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A Tribute to Miss Lucy: Noh Robes from the Collection, February 22, 2002-June 9, 2002

In 1935, Miss Lucy Truman Aldrich, daughter of Senator Nelson W. Aldrich of Providence, gave the Museum 47 costumes from the Nō theater of Japan. Despite her congenital deafness and the political chaos in the Far East, this remarkable woman traveled frequently to Asia, purchasing the robes in Japan in the 1920s. With great foresight Miss Aldrich's dealer, Yamanaka and Company, provided her with information about the former owners of the robes, which came from the collections of noble Japanese *daimyo* families, so that her collection is among the best documented in the world.

The Nō theater, developed in medieval Japan, is above all a theater of suggestion, calling up legends and stories of ancient times. The plays build up a web of feelings through poetic imagery, heaped layer upon layer in slow recitation, declamation, song, and dance. Every element of a play, from poetic allusion to magnificent costuming, builds on every other to allow the audience to experience the essence of the distant past, and the melancholy of life's impermanence.

All the costumes in this exhibition are for the main character in a Nō play. Like the Nō drama itself, the costumes, vast, sculptural, brilliantly colored, form layer upon layer. They are larger and more splendid than life, recalling the magnificence of medieval Japanese court life. Their patterns allude to poetry, literature, or other arts, and their designs and colors have meaning, as seen in the costumes in the cases in this gallery.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Costumes for a Character

The Nō actor chooses his costume in an atmosphere of ritual, combining mask with robes in hushed awe as he develops within himself the spirit of the character he will play. A woman's role may call for an inner robe -- *nuihaku* or *surihaku*, painted with gold or silver -- showing only a hint of its pattern beneath an outer robe (*karaori*) brocaded with flowers. For a role that includes dance, the actor wears a loose gauze dancing cloak (a *choken* or *maiginu*) over a *surihaku*.

The costumes for male roles are similarly layered. The *atsuita*, a stiff robe with "masculine" patterns, is covered by a *happi* or *kariginu* outer cloak. The actor's choice of color, pattern, and weave depends on his interpretation of the character's state of mind, the season of the play, the age of the character, and other variables.

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Japanese
Nō theater costume (karaori), 1750-1800
Silk; gold leaf; paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.489

This very complicated *karaori*, or woman's robe, has three layers of design construction: first, the warps of the cloth are tie-dyed, before the garment is woven, with shades of brown, blue, and red. When the warp is placed on the loom, a twill background pattern is woven, interspersed by supplementary wefts of gold-leafed paper strips that make a key-fret lozenge pattern, and silk supplementary wefts that form the brocaded flowers and cherry branches.

These motifs bespeak the spring season, and so the robe would be suitable for a character in a play set in the spring, such as *Yuya*, in which the mistress of the lord Taira no Munemori dances for him under the cherry blossoms at the temple of Kiyomizu in Kyoto.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (nuihaku), mid 1700s
Silk; gold leaf
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.457

The exquisite pattern of long-tailed birds floats over golden clouds on this glorious robe embellished with gold leaf and embroidery. The orange-red color symbolizes youth, so the robe is suitable for roles of young women.

This robe came in a paper wrapper inscribed "Estate of Lord Maeda" and must have been used by the resident Nō troupe in the court of the Maeda family, located in Kaga, on the coast of western Japan.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (hangire), 1800-1850
Silk; gilt paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.500

Similar to the broad, split-legged *oguchi* worn by samurai in the Momoyama period (1568-1600) and by Nō actors playing samurai characters, divided skirts (*hangire*) are worn under *kariginu* or *happi* (such as the one in the large case opposite) for male roles of gods, demons, goblins, and warriors. The classical motifs of this *hangire* suggest a Heian period (794-1135) warrior-courtier role.

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Japanese
Nō theater costume (atsuita), 1800-1850
Silk; gilt paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.477

The Buddhist implement wheels (*rimbo*) and arrows are masculine symbols, and the scale pattern in the background adds force to the design. This complicated garment, like the *karaori* in case 4, has three layers of embellishment. First, the warp threads are tie-dyed to produce graduated blocks of color in the finished garment, then silk and gold-leafed paper strips form the scale pattern in a twill weave, while supplementary silk wefts form the wheels, clouds, and arrows.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (nuihaku), 1750-1800
Silk; gold leaf
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.468

Unlike other Nō costumes, *Nuihaku* have applied metallic-leaf decoration over a stenciled adhesive, and are further embellished by embroidery. Usually they are worn as an outer robe for female roles under cloaks, or over *karaori*. This robe, with its chrysanthemums, is suitable for a play set in the fall, and the pine-bark hexagons with flower centers give a delicate, feminine impression.

