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KOMADA RYUSHI: TRADITION AND NOVATION IN JAPANESE NETSUKE ART

Svitlana Rybalko

DSc (Art History), Professor
Kharkiv State Academy of Culture
4, Bursatskyi uzviz, Kharkiv, 61057, Ukraine
rybalko.svetlana62@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-5873-2421

The article considers the work of Komada Ryushi, an outstanding Japanese carver, whose many years of activity represent the development of miniature sculpture in Japan in the second half of the 20th – early 21st centuries. A third-generation hereditary carver, Ryushi embodies the tradition of ivory carving using the *hidari-ba* technique and at the same time is one of those masters who revived and brought to a new level the art of miniature sculpture in the field of *netsuke*. Representative works of different years are systematized and identified, the plot and thematic repertoire and the master's approaches to the development of female images are analyzed; the creative achievements, long-term pedagogical and cultural work of Komada Ryushi, his contribution to the revival of *netsuke* as a field of miniature plastic art are highlighted, and attention is focused on his international activities. The article reflects the gradual transition from traditional plots and images of *netsuke* to the development of his own, unique models, marked by a variety of types, conveying characters and emotional states, convincing representation of movements and expressive plastic modelling; it is emphasized that the consistent development of female images is a significant contribution to the art of *netsuke* and is comparable in its quality and scale to the creative achievements of outstanding masters of classical engraving.

The results and materials of the research can be helpful in developing conceptual approaches to the study of Japanese sculpture and decorative arts, can be used in the creative practice of artists, in the attribution of samples of miniature plastic art and the development of exposition approaches, exhibition, competition and festival projects.

Keywords: bone carving; female images in art; *hidari-ba* technique; Japanese fine and decorative arts; Komada Ryushi; miniature sculpture; *netsuke*

Introduction

Komada Ryushi (Fig. 1) is one of the leading masters of *netsuke*, special keychains in the form of miniature carved sculptures. With the help of these keychains, in pre-modern Japan, things were made secure to the belt that was used to gird a kimono. With the processes of modernization that began in the second half of the 19th century and the establishment of Western-style clothing as official one, *netsuke* began to fall out of use and gradually became a collector's item. And although craftsmen continued to make a variety of bone products, the tradition of *netsuke* carving died out due to lack of demand.

With the adoption of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1989, which, among other things, limited the use of ivory in the Japanese domestic market and completely banned international trade in ivory and ivory items, the number of bone carvers also decreased in general, trade and economic ties were severed, the system of organizing craft labor collapsed, and professional continuity became a thing of the past.

Komada Ryushi is one of the few hereditary carvers in modern Japan, a representative of the Komada craft dynasty, whose family and collective experience spans about 150 years. He is one of the artists whose name is associated with the revival and development of this field of art after World War II [Watanabe 2005]. His creative activity spans 75 years, during which the master went from carving figurines (*okimono*) to creation of miniature sculpture (*netsuke*), from an assistant in his father's workshop to the president of the International Netsuke Association, a famous master and teacher. The works of Komada Ryushi were included in the collection of HIH Prince Takamado [Takamado 2003; 2008; *Netsuke...* 2011; 2022] and are stored in the private and museum collections in the world [Kinsey 1977; 1984; 1997; Rybalko 2016; Kinoshita 2009; Comee 1994]. Thus, the master's artwork goes beyond the scope of a separate creative biography in the history of art, being an example of the changes that occurred in the field of bone carving in the 20th – early 21th centuries.

The purpose of the proposed study is to understand the role of tradition in the creative heritage of Komada Ryushi, as well as to determine the essence of the transformations that have occurred in this area of artistic and craft activity.

Certain observations on individual works by Komada Ryushi are contained in publications devoted to general issues in the study of modern *netsuke* [Comee 1994; Kinsey 1977; 1984; 1997; Yahiro 1914]. Among them, the works of the Kinsey couple, famous collectors of modern *netsuke* are especially noteworthy. Thus, on the pages of the first publication, which systematizes information about carvers who worked in the field of *netsuke* in the post-war period, three works by Komada Ryushi are presented, accompanied by an explanation of the plots (which is inevitable due to the low awareness of the Western viewer in matters of Japanese history, literature and mythology). The author characterizes the carver as a master of female images [Kinsey 1977, 74–75].

