

Commemorating the Renovation of the Mausoleum

Kenchūji: Family Temple of the Owari Tokugawa Clan

June 8 (Sun.) - July 21 (Sun.), 2024
at Original Wing of the Tokugawa Art Museum

Welcome Message

Welcome and thank you for viewing our current exhibition.

Tokugawa Yoshinao, the first lord of the Owari Tokugawa clan, passed away in 1650, the next year, the second lord of Owari, Tokugawa Mitsutomo ordered the construction of Kenchūji Temple as the *Bodaiji*, or temple to venerate the deceased members of the Owari Tokugawa clan. At that time, Kenchūji occupied about 165,000 square meters, and the Owari Tokugawa clan granted the temple five hundred *koku*. In 1785, the Sugimura village, located northeast of Nagoya castle, burned down and the entire village was destroyed. The fire spread as far as Kenchūji where everything except the main gate (Sōmon), the gate in front of the Hall of the Buddha (Sanmon), and Lord Mitsutomo's grave were reduced to ashes. In 1787, the temple was rebuilt thanks to the Owari Tokugawa family and the Chief Priest of Kenchūji. After that, the temple survived both the turbulence of the Meiji Restoration and the bombings of World War II and the treasures donated by the Owari Tokugawa, as well as the treasures accumulated by the chief priests of Kenchūji have been passed down to the present day.

This exhibition also presents a reproduction of the paintings in the Owari Tokugawa family's mausoleum to commemorate the completion of the Reiwa period renovation of the mausoleum. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to all who contributed their support to these activities.

Murakami Shinzui
Chief Priest of Kenchūji Temple

Kenchūji Temple, situated southwest of the Tokugawa Museum, was built in 1650 by the second lord of the Owari, Tokugawa Mitsutomo, to venerate his father, Tokugawa Yoshinao. Over the years, the Owari Tokugawa lords and their families constructed buildings and donated treasures to the temple and their graves were constructed on the grounds. Kenchūji has played an important role as a family temple where memorial tablets are enshrined in the mausoleum and memorial services are held for the family.

Starting with the "Painting of the Buddha Entering Nirvana" donated by Mitsutomo's concubine, Kadenokōji, this exhibition presents many items that have been donated to Kenchūji over the years. This exhibit will also discuss the completion of the Reiwa period renovation of the Owari Tokugawa family's mausoleum which was built on the 150th anniversary of Yoshinao's Buddhist funerary rites. Looking back on the history of Kenchūji as it has evolved with the Owari Tokugawa family, the temple hopes to broaden understanding of its commitment to preserving items of cultural heritage for the future.

Finally, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to all who helped prepare this exhibition.

Tokugawa Yoshitaka
Director, The Tokugawa Art Museum

CHAPTER 1 The Origins of Kenchūji Temple

Exhibit No.1-No.7

The first lord of the Owari Tokugawa clan, Tokugawa Yoshinao passed away on May 7th, 1650. Yoshinao, a devout follower of Confucianism, stated in his will that Buddhist funerary rites were not necessary. However, the second lord of Owari, Tokugawa Mitsutomo was a fervent believer of Buddhism and decided to build a new temple to venerate his father, Yoshinao. Construction began on the temple the next year. Thus began the history of Kenchūji as a *Bodaiji*, a temple to venerate the deceased members of the Owari Tokugawa clan.

The main hall (Hondō), lecture hall (Kōdō), and many of the temple buildings were completed in February 1652 and Yoshinao's third anniversary Buddhist funerary services, were held at the newly completed buildings starting on the first of the fifth month. At the closing services on the seventh day, Mitsutomo donated estates to the temple and the rules for Buddhist ceremonies of the temple were established.

CHAPTER 2 Evolution of Kenchūji as a Family Temple

Exhibit No.8-No.19

Kenchūji was founded by the highly learned and virtuous Priest Jōyo-kakudon, who was invited from Yūki Gūyōji Temple (Yūki City, Ibaraki Prefecture), and the successive chief priests were allowed to wear purple robes by the Imperial Court, making it the highest stature temple in Owari province. In 1699, the third lord of Owari, Tokugawa Tsunanari, and in the next year his father Mitsutomo passed away. Their mausoleums and graves were constructed on the grounds and the wives and children of successive generations of lords were interred in the large graveyard on the north side of the Main Hall (Hondō).

However, in 1785 nearly all of majestic Kenchūji was burnt to the ground in a large fire. The ninth lord Munechika speedily ordered reconstruction and the main buildings were rebuilt by the next year. Moreover, to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Yoshinao's Buddhist funerary rites in 1799, a new mausoleum (currently known as the Tokugawa Family Mausoleum) was erected.

CHAPTER 3 Treasures donated and Bequeaths to the Temple

Exhibit No.20-No.62

Starting with Mitsutomo, each of the Owari Tokugawa Lords and their families have donated Buddhist images and implements to Kenchūji Temple. Moreover, to pray for the souls of the departed, relics and scriptures were also bequeathed to the temple. Thanks to the Owari Tokugawa family's and the temple's archives, as well as the records attached to the objects themselves, many items have information about the donor, the previous owner of the item, and the history of the item's donation to the temple. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, some of the treasures were returned to the Owari Tokugawa family and have been kept in the Tokugawa Art Museum. Furthermore, a portion of the many grave goods that were excavated during the reburials at Kenchūji Cemetery that took place after World War II still exist. These items convey a small part of the heart of the prayers that people had at that time.

CHAPTER 4 Renovation of the Mausoleum: Preservation for the Future

Exhibit No.63

Even after restructuring the temple grounds after the end of World War II, Kenchūji still contains many historically important buildings. One of these is the Tokugawa Family Mausoleum that was built to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Yoshinao's Buddhist funerary rites in 1799. The overall composition of the temple contains a Main Hall (Honden), a Sutra Hall (Kyōdō), and the corridors that connect these buildings (Wataridono) as well as the lattice wall (Sukibei) and Chinese style gate (Karamon). The Main Hall, corridors, and Sutra Hall are constructed to resemble *gongen-zukuri*, a complex Shinto shrine construction style, however as the buildings are not actually connected, this is regarded as pseudo-*gongen-zukuri*. The memorial tablets of the Owari Tokugawa family lords and their families are enshrined here, and it has been designated as a registered tangible cultural property by Aichi Prefecture.

Large scale renovation to prevent the colors in the paintings from flaking and to create sketch maps were undertaken from 2012 to 2016. The thatched roof was re-thatched from 2020 to 2023. Future projects include reproducing the colors within the paintings and carefully maintaining the cultural properties that have been passed down through the ages for the future.

