



Woven scroll of *The Tale of Genji*, Itarō Yamaguchi (1902-2007), MA12236 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier

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MUSÉE
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At the court of Prince Genji

A thousand years of Japanese imagination

Exhibition from 22 November 2023 to 25 March 2024

Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet

Press preview 21 November 2023

Director of Guimet National
Museum of Asian Arts
Yannick Lintz

Curation

Aurélie Samuel, heritage curator,
external curator

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Entry

One ticket for all permanent and temporary exhibitions: €13 (standard), €10 (concessions)

Press

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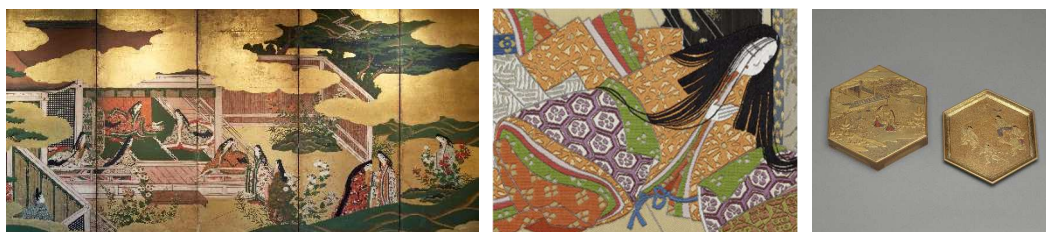
Imperial Japan during the Heian period (794-1185) was not only notable for its extremely elegant court art and its artistic effervescence, but it also gave rise to a major work of Japanese literature, The Tale of Genji. Written in the 11th century by female poet Murasaki Shikibu, the work is widely considered the world's first ever psychological novel, and for a thousand years, it has generated an extremely rich iconography, influencing even modern-day manga artists. Through the centuries, it has inspired numerous Japanese artists and artisans, including Itarō Yamaguchi (1901-2007), a master weaver from Kyoto, of whom four exceptional woven scrolls will be presented at the exhibition in their entirety for the first time.

The first part of the exhibition transports visitors to Ancient Japan through representations of traditional architecture, where they can discover the Heian period (794-1185) and its court art. This was an era of prolific artistic production and when women enjoyed a great deal of freedom, it notably saw the emergence of women's literature for the first time in Japanese history. While Chinese *kanshi* poetry remained the prerogative of elite men, women took possession of *waka* style poetry which they wrote using a cursive writing system developed from Chinese characters and transposed to the Japanese script of the era. Breaking away from the Chinese form, they blended *waka* and prose to write diaries and stories.

Written in the 11th century by female poet Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), is the most well-known of these texts and is today considered the most representative work of classic Japanese literature. By subtly evoking the intricacies of the imperial court, *The Tale of Genji* set the stage for exceptional pictorial art and creativity, and inspired an extremely rich iconography, as attested by the lacquerware, prints, textiles, kimonos, sculptures, paintings and precious objects from the Guimet Museum's own collection as well as from other French and Japanese collections. Even Marie-Antoinette herself collected Japanese lacquer boxes depicting Genji scenes... The novel, which played an important role in the formation of Japanese culture, has inspired numerous artists and artisans throughout the centuries. It continues to be influential even among contemporary forms of art, notably manga, whose authors have been incredibly inventive in their interpretation and illustration of the pictorial codes, themes and scenes of the Genji story. Undoubtedly the most famous of these is *Asaki yume mishi* by Waki Yamato (born in 1948). To this day, this ancient masterpiece continues to be adapted, as evidenced by the recent *Tale of Genji* by Sean Michael Wilson, with illustrations by Inko Ai Takita, which covers the floor and walls in one part of the exhibition.

The second part of the exhibition focuses on Itarō Yamaguchi (1901-2007), a master weaver from the Nishijin district of Kyoto, who wove and donated to the Guimet Museum four exquisite scrolls illustrating *The Tale of Genji*, representing the culmination of a lifetime dedicated to weaving. Based on painted scrolls from the Heian period, and created using a hybridised technique — Western mechanical Jacquard and its digital avatar — these four woven scrolls will be exhibited for the first time ever together and fully unrolled. They will be presented with personal everyday objects, preparatory paintings and other woven creations by the artist.

This exhibition has been organised in partnership with the Sasakawa Foundation, a Franco-Japanese public-interest foundation, in celebration of thirty years of developing cultural relations and cooperation between France and Japan.



-Six panelled screen, illustrations from the *Genji Monogatari*, Momoyama period, late 16th-early 17th century, private collection © Marc Boyadjian
-Woven scroll with scenes from *The Tale of Genji*, Itarō Yamaguchi (1902-2007), MA12236 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier
-Lacquer box, Japan, 18th century, former collection belonging to Marie-Antoinette, MR380-72 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier