The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Bulletin

Fall 1980

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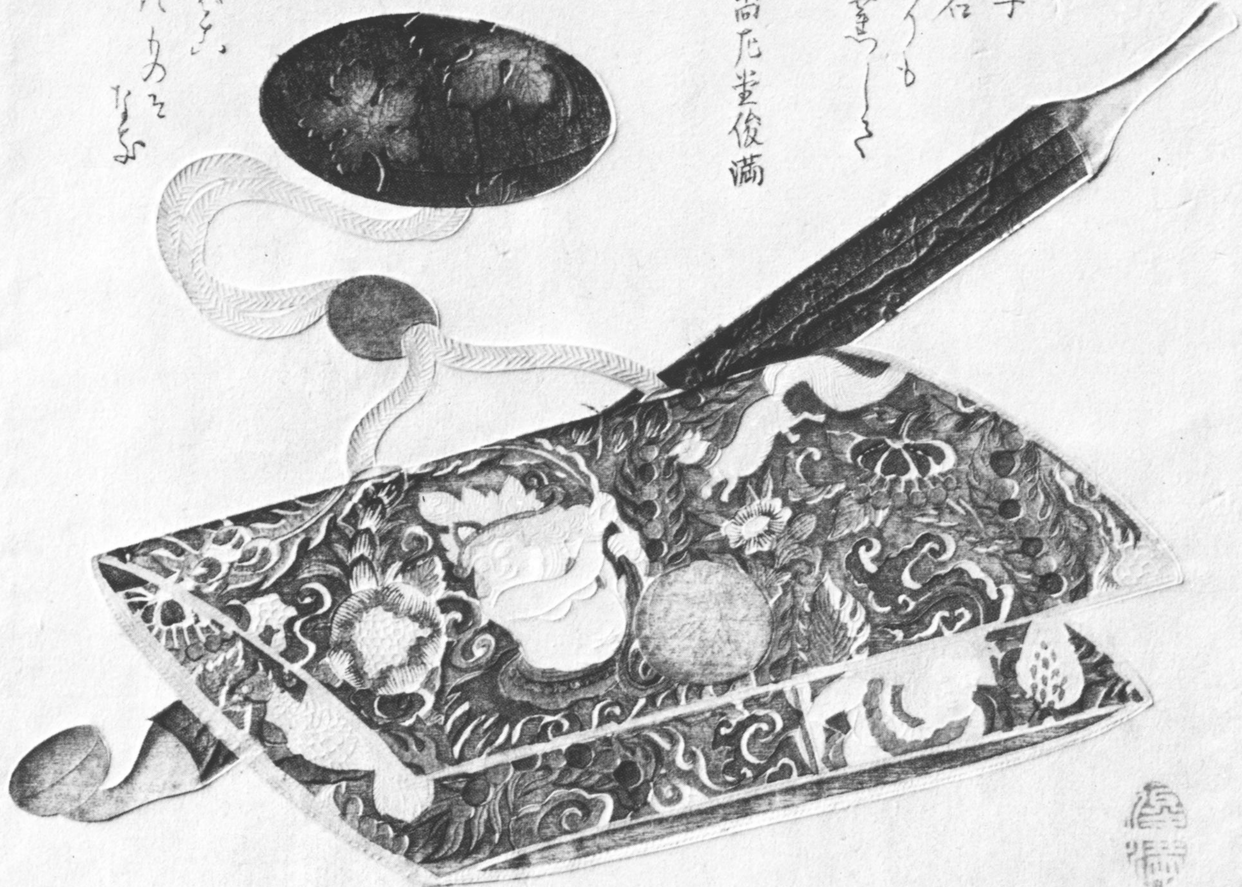
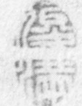


東上田
八十一翁
千歳亭
田鶴友年
尚花堂俊満
四方滸水
米人
癸酉春



In the mid-nineteenth century, after the Meiji Restoration had ended more than two hundred years of Japanese isolation from foreign cultures, Westerners were reintroduced to the arts of Japan. Among the objects eagerly sought by collectors then—and since—were such beautifully decorated articles of daily use as lacquer boxes, sword fittings, and netsuke, the latter being richly carved small toggles that secure tobacco pouches and other items suspended from the traditional *obi*, or sash. Probably the most appealing of these art forms for most Westerners are netsuke; the greater part of their appeal is undoubtedly due to their small size and to their detailed workmanship. But for those whose enjoyment of art is greatly enhanced by knowledge of story or symbolism, the wide variety of subject matter in netsuke exerts a powerful attraction. Netsuke artists have been extremely resourceful and have been able to depict almost every facet of Japanese life and history within the limitations of size and shape. Genre scenes, episodes from Chinese and Japanese legends and mythology, Shinto, Taoist, and Buddhist figures, real and imaginary animals, flowers and small landscapes—treated in styles that range from the greatest simplicity to the most dramatic realism—have all been subjects for netsuke.

Some distinguished collections of netsuke were formed during the second half of the nineteenth century, but most collectors regarded these artifacts as quaint and were not discriminating in their purchases. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was fortunate to receive, in 1910, a collection considered to be the finest and largest in the United States at that time. This group of 2,500 pieces had been assembled by A.C. Vroman of Pasadena, California, and was purchased and presented to the Museum by Mrs. Russell Sage, one of the Metropolitan's first great benefactors. Other notable examples of netsuke came to the Museum as bequests of Edward C. Moore, Stephen Whitney Phoenix, and Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, who along with her husband possessed one of the few great early collections of Japanese art in the United States.

The text for this publication was written by Barbra Teri Okada, netsuke specialist and consultant to the Japanese Collection of The Newark Museum. The netsuke she has selected to write about, which represent but a small fraction of the Museum's holdings, offer a remarkable diversity and a broad range of date and, it is hoped, provide a brief but illuminating introduction to a lesser known aspect of Japanese art.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

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On the front cover (left to right): Baku (p. 17), Ryūjin (p. 14), Monkey and Octopus (p. 34), and Monkey and Chestnut (p. 22). On the back cover (left to right): Daruma (p. 26), Karashishi (p. 17), Daruma (p. 27), and Rabbit (p. 29). Opposite: A *surimono* (a special commemorative print), dated spring 1813, depicts a *manjū* netsuke, tobacco pouch, and pipe, which made up the traditional Japanese smoking ensemble. The middle verse, written by the artist, Kubo (Shōsadō) Shunman (1757-1820), refers to the guard watching the "flying fire of Kasuga" (a fire set annually in the fields near the Kasuga Temple at Nara), who takes out his smoking implements and fills his pipe. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, JP 1954

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Netsuke: The Small Sculptures of Japan

by Barbra Teri Okada

During the Edo period (1615–1867) a highly original and spirited new art form evolved and flourished in Japan. This was netsuke, small sculptures uniquely designed to be worn, an ingenious and decorative means of suspending objects from the traditional sash, or *obi,* that wrapped around the kimono. The demand for netsuke largely grew out of the fashion for carrying bulky items, such as tobacco pouches, purses, and the tiered boxes called *inrō* (literally, "seal case")—originally used to hold seals, and later medicine—which were difficult to tuck into the folds of the pocketless kimono or too heavy to insert into its sleeves.

Customarily, these *sagemono,* or "hanging things," which could be objects as heavy as a writing case or saké container, were strung on a cord that passed through a sliding bead *(ojime)* that acted as a tightener and then was threaded through a toggle—the netsuke—and knotted. The cord was passed under the obi from below so that the netsuke perched on top of the sash, while the sagemono hung securely a few inches below it.

Although a netsuke could be as simple as a stick with two holes in it or as elaborate as a piece of fine jewelry, its function placed certain restrictions on material and design. It had to be small enough to slide easily under the obi but bulky enough to keep the sagemono from slipping down. It had to be made of a durable smooth substance to withstand rubbing and resist cracking. Furthermore, the cord openings *(himotoshi)* had to be incorporated into the composition in such a way that the netsuke would hang properly and the knot would be as inconspicuous as possible. In many early examples the openings were part of the design itself, but more often they were cut into the back or underside.

Fine netsuke are carved on all surfaces including the underside. Most are superbly

The ensemble at the left—an ivory chrysanthemum-shaped netsuke, an *ojime*, and a richly decorated lacquered *inrō*—would have been worn like the pouch shown on the kneeling figure above. Early nineteenth century. Inrō signed: Shōfusai Tōsen. Gift of Mrs. George A. Crocker (Elizabeth Masten), 1937, 38.25.150

In the wood-block print by Torii Kiyonaga (1752–1815), the actor Nakamura Matsue is being dressed by an attendant who carries a pouch on a cord that is threaded through the beadlike ojime, passed under his sash, and secured at the top by a netsuke. Frederick C. Hewitt Fund, 1911, JP 727

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Tiger by Raku (see p. 23)

balanced and will stand unsupported on a flat surface. Even slender pieces six or seven inches high will remain upright by themselves.

Part of the appeal of netsuke is their smooth, agreeable feel, a special quality called *aji* in Japanese, by which the artist communicates his spirit through touch as well as sight. Aji is enhanced by handling, which also produces a patina that gives luster to wood and mellow tints to ivory.

Netsuke have depicted a multitude of subjects and have been made from practically every material found in Japan. The simplest and probably the earliest were of stone, shell, walnut shells, and small gourds. Later and more sophisticated ones were carved from ivory and wood, particularly boxwood, cypress, ebony, cherry, pine, and bamboo. Less commonly employed were bone, metal, and lacquer, although the latter was one of the earliest materials, used for netsuke created to match lacquer inrō. Occasionally, netsuke were made from hornbill or amber.

Several varieties of ivory were used. Until well into the nineteenth century, marine ivories and elephant ivory, which came from India through China, were imported into Japan. Elephant ivory was used for plectrums for the koto, a stringed instrument, and leftover pieces were sold to netsuke carvers. The rarest and most precious of marine ivories came from the tusk of the narwhal, credited with medicinal and magical powers. Two major schools of artists used deer antler and the teeth and tusks of wild boar as their media.

Netsuke are classified according to their distinctive forms. An early type, the *sashi* (literally, "thrust between"), was long, narrow, and usually made of wood, with the openings at the top. It was meant to be inserted behind the obi, leaving the cord on the outside and the sagemono swinging freely. Later sashi had additional openings lower down and farther apart.

The most prevalent form, with the widest variety of subjects and materials, was that of small sculptures called *katabori*, or "carving on all sides." Although they could be almost any shape, katabori are generally compact in keeping with their use.

Manjū netsuke derive their name and shape from the round, flat rice cake eaten mainly at the Japanese New Year. The simplest were made of solid pieces of ivory with a cord hole in the center. A variation developed, first in wood and then in ivory, that had two halves that swiveled to open.

The *kagamibuta* ("mirror lid") is a rounded shape having a disk, or lid, commonly of metal, set into a bowl of ivory or wood. This lid can be opened by releasing the tension on the cord, which is strung through the back of the bowl. Decoration was usually restricted to the metal, but in rare examples the bowl was elaborately carved as well.

Ryūsa netsuke, named for the eighteenth-century carver said to have originated them, were hollowed out with a turning lathe, a method that made possible delicate openwork designs and a lightweight form.

Mask netsuke were diminutive versions of those worn in the traditional dance-dramas of Japan. The earliest, mainly of wood, were created by mask carvers seeking to copy the originals, but later examples became stylized and even comical.

Many netsuke had a secondary function. There were ashtray netsuke for transferring smoldering ashes from the spent pipe into a bowl of unlit tobacco. Other useful items that could be found among netsuke were compasses, whistles, sundials, abaci, brush rests, cases for flints and steels, and even firefly cages.

