Musée universitaire de Louvain

Visitors' guide

UCLouvain

Images and illustrations from the Japanese Edo period (1603–1868)

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Acknowledgements

Nathalie Vandeperre
Curator of the Far East collections : China-Japan-Korea,
Royal Museums of Art and History (Brussels)

Alexis Sonet
Head of the Japan / South-East Asia section, Royal
Museum of Mariemont

Stéphane Soulié
Maker of films on traditional Japanese woodblock printing
www.stephanesoulie.com

Exhibition design and production

Émilie Vilcot
UCLouvain, Service central des bibliothèques

Emmanuelle Druart & **Quentin Moors**
Musée L

Place des Sciences, 3
1348 Louvain-la-Neuve

www.museel.be
info@museel.be

Introduction

The Edo period was marked by 250 years of lasting peace, great political stability and an extremely hierarchical society. Edo became the administrative capital of the country and grew rapidly due to the influx of lords, nobles and military personnel avidly seeking culture and entertainment. The Japanese archipelago underwent a significant cultural shake-up, which is expressed in its literature, painting and applied arts.

Originally the term *ukiyo* – meaning a sad, floating world where nothing is constant – referred to the ephemeral nature of life. During the Edo period its meaning evolved to signify a hedonistic approach to life. The writer Asai Ryōi (1612–1691) used it for the first time in this sense in the preface to his *Ukiyo monogatari (Tales of the Floating World)* in 1661. Later the word *'e'* (meaning drawing, painting) was added to the word *ukiyo*.

The *ukiyo-e* artists, mainly known in the West for their magnificent coloured prints, also illustrated many books and it is essentially through this activity that they made their name. The prints and illustrations were created using the same printing technique. Although already tried and tested in the reproduction of *sūtras* prior to the Edo period, this technique did not become popular as an artistic medium in its own right until the early 18th century.

Décor du *mon* du clan Tokugawa

Sous-tasse, porcelaine | Musée L | Don Prof. et Mme de Strycker

This decorative motif is composed of three *aoï* (Japanese wild ginger) leaves. It is the crest (*mon*) of the Tokugawa shogunate, the family that ruled throughout the Edo period.

浮世絵

The art of *ukiyo-e*

This art movement introduced new themes that reflected the interests of the urban bourgeoisie and nobility, which included pretty women and famous courtesans, the theatre, actors, fantastic creatures, nature and erotica.

The *ukiyo-e* artists were inspired by the beauty of the women of Yoshiwara, Edo's pleasure district, their sartorial sophistication and graceful gestures. Some of their prints gave these *bijin-ga* the status of real celebrities, whose elegance and sensuality became the goal of Japanese women.

Seeking an inexpensive way of recording the art of entertainment in images, theatres welcomed the attention from painters and illustrators. The main themes of the first *ukiyo-e* artists were therefore the extravagant scenes and the actors of the *kabuki* theatre. The Utagawa workshop, widely represented in the Musée L collections, was famous in the 19th century for prints of actors, a genre that first appeared two centuries previously and found success because of the public's infatuation with actors. For the citizens of Edo, the prints were a way to remember their idols and for the theatre owners, a way to advertise their shows.

Hokusai (1760–1849) and Hiroshige (1797–1858), two of the greatest masters of this genre, started a new trend that connected with nature and Shinto philosophy. They contemplated the beauty and vast diversity of landscapes, observed their contemporaries and embodied nature in their art, both its destructive force and the serenity it can inspire.

Utagawa Hiroshige

東海道五拾三次 ***(Tokaido gojusan t sugi)*** **– Édition Kyoka**

1840 | UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

Kosode

Soie - tissage : damas - techniques décoratives : procédé du *yūzen* et broderie au fil de soie et au filé d'or
18e - 19e siècle | Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire

Kosode, which translates literally as 'small sleeve', is the characteristic short-sleeved robe worn by both men and women during the Edo period. It was not until the Meiji period (1868 - 1912) that the robe came to be called a kimono.

