



THE JAPANESE COLLECTION OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

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The collection of Japanese art, handicrafts and ethnographic material is the Náprstek Museum's largest single body of items, currently consisting of around 19,000 exhibits. Its foundations were laid personally by **Vojtěch Náprstek** who, jointly with his wife Josefa, purchased a significant number of valuable and interesting artifacts. Still today a good many of the collection's Japanese woodblock prints bear the characteristic oval rubber-stamp imprint stating, "Gift from Josefa Náprstková", or simply "Vojta Náprstek", proof of a given item's coming personally from the museum's founders. The first object of Japanese provenance was acquired for the museum as early as 1863, followed in subsequent years by further remarkable Japanese acquisitions which were obtained chiefly from art dealers based in Prague, Vienna, Hamburg, Leipzig and Bremen. During that earliest period the museum's collections were built up also thanks to contributions from prominent Czech artists - of whom at least **Julius Zeyer** must be named here - and politicians. An important group of the museum's friends was formed by explorers, including **Josef Kořenský** and **Enrique Stanko Vráz**, who frequently supplemented the collections with didactic material accumulated during their expeditions to distant parts of the world.

The Japanese collections acquired by the museum in the 19th century echo the period knowledge of Japanese art and crafts. Accordingly, the various items most often exemplify materials which the Czechs then found



“Okimono” cut in ivory; seated man preparing sea bream. Japan. 8 x 4.9 cm (NpM A 460).

exotic, such as lacquer, ivory or tortoiseshell, as well as artifacts like smoker's accessories, Japanese porcelain, weapons, and also both early prints and, most particularly, contemporary ones by the decadents of the late Edo and Meiji periods, including war scenes from the Sino-Japanese War. As early as then the museum acquired a collection of 100 prints dealing with this subject, which contains a good many major works in this genre, by Kobayashi Kiyochika, Ogata Gekkō, Yōsai Nobukazu and others. Also worth mentioning in this connection are some of the museum's prints by Hiroshige III. Specimens of earlier Japanese print-making, as well as masterpieces of the Utagawa and Katsukawa schools and works by masters from the circles of Utamaro and Hokusai, reached the museum's collections somewhat later on. This was due to the fact that contemporary prints were regarded more than anything else as auxiliary didactic material, which tuned them in with the museum's then dominant orientation towards education.

The Náprstek Museum maintained contacts with most of the explorers active outside Europe. While the Japanese applied art objects which were brought from his journeys to Japan between 1873 and 1876 by Vice-admiral of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Navy, Count Erwin Dubsky, did not yet reach the museum (most of them can now be found in the

collection of Lysice Chateau, in Moravia), some of the interesting samples of Japanese handicrafts and prints gathered by another Czech naval officer, Frigate Captain **Václav Stejskal z Hostomic**, during his voyage round the world in the years 1886 - 88 (with a stop-over in Kôbe, Japan), already figure in the Náprstek Museum's collections. However, they were acquired only in 1940, together with Stejskal's entire estate which included, apart from the Japanese items, a large quantity of other Oriental material.

A factor of major importance for the Náprstek Museum was its support extended to Josef Kořenský during his round-the-world expeditions of 1893 - 94, and 1900 - 1901. While travelling in Japan, Josef Kořenský showed particular interest in the contemporary Japanese art production, as well as laying emphasis on the didactic relevance of the collected material. Of his purchases for the Náprstek Museum, one ought to mention at least those of 46 Japanese textile dyeing stencils, an important body of Japanese cloisonné enamels, featuring examples of the majority of then employed decorative techniques, complete with a demonstration and step-by-step illustration of the cloisonné process, as commissioned from Kořenský personally by Vojtěch Náprstek. Likewise worth mentioning are small collections of metal objects, bamboo wickerware and Japanese ceramics supplied by Kořenský. The last-mentioned group of items prominently exemplifies the capacities and skills of Japanese craftsmen of the Meiji period. Even though Kořenský's purchases only rarely contributed works of exceptional value, they do include some truly fine specimens. One of them is doubtless a concave porcelain vase with cobalt painting under celadon glaze. Its principal design depicts the bindweed plant with flowers rendered in the "moriyage" technique which assigns to the work a special kind of plasticity. Kořenský bought the vase in Yokohama, during his second Japanese stay in early 1901, probably directly at the workshop of the outstanding master potter Makuzu Kôzan. Equally helpful for students of Japanese art are Kořenský's notes, citing dates and places of his purchases, as well as their prices. No less important is a set of Japanese period photographs brought by Kořenský and his companion, a brewer from Hrubá Skála named Řezníček, from their voyage of 1893 - 94. The collection contains not only standard coloured photographs of famous Japanese sights, but also some less common black-and-white ones, of formidable artistic value.

