

# OBJECT

of the **month** *August 2021*

## BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Hello and welcome to Virtual Object of the Month, a program where we look closely at a single artwork each month. In this video, we're going to explore an artwork by 20th century Japanese artist Sadao Watanabe.

First, let's just look for at least 15 seconds. Scan the artwork from top to bottom and side to side. Notice first impressions as well as details. Pause the video if you'd like. What did you notice? And what's going on here in this artwork?



The artist has depicted a scene of three figures, some on horseback, central to the composition. They are surrounded by fluid forms reminiscent of vines and trees, mimicking a rolling landscape. And on the far-right edge of the artwork, there is a fourth, much smaller figure. Notice how the artist has treated and rendered space within the composition. The forms he has chosen to use to depict the people and elements of the scene are flat and rigid. Dramatically bold and thick black lines outline the forms and produce a dynamic contrast against the artist's choice of limited jewel-tone colors.

Created in 1966, the title of this artwork is *Arrival of the Three Kings*. Looking closely, we can see that the three central forms are holding various items. Based on the title, we know that the artist has depicted his interpretation of the biblical story of the Three Wise Men bringing gifts to Mary and the Baby Jesus.

Sadao Watanabe was a Christian and therefore part of a religious minority which only accounted for about 1% of the population in a majority-Buddhist early 20th century Japan. He was greatly inspired by biblical stories and themes and even listened to Gregorian chants while creating artworks.

Trained as a textile dyer, Watanabe was part of the folk craft movement in 20th century Japan and uniquely blended his Japanese heritage with Western theology using the traditional technique of Japanese stencil printing, called kappazuri. This method was originally limited to cloth dyeing for fabrics

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such as for kimonos and incorporates elements of printmaking and painting. With this technique, first the artist carves the design of their original drawings into a thick type of stencil paper. And from this, a key impression and several color stencils can be made. Next, a rice paste is applied to areas that are to remain uncolored. The artist paints on colors and the areas covered by paste “resist” these painted-on colors. Finally, the print is rinsed in water and when the paste washes off the uncolored portions reappear.

*Arrival of the Three Kings* is currently on-view at the Dayton Art Institute as part of the Focus Exhibition “All by Myself: Japanese Creative Prints” and can be located in Gallery 105 of the Patterson-Kettering Wing of Asian Art. We hope to see you at the museum soon and thank you for joining.

## END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) to access the video presentation.

## ARTWORKS FEATURED IN VIDEO\*

Sadao Watanabe (Japanese 1913–1996), *Baby Moses Being Abandoned*, 1979, color stencil print on washi paper. LACMA, Los Angeles, CA. Gift of Lilly Tsukahira (M.2011.137.26)

Saint-Denis Basilica (stained glass detail from the life of Moses / Moses saved from the waters), 12th century, St. Denis, France. Image via Vassil

Sadao Watanabe (Japanese 1913–1996), *Annunciation*, 1972, hand-colored kappazuri stencil print on momigami wrinkled paper. Private Collection. Image via

bowdencollections.org © 2013 Sandra Bowden  
Saint Joseph Catholic Church (stained glass detail)  
Wapakaneta, Ohio. Image via Nyehob

Sadao Watanabe (Japanese 1913–1996), *Last Supper*, 1978, stencil print on momigami paper. Private collection. Image via Lambsquay Japanese Print Gallery

Sadao Watanabe (Japanese 1913–1996), *Holy Mother and Child*, date unknown, stencil print. Private collection. Image via Artelino

Sadao Watanabe (Japanese 1913–1996), *Hope*, 1961, stencil print. Private collection. Image via Artelino  
Artist unidentified (Japanese, Edo period, 1615–1868), *Yukata with Illustrations from the 1802 novel 'Hizakurige'*, early 19<sup>th</sup> century, cotton plain weave, stencil-past-resist dyed (katazome). LACMA, Lost Angeles, CA. Costume and Textiles Deaccession Fund (M.2006.37.6)

“Katagami & Katazome Demonstration.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Cooper Hewitt Design Museum, March 14 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGfnXGpz8iA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGfnXGpz8iA)

## MEDIA CREDITS\*

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