

Wall Didactic

From Morse to Whyte: A Dynastic Bequest of Japanese Treasurers

April 14 to June 10, 2018

The primary source of the Japanese collection is Catharine Robb Whyte's maternal grandfather, Dr. Edward Sylvester Morse, a marine biologist, who was a scholar with a vast range of interests, including Japanese culture. He first travelled to Japan in 1877, during an important transitional period in Japanese history, and finally in 1882 when he amassed a collection of ceramics, and other artistic and cultural objects. Between 1890 and 1892, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston purchased thousands of ceramic objects from Dr. Morse while the Peabody Museum in Salem, acquired everyday material cultural objects. The Whyte Museum retains the rest.

Morse was born in Portland, Maine in 1838 and at the age of 20 discovered a new type of land snail that launched his career as a natural scientist. In 1866, he moved to Salem Mass., and developed associations with prestigious organizations and institutions. Morse also studied brachiopods along the Atlantic seaboard and then in 1877 travelled to Japan to further his search for new specimens. While in Japan he developed a love for the people and culture that ultimately inspired his acquisition of art, ceramics and other objects.

Morse's experience in Japan is contained in a two-volume publication titled, *Japan Day by Day* and describes daily life there between 1877 and 1883. His interest in the education of biology, sanitation, health, and social values resulted in numerous lectures and scholarly publications. His fascination with archaeology, art and architecture both ritual and everyday items, grew in time. His fascination with pottery secured him a position as the curator of pottery for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and later as the first Director of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. With his expertise, Morse was able to convince prominent Bostonians to contribute to making Boston a mecca of Asian Art.

Peter and Catharine travelled to Japan in 1934 to trace her grandfather's experience. While there they studied with artist Mr. Hotta and learned of the work of many Japanese printmakers. Like her grandfather before her, Catharine also acquired many Japanese works of art and crafts including the exquisite Hiroshi Yoshida print collection within this exhibition.

In January 2018, Dr. Gail Chin, who holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles and is currently Associate Professor Emeritus at the University of Regina, provided a scholarly assessment of our Japanese material. Her extensive knowledge and attention to detail has added further clarity and depth about the cultural history, value and importance of our collection. Over the next year, the Whyte Museum curatorial team will compile this knowledge for future accessibility, research and publication. The exhibition, *From Morse to Whyte: A Dynastic Bequest of Japanese Treasurers* features exquisite early 19th century Ukiyo-e woodblock prints, important ceramic vessels, unique miniature storefronts and personal accoutrements primarily from the Meiji era. The exhibition is accompanied by a colourful exhibition catalogue.