

Contact:
Michele Dilworth (415) 581-3713 or pr@asianart.org

Exhibition Explores the Many Sides of Famed Japanese Warrior Elite

LORDS OF THE SAMURAI

June 12–September 20, 2009

“Culture and arms are like the two wings of a bird, so just as it’s impossible to fly with one wing missing, if you have culture but no arms, people will slight you without fear, while if you have arms but no culture, people will be alienated by fear.”

—From *Instructions for Japanese Men*

by Izawa Nagahide (samurai-scholar active approx. 1711–1732)

San Francisco, CA, February 11, 2009: The culture of the samurai and their code of conduct (*bushido*) have long captivated the imaginations of both young and old in the Western world. In the special exhibition *Lords of the Samurai*, on view from June 12 through September 20, 2009, the Asian Art Museum takes an intimate look at the daimyo (literally “great name”), or provincial lords of the warrior class in feudal Japan (approx. 1300s to 1860). Trained to be fierce fighters, daimyo also strove to master artistic, cultural, and spiritual pursuits.

Through more than 160 objects—armor, weaponry, paintings, lacquer ware, ceramics, costumes, and more—this special exhibition explores the principles that governed the culture of the samurai lords. Nearly all of the objects in the exhibition are from the collection of one of the most distinguished warrior clans, the Hosokawa family. This collection is housed in Japan’s renowned Eisei-Bunko Museum in Tokyo and in the family’s former home, Kumamoto Castle on Kyushu island, Japan. Seven of the artworks on view have been designated Important Cultural Properties, the highest cultural distinction awarded by the Japanese government. Three of the artworks are designated Important Art Objects, another prestigious distinction awarded only to the works of notable artistic and historical significance.

Due to the fragility of some of the artworks, on August 3 a rotation will refresh the exhibition; some works will be removed and will be replaced with others. More than 100 artworks will be on view in each rotation, and each will include a selection of the Important Cultural Properties and Important Art Objects. Ticket prices for the exhibition include a \$5



Haramaki-type armor with black leather and red lacing, worn by Hosokawa Narimori (1806–1861). Japan, Edo period (1615–1868). Iron, leather, lacquer, silk, and gilded metal. © Eisei-Bunko Museum, Tokyo.

surcharge over regular museum admission fees. *Lords of the Samurai* was organized by the Asian Art Museum and the Eisei-Bunko Hosokawa Collection, Tokyo.

“This exhibition marks the first time that the Hosokawa family’s heirloom arms and armor, paintings, and decorative and applied art objects have been shown in a comprehensive way in the United States,” says former prime minister of Japan Hosokawa Morihiro, who is the regent of Eisei-Bunko Museum and the eighteenth-generation head of the Hosokawa family (see below for more about Morihiro). “I am grateful to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and everyone else who has collaborated on this project for providing us with this valuable opportunity. It is my profound hope that by showing the people of San Francisco and beyond the wide range of artworks that have been preserved and handed down within the Hosokawa family, we will be able to promote deeper understanding in America of Japanese culture and contribute to the friendship between our nations.”

“*Lords of the Samurai* reinforces the Asian Art Museum’s reputation for providing quality exhibitions comprising outstanding artworks that tell remarkable stories,” says Jay Xu, director of the Asian Art Museum. “The exhibition provides the opportunity to explore the lineage of a warrior-gentleman family that dates back 700 years. Through the stories of the Hosokawa family, illustrated through their superb collection, we can understand the nature of the upper echelon of the warrior elite in early modern Japan.”

The Hosokawa Family

The Hosokawa family can indeed trace its lineage of military nobility back seven centuries. Only the imperial family and a few select daimyo families have histories extending back even a few hundred years. The Hosokawa family tree includes courageous fighters, poets, tea masters, regional land administrators, a former governor, and a former prime minister—most of whom were patrons of the arts. The stories of family personalities are brought to life through the works on view in *Lords of the Samurai*. Together the stories and artworks paint a portrait of the classic samurai warrior-gentleman—fierce in battle and refined in the arts.

The Exhibition *Lords of the Samurai*

This special exhibition opens in the museum’s Lee Gallery (ground floor) where a suit of armor—one of six suits on view—takes center stage. This suit is a reproduction of the famous armor worn by the founder of the Hosokawa clan, Hosokawa Yoriari (1331–1390). The authentic reproduction was made at the order of the eleventh-generation daimyo, Hosokawa Naritatsu (1789–1826), during a time when such reproductions were fashionable. This armor is of a type

used primarily for one-on-one mounted combat. The armor's heavy ornamentation and detailed decorative elements made it suitable for funeral attire as well, should the wearer be defeated in battle. All six suits of armor in the exhibition will be on view during both rotations.

