

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

1960

For release: Sunday papers
January 10

EXHIBITION OF PRIMITIVE JAPANESE SCULPTURE AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C. January 10: John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today the opening of a loan exhibition of HANIWA - JAPANESE BURIAL MOUND FIGURES. The exhibition has been sent to the United States by the Japanese Government to commemorate the centennial of United States-Japanese diplomatic relations.

The fifty-five clay vessels and figures which make up the exhibition have been excavated principally in the central and northeastern portion of Honshu, the main island of Japan. They range in date from approximately five thousand years before Christ to the seventh century A.D. Of the fifty-five objects, thirty-nine are haniwa, which literally translated means "clay cylinder". The remaining sixteen objects are examples of earlier types of Japanese sculpture and ceramics in clay. The collection has been lent by the National Museum, Tokyo.

The two earliest examples in the exhibition are of a type of pottery known as Jomon. This name, which means "rope-patterned", derives from the fact that the sides of the vessels bear markings from what were probably rope-covered paddles used in smoothing and shaping while the clay of the vessels was still soft. Jomon pottery takes many forms, and can range in date, according to recent evidence, from the fifth or even the sixth

(more)

milleniums B.C. until the third or fourth century A.D. It is known from anthropological evidence that the prehistoric people who produced them were not agricultural, but were hunters and fishermen, like many American Indian tribes.

Next in date are thirteen examples of dogu, small clay images, generally in human form, which closely resemble the primitive art of other cultures at the same stage of development. They first appear during the third millenium B.C., and are the initial attempt by the Japanese at representational sculpture. Usually they are in the form of a stiff, human-like figure standing with its legs apart and its arms slightly extended at its sides, and frequently they show a great variety of surface decoration which may have been a symbolic indication of tattooing. They are usually about twenty inches in height.

Haniwa, which make up the principal group of objects in the exhibition, are first found in the third century A.D. and continued to be produced until the seventh century. According to legend they were first used as substitutes for living humans and animals sacrificed to provide for the dead in the future world. While there is no evidence either to prove or disprove this, it is true that they are usually found in proximity to the outer edges of a burial mound. The earliest haniwa were probably simple cylinders of clay, but later on figures of animals, musicians, warriors, and even buildings were added to the tops of the cylinders. Both male and female figures wave their hands and gesticulate in a manner that became so much a part of the Japanese artistic tradition that it recurs centuries later in the pictures of the Heian and Kamakura periods (eighth - fourteenth centuries A.D.).

In the foreword to the catalogue of the exhibition, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, chairman of the cultural exchange committee of The Asia Society, writes

(more)

"Haniwa...appeal strongly to contemporary artists, who use clay in a free fashion to suggest rather than to delineate. No names of sculptors or of their subjects exist, but across the span of over a thousand years, these animals, warriors, and ordinary people do not seem unlike clay statues which might be made today. Graceful, hollow-eyed, seeming about to shout or speak, they are a timeless recording of the human condition, and therefore in the most profound sense they serve their purpose as burial figures."

The exhibition is sponsored by the National Museum, Tokyo; the Society for International Cultural Relations, Tokyo; and the Japan Society, Inc., New York. It was organized by The Asia Society and is being circulated in the United States with the cooperation of the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Accompanying the exhibition will be Dr. Seiroku Noma, and Mr. Fumio Miki, of the staff of the National Museum, Tokyo. Dr. Noma has written the introduction to the fully illustrated catalogue. The installation of the exhibition, on the ground floor of the National Gallery, was designed by Benjamin W. Lawless and Robert B. Widder of the Smithsonian Institution, Office of Exhibits.

The exhibition continues at the National Gallery of Art through Sunday, February 21, after which it will go to Asia House, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; and the Seattle Art Museum.

#####