The partially embroidered scene is created using the *yūzen* technique, which from the early 13th century helped create very elegant drawings using rice paste. The scene – a cart stopped beside water, close to some cottages surrounded by pines and cherry trees in bloom – alludes to the adventures of Prince Genji during his exile to the Inland Sea, according to an episode in the classic novel *Genji monogatari (The Tale of Genji)*. This book is not only one of the world's oldest examples of works of fiction, but also an absolute masterpiece. Written around the year 1000 by Murasaki Shikibu, lady-in-waiting at the Imperial Court, it involves more than 430 characters in complex intrigues and demonstrates a profound knowledge of nature and human psychology. The plot successively revolves around Prince Genji, his son and his grandson, spans 75 years and is divided into 54 chapters. This novel has inspired artists and decorators down through the centuries, with the first painted edition dating back to the 12th century.

■ Utagawa Kunisada (1786 — 1865)

Kunisada was a major artist – the most prolific and well known – of the late Edo period and was head of the Utagawa school for almost 40 years. It is thought he became a pupil of Toyokuni at the age of 16 and took the second part of his master's name – *kuni* – to form his art name. After a period in which he drew women and illustrated books, he started focusing on the genre that was to make him most famous, actor portraits. In the 1810s he produced more than 50 series of women and actors and in 1814 set up his own illustration studio. During the 1830s he also incorporated landscapes into his portraits, but very rarely were landscapes the sole subject of his images.

Utagawa Kunisada

役者見立）東海道五十三駅之内 ***(Tokaido gojusan tsugi no uchi)***
Portrait de l'acteur Iwai Hanshirō dans le rôle d'Ofune
1852 | UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

From the 1790s, the woodblock engravers commissioned by publishers belonged to a guild (*hangiya nakama*). Their work required specific skills and publishers sought out the best of them for prestigious publications like this one. For books that required an excellent technique, the name of the engraver might have appeared in the credits but not that of the printer, who very often remained anonymous.

■ Kitagawa Utamaro (1753 — 1806)

Utamaro is one of the best-known artists outside Japan. He was a pupil of the painter Toriyama Sekien and his first well-known work was an illustration of aubergines, which he produced under the name of Sekiyō in 1770. He officially announced he was changing his name to Utamaro in 1782. He began by drawing actors then specialised in portraits of beautiful women. Inspired by the art of Masanobu and Kitonaga, he developed his style in the 1780s and 1790s and became a central figure of the Edo art world, renowned for his very sensual and elegant depiction of women.

He captured the most delicate details and emotions. With his prints produced by more than 60 different publishers, he was responsible for almost 120 series of women and illustrated around a hundred books. He also set up his own school, where his pupils kept his style alive.

Kitagawa Utamaro

Suite *Seirō yūkun awase kagami*
Vers 1797 (?) | Musée L | Don Mmes N. et D. Lejeune

Utamaro produced many portraits of women *(bijin-ga)* from Yoshiwara, old Edo's pleasure district. The courtesans and the address of the brothels where they worked were sometimes identified on the prints. Utamaro was one of the first to illustrate women close-up, which intensifies the graphic expression of the images.

Utagawa Toyokuni (1769 — 1825)

Toyokuni served his apprenticeship with Toyoharu, the founder of the Utagawa school. His earliest illustrations of women were regarded as austere, which encouraged him to work hard to improve his style. Most of his work is linked to the *kabuki*. He became a close friend of the great actors, giving him the opportunity to do their portraits in private, off-stage, while others had to content themselves with sketching during the performances.

He produced more than 90 printed series and several hundred prints on individual sheets. Over his 30-year career, he worked for more than 100 publishers and illustrated almost 400 books. His success established the reputation of the Utagawa school, which was the most prolific and influential of the late Edo period.

Utagawa Toyokuni

Femme demi nue faisant sa toilette dans un baquet, sous un magnolia en fleurs

Musée L | Don Prof. et Mme de Strycker

The art of lacquering

Peigne en forme de demi-lune

Bois laqué | 18e – 19e siècle

Musée royal de Mariemont

This comb is one example of the many hair ornaments *(kanzashi)* produced during the Japanese Edo period. Their shape and decoration inspired many Art Nouveau jewellers. The half-moon shape, very popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, kept the hair in place and very often appeared in the *bijin-ga*, portraits of beautiful people (in other words, beautiful women). This comb is entirely gold-plated and enhanced by delicate relief motifs. The illustration features an aristocrat's headdress *(kammuri)* and several *aoï* (Japanese wild ginger) leaves, the symbol of the Tokugawa clan.

