



Kosode (a Garment with Small Wrist Openings) with Autumn Flower-Plants Pattern on Twill Weave Silk, Painted by Ogata Korin

Edo period, 18th century
Important Cultural Property
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Though Ogata Korin was born the second oldest son of a kimono merchant family operating *Karigane-ya*, he virtually never tried his hand at kimono design. A fully intact, extant *kosode* hand-painted by Korin himself is an extremely rare treasure.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

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A scene of autumn-flowering plants swaying in the breeze in a grass field is depicted on the *kosode*, treating the back of the garment as a painter's canvas. Japan has a long history of appreciation of these flowers and plants of autumn, and one poet representative of ancient Japan, Yamanoue no Okura (c.660-733), who worked mainly with the *waka* form, praised the seven plants (*nana-kusa*)¹ he saw blooming in autumn fields. In this *kosode*, a transparent pale blue bellflower is the main character from among these seven flowers, and Japanese pampas grass and bush clover are depicted along with white chrysanthemums. The bellflower blossoms appear in stylized, starlike forms. Also, the background of those flowers is not drawn in detail or realistically, only by expressing a part of the grass, it is drawn as if it had the impression that a wide grassland would continue from there. This distinctive mode of expression would become a major defining characteristic of the signature style of this artist, Ogata Korin, who had an early part in consolidating the Rinpa school of Japanese painting, known for its highly decorative style.

Ogata Korin was born into a kimono merchant family as the second oldest son. The long-standing family business, *Karigane-ya*, had been in operation since the end of the

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The kimono is much more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono of contemporary Japan originated with the short-sleeved *kosode* in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). Around this time, the *kosode* came to be worn by people from a wide range of generations, by everyone from court nobility and the samurai class to commoners, as an outer layer of clothing. The garments came to feature brilliant decorations with techniques including embroidery, *shibori* (shaped resist dyeing), and *katazome* (stencil resist dyeing). This article introduces one such *kosode* of the Edo period featuring a design painted by Ogata Korin (1658-1716), an artist originally from Kyoto.



Yatsushashi Maki-e Suzuri-bako (“Writing Box with the Eight-Plank Bridge. Lacquered wood with [*maki-e*], lead, and mother-of-pearl”) by Ogata Korin
Edo period, 17th century

National Treasure
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Ogata Korin also designed craft items, including ceramics and *maki-e* boxes, such as this gold-decorated lacquerware. This *suzuri-bako* inkstone box features a motif based on a scene from Japanese classical literature. Inlaying slabs of lead into the part of bridge boldly, represents a highly creative and effective use of materials not seen in other *maki-e* items.

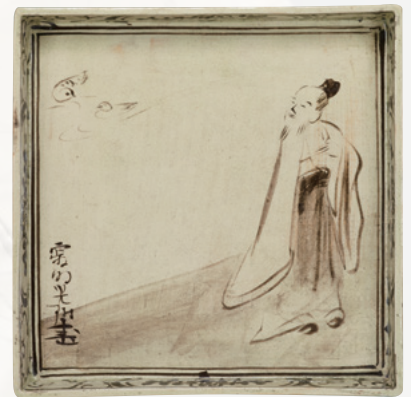
Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

Sabi-e Kan'o-zu Kakuzara (“Square Plate with Picture of a Man Looking at a Seagull in the Rusty-painting Style”) by Ogata Korin and Shinsei

Edo period, 18th century
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

After his younger brother Shinsei (Kenzan) made the square dish, Korin painted the image featuring Chinese poet Huang Tingjian (Shangu) inside it. The brothers’ collaborative works like this enjoyed considerable popularity among devotees of their work in Kyoto.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)



16th century. Besides Korin had been painting *byobu* folding screens, hanging scrolls, and so on, he also designed *maki-e* lacquerware inkstone boxes, sketched tea bowl designs for his younger brother Kenzan, who became a ceramic artist himself, and more. In particular, the brothers’ collaborative works featured designs painted by Korin on pottery crafted by Kenzan. Korin’s paintings seem imbued with a power to create spaces of decorative brilliance in daily life with their stylized depictions of natural forms, from flowers and birds to flowing water. Upon making a name for himself as a painter in Kyoto, Korin relocated to Edo (current Tokyo) around 1704, where he remained an active artist. His first patron in Edo was the owner of a lumber retailer, Fuyuki-ya, based in Fukagawa. The *kosode* introduced here is considered to have been a work Korin created for the wife of this patron as a token of his gratitude.

At the time, *kaki-e kosode* with designs painted by famous artists directly on kimono were much sought after as one-of-a-kind luxury items by affluent townswomen. An *ukiyo-zoshi*² work penned by Yushiken Masafusa, *Koshoku Fumi Denju* (“How to Convey Love,” publ. 1699), even contains a passage describing “a garment with a *sumi-e* ink painting of a pine tree design by Korin on white satin”³ as having “a sense of maturity, or ripeness, defying description.” From this, it can be inferred that *kosode* featuring designs painted by Korin were, indeed, popular items. It is not hard to imagine that the artist may have been desired for taking his brush to the garment by the wife of his patron.

Following the downfall of Fuyuki-ya, however, the whereabouts of this *kosode* would be unclear for many years. After a period of unknown owner, it eventually found its way to the collection of the Tokyo National Museum in 1873. By this time, however, it was in such a tattered and damaged state that it could no longer be worn. A scroll accompanying it contained an accurate drawing of the *kosode* with a designation stating that it had been painted by Ogata Korin for Fuyuki-ya. Accordingly, it had been brought to the museum as a precious garment hand-painted by Korin at that time. Today, the piece has been restored based on this drawing and is displayed in exhibitions on occasion.

Honkan Room 10, Tokyo National Museum “Highlights of Japanese Art: Costume”

Kosode (a garment with small wrist openings) with Autumn Flower Design on White Twill Weave Silk, Painted by Ogata Korin (Important Cultural Property) will be exhibited from October 3 to December 3, 2023.

1. Seven plants (*nana-kusa*) considered representative of Japan’s flowers of autumn, referred to in a pair of poems by Yamanoue no Okura compiled in the *Manyōshū* (“Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves”): bush clover, Japanese pampas grass, kudzu vine, dianthus, yellow patrinia, boneset, and Japanese morning glory. Some have posited that the seventh, however — referred to as *asagao* in the verse — may correspond to what is now called *kikyo* (bellflower) rather than morning glory.
2. A type of novel in the *chonin bungaku* (“townspeople’s literature”) genre written in the mid-Edo period. Featuring a realistic and amusing style, the form enjoyed popularity mainly in Osaka and Kyoto for around 100 years starting in the mid-late 17th century.
3. A type of weave in which somewhat elongated warp threads are made to float over the weft threads on the surface of the fabric, and vice versa, in order to make the points of intersection between the warp and weft threads as inconspicuous as possible.