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**MASTERS OF BAMBOO**  
**JAPANESE BASKETS AND SCULPTURE IN THE COTSEN COLLECTION**  
*February 2–May 6, 2007*

Exhibition Explores Master – Disciple Relationship of Uniquely Japanese Art Form

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, DECEMBER 15, 2006: Beginning February 2, 2007, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco will present *Masters of Bamboo: Japanese Baskets and Sculpture in the Cotsen Collection*, an exhibition that draws on the richness and breadth of the approximately nine hundred works Mr. Lloyd L. Cotsen generously donated to the Asian Art Museum in 2001.

These works comprise the largest public collection of Japanese bamboo art in the world. A variety of baskets from the Cotsen Collection is regularly on view in the museum's Japanese galleries (second floor), with the selection changing twice a year. *Masters of Bamboo*, however, approaches the collection's masterworks in an entirely new way; the exhibition is organized around the network of master-disciple relationships through which makers of these baskets are interconnected. On view in the museum's Hambrecht Gallery through May 6, 2007, *Masters of Bamboo* features one artwork each by 76 bamboo artists representing most of the major lineages in the three key geographic regions—Western Japan, focused in Osaka and Kyoto; Eastern Japan, focused mainly in Tochigi, Niigata, and Tokyo prefectures; and Kyushu, focused primarily in Oita prefecture—over the past 150 years. Many of the artworks in the exhibition are on view publicly for the first time.

*Masters of Bamboo* was organized by the Asian Art Museum, and curated by Melissa Rinne, the museum's assistant curator of Japanese art. The exhibition is accompanied by a 128-page publication in which Ms. Rinne, in collaboration with bamboo specialist Koichiro Okada, provides an overview of this intriguing art form. She also traces the network of master-disciple influences that constitute the major lineages, or lines of artistic transmission, in bamboo art, from the nineteenth century through artists who are active today. These lineages have never before



Flower Basket, *Shimmering of Heated Air* (detail), approx. 1969. By Shōno Shōunsai (1904-1974). Bamboo (*madake*), rattan, and copper alloy. Selected techniques: thousand line construction. *Lloyd Cotsen Japanese Bamboo Basket Collection*, 2006.3.836 (B-1095). Photograph by Kaz Tsuruta.

been described in a systematic way, and they provide a means of comprehending Japanese bamboo work from a global perspective.

In comparison with Japan's other decorative and applied arts, such as ceramics or textiles, bamboo basketry is a relatively small-scale art form that requires decades to learn; most members of the younger generation of recognized bamboo artists are in their forties and fifties, following years of training and development. Another unique aspect of this form of Japanese decorative art is that almost every step of production is accomplished by a single person: Bamboo work requires a sensitive and individualistic approach to the material, which does not lend itself to division of labor within a local industry and cannot rely on the forces of nature. As artist Fujinuma Noboru (b. 1945) says, "Unlike the ceramist, for whom the fires of the kiln play an important role in the outcome, the bamboo artist bears full responsibility for every step of the creative process. Without splitting the bamboo and working through each of the various steps oneself, one cannot get the 'feel' of each individual bamboo culm and thus know for what kind of piece it will be best suited. And there are no shortcuts in bamboo—there is no way to mechanize the process" (personal communication with the curator, October 2005). Because of these qualities, it is very difficult to achieve technical mastery of the bamboo medium without spending the initial years of one's training under the guidance of someone already skilled at working with bamboo as an artistic material.

For this reason, at some time in their careers most major bamboo artists have been formally or informally associated with one of a handful of artistic lineages that have served as the centers of artistic bamboo training for generation after generation. Most of these lineages are based in three regions: Western Japan; Eastern Japan; and Kyushu. While artists must learn a full corpus of techniques, regional characteristics or aesthetic tendencies emblematic of certain lineages appear in the output of the artists in those lineages.

In a traditional arrangement a senior artist has a number of live-in students who work very closely with the teacher, assisting with works produced in quantity while learning by observation the signature techniques used by the master to make his one-of-a kind pieces for competitive juried exhibitions. Often the secrets of how to successfully produce a given effect are known only to members of a lineage, and are reproduced and expanded upon by future generations. While hierarchical succession is not the only way in which artistic techniques have been disseminated (there has also been much lateral influence and cross-referencing within generations through organized bamboo art associations and exhibitions), the master-disciple relationship forms the technical and often aesthetic foundation from which a young bamboo artist begins a career—a foundation that in many cases suffuses his or her art for a lifetime.