The first scholarly classification of the museum's Japanese collection was carried out under the guidance of the founder of Czech Oriental stud-

ies, Sinologist **Rudolf Dvořák**, who acquired for the museum an extensive body of period material, including most notably woodcuts, and illustrated Japanese books, both standard and folding ones. His collection of books, originally presented as a gift to the museum's library and later relocated to its Japanese collection, represents the larger part of the institution's body of about 120 specimens exemplifying the Japanese art of the book.

Another contributor to the Náprstek Museum's collections was **Karel Jan Hora**, a Czech engineer who studied in America and at the end of the 19th century left for Japan, to work initially in Osaka, then in the region of Yokohama and Tokyo. Hora learned both modern and classical Japanese, as well as Chinese. His erudition helped him to accumulate during his Japanese stay an impressive collection of prints of the Japanese plebeian Ukiyoe school. As early as the beginning of the 20th century he already recognized the artistic value of prints produced at the workshops of masters from Kamigata; thereby, he laid the foundation for the Náprstek museum's current extensive collection of these prints. While referring to Hora's collection, one must not fail to mention its important body of prints by decadents of the Japanese plebeian Ukiyoe school, including most prominently works by Utagawa Kunisada and Utagawa Kuniyoshi, which at present form the core of this section of the Japanese collection. Throughout his stay in Japan, Hora was ever eager and willing to lend a helping hand to other Czechs visiting the country, either on business or simply as tourists. One of them was **Joe Hloucha (1881 - 1957)**, a Czech Japanophile and author of sentimental novels set in Japan. Hloucha made two journeys to Japan, the first one, lasting five months, in 1906, two years after the publication of his successful novel, *Sakura ve vichřici* (Sakura in Storm), and the second, involving a four-month stay, in 1926. During the first visit he laid the foundation for his extraordinary collection of Japanese art which he then constantly expanded by purchases from Europe's leading antiques dealers in Prague, Vienna, Paris, Berlin and Hamburg. He further significantly enlarged the collection during his second trip to Japan. It is a great pity that Hloucha's approach to collecting was not as systematic as Kořenský's, and that he did not make any notes commenting on the acquired items, even though he did keep very detailed diaries. While his collection embraced virtually the entire spectrum of Japanese art, its backbone was formed by Japanese 18th and 19th century prints. Apart from that, important places were assigned to photographs and handicrafts. A substantial part of the collection was transferred in two stages, in 1943 and 1955, to the Náprstek Museum, where its nearly 8,000 items

(c. 4,000 prints, 530 photographs, 85 netsuke buttons, 77 tsuba sword fittings, more than 100 pieces of pottery, etc.) constitute about two-fifths of the museum's Japanese collection. An irreplaceable part in Hloucha's collection of Japanese prints is also played by several hundred specimens coming from the Ôsaka region. In the aggregate body of Hloucha's and Hora's collections the Náprstek Museum acquired a unique corpus of over 570 sheets covering all the stages of the history of the Ukiyoe school in the region of Kamigata, which ranks beyond any dispute among the finest and most comprehensive collections on the European continent. As early as 1930 the Náprstek Museum acquired part of the collection of Japanese woodcuts built by **Josef Martínek (1888 - 1976)**. That collection was partly reproduced in the Czech translation of C. Glaser's book, *The Art of China and Japan*, which was published in this country in that year.

The museum's Japanese collection continued to grow after World War II. In the 1960s the museum purchased a very fine body of Japanese prints from the collection of printmaker **František Ketzek (1906 - 1978)**, who was profoundly interested in the art of Japanese woodcut and whose collection included some exceptionally valuable works of the Torii and Kikugawa schools. Another Czech artist whose interest was focused on Japanese art in general, and the art of woodcut in particular, and the larger part of whose collection eventually reached the Náprstek Museum, was **Sigismund Bouška (1867 - 1942)**, a Benedictine monk, Catholic poet and, most particularly, excellent translator of French poetry. As early as 1913 he organized in Prague and Brno a major exhibition of Japanese woodcuts, which displayed 685 items, including not only works from his own property, but also ones from the well-known collections of Berlin's **Julius Kurth** and **Friedrich Succ**, as well as from the private collection of **Otto Jaeckel** from Greifswald. More than 300 Japanese prints were purchased by the Náprstek Museum in the 1980s from Bouška's estate, thanks to the systematic and selfless endeavour of then curator of the Japanese collection **Libuše Boháčková**.

