ROYAL
COLLECTION
TRUST

Japan: Courts and Culture

Plain English Script

THE QUEEN'S GALLERY, BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Pennethorne Gallery

Welcome

Welcome to The Queen's Gallery and to *Japan: Courts and Culture.* The exhibition covers 350 years of diplomatic, artistic and cultural links between Britain and Japan. This is the first time Japanese art from The Royal Collection has been exhibited, in a dedicated exhibition. The collection contains some of most important Japanese art in the western world. More than half the works you will see today have never been shown in public before.

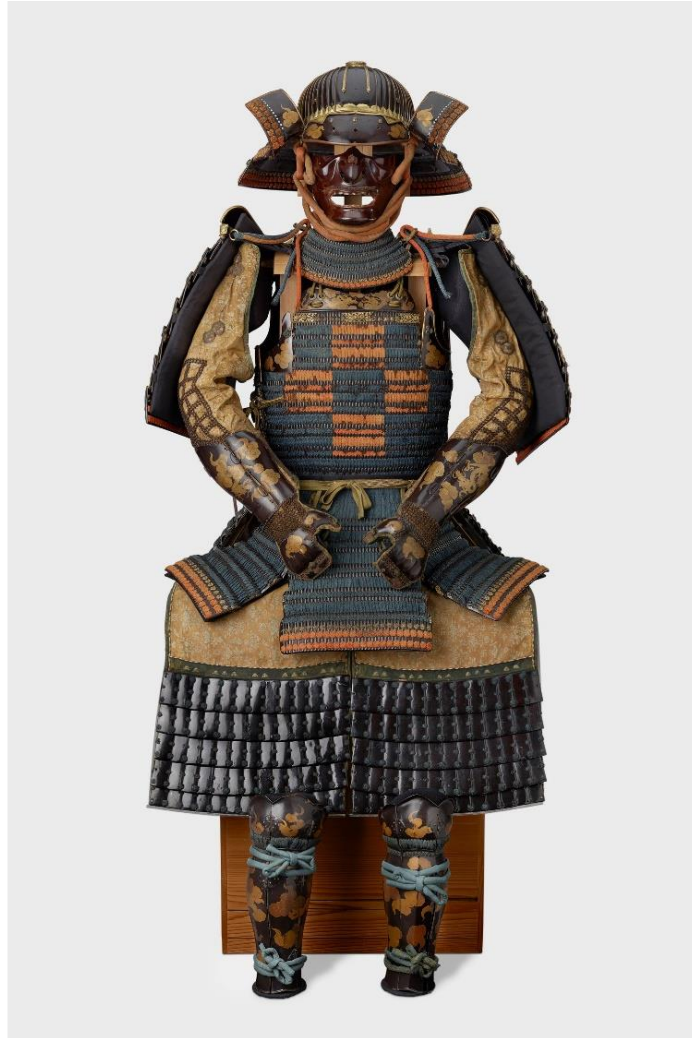
These works tell us about the British Royal Family's fascination with Japan and Japanese works of art. They also tell us about Britain's experience of Japan and how British people have seen the country. At first it was a mysterious place to them, but then they learned about it and celebrated it and some were able to see it for themselves.

Japanese works of art first came to Britain in the 17th century on Dutch and English trading ships. They were made from unusual materials, using unknown techniques. The delicate porcelain, the shining lacquerware and the complicated armour were unlike anything seen here before. As each precious cargo was unpacked people wanted to know more and more about Japan and Japanese culture.

This exhibition is especially interesting because it offers different ways of looking at these works of art. They are fascinating because of where they were made, what they were made of and how they were used in the Japanese royal court. But they also say something about Britain, because of the way they were copied and changed and displayed. They tell us about how Europeans understood Japan, as much as about Japan itself.

Our first stop is the armour you saw when you entered this gallery.

STOP 2 - ***James I armour***
RCIN 71611
Symbol: Dragon in clouds



The samurai were Japan's noble, feared warriors, but also patrons of the arts. These two aspects of the samurai can be seen in this sculptural armour's combination of strength and beauty. Walk round it so you can see the wonderful detail involved in every part. It is made in a style which wraps around the body and fastens on the right. This style is called *dōmaru*. Rows of tiny iron plates coated with lacquer - known as *lamellae* - are laced together with silk cords woven by hand. The raised section at the back of the helmet is designed for the traditional samurai hairstyle of a topknot or 'queue'.

The word samurai means ‘one who serves’. Lower-ranking samurai served under regional feudal lords known as *daimyōs*. They themselves served under *shōguns*, the military upper class. From the late 12th century they governed Japan for the Emperor, who was more of a symbolic figure.

In the early 17th century the Tokugawa Shōguns united the country. This brought a long period of peace - the first Japan had seen for many centuries. This time of peace is known as the Edo period, taking its name from Edo, Japan’s capital city at that time. Later on the name was changed to Tokyo.

This armour was part of the first official diplomatic gift from Japan to Britain. It was sent by the Tokugawa Shōgun to James I, in 1613. It came with a letter allowing British people to trade and settle in Japan.

The relationship between James I and the Tokugawa Shōgun began well but not long afterwards Japan began to close off from the West. This was a policy now known as *sakoku*. It was meant to make the government of Japan stronger and to reduce the foreign influences which might have affected the Japanese traditional way of life. The Japanese would not allow foreigners to trade with them or to enter Japan. The only Europeans allowed into Japan were the Dutch. The Dutch were Protestants, and the Japanese government thought they were less likely than their European neighbours, who were Catholics, to try to convert the Japanese to Christianity. Dutch traders were allowed to have a trading centre on Dejima, a fan-shaped island in the Bay of Nagasaki. From there they exported goods, like this chest, specifically designed for the European market.

Most of the silk lacing on the armour probably dates from the 17th century. This makes it very rare. Silk is really tough and flexible when it is first made, but as it gets old any changes in temperature and humidity along with damage caused by sunlight shining on it can make it fall apart. Also, the lacing in armour is usually replaced, which means there are very few armours left which have not been repaired and re-laced.

