

Release Date: September 12, 2018

## Historic Exhibition of 16 Centuries of Animals in Japanese Art Will Showcase Masterpieces That Rarely Leave Japan



Unknown Artist, *Deer Bearing Symbols of the Kasuga Deities*, Nanboku-chō period, 14th century, bronze, Hosomi Museum

Washington, DC—Artworks representing animals—real or imaginary, religious or secular—span the full breadth and splendor of Japanese artistic production. Today, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, announced ***The Life of Animals in Japanese Art***, the first exhibition devoted to the subject, covering 16 centuries (from the sixth century to the present day) and a wide variety of media—sculpture,

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painting, lacquerwork, ceramics, metalwork, textile, and the woodblock print. On view from May 5 through July 28, 2019, the exhibition will feature 315 works, drawn from 66 Japanese and 30 American public and private collections. The artists represented range from Sesson Shūkei, Itō Jakuchū, Soga Shōhaku, Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, to Okamoto Tarō, Kusama Yayoi, Issey Miyake, Nara Yoshitomo, and Murakami Takashi.

Many of the nearly 180 works traveling from Japan are masterpieces that rarely—if ever—leave the country, including seven designated as an Important Cultural Property by the Japanese government. Three of the registered artworks are from the Tokyo National Museum: the six-foot-tall *Monju Bosatsu Seated on a Lion, with Standing Attendants* (1273) by the Buddhist sculptor Kōen; the intricately carved wood Buddhist sculpture *Aged Monkey* (1893) by Takamura Kōun; and the *Footed Bowl with Applied Crabs* (19th century) by Miyagawa Kōzan I. Two are on loan from the Nara National Museum: a hanging scroll, *Sword with Kurikara Dragon and Two Child Acolytes* (13th century); and a Buddhist hanging scroll, *Fugen Enmei* (13th century). Finally, the wood sculpture *Fugen's Elephant* (13th century) is on loan from a private collection, and a spectacular bronze, *Deer Bearing Symbols of the Kasuga Deities* (14th century), is on loan from the Hosomi Museum, Kyoto.

This historic exhibition is co-organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the Japan Foundation, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), with special cooperation from the Tokyo National Museum, and curated by Robert T. Singer, curator and department head, Japanese art, LACMA, and Masatomo Kawai, director, Chiba City Museum of Art, in consultation with a team of esteemed historians of Japanese art. LACMA is presenting an abbreviated version of the exhibition, titled *Every Living Thing: Animals in Japanese Art* from September 8 through December 8, 2019. The Gallery's presentation of the exhibition, covering 18,000 square feet in the East Building Concourse, is organized into thematic sections that explore the various roles animals have played in the art of Japan. A fully illustrated catalog is being published in association with Princeton University Press.

"The Gallery is honored to partner with the Japan Foundation and LACMA to present the first exhibition to consider the representation of animals across the history of Japanese art," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "It is a privilege to work with the Japan Foundation to share these Japanese masterpieces with American audiences, and we are grateful to the Foundation for making this incredible group of loans possible. As the largest single Japanese lender, the Tokyo National Museum has also played a significant role in this exhibition and we are pleased to welcome nearly 30 works from the Museum's unparalleled collection."

"The Japan Foundation creates global opportunities to foster friendship, trust, and mutual understanding through culture, language, and dialogue, to cultivate friendship and ties between Japan and the world. We believe this is a basis for building a truly peaceful and rich world," said Hiroyasu Ando, president, the Japan Foundation. "To achieve this mission, the Japan Foundation has organized numerous cultural events around the world and in the U.S. Among them, the upcoming

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exhibition of ***The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*** is one of the most ambitious and creative projects, and will display artworks of high quality for everyone's enjoyment. One may call these works of art—created through long, close interactions between animals and Japanese people over 1,500 years—a gift from humans to animals. I very much look forward to sharing this gift with our American friends."

### **Exhibition Support**

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. Additional funding is provided by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

### **Exhibition Organization and Curators**

The exhibition is co-organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the Japan Foundation, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with special cooperation from the Tokyo National Museum.

The exhibition's curators Robert T. Singer, curator and department head, Japanese art, LACMA, and Masatomo Kawai, director, Chiba City Museum of Art, worked in consultation with a team of esteemed historians of Japanese art: Ryusuke Asami, chief curator sculpture, Tokyo National Museum; Masaaki Arakawa, professor, Gakushuin University; Hiroyuki Kano, former professor, Doshisha University; Mika Kuraya, chief curator, Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; Yasuyuki Sasaki, curator, Suntory Museum of Art; Tomoko Matsuo, curator, Chiba City Museum of Art; Nobuhiko Maruyama, professor, Musashi University; and Hiroshi Ikeda, honorary researcher, Tokyo National Museum.

