



ITEM# UJKA459

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

A MASAMITSU KATANA

SIGNED & DATED, SHINSHINTÔ LATE EDO PERIOD (KEIÔ : AUGUST 1865)

Swordsmith:	Geishû-jû Izumo Daijô Masamitsu (芸州住出雲大掾正光)
Measurements:	Length: 69.7cm (ubu) Sori: 1.0cm Moto-haba: 3.19cm Weight: 905g (!)
Jihada:	<i>Tightly forged itame-hada mixed with plentiful chikei</i>
Hamon:	<i>Bright misty chû-suguha with ko-midare, ko-ashi, ko-maru bôshi</i>
Certificate #1:	NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon (Especially Worthy of Preservation)
Certificates #2-5:	NTHK-NPO Kanteishô (koshirae, soroi, menuki & tsuba certified as Authentic)
Fujishiro rank:	Chû-saku (ranked as an average swordsmith)
Provenance:	Heirloom of the Asano family from Geishû province
Authentication:	Sayagaki by Hon'ami Nisshû (Former Living National Treasure)
Included:	Shirasaya, Edo koshirae, fabric bag, kit, printed description

\$9,800

This assured katana by *Izumo Daijô Masamitsu* was forged in August 1865, at the very peak of *bakumatsu* turmoil (closing years of the shogunate), when the *Asano* clan of *Hiroshima* was arming itself between the pressures of the shogunate and the rising tide of revolution. This exceptionally sharp battle-ready katana is tightly forged and features a *chû-suguha* hamon with a poetic mistiness. Its elegant late Edo period koshirae with a mother-of-pearl *aogai-mijin* saya is surely original to the sword with striking gold pine-needle *menuki* by *Ôtsuki Hidekuni*. The *shirasaya* comes with rare *sayagaki* by Living National Treasure *Hon'ami Nisshû*, recording the blade's passage within the *Asano* family. Some swords are made for display. This beauty was made to be carried.

Saki-kasane: 5.6mm [^]

Moto-kasane: 7.9mm

Kissaki: 4.47cm

Saki-haba: 2.38cm

Nagasa: 69.7cm

Sori: 1.0cm

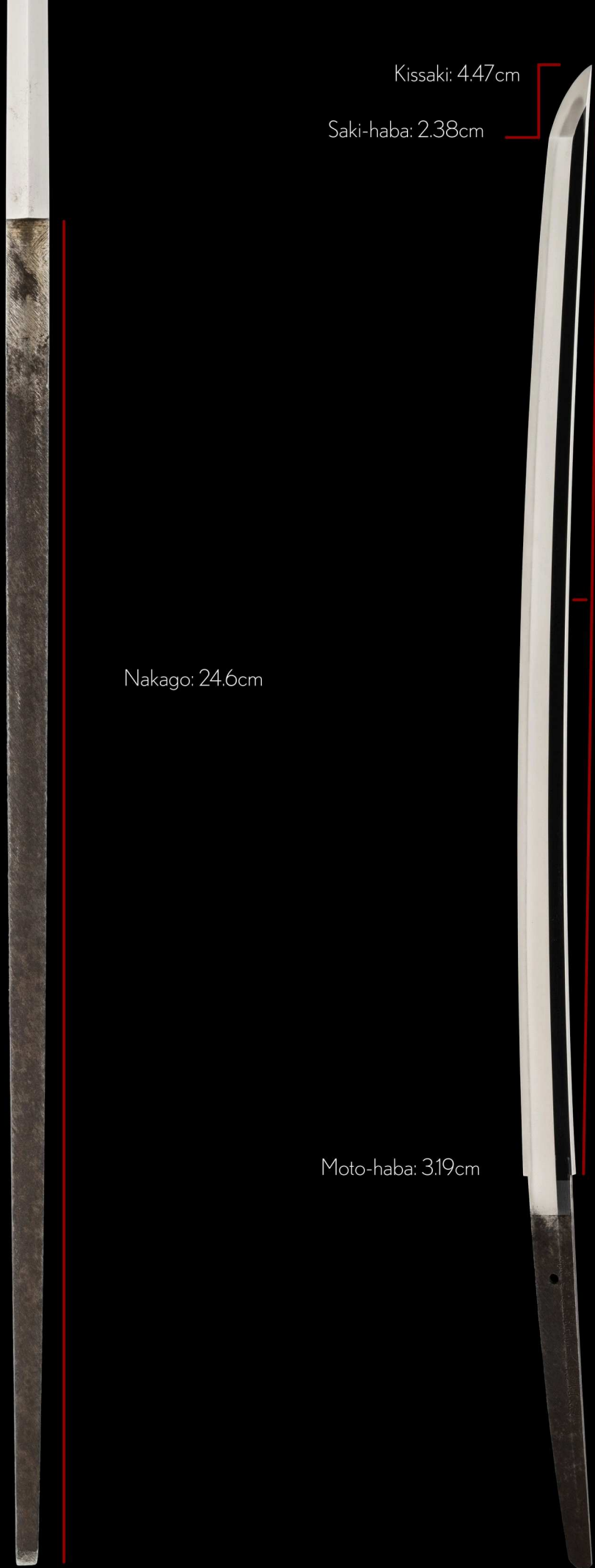
Nakago: 24.6cm

Omosa: 905g

wow

Moto-haba: 3.19cm

Mekugi-ana: 1



Izumo Daijô Masamitsu (出雲大掾正光) was born in the second year of *Kyôwa* era (1802) in *Takano* village, *Aki* province. Though his three elder brothers are also said to have been swordsmiths, few of their works survive, and it was Masamitsu who proved by far the most accomplished. He studied under *Aoki Motonaga*, a disciple of the *Owari* smith *Nobutaka*, and received the honorary title *Izumo Daijô* in the twelfth year of *Bunsei* era (1829). His reputation soon reached the *Asano daimyô* of *Hiroshima*, who granted him the privilege of wearing *hakama* and carrying a sword. In the fifth year of *Ansei* era (1858) he became an official smith retained by the *Asano* family of *Aki*. His last confirmed dated work is from the eighth year of *Meiji* era (1875), and he died in the twelfth year of *Meiji* era (1879) at the age of 78.

