

Samurai Armor from the Collection of Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller

It is the combination of art and armor, the boundless creativity of the objects' forms, and the aesthetics used by these fierce and cultivated warriors that drew us in.

—Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller

The son and grandson of art collectors, Gabriel Barbier-Mueller has been fascinated by samurai armor since adolescence and acquired his first piece in the early 1990s. In the following three decades, he and his wife, Ann, have continued to expand their collection, admiring the sculptural quality of the objects and the compelling feats of imagination that went into their creation. This fascination led them to establish The Ann & Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Museum: The Samurai Collection, in Dallas, Texas. The Barbier-Muellers have assembled an exceptional collection consisting of more than a thousand works, including

a number of unique masterpieces. Since 2011, their collection has traveled to Europe, Canada, Chile, and the United States. This exhibition represents only a fraction of their remarkable holdings and is developed from the collectors' wish to share these works and the samurai culture from which they emerged.

All works featured in the exhibition are from the Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection.

Introduction

This exhibition dedicated to Japanese armor and components showcases more than 140 works from the Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection, one of the world's largest and most refined collections of samurai armor in private hands. On view in this exhibition are seventeen full suits of armor and more than fifty helmets and masks, in addition to weapons and garments spanning from the 14th to the 19th century. Made for samurai elites in combat or ceremonies, these works display craftsmen's creativity and masterful techniques.

The samurai class is associated with military elites who rose to power in Japan during the 12th century. After the shogun (military general) established the first military government in 1185, samurai continued to dominate the nation's political and social realms until the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868, when

imperial rule was restored. Over centuries, the samurai emulated Japanese courtiers, adopted aspects of Buddhism and Confucianism, and conceived their own distinctive culture. Through tracing the evolution of armor from medieval to early modern Japan, this exhibition explores the artistic legacy of the samurai and offers a glimpse of samurai history spanning more than seven hundred years.

Samurai Armor

Japanese armor is striking, refined, and highly functional. The techniques used by Japanese armorers to create the works throughout this exhibition evolved over centuries. Most of the Japanese schools of armor were formed in the mid-16th century. Nine main schools were established in the provinces throughout Japan, at which masters and artisans created distinctive styles. Often founded by prominent artists, the workshops trained generations of artisans who transmitted their craft from father to son. In the Edo period (1615–1868), armorers were elevated to the rank of artists. Wealthier warriors, including the shogun, had their own armorers, each designing a different component of a single suit of armor and proudly signing their contributions. The Myōchin School, well-represented in this exhibition, still exists and

has been maintained by the same family for the past four hundred years.

A complete suit is the product of the labor of many artisans. Blacksmiths created the metal pieces; leatherworkers designed the protective leather elements; weavers and embroiderers wove and embellished the textiles; and metalsmiths created and applied the gold and copper ornamentation. The artisans found inspiration in many sources to create pieces that reflected folklore, nature, and samurai values.

Samurai Japan: A Brief History

In the early Heian period (794–1185), the imperial court controlled the military and the production of armor. By the 10th century, the centralized system collapsed, and provincial landowners had to rely on their private forces for defense—a development that gave rise to the samurai class. For nearly seven hundred years, beginning in 1185, Japan was governed by a military regime, led by the shogun, ruling in the name of the emperor. Samurai warriors were loyal to individual daimyō—provincial lords with large hereditary land holdings. Depending on the period, there were fifty to 250 daimyō who governed provinces in Japan. In 1600, after periods of clashes between these rival clans, the Battle of Sekigahara paved the way for Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) to unify Japan and establish a new shogunate. Fifteen shogun from the Tokugawa family ruled over a

period of peace, lasting some 250 years until 1868, when the emperor gained control of the government. The samurai class was officially dissolved during the Meiji period (1868–1912), and as the country opened itself to the world, modern Japan emerged.

The Mōri Clan

This exceptional set of armor—the only known one of its kind outside of Japan—belonged to the Yoshiki branch of the Mōri clan, a prominent daimyō family whose origins can be traced back to the 12th century. It includes a complete suit of armor, several surcoats, equestrian equipment, and weapons. Most of the pieces bear the family's identifying paulownia-leaf crest. The set reveals the many sophisticated components of a samurai's outerwear. This armor is believed to have been offered to a member of the Mōri clan by the great warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598).



Surcoat (*jinbaori*), from the Mōri Family, 18th century

Wool, cord, brocade

This battle jacket in bright yellow wool displays the bold, black paulownia crest of the Mōri clan. The interior of the jacket is lined with black silk and the lapels are made from gold brocade.



Yoshitsugu, stirrups

Japanese, active mid-18th century

**Saddle (*kura*), Stirrups (*abumi*),
and Robe Box (*hasami bako*), ca. 1750**

Iron, silver, wood, crushed seashell

Each element in this set is ornamented with lacquer and crushed seashells. Coiled dragons, inlaid in silver, decorate the front of the stirrups.

Long Bow (*yumi*),

17th–mid-19th century

Bamboo, lacquer, feathers, leather, wood



Armor of the Nuinobedō Type, from the Mōri Family, chest armor, helmet bowl, and shoulder guards, ca. 1600

Iron, lacquer, gold, bronze, silver, leather, wood, horsehair, hemp, brocade, steel

The jewel of the Mōri set, this nuinobedō armor features a chest piece made in two parts that hinges under the left arm and closes with lacing on the right side. The frontal ornament on the helmet represents two paulownia leaves with an imperial chrysanthemum in the center. The lateral ornaments also bear the paulownia crest (kiri mon) of the Mōri family. A war fan and a command baton complete the set.



Ujitsune

Japanese, dates unknown

Sword (*handachi*), 16th century

Steel, brocade, lacquer, shakudō, gold



Flat Military Hat (*ichimonji jingasa*),

19th century

Iron, gilt copper, *shakudō*, lacquer, bronze, gold

The *jingasa*, with its shallow bowl and wide brim, was originally designed as headgear for foot soldiers. Because it was more comfortable than regular helmets, especially in warm weather, commanders also adopted it. This high-end example is embellished with a repoussé (for which designs or patterns are formed by hammering on the reverse side) dragon with inlaid gold eyes and claws.



Surcoat (jinbaori), from the Mōri Family,
18th century

Wool, cord, brocade

The jinbaori battle jacket, which is sleeveless and worn over armor, was typically made of wool fabric imported from England or Holland. This battle jacket in bright red, displays the bold paulownia crest of the Mōri clan. The lining of this jacket is made from luxurious brocade.



Storage Box, 17th–mid-19th century
Leather, wood, lacquer, cord, metal

This type of box would have stored the arrows of a palanquin bow or possibly archery gloves.

Bow for Palanquin (*kago-hankyū*),
17th–mid-19th century
Bamboo, lacquer, leather, silver

On their annual round-trip journeys to the capital city of Edo (present-day Tokyo), daimyō often traveled by palanquin—small, enclosed carriages borne by porters that allowed privacy, if not comfort. If the procession was attacked, the daimyō could use small bows such as this one for defense in the confined space.



Attributed to **Myōchin Munenori**, armor
Japanese, active 18th century

Attributed to **Myōchin Yoshimichi**,
helmet bowl

Japanese, active 15th–16th century

**Armor of the *Nimaitachidō* Type,
with the Matsudaira Family Crest,**

armor, 18th century; helmet bowl, ca. 1400

Iron, *shakudō*, lacing, silver, wood, gold,
brocade, fur, bronze, brass, leather

Nimaitachidō armor features chest armor that is made in two parts and curves slightly at the waist. A lacquered-wood Chinese lion extends out from the front of the helmet. Each sleeve is adorned with a dragon coiled around a double-edged sword, an attribute of the Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō—the Immovable One. Chinese lions and peonies—symbols of imperial authority—embellish the thigh protection and shin guards. A hollyhock crest, indicating that the armor was made for the Matsudaira family, decorates the top of each hand.



Armor of Ōyoroï Type, mid-Edo period,
18th century

Iron, leather, gold, bronze, copper

Ōyoroï means “great armor,” which features two main chest pieces, hinged on the left and closed on the right. This armor reached its peak during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Worn by warriors on horseback, it became a traditional image of the samurai, as seen in paintings and screens. In the 18th century, inspired by the Kamakura design, Japanese armorers revived the *ōyoroï* armor style, like this set, for wealthy members of the samurai class.



