

[Thematic Exhibition]

# THE WORLD OF MATSURI: DISGUISE AND MASQUERADE

July 24 (Sun.) - September 11 (Sun.), 2022  
Exhibition Rooms of Hōsa Library, City of Nagoya

## Introduction

The Japanese word for festival, *matsuri*, shares etymological roots with the word *matsuru*, "to enshrine," and the primary purpose of these celebrations is to extend prayers and offerings to a deity. Over time, however, the resplendence and liveliness of these festivals became more prominent, and they became a source of visual pleasure for the Japanese people. *Matsuri* became known as lively and joyful celebratory gatherings of large numbers of people and there is even a special term—*o-matsuri-sawagi*—that was coined to describe the "festival fanfare" associated with these events.

The *matsuri* depicted in the genre of paintings known as *sairei-zu* are especially beautiful to look at and have a strong sense of celebration, with elaborate decorations, performances, and costumes. This exhibition introduces the rich world of *matsuri*, with a focus on festival paintings from the Edo period.



No.8 (exhibited from 7/24 to 8/23)

**Important Cultural Property**

Festival of the Hōkoku Shrine, portion from a pair of six-fold screens.

By Iwasa Matabei.

Edo period, 17th c.

Inherited in the Awa Hachisuka Family.

祭り

## Chapter 1: Lively Matsuri, Gorgeous Furyū

When we think of the term *matsuri* today, many people probably think of lively seasonal celebrations. These festivals, which were originally held mainly as solemn Shinto ceremonies or Buddhist rites, became more notable as lavish forms of entertainment around the middle of the Heian period. In the Heian-kyō capital, where epidemics ran rampant, the people believed that such outbreaks were the work of vengeful and malevolent spirits, which they hoped to appease and drive out by dressing in extravagant costumes and physical adornments, dancing around, singing, and making music. Over time, these festivals grew more and more resplendent and attracted many spectators, as various groups competed to present the most elaborate and elegant *furyū* performances.

In the early modern period, festival performances became still more sumptuous, and picturesque scenes of splendid and sometimes strange celebrations were depicted in paintings as well. This section introduces festival paintings featuring particularly gorgeous *furyū* performances.



No.10 (exhibited from 8/24 to 9/11)

Festival of the Tsushima Shrine.

From a pair of six-fold screens.

Edo period, 18th c.

Inherited in the Tsushima Ban Family. Donated by the Okaya Family.

### Sidebar: The Term *Furyū*

The word *furyū* was first pronounced *fūryū* and meant "elegant" or "tasteful," but from the late Heian period (794–1185), it came to be used to refer to the custom of lavishly decorating costumes and floats used in various ceremonies such as personal celebrations, poetry contests, festivals, and pleasure outings in nature. Among these decorations, the beautiful and sometimes strange *tsukuri-mono*—constructed models of an array of different items, such as buildings and gardens—made from luxurious materials were particularly eye-catching. In addition to the elaborately decorated parade parasols and flamboyant costumes and disguises worn at festivals, the group dances accompanied by flutes, drums, and other musical accompaniments and songs known as *hayashi-mono*, were also called *furyū*. At times, they became so spirited and ostentatious that they were forbidden by the imperial court.



Bamboo Shoot Costume—player from exhibit No.8

## Chapter 2: Honoring Ieyasu: The Tōshōgū Shrine Festival

Tokugawa Ieyasu died at Sunpu Castle on April 17, 1616, and, in accordance with his final will, was buried at Kunōsan, where he was enshrined as the deity Tōshō Daigongen. The following year, on the first anniversary of his death, his remains were transferred to Nikkōsan Rinnōji temple. The procession of portable shrines for the Nikkō Tōshōgū Festival is said to have begun as a reenactment of the procession for relocating the deity from Kunōsan to Nikkō that accompanied his reburial ceremony.

During the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate in the Edo period, Tōshōgū shrines were established in various locations throughout Japan, with each holding its own grand festival. This custom further influenced the local festivals held in the surrounding regions, and long, spectacular festival parades appeared all over the country.

## Chapter 3: Festivals in Owari-Nagoya

During the Edo period, the town of Nagoya prospered at the foot of Nagoya Castle, the residence of the Owari Tokugawa family. Nagoya was known for its three grand festivals: the Tōshōgū Festival at Nagoya Tōshōgū Shrine, the Tennō Festival at Tennōsha Shrine, and the Wakamiya Festival at Wakamiya Hachimansha Shrine. While dynamic *dashi* floats populated with mechanical figurines appeared in Nagoya and its surrounding area, the tradition of medieval-style *ōyama* and *danjiri* floats was also preserved, and a rich variety of urban festivals developed. Additionally, festivals that were only held

every few decades, such as the Bonten (Brahma, Hindu god) and Okuwa (hoe) Festivals, inspired more freely conceived and decorated structures and costumes, stirring up wild excitement among the people.



No.26

Illustrated book of Okuwa Festival, the 2nd volume.

Copied by Odagiri Shunkō.

Edo period, 1827-28.

\*People disguised as mice are pulling a carriage with a huge radish. Eccentricities were the most important thing for a festival performance.

## Chapter 4: Edo's Tenka Festival

In the metropolis of Edo, the seat of the Shogun, two major festivals were held, one at Sannō Gongen (now Hie Shrine), the guardian deity of the birthplace of the shogunal family, and the other at Kanda Myōjin (now Kanda Shrine), the general shrine for the city of Edo. These were both known as Tenka Festivals—literally, "All under Heaven" Festivals—so named because splendid processions of festival floats from each town and village entered the grounds of Edo Castle and were presented to the Shogun for his inspection. These elaborately conceived *tsukematsuri* festivals featured *furyū* performances, such as people dressed as Korean envoys to Japan pulling elephant-shaped carts and other distinctively medieval customs. The two Tenka Matsuri in addition to the festival of Nezu Gongen (now Nezu Shrine) formed the three great festivals of Edo, providing entertainment for the people of Edo as the city's greatest spectacles.