



Berlin, 29. September 2015

INTERVIEW

"The Naumann Collection: The Tremendous Beauty of Japanese Art"

– Check against original text in German –

The exhibition titled *Tigers, Cranes, Beautiful Women*. Asian Art from the Klaus F. Naumann Collection opened on 8 October 2015. This is the first public presentation of certain objects from the Naumann Collection that were acquired for the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) in 2014 by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) with financial assistance from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung (Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation) and the Kulturstiftung der Länder (Cultural Foundation of the Federal States). Also to be seen are objects donated by Klaus F. and Yoshie Naumann. Alexander Hofmann, curator of Japanese Art at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, talks about the great generosity that Klaus F. Naumann, as a collector born in Berlin, showed towards the museum in Dahlem, as well as the display of new acquisitions in the future Humboldt Forum, and the special features of the exhibition.

What can visitors see in *Tigers, Cranes, Beautiful Women*?

The exhibition offers a multifaceted overview of many aspects of art in Japan, as it developed between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. A selection of such breadth and diversity has not been seen in Berlin for a long time and it will not be accessible again until the future presentation in the Humboldt-Forum. We do have a Naumann Gallery in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, but there it is only possible to show a small selection of objects. This time we are dedicating seven of the museum's galleries to presenting the Naumann collection in all its glory.

Among the highlights, without a doubt, are the large folding-screen paintings and the magnificent lacquerware, some of which is decorated with gold in-fill or mother-of-pearl inlays. Of the folding screens, ten first-class pieces are being shown in Berlin for the first time. Primarily used to divide interior spaces, they also provided a surface for pictures, often by painters who were very well known. For me personally, it is nice to be able to show these paintings in the context that is customary in Japan: in dialog with lacquerware and ceramics that were made at around the same time. To



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give a broader perspective, there are also small selections of Chinese lacquer work, as well as some Chinese and Korean paintings.

What is the significance of the Klaus F. Naumann collection to the Museum für Asiatische Kunst?

Until 1945, the Japanese collection of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst was considered to be one of the most important in Europe. However, more than eighty percent of this collection was lost during the Second World War. Much of it was destroyed beyond repair and a large number of items remain unaccounted for to this day. Despite their best efforts, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) were unable to make up for this loss. It is only thanks to the collection of Klaus F. Naumann that we have got anywhere near filling the gaps, through the purchase of East Asian lacquerware and his donation of his collection of mainly Japanese painting and ceramics in 2008 and 2009. Crucial in all this was the constant support that we received from the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin, the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, and the Kulturstiftung der Länder.

The Naumann collection has finally made it possible to convey the stylistic and social diversity of traditional Japanese painting in Berlin once again: from academic court artists and intellectual landscape painters to the painters of scenes from daily life in the entertainment districts of the big cities. It also allows us to give a direct impression of the great spectrum of techniques and motifs, ranging from sober monochromes to elaborately decorated lacquer. Items from other areas, such as the domestic ceramics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which gradually gained acceptance as art during the twentieth century, are only present in the museum's collection thanks to Klaus F. Naumann. The great thing was that Klaus F. Naumann knew the collections of Berlin's museums well, which meant that he was able to select meaningful additions.

Has this addition to the museum's collection had an influence on the planned presentation of Asian art in the Humboldt-Forum?

Definitely! We are now in a position to convey certain aspects of cultural exchange in East Asia even better. Before that, the Museum für Asiatische Kunst possessed, for example, only a few works by Japanese artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who were influenced by the centuries-old tradition of Chinese 'literati painting'. In this case, too, many



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items from the Naumann collection are an ideal complement. They allow us to demonstrate how Chinese works were received among certain groups of artists. At the same time, the comparison of Japanese and Chinese artists also illustrates how differently cultural phenomena could develop in the two countries. The topic of cultural exchange will certainly have an important role to play in the Humboldt-Forum. There will also be a focus on large-scale folding screen painting in one of the central galleries there. It is only thanks to the new acquisitions and donations from the collection of Klaus F. Naumann that we can present a broad thematic and stylistic range of these special objects.

How did Klaus F. Naumann become a collector of Asian art?

Klaus F. Naumann was born in Berlin. In 1950, he moved to England with his family and subsequently from there to Japan – probably rather by chance, as he once told me. In England, he once met the celebrated potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979), who recommended that he visit Leach's Japanese friend, the great master potter Hamada Shoji (1894-1978). In Japan, Naumann fell in love with the country, the people – and the art, which he first studied, then collected. In Naumann's own words: "[...] the tremendous beauty of Japanese art in its many and varied forms fascinated me from the first encounter. I have contemplated and lived with Japanese art for 55 years now, and this joy still continues." So he turned his passion into a profession, becoming a highly respected art dealer. Among his donations to the museum there are also several ceramic pieces by Hamada Shoji.

His passion for lacquer work brought him into contact with Beatrice von Ragué (1920-2006). Not only was she the director of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst for nearly twenty years, she was also an internationally respected expert on the history of lacquer art. The contact between Naumann and the museum grew ever stronger during the 1980s. From 2000 onwards, part of his collection was exhibited in Dahlem, initially on loan. This was continually enlarged, leading up to the acquisition of the lacquerware in 2008 and culminating in the donation of all the ceramics and paintings kept in Berlin. The current purchases and gifts finalized in 2014 perfectly complement the acquisitions and donations from the collection of Klaus F. Naumann in previous years and enrich the museum's collection yet further."