

Traditions *Transfigured*: The Noh Masks of Bidou Yamaguchi

For six centuries Japan's Noh theater has provided a dynamic space for exploring and expressing human emotion. In the 14th century, Zeami established and codified the texts, music, acting styles, and theories that still inform Noh. Despite—or because of—these formal codes, Noh has inspired modern authors, dancers, composers, and artists drawn to its themes of human suffering and release.

This exhibition features work by Japanese artist Bidou Yamaguchi (b. 1970). Trained to make reproductions, or *utsushi*, of historic Noh masks, in 2003 Bidou radicalized this idea and practice. He used the forms, techniques, and transformative spirit of Noh masks to reproduce iconic portraits of women from European paintings. Bidou then transformed woodblock prints of Kabuki actors by Sharaku, Japan's enigmatic 18th century portrait master. We present these sculptural translations of two-dimensional images within the context of Noh. By imagining them as masks for characters in plays yet to be written, Bidou's uncanny faces connect past and present, east and west, artistic icon and human spirit.

Following Noh's structure, the exhibition has three parts. The prologue introduces Noh, Bidou's reproduction masks, and the idea of implicit creativity through careful reproduction of old forms. The dramatic core showcases Bidou's sculptural portraits, each infused with the *yūgen*, or mysterious elegance, of traditional Noh masks. The exhibition culminates in an interactive space where visitors engage the masks by exploring the process of mask making, the masks' subtle expressions, and the transfigurative experience of donning a mask.

The exhibition was curated by Dr. Kendall H. Brown and Museum Studies students B. Karenina Karyadi, Lauren Nochella, Kristy Odett, and Ariana Rizo, at the California State University, Long Beach. It was made possible by financial support from the McLeod Family Foundation and, at CSULB, Instructional Related Activities and Associated Students, Inc. We also thank the individuals and institutions who loaned works of art. This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Karin Higa (1966-2013), a thoughtful curator and introspective spirit.

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Past in Present: Noh From Then to Now

Originally the creation of the brilliant actor-writer-theorist Zeami (1363-1443), Noh theater quickly became codified. Although actors and artists learned by reproducing patterns (*kata*), their goal was incremental innovation within tradition. In Noh, the subtle juxtaposition of new and old recontextualizes the past as an inspiration for and a process of creation.

Tsukioka Kōgyo (1869-1927) made his famous Noh prints in the early 20th century. As society was cleaved by change, many Japanese sought to document their vanishing cultural history. A resurgent interest in Noh—along with some of its modern adaptations—is evident in Kōgyo's depictions of actors in wigs, robes, and masks. As valuable heirlooms, masks are carefully preserved in the schools of Noh and used only by a troupe's grand master for special performances. Younger actors utilize newly created “reproductions” (*utsushi*) of old masks.

(Dis)Embodied Female Icons: The European Portrait Series

Collectively, the best-known European portraits form a canon of female icons. Though rooted in historical moments, these women have become transcendent symbols of western culture. Their faces—familiar to every student of art history—have also launched myriad movies and novels. They are our cultural markers of unrequited love, passion, despair, and ecstasy. We are transfixed by the amazement in their eyes, intrigued by the ambiguity in their smiles, and absorbed in their unresolved desires.

Dramatically expanding his Noh mask makers' ethos of reproduction to include two-dimensional oil paintings, Bidou pays homage to European masters and their legendary beauties. More importantly, he sets them in relation to Japan's elite tradition of depiction and canons of beauty. Most critically, through his captivating skill and unique conception, Bidou reveals the power of Noh's mysterious beauty called *yūgen*.

High Meets Low: From The Ukiyo-e Series

After exploring European portraits, Bidou embarked on a series inspired by the woodblock prints of Sharaku. In 1794-95, this mysterious artist, perhaps a Noh mask carver, designed portraits of Kabuki actors to acclaim and condemnation. Although these famous *ukiyo-e* prints are perhaps Japan's best-known portraits, they cross cultural boundaries by linking plebian Kabuki with elite Noh. In contrast to Noh's ghostly personas created by mask-wearing actors, Kabuki actors overtly express emotion through their heavily made-up faces.