The Competition to Be First at Uji River, early 18th century

Six-panel folding screen; ink, color,
and gold on paper

This folding screen depicts a famous scene from the Genpei War (1180–1185) between the Taira (Heike) and Minamoto (Genji) clans. Here, two warriors from the Minamoto family challenge each other to see who will make it across the tumultuous Uji River first, while their commander Yoshitsune looks on. The horses' harnesses are adorned with fringe and tassels, which are characteristic of 12th-century gear.





**Armor of the Yokohagidō Type,
with the Ikeda Family crest**, helmet,
14th century; armor, 18th century

Iron, *shakudō*, lacquer, lacing, leather,
bronze, wood, silk, brocade, bear fur

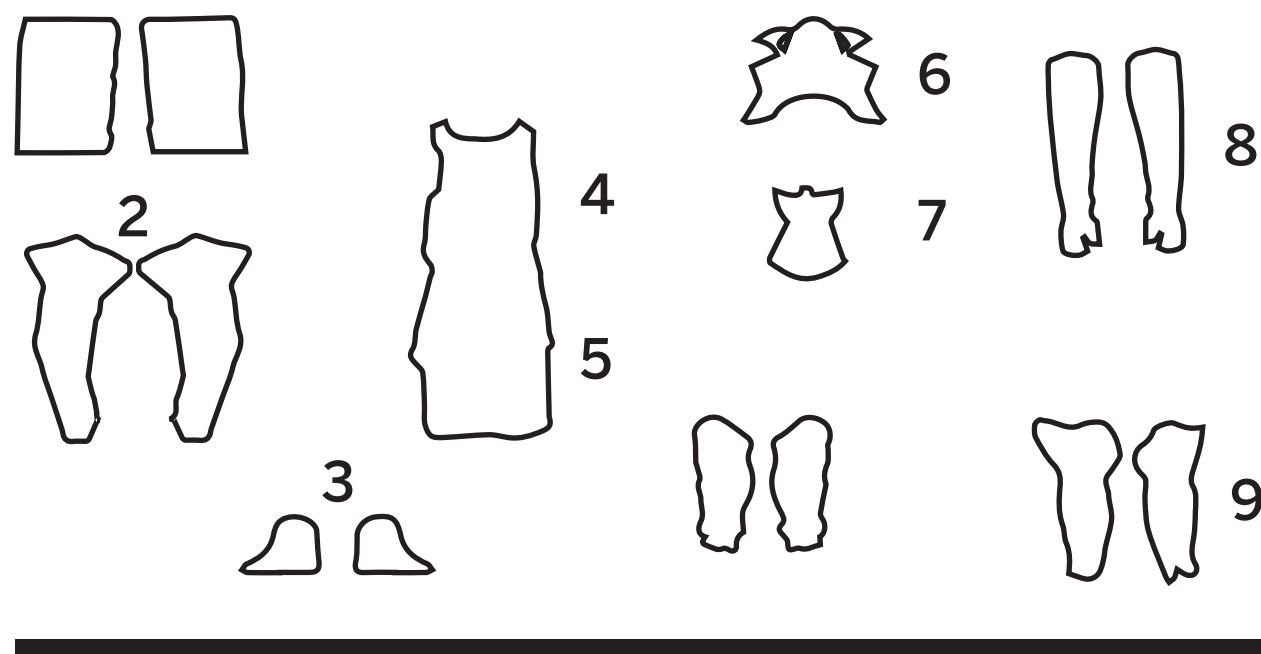
Yokohagidō-type armor features chest armor made of flat and wide horizontal plates. The coiled dragon on the chest is rendered in *shakudō*, an alloy, or combination, of gold and copper treated to give it a bluish-black hue. Blossoming plum branches—symbols of strength and perseverance—embellish the sleeves. Water plantains in gold lacquer climb up the shin guards. The leather shoes are covered in bear fur. This exceptional suit belonged to the Ikeda clan, one of the wealthiest and most important daimyō families in Edo-period Japan, whose crest is an encircled butterfly.



Armor of *Warabe* Type for a Child,
19th century

Iron, lacquer, gold, wood, lacing, fabric

A boy born into a samurai family started rigorous physical and mental training when he received his first wooden sword, around age three. Years of intense instruction in martial arts, history, classical literature, and calligraphy followed. At his coming-of-age ceremony, around age twelve, he was given a suit of armor like the one here. During their apprenticeship, trainees often lived with experienced samurai who introduced them to warrior culture. This close relationship lasted until the boy was approximately twenty years old.



1 Shoulder Guards (*sode*)

The shoulder guards of Japanese armor were originally designed for equestrian combat and took the place of shields. Their size and shape evolved and varied with the style of armor. The large, square shoulder guards seen here reflect the style of Kamakura-period armor that came back into style among wealthy daimyō during the 18th and 19th centuries.

2 Thigh Protection (*haidate*)

Haidate, thigh protectors made of leather or iron scales secured to a foundation of fabric, were introduced in the 13th century. Shaped

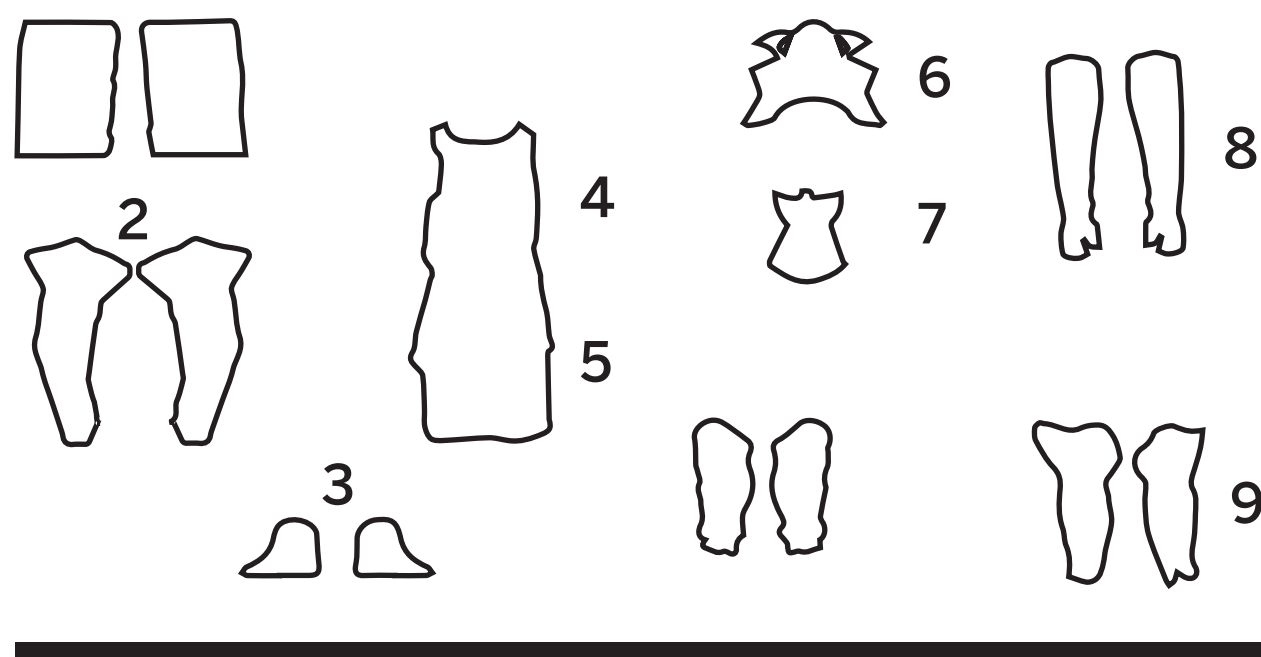
like a divided apron, *haidate* are secured by straps that tie around the waist and sometimes by additional straps that encircle the thighs.

3 Shoes (*kutsu*)

While the average soldier wore straw sandals or went barefoot, commanders wore leather shoes, often embellished with bear fur or horsehair and with soles that were sometimes lacquered.

4 Chest Armor (*dō*)

The chest armor protects the vital organs and, along with the helmet, is the oldest part of Japanese armor. Of the various armor components, the chest armor underwent the greatest changes over time and consequently exhibits the most variety in form and construction. Originally made of small, perforated iron or leather plates, the chest armor's small plates were, over time, replaced with larger metal ones that were quicker and more economical to produce.



