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Saddam linked himself with Assyrian, Babylonian, and Abbasid rulers, substituting his humble origins with false genealogies. Bricks used in his megalomaniacal restoration of Babylon are stamped with his name, and a large inscription states that the city was begun by Nebuchanezzar and completed by Saddam. Close identification with a single ruler can easily backfire once the ruler is removed.

The third factor that seems to have contributed to the looting of museums has to do with their origins under colonial rule and their persisting state of alienation in Iraq and other Arab countries. Most Arab museums still operate within an outmoded orientalist framework, displaying artifacts with little regard for local general audience or even specialists. My Danish colleague, Ingolf Thuesen, who conducted a survey of visitors to a regional museum in Hama, Syria, noted that the museum was primarily visited by foreign tourists and government officials and rarely by the adult Syrian population. Interestingly, precisely this museum suffered severe damage from looting in the aftermath of the 1982 bombardment of the city. By and large seen as symbols of the government, signs of privilege, and as 'foreign' institutions, one can understand why some Iraqis were willing to loot their museums and cultural institutions.

Yasser Tabbaa

View of the Ziggurat at Ur, ca. 2100 BCE

The Laws of Antiquities governing the excavation, possession, and transaction of antiquities in Iraq and other Arab countries seem to foster this rupture between society and artistic culture, in two main ways. First, the overly stringent policies in these laws virtually ignore the existence of an art market or the age-old desire of some people, Iraqis included, to collect ancient objects. Whereas such policies prescribe an ideal situation, in reality they have contributed to the proliferation of an illegal art market. Second, by defining a protected cultural artifact as 200 years or older, these laws valorize the ancient over the more recent and cheapen the still palpable memory of the population.

Finally, I agree that a few well-placed tanks in front of Iraqi museums and libraries would have prevented or at least minimized their looting. But in the end such security measures, whether by US or Iraqi forces, only serve to deepen the rupture and further disengage culture from the population. Rather, I would like us to look a little more proactively towards a future when cultural institutions are not only better protected but also better integrated within their own societies. It is time, I think, to turn alienation into outreach, to develop the public and educational components of these museums, following the example of European and especially American museums. Once Iraqis feel included in their own cultural patrimony, I suspect they will have second thoughts before looting it. <

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Editor's note >

As a follow-up to this issue, the newsletter would like to publish your comments and experiences regarding the recent looting of cultural institutions in Iraq. Please send your comments of 100 words or less to the art & cultures editor, Kristy Phillips phil8632@umn.edu

Kazari

Asian Art >
Japan

Tsuji Nobuo introduced *kazari* as a central concept in the study of Japanese art about fifteen years ago and has been developing the idea ever since. The basic meaning of the verb *kazaru* is 'to decorate, to adorn'. It can also be used in the sense of 'to exhibit', 'to put on show'. Finally, *kazaru* involves the idea of 'being affected', as in *kazarike*, 'affectation or showiness'. Thus, *kazari* stands for decor, decoration, the decorated and the decorative, and for the proper way of handling and appreciating it all. In pre-modern Japan, *kazari* has led to objects and ensembles of objects being used for purposes of play and display.

By Anna Beerens

Kazari is also the title of the catalogue accompanying an exhibition of the same name organized by the British Museum and the Japan Society of New York in association with the Suntory Museum of Art in Tokyo. Some two hundred exquisitely beautiful objects were on display at the Japan Society in New York (autumn 2002) and at the British Museum (spring 2003). Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, director of the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures, and Tsuji Nobuo, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University and currently president of Tama Art University, were co-curators. Both contributed introductory articles to the catalogue: Tsuji's article centres on the role of *kazari* within the history of Japanese art, whilst Rousmaniere's concentrates on conceptual aspects.

In stressing the conceptual complexity of *kazari*, both exhibition and catalogue make an attempt to challenge the conventions of current art-historical discourse which, as Rousmaniere says, 'has tended to categorise the arts arbitrarily', as is evident from terms like 'visual arts' or 'applied arts'. This exhibition seeks to break down such conventional boundaries between artistic forms, even between arts as apparently different as painting and music, with the aim of presenting the 'social life' of artefacts, and to show them in the context of what Rousmaniere calls 'a larger artistic programme' (p. 21). For example, the exhibition not only included high-quality hanging scrolls and painted screens, which would traditionally be classified as high art, but also spectacularly shaped parade helmets and skilfully decorated musical instruments, objects that would usually be considered applied art.

