

The Exhibition of Important Art Object Japanese Swords

2026.3.14(Sat) - 5.24(Sun)

1H:3.14-4.19/2H:4.21-5.24

1. KUNINAGA

Kuninaga is regarded as one of the leading swordsmiths of the Ko-Kyōmono works. He is said to have been either a son or a grandson of Arikuni, a student of Sanjō Munechika, and because he resided in the Gojō district, he is commonly known as Gojō Kuninaga. Fewer than ten signed works are known. In addition to an Important Cultural Property sword, his extant tachi include the former imperial treasure “Meibutsu Tsurumaru Kuninaga,” one preserved at Ise Grand Shrine, two designated Important Art Objects, and another formerly handed down in the Ikeda family of Bizen. Although his extant works are exceedingly rare, his reputation in the field is exceptionally high, owing in large part to the fame of “Tsurumaru.”

Although this tachi has been shortened (*suriage*), it retains a relatively deep curvature, and its somewhat slender form and small *kissaki* suggest the graceful tachi shape it originally possessed. The *hamon* is primarily in a *ko-chōji* style mixed with *ko-midare*, forming a fine, small-patterned undulation, and the style closely resembles the tachi preserved at Ise Jingū Shrine.

2. Awataguchi KUNIYASU

The Awataguchi school produced numerous master swordsmiths over the course of roughly a century, beginning with the six brothers led by the eldest, Kunitomo, and culminating in the late Kamakura master Tōshirō Yoshimitsu. Among them, Kuniyasu—the third son, known as Tōsaburō—is famed, regardless of the historical accuracy of the tradition, as one of the *Goban-kaji* (selected swordsmiths) appointed in the fourth month to serve for the secluded Emperor Gotoba.

This tachi, among his works, is notable for its prominent large *hada* and conspicuous *chikei*, giving it considerable historical value. The *kinsuji* and *sunagashi* that traverse both the *jigane* and *hamon* impart an old-style character reminiscent in part of early Ko-Hōki works, resulting in a truly distinguished piece rich in aesthetic interest.

It was bestowed upon Matsudaira Nobutomi (宜富) when he received the character “nibu (宜)” from Shōgun Ienobu (家宣) and changed his name accordingly.

3. Rai KUNIYUKI

Rai Kuniyuki is renowned as the de facto founder of the Rai school, which flourished in Yamashiro Province from the mid-Kamakura to the Nanbokuchō period. A relatively large number of signed works survive, most of them tachi. Their typical form features a standard or slightly broad width and a wa-zori curvature centered along the middle of the blade, characteristic of the Rai school. The hamon is generally based on a relatively wide suguha, incorporating ko-chōji, ko-gunome, angular elements, and small irregularities. A distinctive feature of this swordsmith is the presence of small additional tempered areas known as karimata-style arrowhead forms appearing above the angular ko-chōji peaks. These characteristics are considered hallmarks of his workmanship and are clearly evident in this tachi. Retaining its original (ubu) tang and signature, it preserves the dignified tachi form of its initial manufacture and stands out as an excellent example.

4. Niji-KUNITOSHI

Niji-Kunitoshi succeeded Rai Kuniyuki, the founder of the Rai school, and carried the tradition into the next generation. Since early times, debate has persisted as to whether Niji-Kunitoshi and Rai Kunitoshi were the same individual or separate swordsmiths. A dated work bearing the inscription Kōan 1 (1278) exists for Niji-Kunitoshi, while a tachi signed Rai Kunitoshi carries the date Shōwa 4 (1314) together with the age notation “aged seventy-five.” Based on these dates, Niji-Kunitoshi would have been thirty-eight in 1278, presenting no chronological inconsistency if the two are regarded as the same person. Accordingly, the identification of the two as one individual is now widely accepted.

This sword displays the robust form characteristic of the mid-Kamakura period. The hamon differs on each side: the omote displays a suguha-based pattern, while the ura is composed of fine, small-scale irregular patterns. The contrast between the two sides provides abundant points of interest.

5. Rai KUNITOSHI

The Rai school, whose de facto founder was Kuniyuki, flourished from the mid-Kamakura to the Nanbokuchō period. Among its leading figures in the late Kamakura period, Rai Kunitoshi played a central role in establishing the firm foundation of the school. As noted, debate has long persisted as to whether he was identical with Niji-Kunitoshi or a separate individual; today, however, the theory that they were the same person is regarded as almost certain.

This tachi was made when the swordsmith was eighty-one years old. Works from this stage of his life are typically marked by a restrained and austere style; however, the lively midare hamon and certain features in the character “kuni” (国) of the signature suggest the possible involvement of his son, traditionally identified as Kunimitsu. In any case, this tachi is

especially esteemed among Kunitoshi's Important Art Object designations and is said to have been presented by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshiteru to Uesugi Kenshin.

6. RYŌKAI

Ryōkai is traditionally described as either a son or a disciple of Rai Kunitoshi. However, based on dated works that survive today, it is considered more natural to regard him as having belonged to the same school as Kunitoshi. His style resembles that of Rai Kunitoshi, and he is particularly known for a gentle, suguha-based hamon. Characteristic features include flowing hada in the jigane with a whitish utsuri-like effect, a tight nioiguchi, a relatively subdued activities in the hamon, and occasional areas showing a softened, slightly blurred appearance. In this work, however, these elements are less pronounced than usual. At first glance, the sword appears to attain a level of workmanship comparable to that of Rai Kunitoshi or Rai Kunimitsu. This impression may stem from its relatively high shinogi and the emphasis placed on areas of flowing hada in the jigane, or from features traditionally associated with swords long attributed to Ryōkai.

