

Ono Yoshimitsu – Pursuing Koto Bizen

1.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Yoshimitsu seitan kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu respectfully made this)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 76.1cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 1 bu)

Curvature: 1.9cm (6 bu, 3 rin)

Kashima Susumu

The Japanese sword's shape (blades with curvature) was perfected by the end of the Heian period. They evolved from straight *kiriha-zukkuri* and *shinogi-zukuri* blades.

This blade is in the shape of Heian period *tachi*, but with quite a shallow curvature. The forging is tight and it displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a mix of *suguha* and *ko-midare* in *nioi-deki* with *ko-nie*. The *boshi* is *ko-maru* with *kaeri*.

An excellent example of an extant *tachi* from this period is kept at Tokyo National Museum. It was worn by Minamoto no San-i Yorimasa.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Suguha was the first consciously made *hamon*. It is the most basic *hamon* used by all workshops from ancient times to the present.

Heian period blades are thinner in construction with a graceful curve giving them an elegant shape. The blade's curve is deepest in the *nakago*. As it appears to have been difficult to use with two hands, it is probable that it was intended for one-handed use. I also believe this is the reason why during Sengoku period, shorter one-handed swords were a common feature, because they are easier to use.

Polished by Fujishiro Okisato

Habaki by Nakamura Saido

Shirasaya by Takayama Kazuyuki

2.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 77.6cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 6 bu)

Curvature: 2.8cm (9 bu, 3 rin)

Kashima Susumu

This *tachi* is in the style of the Bizen school of the late Heian early Kamakura period, in particular that of the Ko-Bizen school. This blade has a narrow *mihaba*, it is *koshi-zori* and has *funbari*. The *boshi* gradates naturally to a small point. It is light when held and is well balanced. It is tightly forged with a *masame-hada* feel and abundant *ji-nie*. The *hamon* is a *nioi* mix of *ko-choji* and *ko-midare* with *ko-ashi* and *yo*. The *omote* has some *midare*. The *boshi* is a deep *notare-komi* with *ko-maru* in the *omote*, whilst the *ura* is *midare-komi*.

I feel that this *tachi* is in the style of Ko-Bizen Tomonari. The *jigane* is strong, and the *hamon* is a highly skilled, graceful mix of *ko-choji* and *ko-midare*. It has the classic style of a *tachi* and displays aspects of the period well.

Ono Yoshimitsu

From the first early straight *hamon*, the next generation of Bizen smiths began to make a more gorgeous flamboyant *hamon*. Inside the *ko-gunome*, *ko-choji hamon* many changes were taking place. Despite their relatively small width, these *hamon* were very intricate.

Although this *tachi* was intended to be in a Ko-Bizen style blade, it more closely resembles the workmanship of the Ko-Ichimonji school.

Polished by Nagayama Kokan

Habaki by Nakamura Saido

Shirasaya by Yonekura Hidekazu

3.

Tachi (Long sword))

Inscription:

Front: Yoshimitsu seitan kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu respectfully made this)

Back: Tetsu wa maboroshi—Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(Steel Phantom-An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 90.3cm (2 Shaku, 9 sun, 8 bu)

Curvature: 3.3cm (1 sun 1 bu)

Kashima Susumu

This is a copy of Okanehira. Of the many blades of Japan, the Okanehira is the most famous. The original was the favorite sword of the Lord of Okayama – Ikeda Terumasa.

This sword is a little longer than the original. It has a wide *haba* and a thick *kasane*. The *kissaki* is large and overwhelming. The blade is finely forged and displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a mix of *ko-choji* and *ko-midare* with plenty of *ashi* and *yo*. It is in *nioi-deki* and is very clear. The *boshi* is *suguha*, with an almost pointed *ko-maru*.

This *tachi* is almost three *shaku* (91cm) long and it has a deep curvature of more than one *sun* (3.3cm). It is evenly forged and *utsuri* can be seen in the *ji*. The *hamon* differs slightly from the original *ko-choji* and *ko-midare*, but on the whole, it retains the essence of Okanehira's style.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This is a copy of the *o-dachi* called Okanehira. The original is a wonderful blade in *ko-nie deki* and is recognised as Japan's most valuable *o-dachi*. I do not have the skill to make a copy to match the masterpiece, so I used the opportunity of copying this sword to gain valuable learning experience of how old swords were made.

On the reverse of the tang I inscribed the phrase—*tetsu wa maboroshi*—steel phantom, because I have devoted my life to pursuing a vision that is held within the steel.

Polished by Fujishiro Okisato

Habaki by Hotei Choichi

Shirasaya by Sakai Toshifumi

4.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 77.8cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 6 bu, 5 rin)

Curvature: 2.8cm (9 bu, 2 rin)

Kashima Susumu

This *tachi* displays the style of workmanship of the Ichimonji school from the early Kamakura period.

The blade is quite narrow and is *koshi-zori* with *funbari* and a small point section that is shaped like the head of a barracuda. The forging is a tight *ko-itame hada* and displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a large *choji-midare* that turns into *juka-choji* with *ko-ashi* and plenty of *yo* mixed in. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and the *boshi* is a deep *midare-komi* in an *ichimai* style with *kaeri*.

This *tachi* has met its aim of attaining the feeling of the early ‘*ichi*’ signed Kamakura Ichimonji *tachi*, and displays the characteristics well.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Early Kamakura blades have a beautiful shape. A flamboyant *juka-choji* can be seen creeping up to the *shinogi*. After this, they began experimenting with different *juka-choji* styles.

As this blade’s *mihaba* was narrow, it was difficult to produce a flamboyant *hamon*.

Polished by Inutsuka Tsuneyuki

Habaki by Nakamura Saido

Shirasaya by Sakai Toshifumi

5.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 74.6cm (2 Shaku, 4 sun, 6 bu)

Curvature: 2.7cm (9 bu)

Kashima Susumu

This blade illustrates the workmanship of the mid-Kamakura period Ichimonji school. The *haba* is wide and the *kasane* becomes thicker. With the *motohaba* at over 3.2cm (1 sun 5 rin), it has a confident and stately shape. It is tightly forged and displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a mixture of large and small *choji-midare* turning into *juka-choji* with plenty of *ashi*, *yo*, and some *sunagashi*. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* with *kaeri*.

This *tachi* illustrates the mid-Kamakura period at its most flamboyant. The *hamon* constantly changes with lots of activity. These wonderful works displayed in ‘World of Juka-Choji’ are worthy enough to be called “Modern Ichimonji”.

Ono Yoshimitsu

I have spent my life trying to recreate Ichimonji *tachi* of the mid-Kamakura period: a wide *mihaba* with a splendid shape, a flamboyant *nioi* based *juka-choji midare* with *utsuri*. With many different features to look at, many people are fascinated by these kinds of works. I have to ask myself, where do I begin to approach making such works? The challenge of approaching such a task is endless.

Polished by Usuki Yoshihiko

Habaki by Hotei Choichi

Shirasaya by Hiroi Akihisa

6.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 74.6cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 2 bu)

Curvature: 3.3cm (1 sun, 1 bu)

Kashima Susumu

This *tachi* is a copy of the Ichimonji Yamatorige. It has a wide *mihaba* and is slightly longer than the original. It has a splendorous *koshi-zori* with an *ikubi kissaki*. The *ko-itame hada* is tightly forged, and the *hamon* is a mix of overlapping *o-choji* and *juka-choji* that reach up to the *shinogi*. The *boshi* is a deep *midare komi*.

Although this copy of the Yamatorige it is a bit longer than the original, it still feels good in the hand. It is forged in a tight *ko-itame hada*. The *koshiha* is an *o-choji midare* that turns into *juka-choji* with plenty of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight, but a little weak. However, at almost the size of an *o-dachi* it is still gorgeous enough. It gives you the feeling that each of the *choji* are individually alive. The even forging with no flaws in a blade of this length is an indication of the smith's superior level of skill.

