

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
JUNE, 2025
ISSUE NUMBER 821

2025 Gendai Toshoku Exhibit

Tachi, katana, wakizashi, naginata, and yari section

Prince Takamatsu Memorial Award

Type: Katana

Mei: Higo koku Kanemitsu
Reiwa 7 nen (2025) 2 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun (69.7 cm)
Sori: 8 bu 1 rin (2.45 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)
Nakago length: 5 sun 5 bu 1 rin (16.7 cm)
Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Commentary

This is hirazukuri mitsumune sword. It is wide, there is a standard thickness, a slightly large sori, and the tip has sori. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume. The entire ji is well forged, and there are ji-nie, frequent chikei and utsuri. The hamon is mainly kogunome and contains angular shaped features. Some parts of the hamon are a suguha style. There are frequent ashi, it is nie deki, on the omote in places there are kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is straight with a komaru. The horimono on the omote is a sanko tsuki ken, and on the ura is a long bonji. The nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai. There are two mekugi ana. On the omote, under the mekugi ana on the center, there is a five kanji signature, and the ura has a date.

The sword smith, Kimura Kanemitsu came from Kumamoto prefecture, was born in Showa 54 (1979), and is 46 years old. He was the Kimura family's first son, and in the past, his family worked as okakae sword smiths for Higo Koku's Hitoyoshi domain's Aira family. In Heisei 10 (1999), right after he graduated from high school, he started working for his father as the school's ninth generation smith. After five years, he received his swordsmith's license, and the following year, when he first exhibited his work, he received the "hard work" award (the newcomer's award). Since then, he has received many awards, starting with the NBTHK Gendaito exhibition, and in other public exhibitions. Also, he is actively working to promote Japanese culture, and in July of Reiwa 2 nen (2020), when the Kumamoto area suffered from very heavy rain,

Kumamoto Prefecture's Hitoyoshi City's Aoi Aso Shrine 's 77 hono-to suffered from flood damage and he helped with their restoration. Three years later during the Reiwa period, he made the Reiwa Period's Go-Shinto (protective) sword and dedicated it to the shrine. Also, he made utsushimono, such as "Okadagiri Yoshifusa" and "Gokotai Yoshimitsu", and in Reiwa 3, with a "Sanchomo" utsushi work, he received the Special Prize (Kunzan award). In recent years we have clearly seen his skills improving in his work with long or short length swords.

This is the winning special award sword, which received the Prince Takamatsu Memorial Award. From the shape and horimono, at a glance we can recognize that this is modeled after the Uesugi family's heirloom "Suishin-giri Kanemitsu" which is a Juyo Bijutsuhin sword. The original sword's sori is 1 bu larger, so there is a slight difference, but all other details are present, and the same as in the original Kanemitsu work: the length, the slightly large saki sori shape, the poor fukura, and of course the horimono. The motohaba, the motokasane, the nakago sori and the subtle sori, the number of mekugi ana and their location are all the same as on the original. This is a copy or utsushimono, and the smith's enthusiasm is obvious. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, and from the moto to the tip, the ji is well forged. The hada pattern is clear with its frequent chikei, and among gendaito, this is not seen often in the hada pattern and appearance. As the notifice says, this is NBTHK tamahagane mixed with old iron, and we can clearly see evidence of interesting forging work. Also, the original hamon is a suguha style hamon mixed with ko-gunome, and some kataochi gunome. The upper half has slight vertical variations in the hamon width. This is as close to the ideal as possible, with almost the same width, gentle nioiguchi, and nioideki. The jigane has faint midare utsuri, and entire blade does not strongly suggest it is a new or gendaito blade.

This is the smith's highest award and was obtained after more than 20 years since he received his license, and was a result of his continuous study and painstaking efforts. We believe that his skills will continue to develop, and we expect that his work will be appreciated by future generations.

Commentary and oshigata by Ishi Akira.

