



ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM
presents



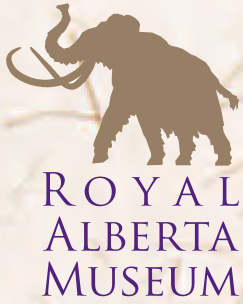
from
Geisha
to
Divva

The Kimonos of Ichimaru
May 27 - September 4, 2006

Organized and circulated by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria with assistance from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Museums Assistance Program

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NEWS RELEASE

May 25, 2006

THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM PRESENTS "FROM GEISHA TO DIVA"



A collection of 24 magnificent, rare kimonos and other personal effects that once belonged to Ichimaru, a geisha turned popular singer and entertainer in 20th-century Japan, will be on display at the Royal Alberta Museum from May 27th to September 4th, 2006.

From Geisha to Diva: The Kimonos of Ichimaru showcases intricately patterned and embroidered kimonos, obi (waist sashes), wigs, hair combs, fans, sandals and other belongings of Ichimaru, telling the story of the elegant and accomplished entertainer who rose from a background of poverty to become one of her country's national treasures.

Ichimaru was born into a poor family and became a geisha in the 1920s. She gained a reputation as an elegant and beautiful geisha who possessed a "nightingale-like

voice". She signed a contract with Victor Records and gave up the geisha life, although she would continue to perform in traditional dress for her entire career. She passed away in 1997 at the age of 91.

The kimonos in this exhibition reflect her taste from the 1930s to the 1970s. The costumes are preserved in almost pristine condition and reflect several different styles and methods of decoration. *From Geisha to Diva* also provides insight into women's history in Japan, and how gender roles, cultural values and stereotypes affect ideals of artistic expression.

From Geisha to Diva: The Kimonos of Ichimaru is a travelling exhibit, organized by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, British Columbia with the assistance of Department of Canadian Heritage, Museum Assistance Program.

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About Ichimaru



Known for her 'nightingale-like voice', Ichimaru was one of the first Japanese celebrities of the 20th century. During a career spanning 7 decades, she recorded thousands of Japanese folk songs and was instrumental in preserving traditional Japanese music during a time when Japan was undergoing unprecedented social and cultural changes.

Born into a poor family, Ichimaru entered geisha life at the age of 14 or 15. Determined to become the most accomplished entertainer she could, Ichimaru left her home province for Tokyo where she could study with the best teachers. In a very short time she became one of the most famous geishas in Tokyo and was praised for her beauty, elegance and skills as a singer and *shamisen* player. Her fame as an entertainer spread outside of the geisha districts and in 1931 the Victor Recording Company signed Ichimaru to an exclusive recording contract. 1933 was a very important year for Ichimaru's singing career. She recorded three songs in a row that became major hits and elevated her to superstar status in Japan. Following this success, Ichimaru gave up the geisha life and became a full-time recording artist.

Ichimaru continued to produce hit records throughout the 1930s and 1940s. She recorded traditional music but also commissioned music and lyrics by famous contemporary composers and poets. Noting the growing popularity of jazz music, she worked with an American composer to record the "Shamisen Boogie Woogie". The Second World War interrupted her recording career but only for a short while. She issued her first new recording in 4 years in 1948 and in 1949 starred in her own radio program, the "Mitsukoshi Calendar of Songs". It remained on the air for the next 10 years. In 1950, Ichimaru performed in Hawaii. She was the first Japanese performer to be invited abroad following the end of the war.

Ichimaru continued to perform and record into the 1990s. She was a popular guest on national television and always appeared in traditional kimono. Although Ichimaru only spent a short period as a geisha, she maintained the time-honoured ways and dress of the geisha throughout her life. Tradition was very important to Ichimaru and in her later years she devoted herself to promoting and teaching traditional music. In 1981 she was awarded the 4th Imperial Order of Precious Treasures by the government of Japan for her work in preserving the music from the Nakamura school of *Edo Ko-uta*.

When Ichimaru died in 1997 at the age of 91, she left a lasting legacy of music and artistry. The kimono and belongings in the exhibit *From Geisha to Diva: The Kimonos of Ichimaru* are a testament to her taste, refinement and dedication to preserving the traditional ideals of Japanese culture.

I sometimes wondered if my life as a woman had been a happy one. I questioned myself if I have chosen a wrong sort of life as a woman. When I was young, I also fell in love and with men, as young women do. My love, however, was never expressed. It was kept only in my heart, and I had to extinguish its flame. Are today's young ladies truly liberated? Their bold behaviour surprises me. Does true happiness depend on outward expression? It is difficult for me to understand this new trend because I was brought up within the strict rules of feminine modesty and manners. Well, I suppose what I see today is the result of democratization.

