



Kenshiro Abbe (阿部謙四郎)

ITEM# UJKA516

ON HOLD

A MASAFUSA KATANA

SIGNED & DATED, SHINTÔ EDO PERIOD (KYÔHO ERA: JANUARY 1727)

Swordsmith:	Sasshû-jû Fujiwara Masafusa (薩州住藤原正房, 3rd.gen)
Measurements:	Length: 71.1cm Sori: 1.6cm Moto-haba: 3.1cm Weight: 836g
Jihada:	<i>Well-forged nashiji-hada with nagare-hada, icy ji-nie, plenty of chikei</i>
Hamon:	<i>Spectacular hitatsura hamon in gunome-midare, kinsuji, sunagashi & mega tobiyaki</i>
Certificate #1:	NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon (sword Especially Worthy of Preservation)
Certificate #2:	NBTHK Hozon (koshirae Worthy of Preservation)
Certificate #3-4:	NTHK-NPO Kanteishô (tsuba & soroi-kanagu certified as Authentic)
Fujishiro rank:	Jô-saku (ranked as a superior swordsmith)
Provenance:	Once the property of the celebrated martial artist Kenshiro Abbe (阿部謙四郎).
Included:	Shirasaya, Edo koshirae, fabric bags, kit, printed description

\$22,000

This exceptional katana was forged by 3rd gen **Masafusa** of **Satsuma** province - a leading figure of **Satsuma-Shintô** school that combined the prowess of **Mino-den** with the intensity of **Sôshû-den**. This sword was crafted in 1727, deep into the mid-Edo period, and was once the property of **Kenshiro Abbe**, one of the foremost martial artists of the twentieth century. A man who, in fact, introduced **aikido** to the United Kingdom in 1955. Its brilliant set of Edo-period koshirae was built in the spirit of Satsuma warriors; decorated with carp amid waves from the famed **Ômori** school and dragon **menuki** make reference to the *Dragon Gate legend*, an emblem of perseverance, and of higher status.