The artists featured in *Masters of Bamboo*, living from the early 1800s through the present, have transformed bamboo work from a sophisticated skill-driven artisanal occupation into a highly innovative art form. While every work in the exhibition has been chosen for its artistic merit and for its demonstration of the maker's abilities, it will become evident to museum visitors that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century bamboo artists were more involved than their later counterparts with reproducing Chinese models or medieval Japanese-style baskets for practitioners of the *sencha* (steeped green tea) and *matcha* (powdered green tea) tea ceremonies, as well as with making baskets that, though of superior artistic sensibility, had primarily utilitarian uses. In contrast the artworks in this exhibition made in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries bespeak the blossoming of bamboo craft into a highly creative and often sculptural means of artistic expression.

The Cotsen Collection, with its remarkable scope, is perhaps the only collection anywhere from whose contents an exhibition such as *Masters of Bamboo* could be organized. For example, the exhibition includes:

- baskets by all five generations of the Hayakawa Shokosai lineage, considered to be the progenitor of bamboo work as an art: Hayakawa Shokosai I (1815–1897) is said to have been the first bamboo artist to sign his baskets, and Hayakawa Shokosai V (b. 1932) is one of the five artists in the bamboo art genre to have been designated Living National Treasures by the Japanese government. (*Masters of Bamboo* features works by all five Living National Treasures.)
- the work of Wada Waichisai I (1815–1909) of Osaka prefecture as well as works by nineteen artists from the various lineages that developed out of his formal or informal tutelage, including four generations of the Tanabe Chikuunsai lineage based in Sakai, Osaka.
- baskets by Iizuka Hosai I (1851–1915) and ten of his direct and indirect artistic descendants.
- a piece by legendary teacher Iwao Kounsai (1901–1992) of Beppu, Oita prefecture, as well as nine works from the generations of successors who benefited directly or indirectly from his teachings. One of these is by Kajiwara Aya, the first female artist to be officially admitted into one of the two major bamboo artist associations.

In addition to breadth, the Cotsen Collection boasts superb quality. Many of the pieces selected for the exhibition are renowned masterworks, representing the height of the artists'

oeuvres. The remarkable *susudake* bamboo flower basket by Sakaguchi Sounsai (1899–1967) seems as strikingly original today as it did when it was made. *Shimmering of Heated Air* by Shono Shounsai, the first bamboo artist to be named by the Japanese government as a Living National Treasure, and *Core* by Tanabe Chikuunsai III expand the realm of the traditional flower basket to new sculptural heights, while artist Yako Hodo dispenses with the vessel form altogether in his extraordinary spherical masterwork *My UFO*.

On the occasion of the *Masters of Bamboo* exhibition, the Asian Art Museum has received seven new bamboo works by important artists not previously represented in the Lloyd Cotsen Japanese Bamboo Basket Collection. The generous donation from the artists of these works not only enriches the range of bamboo artistry in this already extraordinary collection but also serves to reinforce the Asian Art Museum's commitment to it.

### **Exhibition-related programs:**

#### **Celebrating the Next Generation of Japanese Bamboo Artists**

Thursday, February 15

6:00–8:00 pm

North Court

FREE with museum admission (only \$5 after 5:00 pm on Thursdays)

Join ten emerging bamboo artists from Japan, collector Lloyd E. Cotsen, and basket specialist Rob Coffland in this reception honoring the next generation of leading bamboo artists. The work of each of the artists will be on view (the artworks will be on public display through March 18), and interpreters will be on hand to facilitate conversation with museum visitors. The evening will include remarks by Mr. Cotsen, whose donation of nearly 900 Japanese baskets to the Asian Art Museum comprises the largest public collection of Japanese bamboo art in the world. Complimentary beverages will be served. *This program generously supported by the Lloyd E. Cotsen Endowment for the study of Japanese bamboo arts.*

#### ***AsiaAlive*: Bamboo Art of Japan**

Thursday–Sunday

February 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25 (tentative dates, please confirm at [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org))