7. Rai KUNIMITSU

Rai Kunimitsu is regarded as a son of Rai Kunitoshi and is renowned as the swordsmith who carried the Rai school into the next generation. His dated works span approximately twenty-five years, from the late Kamakura period to the early Nanbokuchō period. Among the Rai school, he is particularly noted for the large number of outstanding works attributed to him. His style is diverse: in addition to suguha, he produced swords incorporating small-patterned gunome and chōji elements, as well as others dominated by gunome and ko-notare forming larger, more dynamic patterns, which demonstrate the wide range of his workmanship.

This tantō presents a well-balanced form, with a finely forged, tightly packed ko-itame hada of excellent quality. The suguha hamon, with a tight nioiguchi, is relatively wide and remains in remarkably good condition. As a dated work exhibiting exceptional refinement and dignity among Kunimitsu's swords, it is a particularly valuable example.

8. KANEYOSHI(包吉)

The Yamato Tegai school traces its origins to Kanenaga, and its members characteristically used the character “Kane” (包) in their signatures. The lineage flourished and continued into the Muromachi period. Kaneyoshi was one such swordsmith, and according to one tradition, he later moved to Seki in Mino Province, changed his name to Kaneyoshi (兼吉), and founded the Zenjō school.

This tachi bears a date from the late Nanbokuchō period and is therefore of considerable

historical value. Notably, its hamon clearly differs from the typically suguha-based style commonly seen in this school, incorporating small gunome and pointed elements that recall the Mino-Seki works of the Muromachi period. Nevertheless, certain features affirm its Yamato lineage: the substantial thickness of the kasane and the placement of the swordsmith's signature beneath the date reflect Yamato characteristics, while the distinctly rounded mune of the tang is typical of the Tegai school.

9. MASAMUNE

This sword is listed in the *Kyōhō Meibutsuchō*, the official Edo-period register of celebrated swords. In recognition of his role in steering the Tokugawa house through the political crises of the late Edo period, including the bloodless surrender of Edo Castle, it was presented in the Meiji era by Tokugawa Iesato to Yamaoka Tesshū. However, Tesshū is said to have immediately offered it to Iwakura Tomomi, stating that such a reward was merely the natural duty of a retainer and should instead be bestowed upon one of the leading statesmen of the new government.

The sword displays a richly varied midare hamon and a bōshi. The interplay of nie and nioi produces abundant activity along and within the hamon. The workmanship vividly expresses the dynamic style of Masamune. It is also renowned as one of the large-scale works associated with the Nanbokuchō period, alongside such famous examples as Ikeda Masamune, Kote-giri Masamune, and the tantō known as Hōchō Masamune.

10.MASAMUNE

This sword was bestowed in 1638 (Kanei 15) by Tokugawa Iemitsu to Toda Ujikane, the first lord of Ōgaki Domain, in recognition of his merits during the Shimabara Rebellion (Tokugawa Jikki, Kansei Chōshū Shokafu). The itame-hada is well forged, with chikei appearing throughout, and its refined texture is especially notable. Compared to typical Masamune works, the undulation of the hamon pattern is not strongly emphasized, yet the shallow notare-midare is enlivened by bright nie that blends with nioi, producing a clear and vivid effect. Abundant activities such as kinsuji, nie-suji, and yubashiri also work energetically in the hamon, and the powerful bōshi adds to its presence. This work is a superb example of Masamune's artistry, showcasing quiet elegance with a commanding spirit. It is a masterpiece of peerless dignity.

11.TSUNAHIRO

The jigane is primarily itame mixed with large ō-itame and mokume, standing out clearly with a thick layer of ji-nie and abundant chikei. The hamon is a vigorously formed ō-midare incorporating gunome and chōji-like elements, with tobiyaki, yubashiri, and muneyaki

appearing throughout. The sword thus strongly preserves the tradition of hitatsura-ba that flourished from the Nanbokuchō period onward, particularly among swordsmiths of the Sōshū tradition. The bōshi is an active midare, and toward the tip it takes on a hazy appearance reminiscent of sand swept by a broom, turning back long with a pointed tip. Kinsuji, nie-suji, and sunagashi are prominent, and the tobiyaki, rather than forming the tight nioiguchi typical of later Sue-Sōshū works, are richly covered in nie, imparting a bold and vigorous impression. Although its length is somewhat longer in proportion to its width and it features crescent-shaped tobiyaki, if these characteristics are overlooked, the blade could easily be mistaken for an earlier work of high quality.

12. KANETOMO

This sword was made by Kanetomo, the son of Shizu Saburō Kaneuji of Yamato Province, who later moved to Mino. Relocating with other members of his school to Naoe in the same province, he established the Naoe-Shizu group and is traditionally regarded as the founder of the Sekishichi-ryū San'ami school.

Signed works by the Naoe-Shizu school are extremely rare, and this sword is a valuable example that conveys the characteristic style of the group. In form, it is wide and long, with relatively thin kasane and a shallow curvature—features strongly associated with the Nanbokuchō period. The jigane is itame with chikei, and the hamon is a gently undulating ko-notare mixed with gunome, formed in abundant ko-nie. Notably, the jigane includes areas of masame and displays prominent sunagashi, reflecting the influence of the Yamato tradition. The relative absence of ashi and yō anticipates characteristics seen in later Seki works, supporting traditional attributions.

13. NORISHIGE

Norishige is often associated with works in which variations in nie and chikei appear prominently, forming large and bold patterns. However, he also produced works characterized by a suguha-based hamon, and small-midare patterns in a more subtle and older style, following the Ko-Bizen and Ko-Hōki traditions.

