

ENTERTAINMENT

Japanese ‘Stillness & Movement’ gallery opens at DIA

Michael Hodges The Detroit News

Published 7:01 p.m. ET Nov. 3, 2017 | Updated 10:33 p.m. ET Nov. 3, 2017

The arts of Japan, both traditional and contemporary, finally get the spotlight at the Detroit Institute of Arts with the opening Saturday of its new permanent Japanese gallery.

Creating the exhibition “Stillness and Movement: Art from Japan” was a two-year process. The result is a small-but-striking collection of objects — including an interactive tea-ceremony table and an architecturally distinctive tea house — arrayed in pleasingly uncrowded rooms.

“The collection includes not only traditional Japanese art, but also contemporary,” said museum director Salvador Salort-Pons, “and this is very important. It’s a way of saying that Japanese art is not a dead tradition, but an ongoing one.”

The contrast between new and old grabs the visitor right on entry.

The first two objects are a 17th-century Samurai helmet and an intriguing, abstract sculpture from 2015 by Tomoko Konno titled “Creature,” which looks a bit a crustacean sprouting horns.

Within that first room, among other artifacts, you’ll find a short video on Noh Theater produced with Tokyo’s Kanze Kyukokai Theater, a 17th-century statue of a Buddhist acolyte, a spectacular folding screen and the aforementioned high-tech tea table.

“If you’re familiar with the dining-room table in the European collection,” said DIA Interpretive Planner Alison Jean, “this is Version 2.0.”

She’s referring to the wildly popular interactive projection of an 18th-century aristocratic French dinner in the European decorative arts gallery. In like manner, the new digital tea-

table — created with the high-tech firm Tellart in Providence, Rhode Island — is likely to be a hit, particularly with youngsters.

But from an artistic standpoint, the real stunner in the first room is the folding screen by Suzuki Kiitsu, “Reeds and Cranes,” which stretches across an entire wall. With its tall silk panels covered by thin sheets of gold, on which the artist painted, this is a tour de force that effortlessly commands attention.

“It’s probably one of the masterpieces by this artist, and certainly one of the masterpieces in the DIA’s collection,” said Natsu Oyobe, curator of Asian art at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, who was part of the DIA planning team.

Most of the museum’s Japanese treasures have been in storage since the DIA’s 2007 reinstallation and reopening.

But as with its Islamic art collection, reinstalled in 2010, the museum is now moving to create designated rooms for its Asian artwork. Next year will see new galleries devoted to Indian, Korean and Chinese art.

Many of the artifacts in “Stillness and Movement” will rotate every six months, giving the museum a chance to showcase more of its collection, as well as protecting highly sensitive objects from too much light exposure.

Under no circumstances, however, should visitors walk out of the first room without turning left into the space housing the “Gyo-An Teahouse,” a remarkably beautiful enclosure created by abstract bamboo screens.

Designed by Shigeru Uchida, the celebrated designer who died last year, it’s a work of architecture that instantly summons up the stillness and reverence associated with the tea ceremony. Within you’ll see the simple tea set-up — vessels, a vase with flowers, a mat and hanging banner.

All items, including the teahouse itself, were donated to the DIA by the artists involved.

Also critical to the creation of the new gallery was the Japanese Business Society of Detroit, which contributed \$3.2 million to the “grand bargain” that resolved Detroit’s bankruptcy in 2014.

The society stipulated that one-quarter of that, or \$800,000, go to underwrite a gallery of Japanese art.

“The DIA is an icon,” said Takashi Omitsu, the society’s executive adviser and a museum board member for the past two years, adding that he very much admires the museum’s commitment to using art as an educational tool.

Saturday and Sunday only, the society and a range of Japanese companies are bringing 60 performers to the museum — a celebration of culture that will include master artists, dances, confectionery chefs, martial artists, tea masters and films.

If you’ve ever wanted to learn the Washi paper-making technique or how to make Japanese dolls, this is your big chance.

mhodes@detroitnews.com

(313) 222-6021

Twitter: @mhodesartguy

‘Stillness and

Movement: Art from

Japan’

Detroit Institute of Arts

5200 Woodward, Detroit

9 a.m.-4 p.m. Tue.-Thur.; 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Fri.; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat.-Sun.

\$14 adults; \$9 seniors, \$8 college students with ID; \$6 children 6-17; museum admission free to residents of Macomb, Wayne and Oakland counties

(313) 833-7900

dia.org