Ono Yoshimitsu

The *tachi* called Yamatorige has a flamboyant *juka-choji hamon* running from the *habaki-moto* to the *kissaki*, and crossing the *shinogi*. Why did the smiths of the mid-Kamakura design such a flamboyant *hamon* in that era? Faced with the inherent limitations of a *hamon*, the limitations of flamboyancy, and the limitations of their skill, as a swordsmith, I can't imagine how to produce such an original flamboyant *hamon*. For me, the original *tachi* has a real feeling of power. I feel that the *juka-choji hamon* was perfected in the Mid-Kamakura period.

Polished by Fujishiro Matsuo

Habaki by Hotei Choichi

Shirasaya by Takayama Kazuyuki

7.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu of Etchigo Province made this)

Back: Heisei gannen shogatsu kichi jitsu
(An auspicious day in January 1989)

Length: 74.6cm (2 Shaku, 4 sun, 5 bu)

Curvature: 2.6cm (8 bu, 5 rin)

Kashima Susumu

This blade has a wide *mihaba* and the *kasane* is thick with an *ikubi kissaki*. It has quite a deep *koshizori* and *fumbari* giving it a majestic *tachi* shape. It is very tightly forged, almost *muji-hada* with densely detailed *ko-nie*. The *hamon* goes right up to the *shinogi* in a mix of a large and small *choji-midare* turning into a *juka-choji midare* with lots of *yo* and *ashi*. The *boshi* is *midare komi* and it has a *bo-hi* carved on both sides on the blade.

The blade displays a stout-bodied mid-Kamakura *tachi sugata*, with the *hamon* rising toward the *shinogi* in a splendorous *juka-choji midare*, in which you can feel the ambition. The activities within the *ha* are exceptional, exuding beauty and power. This kind of work is Ono Yoshimitsu's forte - The World of Juka-Choji.

Ono Yoshimitsu

There are several challenges when creating *juka-choji*. First—choosing the materials. To produce a wide *hamon*, lots of hard high carbon materials are best. However, it is difficult to produce *choji-ashi* and *yo* (activities) and easier to generate clumps of *nie* and cause *hagire*. Conversely, producing a lower carbon (softer steel) *hamon* makes it hard to produce *juka-choji*.

Then you have the difficulty of making the application clay. If you make it too thick, it is difficult to form a *hamon*. If you make it too weak, it will fall off during the hardening process. The application of the clay is also difficult, as a variation of one millimeter either way is enough to make the difference between success or failure.

Polished by Yanagawa Seiji

Habaki by Miyajima Hiroshi

Shirasaya by Takayama Kazuyuki

8.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 71.5cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 6 bu)

Curvature: 2.9cm (9 bu, 8 rin)

Kashima Susumu

This *tachi* is a copy of the Nikko Sukezane, which is kept in the Toshogu repository at Nikko shrine, Tochigi prefecture. That *tachi* was famous for being worn by the Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa. This *tachi* has a wide *mihaba*, and a splendid *ikubi* point section. The *jihada* is tight, and the *hamon* is a mix of *o-choji*, *ko-choji* and *juka-choji* with an abundance of *ashi* and *yo*. The *hamon* undulates somewhat, and the *boshi* is *midare-komi* and with some *hakikake*. On both sides it has a single groove: on the *omote* it ends in *kaki-nagashi*, whilst on the *ura* it is *kaki-toshi*.

This *tachi* is a good reproduction of the original. The *hamon* is Ono's own style of *choji*, and is used skillfull and freely. However, in comparison with the original it is quite gentle and not as spirited, but in the swordsmiths own words, "I specialize in *choji-midare*, which is not the style of this *tachi*."

Ono Yoshimitsu

In this exhibition of my pursuit of trying to recreate Koto-Bizen blades, this blade is the only one that I recreated in its shortened form. After some consideration I decided to copy the Nikko Sukezane shape in its shortened form, so it would match the *koshirae* of the original. In this way none of the atmosphere was lost. I did however, switch the *hamon* of the original for one my own style.

Polished by Yoshida Hideo
Habaki by Miyajima Hiroshi
Shirasaya by Hiroi Akihisa

9.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 72.4cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 8 bu, 8 rin)

Curvature: 2.7cm (9 bu)

Kashima Susumu

At the end of the Kamakura period, the Yoshioka and the Fukuoaka Ichimonji schools were highly competitive in *ko-nie deki* works.

This *blade* has a wide *mihaba* and deep curvature. It is tightly forged and *utsuri* can be seen. The *hamon* is a mix of *o-busa saka-choji* and *gunome*, with *saka-ashi* and *yo*. The *boshi* is *gunome* and is almost pointed.

This *tachi* accomplishes its aim of emulating the style of the Yoshioka Ichimonji school in its original length. I feel the *saka-choji* are quite exaggerated, as it has some *gunome* mixed in, evidence of the smith trying different ideas. As the swordsmiths of the Bitchu Aoe school also specialized in *saka-choji midare*, please note the slight differences in *hamons* between the two schools.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Whereas *juka-choji* activities vary, the activities (*ashi* and *yo*) within *saka-choj* are slanted. The activities in *saka-choji* are standardized, and a little simpler than usual *choji*.

Even though regular *juka-choji* are graceful and magnificent, you can feel the power of *saka-choji*.

Polished by Usuki Yoshihiko

Habaki by Hotei Choichi

Shirasaya by Hiroi Akihisa

10.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 76.8cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 3 bu, 5rin)

Curvature: 2.8cm (9 bu, 2 rin)

Kashima Susumu

This is a copy of a blade made by the famous Osafune swordsmith of the Kamakura period—Nagamitsu. The undulation of the hamon is different from that of Ichimonji works; it has a gentle *choji-midare*.

This *tachi* has a wide *mihaba* and magnificent *koshi-zori*. It is forged very finely with lots of detailed *nie* and displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* has round-headed *choji* that do not undulate very much, with lots of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and clear. The *boshi* has some *midare-komi* that comes to a point with kaeri.

This *tachi* has a good shape, and the forging is tight with a lots fine *ji-nie* and it displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a gentle *choji-midare* with *ashi* and *yo* mixed in. It is different to the Ichimonji Style; the *hamon* gives the feeling of Nagamitsu himself. The *nioi-guchi* is very controlled and clear, so it doesn't quite catch the flavor of *koto* blades, however, it does capture the characteristics of Nagamitsu's blades.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This *tachi* is typical of the distinctive style Osafune Nagamitsu was famous for. The start of the *hamon* is quiet, the middle becomes very active, and the *mono-uchi* becomes subdued again. The *boshi* was intended to be *suguha*, but it did not quite turn out quite as planned, as always tends to be the case.

Polished by Kobayashi Hisao

Habaki by Nakamura Saido

Shirasaya by Sakai Toshifumi

11.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Mune: Jitouan Senshu kore (wo) horu
(Horimono by Jitouan Senshu)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 80.6cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 6 bu)

Curvature: 3.3cm (1 sun, 1 bu)

Kashima Susumu

The original *tachi* called ‘Koryu Kagemitsu’ has been shortened. It is said to have been worn by General Dainanko in the Nanbokucho period. This favorite sword of the emperor Meiji is not only a beautiful Bizen blade, but among all Japanese swords it is of the highest class.

This blade has been made in the shape the ‘Koryu Kagemitsu’ would have been before it was shortened. However, it is still well balanced, with a medium point section that is almost *ikubi kissaki*. It has a prominent running *itame-hada* with *ji-nie*. The *nioi-deki hamon* is *gunome-choji*, which on the whole is slanted. It has lots of *ashi* and *yo* mixed in and displays the characteristics and image of the original well. The famous Bakamatsu period smith – Koyama Munetsugu – also made a copy of the Koryu *tachi*, but this one surpasses his attempt. The carving on this blade was done by Mr. Kokeiguchi Senshu, who is well known in the carving world, and incidentally, comes from Okayama.

