

Silk Stories

Taishō Kimono 1900-1940

Within the scope of the 400 year jubilee of Japanese-Dutch trading relations (1609-2009) the Kunsthal Rotterdam presents the exhibition Silk Stories, focusing on the various fabrics, hand made decorations and new techniques associated with the development of the kimono.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

THE WORD KIMONO is a collective term for a variety of traditional pieces of clothing and can be translated as 'thing to wear'. For the first time ever in the Netherlands, over 120 kimono, several haori (short jackets) and obi (broad brocade waist bands) provide an overview of Japanese fashion from the period 1900-1940, and the Taishō period in particular. Attention is paid to the specific role of the kimono within every day Japanese life. Central to the exhibition are the fascinating stories that are often portrayed on the inside of the luxurious silk.

Taishō Culture

As a result of increasing prosperity in the Taishō period – the reigning period of Emperor Yoshihito (1912-1926) – more and more people could afford an expensive kimono. Artists were hired by department stores to design artistic patterns, resulting in an incredibly rich and high-quality supply. Characteristic of Taishō culture are the traditional representations of flowers, cranes, samurai and geishas, coupled with a keen and vivid interest in Western patterns. After the devastating earthquake of 1923 the production of kimonos experienced a boom. The destroyed cities of Tokyo and Yokohama were rebuilt as new metropolises, where big department stores dictated what was fashionable. The 'meisen' kimono, a ready-made and seasonal kimono, became immensely popular because it was cheaper than the very expensive traditional kimono. As a consequence production increased enormously, and with it the development of patterns and decorations. Geometrical designs based on Art Deco were introduced to the world of kimono fashion.

Stories in Silk

A kimono consists of ten to twelve metres of silk fabric. Putting on a kimono is serious business, and the choice of extra pieces of clothing such as an under-kimono, a short jacket or brocade waist band is also of major importance. Men's kimono are made of plain silk; only the under-kimono and the linings of the jackets were completed with decorations that were therefore hardly ever visible. The representations often have some story-like character. Representations of tea ceremonies, horse races, base ball or the upcoming war show the personal interests and beliefs of the kimono wearer. Women's kimono often show more poetic designs. Thus, the jacket 'Parting at Dawn' represents a romantic rendezvous on the outside, while on the inside it is a cock crowing as a sign of the parting that is to come. New trends were mostly introduced by geisha, for whom the kimono is an important aspect of her mysterious appeal. All pieces in the exhibition belong to the collection of Jan Dees, expert in Japan and Japanese Culture.

Kunsthal Rotterdam. www.kunsthal.nl
Opening hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10am-5pm,
Sunday and public holidays 11am-5pm
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All kimonos pictured are from the Jan Dees collection.

Fig. 1 Three Friends, 1910-1920. Woman's furisode, black crepe silk, embroidery, gold foil, hand-painted, yūzen technique.

Fig. 2 Spinning Tops, 1920-1940. Girl's kimono, blue crepe silk, stencil-printed.

Fig. 3 Wild carnations, 1920-1940. Girl's kimono, violet gauze crepe silk, hand-painted.

Fig. 4 Abstract pattern, 1960-1980. Woman's haori, fine crepe silk.

Fig. 5 Parting at Dawn, 1920-1940. Woman's haori, black fine crepe silk, embroidery, hand-painted.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5