### **Exhibition Dates**

National Gallery of Art, Washington, May 5–July 28, 2019

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 8–December 8, 2019

### **Exhibition Highlights**

***The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*** takes an expansive look at the representation of animals in a variety of art forms including painted screens, hanging scrolls, woodblock prints, netsuke, ceramic plates, kimono, and samurai helmets. The selection portrays all types of creatures—from foxes and frogs, snakes and sparrows, to mythical animals such as dragons, phoenixes, and *kappa* river sprites. To explore the many roles animals have played in Japanese culture, objects are divided into eight sections: Ancient Japan; The Japanese Zodiac; Religion: Buddhism, Zen, Shinto; Myth and Folklore; The World of the Samurai; The Study of Nature; The Natural World: Creatures on Land, in the Air, and in Rivers and Seas; and The World of Leisure.

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Since antiquity, animals have held spiritual and symbolic significance in Japanese culture, as evidenced by haniwa, ancient clay sculptures that were placed around gravesites, possibly to protect the dead in the afterlife. A sixth-century haniwahorse on loan from LACMA—standing nearly four feet tall—is one of the largest known sculptures of this animal from the period. In Buddhism, Shinto, and Zen, artworks depicting animals were commonly given places of prominence in temples and shrines according to the creatures' divine duties. For instance, Shinto deer were revered as messengers to—or even stand-ins for—the gods, as illustrated by the 15th-century *Kasuga Deer Mandala*, on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago.

The allegorical power of animals is not limited to the spiritual realm; they carry many meanings in secular works of art as well. Objects portraying the Japanese zodiac animals individually were commonly collected as symbols of an individual's identity. Even rarer are works that depict all 12 animals of the zodiac together. The exhibition includes several examples: a set of 19th-century woodblock prints by Utagawa Kuniyoshi on loan from the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, a finely embroidered 19th-century *Kosode with the Twelve Zodiac Animals* on loan from the National Museum of Japanese History, and a remarkable mid-to-late-19th-century netsuke by Kaigyokusai Masatsugu on loan from LACMA, with all 12 zodiac animals intertwined in one small piece of carved ivory.

Animals were popularly described in myth and folklore in anthropomorphic terms, often as a means of disguising social critiques. One of the most well-known works in the exhibition is a scene from the handscroll *Frolicking Animals* (12th-13th century), on loan from the collection of Robin B. Martin, courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum. Long attributed to the Buddhist monk Toba Sōjō, the scene depicts monkeys, a rabbit, and a deer as protagonists in a thinly veiled satire of priests. Humans also adopted the form of, or decorated themselves with, animals for their symbolic energy. Samurai commonly wore armor decorated with dragons or helmets in the shapes of rabbit ears, deer antlers, or the mythological *shachihoko*, which has the head of a tiger and body of a carp.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, artists developed an interest in the study of the natural world and thus in drawing individual animals directly from life. Inspiration for most images of animals had previously come from earlier examples in art. Whereas Itō Jakuchū painted with lifelike detail every barb in every vane of a feather in *Pair of Cranes and Morning Sun* (c. 1755–1756), on loan from the Tekisuiken Memorial Foundation of Culture, while Utagawa Hiroshige carved every scale of a seabream in *A Shoal of Fishes*, his 19th-century woodblock print series on loan from the Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Many artists depicted numerous animals within a single species in order to convey their auspicious meanings. An elaborate formal kimono like the 19th-century *Uchikake with Phoenix and Birds*, on loan from the Kyoto National Museum, would have brought its wearer good luck, while giving someone a hanging scroll like *One Hundred Rabbits* (1784) by Maruyama Ōkyo, on loan from a private collection in Japan, conveyed a wish for prosperity and plenitude.

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Contemporary artworks spread throughout the exhibition demonstrate the influence of traditional representations of animals on the work of living Japanese artists. The medieval *Deer Bearing Symbols of the Kasuga Deities* is installed alongside Kōhei Nawa's *PixCell-Bambi 14* (2015), while Kusama Yayoi's polka-dotted three-dimensional dogs are in conversation with haniwa animals, illustrating the similarities in their forms and expressions. On loan from the Broad Art Foundation, Murakami Takashi's 82-foot-long vibrant painting *In the Land of the Dead, Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow* (2014) was created in response to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Murakami drew inspiration from a series of scrolls on the 500 arhats, Buddhists who achieved enlightenment, created by Kanō Kazunobu over a ten-year period that included the 1855 Edo earthquake. For his painting, Murakami embellished the background, arhats, and animals such as the *shachihokow* with his signature flourish and vibrant palette. Many of the works exhibited employ distinctly contemporary techniques to depict animals. Whimsical creations by designer Issey Miyake transform wearers into a starfish, a monkey, or a swallow. In a digital work, *Chrysanthemum Tiger* (2017), from the Tokyo-based collective teamLab's *Fleeting Flower* series, flowers and petals coalesce to form a moving image of a tiger which then dissolves, scatters, and takes shape again.