This sword likewise belongs to that group. The hamon is suguha-based, incorporating ko-chōji, ko-gunome, and ko-midare, with kinsuji and sunagashi. The nioiguchi is somewhat subdued, contributing to its classical character. The curvature shows no marked tapering toward the tip, the ha-nie is particularly strong, and the activities are prominent within the hamon. In light of these features, the attribution (kiwame) by Hon'ami Kōchū is worthy of attention. The sword was bestowed by Tokugawa Iemitsu upon Ikeda Mitsumasa and has since been preserved within the Ikeda family. At the time of its designation, it was owned by Ikeda

Nobumasa, the fifteenth head of the family.

14. NORISHIGE

Although slightly compact in overall size, the sword is well balanced in both width and thickness. The mune is relatively high, producing a pronounced inward curvature (*uchizori*) that becomes more restrained toward the tip—characteristics of the so-called *takenoko-zori* associated with Norishige.

The *jigane* stands out with a dark tone and large-textured *matsukawa-hada*, with bold *chikei* clearly visible within it. The *hamon* varies freely in an unrestrained manner, at times loosely formed and at others boldly irregular, with abundant activity along the *habuchi* that creates a blurred boundary between *ji* and *ha*. The *nioi* and the *ha-nie* are strong, with *yubashiri* in places following the grain pattern suggesting the *hitatsura* effect. The *nioiguchi* is slightly subdued, and the *bōshi* becomes hazy toward the tip, reminiscent of sand swept by a broom. Taken as a whole, the sword is an excellent work in which the characteristic features of Norishige are vividly expressed. At the time of its designation, this sword was owned by Marquis Kuroda Nagashige, seventeenth head of the Kuroda family of the former Chikuzen Fukuoka domain.

15. Uda KUNIHUSA

The Uda school encompasses a wide range of styles, including Yamato-den influenced Norishige works, and Gō-inspired northern Sōshū-den styles, Sue-Sōshū, Fujishima Tomoshige, Nobukuni, and Rai-inspired types.

This sword demonstrates a refined appearance that could blend with works by Kunimitsu or Kunitsugu. Its width is slightly generous, the length somewhat extended, the curvature minimal, and the thickness substantial, making it an excellent example that faithfully reproduces the form of the late Kamakura to early Nanbokuchō period. These features point to its Uda-school origin: a whitish area near the blade groove and compact *nie* along the *bōshi*, flowing toward the tip in a broom-swept pattern.

16. TOMONARI

This *tachi*, measuring over three *shaku* in length, preserves the old-style silhouette characteristic of its time. The pronounced difference in width between the base and the tip, the deep *koshi-zori* curvature, the gentle tapering toward the point, the relatively small *kissaki* in proportion to its length, and the *tang* preserved in its original *ubu* state all contribute to its well-preserved classical form. The *jigane* shows a standing *itame hada* with *chikei*,

accompanied by jifu-utsuri, and also reveals the darkish steel tone occasionally seen in works of Tomonari. The hamon is a ko-midare with a subtle suggestion of ko-gunome, executed in a restrained and uncontrived manner. The wide nioiguchi is thickly covered in nie, with hotsure, kinsuji, and sunagashi along the habuchi. Altogether, the sword presents the quiet, elegant, and rustic jigane and hamon typical of Ko-Bizen workmanship, standing as a representative example of this swordsmith's style.

17. MASATSUNE

Among the Ko-Bizen works, regarded as the largest group in the formative period of Japanese swords, Masatsune is known for the comparatively large number of surviving examples and for the stable quality of his workmanship. Based on old sword books and the characteristics of the signatures, it has been suggested that more than one swordsmith may have worked under this name within the school.

This tachi shows comparatively shallow curvature among the works attributed to this swordsmith, presenting a slender tachi form that remains in its original ubu state. The jigane is based on a finely forged ko-itame, well compacted, and displays a distinctly archaic jifu-utsuri with dark bands standing prominently. The hamon is composed mainly of chōji with relatively large undulations, presenting a composition that shows a certain freshness. It is an outstanding work that reveals Masatsune's exceptional skill and progressive spirit, anticipating developments later seen in the Ichimonji and Osafune schools.

18. KUNITSUNA (Ko-Bizen)

Kunitsuna, the maker of this tachi, is now regarded as a swordsmith of the Ko-Bizen tradition. The workmanship of Ko-Bizen swords is highly varied, ranging from finely forged jigane with well-compacted grain to pieces with a more pronounced and coarse surface texture. The hamon also ranges from archaic suguha-based lines mixed with small irregularities to more novel compositions featuring prominent chōji with marked variation.

This tachi presents a slender and classical form with pronounced koshi-zori. The jigane is forged in itame mixed with mokume and flowing hada, with the surface texture standing out prominently. The hamon is characterized by relatively large chōji, showing noticeable variation in height and producing a highly dynamic appearance. Within Ko-Bizen works, it represents a particularly bold style, and the innovative character of the hamon also anticipates developments later seen in the Ichimonji and early Osafune schools, conveying the wide stylistic range of the Ko-Bizen tradition.

19. MASATSUNE

Ko-Bizen produced many swordsmiths from the formative period of Japanese swords through

the early Kamakura period. Among them, Masatsune and Tomonari are regarded as the two foremost figures. Several swordsmiths are believed to have worked under the name Masatsune, and many of the swords attributed to Ko-Bizen Masatsune are particularly noted for the excellence of their jigane.