Signed "*Geishû-jû Izumo Daijô Masamitsu*" and dated August 1865, when Masamitsu was 64, this blade was forged at the height of *bakumatsu* turmoil, when the *Asano* domain was quietly strengthening its military readiness. A retained domain swordsmith in that climate did not forge swords for ceremony, and this blade bears that out. At over 900 grams, it is genuinely battle-ready, and *exceptionally* sharp. The *jigane* is a finely forged *ko-itame* with *chikei*, and the *hamon* a *chû-suguha* with hints of *ko-midare*. There is a mistiness to the *hamon*, like morning mist over still water. This is not a showy blade, this sword stands confidently, fully prepared.

The *shirasaya* bears a 1985 *sayagaki* by *Hon'ami Nisshû*, former Living National Treasure sword polisher, who almost certainly polished the sword back then, recording the blade's passage within the *Asano* family of *Geishû*. This is such a marvellous accompaniment to the katana, there is a palpable sense of history locked in this blade. The sword is also certified NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon.

The *koshirae* is certified from the late Edo period, so the *saya* (scabbard) is surely original to the sword itself. It is finished in a beautiful mother-of-pearl *aogai-mijin-nuri* that has aged exquisitely. Its *fuchi-kashira*, *koiguchi* and *kojiri* form a matching *soroi-kanagu* long-life *karakusa* patterned set, while the *tsuka* highlights the *tsuba's* *matsu* (pine tree) theme with two glorious pine-needle *menuki* that are certified to *Ôtsuki Hidekuni*.

This is a sword for someone who feels the weight of history and wants to hold a piece of it. Forged in the final years of samurai Japan, by the retained smith of a domain that chose the winning side, it is as close as you will get to that world. Some swords are for display. This one was made to be carried.



Location: *Geishû (Aki) province*

Title name: *Izumo Daijô*

Swordsmith: *Masamitsu* (first generation)

ubu-nakago (original, unaltered tang)

ô-sujikai-yasurime (slanting file marks)



藝 (Gei)

州 (shû)

住 (jû)

出 (Izu)

雲 (mo)

大 (Dai)

掾 (jô)

正 (Masa)

光 (mitsu)



yamagata-keshô

The filing on the nakago served originally to prevent slipping, but from the Edo period onward smiths began working ornamental patterns into the *yasurime*, a decorative practice known as *keshô*. This nakago is a fine example of that. Over a base of standard *ô-sujikai yasurime*, Masamitsu added a mountain-shaped decorative pattern known as *yamagata-keshô*. This creative touch will have you appreciating the sword a little more each time the nakago rests in your hand.

Keiô gan-nen hachigatsu hi

Dated on a day in the eighth month in the
first year of *Keiô* era (August 1865).