The growth of netsuke was stimulated by social changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries affecting fashions in sagemono. Soon after Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) became shogun in 1603, he instituted stringent controls to ensure his supremacy and maintain peace. A strict Neo-Confucian code was established. Japanese society was stratified into classes. The highest included the samurai, and it was followed by the farmer, artisan, and merchant classes. Laws governed private conduct, dress, marriage, and, for some, place of residence. Although the highest class was subject to sumptuary laws, samurai were allowed to wear

two swords as symbols of their rank. With no wars to fight, sword blades and fittings became more decorative than practical, and wealthy samurai lavished enormous amounts of money on them.

On formal occasions samurai sometimes wore inrō. Since, like sword fittings, they were not subject to sumptuary laws, inrō also became objects for show, and were elaborately embellished with gold and other precious materials. At first only the samurai class could afford them, but eventually they were adopted by the prospering members of other classes as well, and soon many wore inrō with matching netsuke.

Meanwhile, a parallel social and economic development spurred a second fashion in sagemono. When the Portuguese introduced tobacco into Japan in the sixteenth century, smoking took hold immediately. Crops were planted in southern Kyushu, and soon the majority of Japanese were enjoying pipes, although it was considered improper for members of the upper classes to smoke outside their homes. An edict forbidding the use of tobacco was passed in 1609, primarily because the habit was considered unsanitary, but the law was difficult to enforce and was finally repealed in 1716 in the hope that the tobacco crop would help the economy.

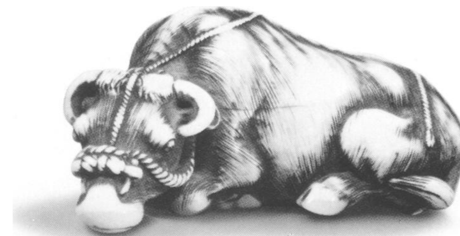
The repeal encouraged smoking. Among tradespeople, it became an integral and almost ritualistic part of any business transaction. The demand for portable implements—pipe cases, tobacco pouches, and lighting devices—increased, and with it the production of netsuke. As a large percentage of the male population began smoking, hundreds of thousands of examples were created in various styles and qualities.

By the mid-eighteenth century virtually every Japanese male carried one or more sagemono requiring netsuke. Artisans such as mask makers and Buddhist sculptors, who originally carved netsuke only as a sideline, began to specialize in them. By the end of the eighteenth century, netsuke carving was no longer considered an insignificant pastime and artists began to sign their works and form schools with local and regional traditions.

By 1781 Inaba Tsūryū (Shineimon) of Osaka, a connoisseur of sword fittings, could devote almost one volume of the seven of his *Sōken Kishō* (which may be translated as "A Treasury of Sword Fittings and Rare Accessories") to fifty-five netsuke carvers of his day and their designs. The cursory text discusses artists working in Edo (now Tokyo), Osaka, Kyoto, and Wakayama, and suggests that they had originally produced other forms of sculpture, such as masks, Buddhist images, and architectural details, before turning to netsuke. He fails to mention what might be regarded as the first school of netsuke artists—the earliest group having a definite stylistic relationship, who worked in the southern Honshu province of Iwami. By the nineteenth century, however, many of the carvers cited in the *Sōken Kishō* had come to be considered originators of schools in their own right.

Earlier written descriptions of the development of netsuke do not exist, and since few seventeenth-century examples survive, we have to rely on scrolls, screens, and prints for a pictorial record. In the *Kabuki Sketchbook Scroll* (in the Tokugawa Reimeikai Foundation, Tokyo), dating from the first half of the seventeenth century, an actress is shown wearing an assortment of articles suspended from a large ring around the narrow obi. The next style, depicted in a screen of the second quarter of the century, was a disk or wheel shape (later the manjū), which toward the middle of the century acquired a center peg with a hole for the knot. Small sculptures in the round are not illustrated much before the eighteenth century.

Fortunately, many fine netsuke remain from about the 1750s on. Early eighteenth-century examples are usually large, spirited, and original in design, being more direct expressions of their creators' personalities and geographical locations than later pieces. For instance, Osaka netsuke reflected the vitality of a bustling commercial center, while those made in Kyoto, the ancient



Ox by Tomotada (see p. 23)

The man smoking a pipe, from the center panel of a wood-block triptych of shellfish gatherers by Utagawa Toyokuni (1769–1825), holds an ashtray netsuke that is attached to his tobacco pouch. Rogers Fund, 1914, JP 204

imperial city, were dignified and restrained; and artists in the remote area of Iwami were interested in naturalistic local subjects rendered in indigenous materials.

Since there was no established tradition to follow, the artists of the eighteenth century enjoyed a freedom of interpretation. As netsuke were unimportant in the eyes of the government, no attempt was made to regulate them. Parody, satire, and parable could be used without fear of censorship. Moreover, with traditional religious sculpture in decline by the Edo period, netsuke provided an opportunity to express religious thought and feeling.

Subject matter was largely derived from Chinese and Japanese legends, religion, and mythology: fantastic animals predominated, like the *shishi* (the lion-dog), but animals of the zodiac were also popular. Heroes, reflecting Neo-Confucian virtues, were part of the figure repertory along with Buddhist and Taoist saints, whose pious feats appealed to the Japanese taste for the supernatural.

Toward the end of the century, new materials were in evidence, with stain and inlay used sparingly for dramatic effect. Coral, ranging in color from black to dark red, was employed principally for eyes, providing textural contrast and a reflective surface simulating "life," or vitality, as did the glass eyes inlaid in the large sculptures of the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

By the first half of the nineteenth century, as schools developed, pupils tended to carry on their masters' techniques and often copied their works. Skilled carvers sometimes published their designs as models, or passed workbooks along to their more gifted apprentices. Subjects were increasingly drawn from printed sources, and this dependency may be responsible in part for the diminishing of much of the spontaneity and originality of the earlier pieces. To make their works distinctive, artists concentrated on refinements of technique. Netsuke became more ornate and more complicated.

In subject, heroic legendary figures gave way to smaller, compact, and complex representations especially those from Japanese folklore. Groups of figures—men and animals—were depicted, and portrayals became more naturalistic. Netsuke paralleled other artistic developments of the time. The introduction of such Western concepts as perspective had its effect on these small sculp-

tures. The soft outlines hardened, and realism became the conventional style. Innovation was largely a matter of imaginative technique, an unusual subject, and complicated decorative motif. If the eighteenth century represented the unrestrained beginnings of this art form, the first half of the nineteenth shows it fully matured and highly sophisticated.

In 1853 Commodore Perry sailed into the harbor of Uraga, and in 1867 Japan's policy of isolation begun under Ieyasu was ended. As the country became Westernized, the daily wear of netsuke declined. Cigarettes replaced the traditional small-bowl pipe and its accouterments, and suits with pockets grew popular with businessmen, who would still wear the kimono at home or for ceremonial occasions. The need for sagemono eventually vanished.

The opening of Japanese ports to foreign trade acquainted European collectors with netsuke, and their interest prompted a tremendous revival of this art form in Japan. Netsuke were produced in great numbers as souvenirs as well as art objects. From the 1870s through the 1890s major collections were formed in Europe. Unfortunately the majority of examples produced after the beginning of the Meiji Restoration (1868) were mechanical imitations of the earlier delightful sculptures, and are often angular and clumsy.

In general, Europeans tended to collect the earlier, more robust, and livelier netsuke, while Americans, who for the most part did not come into contact with them until the twentieth century, were attracted to later pieces demonstrating technical achievement. Recently there has been a new surge of interest in these small sculptures in this country, and, stimulated by the publication of more reference material in English, Americans are building some of the best and most well-rounded collections in the world. The collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, reflecting as it does the tastes of its donors, who made most of their acquisitions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is exceptionally strong in nineteenth-century examples. The pieces on the following pages have been chosen to present as broad a range as possible—in date, subject, and style. Together, these small sculptures, all of high quality, provide an introduction to the many forms of the netsuke carver's art, in all its intricacy, charm, and imagination.

Boar by Tomotada (see p. 22). The beautifully carved underside displays ferns and other plants, and the artist's signature.

General Kuan-yü (died A.D. 219), a hero of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 220) in China, was considered by the Japanese to be the epitome of Confucian virtue. He was a popular image in Edo period prints, paintings, and netsuke.

This tall, imposing figure communicates strength and purpose. The interpretation is characteristically Chinese in the slenderness of the face as well as in the style of the long flowing robes. Here, the undulating mandarin headdress blends into the softly contoured drapery of the outer robe, while the long sleeve falls in gentle folds from the left arm. Kuan-yü's elegantly formed hand, with its tapered fingers, caresses his long beard, as if he were standing in quiet contemplation. His right arm holds his halberd behind him, further minimizing his martial character. This exquisite carving, enhanced by the patination of time and wear, is one of the finest eighteenth-century netsuke in the collection.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 4⅞ inches. Signature undecipherable and added at later date. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1496

Omori Hikoshichi (lived about 1340), a vassal of Shogun Ashikaga Takauji (1305–58), offered to assist a beautiful maiden on her way to a celebration of his victory over Emperor Go Daigo (reigned 1319–38). As he gallantly carried her across a stream, he glanced at her reflection on the water and saw that she had turned into a witch, whereupon Omori slew her with his sword. (In one account she is the daughter of a general killed in the battle, attempting to avenge her father's death.)

When viewed from various angles, the figure of the witch presents an unusual contrast. The back displays a hair style of topknot and curls, characteristic of early Buddhist sculpture, and the body is bare to the waist except for a narrow scarf, again reminiscent of images of holy men. However, the front view reveals a truly absurd female figure—trying modestly to cover herself—whose belly protrudes and whose bent legs cause her feet to turn in.

Tall and superbly carved, this piece expresses the vitality of early netsuke. To convey a sense of physical tension, the artist tilted Omori's body forward, flexed his knees, and depicted his toes grasping for balance. Because of its large size, fine quality, and humorous interpretation, this is the most unusual rendition of the subject known.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 6 inches. Signed: Hōmin and a *kakihan* (stylized signature). Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1502

The netsuke at the left is a variation on the legend of two symbiotic characters, Ashinaga ("Long Legs") and Tenaga ("Long Arms"). They cooperated in catching the fish that comprised most of their diet: as Long Legs waded deeper and deeper into the water, where the fish were more abundant, Long Arms was able to reach down and seize them. The legend became popular in China, and from there entered Japanese mythology. Here, the artist may have alluded to the source as he knew it by putting a Taoist sage in Chinese dress on Ashinaga's shoulder in place of Tenaga.

This is the tallest piece in the collection and is representative of an early elongated style that lasted only a brief period, as it proved too clumsy for easy wear. Because of the shape of this netsuke, it may have been worn either thrust into the sash, or in the more usual way, held tight against the body by the cord passing through two openings on the sides.

Eighteenth century. Wood, height 6¾ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2306

Sennin were "immortals" thought to possess supernatural powers. In art they are frequently accompanied by a spirit, usually in the form of an animal, who attends or guards them. Chinese legends describe them as followers of Taoism, and in Japan the name "sennin" was sometimes applied to Buddhist monks who became mountain hermits. In netsuke they are characterized by curly hair and beard and large ears. They usually have a benign expression, and their Chinese-influenced costumes include a monk's garment, leaf girdle, and drinking gourd.

