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BY JORDI BALTÀ PORTOLÉS
01 DEC 2014 - 17 MAY 2015

Masterpieces of Japanese Art in Polish Collections | Poland



"Masterpieces of Japanese Art in Polish

Collections", the exhibition marking the twentieth anniversary of the **Manggha Museum**, an ASEMUS member, is a presentation of old Japanese art, primarily from the Edo period (1603–1868), and also – in some examples – the Meiji era (1868–1912): *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, paintings, sculptures, textiles, ceramics, bronze wares, lacquerware, and militaria. The exhibition is an opportunity to see some of the iconic images of Japanese art which radically changed the art of the West, such as Hokusai's prints, including his famous work *Under a Great Wave off Kanagawa*. The Europeans' first contacts with Japanese art were accompanied by a deep sense of alienation, which led to misunderstanding and rejection. This was so because the specifically Japanese criteria of beauty are often different from the European tradition, founded on the classical ideals of antiquity; the **typical values of Japanese aesthetics form a system which stands in pronounced opposition to the traditional**

aesthetics of the West, with its notion of ideal beauty based on harmony, symmetry, rhythm, the principle of mimesis, the postulate of durability in art, the division into high and applied art. **The Japanese concept of beauty is strongly pervaded with a sense of transience, the impermanence of things, and the related melancholy.** This is a mysterious beauty, and the typical characteristics of that art – understatement, vagueness and ambiguity – are decisive for the intuitive reception of it. Beautiful objects: lacquerware sprinkled with gold, a brocade kimono, a gilded screen, when placed in dim Japanese interiors (never in bright light!), are designed to be characterised by a reserved elegance. **Zen philosophy gave rise to the idea of sophisticated simplicity, which values the natural quality and ‘truth’ of the material** (e.g. raw wood, bamboo, stone), underscores the value of poverty, and also the wear of things which, with time, take on a fine patina, and stresses the preference for subdued hues and the natural colours of earth. Irregularity and asymmetry are also treated by the Japanese as categories of beauty. **In Japan, aesthetics applies to all the spheres of life; there is no division here into pure art and objects for everyday use.** In this way, simple tea utensils are elevated to the rank of works of art... In the Japanese tradition, the everyday – subordinated to aesthetic categories – becomes art. This was well understood and sincerely admired by Feliks ‘Manggha’ Jasieński: in his vision, every Japanese person appeared to be an artist sensitive to the tiniest manifestations of beauty. This is why "Masterpieces of Japanese Art in Polish Collections" groups Japanese masterpieces from Polish collections into eight thematic spaces: *Prologue, Import and Export* illustrate the presence of and fascination with Japanese art in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; *Woman, Warrior, Spectacle, Spirituality and Nature* bring us closer to a different, fascinating culture. The exhibition **"Masterpieces of Japanese Art in Polish Collections"** aims to show what is most interesting, most valuable – **to highlight the diversity and wealth of the Polish japoneries.** Hence the ‘masterpieces’ in the title, which – sometimes little known or entirely unknown before – are granted an opportunity to be retrieved from the darkness of museum stores and come into the spotlight. The concept of masterpiece has been applied to Japanese art intuitively, from a Western perspective, as a helpful, widely comprehensible tool for the reception of an ‘other’ tradition. The exhibition presents **works of art owned by the following institutions:**

- Castle Museum in Pszczyna
- District Museum in Toruń
- Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology

- Museum of King John III's Palace at Wilanów
- National Museum in Kraków
- National Museum in Poznań
- National Museum in Szczecin
- National Museum in Warsaw
- National Museum in Wrocław
- Princes Czartoryski Foundation

Exhibits have been designed and arranged by Anna Król. Supervising conservator: Joanna Haba. Graphic design and printed matter: Rafał Sosin. For **additional information**, visit <http://manggha.pl/exhibition/26>

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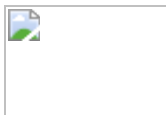
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