The carver's works are also discussed in the dissertation of Ukrainian researcher Yuliia Tormysheva entitled "Japanese miniature sculpture (*netsuke*) of the late 19th – early 21th centuries", where they are presented in the context of the plot-thematic repertoire of *netsuke* in the second half of the 20th century [Tormysheva 2012]. Female images created by the master are presented by David Burditt in a number of articles for the *Journal of the International Netsuke Society*, in fact, the first periodical dedicated to this area of artistic activity. The author mainly focuses on the interpretation of the plot, just like all other researchers, he notes the high level of the master in the interpretation of female images [Burditt 2012a; 2012b].

The master's works were also reflected in the catalogues of the collection of modern *netsuke* of late Prince Norihito Takamado, published by Her Highness Princess Takamado. Her Highness continues to support contemporary carvers through her activities and, therefore, contributes to the preservation of this field of artistry. In one of these catalogues, which has undergone numerous reprints and been translated into several European languages, in a brief information about one of the master's works, he is called "the absolute master in his portrayal of beautiful women" and it is noted the "naturalness" of the *himotoshi* (special holes for advancing the lace) [Takamado 2008, 19], a remarkable feature of the master's mature works.

I would like to especially emphasize the contribution of the artist's daughter, Komada Makiko, thanks to whom many of the artist's memories and explanations of his work techniques were published on the pages of periodicals [Komada M., Komada R. 2018; Komada 2021a; 2021b; 2023] and the Koryuen website [Komada 2021–2024], dedicated to *netsuke*, which she has been running independently for many years now, distributing thus knowledge about *netsuke*.

All of the mentioned works highlight certain aspects of the master's work and lay the specific foundation for its further study in the art history sphere.

The source base of the proposed investigation is grounded on materials from the private archive of the Komada family, interviews and correspondence between the author and the carver during 2008–2023, museum and private collections in Japan and Ukraine, in particular the Tokyo National Museum, to which a significant part of the collection of His Highness Prince Takamado was donated, *Feldman Family Museum*, The Kinsey Collection of Contemporary Netsuke, materials from the Left Blade Sculpture Association website [Dai 22-kai Nihon...], Bonhams auction, Sagemonoya Netsuke Gallery – Tokyo, Japanese art galleries, Internet sites, etc. Considering the presence of fakes and erroneously attributed works on the websites of online auctions and art galleries, only works confirmed by the master were included in the circle of analyzed works.

The goal to be sought and the specifics of the source base determine the use of general research and special art research methods. Among them are methods of historical reconstruction, formal, figurative-and-stylistic, semantic, and comparative analyses, as well as interview methods, photographic recording and content analysis.

The Realm of Traditional Carving. Creative Genealogy of Komada Ryushi

Komada Isamu (creative alias Ryushi: 柳之), was born in 1934 into a family of hereditary carvers Komada (Figs. 1, 2).



Fig. 1. Komada Ryushi in his workroom. Chiba, 2011.
Photo by Svitlana Rybalko



Fig. 2. Komada Ryushi.
Signature



Fig. 3. Komada Ryushi's tools.
Photo by Komada Makiko

His grandfather – Komada Haruyuki (Ryusai: 柳齊, 1857–1922) – was a high-category carver. The founder of the creative dynasty lived in an era when the demand for *netsuke* decreased significantly, but Europeans coming to the country willingly bought small figurines (*okimono*) carved of ivory: figurines of fishermen, peasants, musicians, samurai, and women in elegant clothes. Many craftsmen have focused on making *okimono*. Increasing the size of the figurine required greater knowledge and accuracy in conveying proportions and modeling the shape, which brought it closer to sculpture in its plastic properties. Of course, not everyone succeeded, and many of these art objects were souvenirs of not very high quality. Dealers played the role of intermediary between the carver and the buyer. Dealers developed connections with foreign buyers, accepted and placed orders. Each dealer had his own circle of carvers. The high demand for ivory *okimono* also determined the labor organization system, which provided for the division of functions: primary processing of the material, cutting out the shape roughly, in general lines, and detailed elaboration of the model. The latter required a high technique of modeling the form and working out details, and it was the master of the final carving who had the right to put his signature.