(Kei) 慶

(ô) 應

(gan) 元

(nen) 年

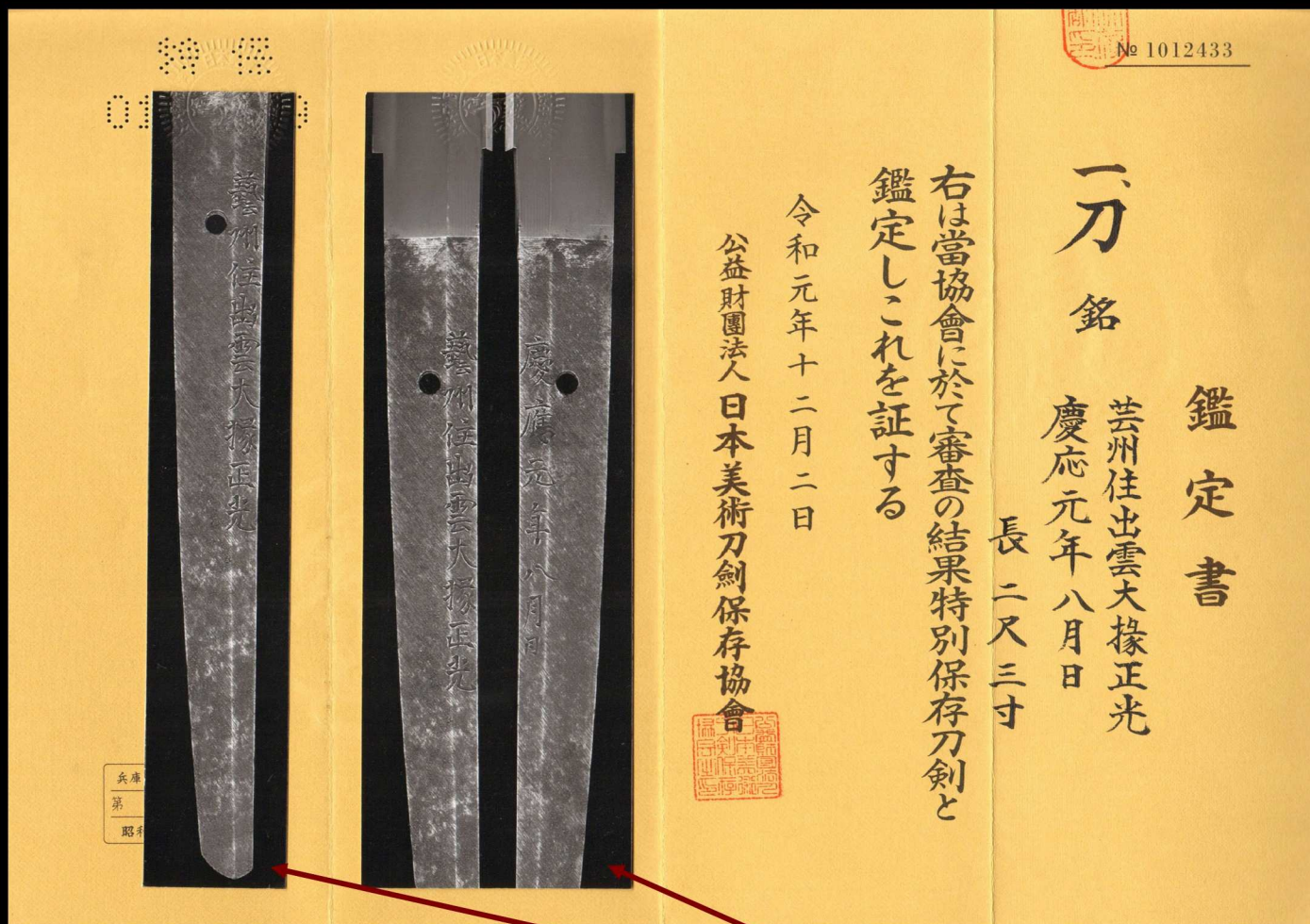
(hachi) 八

(gatsu) 月

(hi) 日

Ha-agari kurijiri - a form in which the rounded tip
of the *nakago* rises toward the cutting-edge.





The nakago is so long, they needed two photographs to capture it all!

NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon Certificate of Designation

A sword designated as *Especially Worthy of Conservation*
by the Society for the Preservation of the Japan Art Sword

Issued in the 1st year of Reiwa (2019), December 2nd

One, Katana

Mei (signature)

Geishû-jû Izumo Daijô Masamitsu
Keiô gannen hachigatsu hi

Nagasa (length)

2-shaku 3-sun (69.7cm)

Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)



Master sword polisher *Hon'ami Nisshû* was given the title of *Living National Treasure* (*ningen-kokuhô*) on April 23rd, 1975. He died on July 13, 1996 at the age of 88. Although we have no records to prove so, it is almost certain that *Hon'ami Nisshû* polished this sword.

藝州住出雲大掾正光

Geishû-jû Izumo Daijô Masamitsu

Izumo Daijô Masamitsu, a resident of Geishû (Aki) province

藝州浅野家御傳來

生中心在銘也慶應元年々紀入り

Geishû Asano-ke godenrai

Ubu-nakago, zaimei nari, Keiô gannen nenki iri

Heirloom of the Asano family from Geishû province

Ubu-nakago, signed, dated in the first year in the Keiô era (1865).

長サ貳尺貳寸九分余有之

Nagasa 2-shaku 2-sun 9-bu amari kore ari

Blade length ~ 69.7 cm

昭和乙丑歳弥生記之本阿弥日洲「花押」

Shôwa kinoto-ushidoshi Yayoi kore o shirusu Hon'ami Nisshû + kaô

Written by Hon'ami Nisshû in the third month in the Showa era

During the Year of the Ox (March 1985)

+ monogram



The Asano Daimyô of Aki Province

The *Asano* family that governed the *Hiroshima* domain of *Aki* province traced its roots to *Asano Nagamasa*, one of the Five Commissioners under *Toyotomi Hideyoshi*. In the fifth year of *Genwa* era (1619), following the dispossession of *Fukushima Masanori*, *Asano Naga'akira* moved into *Hiroshima* from *Kishû*, taking control of the entire province of *Aki* together with eight districts of *Bingo*, a holding of 426,000 *koku*. From that point until the *Meiji Restoration*, the *Asano* family governed *Hiroshima* for twelve generations across some 250 years.

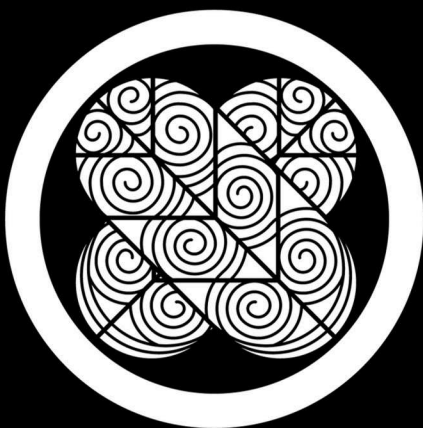
Naga'akira took as his principal wife *Furihime*, third daughter of *Tokugawa Iyasu*, and their son *Mitsuakira*, as a grandson of *Iyasu* through his mother, was granted the honour of bearing the *Matsudaira* name, a privilege carried down through all the generations that followed. Though a major *tozama daimyô* house of western Japan, the *Asano* family thus ran deep blood ties to the *Tokugawa*. A powerful family, with powerful connections.

By the late Edo period, the *Asano* found themselves navigating a difficult course between the shogunate and the domain of *Chôshû*. When the shogunate established its headquarters for the *Second Chôshû Expedition* at *Hiroshima* in 1866, the western reaches of *Aki* province became a front line.

The *Hiroshima* domain played an uneasy intermediary role, aligned with neither side, and the following year quietly moved closer to the *Satsuma-Chôshû* alliance even as it continued to promote the restoration of power to the emperor. In such a climate, the domain's retained swordsmith held a role of real practical significance, well beyond mere ceremony.



