

Japan Art Expo 2023, 3rd – 4th June, Utrecht, Netherlands

June saw the second Japan Art Expo in Utrecht after a prolonged hiatus following the covid pandemic and building upon the experience gained from the first JAE in 2018. An easy 30 minutes train ride from Schiphol Airport, the historic town of Utrecht serves as a convenient and picturesque setting for the Expo with its medieval and renaissance architecture and canal system contrasting with modern developments which includes the Jaarbeurs Event Venue, the location for Japan Art Expo 2023.

The Expo followed a similar format to 2018: a number of exhibiting dealers and a series of lectures focused on Japanese art. At this year's event there were three Japanese dealers, Ginza Seiyudo, Nihonto Hataya and (despite the potentially misleading name) Chicago Regimentals. In addition there were seven European dealers from Italy, France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Japanese dealers exhibited a range of items from fittings, through blades to armour and various supporting accoutrements such as jinbaori, jingasa and katana kake. Ginza Seiyudo, a large Ginza based dealer, displayed exclusively fittings and blades and it was an excellent opportunity to view much of the inventory they feature on their extensive website. Seeing an item in hand is always preferable to buying from website photographs. The fittings ranged from iron sukashi to kinko including a number of excellent mainline Goto items. All they displayed was of excellent quality and with NBTHK kanteisho. The other two Japanese dealers had a more diverse range of items and perhaps appealed more to those intent on bargain hunting or perhaps looking for items to complete a koshirae restoration. However, they had some interesting items including, for example, a framed lacquer replica of a Rai tanto with an incredibly detailed reproduction of the blades hataraki. The lacquer artist had only ever produced three such works of art.

The European dealers, whilst having a full range of items that would appeal to To-Ken members, probably featured more armour items than the Japanese dealers. In the case of armour, the range varied from high quality complete suits to kabuto, mempo and maedate. Nevertheless, fittings were also exhibited although generally machibori kinko was more represented. At least one dealer featured three Juyo katana including Kencho (Kanenaga), Osafune Masamitsu and a Sa Hiroyuki. Finally, some dealers also had other Japanese art antiques such as okimono, inro, netsuke and some lacquerware.

In summary, the exhibiting dealers offered a range of items in terms of both quality and price and there was much to interest and maybe even tempt visitors who had the luxury of viewing items in a relaxed and unhurried manner with the advantage of comparing items easily with the offering of each of the individual dealers.

An integral part of Japan Art Expo is the educational programme. This is designed to appeal to both newcomers to collecting as well as the more advanced collector and covered topics primarily related to swords, fittings and armour. Dieter Kraft from Germany began the first morning by introducing the Gokaden concept for koto period sword evaluation. In the afternoon he was joined by Michael Spasov and they jointly introduced the idea of kantei which was followed by the opportunity for attendees to review several swords provided by the exhibiting dealers and put the knowledge gained from the lectures to the test. Other swords and fittings related topics included a well-researched presentation by Jussi Ekholm from Finland on nagamaki and naginata. Eckhard Kremers, chairman of NBTHKE, presented his latest research on the production of high quality iron sukashi tsuba in Kyoto which he traces to the specific workshop of a master craftsman. Very different in style was the presentation from Italy of a very professionally produced video of the work of Massimo Rossi, an Italian sword polisher. The video exemplified the saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words'.

Armour was covered by Luc Taelman in two presentations. The first dealt with regional variations in armour production from the Muromachi to Edo periods. He followed this up with a presentation on kabuto with the opportunity for a hands-on kantei session in which participants could put what they had learned into practice. Finally, there was a highly informative presentation on lacquer from

Dave van Gompel from Belgium who trained in Japan. He followed up his lecture with a challenge to produce a piece of lacquer art using the maki-e technique to create an image of Mount Fuji. A large crowd gathered round his worktable to enjoy the practical demonstration of a lacquer technique which adorns many of our Edo period saya.

The final dimension to an event like the Japan Art Expo is the opportunity to meet fellow collectors and enthusiasts. Visitors gathered from all over Europe and so it was an excellent opportunity to renew friendships and make new ones. Around 200 people attended the Expo over the two days and hopefully this is a sufficient foundation for the organisers to build on in order to ensure future Japanese Art Expos.