In dealing with the Japanese collection from the viewpoint of exhibit classification, one has to mention first of all its formidable body of Japanese prints, totalling over 7,000 items. Of the various prints, those worth special mention include notably several extremely fine specimens of early Japanese woodcut produced by masters of the Torii school. About 40 prints exemplify the output of artists active during the second half of the 18th century. Ranking among exceptional examples of Japanese printmak-

ing is a portrait of the actor Bandō Hikosaburō, by the eminent artist Tōshūsai Sharaku (active 1794 - 95). One should not fail to mention prints by artists of the Katsukawa school, as well as around 20 sheets by Kikugawa Utamaro I and Kikugawa Utamaro II. Other works dating from the same period worth noting include prints by Shikimaro and Rakumaro, which are ranked among world rarities.

A similarly high quality is characteristic for 19th century prints represented in the Náprstek Museum's collection. The aforementioned comprehensive body of prints by artists active in Kamigata region ranks among the world's foremost collections.

Speaking about the collection of prints, one also has to mention a very extensive body of works produced by the Utagawa school. These are triptychs depicting Japanese warriors, scenes featuring actors, and tributes to pre-eminent beauties of the time, and together they form the core of the Japanese prints collection. To them should be added an interesting series of prints from the Meiji period, including most prominently the output of Yoshitoshi, Yoshitora and artists specializing in battlescene prints dealing with the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, of which the museum owns approximately 300.

Passing from the art of printmaking to that of painting, which is likewise represented in the museum's Japanese collection, it should be noted that the works kept here do not rank among the most important specimens of Japanese art in Czech collections. That notwithstanding, the museum does possess several items that are unique even by international standards. These include above all a screen composed of six parts with a design depicting the Hōgen era tumults, an anonymous work dating from the early 17th century; and another one, of the same size, depicting scenes from Tōkaidō road connecting the cities of Edo and Kyōto, also by an anonymous artist, dating from the early 19th century. No less important are samples of Zenist painting on small screen in Harimaze style, product of several Japanese workshops from the second half of the 18th century.

Another comprehensive body of items is represented by the museum's collection of Japanese pottery, totalling around 1,600 specimens. Of particular interest are about 100 items produced by the porcelain kilns of Arita on the island of Kyūshū, dating from the late 17th through early 19th centuries.

Apart from the old Arita porcelain the collection contains specimens of more recent Arita production turned out by Koransha and Fukagawa



Hiroshige, Taira no Kiyomori Confronted with Frightful Dreams; central part of triptych; 19th c. Japan. (NpM A 18 929).



Plate; white crackle china, brown “horse eyes” pattern; the type of chinaware used along the Tôkaidô route; 19th c. Japan. A. 27 cm (NpM A 22 161).

firms, as well as other wares dating from the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. There, one should not fail to mention at least a flute vase decorated with bindweed design, from the workshop of the outstanding Yokohama potter Makuzu Kôzan; and a tall vase made by another protagonist of the Meiji period potter's craft, Meiji Ryôzan.

Like pottery, cloisonné enamels were also fired in kilns at high temperatures. The Náprstek Museum owns around 100 objects decorated by this technique which actually set root in Japan only in the first half of the 19th century. Although the museum's collection does not contain any signed work by a major Japanese master of this elaborate technique, judging by decorative style and quality some of the items may be bracketed within the production of the workshops of Hayashi Kôdenji, Andô Jûbei and others. Dealing with cloisonné enamels, one should also mention the museum's body of Japanese metalware, including especially incense burners, vases and figurines, dating mostly from the 19th century.