Asano Naga'akira (1586-1632)



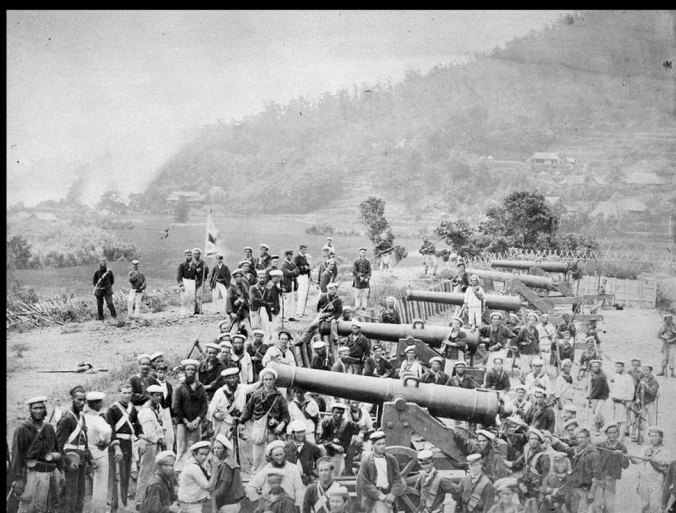
Asano Taka-no-ha mon
The Asano Family Crest
(hawk feather)

Izumo Daijô Masamitsu served the *Asano* family in precisely this capacity, becoming an official smith from the fifth year of *Ansei* era (1858) onward. The present blade was forged in the first year of *Keiô* era (1865), at the very moment when the *Asano* domain was seeking its footing between the shogunate and *Chôshû*. Its *shirasaya* bears a 1985 *sayagaki* by *Hon'ami Nisshû* recording its passage within the *Asano* family of *Aki*. That inscription quietly testifies to a blade forged in this very context, by the retained smith of a *daimyô* house that held a position of weight in western Japan for 250 years.

1865: Forged on the Edge of History

The first year of *Keiō* era (1865) fell at the very peak of *bakumatsu* (late Edo period) turbulence. The era name had only just been changed from *Genji* to *Keiō*, and the change itself reflected the confusion of an age in which shogunal authority was visibly crumbling. Ever since Perry's arrival in 1853, Japan had been torn between opening to the world and expelling the foreigners.

The *Anglo-Satsuma War* of 1863 was fought when the British Royal Navy bombarded *Kagoshima* in retaliation for the killing of a British merchant. The following year, a combined Western fleet bombarded *Shimonoseki*, the strategic strait controlled by *Chōshū*. Both domains took a beating. But rather than hardening their resolve to expel the foreigners, these encounters made something painfully clear: Western military power was overwhelming, and the policy of expulsion was a fantasy. Both *Satsuma* and *Chōshū* drew the same conclusion - the real enemy was the shogunate that had led Japan into this humiliation. And so they began to plan its overthrow.



Anglo-Satsuma War (1863)

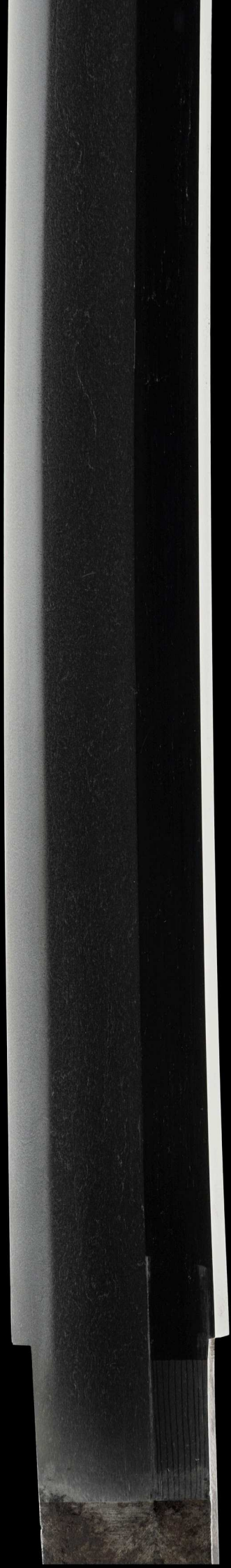
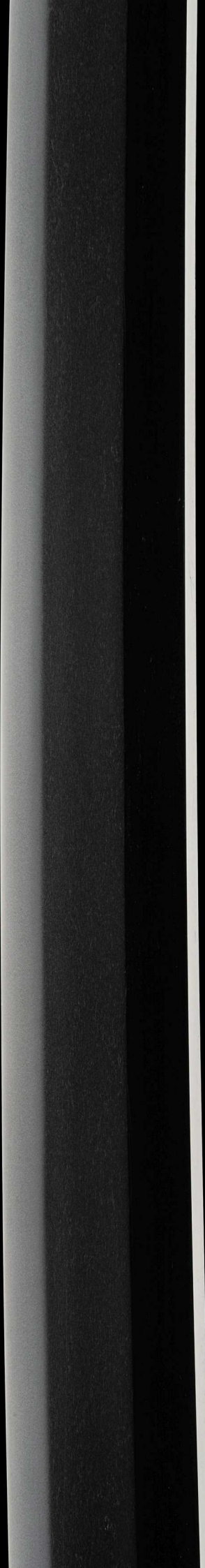
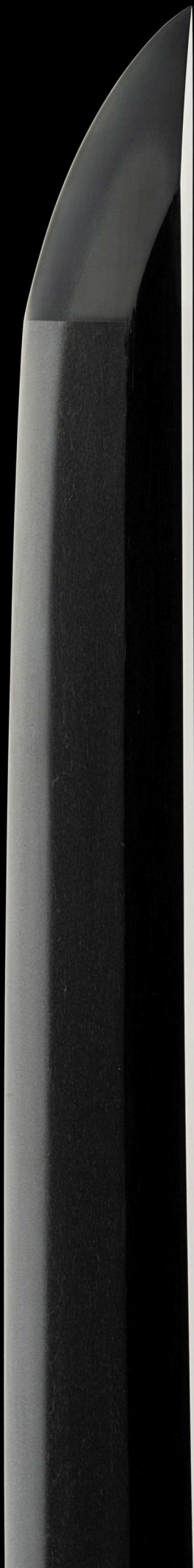