^
Saki-kasane: 5.2mm

Moto-kasane: 7.7mm

Kissaki: 3.65cm
Saki-haba: 2.10cm

Nakago: 21.4cm

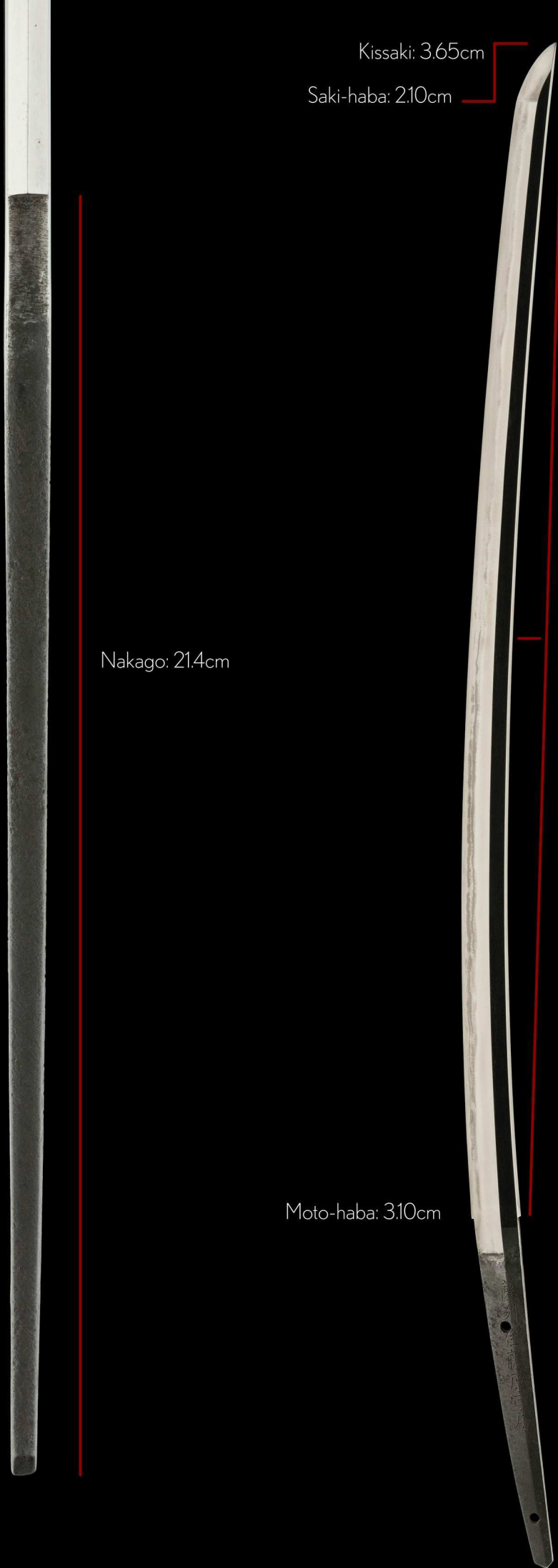
Omosa: 836g

Moto-haba: 3.10cm

Nagasa: 71.1cm

Sori: 1.60cm

Mekugi-ana: 2



Masafusa (三代正房), was the third generation swordsmith of *Satsuma* province whose family name was *Maruta Sôzaemon* (丸田惣左衛門). While several smiths carried the *Masafusa* name, few works by the other generations are known to survive, and the name therefore refers in practice to this third generation. As one of the leading figures of *Satsuma-Shintô*, he trained outstanding disciples including *Mondo no Shô Masakiyo* (主水正正清), and his most active period falls within the *Kyôhô* era (1716-1736). His work is characterized by *nashi-ji hada* and vigorous *hamon* mixed with coarse *nie* - qualities that embody the powerful and martial temperament of *Satsuma-Shintô*.

The *Satsuma-Shintô* tradition began when *Maruta Bingo no Kami Ujifusa* (丸田備後守氏房), a disciple of *Wakasa no Kami Ujifusa* (若狭守氏房) of *Mino* Province, moved to *Satsuma* during the *Tenshō* era (1573-1592). The school established a distinctive style combining the *Mino-den* with elements of the *Sôshû-den*. Most *Satsuma* smiths of the *shintô* period trace back to this lineage – including smiths commonly associated with the *Naminohira* (波平) line, among them *Ichinohira Yasuyo* (一平安代) and *Yamato no Kami Yasuyuki* (大和守安行). *Satsuma-Shintô* is set apart from other *shintô* schools by its powerful *sugata* and intense *hamon*.

This sword was forged in the twelfth year of *Kyôhô* era (1727), at the height of *Masafusa*'s career. The form recalls *Keichô-Shintô* swords - an elongated *kissaki* and a commanding, assertive presence. The *jihada* is a well-forged *nashi-ji hada* with *shirake-utsuri* appearing in the steel. The *hamon* is a vibrant *gunome-midare* internally charged with vigorous *nie* arranged like prayer beads and wildly thick *imozuru* (potato vines) - a hallmark of *Satsuma-Shintô*. Pointed *togari* elements drawn from the *Mino-den* add further character to a *hamon* of exceptional energy. The sword comes certified NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon.

This exceptional katana was once the property of *Kenshiro Abbe* (阿部謙四郎), one of the foremost martial artists of the twentieth century - holder of 8th *dan* in *judo*, 6th *dan* in *aikido*, and 6th *dan* in *kendo*, and the man who introduced *aikido* to the UK in 1955. The sword was sourced by his close friend *Nobuo Ogasawara*, former curator at the Tokyo National Museum and a respected author on the subject of *nihontô*. It's evidently clear why he had recommended this sword for *Abbe-sensei* - it holds an energy reflecting the warrior spirit of the *Satsuma* people.

Its brilliant set of *Ôwari* school Edo-period NBTHK Hozon certified *koshirae* features *soroi-kanagu* (matching set) of carp amid waves and with the *menuki* formed of dragons - together they make reference to the *Dragon Gate* legend, an emblem of perseverance, advancement, and the attainment of higher status.