Komada Haruyuki was just such a master. He passed on his skills and knowledge as an *okimono* carver at the final stage of making a figurine to his two sons, one of them – Komada Ryusui (柳水, 1888–1961) – is the father of Komada Ryushi. Accordingly, he taught his sons carving and, moreover, it was from him that the future master inherited

not only the *hidari-ba* (left blade) carving technique, which was significantly more effective when carving ivory [Komada M., Komada R. 2018, 35–36], but also many techniques and materials for developing a female image. Note that in traditional *netsuke* carving there was no model of a “beauty” (Japanese: “*onna bijin*”, later “*bijin-ga*”), as there was in traditional *ukiyo-e* painting and engraving. Obviously, the need to make holes in the figurine to thread the lace (*himotoshi*) did not correspond to the idea of notional female beauty. The plastic development of this image is the contribution of *okimono* masters to the art of carving. Today there are no surviving works by the first two generations of the Komada family: the high quality of their work and, undoubtedly, the successful commercial activities of the dealers with whom they collaborated, led to the fact that their works (like the works of other talented artists) were quickly sold to private collections and mainly abroad. This circumstance complicates the study of the art of carving before World War II.

Until 1964, Komada Ryushi, like his father, grandfather and uncle, worked exclusively in the field of *okimono* (working in the family workshop did not imply any other choice of path). However, gradually in post-war Japan, thanks to American collectors, demand shifted towards *netsuke*. The young carver was attracted to this type of sculpture due to the complexity of the task, because *netsuke* carving involved the development of a model that could be viewed from all sides. In addition, in this case, one has to do all the stages of carving (from composition and model formation to careful detailing) by himself, and this gave much greater creative freedom.

There was also a certain challenge in this: the finishing carver did not develop the model, did not choose which master of the initial processing to work with, and most often did not even know him. These were two different processes, two different qualifications and different workshops.

Having gained independence after the death of his father, Komada Ryushi decided to master a new area of carving. He studied traditional *netsuke*, where a huge register of plots, images and compositional models had been accumulated; studied the technique of primary ivory processing and the technique of applying paint. For a year he learnt from Ichiro Inada, a *netsuke* and small *okimono* carver. It was then that Komada realized what distinguishes the art of *netsuke* from a craft product in the shape of a *netsuke*. Subsequently, he recalled how, at the suggestion of Ichiro Inada, he made a copy of his *netsuke*. Within the learning process, copying the teacher’s model is a common practice. However, Komada was sincerely amazed that in the end there were two identical *netsuke* standing in front of him:

...I realized then and there I had come to a fork in the road. I could continue to make perfect copies of famous works – which were in great demand by collectors – or create original work and perpetuate my own skill and the art as a whole. For me, there was only one choice then and only one choice to this day; create, create, create! [The Art...].

Thus, in order to move on to *netsuke* carving, he had to not only master the technical skills of rough processing, but learn to develop his own models, to see a figure in a piece of material, just as a sculptor sees a future sculpture in a piece of marble (Fig. 4).

Creative Work: Narrative Repertoire and Means of Artistic Expression

Komada Ryushi was in the first cohort of carvers who finally moved from *okimono* to *netsuke* carving, looking for new themes, techniques, and means of expression. An idea of this early period of creativity as a *netsuke* carver is given in the catalogue of the Kinsey collection, which presents three works by the master from 1965–1970: “Conversation”, “Sleeping Genji lady”, “Geisha Apprentice (Maiko)” [Kinsey 1977, 74–45]. The works presented in the catalogue are distinguished by a certain matureness, although the features that will make his style recognizable are already noticeable: soft and round plasticity, polychromatism, showing the mood and nature of the character. Thus, the heroes

of the first two works convey the atmosphere of the Heian era (794–1185) not only with their multi-layered garments, but also with the type of face, noble modesty of gestures, and the apprentice *geisha* (*maiko*) with the mood of Gion (one of the best preserved ancient entertainment districts) with solemnity in dress and nursery smile.



