



MEDIA KIT

FROM GEISHA TO DIVA

THE KIMONO OF ICHIMARU

FROM GEISHA TO DIVA: THE KIMONO OF ICHIMARU

FERNIE MUSEUM | JUNE 7 TO SEPTEMBER 22

The Fernie Museum presents *From Geisha To Diva: the Kimono of Ichimaru* from June 7 to September 22. The exhibit features a collection of 24 magnificent, rare kimonos and other personal effects that once belonged to Ichimaru, a geisha turned popular singer and entertainer in 20th-century Japan who rose from a background of poverty to become one of her country's national treasures.



Ichimaru was born into a poor family and became a geisha in the 1920s. She gained a reputation as an elegant and beautiful geisha who possessed a "nightingale-like voice". She signed a contract with Victor Records and gave up the geisha life, although she would continue to perform in traditional dress for her entire career. She passed away in 1997 at the age of 91. The kimonos in this exhibition reflect her taste from the 1930s to the 1970s. The costumes are preserved in almost pristine condition and reflect several different styles and methods of decoration.

From Geisha to Diva also provides insight into women's history in Japan, and how gender roles, cultural values and stereotypes affect ideals of artistic expression.

From Geisha to Diva: The Kimonos of Ichimaru is a travelling exhibit organized by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, British Columbia with the assistance of Department of Canadian Heritage, Museum Assistance Program.

THE ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA



First opened in 1951, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria has the largest public collection in BC with a collection of over 20,000 works of art.

The Gallery prides itself on presenting a diverse assortment of exhibitions including showcases of own Canadian, historical and world-class Asian collection, as well as creating, commissioning and hosting important contemporary exhibitions. Both the Canada Council for the Arts and the BC Arts Council recognized the Art Gallery for its outstanding presentations in recent years.

The Gallery is home to one of Canada's most important Asian art collections, second only to the Royal Ontario Museum. The collection of amber and ivory carvings is one of the largest and most exquisite in North America. The Gallery's collection has grown under the careful watch of internationally recognized Asian Curator, Barry Till.

BARRY TILL | CURATOR



Barry Till was Curator of Asian art at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in Canada for 36 years. He has published more than 150 catalogues, books, and articles on various Asian art topics, has organized more than 150 Asian Art exhibitions, and has been given lectures on Asian art in numerous museums throughout Canada and the US. In 2008, Barry received the Distinguished Service Award from the Canadian Museums Association.

Barry has travelled extensively throughout Asia and lectured on more than seventy tour expeditions—including for National Geographic, Smithsonian Museum, and private jets as well as Art Gallery of Greater Victoria trips to China/Tibet, Japan, India, Southeast Asia, Iran, and North Korea. He speaks fluent Chinese, holds BA and MA degrees in Far Eastern Studies from the University of Saskatchewan, and studied at Oxford University and at Nanjing University in China.

Barry is still connected to the Art Gallery of Greater Gallery through his appointment as Curator Emeritus of Asian Art.

THE FERNIE MUSEUM

The Fernie Museum is a vibrant, community-based cultural institution which integrates regional history, art and culture to understand, communicate and preserve what is unique about our community and region.

The Museum is governed by the Fernie & District Historical Society; the Society was founded in 1964, was incorporated in 1976 and has Canadian charitable status.

After years of collecting, the Society opened a museum on August 4, 1979 to coincide with Fernie's Diamond Jubilee in the former Catholic Church rectory. The Society operated from this location until 1999 when the Church realized that it would soon need the property for its own purposes. The museum closed and the collections were put into storage. With the City's purchase of the historic Home Bank building ten years later for the purpose of a museum, the Society began to restore the building and developing its core exhibition. The new Fernie Museum was open to the public in September 2013.

From local architectural and human history, to contemporary art and culture, to fine craft and design, the Fernie Museum's exhibitions and programs offer a diversity of topics and themes that reflect the broad interests, creative energy and rich heritage of our region.

The Fernie Museum is pleased to present the *From Geisha To Diva: The Story of Ichimaru* as part of its gallery programming in 2019. With thousands of visitors visiting Fernie from around the world and a local population of over 15,000 residents in the greater Elk Valley and Crowsnest Pass region, the Fernie Museum strives to present Fernie to the world and bring the world to Fernie through the exhibitions and programs it presents throughout the year. The Museum's rotating exhibition program regularly tells the story of the region through local art and history exhibitions, as well as feature one annual exhibition which highlights collections from lending Canadian museums and galleries.