STOP 3 - ***Pair of Kakiemon-style jars***

RCIN 1094

These two beautiful jars along with their lids have not been made on a potter's wheel. It is quite difficult to work out at first exactly how they have been made. In fact, the artist made them with flat slabs of clay pressed into moulds. These pieces of clay were then brought together with unbelievable skill.

In the mid-17th century there was a civil war in China which disrupted the supply of porcelain. So Dutch traders turned to Japan to meet the growing demand from Europe. Chinese porcelain was usually decorated in blue and white, or in a plain green-grey glaze. But these new Japanese exports were very different, being brilliantly decorated in colourful enamels painted over a milky white glaze known as *nigoshide*.

Although porcelain is described as ‘white’ there are actually many different shades of white and experts have spent many years analysing and discussing them. Potters have somewhere around 200 different white glazes to choose from. The design of birds and women on these jars is painted on top of the *nigoshide* in blue, green and a shade of reddish-orange known as *kaki*, which is the Japanese word for the persimmon fruit. This is what gave this style of porcelain its name - *kakiemon*.

These jars are what is called a ‘matched’ pair. This means that when they are side by side, the designs mirror each other. Actually, this is a European tradition, because in Japan objects are usually made individually rather than in pairs. This shows that Japanese makers are changing what they do to cater for European taste, even during the time when they had little contact with the outside world.

STOP 4 - ***Bowl mounted as a pot-pourri***
RCIN 45262

Every part of this porcelain bowl, including its lid, is covered with a richly coloured pattern and with decorative gilding. This is a style known as *Imari* after the harbour on Kyūshū from which objects like these sailed from Japan for Europe.

The *imari* style is a completely different way of thinking about decoration. First one bit of the pattern is drawn with a cobalt blue line and then filled in. Another colour is put next to it, and another colour on top. After all these colours had been put on the object was fired for the last time. The gold was put on top, which fused onto the body of the porcelain at a lower temperature.

The petal design on the bowl may have given its new European owners the idea of using it to hold pot pourri – a mixture of petals and spices in a bowl to make a room smell nice. So, on top of the rather fancy mount, and the handles and the gilt pomegranate on top of the lid, a gold-coloured band with holes in it was added, to allow the delicate perfume of flowers and herbs inside the bowl to flow around the room. This bowl is a perfect example of how a Japanese object was changed into something for use in the royal court in Britain.

Now you could visit the Cabinet Room if you wish. It is through the doorway to your right. There you will see how 20th century Japanese potters have developed beautiful new styles of porcelain for people in the West.

An example is this pot by *Hamada Shoji,* RCIN 68402:

Japanese society respects artists and craftspeople very highly. The leading figures in each discipline are known as 'Living National Treasures' or, rather more formally, 'Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Properties'. The potter Hamada Shoji was awarded this greatly admired title in 1955.

Hamada Shoji's background is in something called the *Mingei* tradition, which looked back to ancient traditions of basketry, textiles and pottery. He recognised the value of ancient traditions and wanted to make sure they were not forgotten. When he was a young man he moved to England, and worked with the great English potter Bernard Leach in St Ives. He took lots of new ideas back to Japan, settling there in a village called Mashiko, where he spent the rest of his long life making traditional pots in a new way.

He dipped this pot in a beautiful kaki persimmon glaze and then made the marks across it. The blue-green glaze was put on with a traditional brush made from the coarse hair taken from the back of a dog's neck.

Hamada used lots of different old traditions which he brought together to make new work. Some had almost completely died out but he brought them back made them feel very modern. In this way he was putting new life into old Japanese traditions.

The pot made by Hamada in the Cabinet Room was presented to Her Majesty The Queen in 1975 when she became the first reigning monarch of the United Kingdom to visit Japan. During this visit The Queen presented the Emperor Showa with a stoneware plate and etching by Bernard Leach, the artist Hamada had worked with in St Ives. The exchange of works by Leach and Hamada was a reminder not only that the two artists were friends with the same artistic ideals, but also a sign that the two nations, Britain and Japan, were also friends with a similar outlook on the world.

STOP 5 - ***Mother-of-pearl lacquer casket, brought to Britain via Dutch trading networks***
RCIN 39244

In the 17th century British people were used to heavy, carved oak furniture. They would have been amazed by this casket, decorated with an Asian varnish called lacquer and inlaid with a mother-of-pearl design of plants, flowers and animals – as well as some really interesting symbols.

There are some symbols on this chest which were used by individual families to identify themselves. They are called *mon* and are rather like a coat of arms. Some of the *mon* here include the chrysanthemum with 16 petals, which was used by the emperor's family. Directly below it there is a design which looks like three marks. It is called *tomoe*, and is a symbol for long life, found on both Buddhist and Shinto shrines.

Lacquer was a material unavailable in Britain at that time. It provides a shiny protective covering for objects and its use quickly became a status symbol. It conjured up romantic images of a far-off mysterious land, which from the 1630s onwards was out of bounds to the outside world.

Lacquer, which is known as *urushi* in Japanese, comes from the sap of a tree native to Asia. The sap is filtered and heated to remove impurities and excess water before it is put on.

The surface to be lacquered has to be prepared with as many as 20 layers, and each one has to be polished smooth so there are no wrinkles or bumps, and then allowed to dry. This preparation could take a long time, possibly up to a year. Surprisingly, the drying stages need wet not dry conditions. This is because the lacquer is not really 'drying' in the normal sense but is actually hardening, due to a chemical reaction when the sap comes into contact with damp air.

The style of the chest is called *nanban* which literally means 'southern barbarian'. That is the name that was used to describe Europeans because they came to Japan from the south.

STOP 6 - ***Pair of mounted bowls (Lacquer – 1680-1720, mounts 1750-1775)***
RCIN 3154.1-2

These bowls are made using a technique which takes its name from the Asian pear. It is called *nashiji*. *Nashi* in Japanese means pear. Tiny flakes of gold have been scattered over the bowls, making their surface look like the skin of the Asian pear, and this is where the name comes from. This technique is often used to provide the base for a design over which other patterns are sprinkled.