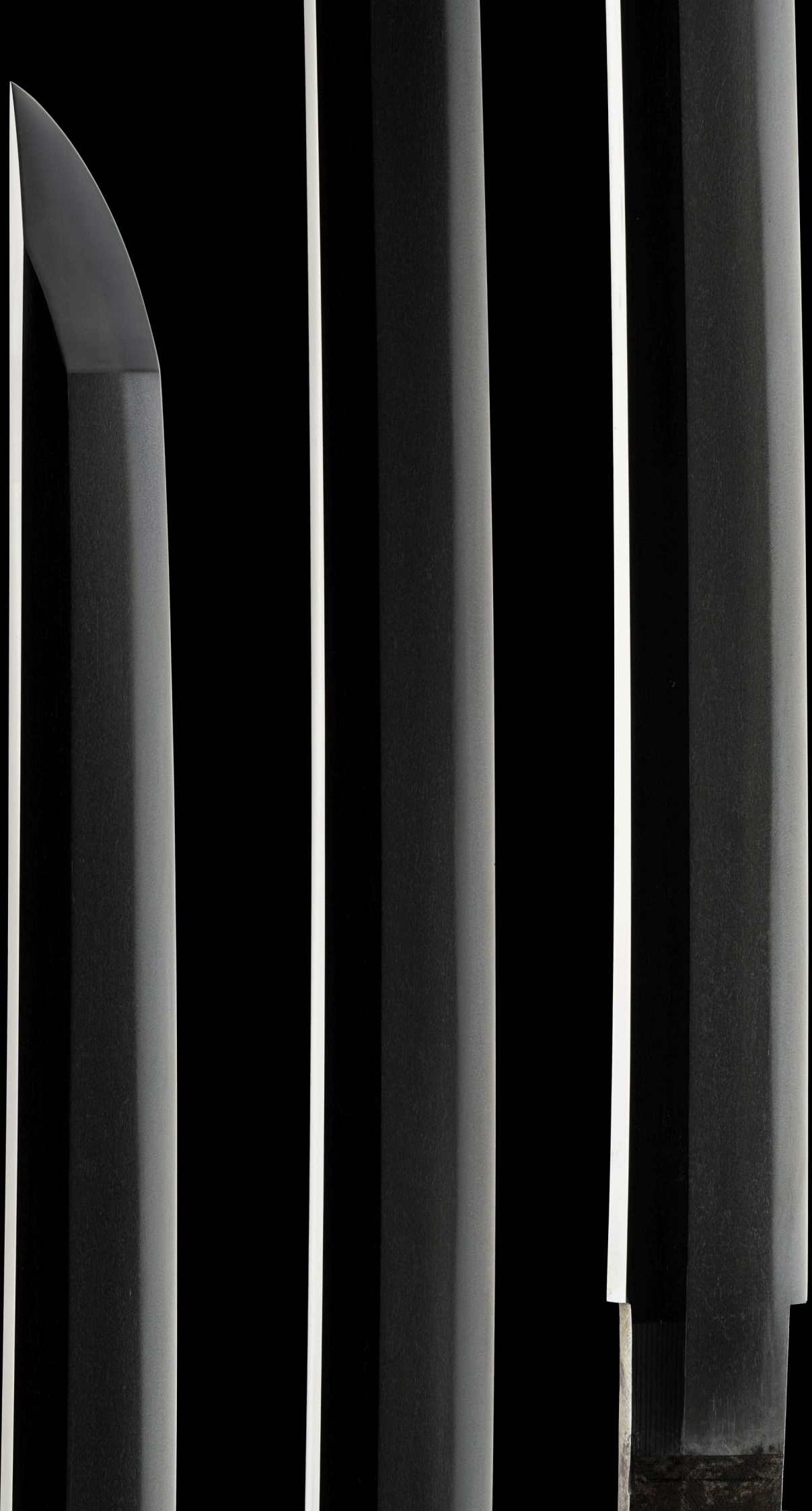
Sakamoto Ryōma

By August 1865, when *Masamitsu* dated this blade, the *Second Chōshū Expedition* had been formally announced but not yet launched. *Chōshū*, now under the reformist control of *Takasugi Shinsaku*, was quietly rearming. *Satsuma* and *Chōshū* had long been rivals and deeply suspicious of each other, but both now shared the same goal: ending the shogunate. It was *Sakamoto Ryōma*, the visionary *Tosa* activist, who bridged the divide and brokered the *Satsuma-Chōshū Alliance* in early 1866, the coalition that would seal the shogunate's fate. He never lived to see what it brought about. Assassinated in *Kyōto* in December 1867 at the age of 31, he was cut down just one month after the restoration he had worked his entire adult life to achieve.

The *Asano* family of *Hiroshima*, squeezed between shogunate pressure and their powerful neighbour *Chōshū*, were watching carefully and strengthening their own military readiness. In such a climate, a retained domain swordsmith did not forge swords for ceremony.

This katana weighs over 900 grams. It was built for the reality of the moment, a sword for a samurai who understood that the long peace was ending, and that what came next would require a blade equal to the times.







The *bôshi* features a classic *ko-maru* turn-back.

Healthy and proud.



A sharp and imposing 4.5cm *kissaki*.

A straight *suguha-hamon* with
a tight *ko-midare* wave pattern.





ko-ashi

As the saying goes, "*less is more*."

