

# WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

## ***KIMONO COUTURE: THE BEAUTY OF CHISO AND THE KIMONO IN PRINT: 300 YEARS OF JAPANESE DESIGN***

*Outstanding kimonos from Chiso, one of Japan's oldest kimono producers, will be presented in the U.S. for the first time at WAM in Spring 2020*

Worcester, MA—February 19, 2020—This spring, the Worcester Art Museum will present the first exhibition outside of Japan of historic and contemporary kimonos from the collection of Chiso, the distinguished Kyoto-based kimono house. ***Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso***—on view from April 25 to July 26, 2020—will examine the history and artistry of the prestigious 465-year-old garment maker through the presentation of 14 kimonos and an exquisite selection of related works of art. Paintings, kimono fragments, and woodblock printed books from the Chiso art collection reflect the creative collaborations between Chiso and several celebrated Japanese artists since the late 19th century. The centerpiece will be a one-of-a-kind, contemporary wedding kimono specially commissioned by WAM for *Kimono Couture*. The exhibition demonstrates Chiso's profound commitment to championing the rigorous artistic traditions of Japanese kimono-making, while highlighting the company's shifting sense of innovation, beauty, and versatility. In tandem with *Kimono Couture*, the Museum will also present ***The Kimono in Print: 300 Years of Japanese Design***, which will provide a wider historical look into the intersection between print and kimono design—on view from March 28 to June 28, 2020.

"I am so excited that we have been able to collaborate with Chiso, to bring these treasures from their collection to the United States for the first time," said Matthias Waschek, the Jean and Myles McDonough Director of the Worcester Art Museum. "These two exhibitions are an opportunity to explore and understand both the history of the kimono as an object of design, as well as its continued, important role as a work of both artistic innovation and fashion in Japanese culture. At a time when segments of the fashion world are very focused on being 'fast,' it is gratifying to see in these exhibitions the commitment to craft and artistry in which kimonos are made with exemplary technique and design. And we are further grateful to Chiso for the opportunity to commission a unique wedding kimono for our collection, an enduring work of art to remind us of our collaboration."

### **Chiso Kimonos**

Chiso's kimonos are commissioned on a bespoke basis, and then individually designed, handmade and dyed by the company's network of over 600 Kyoto-based artisans. The kimono has also played a strong role in reinforcing familial ties and friendships in Japanese society, as exemplified by the creation of luxury kimonos to be given as gifts between intimate friends and family members for special occasions and ceremonies. Of the kimonos included in the exhibition, seven of them are specially commissioned modern wedding kimonos produced by Chiso for its founding family, the Nishimura family, and which the family is generously lending to the Worcester Art Museum for the exhibition.

Crafted in a variety of rich colors built up through several intricate layers of *yūzen* (paste-resist dyeing), *shibori* (tie-dyeing), embroidery, and other advanced techniques, Chiso's kimono collection also demonstrates the enduring significance of imagery and other auspicious designs drawn from the Japanese appreciation of nature and literature. For example, luxuriant pines and red crested cranes bear wishes of longevity, while embroidered fans among golden bands of floating mist evoke hopes for the future. The exhibition presents Chiso's continuing commitment and aspiration to Japanese beauty and steadfast dedication to innovation, design, and creativity in the present and for the future.

The five additional kimonos presented in the exhibition range from the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Edo period to the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Meiji period, and were collected by Chiso to inspire the company's designers. Made on satin, ramie, and silk crepe, and using embroidery, stencil dyeing, tie-dyeing, and various other techniques, the five *kosode* (the commonly known kimono form with small wrist openings) exemplify early innovative patterning, techniques, and designs for kimono. The earliest work in the show, a mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century Kanbun era (1661-1673) *kosode*, acknowledges the early modern mindset of kimono makers in Japan. An overturned, tie-dyed flask pours forth a multicolored stream from the shoulder on the back of the kimono to the hem, demonstrating the conceptual rigor of the design and technique.