Lee Gallery also includes an introduction to Kumamoto Castle, the family home of the Hosokawas for more than 200 years. Considered one of the most beautiful castles in Japan, Kumamoto is on the island of Kyushu. In each rotation—June 12 through August 2, and August 4 through September 20—a different hanging scroll will be used to illustrate the castle's well-groomed grounds and fortifications. The castle included two main towers—one of them six stories high with forty-nine turrets, eighteen turret gates, and twenty-nine other gates; moats; and surrounding walls curved outward at the top. Such defenses discouraged attempts to scale the castle walls.

Portraits of many of the Hosokawa samurai lords and their family members are also on view in the Lee Gallery. A portrait by master painter Kano Motonobu (1476–1559) of Hosokawa Sumimoto (1489–1520) mounted on horseback is a highlight of the first rotation. An inscription above the mounted figure by Keijo Shurin (1444–1518), abbot of Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto, dates the portrait to 1507. The inscription glorifies Hosokawa Sumimoto for possessing both *bu* (warrior) and *bun* (arts and culture), qualities that defined the classic warrior-gentleman:

Hosokawa Sumimoto, a great archer and horseman, is far above other humans. He is also versed in *waka* [a form of Japanese poetry] and appreciates the moon and the wind. . . . Outside the citadel he takes bows and arrows; in meditation and reading of sacred books he protects Buddhism. Inside and outside, pledging to the mountains and rivers for the sake of the rulers and vassals, always with propriety and benevolence, he attains saintly wisdom.

The second rotation features a portrait by Tashiro Toho of Hosokawa Fujitaka (1534–1610; also known by his Buddhist name, Yusai). Fujitaka was a courageous warrior, a celebrated practitioner and patron of the arts, a well-known poet, and a highly regarded scholar of ancient poetry. During a famous battle, when Fujitaka's castle was besieged by 15,000 troops and death appeared imminent, the Japanese emperor issued an edict to lift the siege for fear that the daimyo's vast knowledge of poetry would die along with him. This incident represents a rare episode in Japanese history when literature trumped considerations of politics or war. (Boyo

Okuda, “Hosokawa Yusai: Uta no kokoro” [Hosokawa Yusai: Poetic Heart], in *Eisei-Bunko*, Spring 2008, p. 11.)

Lords of the Samurai continues in Hambrecht Gallery with a focus on weaponry. Included in this gallery are lacquered wooden saddles, stirrups, cavalry banners, and folding screens that depict equestrian scenes. These works attest to the high regard that samurai lords placed on strong, well-bred horses for the essential role they played in battle. Blades, sword guards, elaborately decorated sword mountings, a matchlock gun, and a gunpowder container are also on view. Although all of these tools of war served a deadly purpose, their value goes beyond what their functionality suggests. The embellishments of these weapons and of their accessories elevate them to works of art. Even a piece seemingly as straightforward and of such humble materials (typically forged iron or bronze) as a sword guard—which balances the blade and hilt of a sword and protects the wielder’s hands from slipping onto the blade while it is in use—was an outlet for the samurai’s appreciation for artistic detail. A fine example of such a sword guard is one with a design of broken fans and cherry blossoms executed in inlaid gold cutouts on an iron ground. The sophisticated inlay detail technique identifies the work as that of Hayashi Matashichi (1613–1699), master metalsmith from the Higo region (now Kumamoto prefecture). This sword guard is viewed as one of the masterworks of Higo metalwork. Other works on view in Hambrecht Gallery illustrating the military aspects of the samurai lords include fans, costumes, helmets, and armor.

Osher Gallery opens with a group of objects related to Miyamoto Musashi (1584–1645), the greatest samurai swordsman of his day—perhaps of all time. Musashi, who served as sword instructor to the Hosokawa family, founded and perfected the Niten Ichi school of swordsmanship, in which a long and a short sword are used together. In addition to being a renowned warrior, Musashi was also an accomplished painter. Paintings by him as well as some of his wooden swords are on view. Osher Gallery continues with other martial works, including the remaining two sets of armor and, notably, a sword inscribed by sword manufacturer Moriie, renowned for the distinctive temper lines on his blades. As the symbol of the warrior himself, a sword—called “the soul of the samurai”—was deemed sacred. Accorded the highest status among the daimyo’s luxurious possessions, swords were the items most frequently given as gifts among the military houses. The Hosokawa clan collected many fine swords as evidence of their family status.

