

SAMURAI

Sunrise, Sunset



MUSEO STIBBERT



EXHIBITS
DEVELOPMENT
GROUP

SAMURAI

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IN COLLABORATION WITH

Museo Stibbert



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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Drawing from the rich and varied Japanese collection of the Stibbert Museum located in Florence Italy, this exhibition features some 100 exquisite objects related to the legendary Samurai warriors – full suits of Samurai armor, helmets, swords, sword-guards, saddles to be sure - but also exquisite objects intended for more personal use such as lacquered boxes, incense trays and delicate vases - that characterize the centuries in which Japan was ruled by the Samurai military class.

Highlights of the exhibition include 3 exquisite helmets by Ryoei, one of the most famous and talented helmet-makers. Only about 20 works attributed to Ryoei have survived; 6 of those are at the Museo Stibbert, and 3 on display in the exhibition. Other outstanding objects include a war hat and quiver entirely covered in flakes of mother-of-pearl, iconic swords with grips made of stingray skin and a restored, silk 17th-century brigandine.





ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Frederick Stibbert was born in Florence in 1838, educated in England, the son of a distinguished British citizen and his Tuscan bride. His grandfather had been the Commander in Chief of the British East India Company in Bengal and governor there for many years in the late 1700s, amassing a great fortune and estate that was inherited by Frederick Stibbert. This enabled Stibbert, an astute and sophisticated financier and collector to dedicate his life to collecting works of art, objects, and antiques but in particular, armor and weaponry, costumes and uniforms. According to his own criteria, he transformed his hillside villa and park into the museum that is today known as the Stibbert Museum, located in Florence, Italy that conserves a magnificent collection of nearly 50,000 items.

Although he started collecting in 1861, his passion and attention turned towards the Far East and in particular Japan in the early 1870s. This coincided with the opening of Japan towards the West after centuries of isolation and the end of the political power of the Samurai class. Consequently, Japanese works of art and artifacts began to appear at European art markets such as the Universal Exposition in Paris of 1867. Documentation of the Stibbert Collection corresponds to the systematic acquisition of objects through such fairs, antiquarians, private collections and then directly from Japan through agents. One of earliest, largest, most important collections and most documented outside of Japan, the Stibbert Japanese collection contains some 2000 numbers of inventory and includes 95 suits of armor, 200 helmets, 285 swords (long and short), daggers and spears, 880 sword guards, some firearms, in addition to lacquered objects, furnishings, porcelain, screens and scrolls that represent the period from 1570 – 1868 in which Japan was governed by the Samurai military class.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION STRUCTURE

The exhibition unfolds in 7 sections, organized somewhat according to typology of the objects. The objects are enhanced by a suggestive graphic project, providing background images, landscape vistas as well as text panels with historical, cultural and artistic information about their manufacture and significance. The graphic text panels are designed according to the concept to enlarge and highlight exquisite details hidden in the manufacture. And each section is enhanced by a provocative and informative historical focus box.

Introduction

Timeline

Introduction to Japanese samurai, their origins and evolution over time with focus on the profound transformations that in certain historical moments radically altered their existence and way of life.