5 Skirt Panels (*kusazuri*)

The skirt in Japanese armor is known as a *kusazuri* (literally, the “grass-scaper”) and was composed of several vertical sections dictated by the type of armor or combat. Like the shoulder guards, *kusazuri* were designed to be collapsible.

6 Helmet (*kabuto*)

The traditional samurai helmet was an iron bowl made from overlapping plates of wrought iron and a neck guard of collapsible panels. Here, the high-sided helmet bowl is made of twenty-six silver-lacquered plates. An ornate attachment above the visor supports both stylized, horn-like attachments (*kuwagata*)

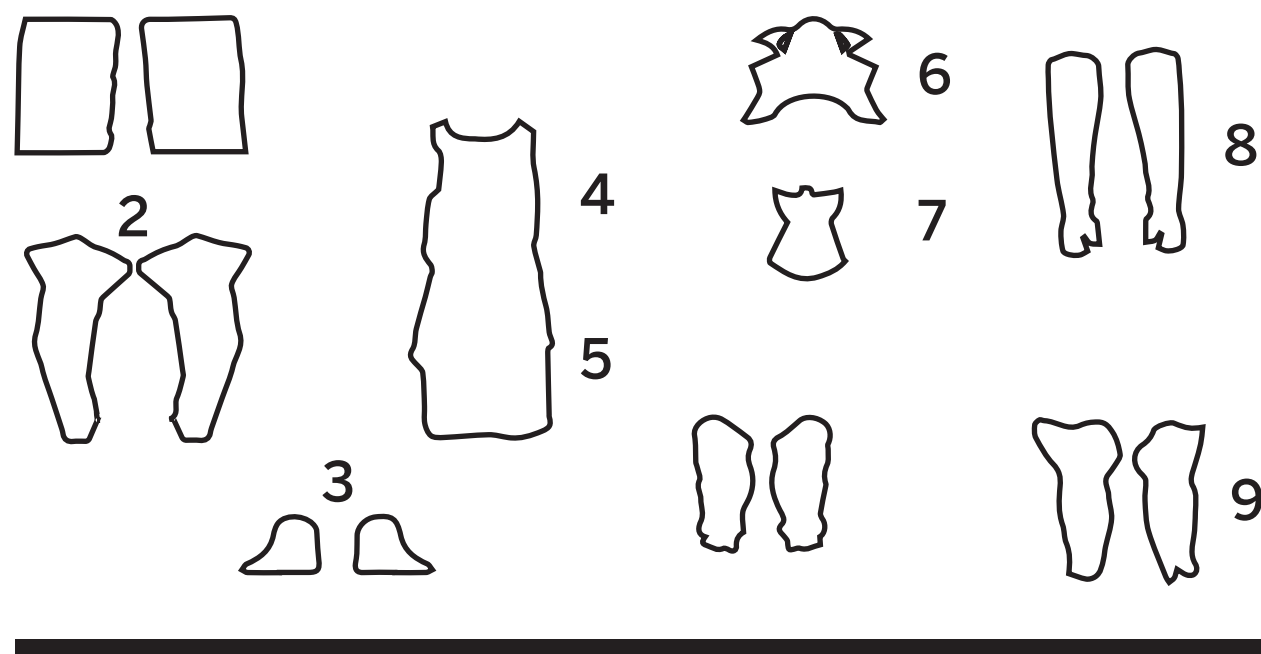
and a large, disk-shaped ornament (*maedate*) with the Matsudaira family crest.

7 Mask (*menpō*)

Masks, usually made of metal, provided total or partial protection for the samurai’s throat and face. This mask is a *menpō*, a half mask that covers only the lower part of the face. Like the rest of this suit of armor, it is lacquered in silver. The attached throat guard is made of five plates.

8 Sleeves (*kote*)

For centuries, a Japanese warrior wore protection only on his left arm to prevent bowstring injury, leaving the right arm unencumbered, allowing greater freedom of movement for shooting arrows. Armored sleeves, or *kote*, came into use during the second half of the 12th century and are typically constructed of iron plates of various sizes and shapes, linked together by chain mail and secured to a silk-brocade backing. These *kote* make use of silver-lacquered iron.



9 Shin Guards (*suneate*)

The earliest Japanese shin guards, or *suneate*, made from three leather or metal plates, covered only the shins. New designs appeared in the 15th century with extensions to cover the knees and soft leather or fabric lining to protect the skin from the metal.

Components and Materials

Samurai armor consists of a helmet, mask, and chest armor combined with shoulder guards, sleeves, a skirt, thigh protection, and shin guards. Additional articles, including a sleeveless surcoat, complete the set, which might weigh between twenty and forty-five pounds in total. The armor, very light when compared to European or Persian versions, was made of small, perforated plates that were often lacquered and held together with colored lacing and silk cords. Many materials were required to produce a suit of Japanese armor that was as beautiful as it was functional. Iron, leather, brocade, and precious and semiprecious metals were often used. Several artisans worked for many months to create a single suit of samurai armor. Today, few suits have survived with all of their original components. Sets were handed down from father to son. Older elements were often incorporated into newer armor and laces destroyed by moisture or wear were replaced.



Jacket (*hitatare*) and Pants (*hakama*),
19th century

Silk

This jacket and baggy trousers were traditionally worn under a suit of armor. This set is made of russet brocade decorated with a woven pattern of peonies—symbols of wealth, fortune, and bravery.



**Armor of the *Tachidō* Type,
made for Matsudaira Yoshiyuki,**

17th–mid-19th century

Iron, lacquer, silver, *shakudō*, gold, bronze,
leather, silk, fur, wood, brocade

This complete suit of armor was custom-made for Matsudaira Yoshiyuki (1641–1711), the great-grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the warlord who founded the military government that ruled during Japan's Edo period. The armor of the *tachidō* type features a rigid chest piece in two parts that hinges together under the left arm and fastens on the right side with a cord. Its components are presented separately here to better display each piece.



Ichiguchi Munemoto

Japanese, active 18th century

Shin Guards (*suneate*) with Design of Chinese Lions among Peonies, from the Yanagisawa Family, 18th century

Iron, gilt bronze, silk

This pair of shin guards has butterfly hinges and is richly decorated with chiseled and gilded bronze embellishments of Chinese lions—protective Shinto and Buddhist creatures—frolicking among peonies, which symbolize imperial power. The knee guard bears the crest of the Yanagisawa daimyō from Kōriyama, Yamato province (modern-day Nara prefecture).



Myōchin Munesada

Japanese, active late 18th century

Sleeves (*kote*) with Design of Silver Clouds, 1790s

Iron, silver

A member of the Myōchin School, the artist used several techniques to create these magnificent sleeves. Clouds and mythical creatures adorn the forged plates covering the hands and forearms. The demons chiseled on the upper plates appear with the sacred pearl—the Buddhist wish-granting jewel—on their foreheads.



Surcoat (*jinbaori*) with the Mōri Family Crest, 18th century

Wool, cord, brocade



Surcoat (*jinbaori*) with the Mōri Family Crest, 18th century

Wool, silk, brocade

This battle jacket is cut from thick Holland wool and rimmed with gold brocade at the sleeves and hem. The paulownia crest of the Mōri family is embroidered on the back in white silk.



Pants (*hakama*), from the Mōri Family, 18th century

Silk, gold thread

Worn underneath the armor, this pair of pants is made of a yellow silk brocade and decorated with a geometric pattern in gold thread.

Evolution of Helmets

The helmet (*kabuto*) is one of the most distinguished components of samurai armor. It evolved from the Kamakura period (1185–1333) through the early Edo period (1615–1868). Early helmet styles are characterized by low and rounded helmet bowls (*ōboshi*) made up of several iron plates held together with visible or hidden rivets. Certain helmets known as *suji kabuto* were designed with protruding edges. Over time, many helmets were modified with ornaments. With the introduction of firearms, battlefields often became blanketed with thick gun smoke, confusing the troops. For easier identification, samurai began to wear helmets with outlandish ornaments at the front, back, or sides. These adornments, either on the helmet or the mask, are derived from animals, insects, sea creatures, and religious motifs, reflecting the samurai's values and beliefs. The

shape of the helmet bowl itself eventually became an important identifying feature. Made of papier-mâché or light wood in elaborate shapes, these superstructures were placed over the iron bowl of the helmet to distinguish commanding officers and warriors. These types of helmets, *kawari kabuto*, became characteristic of the “present-day equipment” (*tōsei gusoku*) of the 16th and 17th centuries.