EXHIBITION RELATED PROGRAMMING

From June 7 to September 21, the Fernie Museum will be presenting a series of programs focusing on the traditional arts learned by geisha including traditional Japanese music, dance and calligraphy. The Museum will also offer a variety of hands-on family programs related to Japanese culture including sushi rolling, silk dying, and more. All programs are free with museum admission, unless otherwise stated.

KIMONO AND SAKE: AN EVENING OF JAPANESE CULTURE JUNE 7, 7:00 – 9:30 PM

Join us for a wonderful evening of Japanese culture with guest curator Barry Till in attendance, along with sake tasting and authentic Japanese cuisine by Yamagoya. This event launches the Fernie Museum's must-see summer exhibit, *From Geisha To Diva: The Kimono of Ichimaru*. This is a ticketed event; tickets are \$20 and are available at the Fernie Museum or online through the Museum's website.

CURATOR'S TALK and TOUR JUNE 8, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

Join Barry Till, the exhibit's curator and Curator-Emeritus of Asian art with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria for a talk on the life of Ichimaru, followed by an opportunity to visit the exhibit and have Barry answer your questions. Barry has published and lectured extensively on the subject, organised over 150 Asian art exhibitions and travelled throughout Asia for National Geographic, Smithsonian Museum and many others.

ART OF THE GEISHA | CALLIGRAPHY JUNE 15, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

Japanese calligraphy is the art of beautiful, stylized handwriting with a pen or brush and ink. It involves the correct formation of characters, the ordering of the various parts, and the harmony of proportions. During the demonstration, you can receive a short phrase or your name in Japanese for you to take home with you for a donation of \$5

ART OF THE GEISHA BOOK CLUB | *GEISHA: A LIFE* JUNE 25, 1:30 – 3:00 PM ART OF THE GEISHA BOOK CLUB | *MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA* JUNE 25, 7:00 – 8:30 PM

Over a cup of green tea, the book *Geisha: A Life* by Mineko Iwasaki will serve as the base for a discussion with guest Gideon Fujiwara from the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Lethbridge on the role of the geisha in Japanese culture, past and present.

This discussion will be followed by an evening program at the Fernie Museum where the book and the movie *Memoirs of A Geisha*, which is partially based on the life story of Mineko Iwasaki, will be discussed within the context of the Museum's exhibit, *From Geisha To Diva: The Kimono of Ichimaru*.

Copies of both *Geisha: A Life* and *Memoirs Of A Geisha* are available from the Fernie Heritage Library. A copy of the movie *Memoirs Of A Geisha* is available at the Fernie Heritage Library or can be viewed on Netflix at:

<https://www.netflix.com/ca/title/70021662>

JAPANESE CULTURE | SUSHI ROLLING

JULY 7, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

The history of sushi began around the 8th century in Japan. In modern times, it is an early form of fast food strongly associated with Japanese culture. Learn how to roll sushi with Fernie's own sushi master from Yamagoya Restaurant.

ART OF THE GEISHA | MUSIC

JULY 13, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

Besides other traditional arts like poetry writing and reciting, flower arrangement, tea ceremony and calligraphy, geisha are also expected to be adept at elegant song and dance. In this drop-in program, visitors will learn about the four different instruments mastered by geisha - the shamisen, koto, shakuhachi and tsuzumi, in a short presentation from 1:30 to 1:45 pm, followed by traditional music performed on the koto from 2:00 to 3:00 pm in the gallery.

JAPANESE CULTURE | SHIBORI DYEING

JULY 21, 1:00 – 3:30 PM

Shibori is best described as "resist" dyeing. The Japanese developed the techniques for silk fabrics that were often used in kimonos. Originally, natural dyes, including indigo, were used to colour the fabric. Stitching, folding and clamping were some of the techniques used to create patterns.

The Fernie Spinners and Weavers Guild will provide instruction on how to create patterns on a variety of silk fabrics. Participants will then prepare a number of fabric samples using some of the patterns. The Guild will set up indigo dye baths so that each participant can then dye their samples and leave the workshop with a number of examples of shibori dyeing.

Pre-registration is required; workshop fee is \$15.00 per person.