For me, singing is my life. That is all I have. I am aware that I have no other choice but to persevere and be satisfied with this life of singing. These days all I can think of is how to improve my art and satisfy my audience.

Ichimaru (translation by Michiko Warkentyne)

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About Geishas

Westerners often misunderstand the concept of Geisha and think of them as something immoral, tawdry or even medieval. In Japan however, the occupation of geisha has a long and honourable history.

Geishas were high class, well-educated hostess-courtesans, who entertained wealthy, sophisticated and powerful Japanese gentlemen who wished elegance, culture and brilliant conversation in an atmosphere of refinement.

The geisha created a wonderful romantic mood for the enjoyment of men who were pampered and fussed over like kings. Association with geisha was desired not necessarily for sexual purposes but for their charming and gentle company.

They were status symbols for the wealthy and provided an air of respectability. The geishas aspired to provide an exclusive dream world of luxury and romance. Their great attention to their personal appearance and their incredible devotion to perfection in the classical arts and in conversation has made them highly respected guardians of Japan's traditions.

Since their early beginnings, geishas have entertained and were trusted by men of intellect like actors, poets and artists, and men of power like samurai, wartime generals, captains of industry, entrepreneurs, cabinet ministers, aristocrats, and even men of the imperial household. In their presence, some of the nation's most important business took place with ideas being freely discussed - deals were made, wars planned and plots hatched. These men knew they could trust the geishas' code of silence not to divulge what they overheard. A geisha's livelihood heavily depended upon discretion and confidentiality and part of the erotic appeal of these women was to do with this secrecy and mystery.

The geisha profession has lasted so long in Japanese society because it was infinitely more than just sex, it was an admired art form. In 1956, when the government abolished legal prostitution in Japan, those cultivated ladies, the geisha, were left exempt, implying to a large extent that they should not be linked to the oldest profession but more to that of exotic entertainer who sells her art rather than her body.



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The Transformation to Geisha

Geisha Dress

- Geisha always wear kimono. Apprentice geishas wear highly colourful kimonos with extravagant obis. Older geishas wear more subdued patterns and styles.
- The colour, pattern, and style of kimono is also dependent on the season and the event the geisha is attending. In winter, a geisha can be seen wearing a three-quarter length "overcoat" lined with hand painted silk over her kimono.
- Lined kimonos are worn during colder seasons, and unlined kimonos during the summer. A kimono can take from 2-3 years to complete, due to the intricate painting and embroidery.

Hairstyles

- Geisha hairstyles have varied through history. In the past, it has been common for women to wear their hair down in some periods, but up in others.
- During the 17th century, women began putting all their hair up again, and it is during this time that the traditional shimada hairstyle, a type of traditional chignon worn by most established geishas, developed.
- There are four major types of the shimada: the *taka shimada*, a high chignon usually worn by young, single women; the *tsubushi shimada*, a more flattened chignon generally worn by older women; the *uiwata*, a chignon that is usually bound up with a piece of color cotton crepe; and a style that resembles a divided peach, which is worn only by maikos.
- Geishas were trained to sleep with their necks on small supports, instead of pillows, so they could keep their hairstyle perfect. To reinforce this habit, their mentors would pour rice around the base of the support. If the geisha's head rolled off the support while they slept, rice would stick to their hair and face.
- Many modern geishas use wigs in their professional lives. They must be regularly tended by highly skilled artisans. Traditional hairstyling is a dying art.

Makeup

- Today, the traditional make-up of the apprentice geisha is one of their most recognizable characteristics. Established geishas generally only wear full, white face makeup during special performances.
- The traditional makeup of an apprentice geisha features a thick white base (originally made with lead) with red lipstick and red and black accents around the eyes and eyebrows.
- The application of makeup is hard to perfect and is a time consuming process. Makeup is applied before dressing to avoid dirtying the kimono. First, a wax or oil substance, called *bintsuke-abura*, is applied to the skin. Next, white powder is mixed with water into a paste and applied with a bamboo brush.
- The white makeup covers the face, neck, chest and hands, with two or three unwhitened areas (forming a "W" or "V" shape) left on the nape, to accentuate this traditionally erotic area, and a line of bare skin around the hairline, which creates the illusion of a mask.

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Geisha Speak

Geisha: literally art-person, or person of the arts are traditional Japanese artist-entertainers. In the Kansai region the terms **geiko** and, for apprentice geishas, **maiko** have also been used since the Meiji Restoration (1869). Geishas were very common in the 18th and 19th centuries; they still exist today, although their numbers are dwindling.

The geisha community was known as *karyukai* meaning "the flower and willow world". The geisha households were called *okiya*.

They played three types of instruments:

- The *shamisen* - a three stringed banjo-like instrument.
- The *tsutsumi* - a small drum played on the shoulder.
- The *kodaiko* - a small drum played with wooden sticks.