Bamen Sadao, helmet
Japanese, dates unknown

**Ridged Helmet (*sujibachi kabuto*)
and Half Mask (*menpō*)**,
helmet, 14th–16th century;
mask, late 16th–early 17th century
Iron, copper, *shakudō*, gold, lacing, wood,
leather, horsehair

This traditional helmet is distinguished by its sixty-two-plate bowl, mustached half mask, and sculpted figure of Fudō Myōō—the Immovable One. In the teachings of Buddhism’s esoteric schools, Fudō Myōō is described as the wrathful form of the Cosmic Buddha, a deity of great powers who destroys all impediments to enlightenment.



Myōchin Nobuie

Japanese, 1496–1564

Multi-Plate Ridged Helmet (*sujibachi kabuto*), 1539

Iron, silver, copper, leather, lacing

The visor of this magnificent helmet is adorned with dragons, while floral motifs decorate each of the bowl's thirty-two plates. The piece is inscribed with an invocation to Hachiman Daibosatsu, the patron god of warriors and divine protector of Japan.



Muneyuki III

Japanese, active late 14th century

Hemispherical Ridged Helmet (*daienzan sujibachi kabuto*), ca. 1380

Iron, gold, bronze, leather, lacing

The bowl of this helmet, constructed of thirty-four separate plates, dates to the late 14th century. The helmet was restored later in the Edo period to suit the taste of its owner, which was not an uncommon practice. It was remounted with a new visor, turned-back deflectors, and neck guard. Also from this later date are the gilt-bronze ornament holder above the visor and the medallions bearing the Mizuno family crest.



Large Riveted Helmet (*ōboshi hoshibachi kabuto*), 13th–14th century

Iron, lacquer, gold, bronze, lacing

This helmet's low, rounded bowl is composed of thirty-four plates held together with protruding rivets. The warrior may have passed his hair through the opening at the top. Like many helmets of its time, this one was modified at a later date. The visor, side crests, and front crest holder were added during the 15th century. At some point, the helmet bowl received a thin coat of lacquer.



**Single-Plate Helmet (*ichimai kabuto*)
Representing Fukurokuju, ca. 1600**

Iron, copper

Made from a single sheet of iron, this helmet demonstrates exceptional craftsmanship by the maker. It represents Fukurokuju, one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, who, according to legend, had a very high forehead, identifiable here by his elongated head.



Head-Shaped Helmet (*zunari kabuto*), ca. 1600

Iron, fur, gold, lacing, lacquer, copper

This helmet imitates a human head with a topknot in the style worn by Japanese warriors. Bear fur was chosen to simulate human hair.



Steep-Sided Helmet (*kittate kawari kabuto*), late 16th–early 17th century

Iron, lacquer, papier-mâché, lacing

This helmet is among the few Momoyama-period examples to retain its original ornaments. Its shape recalls the cliffs at Ichinotani, the site of a famous 12th-century battle. The side crests represent a combination of hare's ears—symbolizing courage and longevity—and bovine horns, which allude to both tranquility and power. The frontal crest is a painted wooden *oni*, a horned demon that is seen in Japanese folklore as both mischievous and protective.



Foreign-Influenced Helmet (*nanban kabuto*), ca. 1600

Iron, silver, lacquer, leather

Nanban, or literally, “southern barbarians,” was the Japanese term for the European missionaries and traders who came to Japan during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This helmet is an exquisite Japanese adaptation of the crested morion helmets worn by Portuguese and Spanish soldiers at that time. It is constructed of six wide iron plates, each adorned with an openwork overlay design of abstracted floral scrolls and a silvered mythical creature.



Foreign-Influenced Helmet (*nanban kabuto*), late 16th–early 17th century

Iron, gold, lacquer, lacing

In the mid-16th century, when trade took place between Asian and European countries, Western culture began to influence the style of Japanese armor. This peach-shaped helmet is very similar to more than two hundred helmets in the Tachibana family's collection in the Tachibana Museum in Fukuoka, Kyushu Island. It is said that this type of gold-leaf helmet was an iconic component for the Tachibana warriors fighting on the battlefield during the late 16th century.



Foreign-Influenced Helmet (*nanban kabuto*), early 17th century

Iron, gold, silver, leather, lacing

This helmet, an example of a design inspired by European helmets, is constructed of six large plates, each of which exhibits a honeycomb pattern of applied iron. The inlaid designs in silver and gold are stylized Buddhist emblems.



Military Hat (*jingasa*),

late 16th–early 18th century

Iron, brocade, gold, bronze, *shakudō*

With its broad, spreading brim and short crown, this hat mimics the shape of the traditional Korean scholar's hat known as a gat. In an effort to imitate European headgear, the craftsman embellished the inside with a brocade lining featuring a design of dragons among clouds.



Foreign-Influenced Half Mask (*nanban menpō*), late 16th–early 17th century

Iron, horsehair, lacquer

To the Japanese of the 16th and 17th centuries, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Europeans was their long nose. This innovative and unique half mask's exaggerated nose gently pokes fun at foreigners.



Flesh-Colored Half Mask (*menpō*), 18th century

Iron, lacquer, horsehair, lacing

This half mask was lacquered in a pink tone to imitate the complexion of Europeans.



Chin Guard (*hōate*), 17th century
Iron, lacing

Usually made of iron, masks provided total or partial protection for a samurai's face and throat and were categorized by the level of protection they provided. This type, *hōate*, covered only the chin and cheeks.



Half Mask (*menpō*) with Chain Mail,
17th–18th century
Iron, lacquer, lacing

An unusual feature of this mask is the chain mail protecting the mouth; it provided superior defense against arrow or spear attacks.



**Half Mask (*menpō*) with Design
of Plum Branches, 18th–19th century**

Iron, horsehair, leather, lacing, lacquer

Grooved with fine, subtle parallel lines, this half mask's cheeks are adorned with applied plum-blossom branches.



Full-Face Mask (*sōmen*), 17th century
Iron, lacquer, leather, silk, lacing, horsehair

A full-face mask provided the most protection, but it hampered the peripheral vision of the samurai, who might opt for a half mask or chin guard instead. This remarkably expressive mask from the Myōchin School of smiths is designed to resemble a character called *okina* (old man) from Noh drama. Three separate plates form the mask: a nose plate and an upper and lower plate.



Myōchin Muneharu, helmet
Japanese, active mid-19th century

Myōchin Muneyoshi, chest armor
Japanese, 1530–1603

Armor of the *Mogamidō* Type,
helmet, mid-19th century; armor, 1849
Iron, gold, bronze, silk, leather, lacquer

Mogamidō-type armor features a chest piece made of horizontal plates held together by widely spaced parallel lacing. This one bears the names of two blacksmiths from the Myōchin School. The artist who crafted the helmet, Myōchin Muneharu, is known for creating a suit of armor that was a diplomatic gift from a Tokugawa shogun to Queen Victoria (1819–1901).



Kojima Munenao

Japanese, active mid–late 18th century

High-Sided Ridged Helmet (*kōshōzan sujibachi kabuto*), ca. 1750

Iron, lacing, leather, gilt bronze, lacquer

This type of helmet is very rare; its construction technique, invented by renowned armorer Myōchin Nobuie, constitutes an artistic feat. The helmet bowl is formed of 120 plates riveted together to create a perfectly symmetrical and harmonious shape. This example bears the Inaba family crest; their leader became a daimyō in 1588.



Head-Shaped Helmet (*zunari kabuto*),
18th century

Iron, lacquer, leather

Inspired by a helmet style that was introduced toward the end of the 16th century, this low, rounded helmet bowl resembles the shape of a human head, complete with flesh-toned lacquer for the skin, black lacquer for the hair and eyebrows, and even detachable ears. The stylized headband, knotted on the forehead to absorb sweat, is a symbol of the samurai's perseverance and endurance.



Military Hat (*shingen jingasa*),
18th–19th century

Lacquered leather, gilt copper, cords

The *jingasa*, a lightweight style of hat with a shallow bowl and wide brim, came into wide use in the late 16th century as headgear for foot soldiers. Commanders wore them when traveling, as they were more comfortable than regular helmets.