Ono Yoshimitsu

The Koryu Kagemitsu has a small *shin-no-kurikara* carved inside the groove on the *omote*, and a sanskrit character called a *bonji* on the reverse. I made this *tachi* as it would have been in its un-shortened form. As the blades go to the horimon carver before going to the polisher, I have to pray that no flaws appear during the polishing process. I believe that Kagemitsu’s *kataochi-gunome hamon* developed from a low *saka-choji hamon*.

Polished by Abe Kazunori

Habaki by Hotei Choichi

Shirosaya by Yonekura Hidekazu

12.

Tanto (Dagger)

Inscription:

Front: **Yoshimitsu seitan kore (wo) tsukuru**
(Yoshimitsu respectfully made this)
Horimono dō saku
(and carved the horimono)

Back: **Heisei san nen ni gatsu kichi jitsu**
(An auspicious day in February 1991)

Length: 28.7cm (9 sun, 4 bu, 7 rin)

Curvature: 0.1cm (0.1 rin)

Kashima Susumu

Kagemitsu was the son of Nagamitsu. He is the third generation of famous smiths of Osafune village in Bizen province. The *tanto* called 'Kenshin Kagemitsu' was a favorite blade of Uesugi Kenshin. In modern times it has been recognised as a national treasure. Although skilful, this work departs somewhat from the Kagemitsu *kataochi-gunome hamon*.

The *tanto* is quite long and has some curvature. The *kasane* is thick and the *ji-hada* is prominent with plenty of *ji-nie*. *Utsuri* is also present. The *hamon* is *choji-gunome*, with *saka-choji*, *ko-ashi* and *yo* mixed in. The *boshi* is *Ichimonji* style.

This blade's *kasane* is quite thick, and displays some *utsuri*. The *hamon* is not pure *kataochi*: it has some *gunome* and *saka-choji* and other activities mixed in. The *nioi-guchi* is rich. The swordsmith carved the splendid *horimono* on both sides of the blade himself. The original Kenshin Kagemitsu, inscribed—*chichibu daibosatsu*, was ordered by Mr. Ogawara when he was appointed as lord and protector of Chigusa ward, Harima kuni (Hyogo Prefecture). He dedicated it to the chichibu shrine in the town from where he came.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Kagemitsu is Bizen's most famous maker of *tanto*. This is a copy of an outstanding *tanto* by Kagemitsu. However, the *hamon* on this blade came out 3mm higher than the original.

Polished by Abe Kazunori

Habaki by Hotei Choichi

Shirosaya by Yonekura Hidekazu

13.

O-dachi (Very long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 96cm (3 Shaku, 1 sun, 7 bu)

Curvature: 3.0cm (1 sun)

Kashima Susumu

There are not many extant Nanbokucho period *o-dachi* remaining in their original length. Among the Uesugi family heirlooms there are three famous large Kanemitsu blades.

This *tachi* has a wide *mihaba*, with a thick *kasane* and a grand point section. The *hada* is quite prominent, with abundant fine *nie*. The *hamon* is a mix of *ko-notare* and *ko-gunome*. From the *koshi-moto* onwards is a deep *notare gunome*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and clear with *ko-ashi* and *yo* mixed in. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* that is almost pointed with *kaeri*.

I believe this *tachi* is a copy of a blade owned by the Uesugi family signed 'Bizen Osafune Kanemitsu' and dated 1359 (Enbun 4). It is well forged, even though the *hamon* has a new blade feel, it conveys the style of Kanemitsu well.

Ono Yoshimitsu

At the start of the Nanbokucho period the *o-dachi* became very popular. At this time Kagemitsu was the representative Bizen smith.

This kind of 'big wave' *hamon* looks simple to make at first glance, but it is easy for the *nioi-guchi* to become wide in the valleys and tight at the peaks. To keep the balance throughout the *hamon* is quite difficult. In addition to this, controlling it the whole length of a blade that is over 90cm (3 *shaku*) presents an even greater problem.

Polished by Fujimoto Terutoyo

Habaki by Yao Toshinori

Shirosaya by Kubo Junichi

14.

Wakizashi (Short sword)

Inscription:

Front: Yoshimitsu hori dō saku
(Yoshimitsu made this and carved the horimono)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 35.6cm (1 Shaku, 1 sun, 7 bu, 5 rin)

Curvature: 0.4cm (1 bu, 2 rin)

Kashima Susumu

There are many *Wakizashi* made in the Nanbokucho period with wide *mihaba*, a thin *kasane* and some curvature. Within Bizen blades made by Kanemitsu, Nagayoshi, Motoshige, Morikage and so forth the same characteristic shape can be seen.

This *wakizashi* has a wide *mihaba*, a fairly thin *kasane* and some curvature. The *hada* is tight, and it displays *utsuri* clearly. The *hamon* is a mix of *notare* and *ko-gunome* with *ko-ashi*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and clear with abundant *ko-nie*. On the *omote* is a carving of a *bonji* and a *suken*. On the *ura* is a *bonji* and *gomabashi*.

This *wakizashi* is a copy of a blade made by the second generation Kanemitsu around the Enbun period. I feel it is as if you are looking at the real workmanship of Enbun Kanemitsu.

Ono Yoshimitsu

A *notare hamon* is as difficult on a big *tachi* as it is on a short *tanto*. A *hira-zukuri ko-wakizashi* with a gentle *hamon* needs some balance and lift. A simple *suken* and *bonji horimono* go in harmony with the *hamon* and improve the appearance.

Polished by Okisato Fujishiro
Habaki by Nakamura Saido
Shirosaya by Hiroi Akihisa

15.

O-dachi (Very long sword))

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 98.2cm (3 Shaku, 2 sun, 4 bu)

Curvature: 3.8cm (1 sun, 2 bu, 5 rin)

Kashima Susumu

Nanbokucho Bizen Osafune smiths Kanemitsu and Chogi are both famous for producing *o-dachi*. Chogi's workmanship is quite different to Kanemitsu. Within Bizen blades, it is said that Chogi makes the most un-Bizen like.

This *o-dachi* has a wide *mihaba* with a deep curvature. The *kasane* is thick, and it has a large point section. The forging of the *hada* is fine and very tight with a feeling of *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a *notare*-style mix of *gunome-choji* and *gunome*, with *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight, and clear. The *gunome boshi* has a *saki-togari* feel and *kaeri*. It has a *bo-hi* on both sides that finishes in *kaki-nagashi*.

This *o-dachi* is the longest blade in this exhibition. The composition of the *hamon* is like Chogi. However it is a little different, because the *nioi-guchi* is a little tighter than the original. I feel a little more practice of Chogi's techniques is required.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Chogi and Kanemitsu were the two best Bizen smiths during the Nanbokucho period. More so than Kanemitsu, Chogi made many strong *nie-deki* blades known as *so-den Bizen*. Among the many works of Chogi, there are many *nioi-deki* blades with a very distinct *choji*. I tried to recreate that kind of *choji* here. To date, this is the largest blade that I have ever made.

Polished by Kobayashi Hisao
Habaki by Nakamura Saido
Shirosaya by Sakai Toshifumi

16.

Wakizashi (Short sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu Saku
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen aki kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Fall 1991)

Length: 33.7cm (1 Shaku, 1 sun, 1 bu)

Curvature: 0.4cm (1 bu, 3 rin)

Kashima Susumu

Nanbokucho Bitchu Aoe smiths prospered during middle Enbun period. Their workmanship was a flamboyant pointed *saka-choji midare*.

This *wakizashi* has a wide *mihaba*, and the *kasane* is quite thin. It has some curvature. The forging is quite a prominent *itame-hada*, and *utsuri* can be seen. The *hamon* is *saka-choji midare*, with *saka-ashi* mixed in. The *hamon* is a clear deep *nioi* with *ko-nie*. The *boshi* on the *omote* is almost pointed, whilst the *ura* is in *ko-maru*.