Boîte à tiroirs laquée

Bois laqué, or, argent | Fin 19e – début 20e siècle
Musée royal de Mariemont

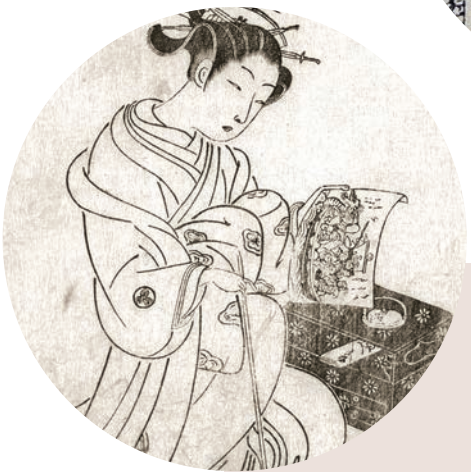
This lacquered box and comb may have been a marriage trousseau, a common custom for the daughters of *shōguns* and lords. Intended to contain toiletries, this type of box could also hold utensils for the incense ceremony. The *urushi* (lacquer) comes from the refined sap of the *Rhus verniciflua* tree. It has been used on wood, leather and fabric for 1,500 years, but the first known specimens in Japan – red and black-lacquered terracotta containers – are 4,000 years old. Lacquer work *(nurimono)* requires the collaboration and specialised technical ability of expert craftsmen in the 50-step process needed to coat a simple wooden object. The objects were both sturdy and beautiful to look at. Incorporating foreign techniques (painting, inlay, dusting with gold or silver, etc.) contributed to the development of a wide variety of decorated lacquers. Lacquered objects *(shikki)* became very popular and were produced in many variations during the Edo period. Unfortunately, because this lacquer was hard and rigid, the wood could not expand or contract at different temperatures, which caused cracks and other damage to appear on this type of object.

■ Suzuki Harunobu (1725—1770)

Harunobu's earliest known work dates back to 1760 when he was in his thirties. In the first half of the 1760s he drew several actor portraits, and in the second half he favoured warriors. In 1765 he began to illustrate calendars. This type of publication was very popular at the time and would help make his name. In the 1760s he achieved great fame for his portraits of delicate, sensual women. He illustrated almost 70 books.

Suzuki Harunobu
絵本続江戸土産 ***(Ehon zoku Edo miyage)***

1768
UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques



Suzuki Harunobu
絵本青楼美人 ***(Ehon Seirō bijin awase)***

1770
UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques

■ Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798 — 1861)

At the age of 12, Kuniyoshi was praised by Toyokuni for his drawing of the demon Shōki. He went on to become a pupil of Toyokuni but also learned other styles of painting. Together with Hiroshige, he was the most important artist of the late Edo period and was particularly well known for his depictions of warriors. He also produced actor portraits in the same style as Kunisada and other pupils of Toyokuni, and embraced other popular subjects with his illustrations of women, actors and landscapes. He worked for more than 150 publishers, produced almost 250 series of prints and illustrated nearly 240 books.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi

Portrait de l'acteur Ichikawa Danjûrô VIII

1840 - 1854 (?) | Musée L | Don Mme N. Lejeune

In this print we see a member of the famous Danjûrô lineage, who excelled in the *aragoto* genre, a dramatic, violent style of theatre that featured a hero with magical powers. Danjûrô VIII (1823-1854) was the most popular actor until the end of the Tokugawa shogunate. Rather than the actors wearing a mask typical of *nō* theatre (a beautiful example of which is on display on the sixth floor of Musée L), *kabuki* theatre preferred them to leave their face uncovered and wear make-up.

