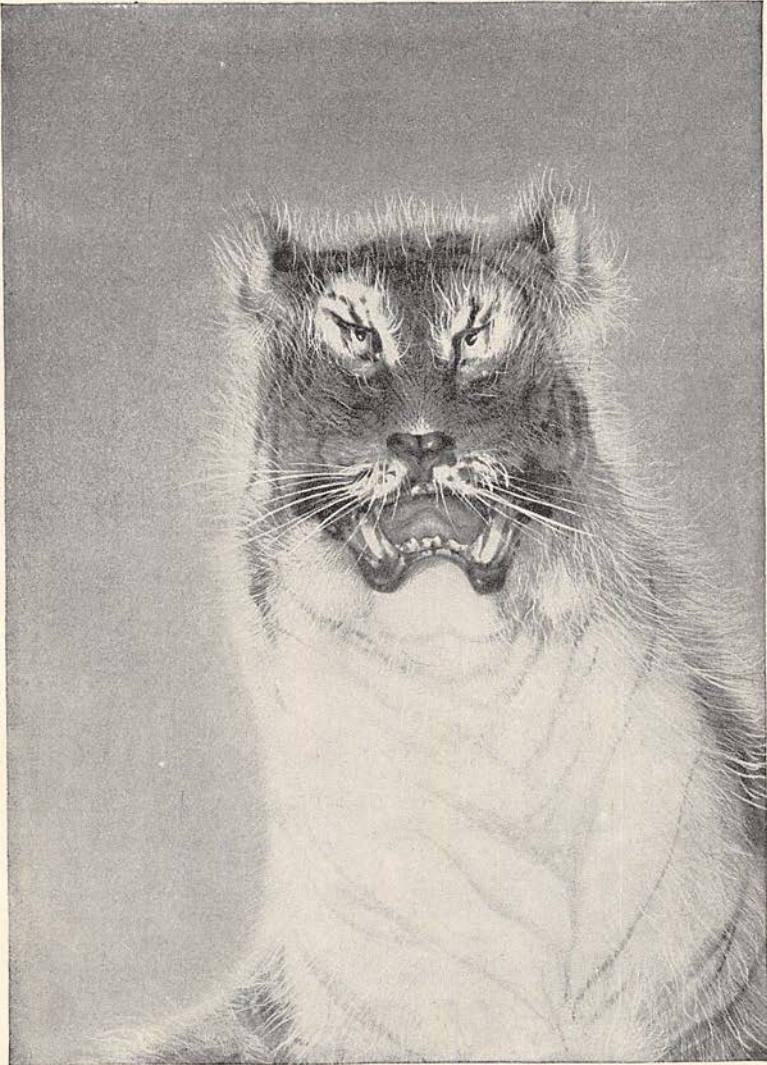


## CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ART.

WITH EXAMPLES FROM THE CHICAGO EXHIBIT.



PAINTING BY KISHI CHIKUGO.

TIGRESS.

THE recent tendency of Japan to return to conservative ideals marks a most healthy reaction from the policy of imitation to that of self-development. Art, the most sensitive barometer of Oriental culture, was the first national interest to plant itself on this new platform. After the fall of the shogunate and of native patronage in 1868, the masters starved; only the poorer workmen found employment in cheap production for the foreign market. Along with brick and stucco architecture, French

clocks, and crimson carpets, it was deemed necessary to import Italian painters and sculptors to educate a new generation of "civilized artists." For nearly a decade large classes of young men trained in crayon drawing from Greek casts, in oil studies of models with blurry drapery, and in marble Madonnas, were turned loose upon a wondering community to perpetrate travesties of European salons. It became a disgrace to exhibit a sign of "barbarous" Oriental feeling.



CARVING IN IVORY BY ICHIKAWA KOMEI. GODDESS KWANNON.

Meanwhile a lucrative trade had sprung up in the exportation of antiques and modern decorated wares. Japanese art became a "craze" in the West; and its signal triumphs in European and American expositions were already working a revolution in our theories of decoration. But by 1882 the old school of designers had for the most part died off without heirs, and the plundered stock of antique models was

well nigh exhausted. The lull in foreign demand due to manifest deterioration perplexed the exporters. Now came the chance of the new men who had been graduated in Venuses and Italian shepherds to take the place of the masters of centuries, and to render the nation solid service. Then was it suddenly found that the fair image of Japanese creative design had been stuffed with sawdust. Those of the proud masters of



CARVING IN IVORY BY ASAHI HATSU.

BOY WITH A DOVE.

Italian art who did not despise the "inferior" work of decoration could, indeed, paint beautiful portraits of black-eyed tea-house girls languidly lolling with gauzy blue veils thrown over their bosoms; but how to adapt Renaissance arabesques to the surfaces of fans, teapots, and lacquered trays was to them an insoluble conundrum. What the West seemed to want was the very birthright which they had sold.

