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Kimono Wall Panel for Gifts of Gold: The Art of Japanese Lacquer Boxes

Fairfield University Art Museum

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20th-Century Kimono

Modern Japanese kimono (“things to wear”) developed in the Meiji period (1868-1912), evolving from earlier robes known as *kosode* (“small sleeves”). Although many men and some women adopted Western-style dress after the Meiji period, it wasn’t until the latter half of the 20th century that kimono fell out of common use by women in daily life, and instead became traditional wear for special occasions.

Kimono are made from one bolt of cloth, usually of silk, with a standard cut and construction. The length of the sleeves, however, varies by the wearer’s age and marital status, with longer sleeves for younger and unmarried women. The formality of the occasion and the season dictate the choice of fabric weight, decorative motifs, pattern distribution, and dyed versus woven designs. Kimono are worn with *obi*, wide sashes that encircle the torso and are tied in elaborate knots, usually at the back.

Textile designers producing kimono and *obi* fabrics have frequently collaborated with, borrowed from, and in turn influenced, artists working in other media. Some pictorial motifs, such as waves crashing by pine-covered islands, are adapted from famous screen paintings. Seasonal, auspicious, and decorative motifs - such as cranes, autumn grasses, weeping cherries, or family crests - echo those also seen on lacquerwares and ceramics.

Displayed here is a group of 20th-century kimono and *obi*, of varying levels of formality, whose motifs resonate with those seen in *Gifts of Gold: The Art of Japanese Lacquer Boxes* in the main gallery. The kimono, *obi*, and display stand have been lent by Setsuko and Michael Cooney.