

KUNSTHALLE MÜNCHEN

Press release

SAMURAI **The Splendour of Japanese Chivalry** **The Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Collection** **1 February – 30 June 2019**

The samurai dominated Japan's history for centuries, not just as warriors but as the political élite. Their legends are tales of courage and discipline, loyalty and noble self-sacrifice – interwoven with betrayal, intrigue and ruthless violence. Exquisitely wrought of precious metals and sumptuous materials, their armour was not merely a protective covering, but also an imposing status symbol.

Over a period spanning more than 30 years, Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller built up an outstanding collection of samurai armour, along with helmets and masks, horse tack and weaponry dating from the 7th to the 19th century, which is now being presented in Germany for the first time. Featuring in excess of 100 objects, the exhibition brings the fascinating history of Japanese chivalry to life.

What makes a man a warrior? A master of combat techniques, the samurai owned weapons and lived according to high ethical values. However, one thing in particular made him stand out: his armour. The quality of his armour meant the difference between life and death; it had to offer both protection and freedom of movement, while serving to identify the warrior on the battleground. To this day, it showcases the fascinating range of materials deployed by the samurai in balancing the interplay of attack and defence in combat. Skilfully crafted metals, leather, wood, lacquer and textiles afforded physical protection. The armour was embellished with a wide variety of forms and motifs – symbols of protection designed to terrify the enemy, such as demons, dragons or other mythological creatures, wild animals, Buddhist protective deities and star constellations, auspicious plants or symbols representing luck, courage and a long life. However, the fact that extravagant suits of armour, masks and helmets with elaborate ornamentation were also popular in times of peace attests to their equally important representative function: during the relatively peaceful Edo period (1603–1868), armour progressively emerged as a status symbol of the élite.

For almost 700 years, the samurai shaped the history of Japan. When the shogun assumed the executive power from the *tennō*, or Emperor of Japan, as supreme military commander at the end of the 12th century, the aristocratic warrior class replaced the nobility as the country's

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political and social élite. Over the centuries that followed, the state's central authority was weakened further. Japan had disintegrated into numerous territories and was now ruled by regional samurai feudal lords (*daimyō*), who had gained influence through land holdings and military power, and were now pitted against each other. The epoch of ferocious battles between these territorial rulers has been recorded in the annals of Japanese history as the "Age of Warring States" (Sengoku period, 1477–1573). To this day, it shapes our concept of the samurai as a belligerent warrior of great courage, who does not recoil from ritual suicide (*seppuku*, commonly referred to in the west as *harakiri*).

The Sengoku period advanced the refinement of military tactics and the use of new weaponry, for example, the firearms introduced by the Portuguese in 1543. This also required the armour to be adapted in line with the new methods of warfare. New types of armour began to prevail, which no longer simply functioned as a protective layer but also increasingly reflected the personality of the wearer, setting him apart in times of mass armies. However, this development showed how the proliferation of firearms in battle undermined the samurai's self-image: in view of long-range weaponry that could be operated by low-ranking foot soldiers, the relevance of individual skills and the sense of allegiance to the mounted élite gradually diminished. This is one of the reasons why firearms never gained acceptance in Japan on the same scale as in Europe. For a long time, the samurai held on to traditional weapons such as the lance, the sword or the bow and arrow. Considered the soul of the samurai, the sword in particular had tremendous symbolic value as the visible sign of the warrior's honour. Only the samurai were permitted to carry two swords. The production of opulent blades, which were regarded as works of art, called for the highest technical workmanship. For days on end, countless layers of steel were forged into sword form, before being elaborately hardened and honed. Swordsmiths were invariably members of the aristocratic warrior class or the nobility; not simply specialised craftsmen, they also carried out ritual acts and consecrations.

At the beginning of the 17th century, Japan was united with military force. The new shogun relocated his seat of government to Edo, present-day Tokyo. The era known as the Edo period ushered in an age of peace lasting over 250 years, coinciding with Japan's isolation from the rest of the world. While the warrior nobility had previously focused on virtues such as courage, discipline and loyalty, during the Edo period, the samurai mainly represented the ideal of unity between civil culture and the moral code of the fighter. Although they continued to perform military service, they also assumed new duties involving administration, finance, the penal system and censorship. The *bushi-dō* code of honour (the way of warriors) played a pivotal role, combining elements from the religions of Shintōism, Buddhism and Confucianism. It validated the existence of warriors in times of peace by presenting the samurai as moral teachers and guarantors of law and order.

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Their armour gradually acquired representative status and was also used as a gift of honour for loyal supporters or foreign rulers, for example. Blending functionality and the highest aesthetic standards, it was a supreme example of the interaction of the various arts and crafts. Military equipment was exempt from the laws prohibiting luxury, which required all samurai below the rank of feudal ruler (*daimyō*) to lead a simple life. Thus, armour was the only status symbol that permitted a certain splendour. Historical models in the style of earlier epochs celebrated the era of great warriors, thereby ensuring the legitimation of the civil aristocracy. Old suits of armour were replicated and overlaid with a special patina indicating years of use to prove – or suggest – that the wearer was descended from a significant family of warriors. With regard to new types of armour, their creativity knew no bounds: the spectacular designs, particularly the ornamentation of the helmet, ranged from mountain shapes and undulations to plants and animal elements or mythological hybrid creatures, right through to Buddhist deities. By means of exotic embellishments, inspired by European, Chinese or Korean armour, the owner displayed his privileged access to the severely restricted flow of international trade.