Unlike the three dimensionality suggested by shading in western painting, Sharaku's graphic *ukiyo-e* prints treat the face as relatively flat. They emphasize linear outline and abstraction for dramatic effect. Despite these formal differences, the themes in Kabuki share with both Noh and the women in Bidou's *European Paintings* the pathos of human experience.

Beneath The Mask: Affect, Process, Transformation

Transformation informs all aspects of Noh theater, but is most pronounced in Noh masks. Newly made masks must connect with the appearance of earlier masks, the spirit of the character, and the expressive power of the human face. Transformation appears in female Noh masks that project a haunting "neutral expression" so that the same mask can express a frown and then a smile, based on the angle of viewing.

For Noh actors, a mask embodies the character to be brought to life through performance. Hence, a critical first step is selecting the "right" mask. Here, visitors can experience this process of transfiguration. By selecting and donning a mask, you "become" the mask—and the spirit it embodies.

Tsukioka Kōgyo
Japanese, 1869-1927
Pictures of Noh Plays: Masks (Nōgaku zue), 1902
Ink and pigment on paper
Collection of Scripps College, Claremont, CA: Gift of Mrs. Frederick S. Bailey

Unidentified Artist
Japan, Edo Period, 1615-1868
Gigaku Mask
Wood, lacquer
Gift of Kurt A. Gitter, M.D. and Millie H. Gitter, 77.36

Tsukioka Kōgyo created many woodblock prints inspired by Noh. His famous *Nōgaku zue* series, selections of which can be seen in this gallery, take as their subject specific scenes from Noh plays. This print—a frontispiece—illustrates ten masks. At left are several types of Noh masks as well as Kyōgen, Gigaku, and Kagura masks from Japanese theater. In the upper right are two Javanese masks for the Wayang Topeng theater, and a tribal mask from British Columbia. Japanese Noh enthusiasts were making broader connections between Noh masks and other mask making cultures. Most broadly, Kōgyo's prints show a renewed fascination with Noh in early modern Japan.

Tsukioka Kōgyo
Japanese, 1869-1927
Pictures of Noh Plays: Picture of Noh Stage (Nōgaku zue: Nōbutai zu), 1898
Ink and pigment on paper
Collection of Scripps College, Claremont, CA: Gift of Ms. Lilian Miller

The stage provides a physical and symbolic setting for Noh plays. The typical indoor stage is comprised of the roof, bridge, painted rear wall, and four pillars. The square stage measuring about 19 by 19 feet, is accessed by the bridge (seen left), creating a threshold crossed by the actors. The sole décor is a painting of a pine tree on the rear wall. The pine represents the natural world, as well as the famous sacred tree at Kasuga Shrine. The four pillars help the main actor, the mask wearing *shite*, gauge his position on stage.

Tsukioka Kōgyo
Japanese, 1869-1927
One Hundred Noh Plays: Okina (Nōgaku hyakuban: Okina shiki), 1923
Ink and pigment on paper
Collection of Scripps College, Claremont, CA: The Aoki Endowment for Japanese Arts and Cultures

Noh is performed exclusively by men dressed in elegant costumes. The main actor or *shite* (“the one who does”) is supported by subsidiary characters (*waki*) and a chorus. A small ensemble of musicians—playing a wooden flute (*nōkan*) and several types of drums—create an ethereal aural atmosphere. In this triptych, the *shite* performs *Okina*, the most important play in the Noh repertoire. Usually performed at the New Year or other auspicious occasions, this play shows the ancient origins of Noh in ritual dance. Paralleling the diverse genesis of masks, the narratives in Noh incorporate elements from Japanese folktales, popular legends, and elite literature.