This is a katana that reminds us what our soul already knows - that simplicity, when it reaches a certain depth, becomes its own kind of perfection.

The image features two curved blades, likely Japanese swords, set against a solid black background. The blades are positioned diagonally, one above the other. Each blade has a dark, textured surface with a prominent, bright, wavy line of light running along its length, known as a hamon. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the curves and the shimmering quality of the hamon. The top blade is slightly more curved than the bottom one, and both have a sharp, pointed tip.

There is a mistiness to the hamon,
like morning mist over still water.

I asked *Ayumu* (Operations Manager at Unique Japan) for his final in-hand impressions of this *Masamitsu katana*, he wrote:

"The sword is surprisingly super sharp.

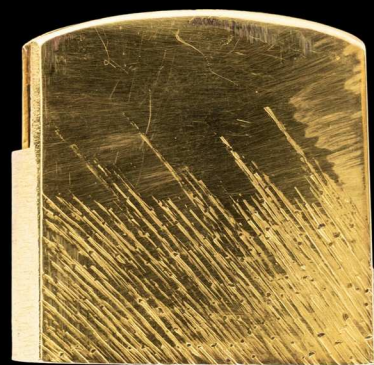
When I hold this sword, I somehow sense a real power to it. That may come from the thickness of the blade and the thickness of the tsuka. The simplicity of the tsuka and tsuba only heightens that feeling. It's hard to put into words, but I get a strange sensation - almost as if I can feel the presence, the very spirit, of the Asano-clan samurai who once owned this sword. It also gives the impression of being a purely practical, battle-ready blade rather than one made for display."

sharp





Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



Tall, brilliant gold *habaki*
with copper base

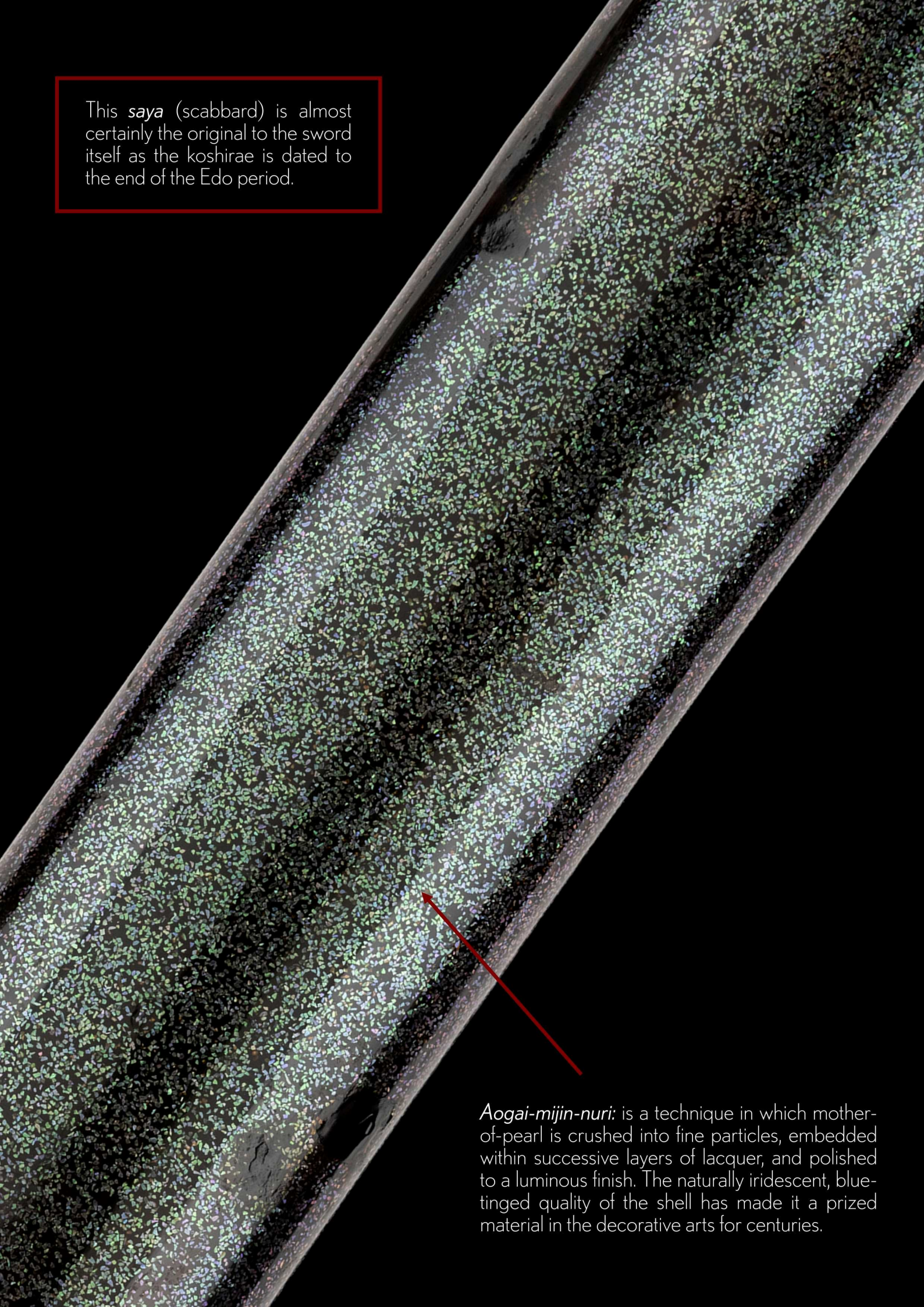
*Aogai-mijin-nuri saya
uchigatana-koshirae*
(青貝微塵塗鞘打刀拵)

*Uchigatana-koshirae
decorated with mother-of pearl*

Crafted during the
Late Edo period
(1780~1868)



*NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
Certificate of Authenticity*



This *saya* (scabbard) is almost certainly the original to the sword itself as the *koshirae* is dated to the end of the Edo period.

