

*Only those who have a long-lasting and  
in-depth knowledge of a material  
are capable of using it in a new way.*

MIRJAM GELFER-JØRGENSEN  
- QUOTATION FROM THE BOOK

## INFLUENCES FROM JAPAN IN DANISH ART AND DESIGN 1870-2010

By Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen

**A major new book about *Japonisme* in Danish art, design and architecture  
will be published on 23 April 2013**

At the end of the 19th century Danish artists were among the first in the Western world to engage with Japanese art and adopt elements of it in their work, creating an independent Danish form of expression.

And that tradition has been maintained ever since.

Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen's book about Japanese influences in Danish art, design and architecture analyses and traces this development over nearly one and a half centuries, from 1870 to 2010.

Inspiration from Japanese art became a catalyst with wide-ranging and lasting effects. The impact of *Japonisme* was so extensive that it became an essential element in the preconditions for Danish Modernism in the 20th century and for the status as a "Design Nation" that Denmark can be proud of right up to the present day.

The book's 450 illustrations provide a splendid basis for a thoroughly documented account of how this style development took place:

At first it was the motifs, the subjects, that were fascinating. Later on it was the treatment of materials and the artistic processes that enticed Danish artists, craftsmen and designers to travel to Japan, often for lengthy periods of study.

The book is based on a research project which centred on the question: why is it that Danish architecture and applied art have drawn lessons and inspiration from the art of a country that lies on the other side of the globe, with a social context which in many ways is fundamentally different from that of Denmark?

The artist sets himself above his own culture, his religion, his language and his location and sees himself in a completely different world.

In that sense Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen's book is also a cosmopolitan narrative about how art belongs to us all and how the cultural heritage accumulates material without regard to national boundaries.

At the same time it is a detailed investigation of conditions determining production, of the qualities of materials, of concepts of value and of artistic motives.

Japanese and Danish art, design and architecture are woven together in pictures and words, with a graphic design by Carl-H.K. Zakrisson and with new photographs of objects from Designmuseum Danmark's major collections of Danish and Japanese art. The photographs have been taken by Pernille Klemp and many are published for the first time in this book. The illustrations also include a large number of photographs of modern Danish and Japanese art, design and architecture, as well as drawings and paintings from both countries from 1870 until the present.

Works by Danish architects, designers and craftsmen:

Thorvald Binsedøll, Cecilie Manz, Vilhelm Bissen, Arnold Krog, P.V. Jensen-Klint, Kaare Klint, Vibeke Klint, Randi Studsgarth, Annette Juel, Kim Naver, Grethe Wittrock and Ann Schmidt-Christensen, Jette Gemzøe, Jeanne Philip, Mogens Koch, Hans Sandgren Jakobsen, Boris Berlin and Poul Christiansen, Knud Holscher, Ole Palsby, Erik Magnussen, Jørgen Bo and Vilhelm Wohlert, Gunnar Biilmann Petersen, Magnus Stephensen, Ursula Munch-Petersen, Børge Mogensen, Hans J. Wegner, Poul Kjærholm, Gertrud Vasegaard, Tora Urup, Per Suntum, Johan Rohde, J.F. Willumsen, Carl Petersen, Johannes Larsen, Jørn Utzon, Palle Suenson, Erik Chr. Sørensen, Halldor Gunnlögsson, Knud Friis, Tyge Arnfred and Viggo Møller-Jensen a.o.

The English version of the book has been translated by Joan F. Davidson.

With best regards,  
The Danish Architectural Press (Arkitektens Forlag)

#### **Facts:**

About the author:

Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, dr.phil., is one of Denmark's leading researchers in Applied Art and Design. After many years as Chief Librarian and Deputy Director of the Danish Kunstindustrimuseum (formerly the Danish Museum of Art & Design, now Designmuseum Danmark) and previously as assistant professor at Copenhagen University, Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen has in recent years been able to concentrate on research, and has now completed this book about the significant and long-standing influence of Japanese art on Danish art, architecture, applied art and design.

Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen is one of the founders of the Nordic Forum for Design History, and initiator and chief editor of *Scandinavian Journal of Design History*, which was published in 15 volumes from 1991 to 2005.

She has been a member of the Danish National Council for Research in the Humanities and is a member of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters.

