Kimono

Place of origin: Japan (made)
Date: 1860-1880 (made)
Materials and Techniques: Satin; embroidery; applique
Museum number: FE.73-2014
Gallery location: Temporary Exhibition, room 39, case CA09

Public access description

The motif on this extremely exuberant outer kimono (uchikake) is a theatrical one which relates to the Chinese legend of Shakkyo (Stone Bridge). This refers to a bridge over a steep gorge near the summit of Mount Seiryō which is reputed to lead to the Buddhist paradise and which is guarded by shishi (mythical lions). The kabuki play adapted from this story culminates in a dramatic shakkyomono, or lion dance. The figure on the bridge is a kabuki actor who embodies the spirit of the shishi, while below actual shishi are depicted with other figures surrounded by peonies. It is possible, therefore, that the uchikake was worn for a kabuki theatre performance. Costumes worn on stage certainly needed to be flamboyant and eye-catching, but the motifs were not normally so literal. It is more likely, therefore, that this garment belonged instead to a high-ranking courtesan.

The three figures, shishi and peonies are composed of satin and crepe silk, dyed in bright colours, which have been applied to the black ground and then outlined with couched gold-wrapped thread. The bridge, clouds, water, leaves and other elements are also in couched gold embroidery. The design is padded in places to add extra three-dimensionality, while the eyes of the shishi are of glass as are those of the main figure on the bridge who also has actual hair, from an animal, and buttons of metal.

Descriptive line

Kimono with motifs relating to Kabuki theatre, Japan, 1860-1880

Physical description

Outer kimono (uchikake) depicting a figure of a bridge across a river gorge, with shishi (mythical lions) and two figures below among peonies. Satin silk with appliqué and embroidery. Lining of polychrome figured silk and red cotton.

Dimensions

Length: 182 cm, Width: 134 cm

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URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1298036/kimono/