Central to *Kimono Couture* is the Museum's newly commissioned wedding kimono. Working with Chiso's head senior designer, Mr. Imai Atsuhiko, the Museum has commissioned a kimono with a design that draws inspiration from New England and the city of Worcester. The commission of a kimono as an *artwork* for an *art museum*, rather than for a specific client or occasion, gave Chiso and its designer significant creative space to give form to their vision regarding the present and future art of the kimono. Inspired by the New England foliage and Worcester's famed seven hills, the designer incorporated the iconic maple leaf throughout the kimono design, as well as seven textile techniques, ranging from newly developed to endangered ones. The display of this commissioned work will include documentary photographs of the process, as well as a video demonstrating many of Chiso's signature techniques.

"Many people have old-fashioned perceptions about kimonos, but they remain an important part of Japanese culture and fashion, and can be very contemporary in their design," said Mr. Imai, the head senior designer at Chiso. "The kimono we have created especially for the Worcester Art Museum is a great example of this, bringing together a motif that is very rooted in the cultures of the city of Worcester and Japan, but doing so with strong, modern forms and colors. I hope that American audiences welcome the piece as an emblem of the beauty of Chiso and of Japanese culture, as well as appreciate our interpretation of the classic maple leaf."

### **Design Inspirations**

The exhibition will also highlight the creative long-term collaborations between Chiso and several renowned Japanese artists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and presents Chiso as an artistic patron. This includes: a pair of painted folding screens on silk, *Otsu and Karasaki*, created in 1876 by the renowned Kyoto-based artist Kishi Chikudo; and a pair of embroidered, dyed, and painted silk hanging scrolls, *Apprentice Maiko and Cherry Tree* and *Skull in the Moonlight*,

created in 1890 also by Chikudo along with Chiso's highly skilled artisans. There will also be five hanging kimono fragments created between 1890 and 1891 designed by the leading *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) artists Sakakibara Bunsui, Umemura Keizan and Imao Keinen for Chiso. Keinen's four-volume deluxe design book, *Bird and Flower Album*, created in 1891 and commissioned by Chiso to inspire its designers, will be on view as well. In addition, there will be five volumes of the *Shotoku hinagata*, an influential 18<sup>th</sup>-century kimono design book by the famous print designer Nishikawa Sukenobu, on display from Chiso's exclusive design library. These innovative partnerships and the company's collection of historic print materials describe how Chiso has been able to reimagine and elevate the kimono form into a contemporary art practice—from a garment of utility and history, to a modern representation of design and fine art.

*The Kimono in Print: 300 Years of Japanese Design*, will be the first show devoted to examining the kimono as a major source of inspiration and experimentation in Japanese print culture, from the Edo period (1603–1868) to the Meiji period (1868–1912). Print artists during these periods documented ever-evolving trends in fashion, popularized certain styles of dress, and even designed kimonos. This dialogue between print and kimono design will be illustrated by approximately 70 Japanese prints, as well as a selection of illustrated woodblock printed books and paintings. The works begin with early prints from the late 17th century, when a more complex and sophisticated attitude towards clothing first appeared, as seen in the lavish prints of the floating world's celebrity kabuki actors and courtesans. Modern design books and prints from the early 20th century, inspired by or made for kimono, will demonstrate how the boundaries between print and textile fashion and design became more fluid.

Co-curated by Vivian Li and Christine Starkman, *Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso* is organized by the Worcester Art Museum in partnership with Chiso, the revered 465-year-old kimono design and production house based in Kyoto, Japan. Support is provided by the Fletcher Foundation and Michie Family Curatorial Fund. Research for this project was made possible by the Japan-United States Friendship Commission and the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies. Additional support is provided by Emily and James Holdstein and by Sandy Hubbard and Thomas J. Logan. The exhibition is sponsored by Cornerstone Bank and Imperial Distributors; media partners are The Boston Globe and WGBH.