Tsukioka Kōgyo

Japanese, 1869-1927

One Hundred Noh Plays: The Drunken Imp (Nōgaku hyakuban: Shōjō), 1925-1928

Ink and pigment on paper

Collection of Scripps College, Claremont, CA: The Aoki Endowment for Japanese Arts and Cultures

Bidou Yamaguchi

Japanese, b. 1970

Shōjō (Drunken Imp), 2003

Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer

Collection of Target Corporation, Minneapolis, MN

In the play *Shōjō*, a sea spirit appears to a liquor merchant. Eventually he presents the merchant with a magic crock that brings lasting prosperity. The spirit's red face attests to his fondness for alcohol and his drunken state. He is said to never age, and is shown as a grinning youth. In the play, the actor wears the red-faced mask with a long red wig. The mask's red color symbolizes Shōjō's supernatural status as well as his drunkenness. The arched and heightened eyebrows convey his jovial personality.

Tsukioka Kōgyo

Japanese, 1869-1927

One Hundred Noh Plays: Bird of Sorrow (Nōgaku hyakuban: Utō), 1925-1928

Ink and pigment on paper

Collection of Scripps College, Claremont, CA: The Aoki Endowment for Japanese Arts and Cultures

Bidou Yamaguchi

Japan, b. 1970

Yase-otoko (Emaciated Man), 2003

Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer

Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

The play *Bird of Sorrow* features a hunter who imitates the call of the parent bird to pursue chicks. Because killing is a sin in Buddhism, the hunter's spirit is sent to hell. To express the hunter's bitter regret and desperate misery, Noh actors wear the Yase-Otoko (emaciated man) mask. The mask's pale color and skull-like appearance suggest an absence of vitality, while the angular features convey wrath. The metallic color of the eyes emphasizes the character's supernatural origins.

Tsukioka Kōgyo

Japanese, 1869-1927

One Hundred Noh Plays: The Feather Mantle (Nōgaku hyakuban: Hagaromo), 1925-1928

Ink and pigment on paper

Collection of Scripps College, Claremont, CA: The Aoki Endowment for Japanese Arts and Cultures

Bidou Yamaguchi

Japanese, b. 1970

Zō-onna (Middle-Age Woman), 1998

Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer

Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

Hagoromo is the tale of a celestial maiden who appears to a fisherman to reclaim her “feather robe.” After she explains that she is unable to enter heaven without the robe, the fisherman states he will return it only if she dances for him. She does so, wearing a feather mantle (*hagoromo*) and a crown reserved for goddesses.

Actors playing the celestial maiden usually wear the Zō-Onna mask because of its refined beauty. The mask’s eyes combine an elongated outer corner with slightly downcast pupils to convey introspection and melancholy. The softly feathered eyebrows and hair parted down the middle indicate maturity. Most beguiling is the curvature of the mouth and slightly parted lips.

Bidou Yamaguchi

Japanese, b. 1970

Mona Lisa, 2003

Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer

Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

Leonardo da Vinci

Italian, 1452–1519

Mona Lisa, c. 1503–1506

Oil on wood

Louvre, Paris, France

The enigmatic smile of the *Mona Lisa* has long captivated viewers. Although assumed to be Lisa del Giocondo, née Gherardini (1479–1542), the wife of a Florentine merchant, she remains as much a mystery today as when Leonardo first painted this portrait. Moved by her striking similarities to the Noh mask of *Zō-Onna*, Bidou breathes new life into a face frozen in two dimensions. Pushing Noh mask carving into a new direction, he frees the *Mona Lisa* from the canvas. Although her image has been assimilated and appropriated over the course of the last century, Bidou conveys the dignity and complexity of Leonardo’s subject.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Venus, 2004
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Courtesy of the artist

Sandro Botticelli
Italian, c. 1445–1510
The Birth of Venus, 1486
Tempera on canvas
Uffizi, Florence, Italy

Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* combines the ideal Greco-Roman female form with the Neo-Platonic idea that physical beauty symbolizes divine love. The painting is rumored to depict Botticelli's model and object of his affection, Simonetta Vespucci, who rebuffed the artist. Given this history, she is a fitting subject for translation into a Noh performance. Through her wistful eyes, red-tinged lids, and face swollen from crying, Bidou's *Venus* is imbued with emotion.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Delphic Sibyl, 2007
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Courtesy of the artist