**Eboshi-Shaped Helmet
(*nagaeboshinari kabuto*) with Big
Dipper Constellation, 17th century**

Iron, lacquer, gold, lacing

The upper part of this helmet imitates the shape of an *eboshi*, the traditional formal headdress worn by adult males. A samurai youth received his first *eboshi* on the occasion of his coming-of-age ceremony at around twelve years of age. The embellished pattern of seven linked stars symbolizes the brightest stars in the Big Dipper constellation.

Armor in Times of Peace

The Edo period (1615–1868) was a time of relative peace under the Tokugawa shogunate. Its headquarters were located in Edo—present-day Tokyo—while the emperor’s court was in Kyoto. The samurai retained their privileged status but became bureaucrats and civil leaders rather than active warriors. Armor became a symbol of pageantry and prestige. For parades and the mandatory biannual processions between their home domains and Edo, samurai would dress in full armor and carry weapons. Because the size and splendor of these processions reflected a daimyō’s status, significant resources were invested in creating pieces of great artistic refinement. On the eleventh day of the first month of each year, the daimyō’s helmet and armor were displayed in the *shoin* of his residence, a room where he received guests. His banners and standards, or personal

flags, flew in the garden to ensure an auspicious year. Some armor was donated to shrines and temples as votive offerings for success and protection.



Unkai Mitsuhisa

Japanese, active 17th century

***Kaen*-type of Helmet Representing the Flaming Jewel, 17th century**

Iron, lacquer, lacing, gold, bronze

This exquisitely crafted helmet takes the form of the flaming jewel, a frequently used symbol in Buddhist imagery. Each of the flanges has been cut from a single piece of iron into a series of flickering flames that join at the crown to form a larger flame. The turned-back side deflectors are also shaped like flames. The frontal crest, which looks like an upside-down heart—*inome* (“boar’s eye”)—within a circle symbolizes Marishiten, the Buddhist goddess of archers.



Masuda Myōchin

Japanese, active 1688–1749

Ridged Helmet with Large Rivets **(ōboshi sujibachi kabuto), ca. 1730**

Iron, gold, silver, bronze, *shakudō*, leather

Made of radiating plates of iron joined by large rivets with raised seams, this helmet is an eloquent example of the Edo-period fashion of revisiting earlier, classical armor of the Kamakura period. Richly decorated with silvered iron dragonflies on a lattice of golden foliage, the helmet bears the Matsudaira family crest. The surname Matsudaira was shared by several branches of the ruling Tokugawa clan.



Unkai Mitsuhsa

Japanese, active 17th century

Chin Guard (*hōate*) with Bellflower Design, 17th century

Iron, lacquer, lacing



Attributed to Myōchin Muneakira

Japanese, 1673–1745

Military Hat (*jingasa*), late 17th–early 18th century

Iron, gold, copper



Myōchin Muneakira

Japanese, 1673–1745

Full-Face Mask (*sōmen*), 1745

Iron, leather, lacing

Myōchin Muneakira, who skillfully forged this mask from a single sheet of iron, added a hole under the chin to release sweat and chiseled iron studs for attaching the helmet cords.



Unkai Mitsuhsa, helmet bowl
Japanese, active 17th century

Umetada Shigeyoshi, decoration
Japanese, active 17th century

Peach-Shaped Helmet (*momonari kabuto*), 17th century

Iron, silver, gold, pewter, lacing, bronze

Two artists contributed to the creation of this helmet. The peach-shaped bowl, signed by Unkai Mitsuhsa, is made of six iron plates with flanges. The inlaid silver dragon amid clouds was designed by Umetada Shigeyoshi, who was renowned for the remarkable finesse of his embellishments.



Kojima Munenao, helmet, mask
Japanese, active 18th century

Armor of Okegawadō Type with Accessories, mid- to late-18th century
Iron, lacquer, bronze, leather, wood, hemp, brocade, steel

The artist Kojima Munenao was part of a school of armorers called Unkai, known for their excellent ironwork. This ensemble includes two types of family crests representing stylized bamboo leaves and likely linked to the Takenaka samurai clan in central Japan. The quality of this armor is evident in its sumptuous details. The inside of the chest armor is covered entirely with textured gold leaf, a rare and costly feature indicating the owner's substantial wealth.

A stylized bamboo branch with leaves is attached to the back of the armor to help identify the warrior. Under the right hand is

a large paper tassel (*saihai*), which was used to signal troops. The ensemble also features a vest (*jinbaori*), which would have been worn over the armor on ceremonial occasions, and a battle standard (*umajirushi*). Each prominently features the Takenaka family's bamboo crests.



Unkai Mitsuhisa

Japanese, active 17th century

Tengu Half Mask (*menpō*), early 17th century

Iron, lacing, leather, lacquer



Myōchin Yoshiiy, helmet bowl

Japanese, active 16th century

Ridged Helmet with Rivets (*hoshi sujibachi kabuto*), helmet bowl, 16th century; ornamentation, 18th century

Iron, brocade, leather, lacing, wood



Buddhism, which originated in India and was introduced to Japan in the 6th century, was widely adopted by most samurai. Represented here on the frontal ornament is the Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō—the protector of warriors and the patron of swordsmen. Here, Fudō Myōō stands on a rock in front of flames, holding a rope and a sword (now lost).



Myōchin Munenaga

Japanese, active early 18th century

Full-Face Mask (*sōmen*), 1710

Iron

This is a mask of Agyō (or Ah), one of the two guardian figures found at the entrance to Buddhist temples. The exceptional quality of the artist's repoussé work (for which designs or patterns are formed by hammering on the reverse side) creates an arresting effect.



Helmet (*kabuto*) with Crest Representing Fudō Myōō and Half Mask (*menpō*), early 17th century

Iron, copper, gold, wood, leather, lacquer, lacing

The frontal crest on this helmet is a Sanskrit character engulfed in flames, an allegory of the Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō—the Immovable One. The stylized shape of the helmet, constructed of six wide plates, represents Mount Fuji, with eternal snow at its summit.



Half Mask (*menpō*), 18th century
Iron, lacquer, horsehair, leather, lacing

The beak-like nose seen on some tengu masks evolved over time into an elongated human nose, as seen on this half mask.

This half mask portrays a tengu, a mythical creature in Japanese folklore with ties to Buddhism. Tengu, characterized by long beak-like noses, can be mischievous and inclined to play tricks on humans, but they are also believed to have magical skills in the martial arts.



Elaborately Shaped Helmet (*kawari kabuto*) with Sanskrit Character for Fudō Myōō, 17th century

Iron, copper, gold, wood, leather, lacquer, lacing

The frontal crest on this helmet is a Sanskrit character engulfed in flames, an allegory of the Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō—the Immovable One. The stylized shape of the helmet, constructed of six wide plates, represents Mount Fuji, with eternal snow at its summit.



Muneyoshi

Japanese, 17th–18th century

Axe-Shaped Helmet (*kawari kabuto*), 17th–18th century

Iron, lacquer, lacing, bronze, gold, leather

This helmet is in the shape of an axe head, a symbol of power and strength. The blacksmith's inscription reads "*makiwari*" (wood-chopping axe) and may be a reference to Kintoki, a small child of Japanese folklore who has superhuman strength and carries a giant axe.



Elaborately Shaped Helmet

(*kawari kabuto*), 17th–18th century

Iron, wood, lacquer, silver, yak hair, lacing, bronze, gold

To fashion this helmet, a demon mask sculpted from lacquered papier-mâché was fitted over a simple iron bowl made of three plates. In Japanese folklore, *oni* (demons) are cruel but protective spirits often depicted as menacing, horned, wild creatures, considered invincible and thus a logical choice for portrayals on armor.



Ridged-Bowl Helmet (sujibachi kabuto), helmet, 16th century;
ornamentation, mid-18th century
Iron, lacing, fur, gold, *shakudō*, bronze,
leather

The bowl of this helmet is constructed of forty-three iron plates. The flanges at the edge of each seam are formed into an S-shape, enabling them to interlock; this technique greatly strengthens the helmet. The ornaments, added in the 18th century, include the sacred jewel of Buddhism at the crown of the helmet and gilt-bronze fern fronds above a grimacing *oni* (demon) face.



Frontal Crest (*maedate*), 18th century
Lacquer, gold, horsehair

This unique *maedate*—an ornament for the front of a helmet— evokes the head of a mythical animal, part ferocious bird and part fish. It was modeled using a dry-lacquer technique in which layers of lacquer are built up to create the shape. White horsehair, fine teeth, and lacquered, scale-like wings further embellish the piece.