As a specialist in *juka-choji*, Ono Yoshimitsu adheres to the original works well with this Sue-Aoe piece. The *midare* on both sides differs somewhat, but every trait of the school from this period can be seen.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This not a Bizen-to, however, the works from the Bizen province had a big influence on other schools and I wanted to make one sword from one of those provinces.

Good form *saka-choji* are harder to make on short *hira-zukuri tanto* than on *tachi* and *katana*. Recently, *saka-choji ko-wakizashi* and *tanto* have become popular orders.

Polished by Fujimoto Terutoyo

Habaki by Yao Toshinori

Shirosaya by Kubo Junichi

17.

Tachi (Long sword))

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen haru kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Spring 1991)

Length: 76.4cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 2 bu)

Curvature: 2.9cm (9 bu, 6 rin)

Kashima Susumu

The representative smiths of Osafune in the Oei period were Morimitsu and Kanemitsu. As well as *tachi*, they produced many *tanto* and *wakizashi*.

This *tachi* has a fairly wide *mihaba*, and is quite long with *saki-zori* curvature. The forging is prominent, with *ji-nie*. The *hamon* has *yamagata koshi no haraita choji* mixed with *gunome*. It has a plentiful mix of *ko-ashi* and *yo*. In *nioi-deki*, the *nioi-guchi* is clear. The *midare-komi boshi* is almost pointed with *kaeri*. The characteristics of Morimitsu have been well-perceived, meeting its aim of emulating an Oei period Morimitsu production.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This *tachi*'s period is the peaceful era when the northern and southern courts rejoined after years of separation in the Nanbokucho period. Within the sword world, it is said that this was a big turning point in sword manufacturing techniques.

I decided make this blade with a standard Kamakura period shape, but with a Nanbokucho style *notare hamon*.

Polished by Sasaki Takushi
Habaki by Nakamura Saido
Shirosaya by Sakai Toshifumi

18.

Wakizashi (*Short sword*)

Inscription:

Front: **Etchigo (no) Kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru**
(*Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata*)

Back: **Heisei san nen haru kissho bi**
(*An auspicious day in Spring 1991*)

Length: **47.0cm (1 Shaku, 5 sun, 5 bu)**

Curvature: **1.4cm (4 bu, 7 rin)**

Kashima Susumu

This *wakizashi* is a part of a pair with the previous *tachi*. The shape is more like a *katana* in construction. The *hada* is very tight, the *hamon* is a mix of *yamagata-choji* and *gunome* with long *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is bright and clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* rising to a point with *kaeri*. It displays the characteristics of Oei-Bizen blades well.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This blade is the short sword of a pair. There are many *shinogi-zukuri wakizashi* still extant from the Oei period. Until now I have not taken many orders for *1 Shaku 5 sun* (45 cm) *shinogi-zukuri wakizashi*. As I had no good samples to copy, it was fairly difficult.

Polished by Sasaki Takushi
Habaki by Nakamura Saido
Shirasaya by Sakai Toshifumi

19.

Wakizashi (*Short sword*)

Inscription:

Front: **Yoshimitsu seitan kore (wo) tsukuru**
 (*Yoshimitsu diligently made this*)
 Horimono dō saku
 (*and carved the horimono*)

Back: **Heisei san nen haru kissho bi**
 (*An auspicious day in Spring 1991*)

Length: **47.3cm (1 Shaku, 5 sun, 6 bu)**

Curvature: **0.9cm (3 bu)**

Kashima Susumu

As well as Oei-Bizen *tachi*, many *tanto*, *hira-zukuri* and *shinogi-zukuri wakizashi* can be seen. Among these there are famous hira-zukuri wakizashi blades by Morimitsu and Kanemitsu.

This *wakizashi* is a *hira-zukuri, sunobi-ko-wakizashi*. The forging is very tight and it displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is *nioi-deki* with *koshi no haraita gunome-choji*. The lower half has *tobi-yaki* mixed in with plenty of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* nearly coming to a point with *kaeri*. The *horimono* on the *omote* is a *bonji* and a *suken*, with a *bonji* and a *koshi-hi* on the *ura*.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This *hira-zukuri wakizashi* has the shape and extended length of *sunobe-tanto* of the Nabokucho period.

Polished by Okisato Fujishiro

Habaki by Nakamura Saido

Shirasaya by Takayama Kazuyuki

20.

Katana (*Long sword*)

Inscription:

Front: Rin Byō Tō Sha Kai Jin Retsu Zai Zen

(*Incantation*)

Yoshimitsu hori dō saku

(*Yoshimitsu made this and carved the horimono*)

Back: Heisei san nen haru kissho bi

(*An auspicious day in Spring 1991*)

Length: 61.5cm (2 Shaku, 3 bu)

Curvature: 1.4cm (4 bu, 7 rin)

Kashima Susumu

One of the best Osafune smiths during the Muromachi period was Katsumitsu.

This *katana*'s *mihaba* is standard, with *saki-zori*. The *hada* is tightly forged, with deep *ji-nie*. The *hamon*'s *koshi no haraita* pattern is mixed with *choji* and *gunome* and has *ko-ashi* and *yo*. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* that is almost pointed with *kaeri*. There is a *horimono* on both sides of the blade of a *bonji* and a *bo-hi*.

This *blade* has a typical *uchigatana* design: it is *saki-zori* with a short *nakago*. The forging is quite prominent and the *hamon* has the characteristic *gunome*—all the marks of Katsumitsu.

It has a nine-character inscription of (*Rin Byō Tō Sha Kai Jin Retsu Zai Zen*) known as *kuji*. This is a chant of encouragement for morale shouted by the frontline ranks of warriors of the sengoku period who were about to go into battle.

Ono Yoshimitsu

The best swords from the end of the old swords period are the Sue-Bizen swords. At just over 2 shaku (60 cm), this *katana* is based on the shape and *hamon* of Katsumitsu.

Looking from the standpoint of Sue-Bizen blades, you can feel the same kind of charm of the Kamakura Ichimonji *tachi*. However, today there is little demand for custom length blades.

The next *katana* was made at standard length. For Ichimonji *tachi koshirae*, finding fittings of the original period is problematic, so they usually have to be made. For Muromachi period mountings however, using old fittings from the Muromachi and Edo

periods holds lots of appeal. *Katana koshirae* when first produced have matching *tsuba*, *menuki*, *kozuka*, *kogai*, so they probably weren't called *tosogu* then.

Polished by Harada Yuji
Habaki by Hotei Choichi
Shirosaya by

21.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Etchigo kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru**
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Mune: **Jitouan Senshu kore (wo) horu**
(Horimono by Jitouan Senshu)

Back: **Heisei san nen haru kissho bi**
(An auspicious day in Spring 1991)

Length: **70.6cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 3 bu)**

Curvature: **2.0cm (6 bu, 8 rin)**

Kashima Susumu

Among the wide Sue-Bizen works, Katsumitsu and Sukesada 's introductory works are excellent. Katsumitsu's workmanship is a remarkably flamboyant mix of *gunome* and *choji*.

This *hira-zukuri katana* is quite long with a thick *kasane*, and is fairly *saki-zori*. The forging is very tight, and it displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a mix of *gunome* and *choji*, and some *koshi-haraki* in places with a mix of *gunome* and much *yo* and *ashi*. The *nioi-guchi* is clear. The *boshi* is *gunome* and almost comes to a point, but turns into *ko-maru*. The *horimono* on the *omote* is a *bo-hi* with a *soe-hi* and *shin-n- kurikara*. The *ura* has a *bo-hi* with a *soe-hi* and the carved characters for '*Hachiman Diabosatsu*'.

Although this *katana* is *hira-zukuri*, it also has a *yokote*. This was one of the popular shapes of the Muromachi period. Ono Yoshimitsu was aiming for the style of Jirou Saemon no Jo Katsumitsu, and in all honesty he has done a marvellous job. It is said that Katsumitsu's workmanship resembled the *juka-choji midare* of the Fukuoka Ichimonji school of the Kamakura period. The *horimono* was carved by Kokeiguchi Senshu.

