

July 29, 1932

My dear Curator:

It gives me great pleasure to submit to you an informal report of my work in the Smith Art Museum.

In Japan there is a proverb which says, "Peep into heaven through a small bamboo pole". I think these few words very eloquently express my feeling toward my work as well as toward your collection. Obviously, this proverb expresses the attempt to see celestial splendor and vast areas through a tiny bamboo pole. It is quite a task to thoroughly acquaint oneself and understand the whole situation by this method. However, for the short period of one year I have been engaged in work with you, and now upon my departure, I feel keenly the desire to give you some account. It is amazing, indeed, that this enormous museum collection was amassed by one man, Mr. Smith. I understand that he had no advisor to give him the best judgment in purchasing the objects. He bought them simply because he thought them beautiful. As I walked through the galleries with the curator of the Fine and Applied Arts of the Imperial Household Museum of Tokyo and Nara in the spring of 1930, he exclaimed many times at how marvelous it was that Mr. Smith possessed such choice pieces of arms and armor, lacquer work, etc. In this report I would like to concentrate on giving a brief account of the result of my research.

Arms and Armor

Arms and armor constitute a very substantial part of the collection. There are many suits worthy of mention and admiration. The best example is of late 17th century scale armor. There is also a suit of plate armor made by one of the Myochin masters in the 18th century, and there are a great number of interesting and varied types of helmets. But above all, the unique treasure that any large museum in this country or abroad would be very envious of the institution that owns it is the helmet made by Myochin Nobuiye. Springfield people are very proud to possess in this collection an authentic Nobuiye helmet made in August 1516.

The collection of sword guards is no less important than that of arms and armor. Mr. Robert Hamilton Rucker of New York who is the foremost American authority on the subject expressed his admiration and satisfaction upon examining the collection. Even Mr. Rucker was astonished when he remembered that Mr. Smith, more than two score years ago, had collected and purchased these sword fittings without knowledge, just because he admired them. The special case is arranged so that the American public may fully appreciate the art of the Japanese metal workers of the 17th and 18th centuries. They are also arranged in chronological order as well as by different schools, different types of workmanships and various alloys. The student of metallurgy

should not miss this case.

There is another important collection of Japanese art in this museum. This is the lacquer work of which there is such a variety of objects that one is able to fully appreciate the different types of workmanships and the different periods. As a whole, the Japanese lacquer work is very difficult to preserve in the dry climate of this part of the world. The Japanese air contains more moisture than here and the Japanese do not use heating systems in their houses. Nature as well as artificial causes affect lacquer a great deal. However, upon examination of those objects, they are found intact and in almost perfect condition. This is due to the careful preservation and care from the time of the former curator. There are a number of masterpieces in lacquer such as Kajikawas, Komas, Ritsuo, Zeshin, Shokasai, Kwansai, and more than a score of other celebrated makers, including inro makers. The museum is also quite rich in Japanese ethnological objects such as tobacco pouches, tobacco pipes, ladies' combs, netsukes, ojimes, cups, etc.

It is well known among museum workers that this kind of research takes quite a long time to accomplish. There is an endless number of collections of ceramics and bronzes in the museum that I cannot reach in my limited time to study. If I may be allowed to say it, the museum is short handed. I do not mean that an elaborate scheme of research is necessary, but at a certain point, there comes the need of adequate tools, time, and assistants, and adequate funds to accomplish the great task of research and to bring the proper light on the objects. I have had wonderful cooperation from fellow workers and willingness to help from assistants. I am more than satisfied with such response and support as we have had from the public. My only regret is that in my limited knowledge of the subject and in my limited time, I have hastily passed on from one subject to another. I cannot guarantee that there is no mistake, and I will be very grateful indeed to have errors corrected by some authority that I may be enlightened on these points. In my own opinion, after considering everything, I am quite happy to submit this very informal report to you and I sincerely hope that my humble work may assist you in the making of a catalogue.

Respectfully submitted,


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