Woodcut printing

The ‘images of the floating world’ – or *ukiyo-e* – owe their unparalleled success to woodcut printing. This method of printing books (using carved woodblocks) originated in 7th century China, was introduced into Japan in the 9th century but remained the preserve of monasteries until the 17th century. The number of private publishers grew from the early Edo period onwards. These publishers experimented with new genres and formats, leading to the creation of a true book market in Japan. During the Edo period there were more than 1,000 active publishers in Edo, Osaka and Kyōto, who began to include more and more illustrations in their books. Because this was easier to do using woodcut than with moveable type printing, images would become an integral part of book production. Edo, the old name for modern-day Tokyo, became the main publishing centre for popular literature and illustrated books.

Bois de teinte et *kentō*

1910 | Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire

If printing requires several blocks, the drawing contains a number of registration marks or notches *(kentō)*. For example, an L-shaped mark *(kagi kentō)* in the bottom right-hand corner, and a straight-line mark *(hikitsuke)* along the lower left side of the block.

Les outils de l'imprimeur : le *baren*

1910 | Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire

To create effects, the only tool a printer needs is a *baren*, which is disk-shaped and measures approximately 12 cm in diameter. A multi-layer core is wrapped in a prepared bamboo leaf. The smooth front surface is sheathed in bamboo and the ends are twisted to form a handle on the back of the *baren*.

Moku-hanga

Traditional Japanese woodblock printing technique

First the artist draws the image onto very thin paper using Indian ink and a brush. The engraver receives this drawing and glues it face-down onto a cherrywood block (chosen because it is a hard wood and can withstand hundreds of print runs). Once the paper has been affixed, it is coated in camellia oil to render it transparent and make the drawing visible. Now the engraver can begin to hollow out the wood using gouges and chisels, closely following the lines created by the artist, until only the final drawing is in relief. This produces the 'key block', which will be used to print the drawing. The engraver then makes a block for each colour he requires, adding notches *(kentō)* as markers to ensure the correct positioning of the paper during printing. This allows the engraver and printer to position each element correctly according to colour and prevent movement. Once they have been made, the printer inks the blocks, colour by colour. The *baren* is pressed down to transfer the ink onto the paper.

In the Print Lab on the fourth floor of Musée L, you can find out all about various woodblock printing techniques.

■ Utagawa Hiroshige (1797 — 1858)

Hiroshige did his first sketches around the age of 9 and became a pupil of Toyohiro in 1810. Two years later he adopted the art name of Hiroshige, and in 1818 produced his first book illustrations and several portraits of *kabuki* actors. He then embraced the traditional *ukiyo-e* themes of feminine beauty and samurai warriors.

In the early 1830s he painted his first landscapes, going on to become the leading figure in this field and particularly well known for his Tōkaidō road series (ca 1832 – 1833). It is thought that his drawings were created from sketches he did during a trip to Kyōto, but most were inspired by travel books. He also achieved great success with his views of famous places in Edo. His masterpieces, however, are his drawings of flowers and birds. During his career he illustrated more than 130 books.

Utagawa Hiroshige
東海道風景図会 ***(Tokaido fukei zue)***

1851
UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques

Utagawa Hiroshige
畫本江戸土産 ***(Ehon Edo miyage)***

1850
UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques

■ Katsushika Hokusai (1760—1849)

The most famous Japanese artist was first trained as a woodblock engraver. Then, at the age of 18, he learned how to make prints. He was the pupil of several famous artists and frequently changed his name, using up to 30 different ones in his lifetime.

His oldest signed work is an actor portrait dating back to 1778. After making prints depicting scenes from the *kabuki* theatre, he turned his hand to landscapes. He began to use the name Hokusai in 1797, and the art name Katsushika in 1805. For over 70 years he created original prints, sketches and book illustrations, working for more than 30 different publishers. Among his most famous works are the series illustrating life along the Tokaido road (published between 1802 and 1810), mangas published in 15 volumes between 1814 and 1878, and 36 views of Mount Fuji *(Fugaku sanjūrokkei)*, one of which is the famous Kanagawa wave.