Fig. 4. Komada Ryushi. Stages of netsuke carving process. Photo by Komada Makiko



Fig. 5. Komada Ryushi. Cricket singing. Netsuke. H approx. 5 cm. Mammoth tusk. 2012. Private collection of Oleksandr Feldman (Kharkiv, Ukraine)



Fig. 6. Tosa Mitsuoki. Murasaki Shikibu composing *Genji Monogatari*. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk. 90.5 × 52.7 cm. Late 17th c. Ishiyama-dera Temple, Ōtsu, Japan's Shiga Prefecture

As a *netsuke* artist, Ryushi carves a wide range of subjects: male and female figurines, figurines of children and animals. In the catalogue of his first personal exhibition, which took place in 1981, one can see traditional *netsuke* subjects: fantastic animals, “Dutchmen”, mythological creatures, etc. However, the leading motif of the master’s entire long-term work was the images of beauties: without exaggeration, one of the most difficult and, let us note, the least developed motifs in netsuke carving. As already noted, the analysis of various collections of the so-called “old *netsuke*” indicates the lack of this motif in traditional *netsuke* carvings. Isolated cases usually represent fairy-tale, mythological creatures such as Okame, Yama Uba, etc. These characters have a funny or scary appearance.

Long-term work on *okimono* carving in his father’s workshop, specifically in the field of female images, gave important experience in understanding the features of proportions, movement, and facial expressions. On a large scale it is impossible to hide ignorance, and working with a chisel requires its own specifics and clarity: what, how and why the master does it. Therefore, work in *netsuke* needed reduction in scale, improved tools, a transition to a smaller range of movements and more painstaking work. At the same time, the master moves away from traditional means of tinting in carving, which gives a warm golden hue to the work, or, thanks to black ink, outlines facial features and patterns. Komada sensei strives to model the face and folds of clothing, and this plastic quality significantly distinguishes his work from the anthropomorphic images created by the old masters. He uses only Japanese traditional paints, the same as those used by *Nihonga* (a Japanese style of painting) painters. This circumstance distinguishes his work from the work of *okimono* masters and at the same time fits it into the broader context of Japanese art, including painting, printmaking and textiles.

Undoubtedly, as in other types of artistic activity, the artist of female images must know the features of dresses. According to Komada Ryushi, he once devoted a lot of time to studying their types, patterns, and dressing features. Like all masters, he uses visual sources: some were inherited from his grandfather and father, some he collected himself. Among them are sketchbooks of his grandfather and father, and engravings (Fig. 4). In addition, one needs to navigate through classical literature, which is the source of the most romantic female images that have been praised for centuries. Over many years of work, Komada-sensei has developed a whole gallery of female types – from heroines of antiquity to modern times – and in this sense, he did in netsuke what the great masters of the *bijinga* genre such as Suzuki Harunobu (1725–1770), Kitagawa Utamaro (1754–1806), Isoda Koryusai (1735–1790).

The complex of motifs associated with culture in the Heian period usually draws on such classical texts as *Ise monogatari* (*The Tales of Ise*) and *Genji monogatari* (*The Tales of Genji*), which became the sources for further literary and artistic works, ideas about taste and beauty. The master reproduces the image of a Heian aristocrat, familiar to the Japanese from many scrolls (Fig. 6), in a multi-layered dress, with long black hair flowing down her back, a porcelain-white face with highly drawn eyebrows. One of the most used models developed by the master compositionally unfolds in length, modeling the figure of a fine lady sitting on the floor in the waves of her silk clothes. Within this model, the master finds a variety of nuances: the beauty adjusts the hem of her outfit, or covers her face with a fan, or listens to the singing of a cricket (Fig. 5), etc. This model was also used in the netsuke ensemble “Conversation” (Fig. 7), consisting of two keychain figures – a man and a woman. Each of them can be used separately (for Him or Her) and together as a decorative composition. In general, the pair of keychains resembles the doll couple “dairi-bina” – a prince and princess – decorating Japanese homes on the Hinamatsuri girls’ holiday.