Location: *Satsuma province*

Family name: *Fujiwara*

Secular name: *Maruta Sôzaemon*

Swordsmith: *Masafusa* (third generation)

ubu-nakago (original, unaltered tang)

katte-sagari-yasurime (slanting file marks)



薩 (Sa)

州 (sshû)

住 (jû)

藤 (Fuji)

原 (wara)

正 (Masa)

房 (fusa)



The shape of the *nakago-jiri* (butt-end of the tang) is called *iriyama-gata*. *Iri* means 'enter' and *yama* is 'mountain', suggesting at the '*base of a mountain*'.



Although the blade retains its *ubu-nakago*, a second hole has been drilled near the base – a hikae-mekugi-ana, used to seat an additional mekugi for reinforcement during *tameshigiri* or hard use. The sword carries no test-cutting inscription, but the hole alone speaks clearly enough.

The *koshirae* is fitted with a corresponding second hole, a detail that is rarely encountered. Blade and *koshirae* were conceived together with use in mind – a coherent statement of the martial outlook of a *Satsuma* domain samurai. This subtle, yet important characteristic would have clearly appealed to its former owner, *judo* champion *Kenshiro Abbe*.

hikae-mekugi-ana

Kyôhō jûni hinoto-hitsuji doshi Shôgatsu kichijitsu

Crafted on a lucky day in the first month in the twelfth year
of *Kyôhō* era during the Year of the sheep (January 1727)

(Kyô) 享
(hō) 保
(jû) 十
(ni) 二
(hinoto) 丁
(hitsuji) 未
(doshi) 年
(Shô) 正
(gatsu) 月
(kichi) 吉
(jitsu) 日



特 保
02202009

東京都 教育委員会
第 322106 号
令和2年6月7日



公益財団法人 日本美術刀剣保存協会

令和二年十一月九日

右は當協會に於て審査の結果特別保存刀剣と
鑑定しこれを証する

一 刀 銘

薩州住藤原正房 (三代)
享保十二年正月吉日

長二尺三寸四分強

鑑 定 書

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 2nd year of Reiwa (2020), November 9th

One, Katana

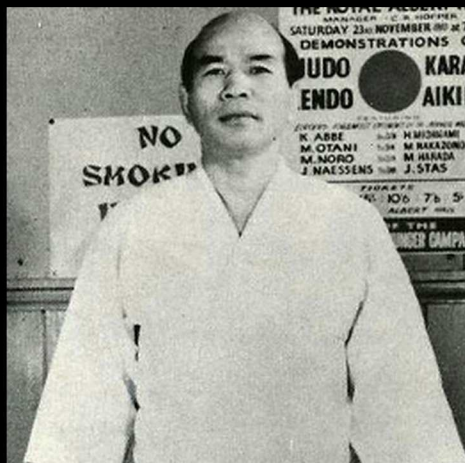
Mei (signature)

Sasshû-jû Fujiwara Masafusa (Sandai)
Kyônen jûni hinoto-hitsuji doshi Shôgatsu kichijitsu

Nagasa (length)

2-shaku 3-sun 4-bu kyô (71.1cm)

Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)



Kenshiro Abbe (1915~1985)

Martial Provenance

This *katana* was once the property of *Kenshiro Abbe* (阿部謙四郎), one of the foremost martial artists of the twentieth century. The sword was sourced by his close friend *Nobuo Ogasawara*, former curator at the Tokyo National Museum and a respected author on the subject of *nihontô*.

Abbe-sensei was a Japanese master of *judo*, *aikido*, and *kendo* who introduced *aikido* to the United Kingdom in 1955 and founded the *Kyushindo* system. He was born in *Tokushima* province, Japan, and was first introduced to martial arts by his father - a *kendo* teacher - at the age of just 3-years-old.

In 1933 he enrolled at the *Butokukai*'s special teacher training college and was graded 5th dan, graduated, and retained as an instructor. In 1935, aged only 18, Abbe won both the All Japan East/West Tournament and the 5th Dan championships - a pinnacle in competitive *judo*.

In 1938, at the age of 23, *Kenshirô Abbe* was awarded 6th dan (youngest person ever) and called up for military service. It was during this period that he first formulated his theory of *Kyushindo Budo*, and it was also at this time he was selected as a student by *Morihei Ueshiba*, the creator of *aikido*. *Aikido* was at this time still secret and *Ueshiba* only selected special students. Abbe was to study for ten years under *Ueshiba* and became his senior student.

