



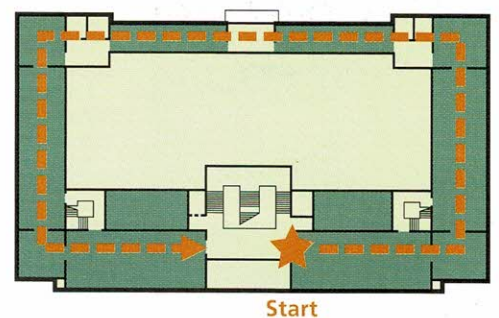
Highlights of Japanese Art

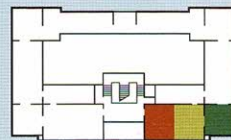
Welcome to the Tokyo National Museum's *Highlights of Japanese Art* exhibition.

This exhibition provides an overview of Japanese history and culture while exploring the chronological development of Japanese art. Proceed counterclockwise through the 10 exhibition rooms to travel from the early Jomon period, over 12,000 years ago, to the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in the late 19th century. The timeline on the back cover shows the relationships between key periods in Japanese, Chinese and Korean history.

*Please note that as objects are rotated regularly for conservation reasons, not all works featured in this leaflet are on view at all times.

Honkan (Japanese Gallery), 2F





The Dawn of Japanese Art

The roots of Japanese aesthetics can be seen in earthenware vessels from the Jomon and Yayoi periods, as well as in *dogu* (small earthen figurines from Jomon period), *dotaku* (bronze bell-shaped ritual items from the Yayoi period), *haniwa* (terracotta figures from the Kofun period) and bronze mirrors (used as symbols of authority in the Yayoi and Kofun periods).

▶ Jomon Vessel with Flame-like Ornamentation

Jomon period, 3000–2000 BC
The Jomon period takes its name from the cord markings ("jomon") that decorate many pieces of earthenware from this time. These sculpture-like works of early Japanese art stand out among examples of prehistoric earthenware from around the world.



◀ **Dogu (Clay figurine)**
Jomon period, 1000–400 BC



◀ Dotaku (Bell-shaped bronze) with Crossed Band Design

Yayoi period, 1st–3rd century
Originally, *dotaku* are believed to have been small bells. They were produced in progressively larger sizes after being adopted as ritual objects.



▲ **Male Figure in Full Dress**
Haniwa (Terracotta tomb ornament)
Kofun period, 6th century
Representing humans, animals, houses, weapons and other objects, *haniwa* are clay figures which were placed on gigantic burial mounds (*kofun*) and are thought to be related to funeral rites.

▲ **Kofun** are gigantic round, square, or keyhole-shaped burial mounds.

The Rise of Buddhism

Based on the teachings of Buddha, Buddhism emerged in India about 2,500 years ago and spread throughout Asia. It was officially introduced to Japan in the mid-6th century when, according to ancient records, the Kingdom of Baekje on the Korean peninsula presented the ruler of Japan with Buddhist items.

Initially, Buddhism was practiced among the nobility, who created, copied, or commissioned various works of Buddhist art. The introduction into Japan of temple architecture and art forms such as calligraphy and painting techniques was also related to Buddhism. The effect of Buddhism can be seen in the development of Japanese art over the centuries.

▶ Seated Bosatsu (Bodhisattva) with One Leg Pendent

Asuka period, 7th century
This is an example of a Buddhist statue made in Japan shortly after Buddhism was introduced. At the time, statues in this posture were common on the Korean peninsula.



National Treasure Gallery

The Japanese government designates artworks and other precious objects as Important Cultural Property in order to protect them. Those of superior quality and cultural value are designated as National Treasures.

Japan has been actively protecting cultural properties since the Meiji period. These efforts were formalized in 1950 with the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, following the destruction of wall paintings in a 1949 fire at Horyuji temple, the site of the oldest wooden buildings in the world.

▶ Kokuzo Bosatsu (Akasagarbha)

Heian period, 12th century
This is a leading example of the many exquisite Buddhist paintings produced during the Heian period. Its detailed expression and abundant use of silver and gold leaf represent the pinnacle of Japanese works in this genre.