Artworks interpolated among the military objects of *Lords of the Samurai*, hint at the cultural side of the warrior-gentleman. Arts and culture become the main focus for the remainder of the exhibition. When not in battle, the samurai lord participated in activities such as painting,

poetry, theater, the Way of Tea (tea gatherings), and spiritual pursuits. Many samurai lords were not only consumers of art but also inspired artists themselves. Among the lacquer ware on view in the exhibition is a picnic set made by Hosokawa Sansai (1563–1645). This ingeniously conceived picnic set is composed of an eggplant-shaped sake flask, a food container, and a sake cup (in the shape of an eggplant leaf) attached to the bottle stopper. The ability to execute such a complex and well-proportioned piece was a rare quality even for a cultured warrior. The exhibition continues with costumes and masks used in Noh plays (a traditional form of Japanese theater originally performed for, and sometimes by, members of the samurai class), and in Kyogen plays (often comedic in nature and performed during interludes between the more formal, sometimes austere Noh works).

Hosokawa Sansai (1563–1646) was one of the family's most important tea practitioners. He was one of seven disciples of Sen Rikyu (1522–1591), the influential tea master who perfected the Way of Tea (*chanoyu*). The tradition of *chanoyu*, maintained throughout the many generations of the Hosokawa family, continues to be observed in the family to this day. Former prime minister Hosokawa Morihiro (born 1938), the eighteenth-generation head of the Hosokawa family, is a celebrated tea practitioner. He has also won worldwide acclaim for his skill as a ceramist and calligrapher. A few of his tea bowls and other tea ceramics are among the many on view in the exhibition. Tea containers, kettles, and other utensils of various origins are also on view.

Lords of the Samurai concludes with a section devoted to the spiritual pursuits of the samurai lords. Zen Buddhism particularly appealed to Japan's warrior class. Its teachings of self-reliance as the essential means by which to attain enlightenment resonated with these professional fighters. Many of the Zen paintings on view are attributed to prominent priest-artists such as Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) and Sengai Gibon (1750–1837).

Exhibition Organization and Support

Lords of the Samurai is organized by the Asian Art Museum and the Eisei-Bunko Hosokawa Collection, Tokyo, and curated by Dr. Yoko Woodson, curator of Japanese art at the Asian Art Museum. Presentation at the Asian Art Museum is made possible by Carmen M. Christensen, the Henri and Tomoye Takahashi Charitable Foundation, the Bernard Osher Foundation, Union Bank of California, United Airlines, and the Society for Asian Art. This exhibition is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Media sponsors: ABC7, KQED Public Broadcasting, CBS Outdoor, San Francisco magazine. Official Hotels: Hotel Kabuki, Hotel Tomo.

Publication

The fully illustrated catalogue *Lords of the Samurai: The Legacy of a Daimyo Family*, published by the Asian Art Museum, includes a preface by Hosokawa Morihiro; essays by Dr. Yoko Woodson, curator of Japanese art at the Asian Art Museum; Takeuchi Jun'ichi, director of the Eisei-Bunko Museum; and scholar Thomas Cleary; as well as contributions by Abe Junko, Miyake Hidekazu, Melissa Rinne, Deborah Clearwaters, Jennifer Chen, and Natasha Reichle. The catalogue is available at the Asian Art Museum store: \$30 softcover, \$45 hardcover; 256 pp., more than 200 color illustrations (prices and catalogue specifications subject to change). 415-581-3600 or shop@asianart.org.

Press Preview

A media preview for *The Lords of the Samurai* will be held on Wednesday, June 10, 2009. Doors open at 10 a.m., remarks begin at 10:15 a.m. Please RSVP by Friday, June 5, to pr@asianart.org or 415-581-3713.

About the Asian Art Museum

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture 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 Asian Art 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 expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's current home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main public library building by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (who famously reenvisioned an abandoned railway station as Paris's Musée d'Orsay) into a showcase for the Asian Art Museum's celebrated collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500 or 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.
- **General 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 First Free Sundays:** The museum offers FREE admission to all on the **first Sunday** of every month, courtesy of Target. In addition to general museum admission fees, entry into *The Lords of the Samurai* exhibition requires a \$5 surcharge.
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.