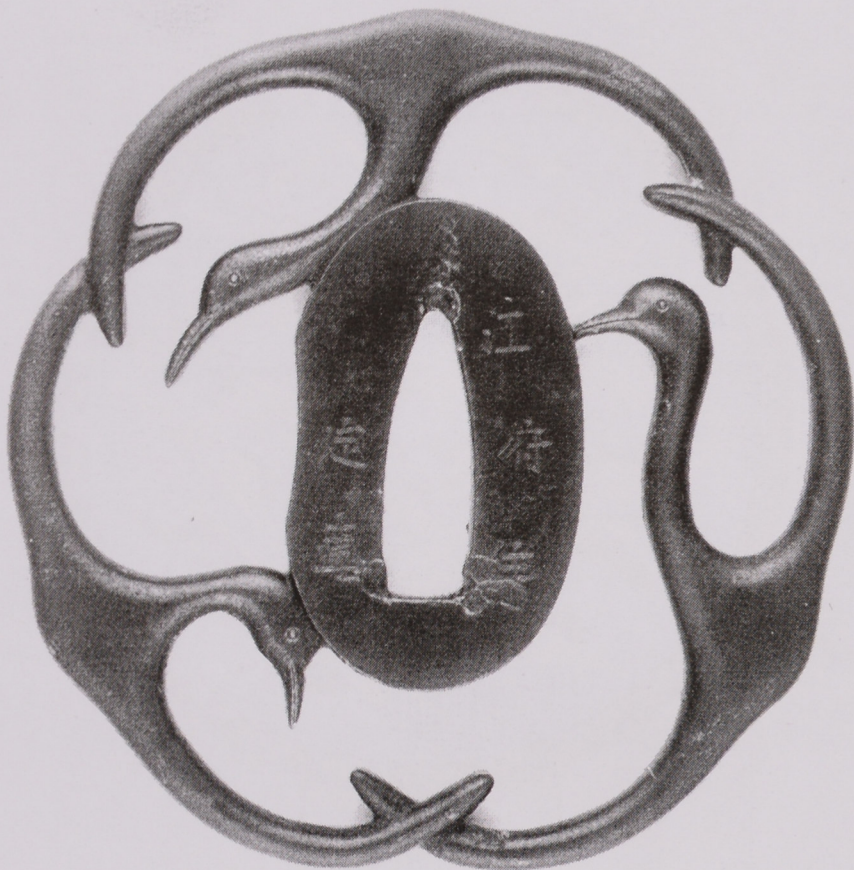
About 400 items constitute the museum's small but consistent collection of art works in lacquer, supplemented by the same quantity of lacquerware made for everyday use. That section's oldest items are two



Plate. Cloisonné enamel; a flock of cranes in flight. Hayashi Kōdenji II. Japan, 1880s. A. 31 cm (NpM A 16 942).

chests and two jewel boxes made in the so-called Namban style, during the Momoyama period. The assortment of lacquer objects includes a set of small boxes for medicaments and personal stamp (inrō; c. 50 items), and netsuke buttons, totalling around 200.

Another excellently represented Japanese handicraft is that of sword-making and sword-decorating. The museum's body of sword decorations in particular, containing more than 300 "tsuba" sword fittings, "kashira" tip-sheaths and "kozuka" small knife handles, captures the attention by its fine presentation of the various decorative trends and schools. The assortment includes both stark 16th century works and samples of later production, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.



“Tsuba” sword-guard; iron, cut motive of three flying geese; 18th c. Japan. D. 6.7cm (NpMA 15 151).

In addition to the above sections, the Japanese collection also contains a relatively small body of early traditional wooden toys, over 2,000 examples of Japanese textiles, including a comprehensive set of types of Japanese fabrics, and approximately 800 “katagami” dyeing stencils featuring amazingly elaborate period ornamental designs.

The Korean Collection

The Náprstek Museum’s Korean collection is one of the smallest of its Asian departments. Both Korean art and crafts are represented very unevenly. The collection has been built chiefly by way of donations. In the



Stencil for dyeing, pattern of hen and cock with a cage, "jishiro" and "jizomari" types, "tsukibori" technique, produced by Bizenya. Japan. 41.5 x 51.2 (NpMA 10 685).

1950s the museum received a gift from the PDRK, consisting of a body of traditional costumes, chiefly women's and children's, and replicas of traditional Korean pottery, as well as specimens of folk art, puppets and masks.

Apart from that, individual purchases have supplied the museum with a small collection of Koryo dynasty celadon inlaid ceramics dating from the 10th - 14th centuries, and pottery dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. The collection also features items produced by other handicrafts,

including lacquer artifacts, mother-of-pearl inlays, etc., dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A noteworthy example of Korean sculpture is a statue of the bodhisattva Kwan-se-um, from gilded bronze, dating from the 16th - 17th c. Black-ink painting is represented by several 20th-century works.



Bodhisattva Kwan-se-um seated on lotus; gold plated bronze; 17th c. Korea.
H. 43.3 cm (NpMA 11 234).

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