The abrasions on the silk at the shoulder, neck, and center back of this *Nuihaku* suggest that it was worn in the "waist wrap" (*koshimaki*) style, folded down to the waist so that only the bottom part shows under a dancing cloak for a female role.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (atsuita), 1800-1850
Silk; gilt paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.476

Atsuita, robes for male characters, are garments in the style of *kosode*, or Japanese kimono from the 19th century and earlier, in bold, masculine designs for the basic male roles: they are worn under broad-sleeved jackets and cloaks like the *Happi* or *Kariginu*, opposite, for roles of gods, demons, warriors, and ghosts.

The scale-like patterns on this *Atsuita* have a slightly otherworldly tone, making it suitable for supernatural roles. Its small size indicates that it was worn by a child actor.

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Japanese
Nō theater costume (karaori), early 1800s
Silk; gold leaf; paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.483

This small *karaori* was probably used for the role of a young girl, played by a child actor. The motif of snow on bamboo sets the play in winter. The evergreen is poetically associated with winter and long life, and the bamboo and plum are symbols integral to the New Year celebrations. The Metropolitan Museum in New York has a duplicate robe that was probably made by the same workshop at the same time.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (kariginu), early 1800s-mid 1800s
Silk; gilt paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.493

Originally an informal gown worn by courtiers in the Heian period (794-1185), *Kariginu* have been adapted for Nō costume as cloaks worn for male roles of nobles and gods. The motif of circular fans and clouds derive from Chinese imagery, and this *Kariginu* might have been intended for the role of a Chinese emperor. Feather fans like these are also carried by goblins in some Nō plays.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (happi), 1800-1850
Silk; gilt paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.491

Happi are outer cloaks for men worn over divided skirts and belted at the waist. A lined *happi* such as this, in a bold traditional pattern with triangle scales that suggest the slightly sinister image of snakeskin, might be worn by an actor playing the part of a powerful character, such as a god or a demon.

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Japanese
Nō theater costume (Kariginu), 1800-1850
Silk; gilt paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.459

This kariginu, sometimes referred to as a "dancing cloak," is worn by a male character over the broad divided skirts called *oguchi* or *hangire* (see case 11, to the left of the door behind you). Its large-scale pattern with willow tree and birds makes this robe one of the finest in the Aldrich collection. The costume with its graceful, gnarled willow seems almost tailor-made for the role of the spirit of the old willow, the main character in the Nō play *Yūgyō yanagi*.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (happi), 1800s
Silk; gold leaf; paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.469

Happi are outer cloaks for men worn over divided skirts (*hangire*) and belted at the waist. The traditional pattern of concentric circles on this *happi* derives from Chinese art, and the cloth itself may have been made in China. It would be appropriate for a Chinese character in a Nō play, or, when hiked up at the shoulders, it could suggest armor worn by a victorious warrior.

In the 8th century, powerful noble families built Nō stages and maintained troupes of Nō actors. An inscription on the paper wrapper that came with the piece indicates that the Ikeda family, whose court was at Bishu, Okayama Prefecture, in western Japan, were the former owners of this *happi*.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (karaori), 1700s
Ikat-dyed silk compound weave with supplementary continuous gold-leaf paper patterning wefts and supplementary discontinuous silk patterning weft floats
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.481

This very complicated woman's robe (*karaori*) has three layers of design construction. The warps of the cloth were tie-dyed in shades of orange, blue, and red before being strung on the loom. After the warp was placed on the loom, a twill background pattern was woven. Interspersed supplementary wefts of gold-leafed paper strips make a pattern of interlocked circles called "seven jewels," and silk supplementary wefts form the brocaded peonies and the bamboo fence.

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These motifs bespeak the summer season, so the robe would be suitable for a character in a play set in the summer. The peony is a Chinese motif often associated with feminine beauty, so this robe might have been chosen for the role of the renowned Chinese beauty Yang Guifei, mistress of the Tang emperor Xuanzong in the Nō play *Yōkihi*.

Japanese
Nō Theater Costume (Atsuita), 1800-1850
Silk, twill weave with supplementary discontinuous patterning wefts, goldleafed paper lamellae
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.466

The triangles of the background pattern represent reptilian scales, giving the garment an otherworldly and somewhat sinister air. Seeing these scales, the audience might suspect that the character wearing this robe may be a demon or evil spirit in disguise. The wheels scattered over the robe are ancient Buddhist ritual implements that appear often in poetic imagery and are commonly found on Nō robes and Japanese priests' robes.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (surihaku), Edo period, 1750-1825
Silk compound weave with applied India ink and silver leaf
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.462

This elegant robe would have been worn under a *karaori* or *nuihaku* for female roles. The pattern of running water is sometimes known as *kanze mizu* and is said to have been created by the Kanze troupe of Nō actors with origins in the 14th century. Its members included the famous actors Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333-1384) and his son Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), who were instrumental in creating the Nō drama in its present form. The running-water pattern has come to symbolize the troupe, which still exists.