Armor of the Okegawadō Type,

sashimono, late 16th century;
armor, early 17th century

Iron, lacquer, bear fur, Japanese paper
(*washi*), bamboo, gold, wood, fabric,
horsehair

This armor and the imposing tall ornament (*sashimono*) at the back reflect the exuberance of the late 16th century, when warfare reached an unprecedented intensity and warriors sought to stand out during interclan conflicts. Made of gilded, lacquered paper, the ornament represents three feathers. Visible from afar but too fragile for combat, this armor was probably worn by a samurai surveying the battlefield or taking part in a procession or ceremony.



Elaborately Shaped Helmet (*kawari kabuto*), early 17th century

Iron, leather, lacing, gilt copper, bronze, gilt wood

This helmet's upper structure is modeled from lacquered leather in the shape of a rhinoceros horn and ears. Though not native to Japan, the rhinoceros was illustrated in books imported from the Asian continent.



Hineno-type Helmet (kabuto) with Hawk Feather, 17th–18th century

Iron, lacing, lacquer, leather, bronze, gold, *shakudō*, wood

Helmets of the hineno type featured a close-fitting neck guard that is longer in the back than it is on the sides (to clear the shoulders). The gilt-bronze frontal crest of this helmet portrays the Buddhist wheel of law, which symbolizes the teachings of Buddha or the Buddha himself. The rear crest is shaped like a giant hawk feather and made of lacquered wood. Hawks were revered for their fierceness, sharp eyes, determination, and speed of flight.



Peach-Shaped Helmet (*momonari kabuto*) with Antlers, 17th–18th century

Iron, gold, lacquer

The striking stag antlers that adorn this helmet are sculpted from dry lacquer and gilded in a realistic texture.



**Elaborate Shell-Shaped Helmet
(*kawari kabuto*), 17th century**

Iron, lacing, papier-mâché

Imposing and majestic, this helmet is a large papier-mâché representation of a scallop shell. Viewed from the side, however, a different shape is suggested: the base of two fins and a fishtail forcefully striking the water.



Armor of the *Okegawadō* Type,

17th century

Iron, lacquer, gold, silver, bronze, horsehair

The *okegawadō* type of armor, named for its tube-like shape, was one of the most popular styles of armor from the late 16th century onward, as it offered excellent protection against gunfire. This example is constructed of heavy iron plates, horizontally aligned and riveted together. Gold and silver inlays illustrate a Chinese lion romping among peonies on the sandbank, as well as the helmet's seashells and dragons.



Elaborately Shaped Helmet (*kawari kabuto*), early 17th century

Iron, lacing, papier-mâché, lacquer

Atop this black-lacquered iron helmet, an animated dorsal fin slices through waves. In East Asian traditions, the fish is a symbol of happiness, freedom, and prosperity.



Half Mask (*menpō*) with Crab Claw Design, 18th century

Iron, lacquer, lacing, hair



Wave-Shaped Helmet (*naruto kawari kabuto*), 17th century

Iron, gold lacquer, lacing

Meant to stand out on the battlefield, this helmet depicts a tall wave with a rounded crest, a frequent natural phenomenon in the Naruto Strait, which separates the Japanese islands of Honshū and Shikoku. The family crest seen here is the *manji*, an ancient Sanskrit symbol that was adopted in Japanese Buddhism to represent the universality of the Buddha's teachings.



**Seashell-Shaped Embossed Helmet
(*awabi uchidashi kabuto*),**

17th–18th century

Iron, lacing, leather, bronze, gold

To create this abalone seashell-shaped helmet, the craftsman used a sturdy, high-relief embossing technique. The helmet bowl is made with two joined plates of iron, the welded seam of which is hidden with a scalloped flange. The quality of both the iron and the patina here is exceptional.



Elaborately Shaped Helmet (*kawari kabuto*), ca. 1700

Iron, wood, silver, lacquer, lacing

The side ornaments of this helmet represent bamboo smoking pipes (*kiseru*) with silver-lacquered mouthpieces. The shape of the helmet bowl is that of a tobacco pouch. Pouches of this type dating to the Edo period are cinched at the top with a drawstring. The overall concept and design of the helmet pays tribute to the art of smoking. Tobacco was introduced in Japan by the Portuguese in the 1500s.



Elaborately Shaped Helmet (*kawari kabuto*), 17th century

Iron, lacing, lacquer, *shakudō*, bronze, gold, lacquered paper, fur

This helmet's frontal ornament (*maedate*) is comprised of nine slightly twisted lacquered paper bamboo leaves and can spin in a breeze. A crescent moon, trimmed with fur, floats above the rear of the helmet, adding further height and majesty. The stylized cherry blossom crest on the side flaps was used by several clans.



**Helmet with Standing Rivets
(*hoshi kabuto*), 17th–18th century**

Iron, leather, lacing, *shakudō*

Forged from a single sheet of iron, this tall conical helmet is embellished with protruding rivets. Stylized eyebrows were added to the visor while a foliage motif made of an alloy of gold and copper were added to the crown.



Bamboo-Shaped Helmet (*takenari kabuto*), 17th century

Iron, lacquer, gold, lacing

This helmet's shape is that of a bamboo shoot with two leaves, symbolizing strength and endurance. The clean and straight cut of the stalk is reminiscent of the cutting test conducted by master swordsmiths who would slash bamboo to test the quality of a blade.



**Eggplant-Shaped Helmet
(*nasubinari kabuto*), 17th century**

Lacquered leather, iron, gold, lacing,
papier-mâché

This tall helmet comprises six iron plates and is extended with a papier-mâché and lacquered-leather structure, forming the conical eggplant shape.

Weapons and Command Equipment

Until the end of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), the bow and arrow served as the samurai's main weapon. During the Nanbokuchō (1336–1392) and Muromachi (1392–1573) periods, frequent conflicts involved a higher number of warriors. Hand-to-hand combat proved to be the most effective strategy. Lances and swords became the weapons of choice even after the introduction of the matchlock gun in 1543. Following the arrival of firearms, archery was still important to the samurai and remained part of the training for military noblemen. Swords were the most important weapons for the samurai. Warriors carried a long and a short sword—a *taichi* with *koshigatana*, or a *katana* with *wakizashi*.

Command equipment was designed to help military leaders convey orders. War fans, command batons, drums, gongs, and conch shell horns were used to direct troops. To

ensure that the commander in chief's rank was properly displayed, and to identify the clans, daimyō and warriors used personal flags, standards, and banners bearing distinctive family crests on the battlefield.



Horse Mask (*bamen*), 19th century
Leather, lacquer, horsehair

This delightfully fierce mask transforms a horse into a creature of mythical powers, complete with horns and golden fangs.



Muneyoshi
Japanese, active early–mid 19th century
Horse Mask (*bamen*), 19th century
Iron

Most known horse masks are made of leather; this iron example is a rarity. Here, a dragon is surrounded by flames. A central hinge makes it possible to adjust the mask to fit the horse.



Horse Mask (*bamen*), 19th century
Leather, metal, lacquer

Horse masks (*bamen*) first appeared in the 17th century and were primarily used in military processions. *Bamen* were often made of boiled leather that was molded and lacquered to portray dragons or caricatures of horses. Lacquered in gold, red, and black, this example, with its menacing jaws and flame-like eyebrows, is a caricature of a horned dragon.



**Horse Tack (*bagu*) with Saddle (*kura*)
and Stirrups (*abumi*), 1678**

Iron, gold, wood, leather

The copper-colored wooden saddle and iron stirrups of this set are richly adorned with peonies of gold- and silver-toned lacquer in low relief. The saddle pads bear a design of dragons cavorting among waves and the Takenaka family crest.



Horse Mask (*bamen*), late 16th century

Wood, leather, gold, hemp



**Horse Tack (*bagu*) with Saddle (*kura*)
and Stirrups (*abumi*), 19th century**

Wood, leather, iron, lacquer, gold

The saddle and accompanying pieces in this equestrian set are embellished in gold with a complex geometric pattern and Fukami family crests.



Nagatsugu

Japanese, active 18th century

Stirrups (*abumi*), 18th century

Iron, silver, wood

Samurai warriors frequently fought on horseback with bows and arrows, using stirrups designed with long soles to function as platforms. Toe braces at the front allowed riders to stand in the stirrups to shoot their arrows. The stirrups were generally made of lacquered iron and often embellished with brass, silver, or copper inlay and appliqué. Such beautifully decorated stirrups were often exchanged as gifts among high-ranking warriors.