Ono Yoshimitsu

It is thought that blades made in *hira-zukuri* with a *yokote* were not made at the start of the sengoku period.

The sengoku period was the period of toppling one's lord. One took the chance of making a name for oneself. It was during this warring period that many new ideas came about. Breaking away from the traditions of older era, lots of new blade shapes appeared in this period.

The metalwork for this *katana's koshirae* was made to compliment the color of the lacquer of the scabbard.

Polished by Usuki Yoshihiko
Habaki by Hotei Choichi
Shirosaya by Hiroi Akihisa

22.

Tanto (Dagger)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) Kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen haru kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Spring 1991)

Length: 21.9cm (7 sun, 2 bu, 3 rin)

Curvature: 0.0

Kashima Susumu

Tanto of the Muromachi period were short with a thick *kasane* and a slight inward curve in the front section. It has an effective shape for thrusting or stabbing. This kind of *tanto* is called 'yoroi-doshi'. *Moroha-zukuri tanto* were also introduced in this period.

This *tanto* is *hira-zukuri* with no curvature. It has a *thick kasane* of about 3 bu (0.9 cm) in the *yoroi-doshi* shape. It is forged finely and tightly and displays *nie-utsuri*. The *hamon* has a tight *nioi-guchi* with *koshi-haraita gunome*, *choji* and *ashi*. The *boshi* is *midare komi*, almost *togari* with *kaeri*. It has a *koshi-hi* carved on the *omote* and *gomabashi* on the *ura*.

This *tanto* is a thick, resilient blade, and you can see the *hamon* has good Sue-Bizen form.

Ono Yoshimitsu

This *tanto* is short with a thick *kasane*. Many stout unbending *tanto* were made during the sengoku period for stabbing up through the armor. These were called ‘*yoroi doshi tanto*’.

It is difficult to forge thick blades. It is also difficult to get a high *hamon* on them. However, this *tanto* has a good high *hamon*.

Polished by Honma Masatoshi

Habaki by Sawada Mitsutoshi

Shirosaya by Sakai Toshifumi

23.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) Kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu hori dō saku
(Yoshimitsu made and carved this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen haru kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Spring 1991)

Length: 70.0cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 1 bu)

Curvature: 2.4cm (7 bu, 8 rin)

Kashima Susumu

Among the Sue-Bizen productions there are some special order blades. Whereas in modern times the tradition of swordmaking is considered art, these blades were made more so for practical use. Katsumitsu and Sukesada are the representational smiths of this period.

This *katana* has a wide *haba* and a large point section. The *shinogi-ji* is steep with a thin *kasane*, and it is forged tightly. The *hamon* has *koshi-haraki gunome* and *choji*, with lots of *ashi* and *yo* mixed in. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and very clear. The *boshi* is *gunome* with a pointed tip. As an *uchigatana* it is splendid. I feel the shape mirrors the work of Sukesada, with a flamboyantly mixed *hamon* of *choji* and *gunome*.

Ono Yoshimitsu

With a thin *kasane*, a high *shinogi*, and a wide *mihaba*, the shape of the blade looks as though it will cut by any means. Made from battle experience, you can feel the earnestness of this blade.

Polished by Kobayashi Hisao
Habaki by Nakamura Saido
Shirosaya by Hiroi Akihisa

24.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Etchigo (no) Kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru**
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: **Kirimono Jitouan**
(Carving by Jitouan)

Heisei san nen haru kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Spring 1991)

Length: **71.2cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 5 bu)**

Curvature: **2.3cm (7 bu, 5 rin)**

Kashima Susumu

Some of the characteristics of the Sue-Bizen works, are the split *gunome* 'kani no tsume' (crabs claw) *midare*, *hiro-suguha*, *o-notare* and *hitatsura* blades.

This *katana* is a little longer than usual with a wide *haba*, a thick *kasane* and *saki-zori*. The forging of the *hada* is quite prominent with *ko-nie*. The *hamon* is a mix of *notare*, *choji* and *gunome* with lots of *ko-ashi* and *yo* mixed in. The *nioi-guchi* on the whole is rather subtle. There is a *bo-hi* on both sides of the blade. On the *omote*, there is also a *So no Kurikara*, whilst on the reverse there is the carved inscription *Hachiman Dai Bosatsu*.

This *katana* completely captures the work of Yosozaemon no Jo Sukesada. The boldly cut *horimono* was by the hand of Kokeiguchi Senshu. The carving compliments the blade beautifully.

Ono Yoshimitsu

On this blade the *hamon* starts out low, like an extended *yakidashi*, then becomes rhythmic like a *hadori* polish. This kind of *hamon* was also constructed in the opposite direction, undulating from the *moto*, then becoming low from the mid-point right up to the *kissaki*. This kind of *hamon* was devised by smiths of the Sengoku Period. Before this period, *hamon* of this nature were never seen.

Polished by Okonogi Takeshi

Habaki by Nakamura Saido
Shirosaya by Sakai Toshifumi
25.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) Kuni (ni) oite Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo Province- Niigata)

Back: Heisei gannen haru kissho bi
(An auspicious day in Spring 1989)

Length: 71.5cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 6 bu)

Curvature: 1.5cm (5 bu)

Kashima Susumu

The late Muromachi period is synonymous with Sue-Bizen blades. There were *shinogi-zukuri* blades, *hira-zukuri* and *moroha-zukuri* blades. There are still quite a few extant Yosozaemon no jo Sukesada *hitatsura moroha-zukuri* blades.

This *katana* is an unusual *shobu-zukuri* (without *yokote*). The *mihaba* is wide and the *hamon* is a mix of *choji* and *juka-choji* with some *tobiyaki*. Inside the *ha* are plenty of *yo* and *ashi*. The *nioi-guchi* feels tight. The *boshi* is *midare-komi*, with a feeling of *saki-togari* and a long *kaeri*. It displays the characteristics of Sue-Bizen blades, but the *hamon* is a bit more flamboyant than the usual Sue-Bizen style.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Sue-Bizen *katana* sometimes can be seen to display a *hitatsura hamon*. In this case, I exchanged it for my own style of *hitatsura*.

This *hamon*'s beauty lies in the *tobiyaki*. I intended to put in big *tobiyaki*, but they came out small. It did not turn out as I intended. As for the shape, I intended to add *mune-yaki* as a calculation of the curve, but this failed too.

This was my first experiment with *shobu-zukuri*, and *hitatsura*.

Polished by Inutsuka
Habaki by Akano Eichi
Shirosaya by Hirato Koichi

26.

Tanto: Moroha-zukkuri

(Dagger with a cutting edge on both sides of the blade)

Inscription:

Front: Tōtō (no) ju nin Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru

(Yoshimitsu, resident of Tokyo made this)

Back: Heisei san nen haru kissho bi

(An auspicious day in Spring 1991)

Length: 24.9cm (8 sun, 2 bu, 3 rin)

Curvature: 0.0

Kashima Susumu

Moroha-zukuri (blades with a cutting edge on both sides) *tanto* were popular during the Muromachi period. They have a ridge down the middle of the blade that gives it a left and right cutting edge. There were many of these blades made by the Sue-Bizen and Sue-Seki schools.

This *tanto* is quite *saki-zori* and is very well balanced. The *hada* is well forged with a *masame* feeling. The *hamon* is a mix of *suguha* and *ko-gunome* with lots of *ko-nie* and *sunagashi*. Among the Sue-Bizen smiths many made *moroha-zukuri*, but I think this *tanto* is based on the workmanship of Sukesada or Tadamitsu.

Ono Yoshimitsu

Almost *ken* shaped, *moroha-zukuri tanto* are characteristic of the Muromachi period. Until the Muromachi period, I believe that smiths had not developed any new blade shapes.

In this past three years, since deciding on the theme of “Pursuing Koto Bizen”, I decided to try to make swords with typical shapes from each of the historical periods: Heian, Kamakura, Nanbokuchō and Muromachi. If I had made a mistake, and had to skip a period that would have looked very strange, so I could not relax until every sword was polished and completely finished.