Fig. 7. Komada Ryushi.
Conversation.
H 6 cm (man), 5 cm (woman).
Ivory. Ca. 2010



Fig. 8. Komada Ryushi.
Ise Monogatari. Netsuke.
Mammoth tusk. 2011. One
of the stages of carving.
Photo by Svitlana Rybalko



Fig. 9. Komada Ryushi. Ise
Monogatari. Netsuke. Mammoth
tusk. 2011. Private collection
of Oleksandr Feldman
(Kharkiv, Ukraine)

One of the most sensitive images created by the master based on the *Ise monogatari* motif is an image of the young man, dressed in luxurious robes, carrying a woman on his back (Fig. 8–9). This is a direct reference to the text of the famous novel, where each dan contains a poem. In this case, a plot is shown in which a nobleman kidnapped his darling from the palace. The author of these lines was fortunate to observe the birth of this piece at different stages. Please note that for this (and other pieces made for Ukraine) the sensei used mammoth tusk, a material close to ivory, but at the same time permitted by all international conventions. The remarkable thing is that at the stage preceding painting, the piece resembled a marble sculpture: soft plasticity, open bone texture reminiscent of woven patterns on a kimono, and scattered shadows bring the work closer to examples of round plastic. At the next stage, the effect of this work changed: the pale violet shades of the dress and tinted facial features brought an expressive decorative effect.

Within the number of plots about “the beauties of the Edo times”, several leading images, to which Komada-sensei returns from time to time, stand out clearly. Among them there are both courtesans of the highest rank, showing off their luxurious silk kimonos (Figs. 10–11), and wandering actresses with their *shamisens* (Fig. 18), and girls who seem to have stepped out of the pages of Edo stories about the escape of lovers (Fig. 15).

Particularly, a figurine of a geisha secretly reading a letter from her darling (Fig. 14) or a young mother carrying her baby, wrapped in a ceremonial kimono (Fig. 13), to the temple for the first time complement the images of beauties and women in kimonos with detailed patterns elaborated in *shibori* technique. The pieces of this group are distinguished by expressive, often S-shaped silhouettes, and a dynamic structure: sometimes with a wide range of movement, sometimes with a barely noticeable sliding gait.



Fig 10. Komada Ryushi. High-ranking courtesan. H 5.6 cm. Mammoth tusk. 1991. The collection of H.I.H. Prince and Princess Takamado. “© H.I.H. Princess Hisako Takamado”



Fig 11. Komada Ryushi. Twilight. H about 7.7 cm. Ivory. Around 1980



Fig 12. Katsukawa Shunsen. Oiran in a black uchikake decorated with a dragon in a night sky. Color engraving. Ca. 1800



Fig 13. Komada Ryushi. Newborn baby's first visit to a shrine. H about 7.5 cm. Ivory. 1990s – 2000s



Fig 14. Komada Ryushi. Love letter. H 6.8 cm. Ivory. 1980s – 1990s.



Fig 15. Komada Ryushi. Woman looking back. Wood. 2013. Private archive of Komada family



Fig 16. Woman. Netsuke. H 6 cm. Ivory. 19 c. Metropolitan, NY. Available at: <http://surl.li/sjqzun> (accessed March 16, 2024)



Fig 17. Komada Ryushi. Woman riding on a cow (an allusion to the herder boy). H about 5 cm. Ivory. 1970s



Fig 18. Komada Ryushi. Allegory of the Arts. Netsuke. Mammoth tusk. 2011. Private collection of Oleksandr Feldman (Kharkiv, Ukraine)

“Woman riding on a cow” (Fig. 17) is also an appeal to the classics of netsuke, but where the viewer is accustomed to seeing the image of a little boy with a pipe, the master depicts a young lady playing the pipe. The cow, as if enchanted by her music, lies quietly with her eyes narrowed. This technique of replacing images (*mitate*) is inherent in the Japanese art of the 18th and 19th centuries and was widely used in Japanese prints and netsuke carvings. The purpose of this technique is to create an effect of surprise, create a certain game of meaning, awaken imagination, or make you laugh.

Among the classical plots, we should also mention *ama* (Japanese: “sea women”, pearl divers), a common image in *netsuke*, however, under Komada’s chisel, the half-naked figurine of a young woman acquires much greater plastic expressiveness (Fig. 23–24).