This tachi presents a slender and classical form with pronounced koshi-zori. The jigane is based on itame mixed with flowing hada, with thick ji-nie and chikei of varying length and thickness running through the surface, creating a powerful and highly varied appearance. The hamon consists mainly of ko-midare mixed with ko-chōji, with abundant nie. Yubashiri also appear along the boundary of the hamon, further emphasizing the rich activities of nie. The pronounced nie activities seen in this sword anticipate features later associated with high-ranking works of the Sōshū tradition.

20.MUNEYOSHI

The Fukuoka Ichimonji school originated in the early Kamakura period with Norimune as its founder and flourished most prominently during the mid-Kamakura period. Among the swordsmiths active in the early Kamakura period, a group referred to as the "Ko-Ichimonji" is particularly notable. Muneyoshi was one of them and is listed among the swordsmiths who served Emperor Gotoba in the seventh month as part of the monthly rotating group of imperial smiths.

This piece features a vividly patterned jigane, characterized especially by a distinctive jifu-utsuri, with dark bands resembling thumb-pressed marks extending across the shinogi-suji. Such utsuri is only found in Bizen works from the late Heian to early Kamakura periods. The hamon is suguha, incorporating ko-gunome and ko-choji, giving the sword an elegant and classical appearance.

21.NARIMUNE

This piece is the work of Narimune, a member of the Ko-Ichimonji school who was active in the early Kamakura period. It is a slender tachi with deep curvature near the base, displaying an elegant silhouette. The jigane is finely forged with tight itame-hada and dense ji-nie, and a clearly visible utsuri appears on its surface. Notably, within the haze-like utsuri, irregular black spots resembling finger-pressed marks can be seen. The dark band rises high toward the shinogi, creating a jifu-utsuri characteristic of Ko-Ichimonji. As works by this swordsmith are extremely rare, this is a valuable surviving example.

22. SUKEZANE

Sukezane represents the height of the Ichimonji school in the mid-Kamakura period. It is said

that he later moved to Kamakura by order of the Kamakura shogunate, together with Saburō Kunimune of the same province and Awataguchi Kunituna of Yamashiro. For this reason, he is also referred to as Kamakura Ichimonji. While Yoshifusa and Norifusa—leading figures of the Ichimonji school of the same period—are known for their flamboyant chōji-midare, Sukezane’s works are distinguished by a markedly stronger jigane and hamon. His style combines brilliance with a powerful, robust character.

In this tachi, fine ji-nie densely covers the itame-hada, with chikei appearing in the jigane and midare-utsuri clearly visible. The hamon consists of chōji-midare mixed with gunome and notare. The nioiguchi is wide, richly covered with nie, and bright and clear. Within the hamon, kinsuji and sunagashi are visible. Altogether, this is an excellent work that vividly displays Sukezane’s distinctive characteristics.

23. NORIFUSA

Norifusa was, alongside Sukezane and Yoshifusa, one of the leading swordsmiths of the Ichimonji school in the mid-Kamakura period. Having moved from Fukuoka to Katayama, he is known as Katayama Ichimonji. The distinguishing features of Norifusa’s work are a strong, bright jigane and a chōji-midare hamon that, compared with those of Sukezane and Yoshifusa, tends to form somewhat smaller patterns with a slightly reverse slant to the undulations.

This sword shows a finely forged ko-itame hada that is tightly compacted and brightly refined. The hamon consists of small-scale chōji with finely formed ashi, and the midare displays a subtle reverse tendency, clearly reflecting the characteristic style of the swordsmith. Notably, this sword bears an orikaeshi-me (folded-back signature), in which the original inscription—normally lost during suriage shortening—was preserved by folding it back into the tang.

24. Osafune MITSUTADA

Osafune Mitsutada is regarded as the de facto founder of the Osafune school and produced many outstanding swordsmiths within his lineage, including Nagamitsu, Sanenaga, and Kagemitsu. Many of Mitsutada’s works survive as greatly shortened, unsigned blades later attributed to him, typically featuring jigane with finely sprinkled ji-nie and prominent utsuri, and flamboyant chōji-based midare hamon.

Although this sword has been greatly shortened, it retains a wide blade, pronounced curvature forming a wa-zori, and an ikubi-kissaki, presenting the dignified appearance characteristic of the mid-Kamakura period. The jigane is refined, with chikei and midare-utsuri clearly visible, and the hamon consists of ko-chōji mixed with ko-gunome, executed in ko-nie finish with a rather wide nioiguchi. In places, kawazuko-chōji (tadpole-shaped chōji) can also be seen, well expressing Mitsutada’s characteristic features. Preserved in healthy condition, it is a robust

and highly appealing example of his work.

25. NAGAMITSU

Nagamitsu was the son of Mitsutada, the founder of the Osafune school. His workmanship ranges widely, from flamboyant midare hamon based on chōji that clearly inherit the style of his father, to comparatively restrained suguha-based hamon with ashi, and he is known for his consistently high level of skill.

This tachi displays the characteristic form of the late Kamakura period, with pronounced koshi-zori and additional curvature toward the tip. The jigane, forged in itame with midare-utsuri, is generally well refined from base to tip. The hamon, predominantly chōji mixed with gunome and ko-notare, forms a bright and lively midare. Overall, this is a work in which Nagamitsu's technical mastery is fully demonstrated.

26. SANENAGA

Osafune Sanenaga is said to have been a son of Mitsutada and the younger brother of Nagamitsu. Among the Osafune swordsmiths of his time, he favored a gentle hamon based on suguha, incorporating ko-gunome, ko-chōji, and ko-notare elements.

This tachi shows a finely forged jigane of tightly packed ko-itame with a clearly defined midare-utsuri. Although the height of the tempering pattern is restrained, ko-notare mixed with gunome appears along the hamon, and the bōshi forms a shallow notare that turns back in a rounded manner. The workmanship presents a more subdued interpretation of his elder brother Nagamitsu's style, conveying a refined and composed elegance. During the feudal period, the tachi was preserved in the Shigetomi branch of the Shimazu family of Satsuma.

