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Exhibition Photos
by Katsura Muramatsu (Calo works Co. Ltd.)



Exhibitions of Entrusted Artworks from the Century Cultural Foundation

Every year, one or more exhibitions based on the collection entrusted by the Century Cultural Foundation are held at Keio University. The Institute of Oriental Classics (Shido Bunko), which is charged with the preservation and management of these pieces, hosts these exhibitions around November of each year, with the cooperation of the Keio University Art Center (KUAC) and Keio University Library. The themes of these exhibitions are determined so as to highlight the unique features of the collected works, and in such a way that they also serve as a medium through which to showcase the outcomes of the bibliographic research in which the Shido Bunko specializes. There have to date been a total of nine of these exhibitions, which have been attended by both people working at or affiliated with Keio University and members of the general public.

About the Century Cultural Foundation

The Century Cultural Foundation was established by Yoshio Akao of Obunsha Co. Ltd. to preserve and pass down artefacts of calligraphic culture. It is engaged in the collection and storage of works of pictorial art and calligraphy, classical books, and arts and crafts, as well as educational and promotional initiatives employing such materials. The foundation's Century Museum opened its doors in 2010, and has since held quarterly planned exhibitions from its base in Waseda-Tsurumaki-cho, Shinjuku, Tokyo.

The museum has entrusted 1740 articles from its collection to Keio University, and these are preserved by the Shido Bunko, in addition to being deployed in its research and educational activities.

About the Institute of Oriental Classics (Shido Bunko)

The precursor to the Institute of Oriental Classics (Shido Bunko) was established in Fukuoka in 1938 by Takakichi Aso, the president of Aso Trading (now Aso Group), with the purpose of studying the cultural traditions of Japan and Asia. The Shido Bunko was relaunched in 1960 as an affiliate of Keio University, specializing in the bibliographic research of classical texts from East Asia based on the original institute's collection of around 74,000 volumes, which were entrusted to Keio to mark its 100th anniversary. The institute has since amassed a collection of around 175,000 volumes including entrusted artworks over the more than half-century it has been in existence. In addition to its international research activities, it is actively engaged in educational initiatives to foster the next generation and social initiatives to disseminate its research outcomes.

In 2010, it held an exhibition of its collection and entrusted artworks to mark its 50th anniversary, and also published a summary volume *Learning from the Ancient Books: An Illustrated Introduction to Bibliographical Studies* (Japanese only), through Bensei Publishing, which is widely used as an elementary textbook for bibliographic studies.

Treasures from the Century Cultural Foundation: Exhibitions to date

1. Handwritten Sutras of Japan

Dates: November 1 (Tues.) - November 17 (Thurs.), 2011

The handwritten sutras which give accounts of the Three Jewels of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) transcend the status of mere documentary written materials to be worshipped as objects of faith. Sutras from various eras have been meticulously preserved and passed on through dedicated efforts such as duplication and donation to shrines.

For the first exhibition of materials loaned to Keio by the Century Cultural Foundation, around 20 articles were chosen from the collection with an emphasis on representative handwritten sutras from the Nara to the Namboku eras. Also included were outstanding related pieces such as Suribotoko (Buddhist images printed in ink on paper or cloth, often placed inside a Buddhist statue), Kyochitsu (wrappings for a bundle of Kyokan, Buddhist sutra scrolls), and Kyojutsu (metal sutra cylinders). Visitors to the exhibition could get a glimpse into changing trends in calligraphic styles, and the beauty of writing tools and bindings.



2. Japanese Letters

Century Cultural Foundation Japanese Letter Collection

Dates: October 30 (Tues.) - November 16 (Fri.), 2012

[Venue 2 until November 30 (Fri.)]

It is said, with regards to calligraphy, that “the style is the man.” However, hand-written correspondence, in particular, is also of a nature which retains powerful traces of the writer’s personal traits and style. Although the function of such items was fulfilled at the point at which they were delivered to and viewed by their intended recipients, thanks to the fact that these materials have been preserved and handed down with great care to subsequent generations, they have come to be regarded as items worthy of appreciation. At the second exhibition, around 30 pieces chosen from the Century Cultural Foundation collection were presented so as to facilitate an understanding of the distinct nuances resulting from the differing social statuses and eras of origin of correspondence by members of the aristocracy, samurai and clerical classes, from the Kamakura era through to the Edo era.



3. Canvas for Waka - Poems inscribed on kaishi paper -

Dates: November 6 (Thurs.)- November 28 (Thurs.), 2013 [Venue 1]

October 29 (Tues.) - November 19 (Tues.), 2013 [Venue 2]

An utakai is a gathering at which people come together to perform waka. Poems which have been submitted for such a purpose are orated in front of those gathered. Waka are inscribed on large white sheets of waka-kaishi paper provided for presentation purposes. In principle, they are self-penned, and much value is placed on their being cleanly and beautifully written. Great care has subsequently been invested in their preservation to ensure that many waka-kaishi sheets from the Kamakura era onwards have been passed on.

At the third exhibition, 30 works of waka inscribed on waka-kaishi by members of the Imperial Household, aristocracy, clerical, and samurai classes, from the Kamakura era through to the Edo era, were chosen from the Century Cultural collection and presented as “canvases” to impart to visitors an insight into the various changes arising out of the transformations of era, purpose, and school of calligraphy which produced them.



