



ASIAN ART MUSEUM

200 Larkin St • San Francisco • asianart.org • 415-581-3500

Contact: Tim Hallman (415) 581-3711 or pr@asianart.org

The Asian Art Museum Celebrates the 150th Anniversary of the Arrival of the First Japanese Embassy to the United States with a Thematic Exhibit

JAPAN'S EARLY AMBASSADORS TO SAN FRANCISCO, 1860–1927

May 4 – November 21, 2010

San Francisco, CA, March 30, 2010: Timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the ship *Kanrin Maru* and the first Japanese embassy to the United States, *Japan's Early Ambassadors to San Francisco, 1860–1927* focuses on some of the first Japanese diplomats and cultural emissaries in San Francisco, and how they responded to the experience of being in



USS Powhatan carrying the First Japanese Embassy to America, approx. 1860.
Woodblock print, ink and colors on paper.
Asian Art Museum, Gift of Mr. Richard Gump, B81D10.

America. It highlights more than 40 artworks and other visual media associated with the first mission, with travel to the U.S., and with Japanese artists and cultural leaders active in San Francisco between 1880 and 1927. The thematic exhibit—on view in the museum's Japan galleries—addresses the personal and artistic challenges faced by these artists, which included discriminatory practices and attitudes, and an anti-Japanese movement tied directly to the 1924 Exclusion Act prohibiting further immigration from Japan. The exhibit culminates with a

presentation of two of the Friendship Dolls sent to San Francisco as "goodwill ambassadors" from Japan in 1927, part of an orchestrated response to this law. Together, the artworks on view demonstrate both San Francisco's significance in the early years of Japan-U.S. relations as well as its role as a destination and as a gateway to the West for Japanese coming to America.

Japan's Early Ambassadors is divided into three sections: 1) Arrival of the *Kanrin Maru* and the First Japanese Embassy, 1860; 2) Early Japanese Cultural Ambassadors and Artists in San Francisco; and 3) Ambassadors of Goodwill: The Friendship Dolls of 1927.

The first section focuses on the 1860 diplomatic delegation that arrived in San Francisco on two ships, the *Kanrin Maru* and the *USS Powhatan*, as well as circumstances that led up to the

mission and its aftermath. The ships carried a number of figures who played important roles in the modernization of Japan, including Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) and Nakahama “John” Manjiro (1827–1898). The featured artwork on view in this section is a rare, handwritten diary manuscript by one of the samurai retainers on the mission, illustrated with sketches of San Francisco in 1860. Also featured are paintings from the *Black Ship Scroll* documenting Commodore Perry’s opening of Japan six years earlier, and some of the diplomatic gifts the delegation brought to San Francisco.

The second section spotlights on artists and cultural ambassadors who came to San Francisco in the earliest years of Japanese emigration and made the Bay Area their temporary or permanent home. Cultural ambassadors highlighted in this section are: Makoto Hagiwara, who served as the caretaker of the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park for over 25 years; artist Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama (1885-1951), who studied at the San Francisco Art Institute and produced America’s first graphic novel entitled *The Four Immigrants Manga* which documents the hardships experienced by Japanese immigrants in the first quarter of the twentieth century; painter Toshio Aoki (also known as Aoki Hyosai, 1853–1912), who drew on his traditional Japanese training to produce baroque imagery that appealed to Californian patrons and also reflected contemporary Meiji painting trends; and painter Chiura Obata (1885–1975), whose images of California integrated formal art training in Japan with lessons from contemporary American artists and first-hand observation of local scenery. Obata went on to become a renowned and beloved teacher of painting at U.C. Berkeley. For all of these artists, creative work had to straddle two worlds, balancing lessons from the West with artistic issues relevant back in Japan. Competing with non-Asian residents in public and civic spheres of activity, they participated in a discourse full of both trials and triumphs on what it meant to be Japanese in America.

The third and final section highlights the Friendship Dolls, sent to the United States in November 1927 as a return gift for American dolls sent to Japan earlier that year. The 58 handmade, near life-size dolls, each representing a Japanese prefecture, territory, or major city of Japan, came complete with their own passports, letters of goodwill, and full trousseaus of accessories. San Francisco, the center of the Japanese American community at the time, was the only place all 58 dolls were displayed together during their two year journey across the United States. The Friendship Doll exchange, though focused on children, was a grand bi-national project of civilian-initiated cultural diplomacy. Its broader purpose was to ease the tensions between Japan

and America in the wake of the Immigration Act of 1924, which had banned all new Japanese immigration to the U.S. Today only 45 of the original 58 dolls are known to exist. Two of the dolls—Miss Osaka Prefecture and Miss Fukushima—and their accoutrements will be on view in this exhibit. Miss Osaka Prefecture is an early work by Hirata Goyo (1903-1981), the first doll artist to be named a Japanese Living National Treasure. Her accessories bear the same Osaka crest used today in conjunction with the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City relationship.

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 more than 17,000 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 San Francisco's 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.
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. From February through September, hours are extended on Thursdays until 9:00 PM. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.
- **General Admission:** \$12 for adults, \$8 for seniors (65 and older), \$7 for college students with ID, \$7 for youth 13–17, and FREE for children under 12 and SFUSD students with ID. Admission on Thursdays after 5 pm is just \$5 for all visitors (except those under 12, SFUSD students, and members, who are always admitted FREE). General admission includes a complimentary audio tour of the museum's collection galleries (offered in English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean) as well as many other free activities and events. In some cases, a surcharge may apply for admission into special exhibitions.
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.