27. Osafune KANEMITSU

Osafune Kanemitsu was the principal heir of the Osafune school following Kagemitsu. His extant works span a long period of approximately forty-five years, from the late Kamakura period into the Nanbokuchō period. His style includes suguha-based hamon incorporating gunome, works featuring kataochi-gunome in the manner of his father Kagemitsu, as well as hamon predominantly composed of notare.

In this tachi, a fine ko-itame hada is tightly forged, with ji-nie and chikei, and utsuri clearly visible. The hamon prominently displays kataochi-gunome, intermingled with ko-gunome and angular elements, clearly exhibiting Kanemitsu's characteristic features. The forms of the kataochi-gunome avoid monotony and show rich variation. The presence of a Kenmu-era date inscription is also a favorable point.

28. UNJI

In Ukai-no-shō of Bizen Province resided swordsmiths such as Unshō, Unji, and Unjū, who are collectively referred to as the Ukai school or the Unrui (Un group). Their workmanship, while grounded in the Bizen tradition, also shows considerable influence from the Yamashiro style and from the Aoe school of neighboring Bitchū Province, making them a distinctive presence within Bizen swords.

This tachi displays a deep wa-zori curvature. In the jigane, a clearly defined dark-banded jifu-utsuri appears. The hamon is primarily a medium suguha, interspersed with angular elements and kataochi-style formations, and features wedge-shaped elements that appear driven inward into the hamon. The jigane and hamon together present the characteristics of this swordsmith, making it a representative and richly expressive example.

29. Osafune YOSHIKAGE

Osafune Yoshikage has traditionally been the subject of differing theories regarding his lineage, including that he was a disciple of Kanemitsu or of Chōgi. However, based on similarities in workmanship and the distinctive style of his signature cut with reverse chisel strokes, recent scholarship increasingly regards him as a swordsmith of a collateral line of the Osafune school, possibly related to Chikakage and Morikage.

Although this work has been greatly shortened (ō-suriage), it retains a wide mihaba with little difference between the base and tip widths, terminating in a large ō-kissaki, displaying characteristics of the Nanbokuchō period. The jigane is forged in itame mixed with mokume, the grain somewhat prominent overall. The hamon forms a relatively small-patterned midare composed of ko-gunome, ko-chōji-like elements, and pointed elements, with abundant ashi and yō, resulting in an irregular and highly varied temper line.

30. KANEMITSU

This wakizashi is constructed in the hira-zukuri uchigatana style occasionally seen in the Nanbokuchō period. Earlier examples are known, such as the famed “Gō Nakigitsune” by Awataguchi Kuniyoshi of the Kamakura period, and among Kanemitsu’s works, another surviving example is the sword known as “Gō Suijingiri.”

The jigane is an itame mixed with mokume and flowing masame, somewhat prominent in texture. The hamon is a gently undulating notare, strongly tempered with abundant nie. The dated example of Jōwa 3 (1347) represented by this wakizashi is, as far as can be confirmed, regarded as Kanemitsu’s earliest extant work in which notare predominates. The abundant nie in both jigane and hamon suggests the influence of the Sōshū tradition, making this blade an important reference for understanding the breadth of Kanemitsu’s workmanship. In

addition, the carving of a hara-mi ryū (a dragon whose abdomen is rendered like a sail filled with wind), seen in the orthodox Osafune lineage after Nagamitsu, demonstrates a high level of skill.

31. CHŌGI

The Sōshū tradition, perfected by Masamune, expanded its influence throughout the country during the Nanbokuchō period. Even in Bizen, where nioi-based tempering was the hallmark, a style known as “Sōden-Bizen” developed, with Chōgi regarded as its foremost representative. As the saying goes, “A Bizen sword that does not appear to be Bizen is Chōgi,” reflecting the characteristic strength of nie activity in his works.

In this sword however, the nie is somewhat restrained and nioi predominates. The jigane is an itame mixed with mokume, and the hamon consists of gunome interspersed with kogunome, chōji-like elements, and pointed formations. The utsuri appears clearly, and in comparison with his usual style, the Bizen characteristics are more strongly expressed. The sugata also suggests that the blade was shortened in the Muromachi period for use as a one-handed sword.

32. NAGASHIGE

The Sōshū-den style, perfected by Masamune, had spread throughout the country by the Nanbokuchō period, even reaching the Bizen Province, known for its nioi-deki swords. The influence of this style was no exception there, and the Nagayoshi line stands out as one of the leading schools. Nagashige is considered a swordsmith from this line, and is said to be the brother of Nagayoshi.

The jigane of this sword exhibits a tight, finely forged itame-hada from the base to the tip. The jigane shows thick ji-nie and distinct chikei, characteristics of the intricate folding technique in Japanese swords, capturing the exquisite appeal of the jigane. Among the various hada patterns, this one exemplifies the typical appearance of “itame-hada.”

33. Yosōzaemon-no-jō SUKESADA

Among the Sue-Bizen swordsmiths, many bore the name Sukesada and are known under various personal names. Foremost among them in terms of technical excellence is Yosōzaemon-no-jō Sukesada. His range of workmanship is broad, encompassing wide-based gunome, suguha, and hitatsura, all executed with notable skill.

This sword exhibits the characteristic form of the late Muromachi period, with a pronounced sakizori curvature and a somewhat elongated chū-kissaki tip. The hamon is composed primarily of high, wide-based double gunome, executed without flaw. It represents the typical

style of the highly accomplished Yosōzaemon-no-jō among the Sue-Bizen swordsmiths and is a fine example demonstrating his refined workmanship.