Looking at the images of *ama* in old *netsuke*, even a cursory glance is enough to see their fundamental difference from modern ones and, in particular, from the interpretation of this image in the work of Komada Ryushi. In traditional *netsuke*, the *ama* figurine is presented statically, generally, with a barely marked skirt, hair, face, and only her semi-nakedness and the sickle in her hand indicate that this is a pearl diver (Figs. 19–22). The image created by Komada is distinguished by the complexity of its compositional solution. *Ama* is depicted as a young, attractive girl with flowing long hair and a flowing underskirt. Additionally, the composition is dynamic, where, thanks to a distinct wavy rhythm, one gets the impression of movement through the thickness of the water. Note that such a compositional and plastic solution creates the illusion of a floating *Ama*, in contrast to traditional *netsuke*, where she is shown **emerging from the water**.



Fig. 19. *Ama*. A stag antler. Late 18th to early 19th c. Unsigned. Available at: <http://surl.li/vazvvp> (accessed March 16, 2024)



Figs. 20–21. *Ama*. Wood. H 6.8 cm. 18th c. Unsigned. Private collection. Available at: <http://surl.li/kvzgyy> (accessed March 16, 2024)



Fig. 22. *Ama*. Wood. 4.7 × 4 cm. Signed by Masakatsu, mid to late 19th c. Private collection. Available at: <http://surl.li/qmkgvm> (accessed March 16, 2024)



Figs. 23–24. Komada Ryushi. *Ama*. Netsuke. Wood. 2008. Private collection of Oleksandr Feldman (Kharkiv, Ukraine)



Fig. 25. Nude beauty. Netsuke. H 5.7 cm. Ivory [An ivory netsuke...]

The composition is balanced in such a way that it can be viewed equally well in both horizontal and vertical positions. Here, as in many of his works, the master, through well-thought-through composition, creates natural gaps that can be used as *himotoshi*. Thus, the item combines functionality and exposability, possessing a high level of plastic image development.

If the image of *Ama* in traditional art to a certain extent legitimized the partially naked female body, then the “nude” genre was completely influenced by Western culture. The remarkable thing is that in general it has not become as widespread in Japan as in Europe, but

for the artist this is, of course, a certain challenge. In addition to inventing a composition that represents the beauty of the female body and, taking into account the peculiarities of the genre, would look aesthetically pleasing from all sides, such a task requires both deft modelling of female plasticity and a certain tact in the representation of female physicality. The latter is achieved through a bucket hat with wide brims that cover her face. The figure of a naked woman is distinguished by a soft modelling of its form; the texture of her hat contrasts with the glossy surface of the beauty's body (Fig. 25).

Note that the variety of figurative characteristics is based on several models invented by the master: a sitting figure with legs crossed, a standing figure with the back bent backward, a figure with the back bent forward, etc. This is connected, on the one hand, with the desire to comply with the rules of netsuke as a type of plastic art, which, together with artistic qualities, implies a functional aspect. Therefore, the composition should be compact, without pointed elements or fragile parts. It should be noted that regardless of whether the images are anthropomorphic or zoomorphic (Fig. 26), a desire to convey a feeling of tenderness is obviously traced in the master's pieces.

Despite the variety of images, the figurines of beauties elaborated by Komada are recognizable by their soft plasticity, rounded faces, and conveyance of their emotional states. Like his famous predecessor Kitagawa Utamaro, Komada represents a variety of female characters and states: a tender mother admiring her child, a lover, a dreaming young woman, an ambitious tayū, etc.

The Netsuke Master on the Edge of Epochs

Among *netsuke* collectors there is a certain sentiment towards ancient themes and all sorts of Japanese exotica. This is often transferred to the carvers, who are preferred to be seen as relics of the era before last, miraculously surviving in the concrete thickets of modern megacities. The sensei recalled how one of the American collectors came to visit him and was extremely surprised to see him wearing jeans, working in his workshop and listening to jazz. "It seems that he expected to see me, having prayed in front of the *kamidana* (home altar), sit down wearing the wide *hakama* to carve *netsuke*" (from interview with Komada Ryushi, October 2008, Chiba). Since his youth, Komada was fascinated by cinema, jazz, vintage cameras and travels (Fig. 27), and is keenly interested in events in the world. In his car, together with his family, he travels around Japan and this love of travel is reflected in his netsuke "My Subaru 1965" (Fig. 28), in which the master, with his characteristic humour, reproduced the mood of a summer vacation in rounded forms: the master's eldest son joyfully looks out of the window and it seems that the car is also winking with its headlights.