Shijo Kantei To No. 821

Information

Type: Katana

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu (71.0 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 6 bu (1.7 cm)

Motohaba: slightly over 1 sun (3.05 cm)

Sakihaba: 7.5 bu (2.25 cm)

Motokasane: slightly over 2 bu (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1.5 bu (0.45 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 4.5 bu (4.4 cm)
Nakago length: 5 sun 9.5 bu (18.0 cm)
Nakago sori: very slight

This is shinogi tsukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not prominent. The blade is thick, there is a shallow sori, the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with strong nagare hada, the hada is visible, and there are ji-nie, chikei, and a whitish jigane. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the oshigata. The hamon has some areas with a unique hamon which has a specific name which was used before the smith changed his name. The hamon is nie deki, there are sunagashi, a worn down nioiguchi, and the boshi hamon falls down slightly towards the edge. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago to around the nakago tip. The nakago is ubu, the nakago mune is square, the tip is a narrow kurijiri, and the yasurime are a pronounced katte-sagari. There are two mekugi ana. On the omote, under the mekugi ana along the center, there is a five kanji inscription with a title. Below this, there is a six kanji signature with a "saku" kanji made with a slightly fine chisel, and the ura has a date.

On this smith's work without hi, his signatures are usually on the omote and ura and along the mune side of the nakago.

Tokubetsu Juyo Tosogu

Sanbaso-zu (a No play design) kozuka

Mei: Gyonen 65 juraku-ou (a 65 year old man enjoying life) Somin with kao

This a kozuka by Kiryusai Somin, who formerly was called Gose Somin.

The subject "Sanbaso" is one of the original No play programs "Shiki Sanba" which has three chapters, "Chichi no jo", "Okina", and "Sanbaso". Among these, the Sanba sarugaku (play) is also called "Sanbaso" and sarugakushi (actors) play a role. The play shows Kuro-shikijo with a mask, and dancing to celebrate a bountiful harvest from the god of rice fields.

The kozuka's omote ground is polished shakudo, the ura is shibuichi. The dancing Kuro-shikijo costume is carved in katariki-kebori, the black mask is shakudo, the skin is white silver. In the right hand, the bell and part of the costume are gold. In the left hand, the fan is gold and copper inlay, and each item has an excellent color. On the calm ground, the Sanbaso play emerges clearly with strong coloring. Also, part of the kuro-shikijo figure goes over onto the ura side. The ura is carved in katakiri-kebori without using colors such as zogan (inlays), and compared with the omote side it is full of expressive movement. The omote and ura have different jigane or grounds and expression methods, which were used to create images of motion in the kozuka, and we feel as if the Sanbaso seems to jump out from the back to the front. On this kind of

kozuka, the omote and ura use different designs for expression, and this is seen in the work of many other gold smiths, but this is a sublime work.

The artist Kiryusai Somin is a different person from Yokoya Somin who is supposed to have been the founder of machibori. He was a gold smith working at the end of the Edo period, and his real name is Uchida Gon-no-suke. The Uchida family is supposed to have worked on the Goto family's ground surface or jigane. Gon-no-suke himself is supposed to have worked under the Goto family's 14th generation Mitsumori preparing the groundwork for his efforts. Later, Somin used the Yokoya name, and introduced himself as Kiryusai Somin and Juraku ou Somin. Looking at this, from his katakiri bori, he admired the master smith Somin (an early Edo period smith) and tried to emulate his work, and we can see that he was continuing to study and improve his work with a chisel.

Explanation by Koiwai Daiki

May Teirei Kansho kai

Date: May 10 (the second Saturday in May)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan Auditorium

Lecturer: Koiwai Daiki

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: O-hara Sanemori

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly over 7 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with large itame, mokume, and nagare hada; the hada is visible.

There are ji-nie, frequent chikei, a dark colored jigane, and clear jifu utsuri.

Hamon: yakiotoshi at the moto; the bottom half is ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji, and komidare; it is a small sized hamon. The upper half of the hamon is based on suguha, mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, frequent nie, yubashiri, fine kinsuji, niesuji and sunagashi; around the monouchi there is a tight and worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: notarekomi, there are hakikake, and the tip is yakizume.

This tachi has a large koshi-sori remaining, even though it is suriage. Going towards the tip, the sori becomes gentle. There is a narrow shape, the widths at the moto and the saki are different, there is a small kissaki, and a classic elegant shape. Ko-Hoki's

active period is supposed to be from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period, and this sword shows the period's style. Also, the narrow shinogi-ji, rich hiraniku, and rich ha-niku are seen sometimes in Ko-Hoki work.

The jigane is itame mixed with large itame, the entire ji has large hada pattern, the hada is visible, and there is a prominent rough hada. There is a dark jigane, and the dark areas have clear jifu utsuri. In some places in the hamon, the hamon hada is prominent and rustic appearing, and Ko-Hoki characteristics appear everywhere.