34. SUKETSUGU

The Aoe school of Bicchū Province is said to have originated with Yasutsugu around the Jōan era. Works of the school dating no later than the mid-Kamakura period are referred to as Ko-Aoe. Many of the Ko-Aoe swordsmiths, including Suketsugu, shared the character “tsugu” (次) in their names. Their signatures are typically inscribed on the ura side, and the file marks are in ō-sujikai, and this work follows that convention. The jigane, forged in itame mixed with mokume and somewhat standing out in the grain, forms the so-called chirimen texture (crepe-like texture), and the occasional appearance of sumihada further reflects the characteristic features of the school.

This small tachi was formerly owned by the political activist Sugiyama Shigemaru from the Meiji to early Shōwa periods. It later passed through the hands of the sword dealer Amiya (Ogura Sōemon) before coming into the possession of Nakajima Kiyochi, the second president of Nakajima Aircraft Company. As such, it is a blade that was cherished by several notable collectors.

35. TSUGUNAO

Tsugunao, together with Tsuguyoshi and Moritsugu, is regarded as one of the leading swordsmiths of the Aoe school in the Nanbokuchō period. Extant dated works bear year inscriptions such as Jōwa, Kannō, Shōhei, Bunna, and Enbun. He is particularly renowned for his skill in forging reverse chōji, yet as this sword demonstrates, he was equally accomplished in suguha, revealing a high level of craftsmanship.

The ownership inscription records Mōri Motoyasu, the seventh son of Mōri Motonari. His descendants continued as the Asa Mōri family during the feudal period.

The sword is also known by the name “Asashimo” (Morning Frost), derived from a tanzaku poem written by the Edo-period kokugaku scholar, poet, and calligrapher Katō Chikage:

「ぬけばかつ朝霜さむし真がね吹く きびのかたしがうてる此たち」

36. SUKEKUNI

Sukekuni has extant dated works bearing the era names Genkō, Gentoku, and Kenmu. Because some of his signatures read “Bishū Kokubunji jū Sukekuni” (Sukekuni, resident of Kokubunji in Bishū), he is commonly referred to as “Kokubunji Sukekuni.” His workmanship is varied. Some pieces show a strong Yamato character resembling the Ko-Mihara school of Bingo; others display a somewhat more flamboyant midare incorporating chōji and gunome.

Still others, such as this work, are executed in suguha with pronounced jifu-utsuri reminiscent of the Bizen Unrui group, demonstrating the breadth of his stylistic range.

This tachi is said to have once been owned by Itō Hirobumi. At the time of its designation as an Important Art Object in Shōwa 9 (1934), it was in the possession of Saitō Makoto, who served as Navy Minister and Privy Councilor.

37. SANEKAGE

Beginning with Yasutsuna, the group of swordsmiths including Sanemori, who is traditionally said to have been his son, as well as Sadatsuna and Sanekage of the same lineage, are collectively referred to as “Ko-Hōki”.

This tachi exhibits the old-style elegance characteristic of the late Heian to early Kamakura period: it shows koshi-zori curvature that becomes shallower toward the upper half, terminating in a small kissaki. The jigane features large-patterned itame and mokume with a pronounced surface texture, showing a darkish tone with some jifu. The hamon is primarily a ko-midare, with well-developed nie that brings out the texture of the hamon, conveying a rustic and subdued aesthetic. Signed works by Sanekage are extremely rare, making this an especially valuable example.

38. SADAHIDE

In Kyushu, swordsmiths had been active since the Heian period, and among the most renowned in Bungo Province are Sadahide and Yukihiro. Sadahide is variously said to have been either the teacher or the disciple of Yukihiro, and is also reputed to have served as the head priest-scholar (gakutō) of Mount Hiko, a major center of Shugendō practice.

This tachi displays an elegant form that does not descend later than the Kamakura period. It shows pronounced koshi-zori with a firm taper toward the tip; the curvature then becomes slightly subdued, ending in a small kissaki. The jigane is finely forged in ko-itame with well-compacted grain, mixed in places with flowing masame, and shows a faint whitish utsuri. The hamon is a slender suguha with ko-midare, the base being left unhardened (yakiotoshi). The nioiguchi appears moist and slightly subdued. The softly textured jigane and the moist nioiguchi of the slender suguha, together with the yakiotoshi at the base, clearly reflect the characteristics of early Kyushu works. Combined with its graceful appearance, this tachi possesses an old-style dignity and refined beauty.

39. KUNIMURA

The Enju school was active in Higo Province from the late Kamakura to the Nanbokuchō period. Kunimura is regarded as the founder of the school and, according to early tradition, is

said to have been the son of Hiromura of the Yamato Senjuin school who is the son-in-law of Rai Kuniyuki—thus making Kunimura a maternal grandson of Rai Kuniyuki.

This tachi displays a form characteristic of the late Kamakura period: the blade is of standard width with a noticeable taper from base to tip, with pronounced koshi-zori and additional curvature in the upper half. The jigane is finely forged in well-compacted ko-itame, partially mixed with flowing hada, and shows jifu-like utsuri. The hamon is a medium suguha with a suggestion of ko-gunome; on the omote appear kyō-saka-ashi running toward the tang, while on the ura there are conventional saka-ashi. As a rare signed work by Kunimura, and one that retains a healthy form despite having been shortened, it offers much of interest. The presence of kyō-saka-ashi further suggests a connection with the Rai school.

