

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TOKUGAWA NŌ ROBES AND MASKS

TO OPEN AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C. March 28, 1977. Robes, masks and accessories of the Nō theater, from the distinguished Tokugawa family collection in Nagoya, Japan, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art between April 10 and May 22, 1977. This will be the first time objects in the rarely seen collection have been shown in the United States.

Many of the objects date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period of the highest elegance and luxury in the Nō wardrobe. Because of the fragility of the objects, they will be shown on a rotating basis; different pieces will be on view for two-week periods, making three separate, but comparable, exhibitions.

Nō, the classical theater of Japan, combines mime, dance, chant, music and costume in a unique and exquisite form. On a bare stage of polished Japanese cypress (hinoki), the brilliant and refined silks and brocades of the robes, to which the actor's controlled and stately gestures give form and structure, are in effect the stage set. As the foreword to the exhibition catalogue states: "...the effect is like that of a Japanese screen, decorative and austere."

For over 500 years, Nō has been performed in Japan, and for fully half of this period, it enjoyed the official patronage of the Tokugawa family. It was the official theater of Japan during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868),

(more)

The Tokugawa family has formed the largest private collection of Japanese treasures in the world, and of particular importance in the collection are the Nō objects. Commissioned for performances on the Tokugawa stage, these costumes and accessories have been passed down from generation to generation. The robes, masks and accessories to be on view in the United States come from the Tokugawa Museum (Nagoya), which was founded in 1935 by the nineteenth lord of Owari, Yoshichika Tokugawa, a direct descendent of the first shogun, Ieyasu.

The exhibition, entitled The Tokugawa Collection: Nō Robes and Masks, was organized by the Japan Society of New York and has been made possible by grants from The Coca-Cola Company, Atlanta, Georgia, and the independent Bottlers of Coca-Cola in Japan. The indemnity for this exhibition was granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, Washington, D. C.

The Japanese, long famous for their silk industry, created Nō fabrics that rank among the finest examples of Japanese textiles. Handwoven, hand-dyed silk was used for the Nō robes, which often included stitched designs embroidered on these rich fabrics or contrasting materials seamed into patchwork. The actor, totally absorbed in becoming his role, chose the color and textile pattern of his costume. He selected garments that would best emphasize his individual interpretation of the part.

The mask in Nō theater is of critical importance. The actor selects his mask before choosing his robe and meditates before putting it on. Masks are required for the principal actor, or shite, in all but a few plays. The mask represents a type of character, and great pride is taken by the craftsman in its construction. They are painted and often signed.

Twenty-nine headbands and caps are also included in the exhibition. Kazura-obi, eight-foot long headbands, bound female wigs to the male actor's head before the mask was attached. Embroidered sumiboshi, or man's cap, is peaked at the top and hangs down the actor's back.

About 250 NŌ plays are performed. They are divided into five categories based on the role which the leading actor takes: god plays; ghost plays about dead warriors; woman or wig plays in which the actor portrays a beautiful heroine; demon plays; and miscellaneous subjects, including mad-woman plays.

Two audio-visual theaters in the exhibition will demonstrate the total effect of costumes and masks in performance, presenting brief excerpts from NŌ dramas.

After closing at the National Gallery, The Tokugawa Collection: NŌ Robes and Masks will be seen at the Japan House Gallery, New York (June 1 through July 17, 1977), and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas (July 27 through September 4, 1977).

END