Aogai-mijin-nuri: is a technique in which mother-of-pearl is crushed into fine particles, embedded within successive layers of lacquer, and polished to a luminous finish. The naturally iridescent, blue-tinged quality of the shell has made it a prized material in the decorative arts for centuries.

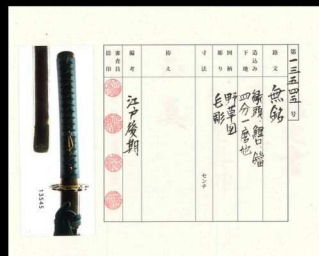


kojiri (end cap)



fuchi (collar)

A completely matching set of long-life *karakusa* (arabesque) *shibuichi* fittings crafted during the Late Edo period.

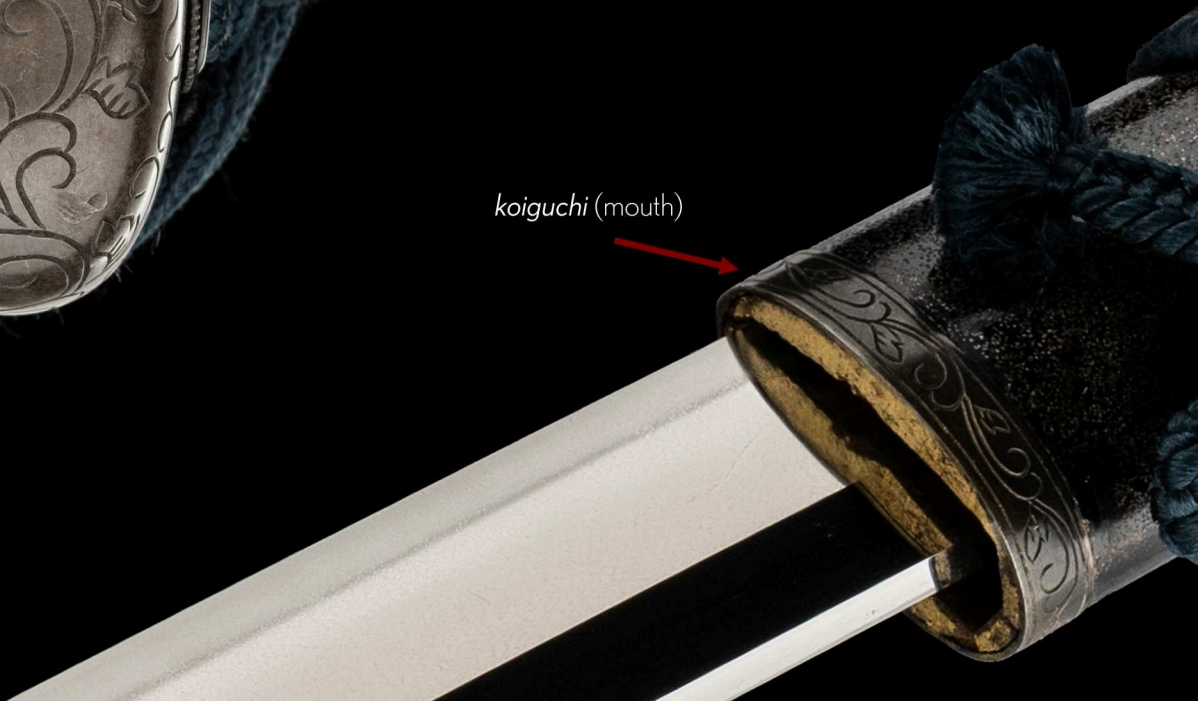


NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
Certificate of Authenticity



kashira (pommel)

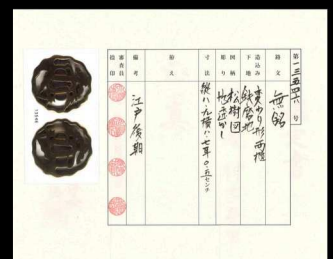
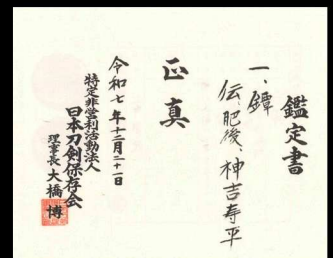
koiguchi (mouth)





This wonderful *tsuba* is the work of *Kamiyoshi Toshihira* (神吉寿平) from *Higo* province. The *Kamiyoshi* family inherited its *tsuba*-making technique from the *Hayashi* school, one of the four great lineages of *Higo*, and went on to establish a school of its own. The *Kamiyoshi* family was especially active in the late Edo period, and *Toshihira* stands as its foremost representative.

