



Alan Kennedy,
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ALAN KENNEDY

Since 1978, Alan Kennedy has specialised in Asian art, while living in Europe and the USA. His main areas of interest are Chinese and Japanese costumes, textiles and paintings. His research and writing has resulted in numerous publications and lectures all over the world. Since 2004, he has exhibited in Asia Week New York, and has sold works of art to over 40 museums on four continents. He is a member of the Asian Art Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and currently lives in the Los Angeles area.

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Schuyler V.R. Cammann,
Philadelphia, USA

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE BUSINESS OF DEALING IN CHINESE AND JAPANESE PAINTINGS, COSTUMES AND TEXTILES?

After finishing my studies in 1972 at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, USA, where I was a student of Schuyler V.R. Cammann, a family friend asked if I would work with him importing handicrafts from Peru. This was my first serious contact with artistic objects from another culture. The textiles of Peru were the crafts that had the greatest appeal for me.

After two years of that endeavor, I then decided to explore the handicrafts of Eastern Europe, which happens to be where my parents came from. During my travels in Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania, I bought contemporary crafts from the official national export agencies, but also found some older pieces in an outdoor marketplace in Zagreb, now in Croatia.

I opened a retail shop upon my return to Philadelphia, and the first piece that I sold was an old kilim from Yugoslavia. Historic textiles turned into a passion, and after being introduced to a Turkish artist and kilim collector named Tosun Bayrak (1926-2018), who was also a devout follower of Sufism, I was invited to visit Turkey and learn about kilims. Antique Turkish kilims became my focus, and the next fortuitous encounter was with a dealer named Jeffrey Hayden (died 2019), who had a collection of Japanese textiles. As I continued to broaden my interest in historic textiles from other cultures, Japan became the center of my greatest interest.

In 1980 I moved to a gallery space and staged changing thematic exhibitions of historic textiles and costumes from Bolivia, Indonesia, Japan, Central Asia and elsewhere. My next move was to New York, where I became a private dealer, allowing me more time for travel and study, and greater access to the most important art market in the USA.

My interest in paintings came about as the result of researching textiles and looking at depictions of costumes and textiles in paintings. I came to realize that most of the finest Japanese and Chinese paintings that interest me are painted on silk, so that added another connection between paintings and textiles. Furthermore, Japanese paintings often have additional mounting elements that consist of precious woven or

even embroidered textiles.

SCHUYLER V.R. CAMMANN (1912-1991) WAS AN IMPORTANT MENTOR FOR YOU. WHAT WAS HE LIKE AS A TEACHER AND FRIEND?

Professor Cammann was quite formal in regard to personal relations, however for his students who expressed a strong interest in Asian art and culture, he made special efforts to expose us to museum collections and to partake in other activities outside of the classroom. During one visit to a museum, using his pen, he actually wrote corrections onto a museum label that had incorrect information. He would take us to Chinese restaurants and show us how to properly eat each dish that he ordered for us, while explaining the history and significance of Chinese cuisine.

Cammann was a great storyteller, and we delighted in his accounts of life in China during the 1930s and 1940s, where he was first a student, and later a special agent for the Office of Strategic Services during World War II. He had a vast knowledge and interest in many subjects, ranging from Chinese textiles and costumes to cosmic symbolism in Asian art. Once it was possible to build a personal relationship with him, he would relate fascinating tales of his experiences with ghosts. Even for those of us who never had such experiences, or could not accept the existence of such other-worldly phenomena, we listened seriously to what he had to say.

I was fortunate to be able to stay in touch with him after finishing my studies, until his death twenty years later. I still benefit from reading and re-reading his many books and articles, and hope one day to publish a book of his collected writings. He always encouraged me to research and write in my areas of interest, and that helped to give me the impetus to write for specialized journals, encyclopedias, exhibition catalogues and other scholarly publications.

DID YOU STUDY JAPANESE OR CHINESE?

I took an intensive summer Japanese language course in 1982, but regrettably, have not pursued language studies since then. I did learn to use a Chinese character dictionary, which is helpful in deciphering Chinese and Japanese texts, since written Japanese makes extensive use of Chinese characters. Nowadays there are online tools that are helpful in translating texts.