Saddle (*kura*) with Inlaid Peonies, 1675

Wood, silver, copper

Adapted from Chinese and central Asian models, Japanese saddles were made of lacquered and decorated hardwood, such as red oak or maple. This saddle features a beautiful design of inlaid peonies.



Tomozane

Japanese, dates unknown

Stirrups (*abumi*), 17th–mid-19th century

Iron, silver, wood, lacquer

These russet-iron stirrups are adorned with a design of silver-inlaid cherry blossoms surrounding a butterfly family crest (*mon*). The cherry blossom, which falls from the tree at the height of its beauty, became a powerful symbol for the samurai who, governed by the *bushidō* honor code, might choose to accept death even in the flower of youth.



Stirrups (*abumi*) with Designs of Monkeys, 18th century

Iron, wood, copper

The tiny monkeys that appear on these stirrups are rare embellishments for this type of equestrian equipment. Monkeys were believed to be protective figures for horses, capable of saving them from potential illness. Live monkeys were often kept in stables to help keep horses calm.



Fireman's Helmet (*kaji kabuto*) with the Mōri Family Crest, 17th century

Leather, iron, lacquer, silver, *shakudō*, Dutch cloth

Firefighting was one of the most important tasks assumed by samurai during the peaceful Edo period. Rotating teams of samurai were assigned to protect the shogun's castle and other important buildings. This cape (attached to the helmet) of Dutch wool is embellished with two crest designs used by the Mōri; the lacquered leather helmet mimics the shape of a war helmet.



Fire Cape (*kaji shōzoku*), late 18th century

Cotton, silk, Japanese paper (*washi*)

The wives of samurai ran the family households while their husbands were away at war. At a time when fires were common in wooden castles and residences, capes like this one provided women some protection against flames. Unfortunately, only wealthy families were able to afford such a garment.



Surcoat (*jinbaori*), 17th–18th century
Leather, lacquer, brocade

The back of this battle jacket is embellished with the image of a type of command baton known as a *saihai*. Made from strips of lacquered paper attached to a wooden handle, a *saihai* was used to signal troops.



Battle Standard (*umajirushi*),
18th century

Gold, wood

This type of standard, known as an *umajirushi*, was placed beside the commander in chief when he was traveling on horseback or seated to direct or observe a battle. Visible at great distances, the standard announced his presence to both his own soldiers and the enemy. This example is in the shape of a butterfly, the crest of the Tokugawa-aligned Ikeda family.



Full-Face Mask (*sōmen*), 17th century
Iron, gold, bronze

This work represents a rare type of full-face mask made of parts fastened together with rivets instead of removable pieces. A fabric cap would be attached to the small holes at the top of the forehead to ensure a secure fit to the head and face.



Battle Banner (*sashimono*), ca. 18th century

Silk

This long silk banner was attached to the back of a samurai's suit of armor to help identify him from a distance. The inscription on the flag translates as "take refuge in the Lotus Law," referring to the Lotus Sutra, the central teaching of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism founded in the 13th century.



War Drum (*jindaiko*), late 17th–early 18th century

Wood, doeskin, gold, metal, silk

The war drum was used to sound orders to troops on the battlefield. This example was carved out of a single piece of wood. Each side is decorated with three hollyhock leaves, the crest of the ruling Tokugawa family.



**Bow Holder (*yumidai*) with Two Bows
with the Tokugawa Family Crest,
18th century**

Leather, iron, bamboo, feathers, gold lacquer

The traditional Japanese longbow measures between seven and eight feet long, with the grip one-third of the length from the base. Great skill was required in crafting the bow to ensure that the two unequal arms exerted an even pull on the arrow. This rare set includes a bow holder, two bows, and a particularly ornate quiver adorned with delicate gold-lacquer leafing. The ten bamboo arrows have forged-iron tips. All the pieces of this bow holder bear the crest of the Tokugawa family, the warrior clan that ruled Japan during the Edo period.



Arrow Box and Arrows, 19th century
Wood, lacquer, gold, bamboo, feathers, iron

This black-lacquered box, decorated with the paulownia-leaf crest, served as a storage receptacle for precious arrows. Each of the arrows, which are made of bamboo with duck feathers, is equipped with a small iron tip. Two of the arrows are fitted with larger, more elaborate iron heads with an openwork design of a cherry blossom.



Arrowheads (*yanone*),
17th–mid-19th century
Iron

The designs on these intricate arrowheads carry votive significance. One is decorated with Sanskrit letters (the liturgical language of Buddhism); another bears the Chinese zodiac wheel and two heart shapes known by craftsmen as “boar’s eyes”; three others are decorated with family crests (*mon*); and one depicts an episode from a folktale in which a child escapes from an ogre by climbing a tree.



Quiver (*utsubo*), 17th–18th century
Bamboo, leather, fur, gold

This quiver takes the form of a bamboo tube covered in lacquered leather and wild boar fur. The wild boar alludes to the Buddhist goddess Marishiten, patron and protector of archers, who is often depicted riding the animal. The quiver was carried diagonally across the back.



Pole Weapon (*naginata*), 18th century
Iron, lacquer, wood, silver, gold

The *naginata*, a pole weapon characterized by a long shaft surmounted by a curved blade, was favored by the samurai for fighting both on horseback and on foot and thus played an important role in Japanese military history from the 12th through the mid-19th century. During the Edo period, samurai women trained with the *naginata* and used it to defend their homes and families when the men were away. This example bears family crests on its pole and scabbard.



Yokoyama Sukesada

Japanese, active 17th century

***Tachi*-type Sword (*efu no tachi*),
1660–70**

Steel, bronze, stingray skin, wood,
lacquer, gold

The sword was a samurai's most prized possession and the symbol of his social status. With a curved blade just over twenty-six inches long, this sword would have been worn only by the highest-ranking members of the military aristocracy on ceremonial occasions. Adapted to mounted combat, this *tachi* was worn on the warrior's left and attached to his belt. The sword mounts include an astonishing 135 crests of the Abe family.



Short Sword (*wakizashi*) with the Mōri Family Crest, blade, 16th century; scabbard, 18th century

Steel, lacquer, *shakudō*, wood

Japanese warriors used several types of bladed weapons. During the Edo period, it was an exclusive privilege of the samurai class to wear two swords: the longer *katana* and the shorter *wakizashi*, an example of which is seen here. The Mōri family crest is worked into the ornamental fittings on the sword's hilt.



Ujifusa, short sword

Japanese, active mid–late 16th century

Dagger (*aikuchi*), 1572

Iron, lacquer, wood, horn, gold, bronze, *shakudō*



Armor of the *Tatehagidō* Type, 17th–18th century

Iron, lacing, gold, boar fur, *shakudō*, bronze

Tatehagidō armor is characterized by chest armor made of five vertically oriented iron plates riveted together.

In this example, a dragon, rendered in relief, winds across the front of the chest plate. Three dents in the cuirass (coverage from neck to waist) show that this particular armor was bullet-tested; marks left by a sword or arrow are also evident.



Matchlock Gun (*teppō*), 17th–18th century

Iron, bronze, gold, wood

European firearms first reached Japan in 1543 with Portuguese merchants who were shipwrecked on a small island south of Kyūshū. Gunsmithing and powder making rapidly expanded across the nation, as skilled Japanese blacksmiths quickly learned to copy and adapt the guns. Imported and domestic guns changed Japanese warfare; the most progressive daimyō added gunnery units to their armies. The stock of this gun is inlaid with a Chinese lion, a floral crest, and chrysanthemums in gilded bronze.

Samurai and Horses on the Battlefield

Statuettes discovered in tombs indicate that Japanese warriors relied on horses as early as the Kofun period (ca. 250–538). When provincial lords took up arms to defend their territories and govern the nation, battle became more frequent. The samurai proved to be excellent mounted archers; mounts played key roles in military strategy and facilitated travel. Later, when battle involved thousands of men, many warriors fought on foot, with samurai elites on horseback leading the troops. Vital in wartime, horses were also important during the peaceful Edo period (1615–1868). Riding on magnificent mounts and wearing their most striking armor, samurai displayed their status and wealth in parades, processions, and ceremonies.