4. Living with Calligraphy in the Edo Period

Dates: November 5 (Wed.) - November 28 (Fri.), 2014

The level of insight into cultured society of the past afforded by bokuseki, a form of Japanese calligraphy and a style of Zenga (Zen painting) developed by Zen monks, is virtually unparalleled. At times, seeing bokuseki with one’s own eyes can leave an impression as vivid as might be imparted by a photograph, invoking in the viewer a distinct sense of the presence and spiritual dispositions of these cultured members of society. This culture, which invested great care and enjoyment in writing, infiltrated broad tiers of the Edo period of Japan.

The fourth exhibition introduced the rich cultural history of writing that blossomed in early modern Japan, with displays of surviving calligraphic specimens of Edo, through which visitors could gain an appreciation of the elegant world of the literati, as well as materials allowing a glimpse into the role of writing in the everyday dealings of the people of that time.



5. The Art at Peace - Early Edo Culture through Books

Art at Peace - Early Edo Culture through Books (400 years since the Genna Armistice)

Dates: November 4 (Wed.) - November 27 (Fri.), 2015

The peaceful era which followed the fall of the House of Toyotomi in 1615 (the first year of the Genna era) is known as Genna-enbu. Enbu, derived from the Shujing of Chinese classics, means to lay down and store one’s arms, and thus the end of this period of fighting is also known as the Genna Armistice, with the transition into an era in which the pen prevailed over the sword expressed by the phrase Enbu-shubun. In contrast to the Azuchi-Momoyama culture, which is said to have been tainted by decadence and the pleasures of the flesh, the culture of the early part of the Tokugawa era, while perhaps less extravagant, is characterized by a subtle, reflective beauty of wholesome stability.

The fifth exhibition, which marked the 400th anniversary of Enbu in 2015, focused on books of the early Edo period which shed light on the nature of this beauty born of an era of peace. The exhibition was held in cooperation with the Nohgami Memorial Noh Theatre Research Institute of Hosei University.



6. Books on Antiques in Pre-Modern Japan

The Painted Past: Antiquities and publishing in early-modern Japan

Dates: November 14 (Mon.) - December 16 (Fri.), 2016

Cultural artefacts have an enduring appeal and a power to move which transcends the ages. Antiquarianism had many adherents among the samurai, noble, merchant, scholarly and artisanal classes of the Edo period. While not confining themselves to volumes which might be referred to as classics, these antiquarians cast their nets further afield to what, in modern times, are referred to as cultural resources. These include ancient calligraphic works and artefacts, but they also created reproductions, copies and replicas, as well as shared information on those items which they could not acquire, to ensure that antiquities endure today as a reminder of the past. These dealings of antiquarianism in early modern Japan would tie together with the flourishing of publishing in this era and result in the collation and publication of numerous volumes. There were also many who, rather than remain preoccupied with things learned from antiquities, applied the insights these afforded to their own creative undertakings.

At the sixth exhibition, a light was shone on the diverse interests which people of the early modern period held regarding the past, and exhibition visitors were given a glimpse into antiquarianism as it existed in early modern Japan, before it branched off into the divergent disciplines of history, literature, the arts and classics of today.



7. Kūkai and Books of the Shingon Esoteric Buddhism

Esoteric Scriptures and Kūkai

Dates: November 13 (Mon.) - December 15 (Fri.), 2017 [Venue 1]

November 13 (Mon.) - December 8 (Fri.), 2017 [Venue 2]

Kūkai (774-835) introduced systemic esoteric Buddhism to Japan from the Tang dynasty of China. His extensive activities included bringing Buddhist sutras and ritual implements back to Japan and composing many original books. Later generations portrayed his legendary achievements using the posthumous name of Kobo Daishi (Great Teacher Who Spread the Dharma), while other works would also be written in his name. The esoteric teachings of Shingon Buddhism were inherited by numerous branch schools, and diverse esoteric rituals developed according to the demands of the aristocratic and military societies of medieval Japan. Many books were composed on these esoteric rituals (ascetic practices).

The seventh exhibition introduced the achievements and legacy of Kūkai through his works and their commentaries. Along with shedding light on the work of esoteric monks in medieval Japan using classical books and Buddhist paintings created to accompany esoteric rituals, this exhibition gave visitors a sense of the spread of the culture of esoteric Buddhism by examining how esoteric practices and faith in Kūkai influenced other spheres, such as the arts and literature.



Even after AY2017, exhibitions were held as follow:

8. Calligraphy and Books of Zen Priests

Dates: November 12 (Mon.) - December 14 (Fri.), 2018

9. Bookworms / Bookfiends

Dates: June 3 (Mon.) - June 28 (Fri.) , 2019

Exhibition Venue |

1st exhibition was held at Keio University Art Space.

2nd exhibition was held at Keio University Art Space (Venue 1) and Keio University Library, Exhibition Room (Venue 2).

3rd - 9th exhibitions were held at

Keio University Library, Exhibition Room (Venue 1)

and Keio University Art Space (Venue 2).