

## TRADITIONAL SHOP SIGNS OF JAPAN

**ON VIEW:** April 15 - October 8, 2017

### Exhibition Resource Guide

Japanese merchants excelled in the art of advertising long before there was a Madison Avenue. Street hawkers, mass-produced wood block print flyers and co-opted popular fiction all were employed in the merchants' attempt at market penetration. But the ultimate of this pre-modern form of advertising was the pervasive use of visually arresting shop signs, known as *kanban*.

Used to attract patronage and customers, Kanban are a fusion of art and commerce, created by skilled artisans. Crafted from wood, metal, paper and fabric, and embellished with paint, gold leaf, and lacquer, Kanban were displayed by Japanese merchants to advertise the products and services they sold, while providing visual identity and branding for the merchant and his shop. This exhibition includes over 60 traditional Japanese shop signs from the 18th to the 20th centuries.

### EXHIBITION THEMES

#### **Design, Advertising and Visual Identity**

These signs provide a lens to explore Japan's commercial and artistic roots, and the ploys of advertising brought on by the emergence of mass consumer culture. Kanban were used to promote a range of different products, and are displayed here in categories that include: Medicine & Pharmacies, Tobacco & Pipes, Tea & Food, Clothing & Grooming, Tools & Household goods, Entertainment, and Business.

#### **Variety of Shapes, Formats and Materials**

Kanban were created in a variety of shapes, formats and materials, from panels of lacquered wood to elegantly carved two and three-dimensional forms. Materials include wood, metal, paper, fabric, paint, gold leaf, and lacquer.

## Savvy Symbolism and Meaning

Japanese Kanban reflect the playful yet sophisticated community of Edo Japan. Japanese shop sign makers excelled in creating a multi-faceted inventory of symbols and meanings designed to engage customers. Kanban can be straightforward, but they also functioned in code, relying on puns and hidden meaning to communicate the products offered, using wordplay to delight and attract potential customers.

## STUDENTS WILL EXPLORE

- Shop signs as an iconic form of folk art found in many different cultures
- Japanese culture, art forms and aesthetics during the Edo Period
- The relationship between traditional Japanese shop signs and contemporary signage and advertising.
- The different elements of shop sign design
  - Fabrication - how it was made
  - Typography - fonts and lettering
  - Illustration - the decorative elements that convey meaning



## SCHEDULE A TOUR

Schedule a Museum visit and receive a **free** Docent-led tour for all Kindergarten – College groups, and **free** transportation for Title-1 schools.

**Contact:** Shannon Foley, Education Associate, 619-704-7495 or [sfoley@mingei.org](mailto:sfoley@mingei.org)

## SELECTED OBJECTS



### Mokey Kanban for Brush Shop

Nineteenth century

Wood, bamboo, pigment, cotton cord

Mingei International Museum, Gift of

Jeaninne and Richard Helmstetter



### Shitta Kanban for Greengrocer

Late nineteenth century

Wood, pigment, lacquer, metal fittings

Mingei International Museum Purchase



### Mokey Kanban for Geta Shop

Nineteenth century

Wood, leather, iron

Private Collection



### Shitta Kanban for Blade Shop

Late nineteenth century

Wood, paper, pigment, metal fittings

Mingei International Museum

Purchase

## DESIGN YOUR OWN KANBAN ACTIVITY

Kanban provide a lens to explore Japan's commercial and artistic roots, and the ploys of advertising brought on by the emergence of mass consumer culture.

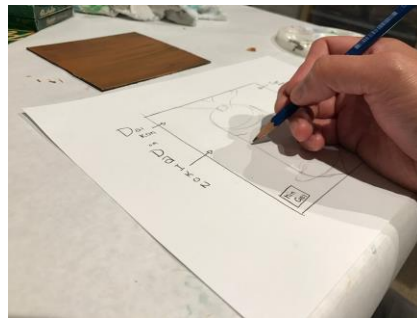
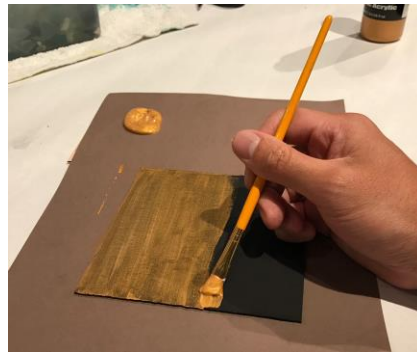
In this project, students will design their own Kanban using mat board, paint and oil pastels, utilizing drawing skills and simple design techniques.

### MATERIALS

- Gold or silver paint
- Paintbrushes
- Pencils
- Pre-cut mat board
- Oil pastels

### DIRECTIONS

1. Paint the mat board gold or silver and leave to dry. It is recommended to dry for 30 minutes or leave overnight to fully dry.
2. On a separate scrap of paper, design your Kanban considering the layout, font, and imagery representative of the product you'd like to advertise. For example, a carrot might represent a Japanese green grocer.
3. Draw your design over the gold lightly in pencil after paint is fully dry.



4. Color in image with oil pastels. Consider blending, layering and mixing colors.
5. Pressing hard with your pencil, outline the sign and add details by carving away some of the oil pastel.
6. Hang your sign.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

1. Trace these words to practice hand-lettering. Which style would you choose for your sign?

*Art of the world*

**ART OF THE WORLD**

# ART OF THE WORLD

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## Art of the world

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### 2. Choose your Color Scheme

Choosing the right color or color scheme for your sign is important. Different colors communicate different emotions. Which of the following color schemes would you choose for your sign?

#### Warm bright colors

Friendly, courageous, energetic

**Art of the People**

#### Cold dark colors

Stable, uniform, secure

**Art of the People**

#### Cold bright colors

Calm, fresh, simple

**Art of the People**

#### Warm dark colors

Classic, traditional, luxurious

**Art of the People**

#### Neutral colors

Solitary, focused

**Art of the People**

3. Design the sign to be double sided
4. Engineer a creative way to hang the sign
5. Design a corresponding logo for the product advertised
6. Include a reflective or creative writing component