

Presenting Japanese Art: A View from Russia, Between East and West

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Profile

Ainura Yusupova is Senior Curator of Asian Paintings and Prints, Department of Prints and Drawings, the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. She had been at the Museum since 2007 and acted as the Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 2010 to 2016. After graduating from the Department of Art History at Moscow State University (MA: 1976–1981; PhD course: 1990–1993) she worked at several museums in Moscow, including the Moscow Kremlin Museums (2003–2007) and the State Museum of Oriental Art (1981–2003). She has curated several exhibitions of Japanese art at several Russian museums, with recent ones including:

Japanese Prints of the 18th–19th Centuries from the Collection of the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts (The State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow; 2008)

Samurai: Treasures of the Japanese Daimyo from the Collection of Tokyo National Museum (Organized by Moscow Kremlin Museums and Tokyo National Museum, Moscow; 2008)

Raku Ware: The Cosmos in a Tea Bowl (Organized by the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, the Raku Museum, and the Japan Foundation in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in Russia and the assistance of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; 2015)

Masterpieces of Edo Paintings and Prints (Organized by the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Tokyo National Museum, and the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan, with the special participation of the Chiba City Museum of Art and the Itabashi Museum of Art; 2018)

In Moscow the most significant collection of Japanese art is in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. The bulk of the Museum's Japanese collection once belonged to the Russian naval officer Sergei Nicholaevich Kitaev (1864–1927). Kitaev entered the Naval College in St. Petersburg in 1878 and went into active duty upon graduating in 1881. He was nominated for navigation abroad in 1885, and for more than ten years served on ships that sailed near Japanese shores, including the clipper “Vestnik”, the frigate “Vladimir Monomach”, and the cruiser “Admiral Kornilov”. Kitaev was promoted to the rank of colonel in 1909 for his brilliant service and was granted the highest military honors. He remained affiliated with the navy after returning to St. Petersburg until his resignation around 1912 due to failing health.

Kitaev was captivated by Japanese art and at that time collected a considerable number of artworks. He wrote that the works were bought “... in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Yokohama, Kobe and many other cities and villages; in the space of several years my agents probably traveled all over Japan ...” Kitaev also visited some Japanese artists and their families, such as Ogata Gekkō. Particularly interesting are his contacts with the descendants of Kishi Ganku.

According notes of made by Sergey Kitaev, his collection consisted around 7000 items, including 276 paintings on hanging and handscrolls and folding screens; 4000 woodblock prints; around 100 printed books, 1900 drawings and sketches by ink, 830

litography copies of the Japanese painters. It is also included 180 posters and 1300 photographs.

Moreover, some parts of the collection were probably lost or destroyed.

The first exhibition of Kitaev's collection opened in St. Petersburg in 1896. After being displayed there in the Academy of Art, the exhibition was shown in Moscow in 1897 at the Historical Museum, where Kitaev delivered several lectures on Japanese art. In the winter of 1905–1906, after the Portsmouth Peace Treaty was signed, a third exhibition was held at the Rerich's Society in St. Petersburg. The first catalogue listing of the collection was published in 1896, and reissued in 1905.

Upon retiring from the navy because of illness in 1916, Kitaev decided to go abroad for treatment. At that time he arranged to store his collection at the Rumyantsev Museum in Moscow, and from there it was transferred to the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in 1924.

Kitaev moved to Japan in 1916, next year in Russia happened Communist Revolution of 1917. There is no other information about his life in Japan except article in Japanese newspaper "Yokohama Bōeki Shinpō" published in October 16, 1918 about him and his collection and short information about his death in Yokohama in 1927. He never returned back to Russia.

The Museum of Fine Arts named in honour of Emperor Alexander III and attached to the Imperial Moscow University as a University teaching center open to the public at large was opened in May 1912.

A major collection of originals paintings and prints appeared in the museum much later, after the Communist Revolution of 1917. Almost all private collections were confiscated by the Soviet Government and transferred to the different State Museums. In 1923 the Museum of Fine Arts was granted independence of Moscow University, in 1932 it was renamed the Museum of Fine Arts, and in 1937 it was dedicated to Alexander Pushkin.

Most publications and exhibitions of the Japanese art at the State Pushkin Fine Arts Museum after WWII made by Dr. Beata Voronova (1926–2017), who was curator of the collection of Orinetal Paintings and Prints from the mid of 1950-s till 2007.

Recent Exhibitions of Japanese Art

- 2008. Exhibition "Japanese Woodcut Prints of 18–end of 19 centuries from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts". Commemorating to the publishing of catalogue raisonné of collection. 250 pieces.
- 2015. Raku Ware: Cosmos in a Tea Bowl.
Organizers: The PMFA, the Hermitage Museum, the Raku Museum, the Japan Foundation, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto. 170 pieces
- 2017. Yasumasa Morimura. The history of the self-portrait at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts.
- The display presented over 80 pieces from the collection of The National Museum of Art (Osaka), Hara Museum of Contemporary Art (Tokyo), The National Museum of Modern Art (Kyoto), and from the collection of the artist.
- 2018. Tadashi Kawamata. Para-site Project at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts.
- 2018. Masterpieces of Edo Paintings and Prints.
Organizers: The PMFA, the Tokyo National Museum, the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan, with the special participation of the Chiba City Museum of Art and the Itabashi Museum of Art. 135 pieces