When the object is ready to be decorated, the artist uses a technique known as *makie* or 'sprinkled picture'. They select small flakes of gold or silver which are just the right size and shape, sometimes even choosing the tiny pieces one by one. They sprinkle them from a tube with a cloth mesh covering its end to make the design. They have to sprinkle them perfectly evenly on to the wet lacquer because as soon as the pieces touch the lacquer they stick. There is no room for mistakes.

A single lacquer object may be decorated using different *maki-e* techniques to make a combination of flat (called *hiramakie*) and relief (*takamakie)* designs.

The most complicated design of all is called *togidashi makie*. When they have finished the design on the object the artist covers it up with another layer of black lacquer. This is polished off so that the design underneath shows through, so that it is level with the surface of the object.

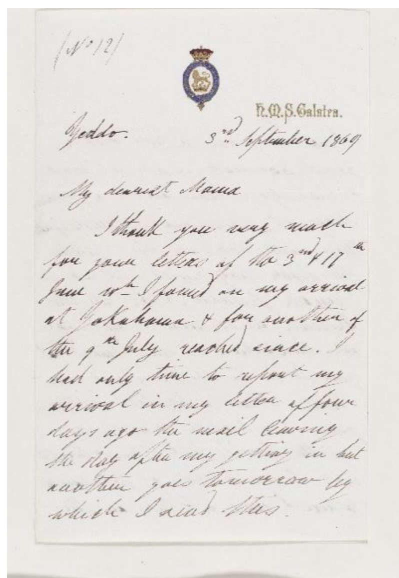
The design of one of this pair of lacquer bowls includes a lotus flower in a swamp with mist swirling around it. This is where the Buddha sits whilst he is meditating and it represents purity and knowledge. The other bowl's design includes symbols of long life. One of them is a crane, a bird which people thought could live for a thousand years. There are evergreen pine trees and *minogame*, the turtle who grew so old that algae started to grow on his back. A mythical figure from a completely different part of the world is looking down on these scenes. He is Bacchus (Roman name) also called Dionysus (Greek name). He is the god of wine, pleasure and fertility, and is surrounded by grapes and vine leaves. The loop-shaped handles are a European addition and they change what originally was a Japanese water bowl into the god's drinking cup.

When they first came to Europe, these bowls went to France where the gilt-bronze mounts were added. The craftsman who made the mounts has been influenced by the Japanese design so that where the handles meet the bowl there is a design that looks slightly like overlapping petals or clouds.

George IV was known for his love of both French and Asian art and for richly decorated designs. He bought these bowls some time before 1826 and put them on display in the library at his beloved Brighton Pavilion.

NASH VESTIBULE

STOP 7 - *Royal encounters* *(with reference to Letter from Prince Alfred to Queen Victoria, 3rd September 1869* and *A diary account of King George V's visit in 1881 as Prince George of Wales)*
RA VIC/ADD/A20/1294
Facsimile of RA GV/priv/gvd/1881



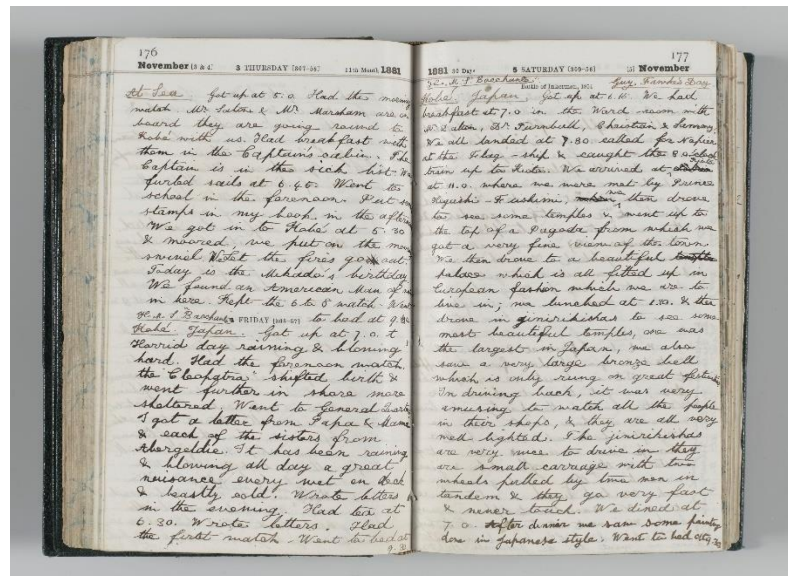
[No 12]

H.M.S. Galatea.

Yeddo. 3rd September 1869

My dearest Mama

I thank you very much for your letters of the 3rd & 17th June wh I found on my arrival at Yokohama & for another of the 9th July reached since. I had only time to report my arrival in my letter of four days ago the mail leaving the day after my getting in but another goes tomorrow by which I send this.



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November [3 & 4] 3 THURSDAY [307-58] 11th Month 1881

At Sea. Got up at 5.0. Had the morning watch. Mr Sutton & Mr Marsham are on board they are going round to Kobé with us. Had breakfast with them in the Captain's cabin. The Captain is in the sick list. We furled sails at 6.45. Went to school in the forenoon. Put some stamps in my book in the afternoon. We got in to Kobé at 5.30 & moored, we put on the mooring swivel & let the fires go out. Today is the Mikado's birthday. We found an American Man of war in here. Kept the 6 to 8 watch. Went to bed at 9.30

H.M.S. Bacchante 4 FRIDAY [308-57]
Kobé. Japan. Got up at 7.0. Horrid day raining & blowing hard. Had the forenoon watch. the "Cleopatra" shifted berth & went further in shore more sheltered. Went to General Quarters. I got a letter from Papa & Mama & each of the sisters from Abergeldie. It has been raining & blowing all day a great nuisance every wet on deck & beastly cold. Wrote letters in the evening. Had tea at 6.30. Wrote letters. Had the first watch. Went to bed at 9.30

1881 30 Days 5 SATURDAY [309-56] [5] November 177
H.M.S. Bacchante. Battle of Inkerman, 1854 Guy Fawkes Day.