Paleolithic Period

— ca. 11,000 BC

Jomon Period

— ca. 5th c. BC

Yayoi Period

— ca. 3rd c. AD

Kofun Period

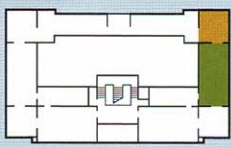
— ca. 7th c.

Asuka Period

— 710

Nara Period

— 794



Buddhist and Courtly Art

Buddhist Art Esoteric Buddhism, which emphasizes rituals and verbal transmission, was introduced to Japan in the 9th century. This resulted in the development of the Esoteric arts and various styles of Buddhist art. Illustrated scrolls depicting the origins of temples and shrines or miraculous occurrences represent this period. Japanese art was initially influenced by the arts and culture of China and Korea, but gradually developed a unique aesthetic.

Courtly Art This section features courtly art from the Heian to the Muromachi period. Court culture of the early Heian period emulated Chinese culture. Literature and art based on Japanese aesthetics flourished in the mid-Heian period.

Proficiency in calligraphy and *waka* poetry was important in the daily life of court nobles. Early Heian calligraphy was strongly influenced by Chinese styles, but this trend gradually declined and *wayo*, the Japanese style, developed.

The nobility also appreciated narrative picture scrolls. These depicted stories such as *The Tale of Genji* and *waka* poems, which also provided popular subjects for decorative art designs.

Zen and Ink Painting

During the Kamakura period, the first shogunal (military) government witnessed the introduction of Zen Buddhism into Japan. Along with Zen teachings, new cultural influences from China flooded into Japan, including ink painting. At the time, most landscape paintings in China were ink paintings. Daoist and Buddhist paintings also adopted the styles and techniques of landscape paintings due to their excellent expression of light and spatial depth.

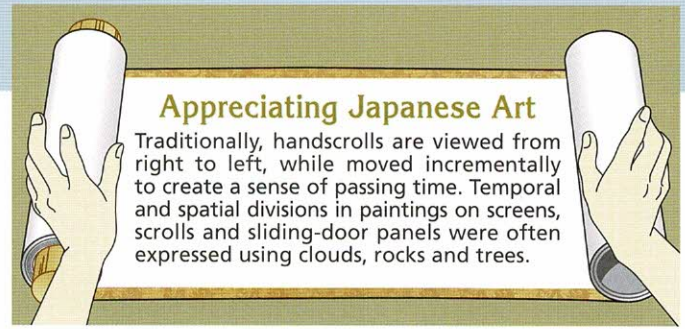
These Chinese paintings differed completely from the Japanese painting traditions of earlier periods. Following Chinese examples and influence, ink paintings were adopted in Japanese Zen temples.

In the following Muromachi period, ink painting transcended temple borders and established itself as a major genre of Japanese painting.



◀ **Bodhidharma under Pine Tree**

Kamakura period, 14th century
Inscription by Issan Ichinei (1247–1317)
Ink paintings of Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism, were worshipped by Zen monks, just as richly colored images of Buddhist deities were worshipped by other sects.



Appreciating Japanese Art

Traditionally, handscrolls are viewed from right to left, while moved incrementally to create a sense of passing time. Temporal and spatial divisions in paintings on screens, scrolls and sliding-door panels were often expressed using clouds, rocks and trees.

◀ **Tebako (Cosmetic Box)**

Heian period, 12th century
This cosmetic box is a major monument to decorative art in the late Heian period, and it reflects the elegant and luxurious life of aristocrats. The design of half-submerged wheels floating in a stream is rendered in mother-of-pearl inlay and *maki-e* lacquer. It may have been used to store sutra scrolls.