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO MOVE TO PARIS AND LIVE THERE FOR 23 YEARS?

My wife and I were concerned about the declining quality of life in New York, and were thinking ahead to the high cost of a quality education for children. I had also started collaborating with Madame Krishnā Riboud (1926-2000), and her scholarly foundation, AEDTA (Association pour l'Etude et la Documentation des Textiles d'Asie) in Paris. She purchased a large collection of Japanese Buddhist robes (*kesa*) from me, and that collection is now in the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, along with approximately three thousand other Asian textiles donated by Mme. Riboud and her family. When our daughters were one and two years old, we moved to Paris in 1990. We truly did find a better place to raise a family, and living in another country and culture enriched all of our lives. I continue to return to Paris for regular visits, apart from the current pandemic period.

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING ON THE EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE, MANTEAU DE NUAGES: KESA JAPONAIS, XVIIIIE-XIXE SIÈCLES?

The exhibition came about due to Mme. Riboud's close association with Musée Guimet. I was asked to select the pieces, primarily from her collection, and to write the principal catalogue essay and the catalogue entries for each of the *kesa*. Marie-Hélène Guelton and Gabriel Vial wrote detailed technical descriptions for the textiles found in each of the *kesa*.

The exhibition was beautifully installed, and the catalogue quickly sold out. It was a further pleasure to see the show in Lyon, at the Musée des Tissus, and eventually in Japan, at the Jotenkaku Museum on the grounds of Shokokuji, one of the most important Buddhist temples in Kyoto. The current Crown Prince of Japan and his wife were present at the inauguration of Japanese exhibition venue.

YOUR BOOK, COSTUMES JAPONAIS, IS CONSIDERED TO BE A WELL-REGARDED REFERENCE IN THE FIELD OF JAPANESE COSTUMES AND TEXTILES.



Krishnā Riboud,
Paris, France,
photograph by Man Ray



Korean Buddhist painting;
ink, colors and gold on silk;
Amitabha Triad,
14th century,
late Goryeo dynasty (918-1392)

The book was part of a series on textiles, published by Editions Adam Biro in 1990, and edited by Monique Lévi-Strauss. There was also an English language edition that was sold out (titled *Japanese Costumes: History and Tradition*), and was later reprinted. My approach was to focus on what I consider to be the most important types of silk costumes of Japan's Edo period (1615-1868), namely Noh theater costumes, *kosode* (the forerunner of the kimono), and Buddhist robes, *kesa*. In other books on Japanese silk costumes of the Edo period, *kesa* are usually not included, however there are important connections between all three types of these costumes.

MANY MUSEUMS HAVE PURCHASED WORKS OF ART FROM YOU. THE PAIR OF CHINESE BANNERS THAT YOU PRESENTED IN THE FIRST CATALOGUE OF THE ASIAN ART SOCIETY IS ENTERING A MUSEUM COLLECTION. WAS THIS A PLEASANT SURPRISE?

It was a very auspicious beginning for the Asian Art Society, and I was delighted to add yet another museum to the long list of museums that have bought works of art from me. The banners were purchased by a support group for a major European museum.

I enjoy working with museum curators, and have great respect for their knowledge and their devotion to their wonderful institutions that preserve and display works of art. I feel honored to have sold so many works of art to museums all over the world, and to have also donated and lent works to museum collections and exhibitions. Knowing that the public has the possibility to see these art works in museums is very satisfying to me. Private collectors are also an inspiration for me, especially when they have a passion to learn and appreciate art by living with it.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORKS OF ART THAT YOU HAVE SOLD?

One of my greatest pleasure in working as an art dealer has been to discover art works that have been otherwise unrecognized or misunderstood. For me, such discoveries are a combination of treasure hunting and detective work. The ultimate validation of such finds occurs when they enter a museum or an important private collection.

One of my most exciting discoveries was a rare Korean Buddhist painting. The mother of a friend of my wife had a contemporary art gallery in New York for many years, but she also had exhibited antique Japanese paintings from a private collection. My wife's friend inherited a painting that had been unsold, and I was asked to look at it.