Katsushika Hokusai
北斎画苑 ***(Hokusai gaen)***

1843
UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques

Katsushika Hokusai
絵本忠臣蔵 ***(Ehon chushingura)***

1802
UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques

The crafts

Printmaking is a collective task requiring the expertise of four people : the publisher, who coordinates the whole process ; the artist, who does the drawing ; the engraver, who hollows out the wood ; and the printer, who prints the work.

Utagawa Kunisada

Courtisane (?)

Musée L | Don Mmes N. et D. Lejeune

The crucial role of the illustrator

Considered craftsmen of equal standing to engravers and printers, illustrators were trained from a very young age. Pupils began by copying the work of their masters then learned to refine their sketches and went on to help illustrate inexpensive books. It is difficult to know what standard of living these illustrators had, and how popular they were, but the most famous among them were probably not treated as mere craftsmen. It was the notoriety of their name that guaranteed the success of a publication. To attract readers, a publisher might have asked them to illustrate the cover of a book that contained images by lesser-known illustrators.

The master decided when the pupil could produce his own work and sign it with a name he had received from the master. Often this name contained a syllable derived from the master's own name; thus Kunisada, Toyokuni's pupil, was given '*kuni*'. This print is signed by the artist Utagawa Kunisada and is stamped with the small round *kiwame* ('approved') censor seal, followed by the *Matsu* seal (with three peaks) of the printer Matsumura Tatsuemon.

The publisher: the project manager

Book publishers were responsible for commissioning the artists, copyists, engravers, printers and binders. Once the engraver had prepared the woodblocks, they became the property of the publisher. Some publishers are known to have held on to their blocks for many years, so a publishing house could stay in business for more than a century, sometimes even two. The publisher affixed his mark to the printed images and books. Most of the publishers were also booksellers. Some had fairly large shops and also sold the work of other publishers, who did likewise, thus guaranteeing a presence in the different districts of the city.

Sales and number of copies

The success of illustrated books, colour or monochrome, very much depended on good collaboration between the different players, under the publisher's supervision. The printing quality, on the other hand, depended on various factors: the quality of the wood, the engraver's skill, the printer's expertise and the quality of the ink, pigments and paper. Archives are rare but some sources give us an idea of the number of prints that could have been made with one set of blocks: 6,000 to 40,000 copies were possible, but commonly it was between 6,000 and 14,000. In terms of production costs, we know that the paper for the book and the cover accounted for 45% of total costs, the wood and the engraver's work 40%, printing 7%, and compilation of the volume and binding 8%. The production costs and selling price of the book varied depending on the notoriety of the artist and the skill of the engraver, and also on factors such as the weight of the paper used, whether or not it was printed in colour and the pigments used.

絵本

E-Hon, illustrated books

The term *'e-hon'* refers to picture books with accompanying text. During the Edo period, however, many types of illustrated books were published, the genres and techniques evolving according to public taste.

Kawamura Bunpō

文鳳画譜 ***(Bunpō gafu)***

1807 | UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

■ *Gafu*, picture albums

The name *gafu* comes from the titles of the albums of Chinese paintings imported to Japan in the 17th century. The first book illustrated by a Japanese artist with the suffix *'gafu'* in its title was Tachibana Morikuni's Fuso *gafu*, published in 1735. The suffix *'gafu'* in titles was used from the 1760s until the 1830s and indicated that the works were devoted to the art of painting, offering examples of an artist's style to inspire other artists.

Publishers listed them specifically as painting manuals but, like an art book, they could also be bought and consulted for pleasure. The first *gafu* subjects were landscapes, flowers and birds, character studies and Chinese-inspired portraits. From the 1800s onwards the artists introduced Japanese themes into their *gafu*, principally studying the life and everyday activities of the various classes of society in Kyōto, Osaka and Edo, and depicting them as they went about their daily business.

In the 1810s several *ukiyo-e* artists also embraced this type of publication, among them Nantei and the famed Hokusai.