Publications by the same author:

*Dansk Kunsthåndværk 1730-1850*, København, 1973.

*Dansk Kunsthåndværk fra 1850 til vor tid*, København, 1982.

*Medieval Islamic Symbolism and the Paintings in the Cefalù Cathedral*, Leiden, 1986.

*Herculanum paa Sjælland, Klassicisme og nyantik i dansk møbeltradition*, København, 1988.

*Toulouse-Lautrec Posters*, Copenhagen, 1995.

*Jødisk kunst i Danmark - Jøder i dansk kunst*, København, 1999.

*Danish Jewish Art - Jews in Danish Art*, editor and author, Copenhagen, 1999.

*Guldalderdrømmen, Dansk nyklassicistisk møbelkunst 1790-1850*, København, 2002.

*The Dream of a Golden Age, Danish Neo-classical Furniture 1790-1850*, Copenhagen, 2004.

*Danske Nyantikke Møbler - fra Abildgaard til Kaare Klint*, Catalogue, København, 2004.

*Danish Neo-antique Furniture - from Abildgaard to Kaare Klint*, Copenhagen, 2004.

*Møbler med Mening - Dansk møbelkunst 1840-1920*, København, 2009.

*Furniture with Meaning - Danish furniture 1840-1920*, Copenhagen, 2009.

#### **About this publication:**

INFLUENCES FROM JAPAN IN DANISH ART AND DESIGN 1870-2010

Danish title: *Japanisme på dansk - Kunst og design 1870-2010*

By Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen

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Graphic layout: Carl-H.K. Zakrisson

Proof-reading: Cornelius Holck Colding

Printing and reproduction: Narayana Press

Paper: Perigord matt, 135 g

Font: Lexicon and Kievit  
Printed in Denmark

English edition:  
Influences from Japan in Danish Art and Design 1870–2010  
ISBN: 978–87–7407–4151  
Danish language version:  
Japanisme på dansk – Kunst og design 1870–2010  
ISBN 978–87–7407–4144

By Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen  
Translation: Joan F. Davidson  
Format: 24.5 X 27.3

Number of pages: 424

Fully illustrated and annotated, with bibliography and index.  
Price: DKK 360 excl. VAT

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Thanks are due to the VELUX FOUNDATION for a grant for preparation of the manuscript of this book.

The Toyota Foundation and The Scandinavia–Japan Sasakawa Foundation are thanked for support for study-travel to Japan.

For support for this publication thanks are owed to:  
A.P. Møller og Hustru Chastine Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal  
Dronning Margrethes og Prins Henriks Fond  
Ny Carlsbergfondet  
Beckett-Fonden  
Margot og Thorvald Dreyers Fond  
Konsul George Jorck og Hustru Emma Jorck's Fond  
The Scandinavia–Japan Sasakawa Foundation

Spreads from the book:







24. Lacquer box for incense, Japan, 17th century. Danish National Museum, formerly in the Royal Kunstkammer

#### Sources of Japanese art in Denmark

The earliest Danish collection of Japanese art is to be found in the Royal Kunstkammer which was created during Frederick III's reign around the middle of the 17th century. It was a collection not just of precious objects, but also of interesting and strange things.<sup>42</sup> The collection was dissolved and divided up among several institutions in the 18th and 19th centuries. The artefacts were acquired by the museums which were later combined in the National Museum; the Kunstkammer's stock of Japanese art is now to be found there.<sup>43</sup> One of the major groups of works from the collection consists of a number of lacquer objects with gilt decoration (fig. 24), but there are also a couple of metal mirrors, some pieces of porcelain, weapons and musical instruments and a few other things. The collection also contains

a number of objects which Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, who later became the first director of the National Museum, acquired from Consul Bloch's collection (fig. 25).

The Nordic Exhibition of Industry, Agriculture and Art in Copenhagen in 1888 displayed to the public a large collection of Japanese art assembled by the Parisian art dealer Siegfried Bing, who had visited Japan in 1880–81 and had built up extensive trade in Far Eastern art.<sup>44</sup> Bing's publication of the richly illustrated periodical *Le Japon artistique*, *Documents d'Art et d'Industrie*, which came out between 1888 and 1894 (fig. 45), had considerable significance for the dissemination of knowledge about Japanese art.