This sennin carries a *karashishi* (from the Japanese *kara*, or "China," and *shishi*, or "lion"), an animal of Buddhist origin (see p. 17). The bond between the immortal and his companion is conveyed in the man's upturned smiling face. Western influence is apparent in his costume—the ruffed collar, tunic, leggings, and soft shoes—but the curly hair and beard, gourd, and Buddhist whisk under his sash (at the back), as well as the sacred animal, indicate beyond doubt the this example was not meant to portray a Westerner. Large, solidly proportioned figures such as this are representative of eighteenth-century netsuke.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 5 inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1498

Kinkō (as he is known in Japanese) was a Chinese recluse (Ch'in Kao) who lived near a river. One day he was invited by the King of the Fishes into the river for a visit. Kinkō bade his pupils farewell and promised to return. After a month he reappeared astride a giant carp. According to a Japanese version of this legend, he then instructed his pupils not to kill fish and returned forever to the underwater domain.

This sennin, in a scholar's robe and reading from a scroll—perhaps an admonishment against the killing of fish—suits one Japanese version of the story, but the carp's horn, an unusual detail, suggests another in which a sennin nurtured a large carp that grew horns and wings. Eighteenth-century carvers often combined details from several similar legends. To them, variation and creativity frequently meant more than adherence to a specific iconography.

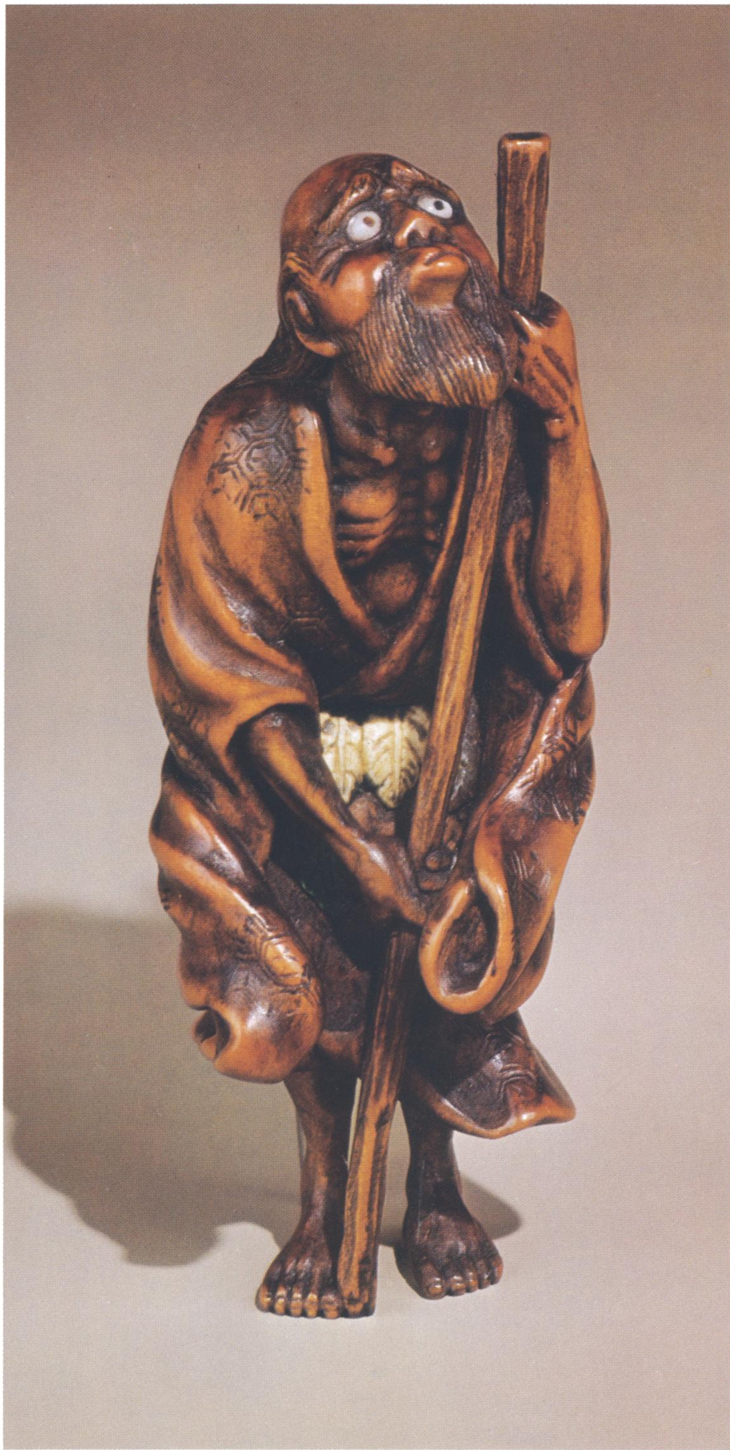
Here, the carp's tail arches protectively over the sennin, while the horn projects upward, focusing the viewer's attention on the small figure. The waves cradle the rider and mount, and seem to be bearing them to their destination. The carp's eyes, of tortoise shell with inlays of black coral, add contrast and color to the design.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 2 inches. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.756

The figure at the far left on the overleaf is Tekkai, a Taoist immortal who blew his soul to heaven. On the soul's return it could not find its body, and had to enter that of an old man. In this portrayal in wood, the face is given great expressiveness through the large ivory eyes, accented by black-coral pupils. The lifelike quality of the sculpture is enhanced by the tilt of the head, puckered lips, and curve of the body, which has a sharply defined neck and chest. Tension within the sculpture is further heightened by the action of an unseen wind whipping the tattered robe against the straining body.

A leaf girdle of ivory and tortoise shell hugs the body at the hips and flows smoothly into the lines of the robe. The inlay adds color and provides textural contrast with the softly contoured wood. Hanging from the sash, attached to a malachite flower-shaped netsuke, is a movable ivory drinking gourd.

Late eighteenth–early nineteenth century. Wood, height 2¾ inches. Signed: Chikusai. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2362



Ryūjin (center), the Dragon King of the Sea, probably came into Japanese folklore from China. He is a popular figure in netsuke, usually shown as a fierce old man, with a long curling beard, and accompanied by a dragon. Here, he holds the jewel by which he controls the tides.

This example is in the style of Yoshimura Shūzan of Osaka, a Kanō school painter of the mid-eighteenth century, who, according to the *Sōken Kishō*, was considered one of the finest carvers of his day. He is the innovator in netsuke of legendary and mythological figures done in this technique: the carved wood was covered with a gessolike sealer over which watercolor was applied.

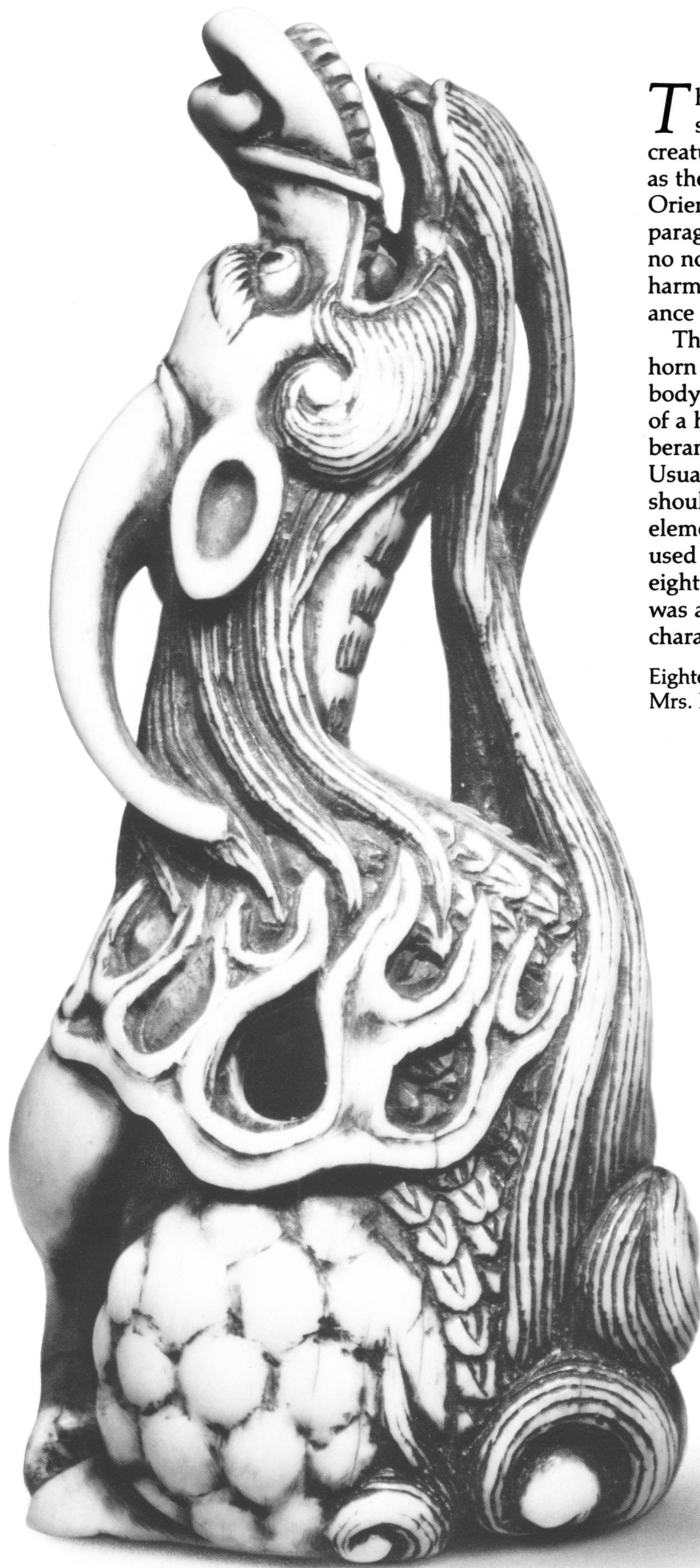
Although this sculpture is in Shūzan's style, it is of boxwood rather than the softer, more open-grained cypress that he favored, suggesting that it was not carved by the master himself. Its freshness of color is the result of applying oxidized copper and other minerals in a solution of glue. Ryūjin's garment is ornamented with a design in gold lacquer, simulating patterns often found on the robes of Buddhist sculptures.

Late eighteenth–early nineteenth century. Wood, height 4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2331

Among the few foreigners allowed to remain after the Tokugawa government banned Christianity and expelled the Portuguese in 1636 were the Dutch, who were confined to the island of Deshima in Nagasaki Harbor. Only the representative of the Dutch East India Company was able to travel to the mainland to give his yearly report. By the second half of the eighteenth century, when some of the restrictions had been lifted, there was a revival of foreign studies, and in 1789 the first Dutch language school opened in Edo. It seems likely, therefore, that netsuke of Dutchmen date from about the last quarter of the century. Their popularity was short-lived, however, as they went out of fashion around the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Since few Japanese had actually seen a foreigner, genuine portraits are rare, and a type of Dutchman developed in netsuke that is exemplified by this representation. Round-eyed, with a bulbous nose and shoulder-length hair, he wears a tasseled, brimmed hat, buttoned tunic with ruffed collar, knee breeches, stockings, and plain soft shoes. Most of the figures carry a dog, gun, or bird—usually a cock, as here, probably referring to the Dutch colony's pastime of cockfighting. Many of these netsuke are ivory, possibly because they would appeal to the wealthier and more worldly clients who could afford that material.

Late eighteenth century. Height, 4⅛ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1506



The first animal netsuke, dating from the seventeenth century, were mostly of creatures derived from Chinese mythology, such as the *kirin, baku,* and *karashishi.* The kirin, the Oriental version of the unicorn, is considered a paragon of virtue: so light-footed that it creates no noise when it walks, and so careful that it harms not even the tiniest insect. Its rare appearance on earth is thought to be a lucky omen.