The hamon is ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji, ko-notare, komidare, and is a small midare hamon. There are frequent nie and a worn down nioiguchi. Each midare peak in the hamon is comparatively clear, which is seen often in the school's work. In addition, the moto has yakiotoshi, and this is an important feature in judging Ko-Hoki work, and this is not seen often in the same period's Ko-Bizen school which has many works remaining.

Also, in Ohara Sanemori's work when compared with Yasutsuna's, who is supposed to be his father, many of his midare hamon are smaller, with fewer vertical variations, and the midare intervals are small, and in this tachi, especially in the bottom half, we can see this characteristic point. Also, in some places around the monouchi area, the nioiguchi is tighter or denser, and straight. His suguha work sometimes has a tight nioiguchi, and this tachi shows this Sanemori characteristic point.

The nakago is shown at 96% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 2: Tanto

Mei: Rai Kunitsugu

Length: slightly over 8 sun 4 bu

Sori: none

Style: hiratsukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada with a slightly visible hada. There are frequent fine ji-nie, fine chikei, clear nie utsuri, and a bright and clear jigane.

Hamon: there is a wide ko-notare hamon, mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, and togari. There are ashi, frequent ko-nie, some yubashiri, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: on the omote, it is a suguha; there is a round tip and a short return. On the ura the boshi is notarekomi, and the tip has a togari (pointed) shape with a komaru and return.

This is a Rai Kunitsugu tanto, and the smith is supposed to have left many tanto and wakizashi. This tanto is slightly wide, thick, and long, and without any sori. It shows a tanto shape from the end of the Heian period to the beginning of the Nanbokucho period. The entire jigane is a tight ko-itame hada. There are frequent fine ji-nie and chikei, and it is notably bright. An beautiful Kyoto style feature is conspicuous, and that is clear nie utsuri called "Rai utsuri". The hamon is comparatively wide, and mainly a ko-notare mixed with gunome, which forms a midare hamon. The nioiguchi and ko-nie

have a gentle and bright appearance, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) shows an emphasis on nie, and from these details, we can see Soshu Den Rai Kunitsugu's characteristic points.

Also, in voting, many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu. Speaking of tanto, they have very similar work, and at this time we treated that as a correct answer. In discussing their differences, if this were Rai Kunimitsu's work, his jiba nie are more gentle, his hamon width is comparatively narrow, and there are more gunome present.

Kantei To 3: Tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni ju Osafune Katsumitsu
Meio 2 nen (1493) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada mixed with some nagare hada; there are ji-nie, and along the hamon border there are bo-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha mixed with ko-gunome, ko-togariba, and angular shaped features. The entire hamon is small; there is a nioiguchi with ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and some yubashiri.

Boshi: There is a wide midarekomi yakiba. There is a komaru and a return.

Horimono: at the koshimoto on the omote and ura there are horimono. On the omote there is a gyo style kurikara, and the ura has kasane-bori with five bonji.

This is a wide blade with a strong saki zori. the difference in the widths at the moto and the saki does not stand out. There is a high shinogi and the nakago is short. This is an uchigatana shape from the latter half of the Muromachi period. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there is refined forging, and along the hamon there are bo-utsuri. The hamon is based on suguha and mixed with ko-gunome and ko-togari, and is a small midare hamon. This is different from many of Katsumitsu's gorgeous midare hamon, but from the mainly nioiguchi style, people narrowed it down to Bizen work, and with the shape, many people voted for sue-Bizen work.

The katana's biggest highlight is the omote gyo style kurikara horimono. Kurikara in a sword horimono has three styles, shin, gyo, and sou, and this is a stylized shin style kurakara, the dragon's face is in profile, and he holds the ken from above. This kind of stylized kurikara is seen in sue-Bizen work from Bunmei 10 to Eisho over several decades. From this, the period's active smiths, such as Katsumitsu, Tadimitsu, Hikobeijo Sukesada, and Yosozaemonjo Sukesada become potential candidates.

Also, the dragon's tail is wrapped around the sankotsuka twice before the Bunki (1501-3) period, the same as this, and after the Bunki period it is wrapped three times around the sankotsuka which is a difference. In addition, around Bunmei and Meio (1469-88) in the Sue Bizen period, many kurikara lengths are about 6 sun (18 cm). On the other

hand, around the Eisho (1504-20) period, they can be seen with slightly shorter lengths of around 4 sun 5 bu (about 14 cm), and it became more common to see horimono on swords. After the Muromachi period, due to an increasing demand for swords, it is a possibility that in the Sue Bizen workshops, horimono was made by horimono specialist, and that there were certain design standards, depending on the horimono style and the period.