Nishimura Nantei

楠亭画譜 ***(Nantei gafu)***

1804 | UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

■ *Nara-ehon*, books of tales

Most Japanese novels published in the 18th and 19th centuries included illustrations, as was already the case for the oldest works of fiction (e.g. *The Tale of Genji*, written around the year 1000). These manuscripts – produced in scroll form – already contained images from key scenes in the different chapters.

Before the Edo period, the only illustrated Japanese tales or novels were reserved for the privileged classes. They took the form of hand-painted illuminated scrolls or *nara-ehon*, tales with paintings, produced in the workshops of the official Kanō and Tosa painting schools between the early 16th and mid-18th centuries.

小原御幸 ***(Ohara gokō)***
1661-1673 | UCLouvain
Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

■ *Kusa-zōshi*, popular fiction

Since the Middle Ages there had been a tradition of travelling storytellers using painted images to accompany their tales. It was this type of practice that inspired the *kusa-zōshi* genre, which emerged at the beginning of the 18th century. In the early books, it was the artist himself, generally a member of the *ukiyo-e* school, who produced the illustrations and added his own text in the empty spaces. The texts and images were closely related.

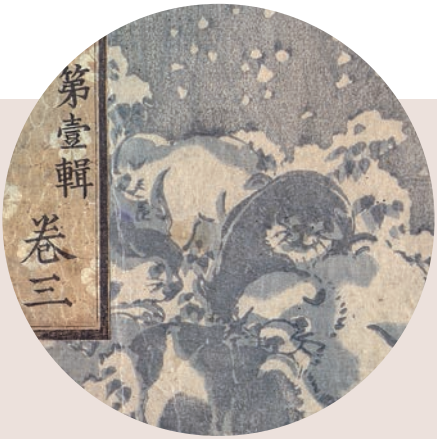
These novels, written in spoken style and often printed on recycled paper, were very inexpensive and sometimes as many as 10,000 copies or more were sold.

化物よめ入 (***Bakemono no yomeiri***)
UCLouvain
Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

■ *Yomihon*, "reading books"

Yomihon, the most sophisticated genre in the Edo period, was a more expensive type of fiction, with more elaborate illustrations. Packed with references to Japanese or Chinese history, the stories often took place in fantasy worlds. Although *yomihon* were reading books, their success often largely depended on their illustrations.

One of the greatest Japanese writers, Kyokutei Bakin, appreciated the importance of illustrations in his novels, giving the illustrators very specific instructions in the firm belief that, to understand his works, the reader needed to be able to decode the images.



Kyokutei Bakin (auteur), Yanagawa Shigenobu I (illustrateur),
Yanagawa shigenobu II (illustrateur), Keisai Eisen (illustrateur),
Utagawa Sadahide, (illustrateur)

南総里見八犬伝 ***(Nansō satomi hakkenden)***
1814 - 1842 | UCLouvain
Réserve précieuse, Service central des bibliothèques

The polychrome printing technique was perfected in the 1780s but did not completely replace black and white images, which were considered to better reflect the artists' craft.

Okimono

Ivoire
Fin 19e - début 20e siècle | Japon | Musée de Mariemont

Okimono are decorative objects intended as gifts or for display in the *tokonoma*, which was originally an alcove in a tea house and then became commonplace in homes. A *tokonoma* is a slightly raised honorary area opposite which guests are seated and in which decorative objects are placed, such as an *okimono*, a *kakemono* (hanging scroll, e.g. displaying a calligraphy inscription) or a floral arrangement. The whole arrangement follows a theme, the seasons often being a popular choice.

This *okimono* depicts a samurai fighting a hybrid animal (a tiger with a snake's tail) with his little sword (*wakizashi*). His long sword, a *tachi*, is hung across his back. Although the tiger is not native to Japan, it has a symbolic presence originating from China and can represent clairvoyance.

将軍 大名 侍

Shōgun, Daimyō, Samurai

In 1600 the battle of Sekigahara brought to an end a century of civil war and constant unrest. During the winter of 1614 and summer of 1615 more than 200,000 samurai came face-to-face for the last time in a major military campaign, following which Japan enjoyed a prolonged period of peace and prosperity. A military government was established in Edo, under the authority of successive *shōguns* from the Tokugawa clan.