ART OF THE GEISHA | DANCE

AUGUST 17, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

The Minyo Dancers were formed in 2011. They assist the Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta with their annual Bon Festival and perform regularly throughout the summer at the Nikka Yuko Japanese Gardens in Lethbridge. These colourful and graceful Japanese folk dancers are a delight to watch. Audience members are invited to learn a few of the steps.

JAPANESE CULTURE | LANTERN MAKING

AUGUST 24, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

Learn to make your own Japanese lantern to take home in this hands-on family program with Leslie Graham.

JAPANESE CULTURE | ORIGAMI CRANES

AUGUST 25, 1:30 – 3:00 PM

In Japan, the crane is a mystical creature and is believed to live for a thousand years. As a result, in the Japanese, Chinese and Korean culture, the crane represents good fortune and longevity. The Japanese refer to the crane as the “bird of happiness”. Make your own origami crane in this hands-on family program with Leslie Graham.

SPONSORS and PARTNERS

The Fernie Museum would like to acknowledge and thank the following sponsors and partners in helping bring this exhibit to Fernie and to offer programming throughout the run of the exhibit.

EXHIBIT FUNDING and SPONSORS

- Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, Museums Assistance Program
- Government of BC, BC Arts Council and the Resort Municipality Initiative
- City of Fernie
- Park Place Lodge, Museum Platinum Sponsor
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- Fernie Spinners and Weavers Guild
- Fernie Heritage Library
- Minyo Dancers

THE LIFE OF THE GEISHA AND DIVA, ICHIMARU

JULY 16, 1906 – FEBRUARY 17, 1997

Because of the confidentiality of geisha, little is known of Ichimaru's early life as a geisha. The following are tidbits gleaned from published books on Ichimaru translated by Michiko Warkentyne.

Ichimaru was born into in Nakatsugawa, Gifu Prefecture on the border with Nagano Prefecture on July 16, 1906 with the birth name of Mitsue Goto. Her parents had eleven children, ten of which were girls. The youngest child was a boy but he died at an early age. With so many mouths to feed, she had to leave home and work in a geisha house at the age of 14 or 15. In her later life, she would never speak of her parents.

Ichimaru started out working as a low-rank geisha or *oshaku*-waitress (one who serves sake) at a hot spring spa inn at Asama, Nagano Prefecture. In older times, at spas men and women bathed naked together without inhibitions, but by the turn of the century Western ideas of puritanism began changing this custom and segregated sections for men and women resulted. Male participants often came to spas for fun and games. Groups of businessmen or friends came to the spas to get drunk and to experience geisha and bar girls. The geisha of these hot-spring resorts called *onsen geisha* acquired a rather poor reputation and were not known for their performing arts.

One day when Ichimaru was asked to sing a particular song by a customer, she was embarrassed and perplexed to be unable to perform it. This single event made her determined to improve her skills. She left for Tokyo and began studying in earnest the songs of the geisha. Her singing talent caught the ear of the proprietress of the Fujita Restaurant in Asakusa, Tokyo. At age 19 she was able to enter a geisha house (*okiya*) called Ichimatsu-ya, the master of which was a noted actor at the Miyato Theatre. She took on the name of Asakusa Ichimaru in 1926 and would later be simply known as Ichimaru. Numerous geisha have names that begin with the character pronounced "*ichi*". The element *ichi* represents the interconnection with one particular branch of geisha and hence a name could often be traced back. The name Asakusa was the name

of one of the geisha quarters of Tokyo, which was known for its high and strict standards of training for the artistic pursuits of the geisha.

Ichimaru had a single-minded attitude and was determined to make herself stand out among other geisha. She began taking *shamisen* and singing lessons (*kiyomoto* style) from the famous female *shamisen* artist-teacher and authority, Enchiga Kiyomoto. She came to enjoy a reputation as the geisha who possessed a “nightingale-like” singing voice combined with elegant good looks and consummate skills with the *shamisen*.

Ichimaru often appeared at the first-class inn-restaurant in Asakusa known as the Kinsen (Golden Pavilion). Her singing talent was in great demand not only in the teahouses and restaurants of the Asakusa geisha district, to which she belonged, but also to other first-class restaurants of the other geisha districts such as Yanagibashi, Akasaka and Shinbashi. It is said that many geisha were jealous of her quick rise to fame and criticized her, accusing her of being haughty. Not discouraged by all the criticism, Ichimaru continued to sing and diversify her repertoire.