40. Ohara SANEMORI

Beginning with Yasutsuna, the group of swordsmiths including Sanemori, who is traditionally said to have been his son, as well as Sadatsuna and Sanekage of the same lineage, are collectively referred to as “Ko-Hōki”. Extant works by Sanemori are exceedingly rare.

This tachi exhibits a typical form of the late Heian to early Kamakura period: it shows koshi-zori curvature that becomes shallower toward the upper half, terminating in a small kissaki. The jigane displays large-patterned ō-itame with a pronounced surface texture overall, and showing a darkish tone, clearly demonstrating the characteristic features of Ko-Hōki works. The hamon is primarily a ko-midare, with abundant nie that brings out the texture of the hamon; kinsuji and sunagashi also intertwine intricately, creating rich variation and imparting an old-style elegance to the piece.

41. YUKIHIRA

Among the swordsmiths of the so-called Kyushu Koten school, Yukihiro ranks highest in both skill and reputation, and a comparatively large number of his works survive. He is variously said to have been either the teacher or the disciple of Sadahide, another prominent swordsmith of Bungo Province, and their styles closely resemble.

This tachi shows pronounced koshi-zori, the curvature toward the tip becoming slightly subdued and forming a small kissaki, presenting a form that does not descend later than the early Kamakura period. The jigane is forged in well-compacted ko-itame, mixed in places with flowing itame, producing a softly textured surface with a faint whitish appearance. The hamon is yakiotoshi at the base and consists of suguha mixed with ko-midare, displaying characteristics common to early Kyushu works, including those of Sadahide.

Although this tachi has suffered fire damage and has been retempered, it bears a dated

inscription of Genkyū 2 (1205). As dated works from the early Kamakura period are extremely rare, this piece is of considerable historical importance.

42. KUNIMURA

Kunimura, regarded as the founder of the Enju school in Higo Province, is said to have been the grandson of Rai Kuniyuki through his daughter. His craftsmanship closely resembles that of the Rai school, though his jigane tends to appear slightly whitish with a prominent masame pattern. The hamon shows a somewhat vague nioiguchi with gentle activities in hamon, and features such as the large, rounded bōshi are characteristic of the Enju school.

This sword, in particular, displays Kunimura's distinctive form with a long blade with a noticeable difference in width between the base and tip, a deep curvature, and a small kissaki. According to old scabbard inscriptions and historical records such as the "Tokugawa Jikki", this tachi was presented to the Tokugawa shogunate in 1693 (Genroku 6) by Maeda Toshiyoshi, when he became the lord of the Nanokaichi domain in Kōzuke Province, as a memento of his late father, Toshihiro. When it was later designated an Important Art Object, the sword was still in the possession of the Tokugawa family head, Iesato, suggesting its long tradition of being handed down within the Tokugawa family.

43. Umetada MYŌJU

Umetada Myōju, commonly known as Hikojirō, is said to have first used the names Shigeyoshi or Muneyoshi. However, among extant works, none bearing the signature Shigeyoshi can be reliably accepted. Of works signed Muneyoshi, three are known: a wakizashi, a tantō, and a yari. He later took Buddhist vows and adopted the art name Kakuho Myōju.

This tantō, made in katakiriha-zukuri, has a noticeably wide blade in proportion to its length. The hamon is based on ko-notare with gunome elements, formed in ko-nie with a somewhat tight nioiguchi. Carvings are applied on both sides. Altogether, it represents a quintessential example of Myōju's tantō style.

44. KUNISUKE

The first-generation Kawachi no Kami Kunisuke was a junior disciple of Horikawa Kunihiro. However, based on the style of his signature and workmanship, his de facto teacher is considered to have been Echigo no Kami Kunitomo. After Kunihiro's death in Keichō 19 (1614), Kunisuke moved to Osaka together with the first-generation Kunisada, another disciple of the same period, sometime after Genna 3 (1617), and became one of the founders of the Osaka shintō tradition.

This sword exhibits the characteristic yakidashi of Osaka shintō, followed by a hamon of gunome and chōji rendered beautifully in nie. From this hamon, executed without disruption, one can discern the foundations of the later tōran-ba style established by Sukehiro. Made five years before the swordsmith's death, it is regarded as one of his finest masterpieces.

45. SUKEHIRO

Sukehiro, together with Inoue Shinkai, is regarded as one of the two foremost masters who established the golden age of Osaka Shintō, and his reputation in the field is exceedingly high. He pioneered the tōran-midare hamon around 1676 (Enpō 4), which became immensely popular, and his suguha (straight hamon) works are also of outstanding quality and highly esteemed. This sword with suguha displays the dignified form characteristic of Kanbun Shintō. The ko-itame-hada is tightly forged, with a dense sprinkling of fine ji-nie, giving both the jigane and hamon a bright, clear appearance that reveals Sukehiro's exceptional skill. The well-forged jigane has a delicate texture reminiscent of fine silk, and the hamon responds with a wide and clear nioi. This piece, made when Sukehiro was forty-three years old, fully manifests the true excellence of his artistry.

46. YASUTSUGU

The first-generation Yasutsugu was born in Shimosaka-go, Sakata District, Ōmi Province. He later moved to Echizen and entered the service of Yūki Hideyasu. In his early years he signed "Higo no Daijō Shimosaka," but between Keichō 10 and 11 (1605–1606) he was summoned to Edo, where he forged swords before both shoguns Tokugawa Ieyasu and Tokugawa Hidetada. In recognition of his skill, he was granted the right to use the hollyhock crest and the character "yasu" (康), thereafter changing his name to Yasutsugu.