Michelangelo Buonarroti
Italian, 1475–1564
The Delphic Sibyl (detail of the Sistine ceiling) 1508-1512
Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State

Michelangelo painted this figure on the Sistine Chapel's ceiling as one of the five Greco-Roman sibyls who foretold the birth of Christ. The Sibyl was transformed into a Christian propheticess and symbolized Renaissance humanism's interest in the classical world. Bidou carries this transformation into the Buddhist realm. The Sibyl's tense, rounded face and curved, open mouth suggests a basic connection with the *Zō-Onna* mask often used in Noh plays about deities. Both works speak of their time: Sibyls reveal the future; Noh characters clarify the past. By removing the Delphic Sibyl from her religious context, Bidou allows the audience to imagine the new prophecies that she might impart.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b.1970
Girl with a Pearl Earring, 2005
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer, pearl, metal
Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

Jan Vermeer (van Delft)
Dutch, 1632–1675
Head of a Girl (Girl with a Pearl Earring), c. 1665
Oil on canvas
Mauritshuis, The Hague, The Netherlands

Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is now regarded as one of the masterpieces of 17th century painting. Vermeer's *Girl* is an extraordinary beauty, whose gaze reveals tremendous vulnerability. By translating this young woman's face into three dimensions, Bidou allows the viewer to imagine donning this mask and inhabiting the psychological world of the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Maria Teresa, 2013 (after 2006)
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Courtesy of the artist

Diego Rodriguez Velázquez
Spanish, 1599–1660
Maria Teresa, Infanta of Spain, c. 1651–1654
Oil on canvas
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY: The Jules Bache Collection, 49.7.43

Between 1651–1654, Spanish court artist Diego Velázquez painted *Maria Teresa, Infanta of Spain*. The daughter of Philip IV of Spain, Maria Teresa married Louis XIV and became queen of France in 1660. Her tragic life in the years following this portrait, including an unhappy marriage and the deaths of her young children, is significant for her translation into a Noh mask. In his *Maria Teresa*, Bidou abstracts her youthful face from her accoutrements of power. Smoothing her skin and slightly rounding her face, he adapts her features to conform with the norms of Noh masks of young women. Ultimately, Bidou balances naturalistic description of the individual with Noh's archetypal young girl not in control of her destiny.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Maja, 2006
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Courtesy of the artist

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes
Spanish, 1746–1828
The Nude Maja, 1797–1800
Oil on canvas
Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

The allure of Francisco Goya's *The Nude Maja* is compounded by the sitter's mysterious identity. Is she the powerful 13th Duchess of Alba, or Prime Minister Manuel Godoy's longtime mistress, Pepita Tudó? Even though the portrait was installed behind its modest twin, *The Clothed Maja*, the Inquisition ultimately seized both paintings and censored Goya. Bidou's *Maja* further conceals and reveals by simultaneously reducing the alluring woman to her facial features and elevating their potential to suggest her character. This ambiguity allows us to project new identities—and thus new narratives—onto a face that now transcends the role of iconic beauty.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Madonna, 2006
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

Edvard Munch
Norwegian, 1863–1944
Madonna (Conception), 1895–1902
Lithograph
Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway

Edvard Munch sought to reveal universal truths based on mysticism and psychology. His series, *The Frieze of Life*, symbolizes love, death, and the search for truth. *Madonna (Conception)*, or *Loving Woman*, posits an archetypal woman as both the source of life and the harbinger of death. Bidou's *Madonna* is deeply ambivalent—the serene face surrounded by tangled hair. She takes on the fluid identity of many female Noh masks: her tangled hair recalls the madness of a “spirit woman;” her soft upper lip is that of the “youthful beauty” Zō-Onna; and her sunken cheeks suggest those of world-weary women.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Kiss, 2007
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

Gustav Klimt
Austrian, 1862-1918
The Kiss, 1907-1908
Oil on canvas
Oesterreichische Galerie im Belvedere, Vienna, Austria

Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* captures the passion, extravagance, and psychological complexity of *fin de siècle* Vienna. By adapting the gold foil and flat space of Byzantine icon painting, Klimt elevates the couple—perhaps the artist and his mistress, Emilie Louise Flöge—into icons of modern love. Bidou's *Kiss* severs the woman from her paramour. Noh mask often used in plays about unrequited love. Here she is transformed from erotic symbol into a passive spirit suspended in a state of longing—waiting eternally for a kiss from her partner.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Jeanne, 2006
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Collection of Kelly Sutherlin McLeod and Steve McLeod

Amedeo Modigliani
Italian, 1884-1920
Jeanne Hébuterne with Yellow Sweater, 1918-1919
Oil on canvas
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

Amedeo Modigliani gained notoriety through his decadent life and nude portraits inspired by “primitive” art, including masks and Japanese woodblock prints. He frequently painted his lover, Jeanne Hébuterne, who committed suicide four days after Modigliani's death. In *Jeanne*, Bidou faithfully renders Modigliani's distorted angles and flickering colors to capture a beauty of innuendo and implication. Jeanne's mysterious expression and almond-shaped eyes give her a languid melancholy that prophesizes her tragic end—and rebirth as a Noh character.

Tōshūsai Sharaku
Japanese, active 1794-1795
Sanogawa Ichimatsu III as Onayo, the Prostitute of Gion
(*Sansei Sanogawa Ichimatsu no Gion hakujin Onayo*), 1794
Ink and pigment on paper; reprinted by Adachi, 1940
USC Pacific Asia Museum Collection, Pasadena, CA: Gift of Peter Ries

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Onayo, 2013 (after 2007)
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Courtesy of the artist

The print seen here shows male actor Sanogawa Ichimatsu III (1759-1813), a specialist in female roles (*onnagata*), playing the unlicensed courtesan Onayo of Gion, from a Kabuki “revenge play.” Because the play’s narrative is unknown, Onayo’s character remains a mystery. Presumably she is a prostitute (*hakujin*) encountered by the protagonists as they plot their attack.

In his *Ukiyo-e* series, Bidou conveys the personalities of both the actor and the dramatic character—the latter a particular challenge here because little is known about the Onayo role. Because a male is playing a female role, there is a strong sense of gender ambiguity in this mask.

Tōshūsai Sharaku (active 1794-1795)
Osagawa Tsuneyo II as Sakuragi, Ippei’s Elder Sister Osan
(*Nisei Osagawa Tsuneyo no Ippei ane Osan*), 1794
Ink and pigment on paper; reprinted by Adachi, 1940
USC Pacific Asia Museum Collection, Pasadena, CA: Gift of Peter Ries

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Ippei’s Sister, Osan, 2011
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer
Courtesy of Sebastian Izzard LLC., New York, NY

Bidou here depicts Osagawa Tsuneyo II (1753-1808), a famous *onnagata*, a male actor specializing in female roles. The representation of a male playing a woman is suggested in the strong jaw and nose; and shown overtly in the piece of cloth on the forehead, worn by *onnagata* beneath their wigs. Although the print’s title specifies the dramatic role being depicted, no Kabuki play has yet been discovered with the character Osan.

By removing the face from the context of clothes and hair, Bidou tightens the focus and thereby heightens the viewer’s ability to recognize emotional expression. Despite obvious differences in style between Japanese prints and western oil paintings, this face shares a pensive quality with many of the women in Bidou’s *European Painting* series seen at the center of this gallery.