Upon seeing the painting, I had a feeling that it was Korean, rather than Japanese. After doing some research, I was able to confirm my hunch, and told my wife's friend that the painting was extremely valuable. If it were Japanese, rather than Korean, it would be worth only a small fraction of the price of a comparable Korean painting of the period. The painting was examined by Professor Chung Woothak, Korea's leading expert on Buddhist painting, and it is now in a Korean collection. This discovery was reported in newspapers in Korea.

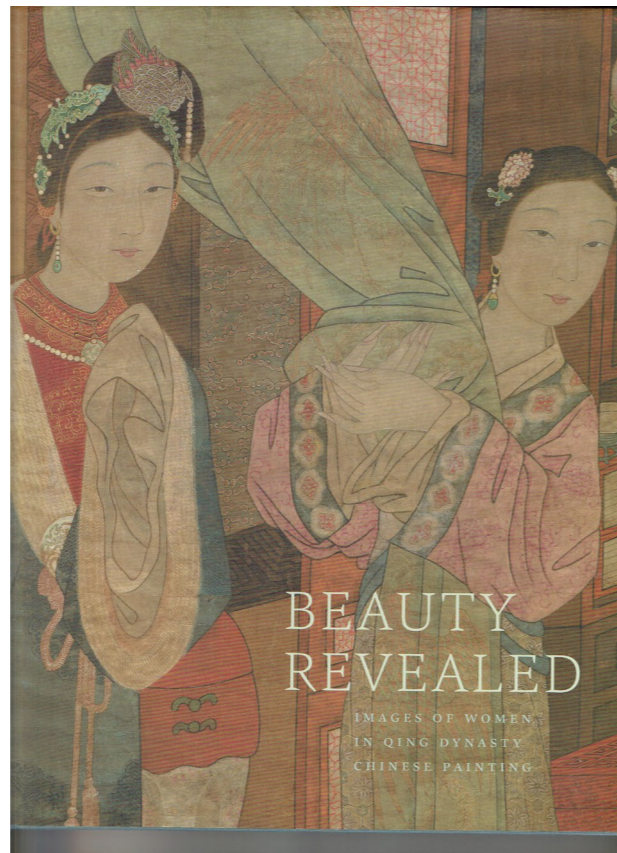
Another find was a Chinese painting of a type known as *meiren* (literally "beautiful woman"). The painting that I discovered was misidentified in an auction house catalogue, and I was able to buy it for a modest price.

I sent an image of the painting to a leading scholar of Chinese painting, Professor James Cahill (1926-2014), who was very surprised that a painting that he only knew of from a black and white photograph had actually been found. He had been looking for the painting for decades since he first saw its photo when employed as a museum curator.

The painting was acquired by the museum at the university where Prof. Cahill taught, and it was chosen as the image for the cover of the catalogue of an important exhibition on *meiren* painting. It was a real thrill to see the exhibition, and to read the catalogue.

Another discovery that appeared on the cover of an important museum exhibition was royal-style, yellow silk robe from Okinawa. I had bought an assorted group of Japanese textile fragments at an auction, and after examining the fragments, I realized that several pieces were parts of a rare robe. After determining the original construction of the garment, it became evident that there were some missing parts.

I took the fragments to Japan, where a leading conservation workshop reconstructed the robe, and added a lining. A museum curator, William Rathbun, eagerly acquired the robe, as he was planning an exhibition of Japanese textiles and costumes. The