Kantei To No. 4: Wakizashi

Mei: Hankei

Length: 1 shaku 5 sun 4 bu

Sori: slightly over 2 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame mixed with large itame and mokume; the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, and frequent thick chikei.

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with gunome; there are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, and abundant nie. Some places have rough nie, which form mura (clustered) nie. There are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: notarekomi with frequent hakikake which form a kaen.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi carved into the nakago.

The jiba (jigane and hamon) and the nakago style show Hankei's strong characteristic points.

The blade is wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not prominent. It is thick, there is a shallow sori and a slightly long kissaki, which are the Keicho Shinto period's characteristics. Among these characteristics, a sharp angled mitsumune is his characteristic point.

The jigane is mainly itame and mokume, there is a large hada pattern, the hada is visible, the entire ji shows rough forging, there are thick dark chikei, and this clearly shows Hankei's "hijiki hada". Also, in places, there are small gaps in the forging, and this also a characteristic point. The hamon is a small notare mixed with gunome, there are abundant nie, some areas have rough nie and mura nie. The entire hamon has a worn down noiguchi, and the border between the jigane and hamon is not clear, but vague. The interior of the hamon and the edge have frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. The jiba is supposed to be modeled after Etchu Norishige's work, and Hankei's individual style is clearly visible.

Also, at the nakago, the ha machi and the mune machi are wide, the nakago yasurime on the omote is a large suji chigai, while the ura is gyaku suji chigai, so the yasurime are different on each side. The nakago tip is Hankei's unique yaken shape. His signature is a slightly large unique two kanji mei, and we can recognize his strong commitment to his own nakago style.

Besides his name, some people voted for Satsuma Shinto Mondo-no-sho Masakiyo. If it were Masakiyo's work, just like Satsuma work, it would have hiraniku, be heavy, and the hamon would have nie mixed with togariba, a clear nioiguchi, and unclear jiba border sections just like Hankei.

Kantei To No. 5 : Katana

Mei: Yamato no kami Yasusada

Manji 3 (1660) Kanoe-ne 12 gatsu 13 nichi

Kinzogan mei: Yamano Kaemonjo Nagahisa with kao

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 3 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; some parts are blurred or unclear. There are abundant ji-nie, some chikei, a dark iron color, and on the ura shinogiji, a strong masame hada.

Hamon: The hamon is wide, and a notare mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, and some square shaped hakoba features. There are ashi, some yo, abundant nie, some yubashiri, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: Shallow notarekomi; there is a round tip and a short return.

This is a wide blade and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori and a short chu-kissaki. This is a typical Kanbun Shinto shape, and mainly on the ura side, the shinogiji is masame, and this is seen in many Edo Shinto works. The hamon is wide, and is a notare mixed with gunome. The notare forms square hakoba shapes. There is a nioiguchi with abundant nie, a worn down nioiguchi, and this is supposed to be Yasusada's characteristic hamon. Also, there is a prominently shallow sori and a rod- or stick-like shape. There is a sharp angle on the ihorimune which is another feature of Yasusada's work. Furthermore, there is a machi okuri (the machi has been moved up), and it is not prominent, but the original length was over 2 shaku 5 sun long, and this is another of Yasusada's characteristic points.

Beside Yasusada, some people voted for the same period smith Kotetsu, and Osaka Shinto smiths such as Sukehiro, Sukenao, and Kunisada. If it were Kotetsu's work, his hamon have a straight yakidashi, and mainly small and large continuous or fused gunome called Hyotanba, and a strong clear nioiguchi. If it were Osaka shinto work, the shape would be from the Kanbun period, and many of their chu-kissaki are long, their hamon have a nioiguchi with abundant ko-nie, and are brighter and clearer. Their notare hamon has vertical variations and toranba, and we do not often see square (hakoba) features.

Also, Yasusada's work has fewer dates, but he has many kinzogan saidan mei. In this case, the people conducting the cutting test are almost always from the Yamano family and by Yamano Kaemonjo Nagahisa, and most of these blades have katana shapes.

The nakago photo is 90% of the actual size.

Shijo Kantei To No.819 in the April, 2025 Issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To 819 is a tanto by Awataguchi Yoshimitsu.