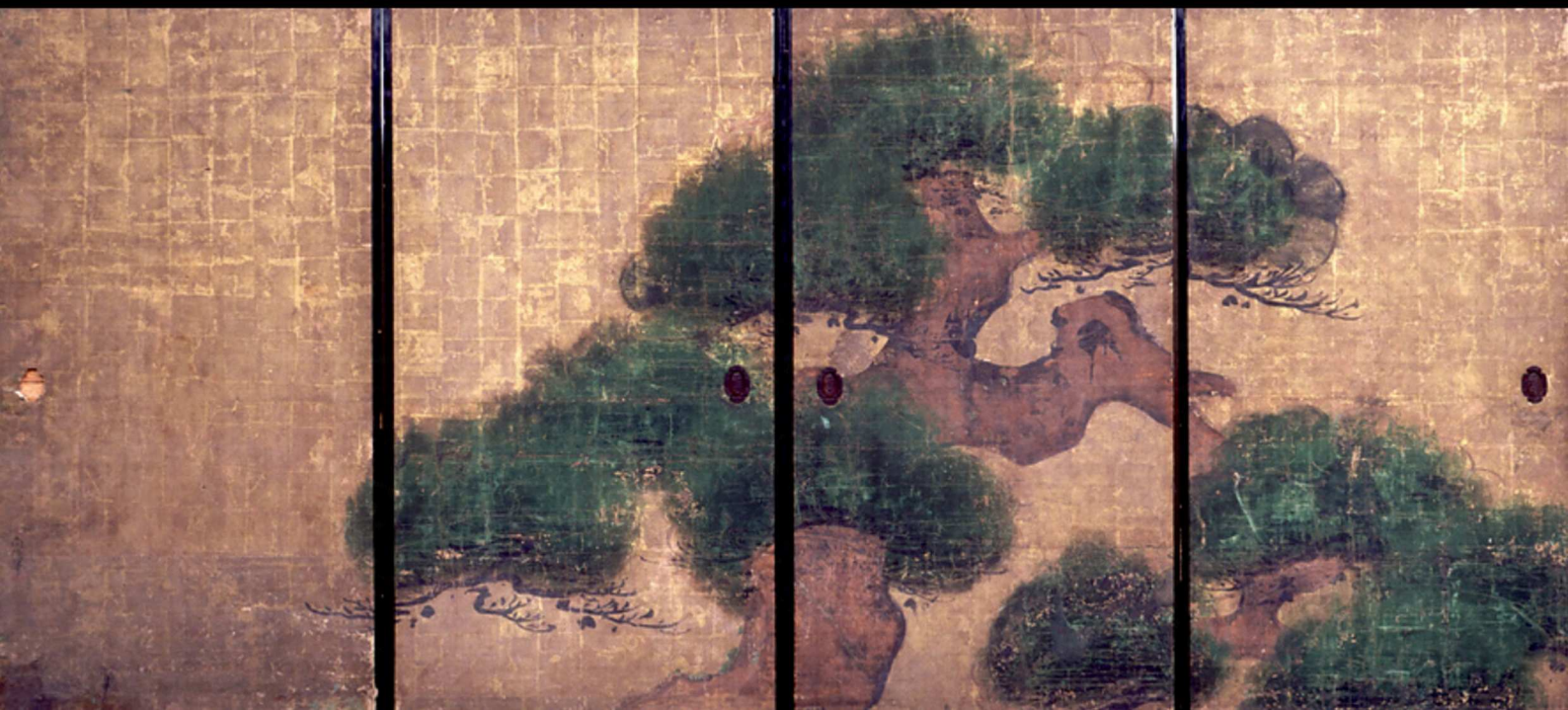
The openwork is rather exceptional. A pine motif, carved in *sukashi-bori* with the loose, natural freedom of a *sumi-e* painting, sits within an undulating *mimi* (rim) that feels less like a border and more like part of the composition itself, as nature had intended. What makes this *tsuba* truly special is the feel of it in the hand, the edges throughout are finished not with sharp angles but as smooth, flowing curves. *Tsuba* with this quality of finish are exceedingly rare.



(reverse)



Fusuma panel with pine trees by *Kanô Naonobu* (1607-1650)



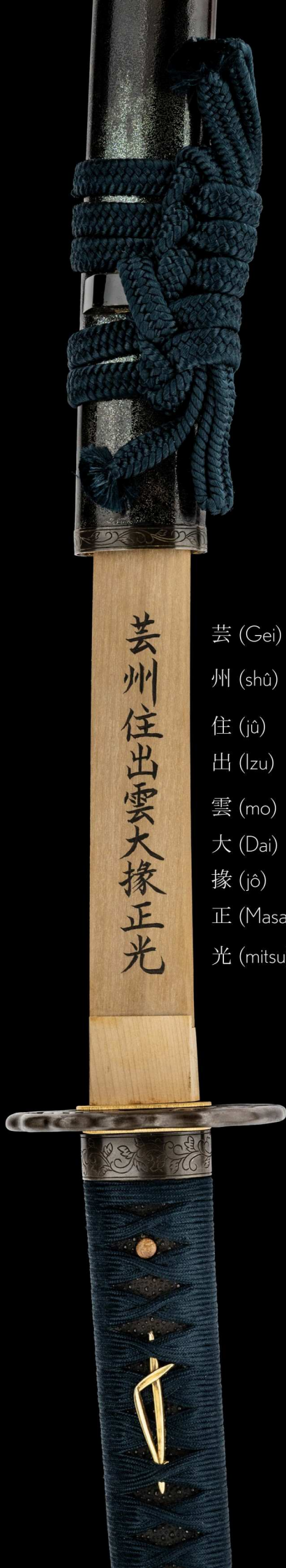


This elegant set of *menuki* is the certified work of *Hidekuni*, a metalworker of the *Ôtsuki* school. Based in *Kyôto*, the school was known as a lineage of exceptional craftsmen.

Hidekuni himself was active during its late *Edo* period, at one point even producing the fittings for the *tantô* of *Emperor Kômei*, the last emperor of the *Edo* period.

Rendered in *shakudô* with gold inlay, these pine needle menuki have an aliveness that draws the eye immediately, exquisitely curved and full of class.





芸 (Gei)
州 (shū)
住 (jū)
出 (Izu)
雲 (mo)
大 (Dai)
掾 (jō)
正 (Masa)
光 (mitsu)

Tsunagi

A handcrafted duplicate wooden sword blade that holds together the *koshirae* when the blade is resting in *shirasaya*.





Koshirae bag
with pine-needle pattern

