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Media, password: swmb

## **Konnichiwa and Grüezi**

### **150 years of Japan and Switzerland**

**19 April 2014 – 5 October 2014**

A special exhibition will take place at the Toy Worlds Museum Basle to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Japanese-Swiss diplomacy and friendship.

The first documented reference in Switzerland to Japan dates from 1522. In 1864, Switzerland finalised one of the first bilateral trade and friendship treaties with Japan, giving rise to a dynamic economic exchange.

The exhibition has been made possible with the cooperation of the Japanese Information and Cultural Centre of the Japanese Embassy in Berne, and the Japan Cultural Institute in Cologne. The sophisticated contemporary dolls originate from the travelling exhibition *Dolls of Japan – Shapes of Prayer, Embodiment of Love* and are provided by the Japan Cultural Institute in Cologne. Japan looks back on a long and unique tradition of dolls which is still alive today. The dolls in the exhibition are in the tradition of their predecessors and are captivating with their many delightful expressions which help us to learn, understand and appreciate the Japanese dolls.

The contemporary ceramic objects and decorations including the lacquer ware provide a fascinating insight into hundreds of years of Japanese history. They are characterised by both ancient traditions and modern influences.

The Japanese tea ceremony ceramics are famous in Japan and that is reflected by the very high prices for objects made by recognised potters. The craft is appreciated as much as painting as in Japan no particular art form is preferred.

The collection *Contemporary Japanese Crafts* is part of the *Japan Foundation Traveling Exhibitions*. Film presentations will give visitors to the exhibition an insight into the unique artistic manufacturing processes of Japanese dolls and ceramic objects.

### **Relationships and friendship between Japan and Switzerland**

It is very likely that the Swiss people knew of the reports of the Venetian merchant Marco Polo from the 13th century; however it was not until the 16th century that the first documented evidence of established relations between Japan and Switzerland was recorded in 1522. The St. Gall scholar and mayor Joachim von Watt published a revised work of the antique geographer and cosmologist Mela, which included the famous world map of Peter Apian from Leisnig including the Japanese Archipelago, which is designated as *Zipargi*. The beginning of the history of Japanese Swiss relations started 64 years later. When the Lucern city scribe Renward Cysat's *Warhafftigem Bericht von den Newerfundnen Japponischen Inseln und Königreichen* (*True report of new found Japanese islands and kingdoms*) was published, although he had never been to Japan the texts were translated from Latin, Italian and Portuguese from letters and mission reports. In particular it



is remarkable that Chinese characters were published for the first time in the German speaking area. The report was prepared during the first "wave" of European interest in Japan, when a Japanese delegation visited Europe for the first time at the initiative of the *Societas Jesu*.

The first Swiss man on Japanese soil was the mercenary soldier Eli Ripon, from the region of Lausanne. In the summer of 1623 he visited Nagasaki and maybe also Osaka on behalf of the Dutch East India Company. During the era of Dutch monopoly of trade between Japan and Europe, Swiss goods, above all watches and textiles, were transported to Nippon by this company. After the forced opening of some Japanese ports in 1854, the Dutch monopoly was broken up. Primarily, the textile industry in eastern Switzerland and the clock industry of Neuchâtel took advantage of this development and opened up a new market.

However, the first mission to Japan, in 1859, was unable to conclude negotiations. The second mission, which left for Japan in 1862, was more successful in their negotiations with the Tokugawa-Shogunate (Japan's last feudal government), which was then in decline. This was in 1864 in Edo (present-day Tokyo) shortly before their mandate ended. The result was the successful conclusion of the first bilateral trade and friendship treaties with Japan. A dynamic economic relationship developed. Textiles, watches and weapons were exported, and from Japan there came above all silk and tea.

The settlement and trade treaty of 1911, included a significant change in the right to purchase land in Japan, and was the basis of the bilateral economic relationship until the 21st century.

The Swiss community in Japan developed swiftly and Swiss merchants played a particularly important role when it came to silk exports. Until the 1920s Japan had been one of the most important markets for Swiss clocks and watches. The Swiss machine industry also benefited from the rapid industrialisation of Japan.