In this emergency the Government acted with exemplary decision. Abolishing the foreign art school as an expensive luxury, it appointed a commission to report upon the feasibility of introducing Japanese drawing into the public

schools, which by this time were reveling in lead-pencil copy-books filled with outlines of such inspiring objects as goblets, student-lamps, and English barnyards. One obstacle was the lack of teachers blessed with a spark of native esthetic attainment. An immediate conservation of remaining Japanese talent into a central normal institute was seen to be imperative. A second obstacle was the bitter hostility of the ultraconservatives who wished to dominate the new movement by chaining it to the stake of modern Chinese esthetic canons. It required four years of aggressive discussion to overcome the patchwork alliance of two

extreme parties who agreed only in this, that no policy of self-development was desirable or feasible. But by the close of 1888 the Department of Education opened the first native Fine Arts Academy, to which were gathered as instructors the few progressive masters who still survived in the arts of painting, sculpture, metal-chasing, bronze-casting, lacquering, etc., and from whom enthusiastic classes of young men, selected from hundreds by competitive examination, now hastened to learn the respective traditions before they should die out. The Government, upon imperial patronage, founded a national museum for the preservation and study of important relics, intrusted commissions for public works to the professors of the new school, and granted to artists pecuniary prizes with honorary titles. Of special moment was the appointment of the progressive leaders as judges of the national exhibitions.

The significance of the Japanese department of the World's Fair at Chicago lies in the fact that here for the first time has the policy of self-development in modern Oriental art an opportunity of justifying itself by results, however immature. By its promoters were the Government plans for this exhibition drafted and superintended; by its professors and pupils were the most important of the detached works and all of the decorations executed; and through its influence has the prevailing character of native and original design been throughout stimulated. It is well understood by the authorities that Japan's future position in the world's art cannot be established by throwing away her special gifts of pure and delicate design, in the quixotic desire to compete with France and America in the field of realistic oil-painting. Neither can she fall back listlessly upon the fame of her past achievements. She must grapple with living problems. She assumes that in her art courses sap enough for new possibilities. While at Vienna, at Paris, and at Philadelphia her triumphs were largely in her loan collections of antiques and in modern replicas, at Chicago for the first time has she deliberately dared to be original, and to ask the world's favor for her contemporary art on its own merits.

Candor compels one first of all to say that to Mr. Kakuzo Okakura, the director of the Fine Arts Academy, more than to any other one man, is the credit for this wonderful Japanese exhibit due. The wise touch of his advice is everywhere felt, from the architectural casket which reproduces the interesting proportions and decorations of the Biodoin temple at Uji, founded in the eleventh century, to the new departures in shape and glaze of the humblest pottery. In paintings the display is small but choice, the severity of the native juries having

apparently exceeded that which has been deprecated in our own. The landscape by Hashimoto Gaho, chief professor of the academy, and undoubtedly Japan's greatest living artist; the summer landscape by Kumagaye Naohiko, of the school of Bunrin; the very original procession of Ogata Gekko; the group of fowls on a cart, in snow, by Watanabe Seitei; and the tigress by Kishi Chikudo, the grandson of Japan's most celebrated animal-painter, Ganku, are among the most noteworthy. In sculpture, the ape watching an eagle, by Takamura Kowun, the leading professor of wood-carving; the statuette of the Buddhist divinity Kwannon, the largest ivory carving ever made in Japan, by the famous Ichikawa Komei; and the splendid bronze relief of the goddess Benten by the great caster of the art school, Okazaki Sessei, appear to carry off the honors. In lacquer, said to be the finest work of the last forty years, is a book-shelf executed by the master Shirayama Fukumatsu; while in faience, cloisonné, woven pictures, and printed velvets, the technical qualities of former work have been decidedly surpassed. That Japanese art is dead no one can now assert.

The head of the tigress and the bronze Benten, here reproduced, are worthy of special remark, being very noble specimens of the work of the new movement. Chikudo, who has already won the highest honors in national exhibitions, here adds supreme luster to the fame of his noted family by a thoroughly original work, the power of which, reached through delicacy of technic, renders it a marvel of Japanese realism. Having painted for this exhibition four tigers which he successively destroyed as unsatisfactory, Chikudo at length produced this at the price, it is said, of temporary mental derangement, his prolonged absorption in his conception having induced the illusion that he was himself a tiger. Of the Benten it must be said that its extreme beauty and its richness of line render it the most notable contribution to sculpture of recent years. Okazaki has here far surpassed in originality and purity of design all previous efforts. Taking the simpler bronze reliefs of the Nara school of the seventh century as his starting-point, he has invested them with a wealth of line structure suggested by the Tosa religious painters of the thirteenth, fusing both elements into a splendid original impression of the "Goddess of Music," so perfectly in accord with the laws of low relief in bronze as to make this work the Japanese analogue of the purest period of the corresponding fifteenth-century Italian art. From this height seems to be descried a limitless horizon for the future of Japanese art.

*Ernest Francisco Fenollosa.*



BRONZE RELIEF BY OKAZAKI BESSEI.

BENTEN, THE JAPANESE GODDESS OF MUSIC.