Other than having a slightly small size, the width and thickness are standard. There is an uchizori, hiratsukuri tanto shape, and from this you can judge this as being Kamakura period work. Also, in this period, often the central surface or ridge of the mitsumune is wide when compared with Muromachi period utsushimono. At the machi area, the hamon has a yakikome, and we can say these details point to this being Kamakura period work.

In talking about the Awataguchi jigane, they are known for a tightly forged ko-itame hada with abundant dense ji-nie, and a beautiful nashiji hada. Yoshimitsu has this kind of nashiji hada, and he also has jigane mixed with itame hada and mokume hada, and a slightly visible hada, and it is pointed out that he has more of the latter type jigane. The latter style of forging was already seen in the work of Awataguchi Kuniyasu and Kunitsuna, and Yoshimitsu preferred this forging technique, and used it.

This tanto has a nashiji hada mixed with the latter type of jigane, and is often seen in Yoshimitsu's work. Also, he sometimes has a clear jigane with nie utsuri, and this also is a characteristic point.

The hamon is Yoshimitsu's bright and clear suguha, and the edge or border has fine details with variations, a nioiguchi with ko-nie, and high-quality workmanship. Furthermore, looking at the details, you can recognize Yoshimitsu's major characteristic points: around the koshimoto there are continuous ko-gunome, and around the monouchi area, the hamon width narrows.

The boshi is a suguha style, with a komaru and return. It has some hakikake around the tip of the boshi, nie descend down into the jigane, and form a stripe-like shape called "Yoshimitsu's falling nie" and this characteristic point is clear on this tanto.

The nakago yasurime are a shallow katte-sagari, the original nakago tip is kurijiri, and there is a large two kanji signature under the mekugi ana, on the center, and this is typical in his usual work.

Yoshimitsu's signature has a prominent round style and an angular shape style. Most of his kanji have a very smooth face or appearance, and they do not appear like someone used a chisel on hard metal, just like this one. Yoshimitsu paid attention to all kinds of details, such as curves, depth of the lines, and the first and last strokes, just like

writing on paper with a brush. At this time, considering the differences between closely related smiths, it is an important hint.

For another acceptable answer, Kuniyoshi has many tanto. His jigane are a very tight nashiji hada, often mixed with niju-ba. Also, the same as Yoshimitsu, he made many shapes, such as a standard width with a long length, a wide width with a long length, a short hocho style, with no sori or with sori, and he used many different shapes.

Besides the correct answer, many people voted for Kamakura period Rai school work and Shintogo school smiths. But looking at either school's smiths' signatures, it is hard to say that they inscribed smooth signatures.

Among the Rai school smiths, many people voted for Rai Kunitoshi. His jigane in places sometimes show a weak ji (i.e. Rai hada), mixed with nagare hada, and few examples like this are seen in the Awataguchi school's work. His boshi are komaru with a return, there are few hakikake at the tip, and his three kanji signatures do not match the hints.

Ryokai's signatures are two kanji made with a fine chisel but his jigane is whitish, there is a prominent nagare hada, the hamon has unclear sections, and his jiba (jigane and hamon) has a slightly weak feeling.

Kuniyuki's confirmed work includes one small wakizashi which was the No.12 Tokubetsu Juyo Token. The two kanji Kunitoshi has only two tanto, one is Juyo bunkazai, the Meibutsu Aizome Kunitoshi, and the other one was the No.61 Juyo Token. Both are wide for their length, have a slight sori, and the hamon and boshi are midare hamon.

Also, Rai Mitsugane's work is rare. Among the Rai school smiths, his forging is strong, just like Awataguchi work, but he does not have many soft Rai hada with a fine tight jigane. But he has many thick blades, his boshi are large and round with a long return, and some of them slightly fall down slightly towards the edge, and are different from this work.

Shintogo Kunimitsu's work, especially the tips of the boshi, has the same details seen in Yoshimitsu's dropping down nie call "okina's hige (an old man's beard)", so this point is understandable, but the hamon's other characteristics do not match. His work is similar to Kunihiro's and Yukimitsu's, there are more pronounced nie seen on the jiba (jigane and hamon), there are frequent chikei and kinsuji, and Soshu Den characteristic points become clear. Also, Kunihiro has few works, but most of them have horimono. Yukimitsu's kanji signature lines are less curved, and are rather linear, and his mei appear as a slightly hard looking signature.

Explanation by Ooi Gaku