Collectors found a range of different objects to buy from Bing's display, and the National Museum also bought a number of things. Among them were several tea-caddies

and boxes (fig. 26), including one in stoneware decorated with Japanese text and plant motifs, on which a freely modelled leaf sits on the transition between the body and the handle. Another is of clay encased by a border of gold of fern leaves, with the body continuing up into the cone-shaped lid. A tea-kettle of black metal inlaid with silver and gold was also purchased, as well as a pair of pots of the same type of greyish glazed stoneware as the one illustrated (fig. 27), and a basket-shaped dish with a cone-shaped lid modelled onto it. A couple of porcelain plates with blue-painted leaf decoration were also bought. And a further acquisition in a totally different style was a rectangular porcelain dish decorated in white and brown shades with a mountainous landscape and a little house or shack surrounded by trees in blossom, and a poem painted on the reverse (fig. 28).



25. Box of lacquered wood, Japan, probably 18th century. Acquired in 1861 from Consul Bloch's collection. Danish National Museum



26. Lacquer tea-caddy with the family crest of the Shogunates, Japan, 18th century. Acquired from Siegfried Bing at the 1888 Nordic Exhibition of Industry, Agriculture and Art. Danish National Museum



45. Hokusai Katsushika. "The tea seller returns home from the market", ink painting, Japan, 18th century. Gift from Siegfried Bing to Karl Madsen. Danish National Museum

the collection, which was sold at auction in 1921. As a result the auction catalogue contains good descriptions and also several illustrations of the collection (figs. 29–35).

Among the many publications about Japanese art, both Western and Japanese, it was possible in Copenhagen to subscribe to the exclusive Japanese periodical *Exale*, in which Japanese pictorial art in particular was reproduced in exceptionally fine colour plates. In Bing's periodical *Le Japon artistique* one can find many parallels to motifs occurring in contemporary Danish decorative art works. Before the Library opened in August 1894 copies were bought of e.g. *The Pictorial Art of Japan*, by William Anderson, from 1886, and *The Industries of Japan*, by J. J. Bédou, to mention just a couple of the more important publications. Karl Madsen writes about the latter book in his catalogue of the Art Association's exhibition in 1894, so one can surmise that he also owned a copy.<sup>46</sup> Mention should also be made of *Art et Décoration*, *Revue mensuelle d'art moderne*, published from 1897 onwards, which does not have depictions of Japanese decorative art, but on the other hand contains innumerable illustrations in which Japanese influence can be traced. In the series from the first year there is an article about the ceramics displayed at the Salon in Paris that year. And in that article it is Danish porcelain that is described first, with five illustrations, all with Japanese-inspired birds, fish and flowers.<sup>47</sup>

Karl Madsen's already-mentioned writings should also be seen against the background of the Japonisme that was infiltrating from abroad, and that uncritically continued the ad hoc plucking of motifs without regard to context. And likely debate was indeed needed, because the period was one of questioning and

46. Sword-guard, signed Tōmoyuki, with scenes from Lake Biwa, bronze with inlaid gold, 18th century. Halber-Haelt Collection, Kunsthistorischesmuseum



Some years later the Japanese tower was built in the Tivoli Garden (fig. 57). More remarkable, seen with today's eyes, was the "exhibition" that took place in 1901 in the Zoological Garden, where a number of Japanese had been roped in so that they could be studied – alongside the animals. This was in fact the last of the series of exhibitions of foreign peoples held in the Zoo (figs. 58–60). A kind of amusement resort from the Japanese visit was left behind and was presented by the Zoo's director to Bornholm Museum, where it can be seen today.<sup>48</sup>

Although there is a lack of reliable evidence as to Danish artists' knowledge about related developments at the time in Sweden, it should briefly be mentioned that from the end of the 19th century there were Japanese collections in Sweden, both public and private, and that exhibitions of Japanese art were arranged. For instance, in 1901 the Swedish association of craftsmen held an "Exhibition of Japanese Art and Crafts" in which more than 2,000 works were displayed. In 1903 the Swedish-Japanese Society arranged an exhibition with around

50 different exhibitions.<sup>49</sup> Many objects were acquired by the Swedish National Museum and were later transferred to the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (figs. 29–35).<sup>44</sup>

Selected Japanese motifs and their attraction Each generation selects from the artistic heritage the elements that are in harmony with that generation's own era, and leaves the rest aside. The majority of the Far Eastern forms