Tōshūsai Sharaku

Japanese, active 1794-1795

Sawamura Yodogorō as Kawatsura Hōgen and Bandō Zenji as Oni Sadobō

(*Nisei Sawamura Yodogorō no Kawatsura Hōgen to Bandō Zenji no Oni Sadobō*), 1794

Ink and pigment on paper; reprinted by Adachi, 1940

15.38 x 10.25 inches

Gift of Peter Ries

USC Pacific Asia Museum Collection, Pasadena, CA

Bidou Yamaguchi

Japanese, b. 1970

Oni Sadobō, 2011

Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer

Courtesy of Sebastian Izzard LLC., New York, NY

Sharaku's print shows two actors from the famous Kabuki play *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* (*Yoshitsune senbon zakura*) as performed in 1794. At right, the chivalrous Kawatsura Hōgen, played by Sawamura Yodogorō II, clenches his fist as he glares at the treacherous monk, Oni no Sadobō, played by Bandō Zenji. Bidou's work isolates the face of the dissolute monk Sadobō. He is animated by a maleficent glare and the orange pigment across the eye and cheek, while the blue paint suggests his shaved pate. The use of horsehair for hair and beards of male Noh characters is also applied to Sadobō's strange side-locks.

The brown specks on the side of the mask replicate the foxing—spots that appear on old paper—as seen on the original woodblock print. Creating the effects of age and wear is a key component of Noh mask reproduction. Continuing this dedication to show the marks of time is a hallmark of Bidou's translations of old paintings and prints.

Tōshūsai Sharaku

Japanese, active 1794-1795

Ōtani Oniji III as the Retainer Edobei

(*Sansei Ōtani Oniji no yakko Edobei*), 1794

Ink and pigment on paper, reprinted by Adachi, 1940

Gift of Peter Ries

USC Pacific Asia Museum Collection, Pasadena, CA

Bidou Yamaguchi

Japanese, b. 1970

Edobei, 2011

Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, lacquer

Courtesy of Sebastian Izzard LLC., New York, NY

Among Sharaku's most famous prints is this image portraying the Kabuki actor Ōtani Oniji III (1759-1786) as Edobei. In the play, *Koi nyōbō Somewake Tazuna*, Edobei steals the money intended to free a geisha from servitude. In the print, Edobei's hands, removed from his kimono, reveal his intentions. In Bidou's sculpture, only the wild exaggerations and distorted angles of Ōtani's face capture Edobei's larcenous character and suggest the impending violence.

Seen from the "proper" angle, Bidou's *ukiyo-e* works resemble the original prints. However, when the viewer shifts position, the sculpted faces become even more unnatural. These expressive distortions recall Bidou's *Jeanne*. Modigliani himself was inspired by masks and Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. Bidou's "masks" challenge us to consider different historical practices of portraiture and the role of art in capturing human character.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Process Masks: Five Stages of Carving a Magojirō Mask
Japanese cypress
Courtesy of the artist

These blocks show the major stages in the carving process. The initial shaping of the wood block creates the mask's silhouette can be seen at the left. This is the stage of rough carving (*arabori*), where the carver strikes the wood with chisel and hammer, physically and spiritually penetrating the wood to create a human form. The character *ue* ("top") is written on the forehead. The blocks that follow show the intermediate modeling (*nakabori*), and the final carving (*shaiagebori*) in which the surface is smoothed with a chisel. The last example demonstrates the application of an undercoat (*shitanuri*), made of ground and baked seashell (*gofun*) mixed with glue.

Noh Affect Video Featuring a Magojirō Noh Mask, 2013
From the study, "The Noh Mask Effect: Vertical Viewpoint Dependence of Facial Expression Perception"
By Dr. Michael J. Lyons, Ruth Campbell, Andre Plante, Mike Coleman, Miyuki Kamachi and Shigeru Akamatsu
Animation by Kayla R. Workman for Art 305, California State University, Long Beach

Noh masks of young women are noted for their capacity to express different emotions and evoke varied responses from viewers. To investigate this phenomenon, Dr. Michael J. Lyon and his team photographed an Edo period (1615-1868) Magojirō mask, used for young female roles. Recreating the lighting conditions of a performance, the team produced a series of photo stills of a mask rotated on a vertical axis. They analyzed the responses of Japanese and western viewers to ascertain that people did perceive the mask as smiling and frowning, independent from the context of the play.

In this video, these photographs are brought to life in order to reflect the subtle changes of expression when a Noh mask is donned by an actor. The frontal "neutral" expression shifts to a frown when the mask is tilted slightly upwards, then transforms into a smile when the mask is tilted slightly downwards.