Section I: Armor

Section II: Helmets and Masks

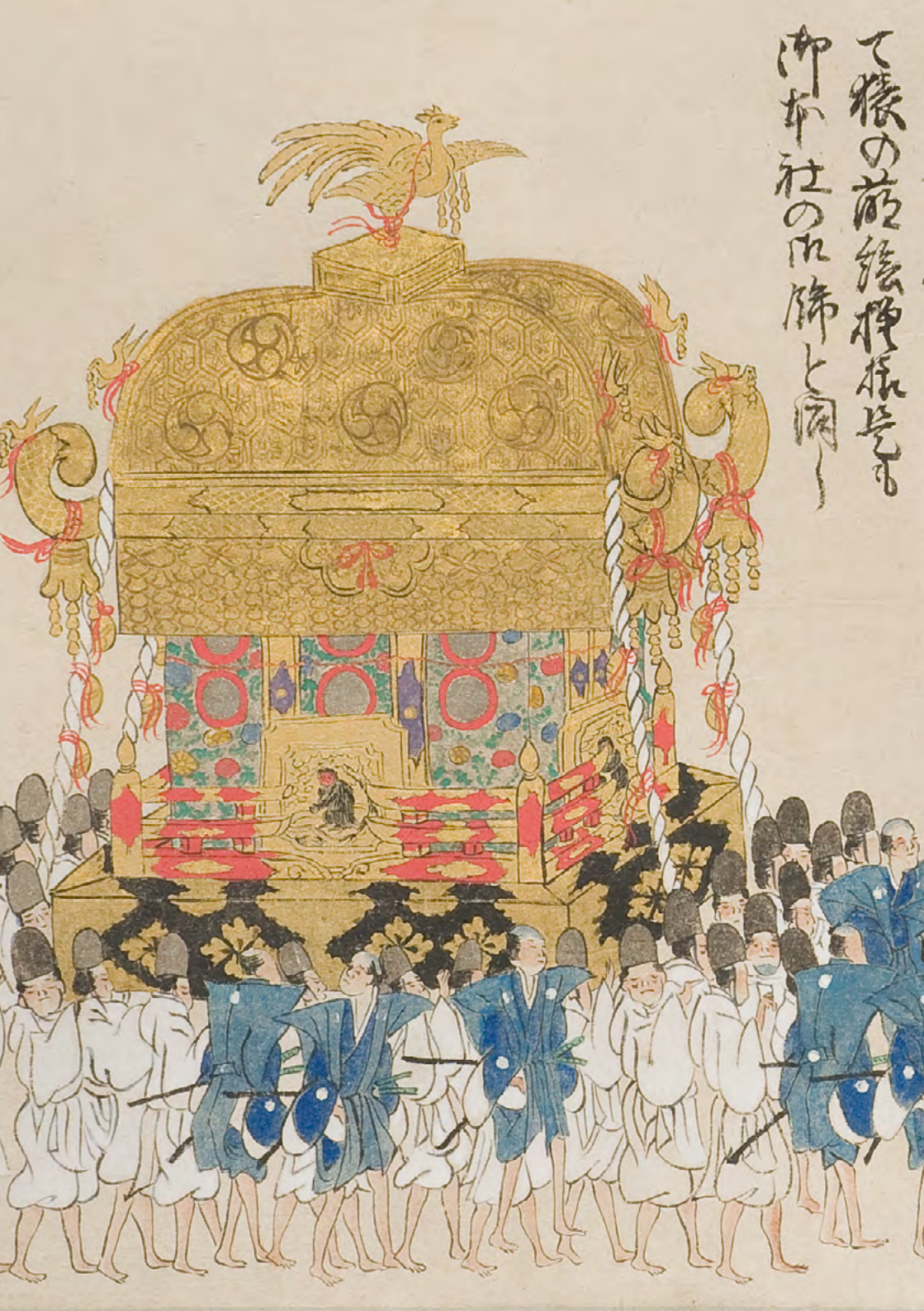
Section III: Samurai Weapons

Section IV: Tsuba

Section V: Horse and Bow

Section VI: Objects of Art

Section VII: The Frederick Stibbert Collection



SECTION I



Armor:

The 10 works on display exemplify the main characteristics of samurai armor, and the way they were made. The aspect that most attracts the observer is their dramatic flare, rendered through multicolored fabrics, lacquers, variegated and exotic materials, and fantastical shapes, that transform mere warriors into the appearance of supernatural beings.

BOX: Armor or Garments?

What clearly distinguishes Japanese armor from European armor is the extensive use of silk fabrics and braiding. The presence of luxurious brocades and embroidered silks in the construction of the armor transforms these works into true, couture fashion statements. Enlarged photographic detail permits this use of fabric to be analyzed and admired.



Suit of Armor (*Koi asagi
odoshi kawatsuzumi-
ishinui nimai- dō tosei
gusoku*)
Unknown
Metal, leather, lacquer, wood,
horsehair, silk, silk brocade
Late 18th century –
Beginning of the 19th
century



Brigadine (*Manchira*)
Unknown
Steel, silk, brocade silk, leather, hemp, horn
First half of 17th century

SECTION II

Helmets and Masks:

In all cultures, the helmet as protection for the warrior's head is of particular importance, not only for its function, but also as a means of communication. The Japanese *kabuto* has constantly evolved over the course of history, adapting to different needs. Their improvement led to masterpieces of blacksmith art, with specimens made up of dozens, and in some cases hundreds, of finely-assembled pieces. By canceling the human expression, the addition of war masks helped to transform the figure of the warrior.

BOX: *Kawari Kabuto*, Spectacular Helmets.

In the late 16th century, a singular phenomenon occurred. Following the encounter with the first Europeans to arrive in Japan, the adoption of western fashions spread, and armor also succumbed to the fascination with European styles. At first, the great feudal lords bought and modified elements of European armor, but soon they began to produce them directly in Japan with shapes and forms inspired by the West. This pursuit of evermore particular armor led armorers to create increasingly extravagant exemplars of spectacular helmets, from specimens modeled in the form of animals or demons to specimens modeled on objects of everyday life.