The famous encounter that led to that relationship is definitely worth sharing: on a train journey in Japan, *Abbe* first met *Ueshiba* - not knowing at all who he was. *Ueshiba* offered *Abbe* his little finger and said "*Please break my finger.*" (as one does!) *Abbe* accepted the challenge, and as he took hold of the old man's finger and tried to break it. Soon he found himself on the floor of the carriage, totally immobilized. Whilst on the floor, *Abbe* asked *Ueshiba* for permission to study under him.

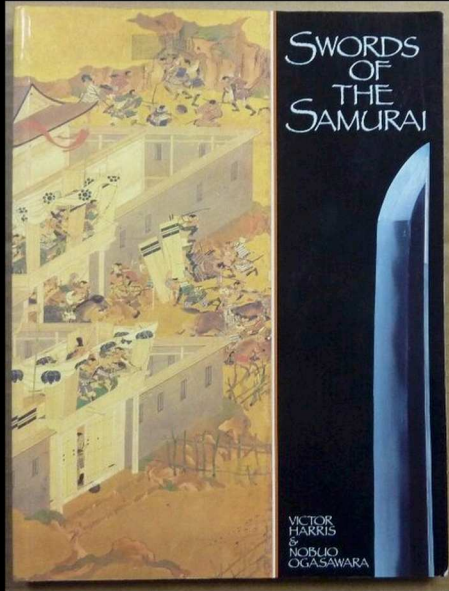
When he arrived in the UK in 1955, invited by the London *Judo* Society, he demonstrated *aikido* at the LJS and at the Royal Albert Hall in London. By 1957, through the various councils he formed, Abbe had introduced *kendo*, *aikido*, *karate*, *kyûdô*, *jukendô*, *iaidô*, *yaridô*, and *naginatadô* to Europe.

A single man had more impact on British martial arts than ANYONE who had gone before or, for that matter, after. He held 8th dan in *judo*, 6th dan in *aikido*, and 6th dan in *kendo*, with additional dan ranks in *karate*, *kyûdô*, and *jûkendô*.

That a man of such stature would own this Satsuma blade by Masafusa is honestly not surprising - it is fitting in a way that almost seems inevitable. Satsuma was Japan's most uncompromisingly martial province: the *Shimazu* clan ruling it under the same family for centuries, their swordsmen trained in the *Jigen* school of swordsmanship, a system built around absolute commitment to a single devastating strike.



Nobuo Ogasawara was the former curator at the *Tôkyô National Museum* and one of the leading *nihontô* scholars of his generation. *Ogasawara* published the authoritative volume on *nihontô koshirae* in the Tokyo National Museum's own *Nihon no Bijutsu* series - Japan's most prestigious museum publication programme - and his work on the fundamentals of sword appreciation is cited as a standard reference by Markus Sesko. He was also the co-author of 'Swords of the Samurai' with *Victor Harris* former *Keeper of the Department of the Japanese Antiquities* in the British Museum.

A large, close-up photograph of a sword blade, likely a katana, showing its dark, polished surface. A red arrow points to a specific area on the blade, indicating a defect. The blade is positioned diagonally across the frame.

shirake-utsuri





Satsuma smiths were deliberately and consistently working at the high end of the temperature range. The result is a strong *nie-deki*, *ara-nie* (coarse *nie*), *nie-kuzure* (broken-up *nie*), and the *imozuru hataraki* – all point to a forging and quenching practice that produced aggressive martensite crystallization across a wide zone.

Higher temperature *nie-deki* is visually spectacular and conveys tremendous energy, and the *Satsuma* smiths embraced this as part of their aesthetic. Their military culture valued punch over refinement. The blades were made for warriors in a fief that maintained a wartime posture through the entire peacetime Edo period.



Unique *gunome* formations
acting like reverse *ashi* (legs).

sunagashi

A bright *gunome-midare hamon*
that is bursting with character.