Yokoto Kiyomi
Japanese, b. 1933
Bitchū Kagura Masks: Ko-Omote and Tenazuchi no Mikoto, c. 1960s
Wood with pigment
Kuniko Brown and Kendall H. Brown Collection

These two masks are used in the performance of Bitchū Kagura, a traditional Shinto play performed in rural Okayama Prefecture. Initially pre-dating the more aristocratic Noh, and later influenced by it, Bitchū Kagura was designated as intangible cultural heritage in 1979. The mask of the youthful woman is *Ko-Omote*. The other mask is the elderly female deity *Tenazuchi no Mikoto*, mother of Kushinadahime no Mikoto, a son whose name is rooted in the word *kami* meaning “of an easy childbirth, child rearing, and household harmony.”

You are invited to take on the role of the actor and wear a mask. Choose which character you want to become—a youthful beauty or an wise elderly woman. Hold the mask at arm’s length; contemplate its appearance and the spirit it embodies. Then, hold it against your face and gaze through the eye holes. Feel the masks around you, and look at yourself in the mirror. Feel free to take a picture while wearing the mask.

Unidentified Maker
Japan, Edo Period
Noh Robe [Atsuita], circa 1840
Twill weave silk brocade
Gift of Allan Gerdau, 52.44.1

This type of robe, known as an *atsuita*, is worn primarily by male actors playing warlords, gods or demons. The costume’s paralleled the role, with powerful motifs, including zigzag patterns and cloud-shaped, flat gongs, as can be seen here.

Unidentified Maker
Japan, Edo Period
Noh Robe [Karaori] with Chrysanthemum Decoration, early 20th century
Silk
Gift of Dr. Joseph W. Heintz, 88.408

This *karaori* robe features the chrysanthemum, symbolizing long life and prosperity. The alternating blocks of color is known as *dangawari*, and appears often in Noh robe designs.

Bidou Yamaguchi
Japanese, b. 1970
Angelina, 2007
Japanese cypress, seashell, natural pigment, Japanese lacquer
Courtesy of the Artist

Unidentified Maker
Japan, Meiji Period
Hannya Mask, early 20th century
Wood, paint and gilding
Gift of Dr. Joseph W. Heintz, 88.401

The mask at the left, by Bidou Yamaguchi, is the first in a planned series interpreting modern celebrities. Angelina Jolie's great beauty, dramatic biography, and powerful celebrity make her a compelling choice for Bidou's only mask of a living person. *Angelina* has the elegantly aristocratic face and downcast eyes of *Semimaru*, a character in a play about a young prince whose blindness led to his abandonment. However, the horns derive from the mask *Hannya*, showing a woman turned demon by obsessive love yet sorrowful in her torment. A *Hannya* mask, from NOMA's collection, is at the right.

Unidentified Maker
Japan, Meiji Period
Chujo Mask
Wood, paint
Gift of Dr. Joseph W. Heintz, 88.404

This mask, depicting a young man, is thought to be based on the historical figure of Ariwara no Narihira, a poet of the Heian period (794-1185). The mask portrays the elegance, grace and sophistication of a nobleman of that era.

Unidentified Maker
Japan, Meiji Period
Ro-jo Mask
Wood, paint silk cord
Gift of Dr. Joseph W. Heintz, 88.403

This mask is used by the character of an old woman. Thin and aged, the woman retains traces of the refined beauty of her youth.

Unidentified Maker
Japan, Meiji Period
Ko-omote Mask
Wood, paint
Gift of Dr. Joseph W. Heintz, 88.402

This mask represents the youngest female character in the Noh repertoire. This mask serves as the prototype for other female masks.

Ogata Gekko
Japanese, 1859-1920
Danjuro IX
Ink and color on silk

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. George F. Lapeyere and from Mrs. Edgar B. Stern, by exchange, 87.26

This painting depicts the famed Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjuro (1842-1903), wearing the costume for the principle male role in the Kabuki drama *Shibaraku*. This role was performed exclusively by members of the Ichikawa family of actors.