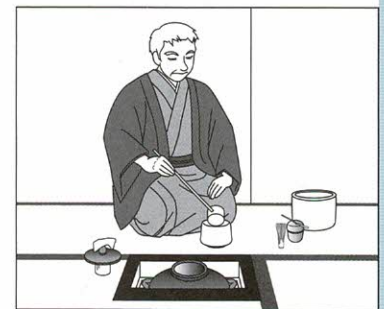
Room
3 [1]
[2]

Room
4

Room
3 [3]

The Art of Tea Ceremony

With a scroll hanging in the *tokonoma* alcove and *tatami* mats, this room reflects a traditional Japanese tearoom. The practice of drinking tea was imported from China by Zen priests during the late 12th century and later spread to other social classes, including the warrior class. During the Muromachi period, wealthy *daimyo* (feudal lords) used expensive imported utensils for tea ceremony. However, a different style, in which tea was enjoyed in more humble settings, also developed. The tea master Sen no Rikyu (1521–91) brought tea ceremony to its peak. The expression *wabi-sabi*, which describes the uniquely Japanese aesthetic of humility and simplicity, refers to Japanese tea ceremony. This aesthetic can be typically seen in the irregular shapes and surface textures of many vessels used for tea. In tea ceremony, utensils of varying origin – artworks from China, specially commissioned tea wares, and everyday items – are liberally combined. Different combinations, based on the host's individual taste or theme, make each ceremony unique.



▶ **Tengoan Teahouse**

Edo period
The free-standing tearoom, or teahouse, was pioneered by Sen no Rikyu. This tea house was built in Kyoto by the tea master Kobori Enshu (1579–1647), and was later moved to the museum gardens. It can be seen from the lounge between Rooms 15 and 16 on the first floor.



Heian Period
1192

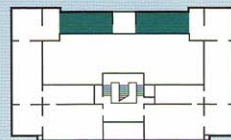
Kamakura Period
1333

Nanbokucho Period
1392

Muromachi Period
1573

Azuchi-Momoyama Period
1603

Edo Period
1868



Attire of the Military Elite

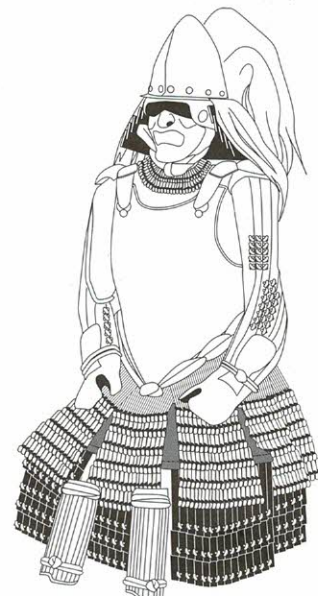
The samurai (meaning “one who serves”) warriors of the Heian period originally ranked beneath the nobility, but gradually rose to power and established a military style of government known as a shogunate. During the Kamakura and Muromachi periods when the warriors held power, imperial authority diminished considerably. When the Muromachi shogunate fell into decline, the capital of Kyoto was destroyed in the Onin War (1467–77) and a century of turmoil followed as feudal lords, or daimyo, vied for supremacy. Decorated arms and armor were standard warrior attire, ensuring honor for those who fell in battle.



Armor

Yoroi type
Kamakura period, 14th century

Made of small metal or leather plates laced together with silk cord, armor such as this large *yoroi* allowed the wearer to use a bow and arrow on horseback.



Armor

Gusoku type with
European-style cuirass
Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century

Guns, introduced from Europe in the 16th century, changed the style of battle. European influence can also be seen in armor such as this, which incorporates plate iron into a traditional design.



Sword Mounting (For sword known as “Uesugi-no-tachi”)

Hyogo-gusari-no-tachi style; Scabbard with bird design
Kamakura period, 13th century

Tachi swords were hung from the waist by cords or chains with the cutting edge facing down. This style was used by aristocrats and warriors from the Heian to the Kamakura period.



Following the death of powerful daimyo Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) unified Japan and went on to rule as a regent. In 1600, after Hideyoshi's heir was defeated by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) in the Battle of Sekigahara, Ieyasu reunified Japan and established the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo (modern Tokyo).

During the Edo period, the shogunate sought to maintain peace by placing firm restrictions on daimyo and society. Warrior code required sword scabbards to be black and prohibited ostentatious decoration. Nonetheless, decorative swords were produced as gifts, or for ornamental purposes and private appreciation.