A close-up view of the impressive *imozuru*.

imozuru

ji-nie, the body shines

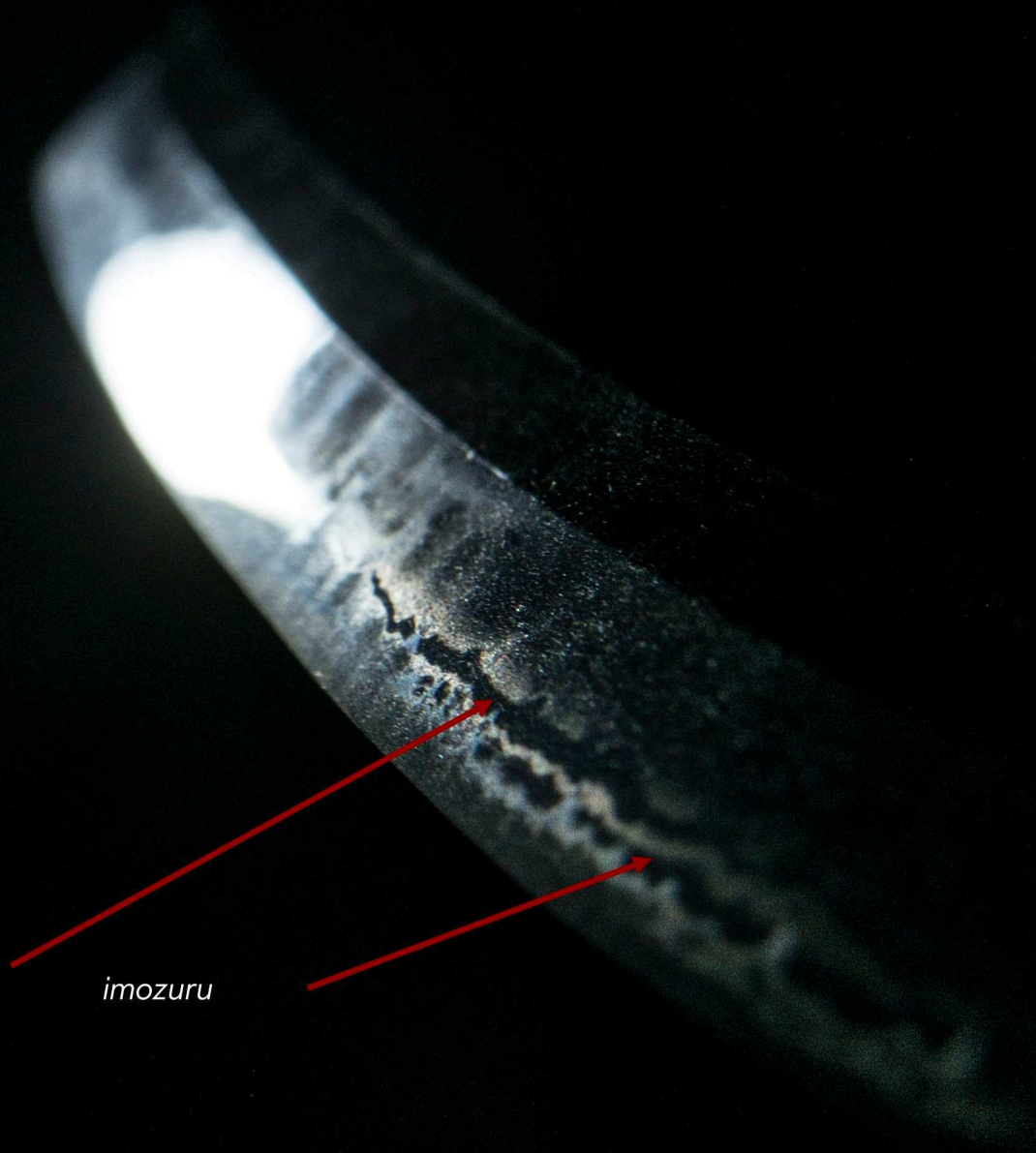


The blade is strong and unwavering.
The visible *nie* crystals reflects the ice cold
will of the Satsuma warrior.

nie-deki



Brave Warriors of the Shimazu Clan, 1877
Artist: *Yoshitoshi* (1839~1892)



imozuru

Imozuru (芋蔓) – literally "potato vines" – is a distinctive *hamon* activity that is the signature fingerprint of *Satsuma*-period blades. It is particularly prominent on the *omote* side of this katana.