Kobé. Japan. Got up at 6.15. We had breakfast at 7.0 in the Ward room with Mr Dalton, Dr Turnbull, Christian & Lemprière. We all landed at 7.30 called for Napier at the Flag-ship & caught the 8 o'clock train up to Kioto. We arrived at Kioto at 11.0. where we were met by Prince Higashi-Fushimi, we then drove to see some temples & went up to the top of a Pagoda from which we got a very fine view of the town. We then drove to a beautiful palace which is all fitted up in European fashion which we are to live in; we lunched at 1.30. & then drove in jinirikishas to see some most beautiful temples, one was the largest in Japan, we also saw a very large bronze bell which is only rung on great festivals. In driving back, it was very amusing to watch all the people in their shops, & they are all very well lighted. The jinirikishas are very nice to drive in they are small carriage with two wheels pulled by two men in tandem & they go very fast & never touch. We dined at 7.0. After dinner we saw some painting done in Japanese style. Went to bed at 9.30

When Queen Victoria's second eldest son, Prince Alfred, stepped off his naval ship at Yokohama in August 1869, he became the first foreign royal to set foot on Japanese soil. This letter is one of four which he wrote to his mother during his stay.

In it he wrote: "*To give you any account of this country, I feel quite at a loss. Everything is so new and so quaint that I am quite bewildered.*"

In the year before his visit, Japan had returned to direct Imperial rule under the Emperor Meiji, after being governed for more than 250 years by the Tokugawa shōguns.

The government of the Emperor Meiji reversed the isolation policy of previous centuries. He looked increasingly to the West for ideas about how to modernise his country's economics, politics and culture. For the first time diplomats, artists and members of the royal families of the two nations could travel freely between the two countries.

Prince Alfred travelled by carriage through crowd-lined Tokyo streets to the Imperial Palace. There he met the 16-year-old Emperor Meiji who was wearing traditional Japanese dress. According to an account written at the time his eyebrows were 'shaved off and painted ... high up on the forehead' and his lips were 'painted with red and gold'.

This was an important meeting between the East and the West. It was the first formal meeting between members of the ruling families of Japan and a Western nation. Prince Alfred was fascinated by everything he saw, which included sumo wrestling, acrobats and sword-fighting. He collected a wide variety of art and souvenirs and some of them are displayed in the next room.

His nephews, Prince George of Wales (who later became King George V) and Prince Albert Victor were the next members of the royal family to visit Japan. A reproduction of Prince George's diary from 1881 is displayed nearby. In it he describes eating with chopsticks, travelling by rickshaw and trying on suits of armour.

The official record of the tour includes a section where artwork from Japan is described as showing *'a perfection of detail in every particular in that which is hidden as well as in that which is exposed to the eye'.*

Our next stop is the pair of screen paintings to your left as you enter the room.

NASH GALLERY

STOP 8 - ***Pair of six-panel screen paintings, sent to Queen Victoria by Shōgun Tokugawa Iemochi, 1860***
RCIN 33530, 33544

The six panels of one of this pair of screen paintings are filled with the golden tones of autumn, fiery red maple leaves, pine trees and a flock of migrating cranes. The cherry blossom (known as *sakura*) on the other one bursts into bloom – a sign that spring has arrived near Mount Fuji.

Folding screen paintings have been used in Japan since the 8th century. They are used as part of luxurious interior decoration but also provide a way of showing off the work of master painters. They are paintings in their own right.

This is the first time this pair of screen paintings has been shown in public. They were part of the first exchange of gifts between Japan and Britain for almost 250 years. They were sent to Queen Victoria just after a 'Treaty of Amity and Commerce' had been signed between the Britain and Japan. This was a particularly important agreement because it opened up Japanese ports for British ships. It also allowed a representative of the British Crown to live in Edo, which was the Japanese capital at the time.

Themes from the natural world were common in Japanese art, including cherry blossom, as on the 'spring' screen. Cherry blossom blooms in Japan for just two or three weeks at the end of March and beginning of April. This time is celebrated throughout the country. This brief flowering has meant that in art, poetry and decorative designs cherry blossom represents how quickly life passes.

Nature and the seasons are central to Japanese art, poetry, literature and also to court culture. In Shintō, the native religion of Japan, gods called '*kami*' are worshipped. They are believed to live in plants, flowers and even the landscape itself. At the same time, both Buddhism and Shintō point out that nature is fragile and that life does not go on for ever. This is represented perfectly by the changing seasons. Animals and plants which are seen at different times of year have become symbols for those seasons.

The triangular, snow-capped silhouette of Mount Fuji is instantly recognisable to Japanese people. It is a dormant volcano and is the highest mountain in the country. It has been a holy site for many thousands of years. There are many temples and shrines on the slopes near Mount Fuji. It appears often in art as a symbol of Japan, but the most famous images of Mount Fuji were the 36 views of the mountain made by the artist Hokusai in the 1820s and 1830s.

There is a woodcut of Mount Fuji in the final room of the exhibition made by the artist Yoshida Hiroshi.

STOP 9 - ***Daisho (katana and wakizashi)***

RCIN 62627 and 72786

There are dragons along the length of this pair of matching gold lacquer scabbards. The dragons are a sign of courage, wisdom and strength. For the samurai the sword was not just a weapon, it was a powerful symbol. In Japan the sword is known as 'the soul of the samurai'. There is probably no other weapon, in any culture in any part of the world, which has been more celebrated than the sword of the samurai.

Only samurai were allowed to wear this combination of swords, known as a *daishō*. The long sword – known as *katana* – was designed for the battlefield and the short sword – or *wakizashi* – for close up fighting.

The traditional way of displaying the sword, used in this exhibition, is to have the scabbard and hilt displayed separately to the sword. This is a sign of how important the blade is as it must be seen on its own.