In the 1960s the economic relationship took a new upswing. In certain fields Swiss and Japanese enterprises became fiercely competitive. Today, Swiss companies are among the most important investors in Japan, and bilateral trade continues to reach record levels. Ties between Swiss and Japanese people have been further intensified by world exhibitions, the Olympic Games and the beginning of mass tourism.

Chambers of Commerce and trade associations, institutes and universities, town twinnings and the Swiss-Japanese cooperation in international organisations such as WTO paved the way for the extension of bilateral agreements on science and technology, and eventually for the Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (2009), the first treaty of its kind with a European country. On 1 September 2009, the Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (FTEPA) Switzerland-Japan came into effect. It is Switzerland's most important free trade agreement after that with the EC. Today, Switzerland supplies Japan mainly with chemical and pharmaceutical products, watches, machines and instruments. It imports vehicles, machines, precious stones and metals.

The mutual interest and friendship and the fascination of the two countries for each other remain unbroken to this day. There is also an ever-increasing interest in Japanese food among Swiss people.

### **The history of Japanese dolls**

The Japanese doll has greatly developed as an object of worship, a child's plaything, something that quiets the mind, or a combination of all three things.



The travelling exhibition *Dolls of Japan – Shapes of Prayer, Embodiment of Love* of the Japan Cultural Institute in Cologne presents the art of contemporary Japanese doll-making, a craft that is both bound by tradition and at the same time deeply rooted in the today's life of the Japanese. The dolls in the exhibition, in the tradition of their predecessors, captivate with their gentle and manifold expressions, enabling the viewer to understand and appreciate the Japanese dolls. Since prehistoric times, dolls have been made everywhere in the world, partly as objects of worship and magic, partly as toys with a human form and also as objects for artistic consideration and pleasure.

No other country has as many different types of dolls as Japan. In Japan, the commitment to creating unique forms is very much alive to this day.

The history of dolls goes back a long way – around 24,000 years. In Japan the first dolls appeared in the Jōmon period (10,000 to 300 BC). However, it was not until the beginning of the Edo period (1603–1868) that forms became more varied. The dolls began to play an increasingly important role and many different types were crafted.

Against the background of peace during the Edo period and the rise of citizenship, seasonal celebrations to avert disasters became increasingly popular. These included the festival of *Joshi no Sekku* on the third day of the third month and *Tango no Sekku* on the fifth day of the fifth month in accordance with the old lunar calendar.

Apart from the original idea of averting disasters, using dolls for decoration and the idea of enjoyment in itself became more and more important. This led to an improvement in materials and to more refined manufacturing techniques. Everywhere people developed local doll types independently, thereby creating the basis for today's rich doll culture in Japan.

### **The dolls of Japan**

Dolls in Japan are made from wood, paper, fabric and clay using a diverse range of craftwork techniques. The high level of artistry elevates these dolls beyond being just toys for children. They represent a distinct genre within the visual arts.

**Gosho-ningyō** or dolls associated with the imperial court represent babies and are crafted by painting the wood several times with ground oyster shell (*gofun*), polishing it and making it shine. Then the eyebrows, eyes and mouth are painted. The relatively large heads and the snow-white skin contribute to the image of a pretty infant.

**Kimekomi dolls** are made from wood and cloth scraps that are glued directly onto the wood with the edges of the cloth tucked into grooves. The word *Kimekomi* refers to the technique of clothing these dolls.

**Clay dolls**, as the name suggests, are made from clay, which is fired and then painted in different colours or with ground oyster shell. They can be found all over Japan, but every region has retained its own simple colouring scheme.

**Kokeshi dolls** are painted wooden dolls that date back to the introduction of the turning lathe. They are historically quite recent, as they were introduced at the end of the Edo period (1603–1868) as folk art of the Tōhoku area in the north of the main island Honshū. The special feature of the Kokeshi doll is that it is formed of a head and cylindrical body only, having neither arms nor legs.



The turned Kokeshi dolls are known for their simplified form and their bright colours. Today they can be divided into two basic types: *Traditional Kokeshi* and *Creative Kokeshi*.

*Traditional Kokeshi* dolls originate from folk art and are distinguished by their place of manufacture: Naruko type, Tsuchiyu type, etc. Each type has special characteristics and a special design. The manufacturing techniques used are passed on from master to student to this day.