## Exhibition Catalog

Published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Princeton University Press, a richly illustrated catalog features contributions by the exhibition's curators and an international team of esteemed experts in Japanese art. Included are essays by scholars Barbara Rossetti Ambros, department chair, religious studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Thomas Hare, William Sauter LaPorte '28 Professor in Regional Studies and professor of comparative literature, Princeton University; and Federico Marcon, associate professor of East Asian studies and history, Princeton University. With 425 illustrations and some 400 pages, the catalog will be available in Spring 2019 at [shop.nga.gov](http://shop.nga.gov), or by calling (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; faxing (202) 789-3047; or emailing [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

The exhibition catalog is made possible through the generous support of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. Additional funding for the catalog is provided by Janice Holland.

## Related Programs

### Lecture

*Introduction to the Exhibition—The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*

May 5, noon

East Building Auditorium

Robert T. Singer, curator and department head, Japanese art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and chief curator of *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*

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## Public Symposium

*The Role and Representations of Animals in Japanese Art and Culture*

June 7, 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Moderated by Robert T. Singer, with illustrated lectures by noted scholars, including Barbara Rossetti Ambros, department chair, religious studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Rory Browne, director of the academic advising center and associate dean of Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, Boston College; R. Keller Kimbrough, professor of Japanese, department of Asian languages and civilizations, University of Colorado, Boulder; Federico Marcon, Associate Professor of East Asian Studies and History, Princeton University; Daniel McKee, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University; and Miwako Tezuka, *consulting curator, Reversible Destiny* Foundation.

## Concert

Yumi Kurosawa, koto

With special guests Anubrata Chatterjee, tabla, and Virgil Gadsen, dancer

May 19, 3:30 p.m.

West Building, West Garden Court

This performance brings together the elements of Japan's spiritual philosophy and the importance of the animal world, as represented in literature, art, dance, and music. To illustrate the soundscape of our story, the koto's melodic timbre recalls Japan's history with chant, the tabla reminds us of the heartbeat, and the featured element of dance echoes the natural world of movement.

## Films

*The Life of Animals in Japanese Cinema*

Summer 2019

Japanese filmmaking has over the years made rich use of animal forms as symbol and object, offering varied meanings and observations about the natural world. This series of approximately 30 films—narrative features, documentaries, and shorts, both contemporary and classic—includes *Hachi: A Dog's Tale*, *Godzilla* (1954 original), *What the Snow Brings*, *Pom Poko*, *Princess Raccoon*, *Ghost Cat of Arima Palace*, *Samurai Cat*, *Madadayo*, *The Hidden Fortress*, *Ran*, *I Am a Cat*, and *Song of the Horse*. Animations by Koji Yamamura and Osamu Tezuka, Kihachirō Kawamoto puppet shorts, plus two productions from the famed Shochiku series Cinema Kabuki—*Triple Lion Dance (Renjishi)* and *The Heron Maiden*—are also featured.

## The Japan Foundation

To cultivate friendship and ties between Japan and the world, the Japan Foundation creates global opportunities to foster friendship, trust, and mutual understanding through culture, language, and

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dialogue. The Japan Foundation was established in October 1972 as a special legal entity supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In October 2003, it was reorganized as an independent administrative institution. Based on a government endowment of 78 billion yen, the activities of the Japan Foundation are financed by annual government subsidies, investment revenue, and donations from the private sector.

**Press Contact:**

Isabella Bulkeley, (202) 842-6864 or [i-bulkeley@nga.gov](mailto:i-bulkeley@nga.gov)

**General Information**

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Department of Communications

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353

e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Anabeth Guthrie

Chief of Communications

(202) 842-6804

[a-guthrie@nga.gov](mailto:a-guthrie@nga.gov)

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## PRESS CONTACT

Isabella Bulkeley  
(202) 842-6864  
[i-bulkeley@nga.gov](mailto:i-bulkeley@nga.gov)

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Questions from members of the media may be directed to the Department of Communications at (202) 842-6353 or [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

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