Although the long and short swords might look like a matching pair, their blades were made at different times, centuries apart. The long blade of the *katana* has three holes - rather than just one - in the end usually concealed by the hilt, known as the *tang*. The extra holes were put in to fasten it into its new hilt which, like the scabbards, is decorated with dragon designs.

Their spiny backs and long claws have been carefully crafted using a metal containing copper. They gleam against a dark background, which has a pattern looking like fish eggs, called *nanako*. At first glance the background looks like a smooth black colour, but it is actually made of microscopic dots, made with a tiny punch and so fine that they cannot really be seen without using a microscope.

Making the sword blades themselves took weeks of patient work. First iron, sand and charcoal were heated together at 1000 degrees Celsius to make 'jewel steel' or *tamahagane*. Then the smith used his skills repeatedly to fold and hammer the hot steel. This removes impurities in the metal that might weaken it, creating a layer with harder and softer parts. Then the whole piece of metal is made into a blade.

The aim is to make a very tough, hard cutting edge so that it can be sharpened. But if the whole blade is made hard and sharp it becomes brittle, and it might break. One way around this discovered by the Japanese was to make a blade with iron on the back of the blade, which is softer and less likely to break, and steel along the edge, which is harder and easier to sharpen.

The soul of the sword is its combination of its strength, durability and sharpness. It is different for every sword and is believed to enter the blade during the tempering process, when it is heated and then rapidly cooled. The swordsmith applies a coating of powdered clay, charcoal and stone, spread thickly along the back of the blade and thinly along its cutting edge. Then he places it in a furnace heated to over 700 degrees Celsius before plunging it immediately into a tank of cold water. The cutting edge, with its thin coating, cools down and hardens quickly. The more thickly coated areas cool down

more slowly and make the metal softer. The edge of the blade is slightly milky-white. That is the border between the softer iron elements and the sharper, steelier elements.

The Japanese sword blades in this exhibition have a pattern along their cutting edge, known as '*hamon*'. In this case it is a horse-teeth pattern which is called '*gunome*'.

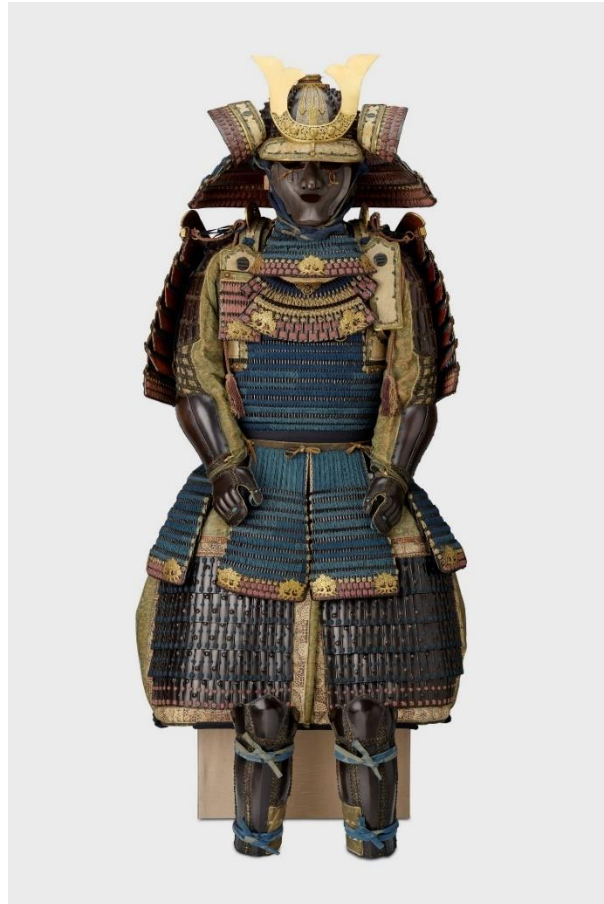
STOP 10 - ***Knife/Meiji dagger, sent to Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh by the Emperor Meiji***
RCIN 62631

The blade of this dagger, or *tantō,* is decorated with plum blossom, which is the first flower of the new year. But it is the detail of the decoration on the scabbard and hilt that are so remarkable. This may be one of the most beautiful weapons in the exhibition. The materials from which is has been made were the best quality, with solid gold fittings, a ray skin grip and lacquer put on to make a pattern of cherry blossoms with a covering of gold dust all over it. And the skills of the craftsman who made it were of the highest standard.

The blade dates from around 1500, but the scabbard and hilt are from the 19th century, when the dagger was sent by Emperor Meiji to Prince Alfred after his visit to Japan. The dagger blended age-old traditions and modern design, which made it an ideal gift. It is a sign of respect for the past, showing how much people valued and honoured thousands of years of skill and craftsmanship. At the same time it shows that people are still a part of that tradition by adding contemporary mounts to the object.

A fascinating part of this dagger's history came to light as it was being prepared for this exhibition. It was known it had first been exhibited in 1872 at the South Kensington Museum, now the V&A. The catalogue of the Japanese items that were on display said that the mounts for this piece were designed by the Emperor Meiji himself. That is something not previously known which gives a personal touch to this piece. It shows how important it was for the two families to be on good terms with each other and how much effort they made to make sure they were.

STOP 11 - ***Armour (Dōmaru) 1750-1850***
RCIN 64125 a-n



Like the previous armour we saw, this armour is also a body-wrapped style known as *dōmaru*. It is made of four pieces joined together with just one opening, so that it is actually wrapped round the body. This kind of armour may look complicated, but it was designed to be put on easily in case of attack. For example, the sleeves will pull on in one motion. Someone was probably needed to help with tying on the large shoulder guards but even so the armour could be put on quickly.

This armour was designed not only to protect but also to impress. The curved gilt bronze deer horn crest – known as a *kuwagata* – stands out at the front of the helmet, which is made of overlapping iron plates studded with rivets.

The protection for the throat at the front, underneath the face, is a beautiful example of very fine craftsmanship using the image of a cherry tree. It is a very realistic cherry tree with visible roots made of gilded copper.