The exhibition is arranged in six thematic sections, each centring on what are considered to be the six highpoints of *kazari*. The first section deals with display in the reception rooms of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century elite; the second with the exuberant style of the early seventeenth-century samurai; the third introduces the taste for finery and splendour of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century merchants; the fourth presents the fashions of high-ranking women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the fifth takes us to the pleasure quarters of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and the last section explores festivals of the pre-modern period, with their colourful floats and costumes.

Taken from the book under review

Campaign coat (*jinbaori*) with saw-tooth pattern at hem and nine-circle crest. Early seventeenth century. Private Collection, Japan. Yasukuni Jinja, Yushukan Museum, Tokyo.

The question to be answered is whether the exhibition is successful in changing the way we look at Japanese art, as its organizers claim it will be. It goes without saying that the exhibits are immensely engaging, but are they shown in such a way that we do indeed see the objects as part of 'a larger artistic programme', and get a notion of their usage in every sense – what Rousmaniere claims the exhibition is all about?

In fact, it is only in the first section that the visitor can experience something of '*kazari* in action'. In large showcases, reconstructions are made of the decorative arrangements in Muromachi period reception rooms. Hanging scrolls, screens, and small decorative objects are put together as they might have been in a sixteenth-century interior. The result is striking. However, hardly any other attempts are made to present an ensemble in this manner. Contemporary etiquette manuals, pattern books, and illustrations are called upon to provide a context, but kimonos, sashes, accessories, screens, small articles of furniture, and ceramics are still mostly displayed in separate cases, and are treated individually in the catalogue. There are no clashes of textures and materials, no three-dimensional confrontations. There may well have been practical reasons (such as conflicting conservation requirements) for not putting objects together, but after the promise of the first section one does expect more of an attempt to show items in ensembles.

The catalogue follows the layout of the exhibition. Articles accompanying the first five sections were written by Kawai Masatomo, John Carpenter, Yasumura Toshinobu, Nagasaki Iwao, and Timothy Clark respectively. The section on festivals has no accompanying essay: there is instead an article on the vocabulary of 'decoration' in early modern Japan by Tamamushi Satoko. Each contribution shows fine scholarship, and the descriptions of the individual exhibits, provided by a range of contributors, are highly informative. Much information is brought together here that cannot be found in any other English-language publication. It is the catalogue, more than the exhibition itself, which draws our attention not only to the beauty of the design and the quality of the workmanship, but also to an object's use, its place within the discourse of ornament and good taste, and

Taken from the book under review

Helmet in the shape of a peach with attached bison horns. Early seventeenth century.

the many allusions to the canon of art and literature, which brings in the element of play and parody. Despite the careful labelling of exhibits, the uninitiated visitor who does not read the catalogue will have little appreciation of the supposedly revolutionary nature ('entirely fresh interpretation' or 'new thinking') of the exhibition, and will only be aware of having seen a series of showcases displaying very appealing objects. This is an exhibition that needs the catalogue to make its point.

In spite of these misgivings this exhibition is of innovative value: both exhibition and catalogue are representative of a perceptible trend in the study of art history (and also in other areas) that encourages scholars to move away from exclusive thinking, break down boundaries, and be more aware of interrelatedness, multifariousness, ambiguity, and ambivalence. Objects really are presented in context, even if one has to read the catalogue to fully appreciate this point, and traditional boundaries are negated. Even a few 'ephemeral objects', as Rousmaniere calls them, such as a wrapping cloth, a decorated lantern, or an incense wrapper are included. This integrative impulse comes from application of the concept of *kazari*. When ideas are represented on such an impressive scale and at such a high level of scholarship, as is the case with the *Kazari* exhibition, they are sure to have an impact, even if it takes time for partition walls to fall and long-standing art-historical considerations to be challenged. Perhaps in a few years' time we will be able to see all the finery of fashionable eighteenth-century ladies presented in one showcase, together with elements of the interiors in which they lived their lives. <

- Rousmaniere, Nicole Coolidge (ed.), *Kazari, decoration and display in Japan, 15th–19th centuries*, London: The British Museum Press/The Japan Society (2002), pp. 304, ill., ISBN 0-7141-2636-5

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