At times this project has been quite stressful, but it has left me with some wonderful memories.

Polished by Hashimoto Kenyo

Habaki by Sawada Mitsutoshi
Shirosaya by Sakai Toshifumi
27.

Kuro urushi aikuchi uchigatana goshirae (Yamatorige koshirae utsushi—Dai roku zuhan tachi no koshirae)
(Black lacquered aikuchi uchigatana mountings) (Yamatorige mountings replica)

This is a replication of the mountings for the Ichimonji *tachi* 'Yamatorige'. The original *koshirae* was produced in the late Muromachi period. It has the unique characteristic of not having a *tsuba*. With the exception of the Uesugi family, this style of *koshirae* is quite rare. It is also thought that Uesugi Kenshin liked the works of Kagekatsu.

The handle is bound in indigo leather, the scabbard is black lacquer, and the *menuki* are *shakudo* Tigers. The *kogai* and *kozuka* are a matching set in *shakudo nanako* with a wild tiger in high inlaid relief. This is a faithful copy of the original. The handcrafted metalwork was by Mr. Hotei Choichi. The rest was under the guidance of Mr. Maeda Kosaku.

Koshirae by Maeda Kosaku
Kanagu by Hotei Choichi
Sageo by Watanabe Toshio

28.

Kuro urushi uchigatana goshirae (Sukezane goshirae utsushi—Dai hachi zuhan tachi no koshirae)
(Black Lacquered Uchigatana Mountings) (Sukezane Mountings Replica)

The original *koshirae* rests in the Toshogu repository at Nikko shrine, Tochigi prefecture. It is the *koshirae* for the national treasure sword Nikko Sukezane that belonged to *Shogun* Ieyasu Tokugawa. The scabbard is finely lacquered. The handle is leather bound and has a *sukashii tsuba* with a four-leaf design. The *menuki* are *shakudo* of three or four tadpoles. Although this simple and graceful *koshirae* is in a later period mounting style than the blade, it is still called Sukezane Koshirae.

The *kozuka*, *kogai* and *menuki* differ from the originals on this *uchigatana* mounting. The *tsuba* also differs, as it is one of Ono Yoshimitsu's own productions.

Koshirae Shitaji by Hiroi Akihisa
Seppa, Shitodome, Fuchi by Miyajima Hiroshi
Tsuba by Ono Yoshimitsu
Lacquer work by Kawanobe Tomoaki
Tsuka-maki by Watanabe Toshio
Sageo Fukai Riichi

29.

Shu urushi uchigata goshirae—Dai niju ichi zuhan katana no koshirae
(*Vermilion Lacquered Uchigata Mountings*)

Each of the modern day *uchigatana koshirae* makers has their own area of production. The *tsuba*, *kozuka*, *kogai kurikata*, the *uragawa*, *kojiri* and so forth, are handmade by Ono Yoshimitsu and the nearby Metalworking school of Sawada Mitsutoshi. On the *shakudo* fittings every single tadpole can be seen in detail.

Koshirae Shitaji by Sakai Toshifumi
Tosokanagu Sawada Mitsutoshi
Seppa, Shitodome by Hotei Choichi
Lacquer work by Koyama Mitsuhide
Tsuka-maki by Watanabe Toshio

Sakuto no Ayumi – The Ayumi Chronology

1.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Yoshifusa (ni) Narau - Ono Yoshimitsu tsukuru**
(Replica of Yoshifusa- Made by Ono Yoshimitsu)

Mune: **Kobayashi Mitsuo shi (no) Tame (ni)**
(For Mr Mitsuo Kobayashi)

Back: **Showa goju-nen haru**
(Spring 1975)

Length: **75.2cm (2 shaku, 4 sun, 8 bu)**

Curvature: **3.2cm (1 sun, 5 rin)**

This blade received the Award for Excellence at the 11th Shinsaku-meitoten

This is a modern production of the national treasure *tachi* by Yoshifusa. Ono Yoshimitsu has splendidly recreated the shape of this *tachi*, the original of which was an heirloom of the Tokugawa shogunate family. The forging is quite prominent and displays a pale *utsuri*. The *hamon* has round-headed *choji* mixed with *ko-choji* and some *gunome*. Whilst the *nioi* goes quite deep, the *nioi-guchi* is tight. The *boshi* on the *omote* is *suguha* in *komaru*, whilst the *ura* is *midari-komi* that goes almost to a point. This blade displays the typical workmanship and characteristics of the Ichimonji smith Yoshifusa of the Kamakura period.

2.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Ichimonji Yoshifusa no i - Ono Yoshimitsu saku**
(Essence of Ichimonji Yoshifusa- Made by Ono Yoshimitsu)

Mune: **Ito Kazunari judai Yorishomo Noshu Ichiyajo henju**
(For the heirs of Mr Ito Kazunari, resident of Yorishomo- Gifu prefecture in the vicinity of Ichiya castle)

Back: **Showa goju ichi nen haru**
(Spring 1976)

Length: **79.1cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 1 bu)**

Curvature: 3.4cm (1 sun, 1 bu)

This blade received the Award for Effort at the 12th Shinsaku-meitoten

This splendid blade has a wide *haba* with a deep curvature in the middle. It has an *ikubi-kissaki*. The forging is very tight and displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a deep *nioi choji-midare* mixed with *Ofusa choji* and *gunome*. On the whole the *ashi* and *yo* are magnificent. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* and somewhat pointed.

The workmanship of Yoshifusa within the Ichimonji school has a particular splendor. This *tachi* exhibits these special flamboyant characteristics well, especially in the beauty of the activities within the *ha*.

3.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: (Bonji) (Ichi) Ito Kazunari judai Yorishomo Noshu Ichiyajo henju
(Sankrit carving) (For the heirs of Ito Kazunari, resident of Yorishomo, Ichiyajo in Gifu)

Mune: Etchigo (no) kuni ju Ono Yoshimitsu saku Showa goju ni nen haru
(Made by Ono Yoshimitsu, resident of Etchigo) (Spring 1977)

Back: Hori onajiku kore (wo) tsukuru
(and carved this Horimono)

Length: 70.9cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 4 bu)

Curvature: 3.1cm (1 sun, 2 rin)

This blade received the Award for Effort at the 13th Shinsaku-meitoten

This blade has a wide *mihaba* with a deep curvature and *fumbari* with an *ikubi-kissaki*. The *hada* is a tightly forged *ko-itame* with fine *ji-nie* and a gentle but prominent *utsuri*. The *hamon* is deep *nioi* with a mix of *choji-midare* and *juka-choji* and has lots of *ashi* and *yo*. On the lower half of the blade, the *hamon* swells and falls erratically. The *nioi-guchi* is on the whole soft and gentle.

This *tachi* is a recreation of an Ichimonji sword given to Okudaira Nobumasa by Oda Nobunaga at the battle of Nagashino in 1575 for his patience in enduring long hardships. With only a few troops under his command, Nobumasa had withstood a long siege at his castle by Takeda Katsuyori's army. This recreation is a little lacking in the power of the original. This can be seen in places where it has been exchanged with the gentleness of Ono san's personality.

4.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Araiso (ni) Narau Ono Yoshimitsu saku
(Replica of Araiso Made by Ono Yoshimitsu)

Mune: Shiraishi Nosei judai Yorishomo Noshu Ogakijo henju
(Made for heirs of the Shiraishi Nosei, of Yorishomo, Gifu prefecture in the vicinity of Ogaki castle)

Back: Showa goju san nen haru
(Spring 1978)

Length: 70.1cm (2 Shaku, 3 sun, 1 bu)

Curvature: 1.5cm (5 bu)

This blade received the Award for Effort at the 14th Shinsaku-meitoten

This blade is a recreation of a Nanbokucho period Bitchu Aoe katana called Araiso (reefy shore). It has the shape of an *o-suriage* blade, a wide *haba* with a thin *kasane* and a shallow curvature. The *hada* is a tightly forged *ko-itame*. The *hamon* is a large *nioi-deki*, *saka choji-midare*, with *gunome* mixed in and plenty of *saka-ashi* and some *yo*. The *boshi* is *gunome* with *saki-togari* and a *turn-back*. A *bo-hi* has been carved on both sides. This *katana* faithfully recreates the characteristic flamboyant *saka-choji midare* of the Nanbokucho Aoe smiths.