After 1615 Japan enjoyed a long period of peace so it is not likely that this armour was ever worn in battle. Instead it may have been worn by a regional governor – a *daimyō* – as he travelled with his samurai company to the capital city Edo. This is something he did every two years, staying in the city for a few months to pay tribute to the ruling shōgun. The rich appearance and the size of the *daimyō*'s procession were a measure of his wealth and importance. Part of it was a military exercise, but part of it also was a theatrical performance. Afterwards his armour might be placed in the *tokonoma*, an alcove in Japanese houses designed for displaying important objects.

Japanese armour is completely different from European armour, although they both have the same purpose. Armour has to protect the person wearing it, but it also has to be flexible, to allow someone to run, ride a horse, shoot a bow, use a sword, or fire a gun whilst wearing it. The Japanese made their armour very light, very springy and very flexible, by using lots of small plates attached by silk lacing onto the outside of the armour. Europeans also wanted flexible, light armour but they used larger iron plates and protected all the lacing and leathering that helps its wearer to bend and flex by putting it on the inside.

Japanese armours are not displayed as if they are being worn, but rather as if they have been hung up on a stand to dry after they have been used. All the armours on display in this exhibition are on traditional stands which have been modified to support as many different parts of the armour as possible. The iron on the armours is mostly wrapped inside the textile which means that it cannot be seen. This gives conservators a huge headache because the metal inside is heavy. Being stitched to very fragile old fabric means there is a danger it will pull the threads of that fabric apart. For this reason a lot of care is taken to support the iron inside the fabric even though it is not actually possible to get to it. The most obvious place where modern conservation has been carried out to protect the armour is under the shoulder guards, which have padded supports.

STOP 12 - *Cabinet with shelves (Kurodana) c.1850-69*
RCIN 26050,

Until the 19th century Japan did not generally have the kind of furniture used in the West, apart from shelves, made for storage and display, like this open-sided cabinet known as a *kurodana.* It was one of three matching sets of shelves that were part of the possessions collected for a bride from a wealthy Japanese family. Nearby are examples of the other two types of shelves that made up the set – the *shodana,* used to display writing equipment and books, and the *zushidana* used for the display of incense equipment and small boxes.

When the feudal lords of Japan, the *daimyō*, were preparing for a wedding they would have expensive sets made, with hundreds of matching pieces. They could take many years to make, and would always be viewed separately, as part of the marriage ceremony, or even processed through the streets. This was a way to display wealth and status.

The lacquer on this cabinet has been decorated using a technique called *takamaki-e* which involves building up layers, using clay or charcoal, so the design stands out from the surface. The two circular symbols (called *mon*) with crossed hawks' feathers and crossed timbers probably represent the two families joined by the marriage. The rest of the design has been carefully chosen with symbols of good wishes for the couple's future together. The main theme is bamboo, which is a sign for strength and determination, because bamboo bends in the wind, but it does not break.

In her new life the bride would have used this *kurodana* for cosmetics, like lipstick, rouge and white face powder. Her mother might also have had materials used to make her teeth black, which was a traditional practice of married women. Teeth blackening had been banned by the Meiji government in 1870, just after this cabinet was made.

STOP 13 - ***Vase showing legend of Yamato***
RCIN 7798

The detailed design on this beautifully decorated pair of bronze vases bring to life scenes from the legend of Prince Yamato, chasing a demon boar in the Forest of Hakone. One of the vases shows Yamato sitting backwards on top of the boar, getting ready to strike at the only place where it can be wounded, its tail. The metalworker who made this vase showed the hero raising his sword. He may be trying to tell us something. In 1876 the Meiji government gave an order that samurai were no longer allowed to wear swords. Because of this the sword makers of Japan had no work and many of them turned to making decorative objects like this one instead. So, by showing a character using a sword, the metalworker who made these vases may have been saying that he was unhappy with this change.

Now that sword makers no longer had work given to them by the samurai, they turned their attention away from concentrating on making a sword as strong as possible to making other metal objects as beautiful as possible. They used their knowledge of metals, built up over many centuries, to make colourful scenes for completely new customers, both in Japan and abroad.

In this example, mixtures of metals called alloys have been added to the vases, sometimes using tiny amounts of gold or silver to pick out fine details. This can be seen in Yamato's costume, for example, which has been outlined beautifully with gold wires. Even the little pinecones on the pine tree have been carefully picked out with individual tiny lengths of silver and gold wire.

The pair of bronze vases in the image below are a good example of the metalwork techniques of the Japanese craftsman who made them, and also how objects like this are looked after in the Royal Collection.

***Metalwork techniques – Pair of bronze vases 1877-82*,** RCIN 7797
Fruit and flower designs have been cut out from this pair of bronze vases and then replaced with exact copies, made from mixtures of silver, gold and copper. When they had been hammered into position designs have been added on to them, including veins on the leaves, and dimples on the surface of the quince and the lemon.

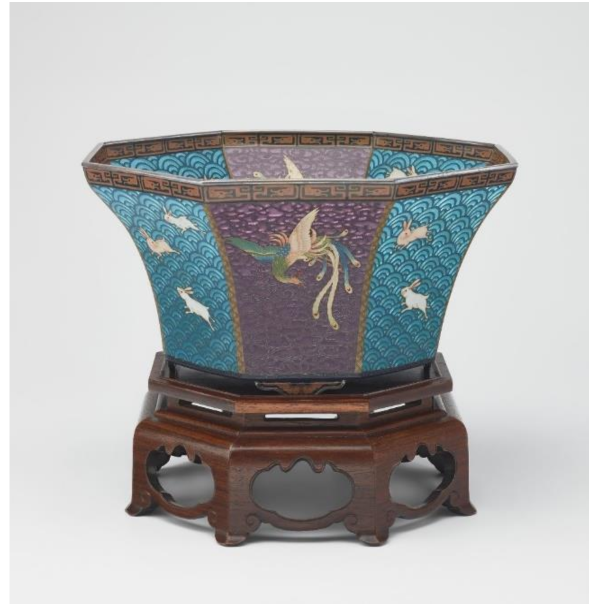
After this the appearance of the metal is changed by a process known as patination, which requires many stages. First it is carefully polished with a series of increasingly fine powders. Then it is coated with different mixtures, for example a paste made from white radish, or solutions with ingredients like plum vinegar, *sake* and green tea. They react with the metal to make different colours.