In the late 1920s and early 30s new technology was occurring in the performing arts. Radio broadcasting and recording companies began replacing stage, teahouse and street performances. Several recording companies were set up and began competing with each other for talent. They searched the geisha districts and began scouting for talented geisha. The Victor Recording company, which was established in 1927, discovered Ichimaru.

In 1933 Ichimaru recorded a song for the movie *Wet Swallow* (*Nure Tsubame*) produced by the Shochika movie company, which became a major hit. This was followed by the production of Nikkatsu's *Three Mile mountain Pass* (*Toge Sanri*), Shochiku's *Two Stone lanterns* (*Futatsu Toro*) and *Tenryu River Ride* (*Tenryu Kudareba*), the last of which proved to be a mega hit that would elevate Ichimaru's position to that of superstar status. Another interesting anecdote to Ichimaru is that she met the famous silent film star, Charlie Chaplin, in the mid 1930s.

During the 1930's Japan was involved with expansionist wars in Manchuria and China. Ichimaru was called upon to perform for the factory workers of the war effort and for troops, both at home and abroad. With the beginning of the full-scale war with the United States in late 1941, her recordings gradually decreased and eventually stopped by 1944. In 1948, Ichimaru resumed her recording career and tried to brighten the gloomy and chaotic post-war society. In 1949 she established

her radio program entitled “Mitsukoshi Calendar of Songs”, which would last for ten years.

With the arrival of television in Japan, she became a popular guest on national television. Her performances became more diverse and mature throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s. From the 1960s through into the 1990s, Ichimaru received numerous honorific titles and awards.

Ichimaru would continue to teach and perform well into her senior years although unfortunately when she passed away in 1997 at the age of 91, she did not have much of a fortune left. Throughout her life, her impoverished sisters would regularly visit her to request loans and she would generously give them money and, near the end of her life her housekeeper maid-servant walked off with much of her fortune, thought to be as much as 80,000,000 yen. Ichimaru did however, leave behind a tremendous legacy to the

Japanese music industry and her triumph over adversity, in perfecting her arts to become an outstanding diva, is indeed a remarkable story.



ABOUT KIMONO

Famed for their elegant shapes and brilliant colouring — everything from peacock blue to tangerine — kimonos are an enduring symbol of the geisha. But there is more to the garments than their admirable style. Woven into the silk or linen of a kimono is the story of the woman who donned it while performing. And no story is more captivating than that of Japan's most sought-after geisha of the 20th century, Ichimaru.

The kimono was influenced by the Chinese Hanfu through extensive cultural exchanges between the two countries starting in the 5th century.

The modern kimono began to take shape during Japan's Heian period (794–1192 ce). Since then, the basic shape of both men's and women's kimonos has remained essentially unchanged.

Traditionally, all women's kimonos are basically one size. Tucks and folds in the fabric accommodate different body heights and shapes.



Kimonos are made from a single bolt of kimono fabric. The bolts come in standard dimensions, and all the fabric is used in the making of the kimono. All traditional kimonos are sewn by hand, and the fabrics from which they are created are also frequently hand-made and hand decorated.

Various techniques such as yuzen dye resist (made with a rice paste), shibori, as well as hand painting are incorporated into the kimono which governs where the pattern is distributed and if it is a singular or a repeating pattern.

Repeating patterns that cover a large section of the kimono are traditionally done with the yuzen resist technique and a stencil.

In the past, a kimono would often be entirely taken apart for washing, and then re-sewn for wearing. Modern fabrics and cleaning methods have been found that eliminate this need. However, the washing of kimonos in the traditional way can still be found. There are styles of kimonos for various occasions, ranging from extremely formal to very casual. The level of formality of a woman's kimono is determined by the shape (mostly the length of the sleeves), pattern and fabric, and also the color.

Men's kimonos are usually one basic shape and are mainly worn in subdued colors. Formality is determined by the type and color of accessories, the fabric and the number or absence of kamon (family crests).

Silk is the most desirable, and most formal, fabric. Cotton is more casual. These days there are polyester kimonos as well; they are generally more casual.

Kimonos can be expensive. A woman's kimono may easily exceed US\$10,000; a complete kimono outfit, with kimono, undergarments, obi, ties, socks, sandals and accessories, can exceed US\$20,000. A single obi may cost several thousand dollars.

