

Chigiri-e piece – Japanese papercraft – Japanese collage

I have chosen to create a piece based on a page from the *Sanju-rokunin Kashu* (*Collection of Thirty-six Anthologies*). This is a poetry anthology manuscript that was copied and compiled during the 12th Century for the birthday of Emperor Tosa. Each page of this anthology is decorated using different methods, each volume and page is different. I will proceed to go through the context of this manuscript, the history and the people surrounding it and its content, the methods used in period for its creation which will lead into how I created my own piece.

Japanese Language, Art, Literature and Calligraphy



The Tale of Genji, beginning of chapter 40 (源氏物語), a novel by Murasaki Shikibu (紫式部), kana script, Heian period, early 12th century C.E., National Treasure Goto Museum, Tokyo. - Part 1.

The early appreciation of art and literature in Japan was primarily about influence from Tang Dynasty China (7th-9th Century CE). During the Heian period, (9th-12th Century), there was a move towards art in the Japanese language by artisans. This not only led to the development of Japanese art about Japanese culture and mythology, but for the development of the writing system of which transcribed the Japanese language. This writing system, *kana*, was based on the Chinese cursive script (*sosho*). The first of these was *man'yōgana* which was developed around the 7th Century.

Man'yōgana eventually led to the development of *hiragana*, for Japanese words and *katakana* for words of foreign origin. *Hiragana* was and still is seen as a feminine script and it was firstly primarily used by women writers, poets and calligraphers. This was also known

known as *onna-de*, “woman’s hand” and is characterised by the free-flowing form of *kana* characters as opposed to the rigid formalism of official and religious texts that were written by men and used *kanji*. One of the earliest novels that was written, *Tale of the Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*) was always copied in *onna-de* as were poems even when men were the authors or calligraphers.

Japanese poetry itself also developed from influences from Chinese poetry with Japanese poets composing in classical Chinese. Later, there were poems composed and copied in the Japanese language, these are called *waka* and had a variety of forms they came in. *Waka* began appearing in the 8th Century but came into its own during the Heian Period which was a flowing of Japanese art, literature and culture.

The Sanju-rokunin Kashu

During the 11th Century, the poet and bureaucrat Fujiwara no Kintō compiled a list of thirty-six male and female poets in what he called the Thirty-Six Immortals of Poetry (*Sanjūrokkasen*). He compiled several anthologies of short *waka* poems for the imperial court, to be presented as gifts and as reference materials for contemporary poets. One of these was the *Sanju-rokunin Kashu* which consisted of ten poems to a volume from each of the *Sanjūrokkasen* in thirty-nine volumes, three poets having two volumes. The volumes are *Detchōsō*, a book made of the pages folded over and bound with glue.

These pages were decorated using techniques of *chigiri-e* which uses a variety of techniques for paper decoration including torn and cut paper glued collage (*tsugigami*), the use of stencils and patterned woodblocks (*karakami*), the use of gold and silver ink (*kingin-dei*), gold and silver leaf (*kinginhaku*) and mica dust (*unmo*), paper dyeing (*somegami*) and marbling (*suminagashi*). Not all of these techniques are used in a single piece, but the entirety of *Sanju-rokunin Kashu* does contain examples of all of these techniques and

materials. Many *chigiri-e* pieces were later separated from the books they were in, mounted on hanging scrolls (*kakejiku*) and hung up as art.

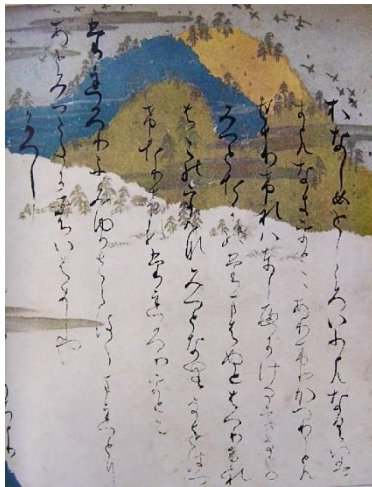
Ise no Miyasudokoro

Ise no Miyasudokoro, or Lady Ise as she is usually known, (c 877 - c 940) is one of the five women poets included in the *Sanjūrokkasen*. She is considered the premier female Japanese classical poet, though not much is known about her early life or parents. She was the concubine of Emperor Uda, having a son by him and a lover to his son Prince Atsuyoshi. Ise and Atsuyoshi's daughter, Nakatsukasa, is also included among the five women in the *Sanjūrokkasen*.