Before the 17th century, samurai horses did not wear armor. Painted scenes of large-scale combat provide evidence that, by

around 1600, more elaborate warrior dress began to appear, as well as horse masks and armor. In the Edo period, horse armor became more luxurious and sophisticated for use in ceremonial processions.



Armor of the *Nuinobedō* Type with *Kazaori Eboshi* Helmet, armor, 1550–1600; mask, 17th–18th century
Iron, gold, lacquer, lacing, leather

In the second half of the 16th century, when warfare reached unprecedented heights, demand increased for simpler armor that could be produced with speed and efficiency without sacrificing an impressive appearance. One of the most elegant solutions was *nuinobedō* armor comprised of two chest plates, created with slightly overlapping scales laced together in parallel rows with hinges under the left arm and laces on the right side. The helmet is shaped like a headdress worn at court.



Saotome Ienari, helmet bowl
Japanese, active 17th century

Ichiguchi Yoshikata, mask
Japanese, active 18th century

Armor of the *Yokohagidō* Type, helmet,
17th century; mask and armor, 18th century
Iron, leather, gold, wood, lacing, fur, hemp

This flamboyant example of *yokohagidō* armor, with its red-lacquered plates and blue lacing, illustrates how color and an impressive helmet could help a warrior stand out on the battlefield. The Sanskrit characters emblazoned in gold on the sleeves and the dragon engulfed in flames on the helmet ornament are both emblems of the Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō. Buddhist motifs often appear on samurai armor to offer divine protection.



Hōrai Kunichika, helmet
Japanese, active 16th century

Myōchin Muneaki, mask
Japanese, 1682–1751

Armor of the *Mogamidō* Type, helmet
bowl, ca. 1530; mask, early 17th century;
assembled mid-18th century

Iron, lacquer, *shakudō*, gold, silver, copper,
bronze, silk, leather

In *mogamidō*-type armor, the chest armor is constructed of horizontal iron plates held together by parallel lacing instead of rivets. Here, the distinctive chest armor comprises five hinged parts; the decorated helmet's elegant, rounded shape is reminiscent of *akodanari kabuto* (melon-shaped helmets).



Armor of the *Dōmaru* Type with the Mizuno Family Crest, armor, early 17th century; helmet, ca. 1550

Iron, shakudō, lacquer, copper, brocade, gold, doeskin, bronze

Assembled from individual scales, *dōmaru* armor was easily custom-fit to its owner. This chest plate is made of articulated scales laced with doeskin braids (a rare embellishment); the plated helmet is adorned with *shakudō* (an alloy of gold and copper) arrows. This armor bears the crest of the Mizuno family of daimyō.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳

Japanese, 1798–1861

**The Great Battle Between the
Minamoto and the Taira in Northern
Echizen Province, ca. 1830**

Triptych of woodblock prints; ink and
color on paper



A chaotic mass of armor, swords, flags, and horses was created to capture the frenzy of this battle scene that took place between several commanders and their forces during the Genpei War (1180–1185). The Genpei War was the nation's civil war between the Taira and Minamoto clans during the late Heian period. The Minamoto defeated the Taira and established the first shogun military government in the city of Kamakura. In the following centuries, fifteen shogun ruled Japan until the fall of the shogun in the late 19th century.



Tsukioka Yoshitoshi

Japanese, 1839–1892

The Surrender of Abe no Munetō and His Retainers, from The Earlier Taiheiki, 1864

Triptych of woodblock prints; ink and color
on paper

This triptych shows the legendary commander Yoshiie of the powerful Minamoto clan (seated on a stool on the right) receiving his captive, Abe Munetō of the Abe family, who bows to him on the left while three Minamoto retainers look on. A backdrop of colorful and ornate standards, military curtains (jinmaku), and flags set the scene. These great foes engaged in frequent battle during the Heian period (794–1185). The story is described in the Earlier Taiheiki, a historical epic that chronicles the lives of great Heian-period samurai.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi

Japanese, 1798–1861

Reconstruction of Kiyosu Castle in Three Days Under the Direction of Kinoshita Tōkichirō, 1847–50

Triptych of woodblock prints; ink and color on paper

According to legend, in the mid-1500s, a 180-meter (just over 580 feet) section of the moat wall of Kiyosu Castle that had crumbled into the water was repaired in a mere three days under the direction of Kinoshita Tōkichirō. He went on to become one of the greatest samurai warlords in history and changed his name to Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Here, Hideyoshi is shown at the center, bowing to the lord of the castle, Oda Nobunaga, who is surrounded by retainers with a falconer on his right.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳

Japanese, 1798–1861

The 47 Rōnin at Moronao's Palace, 1852

Triptych of woodblock prints; ink and color on paper

The story of the forty-seven rōnin is one of the most famous tales in Japanese history. A feud broke out between two daimyō, Asano Nagonori and Kira Yoshinaka (also called Moronao). After attacking Kira, Lord Asano was ordered to commit seppuku (ritual suicide). In revenge, forty-seven of Asano's former samurai, now rōnin (masterless samurai) swore to take revenge on Kira.

This triptych shows the day, December 14, 1702, when the rōnin, dressed in their black-and-white jackets, rushed into Kira's palace on the far right. Kira's men can be seen



shoving him into a hiding space concealed behind a scroll painting. The Asano retainers found Kira and beheaded him. After achieving their ultimate revenge, the rōnin turned themselves in. They, too, were ordered to commit seppuku. The story of the forty-seven rōnin embodies the spirit of loyalty and honor that samurai were to possess. Over the centuries, the tale has been told in Kabuki plays, television series, and numerous films.



Armor of the *Tachidō* Type,

17th century

Iron, gold, lacing, bear fur, silver, wood

In this suit of armor, the chest, shoulder guards, and skirt are constructed from rows of horizontal iron plates that have been heavily coated with black and gold lacquer and laced together with silk cords. Compared to an older style of armor assembled from tiny individual scales, this type of construction makes the armor lighter and easier to maintain. Note the bear-fur edging on the armor skirt, helmet, and throat guard.



Horse Armor (*bagai*) and Saddle Pads (*auri*), 18th–19th century

Leather, gold, fabric, lacquer, iron



Armor of the *Hotokedō* Type with Fish Scales, 18th century

Iron, lacquer, gold, silver, bronze, horsehair

Surcoat (*jinbaori*), 16th–18th century

Wool, silk

Horse Armor (*bagai*), 19th century

Iron, wood, leather, gold, hemp, lacquer

This horse armor is made from small squares of lacquered leather sewn to a hemp lining. Lacquer enhances the durability and hardness of the leather and allows it to dry quickly.

Horse Mask (*bamen*), 18th–19th century

Iron, leather, lacquer



**Horse Tack (*bagu*) with Saddle (*kura*),
Saddle Pads, and Stirrups (*abumi*),**

1850–1900

Iron, wood, leather, lacquer, gold, hemp, silk
brocade

Horse armor developed during the Momoyama period (1568–1600); it's possible that horses wore armor in battle by the early 17th century. This example is constructed from small leather squares coated in russet lacquer and sewn to a silk brocade lining. The saddle pads are adorned with a gilded design of birds called plovers flying over a spray of waves, a traditional Japanese motif that signifies overcoming obstacles.



Attributed to Myōchin Nobuie, helmet
Japanese, active 19th century

Armor of the *Tachidō* Type, 19th
century

Iron, lacquer, gold, lacing

In *tachidō* armor, the torso is protected by a rigid cage made in two parts that are hinged together under the left arm. In this example, the chest armor is constructed of individual iron scales (*honkozane*) that have been lacquered, gilded, and tightly laced together with silk braid. Of all types of armor construction, the use of *honkozane* was the most time-consuming and expensive.

Horse Armor (*bagai*) with Horse Mask (*bamen*), 19th century

Leather, metal, lacquer, hemp, gold



Horse Tack (*bagu*) with Saddle (*kura*), Saddle Pads, and Stirrups (*abumi*), 18th–19th century

Iron, wood, leather, gold, hemp, lacquer

Lacquer was used to waterproof saddles, stirrups, and saddle pads. The saddle is black lacquered wood and the stirrups are iron with a red lacquer interior. The leather saddle pads have been coated with green lacquer and enlivened with a gold-embossed pattern of turbulent waves beneath a full moon.



Battle Banner (*sashimono*),
19th century
Silk

Battle banners were worn on the back of a suit of armor to identify military units rather than individual soldiers. Foot soldiers wore uniform flags with the crest of their daimyō. Commanders sometimes had their own flags.