The Tale of Heiji

Illustrated scroll; Volume chronicling the removal of the Imperial family to Rokuhara
Kamakura period, 13th century

This figure is from an illustrated scroll chronicling a great battle, and shows how armor was worn by the warriors of the time.

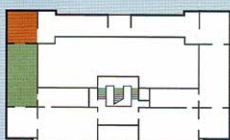


Sword Mounting

For *daisho* (pair of long and short swords)
Red-lacquered scabbard with gold spiral banding
Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century

Katana swords (such as the large sword here) were worn tucked into the obi sash with the cutting edge facing up. This style became popular in the Muromachi period. These swords were used by the potentate Toyotomi Hideyoshi.





◀ This is an interior view of the Okyokan, a historic teahouse on the museum grounds. The sliding doors were painted by Maruyama Okyo.

Folding Screens and Sliding Door Paintings

Folding screens and sliding doors often featured paintings of seasonal plants and birds, landscapes, figures and narrative scenes which served as interior decoration. In pre-modern times (the Muromachi to Edo periods), warriors adorned the interiors of grand buildings with paintings in bold ink, or gold leaf and vivid color. The Kano school painters emerged in the Muromachi period and were favored by the warrior class, while the Tosa school followed the courtly art tradition. The unrestrained, realistic styles which appeared in the latter half of the Edo period reflected the tastes of the townspeople.



▲ **Yoshiwara Pleasure Quarters and Theatre District**
Edo period, 17th century
By Hishikawa Moronobu (?–1694)

This merry-making scene in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters shows how folding screens were used freely to decorate interiors.

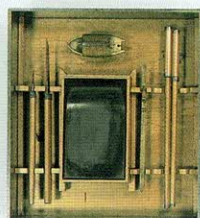
The Arts of Daily Life

The Azuchi-Momoyama period, named after Oda Nobunaga's castle in Azuchi and Toyotomi Hideyoshi's castle in Momoyama, witnessed international exchange and trade on an unprecedented scale. As a result, the merchant class enjoyed increased economic power which continued to grow throughout the peaceful Edo period. Affluent merchants commissioned artisans to produce ceramics, sumptuous robes, furnishings, metalwork and fine lacquerware—such as writing boxes with literary-themed designs in *maki-e* and mother-of-pearl inlay—which appealed to the tastes of their class.

▶ Writing Box, Ivy-bound path design in *maki-e* lacquer

Edo period, 17th century
By Tatsuke Chobei

This writing box contains an inkstone, a water dropper and writing brushes. It is decorated with *maki-e* lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay.



Developments in Painting and Calligraphy

Painting

The rise of decorative and genre paintings were defining characteristics of the Azuchi-Momoyama period. Feudal lords decorated screens, sliding doors and walls with bold paintings in color and gold leaf, symbolizing their authority. Genre scenes became subjects in their own right as yearning for the afterlife was eclipsed by interest in this life, and paintings appeared depicting the everyday activities and seasonal events of common people.

In the Edo period, continued peace and economic growth led the culture to mature, and many new styles emerged. Painters from the Kano school followed first-generation shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu to Edo, establishing the Edo Kano school which became appointed to the shogunate. In Kyoto, which remained a major cultural center, a new style of painting was created by Tawaraya Sotatsu. Later known as "Rinpa," it influenced other art forms, including decorative arts. Other key styles include the realistic expression of the Kyoto-based Maruyama school and the *bunjinga* ("literati painting") style inspired by the literati of Ming China.

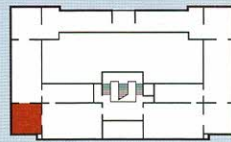
Calligraphy

Two major calligraphic styles proliferated in the Edo period: *wayo*, the traditional Japanese style which developed in the Heian period, and *karayo*, based on Chinese style. *Wayo* was used by the imperial court and the shogunate, and spread to the general populace through small private schools known as *terakoya*.

