

SPOTLIGHT: Netsuke

Title of Piece: Example of Netsuke of Horse



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Year created: Edo Period (1615-1868)

Five most essential aspects of this work or art:

1. Netsuke means ne (root) and tsuke (to suspend or hang). Men who wore the traditional kimono robes had no place to keep personal belongings. The most popular was the INRO which was a crafted box with sliding beads on cords and the toggle that fastened it was the netsuke. The INRO first held the seal (red pigment stamp) then herbs and medicines and had several compartments.
2. They fell out of favor when they went to traditional dress. Now the artists still carve them from mostly the foreign market and those done well still demand high prices. They were sometimes signed by the artist. They were typically worn by men as women put objects in the folds of their sleeves. After they were not worn, they became objects that could be placed on a shelf, and even more delicate and intricate pieces could be created. Tourists would buy inexpensive copies as well.

3. KATABORINETSUKE was the most popular. This was a sculpture carved in the round typically one to three inches high. It was carved in the round into a three-dimensional figure. They were carved smooth as any sharp corner could damage the silk kimono. Some were long, almost like a short stick. Others can even be a trick or magic netsuke with secret compartments or hinges.
4. Typically, they were carved out of ivory. As the harvesting became illegal, they are now done with hippopotamus teeth or whale teeth especially the sperm whale. The teeth are more solid than the bones which are also sometimes used. Also ay typically were carved from boxwood which gave them the deep brown color. This actually was the first material used. Can also be done of bamboo, coral, metal or a combination of materials.
5. Netsukes became a way to display the Japanese culture. As they developed, they portrayed some of the rich folklore of the culture, such as the 7 rats on top of each other. They also reflected the religions of the people, crafts, trades also cared as Netsukes. Of course, animals were carved, especially those that were signs of the zodiac. They were a way in a culture that had limited avenues of self-expression, according to culture and law, this was a way that was acceptable.

Possible questions to use when discussing this piece with museum visitors:

1. What do you think it was of and how did they do it?
2. Why are there so any different types?
3. What could these tell you about the person who wore them?

Tour Type: Explore Asia

JSMA Collection:

<https://jsmacollection.uoregon.edu/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=11153;type=101>