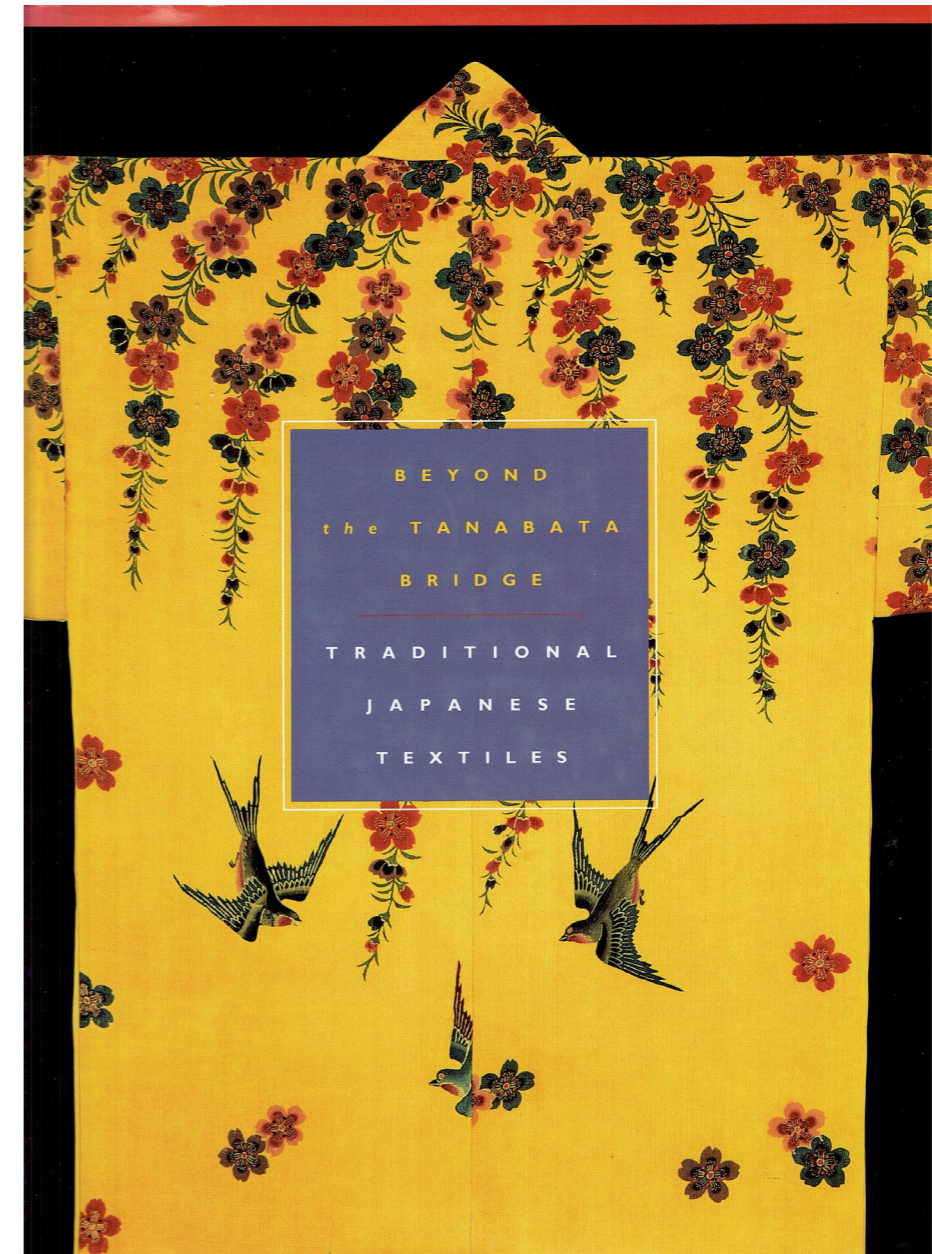


Exhibition catalogue,
James Cahill, Julia M. White, et. al., *Beauty Revealed: Images of Women in Qing Dynasty Chinese Painting*, Berkeley 2013

Chinese *meiren* painting;
ink, colors and gold on silk;
18th century,
mid Qing dynasty (1644-1911);
Berkeley Art Museum



Okinawan royal-style robe; silk with paste-resist designs; first quarter of the 20th century, Meiji period (1868-1912) or Taishō period (1912-1926); Seattle Art Museum



Exhibition catalogue, William Jay Rathbun, Amanda Mayer Stinchecum, et. al., *Beyond the Tanabata Bridge: Traditional Japanese Textiles*, Seattle 1993

garment is pictured on both the front and back covers of the exhibition catalogue.

Years ago, when looking through a catalogue for an Asian art auction in London, I noticed a Chinese Buddhist painting that seemed familiar.

After doing some research, I realized that it looked familiar because it was very similar to rare Chinese Buddhist textile in a museum collection. The museum's textile is woven in a silk tapestry weave technique (*kesi* in Chinese), and the painting, which has the signature and seal of a well-known Chinese artist, could have served as a model for the Buddhist textile.