The kirin has the head of a dragon, with a horn that lies against the back of its head, the body of a deer, legs and hooves similar to those of a horse, and the tail of a lion. Scales or protuberances are part of the body decoration. Usually, flamelike shapes flare from the chest or shoulders. These "fire markings" are a design element that originated in Chinese art and were used by netsuke carvers only during the eighteenth century to indicate that the subject was a mythological beast with supernatural characteristics.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 2⅞ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1408

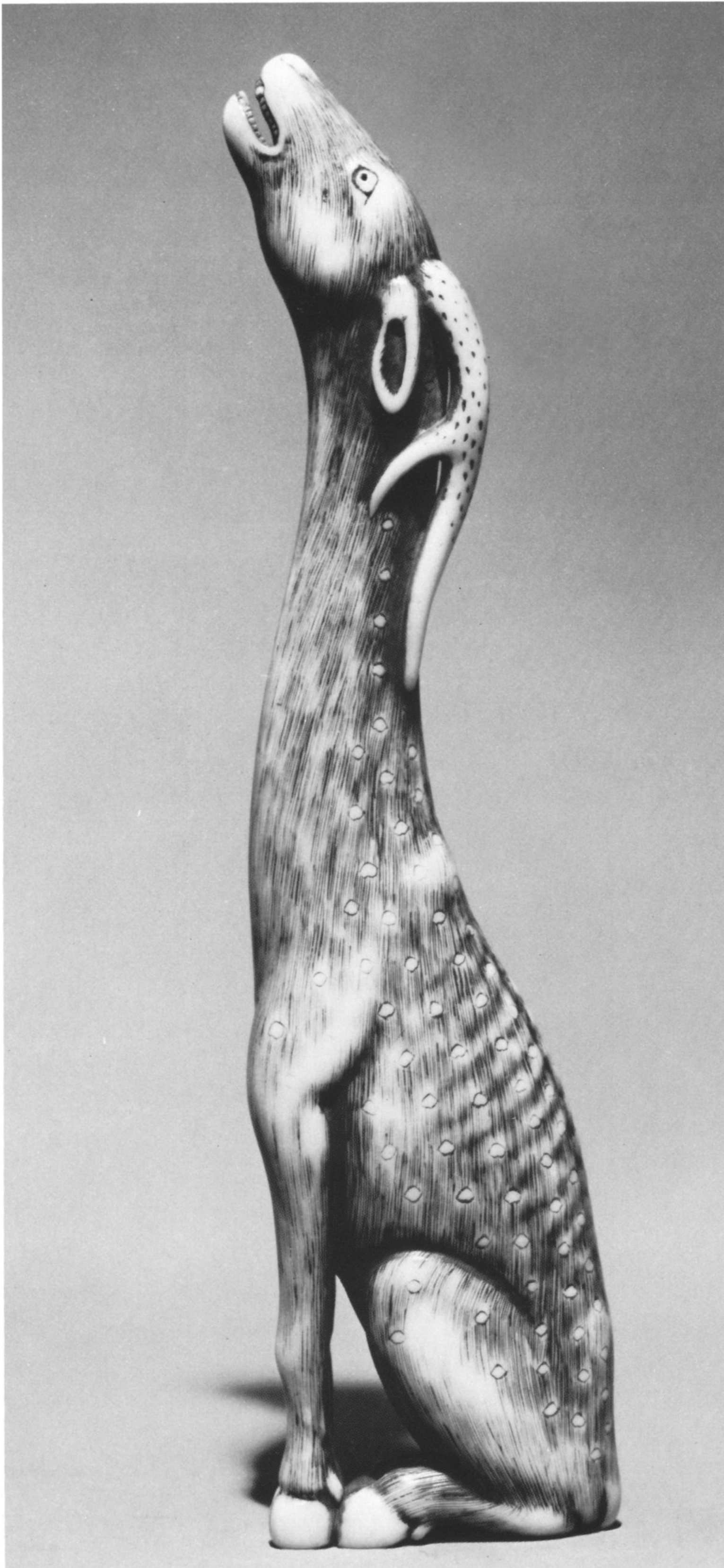
The baku is supposed to eat bad dreams. It is so effective that even the character for "baku" painted on a headrest will keep away frightening nightmares. Physically it combines the head of an elephant, and the body, mane, claws, and tail of a karashishi (below). The Japanese version differs slightly from the Chinese, which has the tail of an ox and a spotted hide. Fantastic composite animals like the baku and kirin went out of style in netsuke by the end of the eighteenth century.

This is a rare example, depicted not in the usual seated position but crouching as if searching for something, and carved in wood rather than the ivory used for most early mythological animals. The finish is enhanced by contrasting gold lacquer applied to the surface (see cover illustration).

Eighteenth century. Wood, length 2 inches. Signed: Sadatake or Jōbu. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2278

The karashishi is characterized by a fierce expression with protruding eyes, wide nostrils, and open mouth. Its curly mane is usually balanced by long curled locks on its legs and a bushy tail. The earlier the rendition, the stronger the facial expression and the more elaborate the curls. In China they are shown in pairs and commonly associated with the imperial family; in Japan they are often found in Buddhist lore, occasionally as temple guardians, and are sometimes associated with holy men (see p. 12). In netsuke shishi are frequently depicted whimsically, and this one, resting quietly, gazes solemnly out of dark inlaid pupils set dramatically into gold eye sockets. This subtle use of gold indicated the owner's wealth while circumventing the government's sumptuary laws.

Late eighteenth–early nineteenth century. Ivory, length 1⅝ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.17



This stag represents the stylistic transition between the highly imaginative creatures of the early to middle eighteenth century, and the more realistic animals of the nineteenth century. Its elegantly simple pose—seated, with an upturned head and stretched neck—is similar to those of kirin in earlier netsuke, but its branched antlers, sloping ribs, and spotted coat are indications of a new interest in authentic details.

Late eighteenth century. Ivory, height 5¼ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2308

The *tanuki,* a badgerlike animal that is a member of the raccoon family, was portrayed as a partially imaginary beast endowed with supernatural powers. Depicted as more of a practical joker than a malicious or evil character, it often assumed disguises to further its subterfuge. Here it wears a lotus-leaf hat, carries a bottle of saké in one hand, and holds a bill of sale for the liquor in the other. While the bottle and the bill suggest drunkenness, the lotús leaf, symbolizing purity, alludes to Buddhism, with its emphasis on sobriety. This netsuke might be taken as a comment on the priests of the time, who sometimes indulged in practices contrary to their religious vows.

Garaku, the artist, is mentioned in the *Sōken Kishō* as "a clever carver and a disciple of Tawarya Denbei," an early master whose works have not survived. The few authentic netsuke by Garaku are highly imaginative and expressive, as is this one, and frequently communicate the same feeling of humor.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 2¾ inches. Signed: Garaku. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1436

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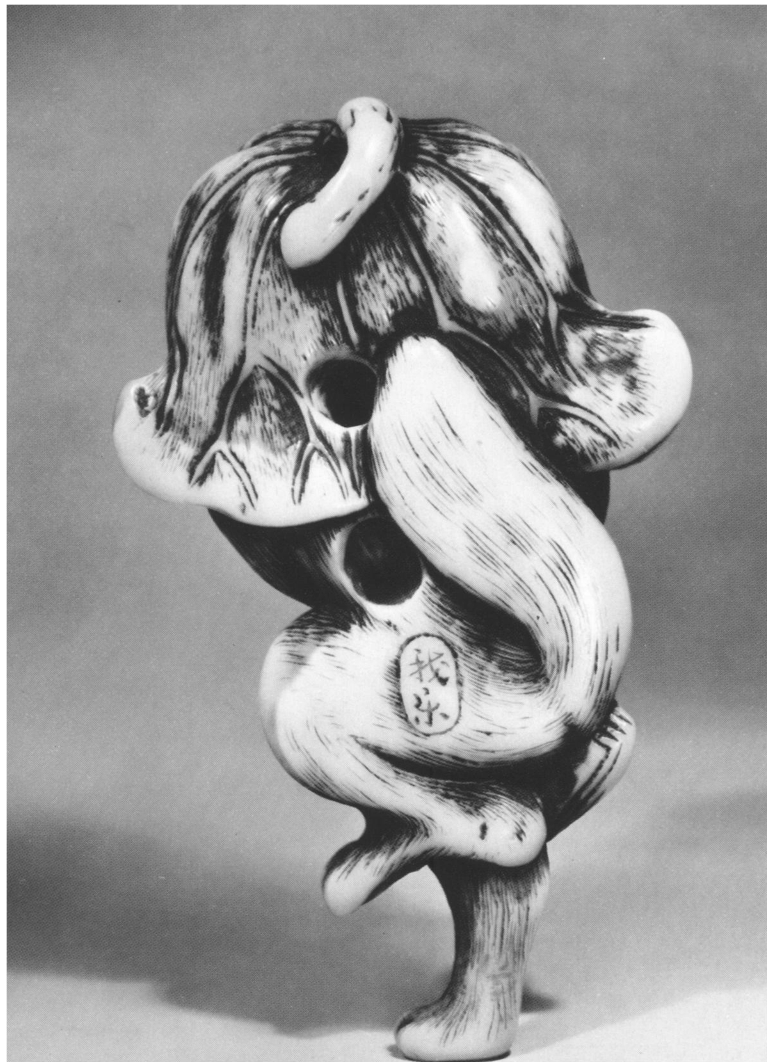
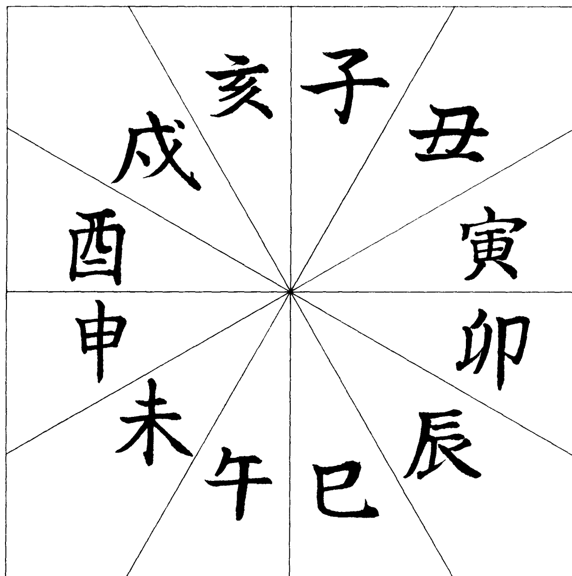


Eighteenth-century animal netsuke by artists in the Kyoto area had well-defined spines and rib cages, and if the creature had a tail, it was usually tucked between the legs and hidden under the body. (During the nineteenth century, the tails of animal netsuke were incorporated on the outside of the piece, usually wrapped around the body.) On the basis of these features alone, this wolf can be attributed to a Kyoto artist of the eighteenth century, a date verified by the signature of Tomotada, who is listed in the *Sōken Kishō* and probably worked in Kyoto in the second half of the century.

The gaunt figure may represent pure hunger or it may be a symbolic expression of anger against the poor crops, high taxes, and capricious samurai overlords of the time.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, length 2 inches. Signed: Tomotada. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.918



The Oriental zodiac is based on a cycle of twelve years, each associated with an animal. These animals also represent the hours of the day and the points of the compass. According to legend, Buddha called all the creatures to him for a celebration, but only twelve came. The order in which they arrived determined the year each symbolizes in the zodiac. In the diagram above the Japanese characters (reading clockwise) stand for rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep (though the animal depicted is a goat), monkey, cock, dog, and boar, which are illustrated on the overleaf.