There is also a thriving business in second-hand kimonos in Japan. Women's obis, however, remain expensive items. Even secondhand ones can cost hundreds of dollars, and they are difficult for inexperienced people to make.

Kimonos are never wasted. Old kimonos are recycled in various ways: they may be altered to make haori, hiyoku, or kimonos for children; the fabric may be used to patch similar kimonos; larger pieces of fabric may be used for making handbags and other similar kimono accessories.

THE ROLE OF THE GEISHA IN JAPANESE CULTURE

Westerners often misunderstand the concept of Geisha and think of them as something immoral, tawdry or even medieval. In Japan however, the occupation of geisha has a long and honourable history. Geisha were high class, well-educated hostess-courtesans, who entertained wealthy, sophisticated and powerful Japanese gentlemen who wished elegance, culture and brilliant conversation in an exotic atmosphere of decadent refinement. They were status symbols for the wealthy and provided an air of respectability.

The word geisha is made up of two characters, *gei* means “art” or “accomplished” and *sha* means “person”. Therefore it can be translated as “accomplished person” or “person who lives by the arts”. They were professional entertainers and hostesses, who became an important part of traditional social life for men. They provided a beautiful and sensuous fantasy that all men desired. Their community came to be referred to as *karyukai* meaning “the flower and willow world”. They were extensively trained in many of the traditional Japanese arts and their services were exclusively for the realm of wealthy men. It was because of these glamorous women that much of the richness of traditional art and entertainment came to survive in modern Japan. The geisha became Japan’s unparalleled conservators of traditional costume, music, song and dance. In the old days, the geisha were considered a valued possession of a city and a measure of its vitality.

The geishas aspired to provide an exclusive dream world of luxury and romance. Their great attention to their personal appearance and their incredible devotion to perfection in the classical arts and in conversation has made them highly respected guardians of Japan’s traditions. Since their early beginnings, geishas have entertained and were trusted by men of intellect like actors, poets and artists, and men of power like samurai, wartime generals, captains of industry, entrepreneurs, cabinet ministers, aristocrats, and even men of the imperial household. In their presence, some of the nation’s most important business took place with ideas being freely discussed – deals were made, wars planned and plots hatched. These men knew they could trust the geisha’s code of silence not to divulge what they overheard. The geisha’s livelihood heavily depended upon discretion and confidentiality and part of the erotic appeal of these women was to do with this secrecy and mystery.

THE GEISHA AS AN ICON OF FEMINITY

“A geisha contains her art within herself, and because her body has this art, her life is saved. That is the power of art - the salvation of one’s soul”.

Mayumi, a geisha - quote from Jodi Cobb, *Geisha, The Life, The Voices, the Art*, page 23.

With the perfect balance of beauty, knowledge of the arts and cultivated etiquette, the geisha became a “living work of art” and this was a source of pride for herself. She succeeded in turning herself into the image of the ideal woman of Japan and the embodiment of Japanese culture and refinement. She lived her lifestyle 24 hours a day. Even if she couldn’t afford it, she would always travel first class as it would be an embarrassment for her to be seen in economy class.

The single greatest expense of the geisha’s budget was her kimono wardrobe. When she began her geisha career, she was obliged to purchase at least ten kimonos and this would put her deep in debt. Geisha would throw away worn or stained kimonos and purchase new ones, so kimonos continued to be a burden on her budget throughout her career. Since the geisha would never be seen not wearing a kimono, she needed a large number of them. She had to have a number of styles, designs and colours, which she would wear during the various seasons. Through her art of dress selection she sought to harmonize herself with her surroundings. She had to have the right kimono for the right place, the right season and the right occasion. If an evening event or party went on too late, she would change into another kimono.

From the late 18th century to the early 20th century, the geisha became chic, avant-garde and the fashion trend-setters. Her gorgeous costumes and her elegant mannerisms exuded a sense of style (*iki*). Geisha would often vie with each other for originality and novelty of display. They knew how to parade their kimono with a flash of ‘pale’ at the sleeve and below the hem of the kimono, a collar pulled down, a train on the ground, and the skirt of her kimono gracefully held in the left hand. There was no mistake that this was no ordinary woman when she walked in the street. The geisha were literally the celebrities or supermodels of their time, and the primary arbiters or vanguards of kimono fashion. The geisha became an emblem of Japan and the idealized concept of femininity.