The peony flower on one of the vases is actually silver, but its colour has been changed, on purpose, to grey. There are also beautiful dark red elements like the colour of brick. They are actually copper, which is very pink. This pair of vases has a lot of different versions of a metal mixture called *shibuichi* which in Japanese for 'a quarter'. Traditionally it is one-quarter silver and three-quarters copper.

Shibuichi and silver can look very similar, especially as they become discoloured over time. But it is important not to confuse them, as silver is softer, and easier to damage. The different metals and mixtures used by the craftsman have to be analysed in order to know how to look after each area of the design properly.

To take care of the object it must first be cleaned, to get rid of all the grease which has built up and which is covering the metals. Some very gentle abrasives are then used to rub the object's surface, just hovering over it and rubbing it very gently. They are usually put into a rubber, like a pencil rubber, making them much easier to control. This avoids leaving powder everywhere, and makes it possible to see exactly what effect the abrasives are having.

STOP 14 - ***Cloisonné tray; Bowl and Stand***
RCIN 8586, 41530



A cockerel, a symbol of kindness and hospitality, has been made on this copper tray using enamel known as *shippō*, or 'seven precious stones', because of its bright colours.

Traditionally enamelling had been made using small areas outlined in wires. These areas are known by their French name '*cloisons*', so enamelled objects made in this way are described as *cloisonné*. Japanese craftspeople developed a way of removing these wires so that their objects were completely free of these *cloisons*. Enamelled objects have to be fired in a kiln. Just before firing, the makers removed the wires and the object was fired without them. What resulted looks like a painting in enamel. The cockerel on this tray shows this perfectly. It is a wonderfully example of a skilful enameller which looks like a painting by a very skilful painter.

The eight-sided bowl on the wooden stand nearby uses a different technique. The enamel design of phoenixes and hares was originally put on to a copper

bowl. This time, instead of removing the wires, the whole copper bowl underneath the enamel was removed. This was done after the enamel had been fired. The enamel was coated with a layer of lacquer and the whole object was then dipped in acid. This melted the copper away, but the lacquer protected the enamel on its surface. The enamelling was left behind which meant that light could pass through it. For this reason, this enamelling method is known in Europe as 'plique-à-jour' or 'open to the light'.

The Japanese craftsman Andō Jubei spotted a plique-à-jour object while visiting the 1900 Paris *Exposition*, an international exhibition showing off advances in art and industry. He was fascinated by it, and took an example back to Japan so that the technique could be copied by the Andō Company, who were enamel manufacturers favoured by the emperor's family. This bowl has a design with phoenixes. They are symbols of immortality which were traditionally associated with gifts from the emperor's household. This bowl was almost certainly a gift from the emperor to the Prince of Wales when he visited Japan.

CHAMBERS GALLERY

STOP 15 - ***Field Marshal's sword (Gensuitō), presented to King George V by Prince Higashi Fushimi Yorihito on behalf of the Emperor Taishō, 29 October 1918***
RCIN 62630

This sword is on public display for the first time in living memory. The gold 16-petalled chrysanthemums at the end of the curved blade, along the scabbard, and in the metal fittings on the hilt tell us that it comes from the Imperial Household. The picture above is a close up of the hilt.

This is a Field Marshal's sword. It was presented to King George V in 1918 when he was made an Honorary Field Marshal in the Japanese army. This honour was never given to any other non-Japanese person other than King George V, which means that the sword and the Field Marshal's badge that goes with it are the only examples of their kind outside Japan.

Earlier in 1918 the British Government had made the Emperor Taishō an Honorary Field Marshal of the British Army. This exchange of honours showed that the diplomatic, cultural and political ties between the two countries were getting stronger. At this time Britain and Japan thought of themselves as two 'island empires', one in the East and the other in the West. They looked upon one another as equals. This was the time when the relationship between the two countries was strongest, when the two royal families were exchanging gifts, attending coronations and funerals, and making official visits.

Such an important and symbolic sword had to shine. Polishing it took hundreds of hours using smoother and smoother stones to end up with a surface free of dents or ripples. It has been polished so flat that it is possible to see the crystal structure of the steel that the object is made of. Anyone spending a minute or so staring at these blades reveals a shimmering grain deep in the surface of the metal.

STOP 16 - *Woodblock printing* - prints by Urushibara Yoshijirō
RCIN 502217, 502218, 502219, 502220, 502221

These images of flowers in vases were created by Tokyo-born artist Urushibara Yoshijirō. He came to the Japan-British Exhibition in 1910 to demonstrate the art of woodblock printing. After the exhibition he stayed on and worked at the British Museum. He found that people in London wanted to buy his woodcut prints, and in fact Queen Mary bought some of his work, displayed here.

For centuries Japanese artists and craftsmen used woodblock printing to make colourful images known as *ukiyo-e*, or ‘pictures of a floating world’. They depicted folk tales, portraits of fashionable courtesans and famous actors, battle scenes and dramatic landscapes like Hokusai’s well-known images of the Great Wave and Mount Fuji. Woodcut prints were quite cheap and easy to make, so could be enjoyed by a wide audience.

Printing *ukiyo-e* had usually involved four people: a publisher, an artist, a carver and a printer. But for his own designs, like these images of flowers in vases, Urushibara carried out every stage himself. Each print starts with a design carved onto a wooden block, known as the ‘key block’. This is used to print outlines onto strong, absorbent handmade Japanese paper often made from fibres from the mulberry tree. This paper was known as *washi*. More printings are then made on the same piece of paper, using separate carved woodblocks, each coated with a different ink colour. Urushibara used five blocks for his print of *Carnations in a Ginger Jar* displayed here. Because several woodblocks may be used to make a single print each block has to be lined up accurately on the paper – a process known as ‘registration’.