Netsuke representations of zodiac animals became popular by the late eighteenth century, and it was considered lucky to wear a netsuke representing the year in which one was born. The earliest recorded netsuke artists to specialize in these animals worked mainly in the Kyoto area.

子 The first to respond to Buddha was the rat, who is usually portrayed as a gentle creature. Here the presence of tiny offspring further softens the characterization.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 1⅞ inches. Bequest of Stephen Whitney Phoenix, 1881, 81.1.34

丑 The ox is often found in Japanese art because of its association with the Zen parable of the ox and the herder, which symbolizes a man taming his own spirit. The *Sōken Kishō* identifies this artist, Tomotada, as specializing in the carving of oxen. His netsuke were highly prized and frequently copied.

This example has all the characteristics of a genuine Tomotada sculpture: the proportions are realistic, the muzzle is softly rounded and double-haltered—with a rope meticulously carved in raised relief. Other indications of his work are the large eyes, inlaid with pupils of black coral, the bulging sides, and the tucked-up legs with clearly defined hooves.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, length 2⅜ inches. Signed: Tomotada. Bequest of Stephen Whitney Phoenix, 1881, 81.1.40

寅 Tigers are not native to Japan, but their ferocity and strength made them favorite subjects in Japanese art of the Edo period. Tiger netsuke are usually carved in a crouching position, the head turned into the curve of the body. This feline, with its beetle-brow and mournful eyes, seems like a household pet, although strength is suggested in its haunches and well-padded paws.

Nothing is known about the artist, Raku, but there are a number of tigers with features carved in this manner that bear his name in a jagged reserve, as here.

Late eighteenth century. Ivory, height 1⅜ inches. Signed: Raku. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1099

卯 The hare is connected with legends about the moon, in which it administers the task of keeping the disk clean. The moon hare, a Japanese "Man in the Moon," is said to live a long time, and to turn white at an advanced age. This netsuke, with its broad chest and powerful body, conveys the spirit of an animal prepared for instant flight.

Nineteenth century. Wood, height 2⅛ inches. The Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891, 91.1.988

辰 The dragon is the only mythical beast included in the zodiac. The traditional Japanese interpretation has a flat head with two horns extending down its back, long whiskers, a scaly, snakelike body with spines on its back, and four three-clawed feet (the Chinese imperial dragon has five-clawed feet). It is said to embody both male and female characteristics with unlimited powers of adaptation. This one is unusual, as it seems to be based on the seventeenth-century doughnut-shaped style of netsuke.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, height 1¾ inches. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.787

巳 Before the advent of Buddhism in Japan, snake deities were worshiped in early Shinto rites. In Buddhist lore the snake came to

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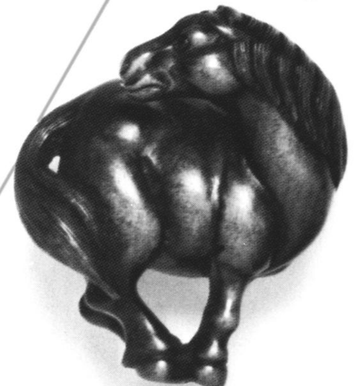

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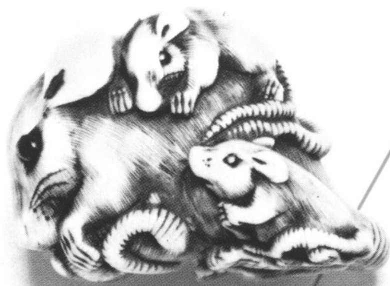

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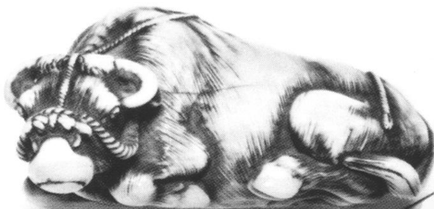

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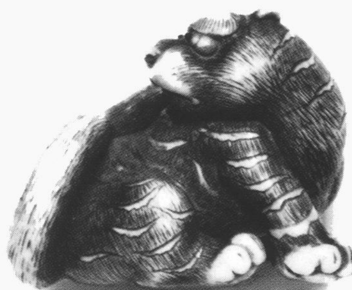

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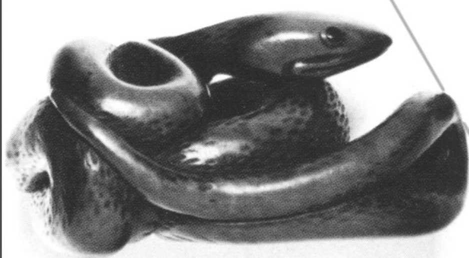


be associated with "female" passions of anger and jealousy. However, to dream of a snake was considered a good omen.

This reptile's satisfied expression and swollen midsection (more visible from the front) suggest a recent meal. The tiered undulations of its coiled body form a compact mass perfect for use as a netsuke. This carving probably enjoyed considerable handling: for if the scales on the underbelly are rubbed the right way, they feel smooth; and if rubbed in the opposite direction, rough like those of a live snake.

Late eighteenth century. Wood, length 2¼ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2284

午 Although Japanese horses are short-legged and stocky, they are nevertheless difficult to depict standing in compact netsuke form. This composition is similar to that of the tiger, as the line of the neck and head curves along the body to form a smooth oval.

Tomotada worked mostly in ivory, a medium in which he seems the most expressive. His wood netsuke, such as this horse, lack the dynamic quality found in his ivories.

Eighteenth century. Height 1⅞ inches. Signed: Tomotada. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1645

未 Although the zodiac sign is actually a sheep, the animal portrayed is usually a goat, and the few legends associated with it are derived from the Chinese. In Japan, where goat flesh is not eaten and the hair scarcely used, the animals rarely appear in any art form. This artist, however, specialized in them, masterfully rendering the texture of their hair by meticulously carving the strands in layers. The horns, while sharp, lie gently on this goat's hunched shoulders, following the curve of the spine.

Nineteenth century. Signed: Kokei. Wood, length 1¾ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2000

申 The monkey is much loved in Japan, and the subject of many paintings and netsuke. The small, light-furred and short-tailed variety (*Macaca fuscata*) is found throughout the islands, and in the north is sometimes called the "snow monkey." The year of the monkey is considered unlucky for marriages, as the word for monkey (*saru*) has the same pronunciation as the verb "to leave," or "to divorce."

Masatami delighted in carving this animal in various textures. The face is molded in smooth planes; the inlay of the eyes is black coral. The body is carved with every hair carefully delineated, and its forelegs are beautifully tapered, terminating in minutely articulated fingers and fingernails. The smoother, lighter chestnut, accented by a bug, offers a contrast to the detail and darker color of the monkey.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, length 2¼ inches. Signed: Masatami. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1065

酉 A cock on a drum is both a zodiac sign and a peace symbol. In China and Japan, the beating of a drum was a call to arms or a warning of danger. In Japanese folklore, when the unused drum became a perch for roosters, peace prevailed.

Here, the bird's head, tucked into the plump wing, is balanced by the high arch of the tail feathers, which blend harmoniously into a rounded form. The careful carving of the dragon on the sides of the drum is in opposition to the smooth drumhead, creating a textural contrast further dramatized by the studs of black coral around the rim.

Late eighteenth century. Ivory, height 1⅝ inches. The Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891, 91.1.1015

戌 The Chinese attitude toward dogs, associating them with bad luck and ill health, was gradually dispelled in Japan. Dogs became symbolic of loyalty and were much loved. Their reputation was considerably enhanced by the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi. Born in 1646, in the year of the dog, Tsunayoshi was told by Buddhist priests that his lack of a son might be due in part to his killing of dogs in a former life, so he issued a proclamation protecting them.

This group of frolicsome puppies by Tomotada is an extraordinary composition that has been copied many times. From any angle the design is perfectly proportioned, and several natural openings allow it to be worn in different ways. Snapping jaws, tiny noses, and shell-like ears convey the youth and energy of these two little animals at play.

Eighteenth century, Ivory, length 1⅜ inches. Signed: Tomotada. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.854

亥 The boar, the twelfth zodiac symbol, is thought to possess reckless courage. It is found wild in western Japan, especially in the province of Iwami, where its tusks and teeth were carved by a group of netsuke artists.

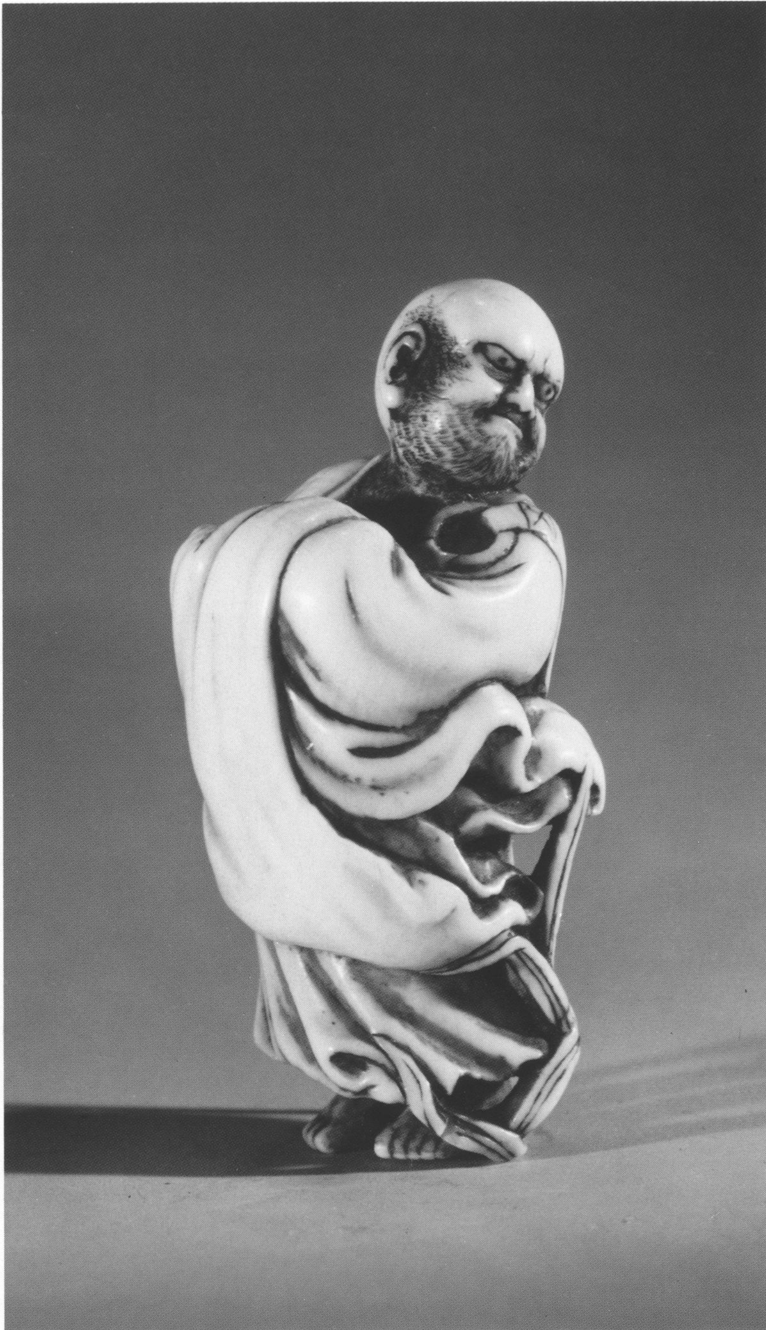
This slumbering beast, nestled snugly in a bed of boughs and ferns, reveals both a gentle humor and a sense of sheer brute force temporarily restrained. Although this design by Tomotada was frequently copied, no other artist has captured the power of the original.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, length 2¼ inches. Signed: Tomotada. Bequest of Stephen Whitney Phoenix, 1891, 81.1.91

Ryūsa, named for the carver who originated the style, is a form of manjū netsuke that is turned on a lathe. The broad, rounded edge allows the artist to continue his design uninterrupted from front to back.