Fig. 26. Komada Ryushi.
Mother-seal with her young.
L 8 cm. Wood. Ca. 1980



Fig. 27. Komada Ryushi during
his travel in 1974. Photo from the archive
of Komada Ryushi



Fig. 28. Komada Ryushi. My 1967 Subaru
H 5.7 cm. Pink ivory wood and mammoth tusk.
Ca. 1992. Mrs. Hollis Kinsey



Fig. 29. Komada Ryushi.
The Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko
National Museum of Arts. Kyiv, 2010

Despite the fact that Komada Ryushi learned to carve specifically from ivory, he also uses other materials. The latter is due to the 1989 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). According to the Convention, to comply with the rules, netsuke artists had to limit the use of ivory on the domestic market. Komada Ryushi, like other Japanese carvers, was forced to work on adapting other materials for the Western market. In particular, the master works with materials such as mammoth tusk, deer antlers, boxwood, various types of wood and black coral, which gives prospects for the further development of netsuke.

Komada Ryushi's first solo exhibition took place in Los Angeles in 1981, and then in Tokyo in 1992 [Netsuke Exhibition... 1981]. On the website of the Japanese Ivory Sculpture Exhibition of Left Blade Sculpture Association one can see a piece called "Afternoon", for which Ryushi was awarded the "Incentive Prize by Minister of Education, Science and Culture" in the 22nd Japan Ivory Sculpture Exhibition. Komada Ryushi's long career as an artist and his efforts to pass on the art of netsuke carving to the next generation were recognized by the International Netsuke Society with the 2009 Bronze Hakutaku Award. In the same year, he also received the Golden Dragon Award from the Kinsey International Art Foundation [Komada 2023].

For ten consecutive years, from 1994 to 2004, Komada Ryushi served as President of the International Netsuke Carvers' Association. In this capacity, he promoted the exchange of information among netsuke artists and did much to popularize netsuke for the general public. After leaving this responsible position, Komada Ryushi continues to attend association meetings, participate in exhibitions, deliver lectures and conduct master classes on netsuke carving in Japan and abroad. Among the countries, where he demonstrated the art of carving and also met with local carvers, there are Ukraine (Fig. 29) and the USA.

In addition, Ryushi has been educating young artists for more than 20 years: from 2002 to 2020, he conducted netsuke carving lessons together with artist Kuroiwa Akira at the Asahi Culture Center in Shinjuku (Tokyo), after 2020 – video lessons on the Koryuen website [Komada 2021–2024]. Moreover, he taught classes at the Tamagawa Community Club in Futako Tamagawa (Tokyo), and at Sankei Gakuen in Shin Yurigaoka (Kanagawa Prefecture) [Komada 2023]. Unlike the masters of the old formation, Komada sensei does not limit his students to certain plots, models, or style. He supports the creative spirit in his students and inspires them to independently search for forms and subjects. Some of them became professional netsuke carvers. Among them, the most famous are Akira Kuroiwa, Yoka Mukoda, Mansei Uehara, whose pieces are parts of the best collections of contemporary netsuke today.

As Makiko Komada rightly notes, in contrast to the previous tradition, according to which the secrets of craftsmanship were not passed on outside the workshop, Komada sensei generously shares his knowledge, discoveries, and skills [Komada 2023]. He teaches netsuke carving from the very basics: from the plan, the formation of a model in general lines to the preparation of tools, the technique of cutting out parts of varying difficulty, and the introduction of paint. He developed teaching models and a number of video lessons for his students. Thanks to the efforts of his daughter Makiko, who translates the master's lessons into English, the audience of students is not limited to Japan.