54. Hokusai Katsushika. "Kajika zawa", from "36 views of Mount Fuji", woodblock print, Japan, 1830–35. Kunsthistorischesmuseum's Collection of Prints and Drawings

55. Arnold Krog. Dish, porcelain with underglaze decoration, Royal Porcelain Factory, 1880. Kunsthistorischesmuseum





162. Harald Stott-Møller. Silver teapot and warmer. A. Michelsen Silversmiths, 1898. Kunstindustrimuseum



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Factory. In 1888 he became the head of Michelsen's workshop. In the period around the turn of the century it was Henriksen in particular who tried using, on hollowware, plant motifs that had an affinity with the Japanese: plants such as thistles, dandelions, and of course seaweed, with fish among it (p. 130).<sup>339</sup> A conchshell lent its shape to a bowl. In his work again one finds the national roadside flowers decorating groups of functional objects in particu-

lar, and insects are also represented. In his time the Japanese motif-world was carried forward in the silversmith firm's many silver mountings for porcelain vases from the two Copenhagen factories, e.g. in the form of fern leaves and little stylised flower-like circle-ornaments that are related to Japanese family emblems (FIG. 56). At the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900 the firm showed a selection of these mounted vases, and from a little bro-

chure that was produced in the following year one can form an impression of some of the variations.<sup>220</sup> A cylinder-shaped blue-glazed vase from the Royal Porcelain Factory was provided with a mounting that had mussel shells and seaweed on the lower part of the corpus (Fig. 160): a vase from Kähler was given an irregularly-shaped wave- or lava-like mounting around its rim and on its shoulders, reminiscent of the use of drip glaze in Japanese ceram-



163. Plant stand,  
bronze, Japan, 18th  
century Nordenfjeldske  
Kunstindustrimuseum,  
Trondheim.

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188. Thorvald Binder-  
bell Vase, glazed  
earthenware, made  
in G. Ekfrig's workshop,  
Valby, 1906. Museet  
et Koldinghus

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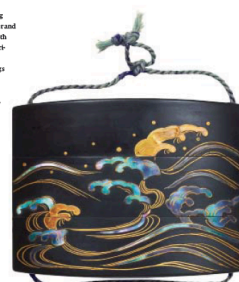
found on lacquer furniture. In general it can be said that movement is an element in Japanese art, whether it is to be found in the folds of a kimono or in the depiction of water on a screen.<sup>340</sup> These few examples chosen from Bindesbøll's extensive production are highlighted here because Japonisme has to be supposed to have been a significant stimulus to his liberation from the naturalism that was still the basic point of reference for his contemporaries.

At the same time there was another artist who was turning his talents to designing furniture – and just like Biedstøff he had previously worked with other genres of art. Johan Rohde originally studied medicine, but was attracted to art, and in 1878 he began studying painting at the Danish Royal Academy of Art and Architecture, where the courses on offer were not in line with his intentions, however. In 1892 he travelled to study in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and there he came into contact with the new European art of the time and had the opportunity to soak up impressions.

In the catalogue of the exhibition that was held in 2006, which covered all aspects of Rohde's work, Gertrud Hvidberg-Hansen provides a fine characterization of Rohde's earliest paintings – those from the beginning of the 1890s.<sup>448</sup> There can be no doubt that French symbolism, and in particular new Dutch painting, had a decisive influence on Rohde's earliest landscapes and urban scenes, but one can also sense that certain features are connected with the tonalism of the time.



189. Stencil for dyeing textiles, made of paper and human hair, Japan, 19th century. Kunstindustrimuseums Collection of Prints and Drawings



190. Inro, lacquer with mother-of-pearl, Japan, early 19th century. Acquired in 1903 from Nathanson's Antique Dealers. Kunst-



242. Tove and Edvard  
Kinde-Larsen. Dressing  
set, silver, inlaid  
with gilded margue-  
rites, A. Michelsen,  
1958. H.M. Queen  
Margrethe II



239. Jug for sake,  
pewter with lacquer lid,  
inlaid with karakusa-  
pattern spirals in  
gold. Bought from  
R. Warner, Berlin.

240. Sword-guard, iron, inlaid with silver, Japan, 17th-19th century. Kunstindustrimuseet, Copenhagen.

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