In this sword, the jigane shows an itame-hada mixed with mokume, with a slightly standing texture. The hamon is based on a shallow notare, intermingled with gunome in succession; nie is well developed along the hamon, at times appearing somewhat coarse, and kinsuji and sunagashi are seen in places. These features clearly display the characteristics of the first-generation Yasutsugu. The ownership inscription names Honda Gorōemon, who is thought to have served as an Edo-based senior retainer of the Echizen Matsudaira family.

47. Nagasone KOTETSU

Nagasone Kotetsu was originally an armorer in Echizen Province and is said to have turned to swordsmithing after moving to Edo around the Jōō era. In his early period, when he signed "Kotetsu" (虎徹), he forged the so-called "hyōtan-ba," in which large and small gunome are linked together like a guord. In his later period, signing "Kotetsu" (厩徹), he produced the so-

called “juzu-ba,” composed of a succession of rounded gunome resembling a string of prayer beads. His technical skill has been highly esteemed.

This work is a rare example of a hira-zukuri wakizashi by this swordsmith. The brightness and clarity of the jigane and hamon are characteristic of Kotetsu. However, the workmanship differs from both of the aforementioned styles. The hamon consists of ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome, forming fine-patterned kuichigai-ba, and the bōshi is yakitsume, from which a Yamato-influenced character may be discerned. The sharp and decisive carving is also noteworthy, reflecting Kotetsu’s mastery of iron as a former armorer.

48. Sagami no Kami MASATSUNE

Sagami no Kami Masatsune was born in Tenbun 4 (1535) as the second son of the eighth-generation Senjuin Kanetsune, who belonged to the Nara school. In Eiroku 10 (1567), he established an independent branch and moved to Komaki Village in Owari Province. In Tenshō 19 (1591), he received the title of Sagami no Kami, and in Keichō 5 (1600), he entered the service of Matsudaira Tadayoshi, the fourth son of Tokugawa Ieyasu, under whom he was active.

This work is a slightly extended tantō with somewhat wide mihaba, its bold construction reflecting the characteristics of the swordsmith. In addition to the well-forged jigane, the hamon shows fraying along the edge with kuichigai-ba and areas of nijū-ba. Particularly noteworthy is the dense openwork carving, which is rare for him. Openwork carving itself is uncommon throughout sword history, and the composition of the kurikara motif on this piece bears a relatively close resemblance to examples seen in Sue-Bizen works, suggesting the possibility of reference or influence.

49. KUNIKANE

The first-generation Kunikane was born in Bunroku 1 (1592) in Kokubun-Wakabayashi, Miyagi District, Ōshū Province (present-day Sendai). In Keichō 19 (1614), by order of his lord, he went to Kyoto and is said to have studied under Etchū no Kami Masatoshi. In Shōhō 2 (1645), at the age of fifty-four, he retired and passed on the headship of the family, yet he continued forging swords thereafter and died in Kanbun 4 (1664) at the age of seventy-three. His style consistently adheres to the Yamato Hōshō tradition. In this work as well, the shinogi is high and the jigane is in masame, with chikei running along the grain and at times forming striped patterns, clearly expressing these characteristics. In addition, compared with his usual works, the hamon here shows more pronounced irregularity, and frequent nijūba and yubashiri appear around the monouchi, giving the sword a vigorous and spirited character.

50 .KANENAGA

The Gojō school, together with the Sanjō school, represents one of the principal traditions of Ko-Kyō-mono. Among its swordsmiths are Kanenaga and Kuninaga, who is famous for the sword known as Tsurumaru. Both are recorded in old sword books, though signed works are extremely rare. Kanenaga is said to have followed the lineage of Sanjō Munechika, while Kuninaga is regarded as either the son or younger brother of Kanenaga.

This tachi almost perfectly preserves its original ubu form. The jigane shows a finely forged and tightly compacted ko-itame typical of Kyō-mono. The hamon consists mainly of ko-chōji mixed with ko-midare, and both within the hamon and along its boundary fine activities may be observed. The nioiguchi is soft, with slight areas of mistiness. Together these features demonstrate, at a particularly high level, the typical midare-style workmanship of Kyō-mono. Combined with its extremely rare signature, this tachi conveys the true excellence of the Gojō school.

51.UNZI

In Bizen Province, several schools flourished, most notably the Osafune school, and the Ukai school was one among them. Because its swordsmiths characteristically used the character “un” (雲) meaning cloud, in their signatures, the group is also referred to as the “Unrui” (Cloud group).

In this tachi, the jigane shows a finely textured surface with abundant mokume, exhibiting jifu, revealing an Aoe-like characters. It is further distinguished by its rare long signature and dated inscription, which greatly enhance its historical importance.

It is said to have been treasured by Date Masamune, who laid the foundations of the 620,000-koku Sendai domain. At the time of its designation as an Important Art Object in September Shōwa 15 (1940), it was owned by Date Yasuo, the 18th head of the Watari-Date family, senior retainers of the Sendai domain. It was subsequently designated an Important Cultural Property in March Shōwa 29 (1954).

52. KANEIE

Kaneie is said to have pioneered pictorial-style handguard (e-fū tsuba). The appeal of his work lies in the finely forged iron plate marked with tsuchime hammering, the economical and carefully balanced composition, and the restrained use of color.

In this handguard as well, the iron plate is finished with natural hammer marks and only sparingly colored with inlay. A mountain temple is carved in the distant landscape. The natural quality of the tsuchime and the richness of the iron are qualities unparalleled outside Kaneie's work, and the composition, together with the subtly varied rim, is masterful. The piece

evokes the quiet profundity of an ink painting translated into metal, fully demonstrating the genius of the so-called “tsuba saint,” Kaneie.

Notice : During the exhibition period, some Japanese swords will be exchanged in order to present the collection.