In February 2024, Komada Ryushi celebrated his 90th birthday. He continues to carve netsuke and share his experiences through the Koryuen website, run by his daughter Komada Makiko.

Conclusion

Summarizing the foregoing, we note that the work of Komada Ryushi represents a new stage in the development of netsuke, where the artistic component comes to the fore, and the limitation in the use of ivory led to the use of other materials. Analysis of the master's pieces indicates mastery of traditional subjects and adaptation of okimono carving skills to work in the field of netsuke. His works combine the qualities of sculpture in the round with complex convey of movement, expressive plastic modeling and such qualities of netsuke as compactness and visual information nature from all points of view.

The master's legacy consists of plastically expressive lyrical images of women from different historical eras. An appeal to classical literature, painting and engraving in the bijinga genre, and the use of the mitate technique establish a connection between Komada Ryushi's work and a centuries-old artistic tradition. At the same time, all models and female types developed by the master are exclusively the author's heritage, made in a recognizable style and, undoubtedly, are a unique phenomenon in the field of netsuke. He significantly expanded the plot and thematic repertoire of netsuke by the development of female images. His models overcome the static nature inherent in anthropomorphic depictions in netsuke, and the best works go beyond the boundaries of a decorative piece and acquire the qualities of miniature sculpture.

Summarizing what has been said, I emphasize that the innovativeness of Komada Ryushi's work lies in the complex synthesis of the traditions of ivory carving (both *netsuke* and *okimono*), classical engraving and painting, developing unique designs and updating the plots, thematic and narrative repertoire of *netsuke*.

The creativity and multifaceted activities of the Ryushi team are also a striking example of the transformation of the traditional way of life among carvers. The master overcomes the isolation of the workshop, his many years of teaching and Kulturtraeger activity influence the development of netsuke carving art both in Japan and in the world. The list of his activities (classes with carvers, master classes, video tutorials, lectures and participation in exhibition presentations, work in the competition jury, heading the International Netsuke Association for ten years, consultations, articles) makes him one of the outstanding figures in the contemporary world of netsuke.

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С. Б. Рибалко

Комада Рюсі: традиції та новації в мистецтві нецке

У статті розглядається творчість Комади Рюсі – видатного японського різьбяр, чия багаторічна діяльність репрезентує шляхи розвитку мініатюрної скульптури в Японії у другій половині ХХ – на початку ХХІ століття. Спадковий різьбяр у третьому поколінні, Рюсі уособлює традиції різьблення зі слонової кістки з використанням техніки хідаріба і водночас є одним із тих майстрів, що відродили і вивели на новий рівень мистецтво мініатюрної скульптури в галузі нецке. У фокусі запропонованої розвідки – особливості творчої еволюції Комади Рюсі, джерела його творчості, коло творчих зв’язків та фактори впливу.

Систематизовано та визначено репрезентативні твори різних років, проаналізовано сюжетно-тематичний репертуар та підходи майстра до розробки жіночих образів; висвітлено творчі здобутки, багаторічну педагогічну та культуртрегерську роботу Комади Рюсі, його внесок у відродження нецке як галузі мініатюрної пластики; приділено увагу його міжнародній діяльності. У статті висвітлено поступовий перехід від традиційних сюжетів та образів нецке до розробки власних, унікальних моделей, що вирізняються різноманітністю типажів, передачею характерів та емоційних станів, переконливою передачею рухів та виразним пластичним моделюванням; підкреслено, що послідовна розробка жіночих образів є суттєвим внеском у мистецтво нецке і за якістю та масштабом її можна порівняти з творчими доробками видатних майстрів класичної гравюри.

Результати та матеріали дослідження можуть стати у пригоді при розробці концептуальних підходів до вивчення японської скульптури та декоративно-ужиткового мистецтва, а також можуть використовуватися у творчій практиці митців, застосовуватися при атрибуції зразків мініатюрної пластики та розробці експозиційних підходів, виставкових, конкурсних та фестивальних проєктів.

Ключові слова: жіночі образи в мистецтві; Комада Рюсі; мініатюрна скульптура; нецке; різьблення з кістки; техніка хідаріба; японське образотворче та декоративно-ужиткове мистецтво

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