Ise's poems have been included in many other collections of poetry aside from the *Sanju-rokunin Kashu*, including the *Kokinwakashū* (*Collection of Poems Old and New*), the first imperial collection of poetry completed in the middle of the 10th century. Another imperial collection of just her poems was compiled, the *Ise Shū*. A poem from Ise is also included in Fujiwara no Teika's 12th century collection *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* (*One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each*) which was later turned into the card game *karuta*.



Ise's Volume



To begin with, I was unable to find a good translation of the text on this page. Looking at its length, it is likely it contains two poems with another poem on the facing page that has been cut off when the book was taken apart to be used as artwork. The text is written in vertical columns, there seems to be no deliberate design choice as to the placement of the text as in other pieces. But there does appear to be dry brushing used at the bottom of the page, where the ink on the brush is deliberately let to run low to give a fainter and more delicate appearance than the rest of the text.

The page primarily uses the technique of *tsugigami* (patched paper), with torn paper as decoration to suggest a watercolour painting. The paper is perforated with an awl using a template as a guide for the perforations. The paper is then deliberately and carefully arranged in the desired shaped before being glued down, likely with a cowhide or rice-based glue. In some pieces the paper is also layered with different coloured pieces of the same shape but smaller and smaller giving a gradation, but that is not what has happened here. The pieces here are assembled and layered in a way suggesting the slopes of a mountain.

What is also being used are the drawings made with gold ink, primarily of trees and birds, which are typical of a *chigiri-e* piece. But what is also depicted are clouds, long thin gold clouds that are somewhat reminiscent of the golden clouds which later became characteristic of the *Yamato-e* style of painting.

Recreating the page

I used a light table to trace the shapes onto paper directly from a copy of the original page. These I then cut out and it was then I realised these needed to be a bit different for the layering to happen properly. So, I had to extend the lines on the two shapes that formed the bottom and middle layers and then cut out new shapes.

I then used these shapes as a guide to make the perforations, which I did on mulberry washi paper using a large needle. After tearing the pieces, I used my copy of the original page as a guide to arrange the pieces.

The pieces were then glued down in the requisite order, yellow, then blue, then green. I used a diluted PVA glue solution which I saturated the paper with, coating both sides of the pieces before and after they were secured to the page. The paper is absorbent enough that the glue goes through and sets hard.

While the glue was still wet, I attached tiny pieces of gold origami paper using a bamboo skewer to replicated gold leaf. I then applied the powdered gold mica and left them all to dry overnight.

The drying does make the paper warp, so once the piece was dry, I pressed it under heavy books for several days. After this, I started applying the gold ink, drawing the trees, the birds and taking extra care when forming the clouds.

Writing the poem

As said before, I was unable to find a translation of the poem or discover which of Ise's poems was used for this page in the *Sanju-rokunin Kashu*. So instead I chose one of Ise's poems that mentions mountains to keep with the theme of the piece. This poem is from the 11th century anthology *Shūi Wakashū* (*Collection of Gleanings*). Here it is in Romanised Japanese and in English.

*asifiki no
yamawi ni fureru
sirayuki fa
sureru koromo no
kokoti koso sure*

*Leg-wearying
Between the indigo mountains fall
White snowflakes:
Robes dyed that hue
Spark such feelings.*

When this was finished, I attached the page to a blank hanging scroll I had purchased.



Commentary on my piece

This piece uses several techniques that I was experimenting with that I was please to put into execution here. One of these was the use of templates and the perforation which leads to careful rather than random tearing of the paper. This, also with tracing the shapes of the original picture, meant that I was able to closely replicate the original piece. I also used the original piece as a guide when doing the gold painting. Though I did practice on scrap paper, I only really had once chance to get this right unless I wanted to do the whole thing again.

The calligraphy I wasn't sure whether to include or not in the final piece. In the end, I decided to include it, after some practice. While I am pleased with the effect, I can see that I do need more practice in writing the characters of a consistent size.

I did like the overall effect of mounting the scroll on a hanging calligraphy scroll, even if it was just one made of paper that I had purchased from Amazon. In future, I plan on getting more scrolls, perhaps even ones that are made of fabric so that I can mount more of my pieces.

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