Their dances *nihon buyo* or *jiutamai* were much revered in the geisha arts and were partially derived from the *No* and *Kabuki* theatre of the day.

Kabuki: a form of traditional Japanese theatre. Kabuki theatre is known for the stylization of its drama and for the elaborate make-up worn by its performers. Kabuki is sometimes translated as "the art of singing and dancing." These are, however,

ateji, characters that do not reflect actual etymology, and the word kabuki is in fact believed to derive from the verb *kabuku*, meaning "to lean", or "to be out of the ordinary", hence kabuki can be interpreted to mean "avant-garde" or "bizarre" theatre.



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A Geisha Glossary



Bijin: beautiful woman.

Bin: the side locks of a traditional hairstyle.

Bon Odori: *Dance of the Dead*. A special festival honouring the spirits of dead ancestors.

Bontan Bake: type of make-up brush used to apply the oshiroi (white powder paste make-up) to the face and neck.

Douran: the white paste make-up worn by geishas and hangyokus. (Tokyo)

Eri: The removable collar/neckband of a kimono.

Eri Ashi: The painted prong shape at the nape of the neck of geikos and maikos. Originally, the hairline itself was in this prong shape, but now, it is shaved, and the make-up is painted to emulate.

Fue: Japanese bamboo flute.

Furisode: a kimono worn by girls and young women with long swinging sleeves.

Gei: art.

Geiko: Kyoto dialect for the word geisha. This term is sometimes also used in Osaka.

Geimei: the professional name chosen by a geisha/geiko.

Geta: wooden sandals/footwear, worn by both sexes.

Haori: a jacket that is worn by both sexes over the top of a kimono.

Hanamachi: "Flower Town" - a geiko/geisha community.

Hikizuri: trailing kimono worn by geikos and maikos and often in dance.

Iki: smart and stylish. Equivalent to the Western term, "Chic".

Kabuki: traditional stage performance, originally with an all male cast, even for women's roles. The recognized founder of Kabuki, however, was a female dancer: Okuni.

Katsura: traditional Japanese wig.

Karyukai: a contemporary term for the "Flower and Willow" (or Geisha) world.

Ketabo: false hair used in the styling of both natural hair and katsura.

Kimono: the robe-like national garment, worn on a daily basis by geikos/geishas and maikos.

Kouta: "Short Song" sung in accompaniment with the shamisen.

Koto: a 13-stringed harp-type instrument, played flat on the ground.

Maiko: literally, "dancing girl". Maikos are young girls who start their training around 15-16 years of age in Kyoto. There used to be maikos in Osaka, and the Tokyo equivalent is Hangyoku. (*Kyoto*)

Noh: a highly stylized traditional theatre performance once enjoyed by the members of the upper class in feudal times. Now enjoyed by all.

Obi: the wide sash worn around the waist, on top of the kimono, tied at the back.

Obi-age: a long piece of silk cloth tied around the body and tucked into the top of the obi.

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A Geisha Glossary cont

Obi-jime: a cord that is tied around the centre of the obi.

Okamisan: mistress, hostess. Proprietor of teahouse or shops.

Okiya: house where geishas and maikos live with their okasan. Independent geishas must be associated with an okiya.

Okobo: the high wooden clogs worn by a maiko.

Oshiroi: the white paste make-up worn by geishas and maikos. (*Kyoto*)

Shamisen: also spelled samisen, three-string banjo-like instrument used in dance and singing. One of the geiko's/geisha's main instruments.

Shikomi: the first stage of a young girl in becoming a maiko. Shikomi-san normally helps with the daily chores around the okiya along with helping out her onesan and okasan. She will also start classes in various arts, in anticipation of becoming a maiko.

Shimada: traditional hairstyle worn by geishas. There are a few different variations of the Shimada hairstyle worn by geishas and maikos for certain occasions.

Sui: refined taste and gracefulness.

Taiko: traditional Japanese drum.

Tsutsumi: traditional Japanese shoulder drum.

Uta: a song.

Wafuku: traditional Japanese dress.

Yofuku: western style dress.

Yukata: cotton kimono worn in summer months.

Zashiki gei: dance, music and singing performances by geishas and maikos in a zashiki.

Zori: thong/flip-flop style of footwear.



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About the Kimono

The kimono was influenced by the Chinese Hanfu through extensive cultural exchanges between the two countries starting in the 5th century.

The modern kimono began to take shape during Japan's Heian period (794–1192 ce). Since then, the basic shape of both men's and women's kimonos has remained essentially unchanged.

Traditionally, all women's kimonos are basically one size. Tucks and folds in the fabric accommodate different body heights and shapes.