STOP 17 - ***Spring Beauty of Kyoto, folding concertina photograph album***
RCIN 2862255

Photographer Okamoto Tōyō set out on foot to capture the delicate and fleeting beauty of cherry blossom season in 1920s Kyoto. The result was a series of photographs probably taken with a pocket camera.

The photographs have been arranged in an album designed like a concertina. There are photographs on both sides. It is like a folding screen leading the viewer through the streets and gardens of Kyoto to these different viewpoints.

Okamoto's simple approach and his use of very basic equipment were the opposite of the fashion in photography at that time. Most photographers wanted photography to have the same status as painting, so they used complicated printing methods to make their images look like paintings. But Okamoto did not think that cherry blossom needed to be improved. Instead he simply chose the angle for an image which would show that it was nature that was the real artist.

His images have very few human figures in them and almost no modern buildings. There is no sign of how Kyoto is growing and changing as a city in the early 20th century. Instead, the season is in the foreground. The different shades in his images look a little like ink wash paintings. The deliberate asymmetry in the way the images are framed reminds the viewer of woodcut prints from the Edo period.

The album of 24 prints was presented to Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester when he travelled to Japan in 1929 to grant the Order of the Garter on the new Emperor Shōwa.

STOP 18 - ***Yamato-mai Performance, Ōmura Chōfu***
RCIN 403847

These musicians in red are playing wind instruments and a six-stringed zither in the courtyard at the Kasuga Grand Shrine in Nara, whilst their leader beats time with a clapper known as a *shakubyōshi*. They are accompanying dancers who have tucked branches of the sacred *sakaki* tree into their sashes.

They are all taking part in a ritual performance of Shinto music and dance, called *yamato-mai*, which is one form of the traditional arts performed at the imperial court and at certain shrines, known as *gagaku*.

To make sure that he recreated the *yamato-mai* accurately the artist, Ōmura Chōfu, consulted the *Jōganshiki*, an ancient book with details of hundreds of Shintō rituals. But actually the way that he paints the scene goes against Japanese tradition. Chōfu worked in the Yogā school of western-style painting, used by artists returning from study in Europe. Instead of water-based paints and paper, Yogā artists used oils on canvas. They also painted in a realistic style. Here Chōfu shows the dancers' and musicians' individual expressions and includes small details like the dried, brown branches lying on the paving stones left over from an earlier ceremony.

These painters did not want to put people off their work by doing something completely different. For this reason, they continued to paint familiar festivals and rituals and landscape scenes that people would know and understand but in a very new style.

STOP 19 - ***Buckingham Palace, Yoshio Markino***

RCIN 702798

It is dusk in London's Green Park as these people make their way along a meandering path. The ghostly silhouette in the background is Buckingham Palace. The dark tones of this woodblock print are interrupted by flashes of bright colour: the purple skirt of one of the walkers, the gold statue of Victory on the Queen Victoria Memorial, and the orange glow of gas streetlights shining through London fog.

This is the work of a Japanese artist, known in Britain as Yoshio Markino. He was born in Japan but studied and trained in San Francisco. He came to London in the early 20th century and was absolutely fascinated by the effect of fog and gaslight on the buildings that he saw.

For Markino, just like his contemporaries and fellow artists Whistler and Monet, London's pollution was not a nuisance, but a filter that blurred outlines and changed colours. Its effects gave artists some interesting new ways of showing what they saw.

Markino combined elements of western art with his Japanese heritage. The painting looks rather like a Japanese Edo period print, but its colours are toned down. It also has a very strong sense of perspective created by the path winding through Green Park, unlike a Japanese print which would be deliberately flat and two-dimensional.

This blend of styles shows how Japanese and British artists were exchanging ideas and expertise. The year before Markino created his image, 8 million visitors had flocked to the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition at London's White City to marvel at the objects on display there. They watched demonstrations of methods like woodblock printing, used here. After the exhibition closed some Japanese artists and craftspeople stayed on in Britain. By 1915 it was estimated that around 40 were working in London.

STOP 20 - ***Shirayama Shōsai lacquer box, presented to The Queen for her Coronation in 1953.***

RCIN 39503

A heron stands on one leg, its head drawn back into feathers delicately made with silver lacquer and gold lacquer streaks. This cosmetic box was made by Imperial Household artist Shirayama Shōsai and was presented by the Emperor Shōwa to Her Majesty The Queen on the occasion of her Coronation in 1953.

It was the first official gift from Japan to Britain after relations between the two countries were restored following the Second World War. The Japanese Government obviously wanted to select a high-quality work to show how important those relations were for them.

This box brings together artistic vision, the finest materials, and skilled craftsmanship. These are exactly the qualities behind the British fascination with Japan and Japanese art since the 17th century. Bringing together these magnificent works of art from the Royal Collection tells the story of how exchanging gifts and visits prepared a path which led to wider cultural exchanges and greater respect for each other.

The exhibition is about a relationship between two nations and two ruling families and the way that works of art have strengthened those connections.

This is the end of our tour. If you would like to pause for a while, leave this gallery and turn right to enjoy a short film showing rich details of some of the objects in the exhibition.

To find out more about works of art in the Royal Collection, please visit our website at www.rct.uk. There you can find out about future exhibitions and keep in touch by signing up to our e-Newsletter. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Please remember that you can return to The Queen's Gallery, free of charge, for a year, by converting your ticket into a 1-Year Pass. Just sign the back and ask a member of staff to stamp it before you leave.

We hope you have enjoyed the exhibition.

The Royal Collection

The Royal Collection is one of the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain together. It includes examples from almost all aspects of the fine and decorative arts, and is spread among some 13 royal residences and former residences across the UK, most of which are regularly open to the public. The Royal Collection is held in trust by the Sovereign for her successors and the nation. It is not owned by The Queen as a private individual.

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