Helmet (*Kōseizan yonjuni ken zaboshibachi kabuto*)

Myōchin Sadaie, province of Sagami
Steel, brass, copper alloy, leather, silk, hemp
Second half of the 16th century



Helmet (*Kōshdōzan rokujuni ken suji-bachi kabuto*)

Saotome lehisa, province of Hitachi
Steel, copper alloy, gilded copper, leather, silk, hemp
Ca. 1656

Helmet (*Sazae tetsubari
uschidashi kawari-bachi*)
Ryoei (Ohara Katsunari)
End of the 17th century





SECTION III

Samurai Weapons:

Among the various weapons of the samurai, it is the sword that has become symbolic of samurai. There are many different types of swords - *tachi*, *wakizashi*, tanto and the famous *katana* - with their own characteristics, as illustrated by the swords on display. The pair of long and short swords (*daisho*) are distinctive to the samurai caste as only samurai could wear a *daisho*.

There were not only edged weapons; over time, swords were also flanked by polearms such as *yari* and *naginata*. From the 16th century, firearms also appeared which, contrary to popular belief, were widely used by samurai.

BOX: Weapons and Religion

As in other world cultures, swords also in Japan assumed a mystical value closely linked to the religious sentiments of the warriors. The sword protects and takes life, making it an instrument deeply linked to the concept of the afterworld, and it is no coincidence that many have decorations and inscriptions dedicated to certain gods who protected warriors, such as Fudo Myoo. Swords were often used as ex-votos and this is the reason why many temples in Japan have rich collections of swords. On display, a ceremonial broadsword (*nodachi*) is presented, expressly forged as an ex-voto, as well as a plaque depicting Fudo Myoo, the Buddhist protector-deity of warriors.



Sword (*Katana*)
Tairyusai Munehiro
(Sokan)
Steel, iron, copper alloy,
silver, gilded copper, wood,
lacquer, silk, stingray skin
Mid-19th century



Sword (*Katana*)
Bishū Osafune
Sukesada Tensho Ninen
Nachigatsu Hi;
Hi, Sue-Bizan School
Steel, gold, copper alloy,
silver, wood, lacquer, silk,
stingray skin
August 1573



Sword (*Katana*)
Yoshisuke Saku,
Shimada School
Steel, gold, copper alloy,
silver, horn, wood, lacquer,
silk, stingray skin
End of 15th century

Paired Set of Swords:
*Daishō, Katana and
Wakizashi*

Sekishu (no) jū tadamune
(wakizashi) (Iwami School)

Steel, iron, gold, lacquer, silk,
leather, stingray skin
Mid 17th century



SECTION IV



Tsuba: the term *tsuba* indicates the guard of the Japanese sword and its main functions are to protect the hand and to balance the weight of the blade. As a fundamental part of the sword, it became the object of rich decorations since ancient times. However, since the 17th century, there has been a profound change in the tsuba. With the end of the wars, weapons lost their value as a war instrument, assuming that of a status symbol, and tsuba and other sword accessories began to be enriched with decorations and precious materials. From the late 18th century, the tsuba became a collector's item in its own right and wealthy samurai and merchants competed for the works of the most famous artists for large sums of money. Some examples of great quality are on display.

BOX: Weaponry or Jewelry?

In Japan, there is no real tradition of jewelry as it is understood in the western culture, so it was other elements of clothing and accessories that fulfilled the function of status symbols; for men, status was transmitted through sword accessories. Starting from the 17th century, tsuba and other parts of the sword's mount were even made of solid gold. From the end of the 18th century, great artists working with metal used precious metals and alloys to produce true works of art, decorating sword accessories with figures, animals, botanical motifs and all kinds of iconography with an astonishing precision; true works of jewelry made to embellish swords.



Sword Guard (*Tsuba*)
Nashijin (no) jū Shoami, Kyo
Shoami School
Steel, gold, silver, shakudō
Ca. 1690



Sword Guard (*Tsuba*)
Kyoto School
Steel, gold
First half of 16th century



Sword Guard / *Tsuba*
Ōmori Terumasa
(1702-1775)
Steel, gold, silver
Mid 18th century

SECTION V

Horse and Bow:

Since the dawn of their history, samurai warriors foremost fought on horseback using the bow and arrows as their main weapon. In paintings from the 11-13th century onward, warriors wearing heavily-clad armor can be seen, rendering horses necessary for movement, and consequently, the bow as an essential arm for attacking opponents while the move. Mastery of the horse and the bow (*kyu-ba*) was fundamental in the education of every warrior. It was only from the 15th century, onwards with the introduction of the large armies of foot soldiers that horses and bows were limited to high-ranking samurai. Thus, in the context of a melee, the use of the sword becomes the primary weapon of the Japanese warrior. In this section, horse accessories, bows and arrows are on display.