The *karayo* tradition was mainly practiced by Zen priests. Its popularity was influenced by the calligraphy of Zen priests who came to Japan from China and the promotion of Confucian studies by the Tokugawa shogunate. Unlike the *wayo* tradition, which valued adherence to established forms, *karayo* allowed freedom of expression. This attracted poets and intellectuals, leading the *karayo* style to flourish from the mid to late Edo period.

▼ The character for "wind" in various styles:





Noh and Kabuki

Noh is a Japanese performing art which originated in the 14th century. It was based on traditional court dances known as Bugaku, originally introduced from China, and was firmly patronized by the shogunate. In the Edo period, Noh became the official performing art for ceremonial occasions. Actor-playwrights Kan'ami (1333–84) and son Zeami (1363–1443) contributed greatly to Noh's development.

Noh actors wear masks to indicate their roles, which include warriors, priests, women or spirits, and their movements are slow, symbolic and highly stylized. As Noh plays developed in complexity, Noh costumes became increasingly sophisticated and elaborate. Costumes consist of *kitsuke* (inner garments), *uwagi* (outer garments) and *hakama* (trousers), and their designs reflect the nature of each character. While dyeing techniques were central to pre-modern textile art, figure weaving was also still in use. When Noh flourished among the warrior class, the demand for costumes increased dramatically and many excellent figure-woven pieces were produced. Between Noh plays, short comical or satirical acts known as Kyogen were performed, and these spawned yet another performing art: Kabuki.

Kabuki was developed in Kyoto in the early 17th century by a female performer named Izumo no Okuni. It attracted the attention of the shogunate, which eventually resulted in both male and female roles being performed by adult men only. Kabuki incorporates dance, dramatic gestures and music. Through playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), it also came to feature complex plotlines. Unlike Noh costumes, which were based on the courtly garments of the middle ages, Kabuki costumes were based on clothing worn by commoners in the Edo period. Colorfully avant-garde Kabuki costumes were a source of fashion trends among Edo townswomen.



◀ Noh Mask, *Ko-omote* type

Edo period, 17th–19th century

Noh masks are smaller than Bugaku masks and do not cover the entire face. *Ko-omote*, the smallest Noh mask, represents a young woman. Other types include demons, elders, men, warriors and women.

▶ Bugaku Mask, *Chikyu* type

Kamakura period, 13th century

Bugaku, a Japanese court dance originally introduced from China, became the basis for Noh. This mask is used for the Chikyu dance which celebrates the eternal prosperity of the world.



▼ *Karaori* Garment (Noh Costume), Pine and sail design on gold ground

Edo period, 18th century

Mainly used for female roles, *karaori* costumes are characterized by colorful woven designs. Many feudal lords commissioned lavish Noh costumes after advanced weaving techniques were developed in Kyoto during the mid-Edo period.



◀ Kabuki Theater

Edo period, 17th century

By Hishikawa Moronobu (?–1694)

This is the Nakamuraza, a Kabuki theater of late 17th-century Edo (modern Tokyo). Based on the Noh theater style, it had no floor or roof. It featured special seats for high-ranking people and sign boards outside announcing the program.

Paleolithic
Period

ca. 11,000 BC

Jomon
Period

ca. 5th c. BC

Yayoi
Period

ca. 3rd c. AD

Kofun
Period

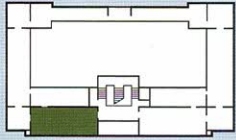
ca. 7th c.

Asuka
Period

710

Nara
Period

794



Fashion in the Edo Period

Kosode robes, characterized by their small wrist openings, rapidly gained popularity from the mid-Muromachi period. In the Azuchi-Momoyama period, *kosode* came to be worn by people from all social classes and new methods of fabric decoration emerged. Particularly popular were *tsujigahana*—which combined tie-dyeing, painting, gold and silver leaf, and color brushing—and *nuihaku*, which combined embroidery with applied gold and silver leaf. These styles became the basis for the many decorative techniques that appeared during the following Edo period.

In the mid-Edo period, dyeing techniques developed further, giving birth to the *yuzen* method. *Yuzen* employs starch-based paste-resist and applied color to create colorful and detailed designs. *Yuzen* dyeing is regarded as the most notable development in the history of pre-modern Japanese textile art.