This example, done with extraordinary skill, is probably the work of Ryūsa himself. Here the stippled surface gives the illusion of morning mist. The flowers and other vegetation, as well as the praying mantis, were fashioned by carving the surface of the ivory in a higher relief than the background, which was stained to provide textural contrast and added dimension. The hollow center adds a dark distance, and becomes part of the composition. On the reverse, also carved in relief, is a scarecrow in a field.

Eighteenth century. Ivory, diameter 2 inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1271



Founder of the Ch'an (Zen in Japanese) sect of Buddhism in China, the Indian monk Bōdhidharma, known in Japan as Daruma, traveled as a missionary from India to southern China about A.D. 520, but finding no welcome there, crossed the Yangtze River to settle in the north. This netsuke depicts him crossing the river on a reed. Bōdhidharma, his robe folded over his hands, displays a stern countenance set in deep concentration. The rippling of the long robes suggests motion and also emphasizes the upright posture of the body, balanced precariously on the single reed and braced against the wind.

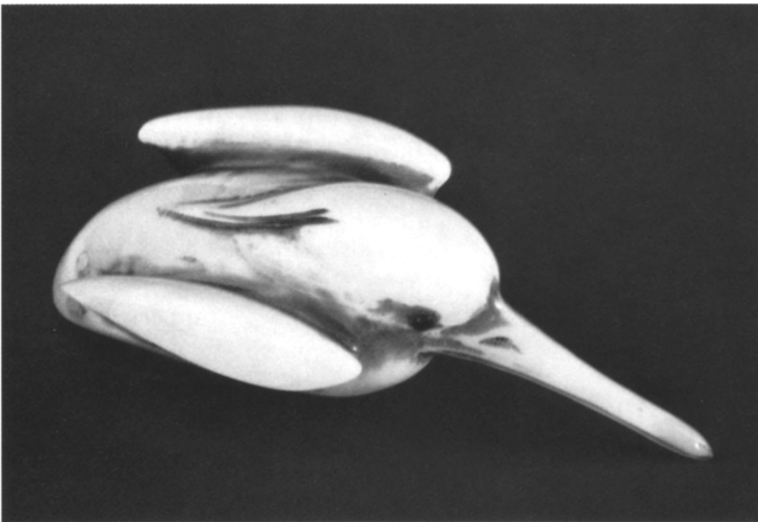
Nineteenth century. Ivory, height 1⅞ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.731

One legend concerning Daruma tells of his meditating for nine years facing the wall of a cave. During this period, he fell asleep and upon awakening, screamed in consternation because he had been unable to remain awake. Here, his rage is fondly reproduced. Although netsuke usually depict him beardless, this rendition gives him eyebrows, a moustache, and a short beard composed of small spiral curls, a form usually associated with the hair on early sculptures of the Buddha. The eyes are sorrowful rather than angry, and are marvelously expressive in their downward droop. The flow of the garment is simple, but the careful execution of feet and hands with sharply defined nails is an indication of the increasing emphasis on realism. Gold lacquer is applied for color.

Late eighteenth century. Wood, height 3⅛ inches. Signed: Sensai tō (literally, "Sensai's knife"). Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2346

The most noticeable change in late eighteenth-century animal netsuke is the use of realistic, or active poses rather than the more static, "at rest" poses that had been common from the mid-eighteenth century. The twisted pose of this squirrel succeeds in capturing the animal's nervous quality. The black-coral eyes protrude and the ears and paws are extended, but the composition still retains its compact form. The squirrel's chubby legs and tiny, clenched paws make it a very appealing figure.

Late eighteenth century. Ivory, height 1½ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.52



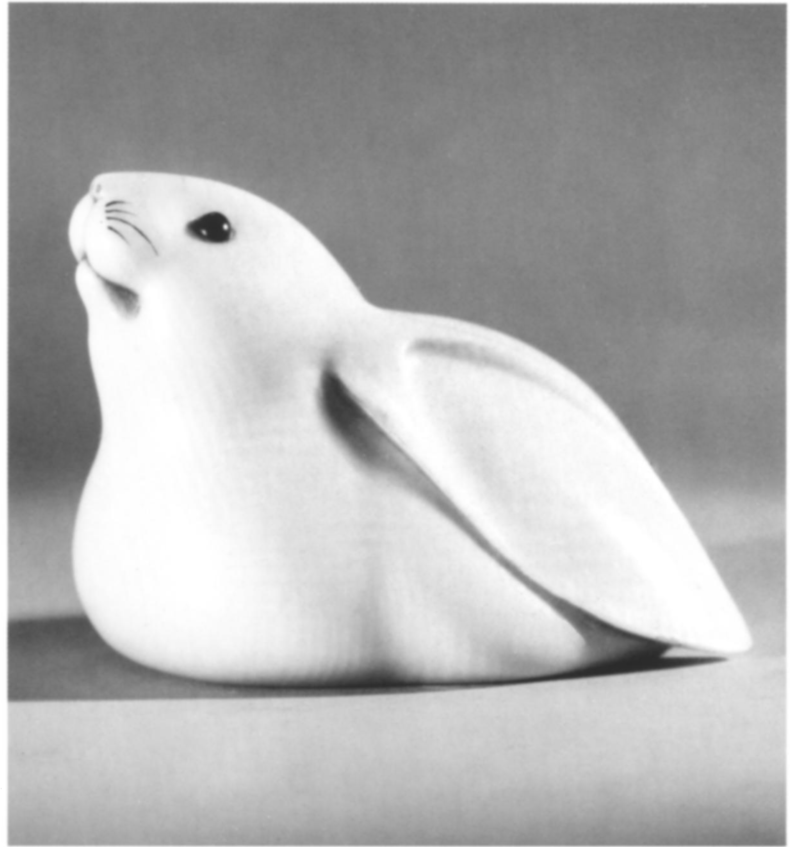
Birds other than sparrows and falcons, which have symbolic associations, are seldom found in netsuke. This artist has portrayed a kingfisher in a very simple and smooth form. The wings curve and blend into the body, creating a slick surface broken only by the cord openings on the underside. Befitting this small, quick bird, the tiny black inset eyes add a quality of alertness.

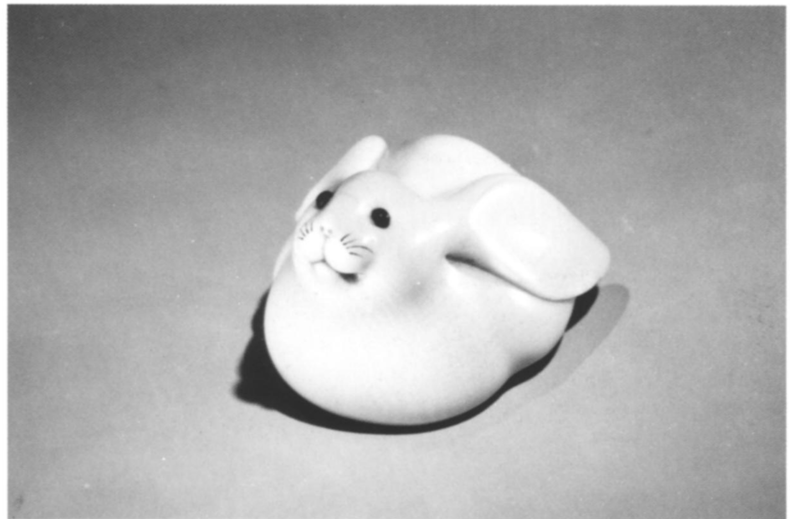
Nineteenth century. Ivory, height 2⅜ inches. Signed: Yasuchika. The Howard Mansfield Collection; Purchase, Rogers Fund, 1936, 36.100.183

This white rabbit is a masterpiece of understated simplicity and elegant design. Although very compact, it is subtle in its sophisticated modeling. The legs are tucked out of sight, but the long ears are articulated with loving attention. Despite the abstraction of shape, the proportions remain lifelike, and the rabbit appears alert, as do most nineteenth-century animals. The sharp eyes are inset with black coral, and the whiskers and nostrils defined in black to stand out more clearly against the white ivory, which looks sensuously tactile even in these photographs.

Ōhara Mitsuhiro (1810–75), who worked in Osaka, is one of the outstanding netsuke artists of the mid-nineteenth century. A versatile carver, he used many styles and techniques, in pieces that could be incredibly complicated and detailed, or as refined and simple as this rabbit.

Mid-nineteenth century. Length 1½ inches. Signed: Mitsuhiro and Ōhara (in a seal). The Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891, 91.1.975





The sculpted scene at the left is a lacquer netsuke made to match an inrō of the same material. Its base was carved from a light wood, probably cypress, which is porous and provides a good surface for the application of lacquer. In a uniquely Japanese technique known as *maki-e,* literally "sprinkled picture," clear lacquer is applied and minute gold flakes are sprinkled onto it when it is still tacky. Here various techniques were first used in building up the upper parts, before the artist completed the lacquering and added cut gold for further embellishment, while the back has a thin, even coat of sprinkled gold. This piece has a metal ring attached to its underside through which the cord is threaded and knotted.

Eighteenth century. Height 1¾ inches. Signed: Koma Koryū. Bequest of Stephen Whitney Phoenix, 1881, 81.1.304

At the Japanese New Year, it is considered good fortune to dream of a falcon, an eggplant, or Mount Fuji. Falcons are identified with persistence and success, eggplants signify fruitfulness, and to dream of Mount Fuji is an omen of the greatest luck. The netsuke illustrated on the opposite page incorporates all three symbols, and may have been intended as a New Year's gift.

The sagemono was not hung from the opening formed by the stem of the eggplant, but from cord openings carved in the back of the netsuke.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, length 2⅜ inches. Signed: Sadayoshi. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.751

Kintarō, who was brought up in the mountains, had superhuman strength. As a small child, he could uproot trees, wrestle bears, and was constantly fighting other beasts and goblins. Most often he is depicted overcoming the *tengu,* which is part bird and part other animal or man, that lived deep in the mountain forests.

Here, boy and beast are in the final stages of a struggle. Both are exceptionally well delineated. The boy's hair and features are sharply described, and tortoise-shell eyes with black inlaid pupils add a realistic touch. His body is rounded with exaggerated but softly contoured muscles that are indicative of his strength. The tengu, on the other hand, is on its stomach with wings spread in the posture of weakness, and bends its head backward in a feeble attempt to peck at Kintarō. Every feather of the tengu is carved individually, and small ivory inlays (see below) highlight its arms and legs, creating a contrast to the wood. The emphasis on realistic detail and intricate carving, characteristic of early nineteenth-century netsuke, adds complexity to this piece, but does not detract from the vigor of the composition.

Early nineteenth century. Wood, height 1⅜ inches. Signed: Hachigaku. The Sylmaris Collection, Gift of George Coe Graves, 1931, 31.49.12

The *kappa,* a fantastic aquatic creature, appeared in netsuke during the nineteenth century. Traditionally, it has a tortoise body, frog legs, and a monkeylike head with a saucer-shaped hollow in the top. This indentation contains fluid that makes the kappa ferocious and uncompromising. However, being Japanese, it is very polite; when bowed to, it will bow in reply, losing the fluid and, consequently, its strength. The face is usually that of a pouting child rather than a terrifying monster, and it walks upright. Kappas are reputedly responsible for drownings, but can be propitiated by throwing cucumbers, their favorite food, into the water.

