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Minneapolis Institute of Art Organizes Exhibition Celebrating the Artistry of Textiles from Japan

Recently acquired, exceptionally rare garments on view are made of delicate natural materials, such as Japanese fiber banana plant, elm bark, nettle fiber, and fish skin

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Japan, 18th century, Attush robe with exceptional decoration of fish bones and tassels (back), cloth: elm bark fiber; cotton appliqué and embroidery, silk, wool, sturgeon scales, shells, bird bones, silk tassels, metal, stone; lining: cotton, The Mary Griggs Burke Endowment Fund established by the Mary Livingston Griggs and Mary Griggs Burke Foundation; purchase from the Thomas Murray Collection 2022.6

MINNEAPOLIS, March 16, 2022—This June, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) will debut the special exhibition “Dressed by Nature: Textiles of Japan.” Demonstrating the resourcefulness and skill involved in transforming locally sourced materials into extraordinary garments, “Dressed by Nature” will feature clothing and fabrics made from traditional organic materials, including robes crafted from the Japanese fiber banana plant from the subtropical Okinawan region; textiles fashioned from paper, ramie, cotton, silk, wool, hemp, wisteria, deerskin, and rice straw from across Japan’s many islands; garments of elm bark and nettle fiber created by the indigenous Ainu people; and festival coats of fish skin made in neighboring Siberia. Showcasing objects acquired in 2019 from Thomas Murray, a collector of Asian art, the exhibition will highlight rare and exceptional examples of textiles from Japan made between 1750 and 1930. The exhibition, which will be on view from June 25 through September 11, 2022, is curated by Andreas Marks, PhD, Mary Griggs Burke Curator and head of Japanese and Korean Art at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

“These garments and cloths are unique objects that showcase the creativity of their makers in fashioning textiles from all kinds of natural materials depending on their living circumstances,” Marks said. “While many exhibitions on the dress of Japan focus on the silk kimono and clothes worn by the aristocracy, ‘Dressed by Nature’ instead celebrates the inventiveness and beauty of folk traditions and clothes worn in

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everyday life. We are excited for visitors to experience the kaleidoscope of materials and designs that will be on view and which demonstrate human ingenuity in the pre-industrial period of Japan between the 18th and early 20th centuries.”

The over 120 textiles on view will highlight the artistry from the diverse cultures that form the Japanese archipelago. These include exceptionally rare, brightly colored resist-dyed *bingata* robes from Okinawa; delicately patterned garments used by farmers, fishermen, and firemen from Japan's largest and most populous islands of Honshu and Kyushu; and boldly patterned coats created by Ainu women from Japan's northern island of Hokkaido and the Sakhalin Island of Siberia.

Exhibition highlights include:

- an exuberant festival robe from the early 1900s, decorated with sea creatures and water motifs, used to celebrate a successful fish catch. The robe's decorations were hand-drawn and painted with *tsutsugaki*, a rice paste resist-dye technique, making this robe one of a kind;
- an *attush* Ainu robe—acquired by Mia this year— from the 18th century. *Attush* (elm bark) robes were decorated with appliqued cotton and embroidery, but this robe is unique in the world in that it is embellished with various talismanic pendants created from sea creatures (mostly sturgeon scales) as well as shells, bird bones, and silk tassels;
- a festival coat for women made of fish skin by the Nivkh people, hunters and fishermen who lived on the northern half of Sakhalin Island and in the Amur River region in the Russian Far East. The back of this robe from the 19th century was richly decorated with appliqué and embroidery of abstracted, animalistic designs that represent masks, birds, serpents, and dragons of Chinese origin;
- a *boro* patchwork farmer's short coat from the 19th century, made using recycled textiles that have been patched together, demonstrating the tradition of reusing old, worn-out clothing and making it into new garments;
- a complete fireman's kit from the second half of the 1800s that includes a coat, a quilted hood, heavily padded gloves, and close-fitting trousers. During this period, fires were a constant threat in the densely populated wooden cities. Kits like this—crafted from indigo-dyed, quilted cotton—were soaked in water before the men headed into the blaze;
- a luxurious dark blue-ground lined winter robe (*watajin*) with dog paw-print pattern that was created through floating-relief weft (*Yomitanzan hanaori*). The height of the Ryūkyū Kingdom elite on the subtropical islands of Okinawa in the 19th century is expressed in this robe, which has a yellow-ground lining decorated with ivy, chrysanthemum, and bamboo grass pattern achieved with the traditional *bingata* stencil-resist dyeing technique, unique to Okinawa.

This exhibition is made possible by lead sponsor Thomson Reuters and major sponsor *Artful Living*, with generous support provided by the Gale Family Endowment.

About Mia's Japanese Art Collection

Mia's collection of Japanese art features outstanding concentrations of Buddhist sculpture, paintings, lacquer, works of bamboo, woodblock prints, and ceramics, and is particularly rich in works from the Edo period (1603–1868). A special exhibition of masterpieces from Mia's paintings collection was on view at four museums in Japan from 2021 until 2022. Also notable is its collection of *ukiyo-e* prints and paintings, popularly known as “pictures of the floating world.” Representative examples from the permanent collection of close to 9,000 works are shown in sixteen galleries of Japanese art—the largest permanent display devoted to Japanese art within any Western encyclopedic museum. Two historic rooms, a formal audience hall (*shoin*), and a teahouse (*chashitsu*) serve to heighten awareness of the relationship between art and architecture.

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Tuesday-Wednesday 10am–5pm

Thursday 10am–9pm

Friday-Sunday 10am–5pm

Monday Closed

For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org

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