*Creative Kokeshi* allows individual artists more freedom to create their own designs. Since the Second World War *Creative Kokeshi* have been crafted using original techniques of engraving and firing. They are highly appreciated for their unique craftsmanship.

**Costume dolls** are, as the name suggests, dolls with costumes made of dyed and woven fabrics that are used for decorative purposes. The design of these dolls is the most diverse of all. Usually, one doll-maker creates the head, another specialist sews the clothes, and a third expert produces the hands and feet. Finally the doll is assembled. Some costume dolls displayed at the exhibition, were made for special celebrations (e.g. the Girl's Day and Boy's Day celebrations), according to a specific theme or a particular art form.

#### ***Hina-ningyô* (dolls of Girl's Day)**

In Japan, families with little girls celebrate the *Hina-matsuri* (doll festival for girls) annually on 3 March. On the day of this pleasant celebration, with a tradition of a thousand years, every house is decorated with numerous dolls. The centrepiece is a couple formed by a male doll and a female doll. This is intended to bring luck to the young daughters.

#### ***Gogatsu-ningyô* (dolls of Boy's Day)**

Corresponding to *Hina-matsuri* for girls in March, families with little boys celebrate *Tango no Sekku* on 5 May. The house is decorated with warrior dolls in traditional armour with miniature weapons. This is the way to wish the boys a healthy and strong development.

#### ***Nô-ningyô* (Nô dolls)**

The *Nô Theatre*, with its origin in the *Muromachi period* (1338–1573) is one of the classical stagecrafts of Japan. The dancing Nô characters wear masks and splendid kimonos. This Japanese theatre form is traditionally performed or danced – and accompanied – exclusively by men. The exhibition displays some characters from Nô plays made into dolls.

#### ***Meisaku Kabuki-ningyô* (dolls from famous Kabuki plays)**

As famous as the *Nô* is also the *Kabuki Theatre* as a classical art form in Japan. Particularly well-known figures are also reproduced as dolls.

Kabuki Theatre is the most traditional theatre of the middle classes from the Edo Period (1603–1868) and includes singing, pantomime and dance. Kabuki is an essentially wordly art form and somewhat less formal than the older Nô Theatre of the Samurai which is dominated by Buddhism.

#### ***Ichimatsu-ningyô* (Ichimatsu dolls) and *Osana-ningyô* (child dolls)**

These dolls represent Japanese children participating in various activities in a realistic way. The term *Osana* means *little child*.

#### **Contemporary Japanese utilitarian and decorative objects**

In Japan the boundaries between visual and applied art (everyday art) are indistinct, the same applies to the commensurate values for tradition and innovation. A tea cup is appreciated as much as a painting, as in Japan all art forms valued equally.



Japanese craftsmanship can look back on a long history rich in tradition. As early as 700 BC, the Jōmon culture (cord pattern culture) produced the first low-fired ceremonial vessels with rich embellishments. Japanese craftsmanship was open to influences from China and Korea which were fused with the native understanding of art. Artists strived constantly not only to uphold traditions passed down the generations, but also to incorporate new forms and techniques into their creations.

In modern times, with the introduction of Western social systems and culture, Japanese crafts have not simply retained the traditional forms and decorative embellishments that have been handed down from previous generations. Artists have also attempted to express their own artistic temperament through their works. Some adopt traditional approach as the basis of their work, while others incorporate ideas from Europe and the United States, such as Art Deco, into their creations. Some intend their creations to be used as a part of our everyday life, and therefore emphasise practical functionality, whereas others take an avant-garde stance and seek to express new artistic concepts in concrete forms in their work.

Following the Second World War, crafts also developed in ever more complex ways and branched out in many directions. However, even though contemporary Japanese crafts may appear to be completely disparate, it is possible to identify several common themes.

Contemporary Japanese ceramics are characterised by variety and the juxtaposition of ancient traditions and modern influences. Tea ceramics are highly appreciated in the Land of the Rising Sun, a fact that is reflected by the sometimes very high prices demanded for objects made by recognised potters.