This robe came with a paper wrapper indicating that it had been in the possession of the Nō troupe associated with the court of the Ikeda family in Bishu, Okayama Prefecture, in western Japan.

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Japanese; Edo
Nō theater costume (atsuita), late 1700s-early 1800s
Silk; ikat dyed, twill weave, supplementary weft patterning
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.465

Atsuita, robes for male characters, are garments in the style of *kosode* (Japanese kimono from the 19th century and earlier) with bold, masculine designs. They are worn under broad-sleeved jackets and cloaks such as the *happi* or *kariginu* (opposite) for roles of gods, demons, warriors, and ghosts.

The background of this *atsuita* is tie-dyed in brilliant yellow, orange-red, blue, gold, and green in a complex pattern of blocks and "lattice." Silk supplementary wefts form a superimposed pattern of swirling clouds with three-comma *tomoe*, a symbol of great antiquity. The *tomoe* symbolizes the constant harmonious revolution of the elements of the universe and the continuity of human life. Here, it is also a nostalgic reminder of the splendor of ancient Japan.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (nuihaku), late 1800s-early 1900s
Silk; satin, embroidered with silk and metallic thread in couching, long and short satin stitch, stem stitch, satin stitch, and knot stitch
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.380

Embroidered *nuihaku* are worn as outer robes for female roles under cloaks or over *karaori*. This small *nuihaku* may have been used for the role of a young girl, which would have been played by a youthful male actor. The motifs of mandarin orange and cherry branches are rendered in complex embroidery, as if they were suspended in clouds overhanging the bamboo blinds, also embroidered. The realistic technique suggests that it was made at a relatively late date.

Cherry blossoms and mandarin orange suggest the early summer season. Innumerable Japanese poems have cherry blossoms as their subject, such as the fol- lowing, written in 1688 by an anonymous author.

On cherry blossoms

A riot of blossoms:
Amongst the peach appears
The first cherry.

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Masks

Japanese
Nō mask, 1800s
Carved cypress wood covered with primer (powdered shell and glue), then paint and ink
Gift of Isaac C. Bates 97.125

The creation of a character in a Nō play begins with the choice of a mask. Nō masks are imbued with the spirit of the character they represent, but each play does not necessarily employ a specific mask for a certain character. The actor chooses the mask from those belonging to the troupe based on his interpretation of the role. The actor then combines this mask with his choice of robes to suggest the spirit of the character he will play.

This mask, Yase-onna, represents an old woman.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (katsura-obi), late 1800s-early 1900s
silk; gold leaf
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.502

Katsura-obi hold in place the wig necessary for a male actor playing a female role. Evidence of such a headband may be seen in the yase-onna mask also shown in this case.

Patterns and Poetry

Poetry is central to the Nō theater. Every play includes spoken poetry, allusions to poetry, quotations of poetry, and poetic symbolism. Nearly every line calls up hundreds of images to the listener, conveying many layers of meaning and evoking the atmosphere of medieval Japan, when skill in poetry was considered the ultimate refinement.

Costumes add to these layers of meaning by the symbolism of their patterns. The robes may allude to specific poetic works, suggest an emotional state, or evoke the season of the year. Brocaded chrysanthemums suggest the poignancy of autumn, recalling images from hundreds of poems; an under-kimono in the pattern of scales foretells a character's madness, and a stiff short satin overcloak may represent at once the armor of an aristocratic warrior and the refinement of his character.

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Japanese
Nō theater costume (karaori), early 1800s
silk; gold leaf; paper
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.478

Karaori are outer robes for female characters and are patterned with poetic floral imagery. The chrysanthemums, pampas grass, and lattice fence woven into the design of this robe bring to mind images and poems of autumn, the season of memories. The color red or orange symbolizes youth, so this robe would be used in plays about young women set in autumn.

An example is the play *Nonomrya (The Shrine in the Fields)*, based on the eleventh-century novel *The Tale of Gugi*. The ghost of the young Lady Rokoju tells the story of her retirement to a distant shrine in the fields (perhaps behind a lattice fence like the one depicted on this robe) after her lover, Prince Genji, neglects her. In melancholy, poetic language she relates how, pushing through the dried growth of the autumn fields, Prince Genji visits her for the last time. Then, having told the audience her tale, the ghost steps through a torii gate, the symbolic boundary between life and death, no longer bound to the world by her lost love.

Japanese
Nō theater costume (karaori), early 1700s
Silk
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.472

Karaori are outer robes for female characters and are patterned with poetic floral imagery often indicative of the season in which the play is set. Here, the wisteria pattern suggests summer. This flower recalls the glory of ancient Japan, as shown by the following 19th-century poem in haiku form by Shiki Masaoka:

I see the wisteria
that moves lik e waves and longings rise
for Nara and Kyoto,
the ancient courtly days