BOX: The Japanese Horse

If the horses depicted in Japanese works of art are analyzed, it is apparent that they are very different from their western counterparts; they are small, stocky, with short legs and sturdy necks. The horse imported into Japan from the Asian continent around the 6th century is in fact, a small animal - very robust, but with a far from imposing appearance. The economic and military importance of these horses made them indispensable. It is no coincidence that they have become one of the most revered themes in Japanese art and can be found everywhere, even inside temples.

SAMURAI & HORSES

Horses were probably introduced to Japan from China or Korea in the 4th century. By the early Heian Period, a horse had become an essential part of the noble warrior's equipment. Most likely descendants of Mongolian stock, they were stout, short-legged and shaggy manes, tough and sturdy, but well suited to the ground used for a noble platform for mounted archery. They were trained to be controlled by the rider's weight and legs, not by the reins, leaving the warrior free to use his bow and arrow. Over time, as battlefield tactics changed to accommodate the need for numerous foot soldiers, an elite force of mounted warriors emerged, and horses remained the chosen prerogative of the upper classes of samurai. They were symbols of status and wealth, and only members of the upper samurai classes were allowed to ride horses.

Buildings or tents, (馬) and stables, (馬廄) attest to the importance of the warhorse. There were two types of stables used by the samurai: the *kyu-ba* used on the battlefield, lightweight, strong, yet comfortable, and *danjara* saddles used for ceremonies, heavy and elaborately decorated in lacquer such as those on display here.

Constructed from wood, the separate parts were held together by interlocking joints and seams of woven silk. Red silk was the preferred material due to its strong qualities. Often were manuscripts of expertise, the secrets of their construction were passed from father to son, and famous schools of lacquer were entrusted with their decoration. Many samurai corporations and lacquerers often signed and dated their work underneath the seat.





War Hat (*Jingasa*)

Unsigned
Wood, gold, mother-of-pearl, lacquer
End of 18th century



Saddle and Stirrups (*Kura and Abumi*)

Signed, but not known
Red oak wood, lacquer, gold, silver, iron, hemp, silk
1646



Quiver (*Ebira*)

Unsigned
Wood, gold, mother-of-pearl, lacquer, reed, lacquered leather, silk
First half of the 17th century

SECTION VI

THE ART OF LACQUER

Lacquered objects such as the ones on display here exemplify refined, courtly aspects of samurai life during the Edo Period. They are the result of an intentional fusion between an ingenious process of nature and artistic expression, beauty and functionality, and represent an art form still very much practiced today.

In essence, lacquer or *urushi* (漆) in Japanese is a chemical compound that appears in nature as a sticky resin. It is obtained from incisions into the exterior bark of the *Rhus verniciflua* tree, also commonly known as the Lacquer Tree. In response, the tree exudes its precious sap to seal the damage. Such trees can grow to be at least 200 feet tall and 80 inches in diameter, and are planted on hillsides or in mountains. The extracted sap is then filtered and dried. The end of the process is a series of lacquers, each with a different color and texture. A lacquer, a sort of double-bladed sword, is used to apply the lacquer to the object. A lacquer can be used on a variety of materials, but it is most commonly used on wood. A lacquer can be used on a variety of materials, but it is most commonly used on wood. A lacquer can be used on a variety of materials, but it is most commonly used on wood.

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Objects of Art:

Since the first shogun took power in 1185, high-ranking samurai competed with the imperial court and the noble caste in collecting works of art and financing the great artists of the various eras. This phenomenon favored the birth of the concept of *bun-bu* according to which the perfect warrior must also cultivate the arts. And if weapons are certainly the emblem of the samurai, no less are those works of art that in large numbers surrounded the life of the highest strata of the warrior caste. In the exhibition, works of art chosen from porcelain, lacquers, bronzes and enamels that best represent the artistic universe linked to the samurai world are presented.

BOX: Samurai Art to the World.

The artistic production of objects connected to the samurai class of yesteryear also had enormous influence in the markets of the western world. With the opening of Japan to international markets in the second half of the 19th century, numerous works of art were presented at the grand universal exhibitions where a large number of people had the opportunity to admire them. Among these were important artists who were so fascinated by the mystique that they incorporated aesthetic standards from the East into their work. Thus began the movement called Japonism that from the end of the 19th century had great popular success throughout the western world.



Smoking Accessory
(*Tabakobon*)
Unsigned
Wood, lacquer, silver
3rd quarter of 19th century



Food Box (*Jubako*)
Unsigned
Wood, lacquer
Mid 18th century



Calligraphy Boz
(*Suzurikabo*)
Unsigned
Wood, lacquer
Second half
of the 18th century

CONCLUSION

SECTION VII

Frederick Stibbert



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