I was able to buy the painting at a modest price, as no one else seemed to have recognized its importance, and it was acquired by the museum that owns the textile version of the painting. The painting and the textile have been displayed side by side, and it was exciting to have reunited them centuries after they had been made.

The last find that I would like to mention is a Japanese *kosode* (the garment that is the forerunner to the kimono). I had seen a black and white illustration of the *kosode* in a newspaper article about an antiques fair in Tokyo, and tried to find out which dealer owned the robe.

Even though years had passed, I kept the newspaper article, and during one of my regular visits to Japan, I decided to show the article to a friendly Japanese art dealer, and he told me that he owned the *kosode*.

I sold it to a major US museum, and after conservation work at the museum's textile conservation department, it was put on display in their Japanese art galleries. It is one of the oldest *kosode* in any collection outside of Japan.

YOU HAVE EXHIBITED IN NEW YORK DURING ASIA WEEK FOR 16 CONSECUTIVE YEARS PRIOR TO THE CURRENT PANDEMIC. ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO EXHIBITING AGAIN WHEN IT IS SAFE TO DO SO?

Asia Week in New York has always been an exciting experience for me. Museum curators, collectors, scholars, dealers, auction house specialists and even people with only a casual interest in Asian art are



Chinese Buddhist textile;
silk; slit-tapestry weave (*kesi*);
dated 1744;
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco



Chinese Buddhist painting; Buddhas of the Three
Ages; Ding Guanpeng (active 1708-1771);
ink and colors on paper;
18th century, mid-Qing dynasty (1644-1911);
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco

present in large numbers during the March event. I get to meet visitors who come from all over the world, and it is wonderful to have in depth discussions about the Asian art that is displayed in my exhibitions. I always learn more about the art works on view, even though I have already done my own detailed research on the each piece.

One regret for me is that I rarely have time to visit my colleagues' exhibitions, since my days in the gallery are quite long. With the auctions, museum exhibitions and lectures, there is always so much to do and see.

I do look forward to returning to the in-person experience of Asia Week in New York, hopefully in 2022. In the meantime, I am grateful for the opportunity to present works of art for sale every month, thanks to the Asian Art Society. Online platforms will undoubtedly be of continuing and growing importance for the international art market.

YOU HAVE LECTURED WIDELY AT MUSEUMS AND VARIOUS SPECIALIST SOCIETIES.

PLATFORMS LIKE ZOOM HAVE BECOME AN EXTREMELY USEFUL AND POPULAR WAY TO PRESENT A TALK TO A WORLDWIDE AUDIENCE. HAVE YOU GIVEN ANY SUCH LECTURES YET?

At the end of February I will give my first such presentation, a lecture on Japanese Buddhist *kesa*, that is sponsored by the Textile Museum Associates of Southern California. It is a subject that I first wrote about in 1983 for the *Textile Museum Journal*, so apparently I have not lost interest in the subject!

IN 2018 YOU LED A TOUR TO JAPAN FOR MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL AND HALI MAGAZINE OF LONDON. PLEASE DESCRIBE THAT EXPERIENCE.

I was honored to be asked to create a tour on the theme of historic textiles and costumes in Japan. In organizing the tour, I contacted museum curators, independent specialists, collectors and dealers whom I have known for years, and put together an itinerary that was focused on Tokyo and Kyoto. The travel company booked first-class hotels and restaurants for our group, and everything went smoothly, even though we were a large group. In fact, the tour was over-subscribed. Our hosts at the various sites in Japan were very hospitable, and quite generous in sharing their

expertise and in showing us wonderful collections, as well as guiding us through exhibitions. One very special visit was to an imperial convent, Daishoji, that is not open to the public. We were greeted there by the venerable Abbess Kasanoin Jikun. Another 'celebrity' host was the travel writer and public speaker Pico Iyer, who has lived in Japan for many years.

The tour was meant to be repeated in November 2020, but was cancelled for obvious reasons. We do hope to reschedule the tour to November of this year, and if all goes well, I look forward to organizing and leading the tour again.



Japanese *kosode*;
silk and gold; embroidery and resist-dyeing;
circa 1660s, early Edo period (1615-1868);
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York