◀ **Kosode Garment, Flower basket and maple design on light blue crepe ground**

Edo period, 18th century

The term *kosode* refers to kimono robes with small wrist openings. *Kosode* designs changed over time to reflect fashion trends. Their motifs, colors and embroidery represent Edo-period chic.



◀ **Furisode Garment, Pine, maple, peony, stream and peacock design on light green crepe ground**

Edo period, 19th century

Furisode are kimono robes characterized by long, hanging sleeves. Featuring innovative designs which made use of picturesque styles and blank space, these garments were highly fashionable among women of the Edo period.

▼ **Kanzashi Hairpins**

Edo period

This image shows two types of *kanzashi* hairpins. The top example features a three-dimensional floral ornament, while the lower example is flat with an openwork design. Other types feature pendant ornaments or unusual and novel decorations.



▲ **Geisha with Shamisen (Detail)**

Edo period, 18th century

By Kitagawa Hidemaro (dates unknown)

During the Edo period, it became customary for women to wear hair ornaments such as combs and hairpins. Originality in materials, shapes, designs and usage sparked trends, making them an indispensable part of women's fashion.

Room

10

Ukiyo-e in the Edo Period

Ukiyo-e—literally, “pictures of the floating world”—depict famous places, beautiful women, courtesans, kabuki actors and merchants, in contrast to the ideal landscapes depicted in ink painting. This new form of expression reflected the shift in economic power from the warrior class to merchants and townspeople during the late 17th century.

Mitate (“parody”)-type ukiyo-e depict subjects in a humorous or ironic way. Examples include images of beauties performing manual labor (traditionally the role of men), as well as historical, legendary or literary subjects. As the Edo period was a time of rich learning, people were able to understand and enjoy the nuances of these works.

Ukiyo-e were produced in two formats: woodblock prints, which allowed mass-production and distribution, and paintings, which were produced individually for wealthy clients.

▼ **Famous Products of Edo: Making of Polychrome Prints**

Edo period, 18th century

By Kitagawa Utamaro (1753?–1806)

Images of beautiful women in contexts or roles normally occupied by men are typical among *mitate*-type works. This image shows the process of print-making, with the artist drawing and engravers making woodblocks.



Heian Period	Kamakura Period	Nanbokucho Period	Muromachi Period	Azuchi-Momoyama Period	Edo Period
1192	1333	1392	1573	1603	1868

Timeline

	Japan	China	Korea
BC	-11,000 BC	Paleolithic	Paleolithic
	11,000 BC - 5th c. BC	Jomon	Neolithic
1500		10,000 - 2000 BC	
		16th - 11th c. BC	
1000		11th - 8th c. BC	
		8th - 5th c. BC	Bronze Age
500		5th - 3rd c. BC	
	5th c. BC - AD 3rd c.	221 - 206 BC	Early Iron Age
AD 1	Yayoi	206 BC - AD 220	Proto-Three Kingdoms
100			
200			
300	3rd c. - 7th c.	221 - 280	
	Kofun	265 - 316	
400		317 - 420	4th c. - 676
			Three Kingdoms
500		420 - 589	
600	593 - 710	581 - 618	
	Asuka		
700		618 - 907	
			676 - 935
800	710 - 794		Unified Silla
	Nara		
900	794 - 1192		
	Heian		
1000		907 - 960	
		960 - 1127	918 - 1392
1100			Goryeo
1200	1192 - 1333	1115 - 1234	
	Kamakura	1127 - 1279	
1300		1271 - 1368	
1400	1333 - 1392	1368 - 1644	
	Nanbokucho		1392 - 1910
	Muromachi		Joseon
1500			
1600	1573 - 1603		
	Azuchi-Momoyama		
1700	1603 - 1868	1644 - 1911	
	Edo		
1800			
1900	1868 - 1912		
	Meiji		
2000	1912 - 1926		
	Taisho		
	Showa		
	1926 - 1989		
	Heisei		
	1989 -		

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Cover Photo: *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji: A Mild Breeze on a Fine Day*, Edo period, 19th century, By Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