Imozuru are thick, conspicuous *inazuma* (lightning-bolt-shaped *kinsuji*) that runs through the hamon. Where a standard *inazuma* is relatively fine and sharp in appearance, *imozuru* sprawl across the *hamon* with a thick, winding presence that truly earns the "potato vine" name.

This feature is almost exclusively associated with *Satsuma-shintô* and *Satsuma-shinshintô* blades. It is one of the most peculiar and regionally diagnostic *hataraki* in the entire *nihontô* world – and this is textbook *imozuru*.

Unique *gunome* formations similar
to pointed *togari* illustrating
Satsuma's *Mino-den* heritage.

sunagashi

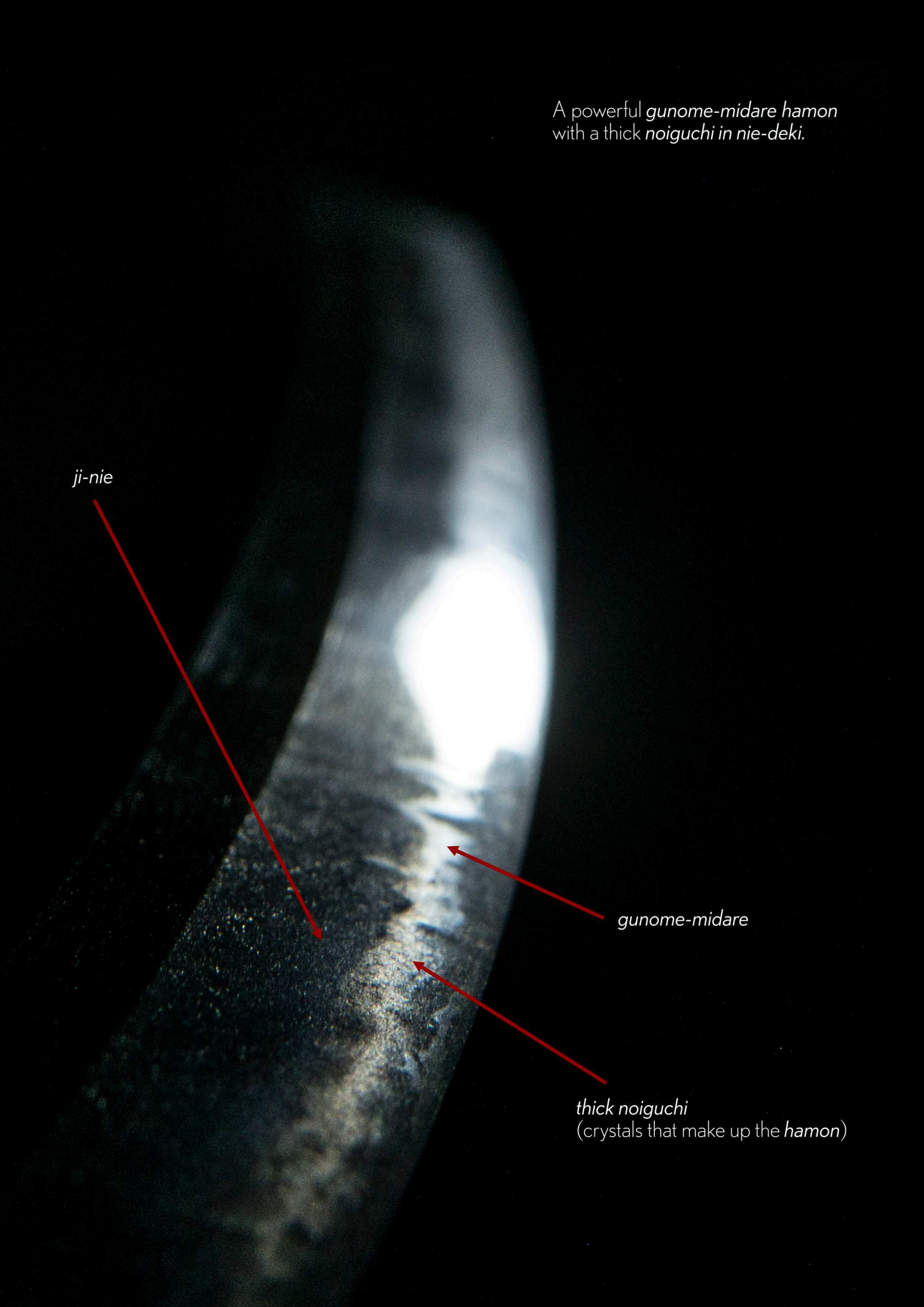
A bright *gunome-midare hamon*
that is bursting with character.