Typical characteristics of contemporary Japanese crafts include the following:

**Ostentation (the use of ostentatious colours, gold and silver)**

One major characteristic of Japanese art is the use of ostentatious colours as well as gold and silver. They are used in a variety of special techniques, such as the application of gold and silver leaf, the sprinkling of gold or silver dust, and the inlaying of gold or silver. Other metals are not used as basic materials. In many cases gold or silver are used together with other hues, such as vermillion, velvet dark green, or orange, to create unique and beautiful colour combinations. These colours are sometimes used independently and sometimes together with other hues. Though they are very ostentatious, the intention is not simply to express the raw power of gold and silver elements, but rather to suggest depth, velvetiness and gentleness.

**Quiet refinement (the national expression of the materials)**

In direct contrast to the use of ostentatious colours, “quiet refinement”, which uses simplicity to create a feeling of serenity, is another characteristic of Japanese art. The concrete expression of many Japanese crafts is marked by a direct emphasis on the properties of the materials themselves and a quiet austerity. Examples include pottery that is vibrant with the feel of the clay, woodcrafts with a fresh feel of natural wood, metal tea kettles muted with patina, and lacquerware with the soft touch of the lacquered surface. In each of these cases, the aesthetic result is the opposite of power or brilliance. The fundamental elements are calm, austere, intermediate colours; soft, matte surface textures; and calm organic, linear compositions.



**Crispness (strong shapes and colours)**

Craftwork in Japan underwent a significant development in the period extending from the late Taishō period (period 1912–1926) through to the early Shōwa period around 1920/1930s (period 1926–1989). It became established as a form of contemporary art, and with this move toward the contemporary came the introduction of new artistic ideas from Europe. In particular, the influence of trends such as Art Deco and Constructivism lead to the creation of a large number of works consisting of combinations of straight lines, circles, etc. Nowadays, many works go beyond utilising geometric lines and planes, and are also enlivened with a more organic structure that contain elements such as strong, sharp edges. Such works make a clear impression and eloquently express their contemporary sensibility. Also, the colours used in such works follow a similar trend, tending toward clear, strong hues.

**Fine detail (elaborate workmanship)**

It is often said that fine detail is a major characteristic of Japanese crafts. The emphasis on technique reached its apex in the Edo period (1603–1868), but it is undeniable that technical accomplishment has been important since the very beginning. Nowadays, works exhibiting technically intricate workmanship tend to be most numerous in the traditional crafts. This tendency can be seen in a wide range of fields in, for example, the creative design of decorative patterns. In many of the most sophisticated technical accomplishments of this type, the artists' skills impart to the work both aesthetic beauty and high quality.

**Deformation (the beauty of unevenness)**

Another important characteristic of Japanese crafts is the intentional introduction of deformation in the creation of bowls and the like. By destroying perfect shapes such as circles or squares, a form is revealed in which the beauty is hidden behind the perfect, the beauty that cannot be breached through reason is apparent. In this way, a special Japanese artistic insight, which is not accessible via rational thought of the Western type, is expressed. Deformation as an expression of beauty can often be seen in tea utensils. Today, more general displays of deformation can be found in crafts created as a means of self-expression by the artist.

**Flowers and birds (ornamentation on flower and bird motifs)**

Drawing flowers and birds as ornamentation for crafts goes back to ancient times. In particular, the use of representations of natural objects such as flowers and birds as an ornamental technique has been extremely common in both Japan and China. However, even such traditional motifs tend to reflect the artistic temperament of the times. So in contemporary art, flowers and birds are expressed in a contemporary way. That is to say, instead of conceptual motifs, one sees creative designs.

The travelling exhibition *Contemporary Japanese Crafts* is part of the *Japan Foundation Traveling Exhibitions*. It aims to enhance people's understanding of the wide variety of contemporary Japanese crafts and its various characteristics. The works are arranged by production material, such as ceramic or lacquer works, by artist or by historical periods. However, one can simply enjoy the beauty and creativity of the craftwork on display.



## **Facts & figures**

Opening hours.

Museum, shop and restaurant

from 10.00–18.00 daily

The Swiss Museums Pass and the Museums-PASS-Musées are valid for the Toy Worlds Museum Basle.

Admission.

CHF 7.00/5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free of charge and only in the company of adults.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair-accessible.

## **Media contact**

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