In this superbly elegant and sophisticated netsuke, no surface has been left uncarved. The head is gracefully modeled, and small ears peep out of the sharply defined striated hair. The body's texture appears to imitate a tortoise shell, and the froglike limbs end in webbed feet. The carving is sharp and precise, which is typical of mid-nineteenth century work, and one of the characteristics of the style of this artist.

Mid-nineteenth century. Wood, height 1⅞ inches. Signed: Shoko. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1858

The unlikely combination at the left probably alludes to an episode in the legend of Ryūjin (see p. 14) in which the Dragon King's doctor, an octopus, prescribes the liver of a live monkey as the cure for an ailment. A jellyfish is sent to find a monkey, but fails in his mission, and the story ends there. However, the pair shown here is often depicted in netsuke, probably indicating that the octopus finally undertook the task itself.

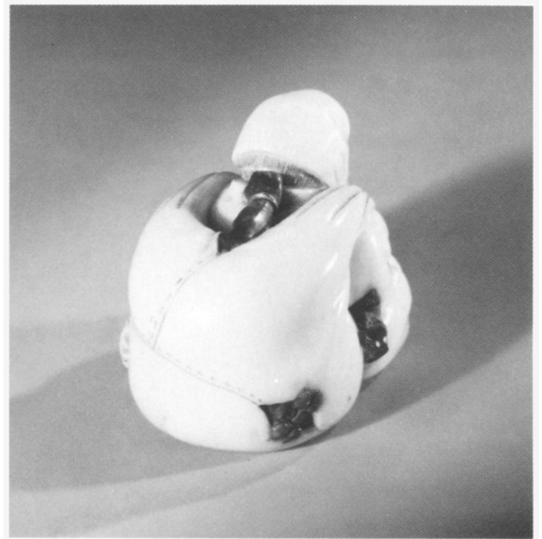
The excellence of this netsuke lies in the skillful use of dissimilar shapes and forms, and in the artist's ability to communicate some of the terror and physical pressures of the fight. (Struggle for survival is a common theme in Rantei's netsuke.) The expressions are exaggerated, and the force with which the monkey pushes his adversary is seen in the indentation in the octopus's head.

Unlike earlier Kyoto artists who concentrated on the larger, individual zodiac animals, Rantei and his generation usually worked with combinations of figures in a smaller format. Despite the small size, they were able to give their netsuke more expression and more realistic detailing.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, length 1½ inches. Signed: Rantei. The Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891, 91.1.962

In Japan, the hawk is a symbol of masculinity, and hunting with hawks was a popular sport among the samurai. This bird's great power is expressed in its spread wings and cocked head glaring down at its prey, a dog. Its mouth and tongue are deeply undercut to emphasize the sharp curve of the beak. Black inlaid eyes contrast with the light ivory of the body, and a stain accents the play of light and dark throughout the composition. The placement of the hawk's claw in the dog's eye heightens the brutality of the struggle.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, height 2 inches. Signed: Hidechika. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.796



An old man weary of carrying his bag of troubles rests for a moment. His burden takes the form of *oni,* or demons, who are trying to free themselves. One, stained green, has torn a hole in the bag and glares out between his fingers with a single eye (below). Another is about to grasp the old man by his coat collar.

The man wears a netsuke and tobacco pouch made of wood with tiny brass highlights (repeating the metal ornament on the larger versions). The arm of the grasping oni is of wood, and its wrist is encircled by an inlaid metal bracelet. Inlays of various materials were applied only sparingly to eighteenth-century netsuke, but in the nineteenth century, artists increasingly used distinctive combinations as a statement of individual style.

This subject was originated during the latter part of the eighteenth century by Ryūkei who carved it in dark-stained boxwood. This ivory copy, with its metal inlays, called for techniques not associated with ivory carving, and is possibly the product of two artists.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, wood, and metal, height 1¼ inches. Signed: Seikanshi. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.907

The sword is one of the three sacred symbols of imperial authority. From the earliest times in Japan, a spiritual presence, or *kami,* has been associated with the forging of a blade. This netsuke represents the creation of the sword "Little Fox," forged by the swordsmith Kokaji Munechika (938–1014) for the emperor Ichijō Tennō (986–1011). It is said that the fox god Inari manned the bellows during the making of the blade, and here his ghostly form hovers in the background.

In this ryūsa-style netsuke, Munechika is depicted in the metal cut-out that fits into the surface of the ivory. The figure of the fox, cut in the ivory, is made all the more mysterious by the hollow, pierced ground, with its various intensities of dark and light.

Nineteenth century. Ivory and metal, diameter 1¾ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1203

This superbly articulated rendition of a skeleton astride a skull is a humorous statement of the transitory nature of life. The bony hips of the skeleton are modestly covered with a loincloth, a reminder of its humanity and also an iconographic detail found on demonic figures of the eighth century. The careful definition of the skeletal structure demonstrates the knowledge of anatomy on the part of this artist, Rantei, who often created subjects dealing with death or the struggle for survival (see p. 34).

In this netsuke the head and arm were made as a separate unit and then inserted at the top of the spine and into the shoulder. This construction provided movement, and also allowed for the contraction and expansion caused by changes in humidity.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, height 1¾ inches. Signed: Rantei. Bequest of Stephen Whitney Phoenix, 1881, 81.1.72

According to legend, a group of seven gods whose origins derived from Brahminism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Shinto, appeared to the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1603–51) in a dream. In explaining the dream, a courtier pronounced them the Seven Gods of Luck. Hotei, the most popular of the group, is commonly portrayed as a fat, jolly figure with an ample stomach and holding a fan. He is frequently surrounded by children, and carries a bag of twenty-one objects representing prosperity. Here, he is in his bag.

This example by a well-known artist combines elegant simplicity and exquisite detail. The smiling fat face and the pudgy arm protruding from the bag create an appearance of joviality. The well-carved folds and stitching on the bag lend authenticity to its fabric, and the fine details of Hotei's features and fan provide a textural contrast to its smooth worn material. This counterpoint of textures is often found in Mitsuhiro's work.

Nineteenth century. Ivory, height 1⅛ inches. Signed: Mitsuhiro and Ōhara (in a seal). The H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.841

The small figure clinging to the top of the long nose of the mask netsuke at the left is the popularized form of Uzume-no-Mikoto, who, according to a well-known Japanese legend, danced to entice the sun goddess Amaterasu out of a cave where she had hidden, thus depriving the world of light. Okame, as the deity is also known, created such raucous merriment that Amaterasu emerged, and light was restored. Certain Shinto songs and dances are said to trace back to those of Okame.

Okame is shown grasping the nose of the mask, which represents Saruta-Hiko-no-Mikoto, the Shinto god who blocked the crossways to heaven. The sun goddess asked Okame to confront him and clear the way. This would possibly explain the humorously erotic relationship illustrated here, a theme commonly found in netsuke of the Edo period.

This Okame is a playful young girl; her rounded body and chubby arms, hands, and feet, give her a childlike innocence that conflicts with the scowling mask. By using opposites, the artist, Masanao, has created a successful satire.

Nineteenth century. Wood, height 1½ inches. Signed: Masanao. Bequest of Kate Read Blacque in memory of her husband Valentine Alexander Blacque, 1938, 38.50.296

Hannya is a demon representing the spirit of a jealous woman. One of the most fearsome of all Nō masks, it is most often associated with the play *Dōjōji,* in which a young maiden falls in love with a handsome priest. Enraged by his resistance to her advances, she finally traps him under the bell of the Dōjō Temple. After turning herself into a snakelike dragon with the face of a Hannya, she encircles the bell and burns him to death with the heat of her anger.

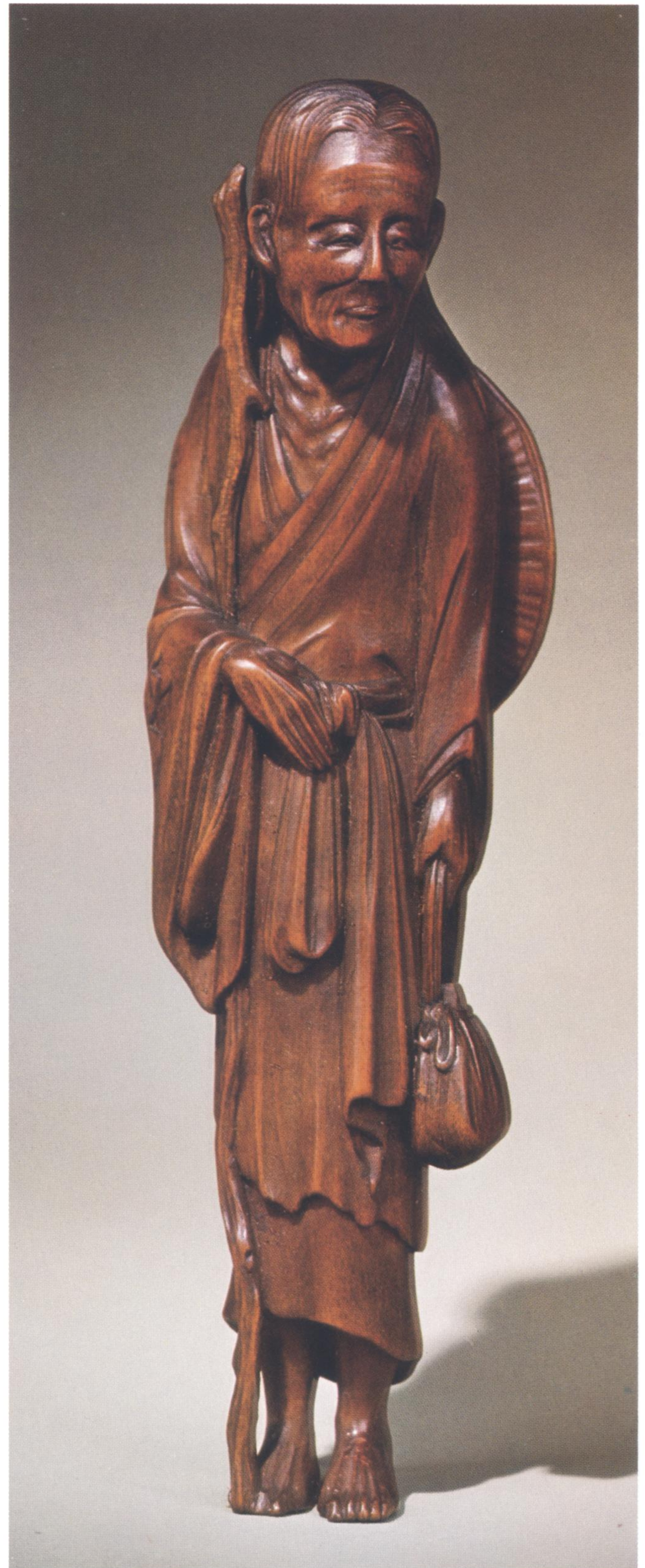
Hannya are among the most common subjects of mask netsuke. The one at the right is not a true copy of a Nō mask as it lacks the reflecting metal or gilded eyes usually found in Nō masks of supernatural beings. However, the carving is superb: the strength of sculptural movement from the powerful forehead to the almost skull-like form of the cheek area and jaw is the work of a skilled artist.

Nineteenth century. Wood, height 1⅞ inches. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2388

The few dignified or graceful representations of women in netsuke are of heroines of the Heian period (794–1185), a time when women enjoyed considerable success in the arts. Ono no Komachi (834–900) was a renowned court beauty as well as an accomplished poetess. At the height of her glory, she was said to be extravagant and proud, setting impossible tasks for her lovers, until one of them died in the pursuit of her favors. Out of remorse, or perhaps as punishment by the gods for her extreme vanity, she became destitute in her old age. In netsuke, she is often portrayed as a toothless hag dressed in rags.

