visitors Japan's remarkable creative heritage. Through the new Arts of Japan Gallery, the MFAH will be able to showcase Japan's vast legacy for generations to come. We extend special thanks to our friends and colleagues from all over the world who have generously given so much to make this goal a reality.

Gwendolyn H. Goffe
Interim Director
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

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The Arts of Japan Gallery project at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, would not have been possible had not many people from all over the world generously given their amazing support and efforts to every stage from its conception to its grand opening. My sincere gratitude goes to Zeniya Masami, executive director, Matsumoto Nobuyuki, director of curatorial planning, and Shimatani Hiroyuki, vice executive director, of the Tokyo National Museum (TNM) for their enthusiasm and unwavering support of the magnificent loans from the museum's stellar collection to the Arts of Japan Gallery at the MFAH.

I would like to extend special thanks to the Honorable Takahiko Watabe, deputy-consul general of Japan in Houston, and the Honorable Tsutomu Oşawa, the previous consul general of Japan in Houston, for their great help and joint efforts in sharing Japanese culture with the larger Houston community. My sincerest gratitude also goes to the Japanese Business Association of Houston and its 2011 president, Mr. Shinichiro Akiba, and vice president, Mr. Ryuji Watanabe, for their constant assistance in this important project, and for generously offering the MFAH their many resources in the local Japanese community and abroad to help ensure the success of the Arts of Japan Gallery. My heartfelt thanks also go to Dr. Marjorie Horning, Dr. and Mrs. James Butler, Stephen Hamilton, and Dale and Nanako Tingleaf for helping to initiate the creation of a substantial program of Japanese art at the MFAH and for facilitating initial contact with cultural and artistic institutions in Japan.

I would also like to thank Emura Tomoko, art historian and researcher at the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo, for helping us to establish initial contacts with the Tokyo National Museum. The staff at the TNM has been of tremendous and invaluable help managing the loans and arranging for the objects' safe arrival in Houston. Special thanks are due to Kito Satomi, senior manager of international relations at the TNM, who skillfully coordinated the Tokyo National Museum's resources for the Arts of Japan Gallery project. Dr. Wada Hiroshi of the TNM Conservation Department has also been a great source of knowledge and assistance.

Many of the curators and experts also lent their extensive knowledge and expertise in writing the essays and entries for the catalogue to create this fine scholarly contribution to the understanding of Japanese art in the West. Aida Satoko of DNP Art Communications Co., Ltd., has played an instrumental role in supplying catalogue photography and copyright materials. Maiko Behr deserves recognition for diligently translating the essays and entries into English.

Many colleagues at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, helped to make the Arts of Japan Gallery and its related materials a reality. Thanks go to Gwendolyn H. Goffe, interim director, for her leadership, support, and long-term vision, and to Jack Eby, exhibition design director, for his thoughtful and remarkable sense of aesthetic. Bill Cochrane, exhibition designer, with Jack Eby planned and created the beautiful gallery space. Victoria Ramirez, the W. T. and Louise J. Moran Education Director, and Margaret Mims, associate education director, coordinated the robust educational programming in conjunction with the opening of the Arts of Japan Gallery. Jon Evans, head librarian, provided great support in acquiring the needed books and research material for the writing of the didactic material for the Arts of Japan Gallery. Felicia Yao, curatorial assistant of Asian art, organized the many details of the project and corresponded with the various people and institutional entities involved. Elspeth Patient, former administrative assistant to the Asian Art Department, handled the clerical and administrative matters related to the exhibition and catalogue, and new administrative assistant Esmeralda Salinas followed up on all tasks that needed to be completed with great attention to detail.

Julie Bakke, chief registrar, Geoffrey Dare, senior assistant registrar of incoming loans, and David Aylsworth, collections registrar, efficiently and thoroughly managed the transportation and storage of loan objects from Japan. Wynne Phelan, conservation director, Tina Tan, assistant conservator of works on paper, Toshiaki Koseki, Carol Crow Conservator of Photography, and their colleagues in the Conservation Department at the MFAH have also been instrumental in the safe transport, conservation, and storage of the objects.

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Many thanks also to Dave Webb, security director, and his impressive team for their continued assistance. In the Image Library, Marty Stein oversaw the cataloging and organization of all the photography for the project. Under the supervision of Dale Benson, chief preparator, and Michael Kennaugh, senior preparator and administrator, the MFAH Preparations Department handled the movement of the art pieces with its usual excellence in care and professionalism. Diane Lovejoy, publications director, and Heather Brand, editor, lent their expert insight and sensitivity to the content, layout, design, and production of this catalogue.