5.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni ju Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Ono Yoshimitsu, Resident of Etchigo-Niigata, made this)
Showa goju go nen haru
(Spring 1980)

Back: Takaki Shigeo judai Yorishomo Noshu Okachiyama suso henju
(Made for the heirs of Takaki Shigeo of Yorishomo, Gifu Prefecture at the foot of Okachi Mountain)

Length: 77.2cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 5 bu)

Curvature: 2.8cm (9 bu)

This blade received the Award for Effort at the 16th Shinsaku-meitoten

The workmanship of the mid-Kamakura Ichimonji school has many blades that are magnificently constructed. With a wide *haba* and grandiose *choji*-themed *hamon* they have lots of personality.

This *tachi* has a wide *mihaba* and a thick *kasane* in a strong *koshi-zori*. The *hada* is quite prominent. The *hamon* is like a range of mountains composed of large and small *gunome* and *choji* with plenty of *ashi* and *yo* mixed in. The *nioi-guchi* is very tight and clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* that almost comes to a point with a turn-back.

This is not the workmanship of a particular smith of the school, but it can be said to be a sound recreation of Ichimonji work of the period.

6.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) Kuni Ono Yoshimitsu hori dō saku
(Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata, made this and carved the horimono)

Back: Showa goju roku nen haru
(Spring 1981)
Kawabata Terutaka shi motome (ni) ojiru
(Special order by Mr. Terutaka Kawabata)

Length: 69.5cm (2 Shaku, 2 sun, 9 bu, 5 rin)

Curvature: 2.5cm (8 bu)

This blade received the Award for Excellence at the 17th Shinsaku-meitoten

The original sword, called the ‘*Suijingiri*’, belonged to the Uesugi family. It was inscribed Bishu Osafune Ju Kanemitsu and dated a day in November, 2nd year of Kanei (1343). During this period not many long, *hira-zukuri uchigatana* were made. This sword is among the 35 choice swords as listed by Uesugi Kagekatsu.

This *katana* has a wide *mihaba*, the *kasane* is quite thick and it has a strong *saki-zori* shape. It has an *itame-hada* with *ji-nie* and a feeling of *utsuri*. The *hamon*, whilst based on *suguha*, is *gunome* with some *saka-gunome*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight with *ko-nie* in places and plenty of *ko-ashi*. The *boshi* is an almost pointed *ko-maru*. On the *omote* there is a confident carving of a *sankozuka-ken*, whilst on the *ura* there is a *bonji*. On the whole, it adheres the original well. The *ji-testu* looks old, and the *hamon* is splendid. The *ji* and the *ha* also have the flavor of the original.

7.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Takamatsu (no) Miya sho, Etchigo (no) kuni Ono Yoshimitsu saku**
(Prince Takamatsu Award, Made by Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: **Showa goju shichi nen haru**
(Spring 1982)

Length: **75.9cm (2 Shaku, 5 sun, 5 rin)**

Curvature: **3.1cm (1 sun)**

This blade received the Prince Takamatsu Award at the 18th Shinsaku-meitoten

This *tachi* was Ono Yoshimitsu's first blade to win the Prince Takamatsu Award. It has a wide *haba*. The *mihaba*, of the upper part of the blade, is also wide displaying a splendid *tachi sugata*. The *hada* is prominent with *ji-nie* and *utsuri*. The *hamon* is made up of lots of large mountain ranges of *choji* mixed with *juka-choji* in a smokey *nioi-deki* with *ko-nie* and plenty of *nioi-ashi* giving it a splendorous appearance. The *boshi* is a gentle *midare-komi*.

This *tachi* is not a copy of a Bizen *meito*, but a sincere effort by the smith to recreate the feeling of the Kamakura Bizen Ichimonji school that bloomed into this splendid blade.

8.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Etchigo (no) kuni Ono Yoshimitsu tsukuru**
(Made by Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata)

Mune: **Bunkacho-Chokanshō Jushōsaku Kondo Shigeru shi (no) tame (ni)**
(Director of Cultural Affairs Award winning sword - Made for Mr. Kondo Shigeru)

Back: **Showa goju hachi nen haru**
(Spring 1983)

Length: **75.5cm (2 Shaku, 4 sun, 9 bu)**

Curvature: **3.2cm (1 sun, 5 rin)**

This blade received the Director of Cultural Affairs Award at the 19th Shinsaku-meitoten.

This blade has a wide *haba* and a thick *kasane* and is stout in appearance. The forging is very fine, with fine *ji-nie*. The *hamon* is a deep *nioi* mix of *choji* and *juka-choji* with lots of *ashi* and *yo* sprinkled throughout. The *nioi-guchi* is very clear and bright. The *boshi* is *ko-gunome* that nearly comes to a point before turning back.

This *tachi* is somewhat similar to the previous blade, however, there is a wealth of activity going on with lots of exchange of larger and smaller *choji* within this flamboyant *choji-midare*. In addition to this, the beauty of this *choji-midare* is said to be of the highest quality and flows along the blade like poetry.

9.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo made this)

Back: Takamatsu (no) Miya sho jushōsaku Showa goju (hachi-ichi) kyunen haru

(The Prince Takamatsu Award Winning sword Spring 1984)

Saito Ke judai (no) Tame (ni)
(Made for the Successive generations of the Saito family)

Length: 80.1cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 4 bu, 5 rin)

Curvature: 3.1cm (1 sun)

This blade received the Prince Takamatsu Award at the 20th Shinsaku-meitoten

This blade is a recreation of the National Treasure sword in the collection of the Uesugi family called the ‘*Yamatorige*’ (also known as ‘*Sanchomo*’). The original is an unsigned *tachi* still in its original length. However, I think the maker may have taken lessons from the smiths who were signing only with the ‘*ichi*’ character during this period. This magnificent *tachi* is extremely long at 78.9cm and the depth of the curvature is 3.2cm. This *tachi* is listed among the 35 choice swords of Uesugi Kagekatsu, who was something of a connoisseur. It is recorded in his own handwriting as ‘*Yama-teu-mau*’. It is called ‘*Yamatorige*’, because the *hamon* resembles the feathers of a mountain pheasant.

It can be said that this *tachi* is Ono Yoshimitsu’s triumph after much hardship. This long *tachi* has a magnificent shape with a thick *kasane* and a large commanding *kissaki*. The *hada* is very fine and the *hamon* is a mix of *juka-choji* with *choji-midare* and has lots of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is bright and clear. The *boshi* on the *omote* is *midare-komi*, almost coming to a point, whilst the *ura* is *ko-maru* in style with a turn-back.

It can be said that Ono Yoshimitsu's endeavour to produce *juka-choji* had come to an end. The flamboyance in this *hamon* has lots of charm. The *hamon* breathes life and can be called a thing of purity and clear beauty, Ono Yoshimitsu is the only smith in the world who displays such an accomplishment.

10.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni Ono Yoshimitsu Saku

(Made by Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: Takamatsu (no) Miya sho jushō sakuhin Showa rokuju nen haru

(The Prince Takamatsu Award Winning sword—Spring 1985)

Length: 80.6cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 6 bu)

Curvature: 2.6cm (8 bu, 8 rin)

This blade received the Prince Takamatsu Award at the 21st Shinsaku-meitoten

Following the previous year's Prince Takamatsu Award winning sword, this blade has a free flowing flamboyant *choji-midare*, and has a nobleness that could be called the ultimate *juka-choji*.