Kimonos are made from a single bolt of kimono fabric. The bolts come in standard dimensions, and all the fabric is used in the making of the kimono.

All traditional kimonos are sewn by hand, and the fabrics from which they are created are also frequently hand made and hand decorated.

Various techniques such as yuzen dye resist (made with a rice paste), shibori, as well as hand painting are incorporated into the kimono which governs where the pattern is distributed and if it is a singular or a repeating pattern.

Repeating patterns that cover a large section of the kimono are traditionally done with the yuzen resist technique and a stencil.

In the past, a kimono would often be entirely taken apart for washing, and then re-sewn for wearing. Modern fabrics and cleaning methods have been found that eliminate this need. However, the washing of kimonos in the traditional way can still be found.

There are styles of kimonos for various occasions, ranging from extremely formal to very casual. The level of formality of a woman's kimono is determined by the shape (mostly the length of the sleeves), pattern and fabric, and also the color.

Men's kimonos are usually one basic shape and are mainly worn in subdued colors.

Formality is determined by the type and color of accessories, the fabric and the number or absence of *kamon* (family crests).

Silk is the most desirable, and most formal, fabric. Cotton is more casual. These days there are polyester kimonos as well; they are generally more casual.

Kimonos can be expensive. A woman's kimono may easily exceed US\$10,000; a complete kimono outfit, with kimono, undergarments, obi, ties, socks, sandals and accessories, can exceed US\$20,000. A single obi may cost several thousand dollars.

There is also a thriving business in second-hand kimonos in Japan. Women's obis, however, remain expensive items. Even secondhand ones can cost hundreds of dollars, and they are difficult for inexperienced people to make.

Kimonos are never wasted. Old kimonos are recycled in various ways: they may be altered to make haori, hiyoku, or kimonos for children; the fabric may be used to patch similar kimonos; larger pieces of fabric may be used for making handbags and other similar kimono accessories.

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Geisha Summer Programming

May 27th

Miyabi Ensemble performs traditional Japanese music on Koto in kimono. 1- 3 pm

June 29th

Lecture: *The Geisha in Japanese Society*
7 pm start

In Japan, the occupation of geisha has a long and honourable history. Geishas were high class, well-educated hostess-courtesans, who entertained wealthy, sophisticated and powerful Japanese gentlemen who wished elegance, culture and brilliant conversation in an exotic atmosphere of decadent refinement. One of the most successful geishas was Ichimaru as evidenced by her beautiful wardrobe in this exhibition.

The lecturer is Barry Till, East Asian Art Curator from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Ticketed event (\$8.00 for adults, \$6.00 for seniors and youth)

July 6th

Presentation: *The History of Tea*
2:30 pm Local businesswoman, Anna Summerville, from Acquired Taste Tea Company will do a 20-minute presentation on the history and benefits of Green Tea.

July 12th

Lecture: *From Kimono to Harajuku Girls: A History of Japanese Fashion*
Cultural Communities Curator, Linda Tzang will do a lunch-time lecture on the changing fashion trends in Japan. (12 – 1 pm)

July 14, 28 and August 11 & 25 at 2:30 pm

Silk Painting Demonstrations:
Enjoy a demonstration of silk painting in the exhibition's programming room. Watch Anne Hill, a skilled silk painter, and then try it for yourself to gain an even better appreciation for the artistry on display. Included with admission.

August (date to be determined)

Presentation: Calgary Artist Hiroko Okamoto will do a demonstration of Ikebana flower arrangement.

August 17th

Presentation: *The History of Tea*
2:30 pm Local businesswoman, Anna Summerville, from Acquired Taste Tea Company will do a 20-minute presentation on the history and benefits of Green Tea.

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Museum Information



Admission:

Adult (18-64 years) \$10
Senior (65 and over) \$8
Student (with ID) \$7
Youth (7-17) \$5
Family (Two adults and children 7-17) \$28
Children (aged 6 and under) FREE

Annual Mammoth Pass: (Unlimited Admission plus benefits)

Adult (18-64 years) \$35
Senior (65 and over) \$30
Student (with ID) \$30
Youth (7-17) \$20
Family (Two adults and children 7-17) \$70
Grandparent (Two grandparents and children 7-17) \$60

Enjoy half-price admission on Saturdays and Sundays between 9 am & 11 am

Hours:

Daily: 9 am to 5 pm

The Museum Shop

The Shop is the perfect place to find unique gifts, including one-of-a-kind pieces of jewellery, heritage books and keepsakes, colourful clothing and toys from days gone by. Try our exclusive *Museum Tea*, and lose yourself in the *Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture* book. The *Museum Shop* carries a great variety of Japanese themed products that complement this exhibition including a Gallery guide, history books, geisha DVD's, Sushi sets and teapots just to name a few.

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