This is a rare sympathetic interpretation of the poetess in her last years. The carving of her face is particularly sensitive, including a hint of a dimple in her cheek, a poignant reminder of her former beauty. Takehara Chikkō is known for his figural netsuke of Japanese legendary subjects.

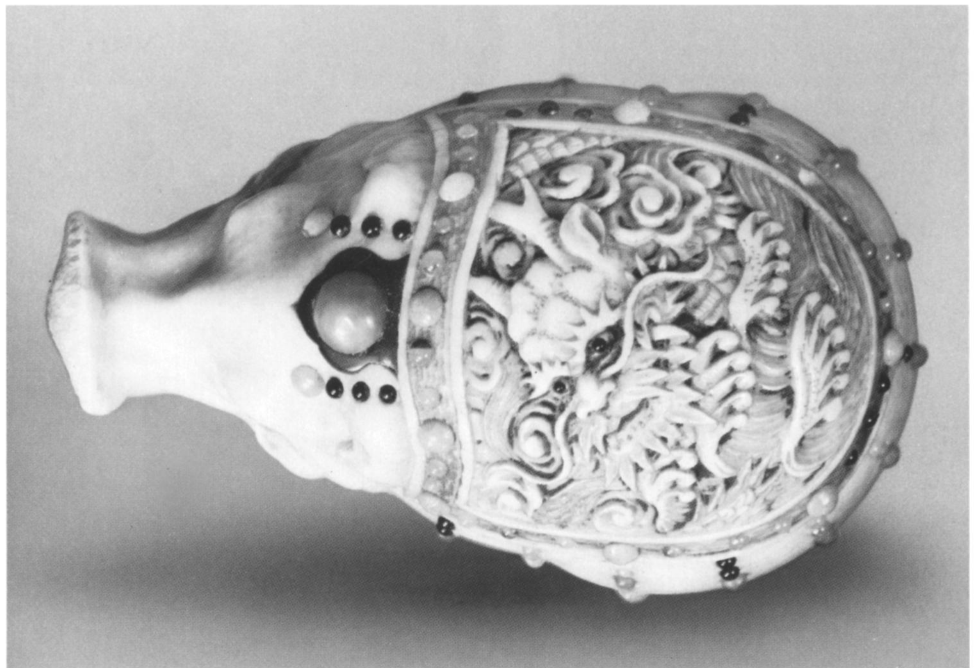
Late nineteenth century. Wood, height 3½ inches. Signed: Chikkō saku ("Chikkō made"). Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2336



This unusual figure wears a headdress comprised of three mother-of-pearl disks inlaid in wood frames, in a shape based on that of a *matoi,* an implement used in victory celebrations during the Meiji period (1868–1912). On the disks are scratched the characters for *Dai Nihon Senshō iwai,* which may be translated as "Celebration for Japanese [War] Victory." The artist's dates, 1871–1936, suggest that this netsuke was carved to commemorate the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. The figure's face reflects the agony of war and war's conflict with Buddhism, which is symbolized by the whisk and the necklace of leaves.

This is a striking interpretation, rendered with both delicacy and force. The subject indicates that it was not intended for export, and its high quality is representative of many of the pieces created by artists of the Meiji and Taishō (1912–26) periods who did not capitulate to the expanding export market.

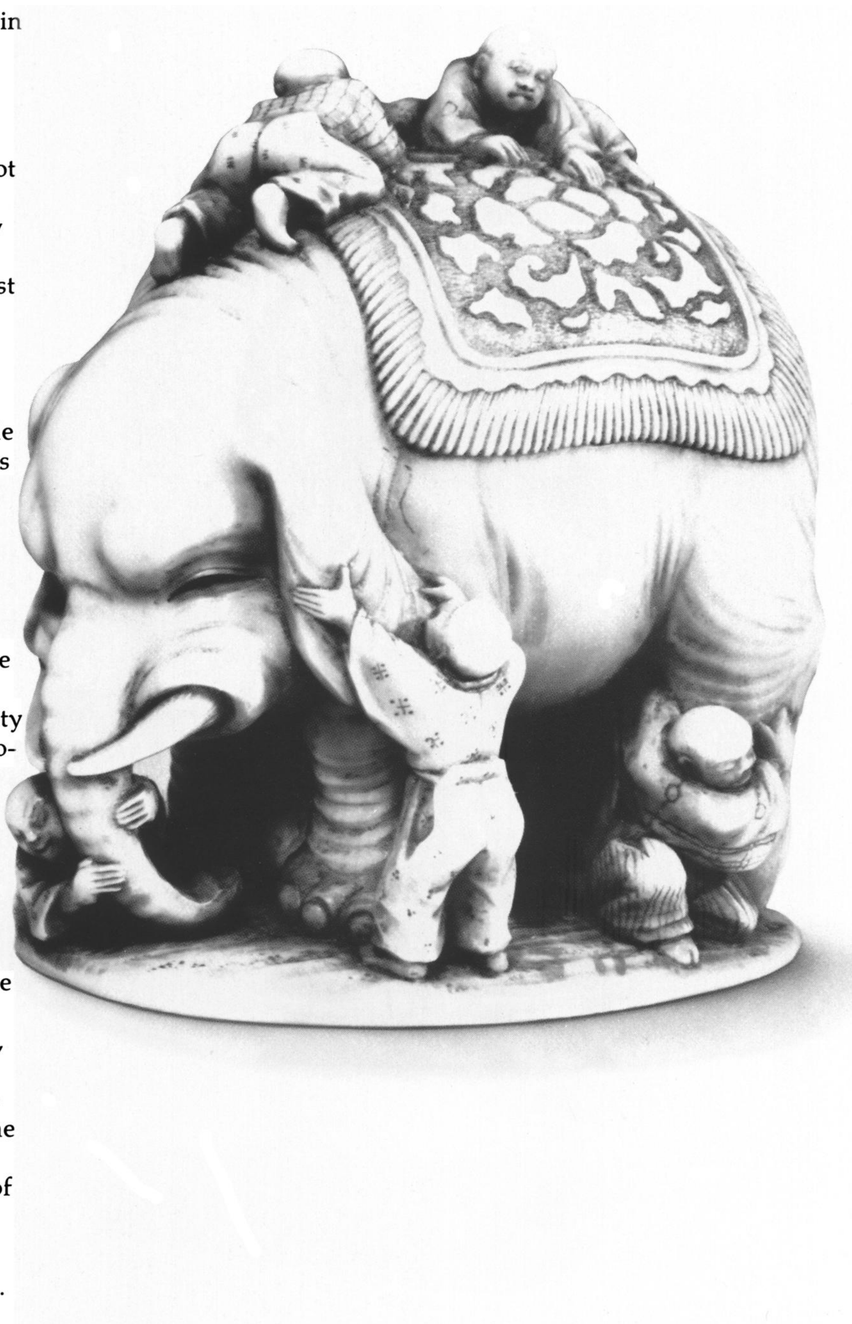
Early twentieth century. Wood, height 4⅛ inches.
Signed: Sanshō and a kakihan (stylized signature).
Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2319



When netsuke were introduced to Europe in the Meiji period, variations on traditional subjects evolved that were thought more appealing to Western taste. For example, Kōhōsai, who created this boar, felt that a somnulent, ferocious animal (see p. 7) would not be appealing, so he developed a new approach.

The boar's head is large compared to its body size, and the facial expression is amusingly exaggerated. To embellish this netsuke, the artist included a decorated back covering with an elegant dragon pattern. Hanging beads are simulated by colorful incrustations of semiprecious stones in the technique known as *shibayama*. The signature plaque on the underside bridges the space between the legs and provides the cord opening.

Late nineteenth century. Ivory, length 2¼ inches.
Signed: Kōhōsai and a kakihan (stylized signature).
Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.899



The image of the elephant has stimulated the Japanese imagination for centuries. Early Buddhist paintings and sculpture depict the deity Fugen Bosatsu seated on the beast, and mythological animals sometimes derive characteristics from it (see p. 17). In the early part of the eighteenth century a pair of elephants was sent to Japan as a gift to the imperial family, and netsuke of that animal could easily have been based on drawings from life.

This is an interpretation of the allegory concerning truth and how man interprets it. The blind men are investigating an elephant in an attempt to describe it. Their findings, of course, are based on which part they feel.

The tininess of the figures against the beast's expansive body is meant to be as amusing as the humor reflected in the animal's face. This is a sensitive rendition by the founder and master of the renowned Sō school of netsuke carvers.

Late nineteenth century. Ivory, height 1⅝ inches.
Signed: Kuku Josō tō (literally, "Kuku Josō's knife").
Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.900

By the late Edo and early Meiji periods, competition among netsuke carvers had exhausted conventional themes, and artists searched for fresh subjects. During the 1850s the well-known artist Hōjitsu (died 1872), who was patronized by the daimyo of the Tsugaru District of Mutsu Province, began to specialize in genre figures, depicting in his sculptures the daily activities of townspeople. His work, supposedly influenced by the genre painter Hanabusa Itchō (1651–1724) is refined, with few frills.

This man applies salve to a painful area on his neck. Although his face is contorted with suffering, it is still well defined enough to be a portrait. The countermovement within the body is emphasized by the tilt of the shoulders and the folds of the garment as it gathers in the man's lap. His slender wrist and forearm draped in a rippling sleeve are elements of studied grace.

Nineteenth century. Wood, height 1¼ inches. Signed Hōjitsu. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1823

While Hōjitsu provided the impetus for the proliferation of genre subjects, Josō Miyasaki (1855–1910) further shifted the emphasis from the activities of the upper and middle classes to those of workmen and farmers. The man shown here, kneeling in Japanese fashion, is cutting a pumpkin on a board. His headband, originally a sweatband, is traditional among the working class in Japan even today. From any angle, the netsuke displays great vitality. The expression on the man's face—which is only about ½ inch high—is intense, and his long tapering fingers energetically grasp the vegetable as he cuts it.

At a time when the export market demanded flashy inlays and overly decorated, intricate pieces, Josō concentrated on the smaller home market. Typically, his netsuke were of simple subjects, exquisitely executed. Determination and tension are expressed in the faces, finely muscled bodies, and strong hands of his workers. Occasionally he carved other figures—a crying child or a blind man—but they are all treated with sympathy rather than ridicule.

Late nineteenth century. Wood, height 1¼ inches. Signed: Josō yafu tō (literally, "Josō the rural man's knife"). Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.1827

Kokeisai Sanshō (1871–1926), the creator of this netsuke, was known for his genre figures. He tended to exaggerate facial characteristics as a means of stylistic expression; here, for example, the twisted features suggest drunkenness.

The well-proportioned body clothed in a casually draped, simple garment is pure Sanshō. The hair is stained black to emphasize the headband, part of the workingman's costume. The bare, tightly curled toes grasp the ground to maintain balance. The netsuke, however humorous, may have a serious intent: it might have served as a reminder to its owner of how foolish one looks when drunk.

Late nineteenth century. Wood, height 3¼ inches.
Signed: Sanshō and a kakihan (stylized signature).
Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2353

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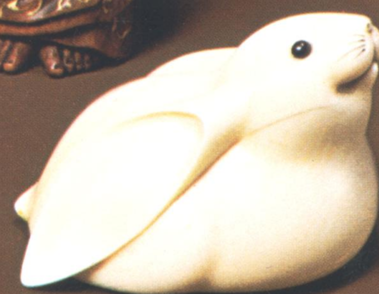
Puppies by Tomotada **(see p. 22)**



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