The role of the emperor, in his Kyōto palace, became merely symbolic and religious. Japan became a feudal society and the warrior class, to which the *shōgun* belonged, included the *daimyō* and the *samurai*. The latter were relegated to the role of protecting their lord and performing administrative tasks, but they continued to cultivate a code of honour based on loyalty, honesty, devotion and self-control. Ancestral armour was now reserved for ceremonial purposes. The new armour and sword accessories such as guards *(tsuba)* and war fans were adorned with decorations and other embellishments.

兵器図解 ***(Heiki zukaï)***

UCLouvain | Réserve précieuse,
Service central des bibliothèques

Netsuke Katabori

Ivoire | Fin 18e - début 19e siècle | Musée L
Don Prof. et Mme de Strycker

A *netsuke* is a miniature sculpture between 3 cm and 8 cm in size, which acts as a toggle on the kimono belt in traditional Japanese dress. It holds the *sagemono* (hanging objects), such as small boxes *(inrō)*. There was a major boom in *netsuke* production during the Edo period. They were made from boxwood or ivory imported from China and in the late 17th century, because of the fine craftsmanship and intricate detail of the carved subjects, they came to be considered objets d'art. The subjects were only limited by the craftsman's imagination and included public figures, wild or domestic animals, birds, insects, fish and masks.

The scene here is Nitta no Shiro killing a wild boar. In the early 12th century, during a hunt close to Mount Fuji, this warrior is thought to have saved a military leader from attack by a wild boar by stabbing it to death.

***Katana*, sabre long**

Acier, galuchat, cuivre, fer - fourreau : bois laqué

18e - 19e siècle (?) | Musée de Mariemont

Sabre d'apparat

Acier, galuchat, cuivre, fer - fourreau : ivoire gravé
18e - 19e siècle (?) | Musée L | Fonds ancien de l'Université

During the Edo period, only the samurai were permitted to carry two swords: a long one *(katana)*, held in place in their belt with the blade facing upwards, and a short one *(wakizashi)*. This pair of swords *(daisho)* was therefore of great symbolic importance because it was an indication of their social standing (the highest rank during the Edo period). At the lower end of the social ladder, tradesmen did not have this privilege but were wealthy enough to buy highly decorative ceremonial swords. These non-functional weapons had a shorter blade and no braided handle, as can be seen in the second sword, which has a carved ivory handle and sheath.

1 ***Kogai-hitsu :*** a slot for storing the kogai, a pair of spikes with many uses. Sometimes this slot was plugged.

2 ***Sekigane :*** two small pieces located at either side of the central opening to ensure the blade is held firmly in place. Sometimes they were made from precious metal.

3 ***Kozuka-hitsu :*** slot for a smaller knife for everyday use by the samurai.

4 ***Nagako-ana :*** central opening through which the blade was inserted (silk)

Tsuba, garde de sabre

Alliage cuivreux | Déb. 19e siècle | Musée L
Don Prof. et Mme de Strycker

The guard on a Japanese weapon is called a *tsuba*. This is a delicately carved or openwork piece whose main function is to protect the hand, stopping it slipping from the handle to the sharp edge of the blade. Often round, as in the Musée L examples, sword guards were made from a vast range of metal alloys. These objects are the perfect illustration of the Japanese fondness for simplicity and elegance, even in everyday objects. This keen decorative taste is apparent in the openwork surface *(sukashi)* depicting a moon surrounded by clouds.

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Françoise Goethals

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Julien Bayot

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Visite du prince impérial Hiro Hito à l'université en ruines

Photographie argentique | 1921 | Leuven | UCLouvain
Service des Archives

In the 1920s Japan donated more than 13,600 books to the Université catholique de Louvain, a collection specifically put together to showcase the rich diversity of Japanese culture. At the time, it was considered to be the finest collection outside Japan. The works – handwritten, printed, scrolls and bound books – in Chinese or Japanese, were all produced in Japan. The oldest date back to the 13th century, while the most recent were published in the early 20th century. Most were produced during the Edo period (1603 - 1868) and a fine selection of these works is on display in the exhibition.

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