

FASHIONING KIMONO

ART DECO AND MODERNISM IN JAPAN



The Samuel P. Harn Memorial Exhibition

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University of Florida, Gainesville

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The early to mid-twentieth century was one of the most dynamic periods in the history of the kimono. Although lifestyles were changing and concepts of modernity were being defined, the kimono remained the daily dress of choice for the majority of people in Japan. While some kimono created during this time reflect the country's long-standing tradition of elegant designs made with centuries-old techniques, many illustrate a dramatic break with aspects of kimono tradition.

Kimono of the Taishō (1912–1926) and early to mid-Shōwa (1926–1950s) periods combined reinvented traditional techniques with modern weaving and dyeing technology. Western art and aesthetics were also reflected in designs, with traditional motifs updated and new influences incorporated. Kimono fashions for men were conservative but could include decorative jacket linings and underrobes, while boys' kimono often utilized modern imagery. Above all, the boldly patterned and brightly colored kimono of the period perfectly suited young, independent women; wearing such a garment, a woman could be glamorous, fashionable, and modern, but still Japanese.

This exhibition presents a selection of kimono from the internationally renowned Montgomery Collection of Lugano, Switzerland. Prior to 2008 this exhibition was never before exhibited in North America. It is organized and circulated by Art Services International, Alexandria, Virginia. The exhibition is made possible locally by the AEC Trust.



Front cover: Woman's Kimono, 1912–26. Machine-spun silk plain weave with stencil-printed warp threads (*meisen*). **Inside flap and back cover:** Woman's Kimono (detail), 1910s. Machine-spun silk plain weave with stencil-printed warp and weft threads (*meisen*). **Center spread** (bottom, left to right): Woman's Kimono, 1930s–40s. Machine-spun silk plain weave with stencil-printed warp and weft threads (*meisen*); Woman's Kimono, 1920s–30s. Machine-spun silk plain weave with stencil-printed warp and weft threads (*meisen*); Girl's Long-Sleeved Underkimono (*juban*), 1912–26. Silk-rayon blend crepe plain weave with direct-dye stencil-printing (*kata-yūzen*); Woman's Unlined Kimono (*hitoe*), 1920s–30s. Machine-spun silk plain weave with stencil-printed warp threads (*meisen*); Woman's Kimono, 1920s–30s. Silk figured satin with hand tie-dying (*shibori*); (top right) *Portrait*, 1934, Japan (The International Hokusai Research Centre, Milan). All kimono are from The Montgomery Collection of Lugano, Switzerland.

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TYPES OF KIMONO

Kimono are classified into various types that can denote the age, marital status, and social standing of the wearer, as well as the occasion and season for which they are worn.



Furisode: "Swinging sleeves;" kimono with long, hanging sleeves and small wrist openings that is reserved for unmarried young women and girls.

Haori: Jacket worn by men, women, and children over a kimono.

Hitoe: Unlined kimono of silk.

Homōngi: Simplified version of the *furisode* and *tomesode* worn by single or married women for visiting.

Juban and naga-juban: Types of underkimono.

Katabira: Woman's summer kimono made of soft, cool linen-like bast fibers.

Tomesode: Kimono with truncated sleeves; the most formal type worn by married women. A black *tomesode* with five crests is the most formal, but colored *tomesode* are suitable for festive, dressy occasions.

Uchikake: Formal, full-length unbelted robe, often with a padded hem and long, flowing sleeves. Worn for ceremonial occasions by women of the warrior or noble classes until the Edo period (1615–1868), it has since become part of the traditional bridal costume.

THE KIMONO

Since its inception in the eighth century, the Japanese kimono has proven to be an adaptable and almost all-purpose garment. First known as a *kosode* ("small sleeves," a reference to the wrist openings), it became the main attire for all classes and both sexes by the sixteenth century. The term kimono ("thing to wear") came into wide use in the mid-nineteenth century.

The kimono serves both men and women in a variety of roles assumed throughout life. It can be worn as casual, everyday dress or as formal wear for festive and ceremonial occasions. The same basic pattern is used for men's, women's, and children's kimono. The adult kimono is made from a piece of fabric 12 to 14 yards long and 12 to 16 inches wide. It is economical in its construction and use of fabric as well as practical in its application. A kimono can be made of a number of fabrics to be either warm or cool, and depending on the season, weather, and occasion, it can be unlined, single-layered, or multi-layered. Air passing through the loose, open sleeves ensures the wearer's comfort.

The kimono is wrapped left over right and held closed with an obi (sash). A woman's obi wraps tightly several times around the midriff and ties in the back. A man's obi wraps twice around the body slightly below the waist and knots in the back. The kimono is worn long, nearly touching the floor; the length can be altered by folding excess fabric under the sash. Its front-wrap style readily adjusts to the body when the wearer sits on the floor in the traditional Japanese manner, and can be easily rearranged after rising.



KIMONO TEXTILES AND TEXTILE TECHNIQUES

Kasuri: Japanese version of ikat. Bundles of the warp and/or weft threads are tightly tied in places before being dyed so that these areas remain undyed. The fabric is then woven and, since the threads shift slightly, the pattern outlines are blurry.

Kata-yūzen: Stencil-dyeing method developed in the late nineteenth century. Chemical dyes mixed with rice paste are applied through stencils directly onto the fabric, speeding up the dyeing process and allowing for the creation of very precise, complex designs.

Kata-zome: A traditional stencil-dyeing technique. The pattern is created by applying rice paste through a stencil to protect certain areas of the fabric when the cloth is dyed.

Meisen: A machine-spun silk developed in the late nineteenth century, this nubby plain-weave was thick and lustrous yet durable and inexpensive. Designs on this fabric were often made with a new complex but affordable technique in which the warp and/or weft threads were temporarily woven, synthetic dyes applied through stencils, the holding threads removed, and the fabric woven. Since the dyed threads shifted slightly during weaving, the final designs were somewhat blurred. *Meisen* revolutionized kimono fashion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so the term also generally describes the bold, modern kimono popular during this period.



Sarasa: A Japanese form of textile printing. A variety of methods, including block- and stencil-printing, may be used to imitate the printed Indian cottons that Spanish and Dutch traders imported to Japan beginning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Shibori: A resist- or tie-dyeing technique. Before the cloth is dyed, areas of the fabric are protected by folding, stitching, knotting, or other methods. Specialized methods for shaping and securing the cloth produce varied patterns and a distinctive, raised texture.

Surihaku: A traditional method of applying metallic foil to fabric. Paste is applied to the cloth through a stencil, and gold or silver foil is then pressed onto the partially dry pasted areas.

Tsumugi: Plain-weave silk that has a nubby, dull surface because the hand-spun silk fiber is obtained by processing defective cocoons.

Yūzen: Complex and highly refined surface design technique. Developed at the end of the seventeenth century, it can include hand-painting, rice-paste resist-dyeing, stencil-dyeing, embroidery, and gold and silver leaf.