*The Kimono in Print: 300 Years of Japanese Design* is generously supported by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. Early research for this project was made possible by the Japan Foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

### **Related Programs**

To launch *Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso*, the Museum will host an opening party on Friday, April 24 (6-7pm preview for Members only; 7-10pm for the general public). The evening's highlight will be the first look at the commissioned Worcester wedding kimono. The evening will also include Japanese and design-inspired entertainment, light refreshments, and a cash bar. Tickets are \$15 for WAM Members; \$25 for Nonmembers. Tickets may be purchased at [kimonocouture.eventbrite.com](http://kimonocouture.eventbrite.com), or at the door.

As part of its monthly Master Series Third Thursday program, the Museum will present a talk, “Kimono Fashion in Kyoto,” by Monika Bincsik, the Diane and Arthur Abbey Assistant Curator for Japanese Decorative Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art on **Thursday, May 21 at 6:00 p.m.** A reception will accompany the program, which is free with Museum admission. Master Series Third Thursday programs are hosted by the WAM Members' Council and sponsored by AbbVie. Additional support is provided by the Michie Family Curatorial Fund, the Amelia and Robert H. Haley Memorial Lecture Fund, the Bernard and Louise Palitz Fund, and the Spear Fund for Public Programs.

### **About Chiso and the Nishimura Family**

Founded in Kyoto in 1555, Chiso is one of the most prestigious luxury kimono houses in the world, creating one-of-a kind, custom and handcrafted pieces. Chiso produces approximately 4,000 kimonos per year—taking anywhere from 2 months to 18 months to complete, depending on the complexity of the garment. Handled by individual artisans and designers, the meticulous process begins on white silk fabric and can include at least 20 steps and the use of up to 50 colors. This procedure incorporates multiple iterations of silk reeling, weaving, cutting, hand-sewing, designing, sketching, starching, dyeing, steaming, rinsing, hand-painting, stretching, gold leaf-sealing and embroidering.

Initially specializing in the creation of Buddhist vestments worn by monks, by the 1860's Chiso's kimono practice had shifted from one of simplicity and practicality, to one of luxury and opulence directed at emerging wealthy consumers. Over its 465 years of existence, Chiso and the Nishimura family have been successful in reinventing and evolving their textile and garment business in tandem with the cultural, social, and economic revolutions of Japan—including their distinctive innovations of the *yūzen* (paste-resist dyeing) technique. Invented in the mid-17th century, this technique allowed for the use of colorful designs for kimonos, while avoiding any challenges to the sumptuary laws of the time, which allowed only the samurai elite the use of embroidered silk in their clothes. The *yūzen* technique, paired with Chiso's innovative designs, allowed for the use of colorful patterns. As a result, Chiso has led the industry as a pioneer in Japanese art and textiles, winning awards at international presentations in Japan as well as overseas.

It is this ambition for transformation, innovation and reinvention—along with Chiso's emphasis on unparalleled technique and craftsmanship—that has maintained the brand's legacy and reputation. Today, as the demand for the kimono continues to shift, Chiso's value remains in their continued commitment to authenticity, exceptionality, and the transmission of Japanese ideas about nature, beauty and culture.

### **About the Worcester Art Museum**

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3,000 BC to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—

including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists.

Since its founding in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum has assembled a collection of 38,000 objects: from the ancient Near East and Asia, to European and American paintings and sculptures, and continuing with works by contemporary artists from around the world. WAM has a history of making large scale acquisitions, such as its Medieval Chapter House, the Worcester Hunt Mosaic, its 15<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish ceiling, and the Flemish *Last Judgment* tapestry. In 2013, the Museum acquired the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection, comprising two thousand arms and armor objects. It continues to commission and present new works, such as 2017's installation of the immersive *Reusable Universes* sculptural series and *Organic Concept* environment by Shih Chieh Huang.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and the third Thursday of every month from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$8 for children 4-17, \$14 for seniors 65+ and for college students with ID. Admission is free for Museum Members and children under age four. On the first Sunday of each month, admission is free for everyone. Museum parking is free. For more information, visit [worchesterart.org](http://worchesterart.org).

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