Nonetheless, the lavish lifestyle evoked by such opulent status symbols was at variance with the deteriorating economic situation of the samurai. The entire social system laboured increasingly under the immense costs generated by the warrior nobility. In 1868, the abolishment of the shogunate and the restitution of the power to the Emperor established a new political order. The samurai were dissolved and compulsory military service was introduced. With their armour and swords, archaic warriors were an anachronism in a modern Japan that was opening up to the Western world. Nevertheless, the legend of the samurai is undiminished to this day: not only did it dominate the perception of Japan's history, it also largely defined the western concept of Japanese culture.

Nestled between Marienplatz and Odeonsplatz in the heart of Munich, the **Kunsthalle München** organizes three exhibitions annually and has built up an international reputation. With an area of approximately 1,200 m² equipped with state of the art museum technology, the exhibition space provides a worthy stage for all artforms. Every year, the Kunsthalle welcomes around 350,000 visitors every year and is one of Germany's leading exhibition venues. The most important criterion for the selection of an exhibition theme is an outstanding level of artistic quality. The time range spans from prehistory and early history right through to the present day. Art and culture from around the world are displayed here in all their glory, whether it be painting, sculpture, graphic arts, photography, handcrafts or design. Monographic exhibitions and themed projects share the spotlight, however, the Kunsthalle München also pursues an interdisciplinary approach in its diverse Programme.

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The Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller collection is the most complete and largest of its type in the world, selectively amassed by Ann and Gabriel and their children over the past twenty-five years. Centuries of craftsmanship are represented in the collection with objects dating from the seventh to nineteenth centuries.

“The Ann & Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Museum: The Samurai Collection” in Dallas, Texas, was created in 2012 to permanently house their ever-expanding collection of samurai masterpieces. Beyond the Museum, the dynamic and beautiful compilation of suits of armor, helmets, masks, horse armor, and weaponry are on display in a traveling exhibition as well as the lobbies of Harwood International developments around the world.

“It is the combination of art and armor, the boundless creativity of the objects’ forms, and the aesthetics used by these fierce and cultivated warriors that drew us in to assemble our collection”, says Gabriel Barbier-Mueller.

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Exhibition partner



Insurer and partner



The Kunsthalle Munich is supported by



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OPENING HOURS

daily 10am–8pm | **20.2., 20.3., 17.4., 15.5. und 19.6.:** 10am–10pm | **5.3.:** 10am–5pm | **29.6.:** 10am–5pm

Special opening hours for school groups:

each wednesday 9am–10am, by appointment only: kontakt@kunsthalle-muc.de

DIRECTOR

Roger Diederer

CURATORS OF THE EXHIBITION

Nerina Santorius (Kunsthalle München)

Gabriel Barbier-Mueller, Jessica Beasley (The Ann & Gabriel Barbier Mueller Museum)

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Martin Kinzmaier, stage designer and stylist

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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PRESS IMAGES FOR DOWNLOAD

www.kunsthalle-muc.de/en/press_area/samurai/

ADMISSION FEE

Standard: € 14 | **Reduced fees:** Senior citizens (60+): € 12 | Students (< 30 years) and unemployed: € 7 | Young people (6–18 years): € 1 | Children under 6: free of charge | school classes: € 1 per pupil (pre-booked) | Family pass for 2 adults and their (grand-)children (< 18 years): € 24 | On Mondays 50% discount on all admission fees (except bank holidays: 22.4., 10.6.)

GUIDED TOURS

Guided tours for groups: guided tours in languages other than German: Tue–Sat: 10am–8pm, by appointment only: kontakt@kunsthalle-muc.de

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME (SUMMARY)

»Re-Act!« Harry Klein goes Kunsthalle and Afterwork^{KH} evenings, lectures at the Museum Fünf Kontinente and a movie series. Furthermore there will be experts' tours and guided tours for children.

CATALOGUE

Accompanied by a richly illustrated 360-page German catalogue published by Hirmer Verlag, edited by Gabriel Barbier-Mueller with essays by Morihiro Ogawa, John Stevenson, Sachiko Hori, Stephen Turnbull, John Anderson, Ian Bottomley, Thom Richardson, Gregory Irvine, and Eric Meulien and text by Bernard Fournier-Bourdier. This publication presents the samurai armor collection of "The Ann & Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Museum: The Samurai Collection" in Dallas, assembled over the past 30 years and one of the largest and most important collections of its kind. The book offers a look into the world of the samurai and highlights topics such as the phenomenon of the warrior in Japan, the development of the samurai helmet, castle architecture, women in samurai culture, and Japanese horse armor. The book's final section consists of an extensive catalogue of objects, concentrating on 120 significant works in the collection. The publication will be available for purchase in hardcover.

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