12:00–4:00 pm

North Court

FREE with museum admission

Japanese basket artist Kibe Seiho—visiting from Kyushu Island's Oita Prefecture—demonstrates bamboo weaving techniques typical of Kyushu bamboo artists, including the so called “plover plaiting” or *chidori-ami*. Kibe actively exhibits in the Japan Craft Arts Association, and has won numerous awards for his work. This program is generously supported by the Lloyd E. Cotsen Endowment for the study of Japanese bamboo arts. Appropriate for all ages, *AsiaAlive* is an ongoing drop-in interactive program that features live artist demonstrations, hands-on activities, videos, and books.

### **Lloyd Cotsen Japanese Bamboo Basket Collection**

Many friends of the Asian Art Museum may already be familiar with Mr. Cotsen's Japanese baskets. In the year 2000 the museum hosted the critically acclaimed traveling exhibition *Bamboo Masterworks: Japanese Baskets from the Lloyd Cotsen Collection*, which featured more than 100 baskets and offered visitors a rare opportunity to view the extraordinary beauty and intricate craftsmanship as well as the historical and cultural importance of this unique art form. Mr. Cotsen, a resident of Los Angeles and the former CEO and chairman of the Neutrogena Corporation, assembled his collection during the course of what he calls a "forty-year love affair" with Japanese bamboo baskets. In explaining their appeal, he says, "I was attracted by the tensions created by the balancing of forces: of cohesion and chaos, structure and nature, refinement and exuberance, and ultimately, simplicity and complexity."

The nearly 900 baskets in the collection range in date from the Edo period (1615–1868) to the present. The techniques of weaving bamboo in strips vary with each basket, which may include such materials as old bamboo arrow shafts, driftwood, cloud-pattern bamboo (named for its intermittent mottling), and smoke bamboo (taken from the rafters of old country cottages exposed to smoke for more than 100 years). Many of the baskets were originally made for the tea ceremony or for flower arranging, activities with profound artistic and philosophical meanings in Japanese culture. And many were created by artists who represent basket-making lineages and by others who have been designated in Japan as "Living National Treasures" in recognition of their mastery.

#### **Media Preview:**

A media preview for *Masters of Bamboo: Japanese Baskets and Sculpture in the Cotsen Collection* will be held on Wednesday, January 31, 2007, from 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM, with a gallery walk-through at 10:30 AM led by exhibition curator Melissa Rinne, assistant curator of Japanese art at the Asian Art Museum. Complimentary refreshments will be served. Please RSVP to [pr@asianart.org](mailto:pr@asianart.org) or call (415) 581-3712.

#### **Exhibition publication:**

*Masters of Bamboo: Artistic Lineages in the Lloyd Cotsen Japanese Basket Collection*. In this book accompanying the museum's exhibition of Japanese baskets and sculpture, exhibition curator Melissa Rinne, in collaboration with bamboo specialist Koichiro Okada, provides an overview of this intriguing art form. She also traces the network of master-disciple influences that constitute the major lineages, or lines of artistic transmission, in bamboo art, from the nineteenth century through artists who are active today. These lineages have never before been described in a systematic way, and they provide a means of comprehending Japanese bamboo work from a global perspective. Kaz Tsuruta's photography captures the essence of bamboo artistry. *128 pages, paperback, 8 1/2 x 10 in., approx. 100 color illustrations, price \$25 (inquire at [shop@asianart.org](mailto:shop@asianart.org)).*

**Acknowledgments:**

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**About the Asian Art Museum**

The Asian Art Museum is a public institution whose mission is to lead a diverse global audience in discovering the unique material, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements of Asian art and culture. Holding nearly 16,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history, the museum is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Once located in Golden Gate Park, the museum now resides at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's new home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main library building by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (designer of Paris's Musée d'Orsay) into a showcase for the museum's acclaimed collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500 or [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org).
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, with extended hours until 9:00 pm every Thursday.
- **Admission:** \$12 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$7 for youth 13–17, and free for children under 12. Thursday evenings after 5 pm admission is just \$5 for all visitors except those under 12 and members, who are always free. **Target Tuesdays:** The museum offers FREE admission to all on the **first Tuesday** of every month, courtesy of Target Stores
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.

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