With a wide *haba*, this blade is magnificently constructed: the *kissaki* is large, the forging is very fine and the *hamon* is a mix of *choji* and *juka-choji* with plenty of *ashi* and *yo*. The tight *nioi-guchi* is bright and clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* almost coming to a point before turning back. There is a *bo-hi* on both sides of the blade.

If this blade had a name it would be called 'Gosokare' (Magnificent elegance). The overlapping layers of *choji* form into *juka-choji*. One can see the smith's confidence and mastery of *choji-midare* in the poetic breath of the *juka-choji*.

11.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni Ono Yoshimitsu saku

(Made by Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: Takamatsu (no) Miya sho jushōsaku Showa rokuju ichi nen haru

(The Prince Takamatsu Award Winning sword—Spring 1987)

Length: 79.2cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 1 bu, 5 rin)

Curvature: 3.3cm (1 sun, 1 bu)

This blade received the Prince Takamatsu Award at the 22nd Shinsaku-meitoten.

This blade has a wide *haba*, deep curvature with pronounced *fumbari* and an *ikubi-kissaki*. The *hada* is very tight, with fine *ji-nie*. The *hamon* is *choji-midare* mixed with *juka-choji*, with *ashi* and *yo* sprinkled liberally throughout and *tobi-yaki* in places. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* that rises to a point and then turns back.

This splendid *tachi*, with its flamboyant *juka-choji*, is a lovely piece. The beauty of this work can be seen in the excellent match of his skill and character. Although a *juka-choji hamon* is complicated and flamboyant by nature, the humbleness of the smith shines through and the *hamon* has leisurely feel to it.

12.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Made by Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: Takamatsu (no) Miya sho jushōsaku Showa goju rokuju ni nen haru
(The Prince Takamatsu Award Winning Sword Spring 1984)
Watanabe Ke judai
(Made for the Successive Generations of the Watanabe family)

Length: 80.1cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 4 bu, 5 rin)

Curvature: 3.1cm (1 sun)

This blade received the Prince Takamatsu Award at the 23rd Shinsaku-meitoten.

This is another recreation of the ‘*Yamatorige*’. It can be said that no two ‘*Yamatorige*’ are identical. The smith’s target in this case is to recreate a blade of a common nature. This *tachi* has a wide *mihaba* and a thick *kasane*, with an *ikubi-kissaki*. This long blade has a splendid shape with a *ko-itame hada*. The *hamon* is a mix of *o-choji* and *choji* becoming *juka-choji* with plenty of *ashi*, *yo* and *tobi-yaki*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* coming almost to a point before turning back. There is a *bo-hi* carved on both sides.

Among the many copies of the ‘*Yamatorige*’, this *tachi* is of the highest quality and exhuberance. The heads of the *hamon* come right up to the *shinogi* along with the

tobiyaki. There are *nioi-ashi* and *yo* liberally sprinkled throughout adding to the flamboyance. You can see the delightful expression of the *hamon* at the time of the excellent union of the clay, fire and steel.

13.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) Kuni Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Made by Ono Yoshimitsu of Etchigo-Niigata prefecture)

Back: Showa rokuju san nen haru
(Spring 1988)

Length: 79.1cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 1 bu)

Curvature: 3.3cm (1 sun, 1 bu)

This blade was displayed in the mukansa category at the 24th Shinsaku-meitoten

This blade was Ono Yoshimitsu's first entry as a member of the *mukansa* category.

Among the works of the Ichimonji, the blades with the largest *choji-midare* are seen signed with the single 'ichi' character. Whilst the *Yamatorige* is an unsigned blade, I believe it is akin to this kind of Ichimonji work. On first inspection of this *tachi*, whilst having an unrestrained look about it, is a result of Ono Yoshimitsu's pursuit for a prevailing sense of beauty.

It has a wide *mihaba*, a typical deep *koshi-zori tachi sugata* with *fumbari* ending with an *ikubi-kissaki*. The *hada* is well forged. The *hamon* is an *o-choji-midare*, turning into *juka-choji* with plenty of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and clear. The *boshi* is *ko-maru* with a turn-back. There is also a *bo-hi* carved on both sides of the blade.

Ono Yoshimitsu san has produced several copies of the *Yamatorige*. However, the *choji* of this *tachi* are unrestricted and have been quenched with complete confidence.

14.

Katana (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Ono Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: **Heisei gannen haru**
(Spring 1989)

Length: **73.8cm (2 Shaku, 4 sun, 3 bu, 5 rin)**

Curvature: **2.2cm (7 bu)**

This blade was displayed in the mukansa category at the 25th Shinsaku-meitoten.

This sword has a splendid shape with a wide *mihaba* the full length of the blade. It has a tightly forged *ko-itame hada*, and displays *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a mix of *o-choji* and *juka-choji midare*, with lots of *ashi* and *yo*. There is also a very small amount of *sunagashi* and the *nioi-guchi* is clear. The *boshi* is *midare-komi* that almost comes to a point before turning back. There is a *bo-hi* carved on both sides of the blade.

This is Ono Yoshimitsu's forte—recreating the flamboyant works of the Ichimonji. The *hada* is a fine, elaborate *ko-itame* with a pale but defined *utsuri*. The *hamon* is a mix of *juka-choji* and grandiose *o-choji midare* with lots of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is bright and clear. As an Ichimonji work, this blade shows Ono's high level of skill in displaying the ultimate poetic characteristics of the school.

15.

Tachi (Long sword)

Inscription:

Front: **Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru**
(Ono Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: **Heisei ni nen haru**
(Spring 1990)

Length: **79.7cm (2 Shaku, 6 sun, 3 bu)**

Curvature: **3.2cm (1 sun, 5 rin)**

This blade was displayed in the mukansa category at the 26th Shinsaku-meitoten.

This long blade has a wide *mihaba* and a thick *kasane*. It has a splendid shape with *koshi-zori* and *fumbari*. The *hada*, which is hidden by the *hamon*, is tightly forged. The *hamon* is an *o-choji-midare* that becomes a *juka-choji* reaching right up to the *shinogi* with lots of *yo* and *ashi*. The *nioi-guchi* is bright and clear. The *boshi* is a deep *midare-komi*, almost *ichmai* on the *omote*, whilst on the *ura* it is almost pointed with a turn-back.

This is another recreation of the Uesugi family's Ichimonji *Yamatorige*. It has the trademark *koshi-ba* pattern, while the *ha-saki* is close to the *shinogi* with lots of *ashi* and

yo. The *nioi-guchi* is clear and bright with a tight feeling. Whilst flamboyant in nature, an element of power can be seen.

Through his continuous efforts at forging this recreation of the Ichimonji *Yamatorige*, Ono Yoshimitsu has resurrected the Ichimonji into the present day.

16.

O-dachi (Very long sword)

Inscription:

Front: Etchigo (no) kuni (ni) oite Ono Yoshimitsu kore (wo) tsukuru
(Ono Yoshimitsu made this in Etchigo-Niigata)

Back: Heisei san nen haru
(Spring 1991)

Length: 73.8cm (3 shaku, 2 sun, 1 bu, 8 rin)

Curvature: 3.5cm (1 sun, 1 bu, 5 rin)

This blade was displayed in the mukansa category at the 27th Shinsaku-meitoten

The *mihaba* is wide, the *kasane* is standard thickness, and the point section is large. This *tachi* has a splendid *koshi-zori* shape. The forging is a very tight *itame hada*. The *hamon* is a *nioi-deki juka-choji* with lots of *ashi* and *yo*. The *nioi-guchi* is tight and very clear. The *boshi* is *choji-midare* that almost comes to a point before turning back. There is a *bohi* on both sides of the blade that ends in *kaki-nagashi*.

This splendid *tachi* is quite a long example. It has the shape of an unshortened Nanbokucho *o-dachi*. The *juka-choji* *hamon* is magnificent and the activities within the *ha* are also excellent. This *o-dachi* displays the Ichimonji style of *choji-midare* well.