A powerful *gunome-midare hamon*
with a thick *noiguchi* in *nie-deki*.

ji-nie

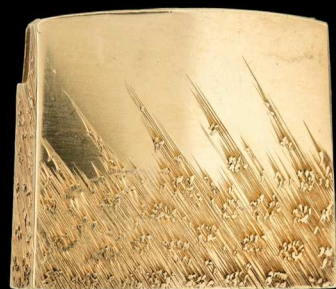
gunome-midare

thick noiguchi
(crystals that make up the *hamon*)





Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



gold *habaki* with
copper ground

*Kuro-roiro-saya
uchigatana-koshirae*
(黒蠟色鞘打刀拵)

*Uchigatana-koshirae
lacquered in glossy black*

Crafted during the *Edo* period



NBTHK Hozon
Certificate of Authenticity

02202007

No 4017634



公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協会



令和二年八月二十五日

鑑定しこれを証する
右は當協會に於て審査の結果保存刀装具と

一黒蠟色鞘打刀拵

縁頭波鯉図 無銘
目貫這龍図 無銘
鐔大根透無銘

柄白絞着黒色糸片撮卷

鑑定書

NBTHK Hozon Certificate of Designation

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

Issued in the 2nd year of Reiwa (2020), August 25th

One,

Uchigatana-koshirae lacquered in glossy black

Fuchigashira: motif of a carp amid waves, unsigned

Menuki: motif of a crawling dragon

Tsuba: openworks depicting a radish

Tsuka: white samekawa with black braids in kata-tsumami-maki

Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)



This *tsuba* was made in the mid-Edo period by *Sadanaga* (貞命), a leading *tsuba* maker of *Kii* Province. *Sadanaga* is held to belong to the lineage of *Hôan* (法安), who moved from *Owari* to *Kii* and later to *Aki* Province. His work shows the influence of *Owari tsuba*, but *Sadanaga* is known for designs of considered refinement – the quality of the iron and the clarity of the motif working together.



tomoe crest

The *tsuba* is *sukashi*, combining a *tomoe* crest with a chrysanthemum leaf whose outlines form the *hitsu-ana*. While the *tomoe* was not the official crest of the *Shimazu* (島津) clan of *Satsuma*, it was used by some of their retainers – and the restrained simplicity of this piece gives it a distinctly *Satsuma* character.





(reverse)



fuchi

koiguchi



kurikata

Soroi-kanagu
depicting a carp ascending a waterfall

This stunning *soroi-kanagu* (matching set of fittings) is by the renowned Ômori school (大森派), celebrated for its wave designs. The motif draws on a Chinese legend: of all the fish that attempted to climb the waterfall at the **Dragon Gate** on the Yellow River, only the carp succeeded – and in doing so, transformed into a dragon. The carp ascending the waterfall became, from this, an emblem of perseverance, advancement, and the attainment of higher status.



kashira



kojiri



The *tsuka* is wrapped in white *samekawa* with black *tsumami-maki* braiding, a formal wrapping style well suited to the period.

The *menuki* are gold dragons, a deliberate complement to the *soroi-kanagu*, where dramatic carp are shown ascending a waterfall. The reference is to the **Dragon Gate** legend, in which carp that complete the climb transform into dragons. The pairing is intentional and gives the *koshirae* an aspirational theme throughout.



Carp-e diem!





Koshirae bag, rope design

ARIGATO!

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