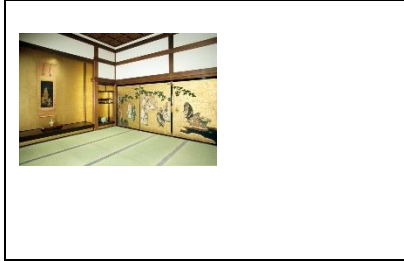

Title of Object

Formal Audience Hall

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Yasuimoku Komuten Company Ltd.

Culture: Japanese

Date of Object: 2001 constructed, 17th century

Country: Japan

Accession Number: 2001.204.2

File Created: 10/27/2016

Material/Medium: Various woods, Japanese cedar, tatami, paper

Author of File: Kristen McDougall

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Japanese and Korean Art

Last Updated/Reviewed: 7/6/2017

Tour Topics

Betrayal, Group 5, Highlights 1600-1850, Love_Honor_and_Betrayal group tour, architecture, leaders, Buddhism, Buddhist, Zen, ritual/ceremony, power/status, nature, wood, spirituality, symbolism,

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. How would you determine rank and status for seating priorities with this group today?
 2. What kind of places do you go to today to honor religion and art simultaneously?
 3. How is this space filled with honor?
 4. How would you describe the style of this room?
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Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

This is a formal Japanese audience hall—called a shoin (SHO-een). It represents a form of architecture that developed in Japan's Muromachi Period—roughly between the 14th and the 16th century (1338-1573). There are many changes that took place in Japanese architecture with the development of the Shoin style. The Shoin typically contained several fixed elements including a tokonoma (raised alcove) and chigaidana (staggered shelving unit) both for displaying works of art. Woven tatami mats with

decorative brocade borders covered the floors wall to wall. Take note of all the fine craftsmanship and different natural materials used throughout the structure. Besides the clear-grained cedar used in the rafters and room, note that a solid piece of elm called zelcova forms the base of the tokonoma. (Art of Asia)

Tatami mats are finely woven straw covered with rush reeds, and these made it more comfortable to sit on the floor since the Japanese did not customarily use chairs. The edges are bound with fabric—and depending on the formality of the room and the wealth of the owner, this fabric border might be expensive silk brocade. (Art of Asia)

Impressive sliding doors are often covered with gold leaf and painted with evocative landscapes, ferocious animals, or exotic figures. The museum's Shoin room showcases a masterpiece from the permanent collection, a set of four painted screens dating from around the time of the construction of the original room. Although unsigned, the set is believed to be painted by Kano Sansetsu (1589-1651). These sliding door panels (*fusuma*) show a group of Chinese Daoist immortals. (Art of Asia, and Sumptuous and Sublime)

As is typical of traditional Japanese residential architecture, this shoin has exposed posts and beams, which exhibit the natural beauty of clear-grained Japanese cedar and the remarkable craftsmanship of their construction. The coffered ceiling and lattice transoms show the precision of Japanese joinery techniques. While early domestic buildings in Japan had exposed rafters—they now began to construct suspended ceilings. The suspended ceilings helped create a more human scale to the room, particularly while seated on the floor. But it also provided an opportunity for decorative elaboration—as is the case with the ceiling of the museum's shoin room

To Western eyes, such rooms can seem extremely spare. Close examination, however, reveals many exquisite details, like the gilded bronze door pulls and lotus-shaped nail-head covers, which have both been further adorned with embossed floral designs. (Art of Asia, Mia label)

In 2001, the museum commissioned an architectural firm that has operated in Kyoto since the mid-17th century, to construct this room. Using traditional Japanese building and woodworking methods, their skilled carpenters first assembled the room in Japan, and then carefully dismantled it for shipment to Minnesota. Team of 9 craftsmen spent a summer reconstructing and finishing the rooms. There was a traditional ceremony to ritualistically purify and honor both this room and the tea house, and to ask the gods to protect them from future damage. 2 wooden tablets. One describes the project and workers name. The other the names of 3 Shinto deities, each associated with water, in the hope that they would guard the structure against burning. They also affixed a folk-style mask of the Okame, the Shinto goddess who is associated with fertility, the earth and bountiful harvest. Placed in the ceiling rafters. (Docent files)

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

This formal audience hall is a room in an abbot's quarters; an abbot is the head of a monastery. It is a replica of a 17th century room at the Konchi-in, a temple within the Zen monastery of Nanzenji in eastern Kyoto. The simple elegance and beautifully proportioned rooms are typical of a style known as *shoin*, which literally means study or writing hall. It was a place where the Abbot would study, pray, and meditate. It was also a busy social place into which he would invite guests and perform many

ceremonies. An Abbott took great care decorating the rooms with precious paintings for his honored guests to admire. (artsmia and Interview with the Curator, Art of Asia)

Wall-to-wall tatami mats, finely woven straw covered with rush reeds and edged with silk brocade, covered the floor, making it more comfortable to sit on since the Japanese did not customarily use chairs. (A room's dimensions are measured in tatami mats, each 90 x 180 centimeters, in Japan even today.) The most impressive shoin rooms were constructed within the palace-castles of Japan's great warlords. These rooms were enormous, as large as 80 tatami mats, but our audience hall is 10 tatami mats. (Sumptuous and Sublime)

The tokonoma and the staggered shelves displayed Chinese art. With the increased appreciation and collection of Chinese paintings and utensils during the Muromachi period (1392–1573), the alcove was enlarged and devoted to the display of works of art and the tokonoma was developed to constitute an essential feature of Japanese formal rooms. (metmuseum) Hanging scrolls, bronzes and ceramics were not only admired for their beauty, but also as a measure of an individual's power and status. The Japanese warrior class looked to Chinese philosophy, government, and culture as models for reshaping their own culture (and asserting their authority to rule) after the frivolous excesses of the Heian imperial court. Extensive collections of Chinese art were a powerful status symbol and the subject of competitive connoisseurship. (Art of Asia, Sumptuous and Sublime)

The sliding door panels are believed to be painted by Kano Sansetsu (1589-1651). These sliding door panels (fusuma) show a group of Chinese Daoist immortals. The Chinese believed the immortals were historical and legendary personages who, through moral virtue, faith, and discipline, managed to transcend the bounds of the natural world and live forever. They were worshiped as saints. Old Chinese themes like this were admired in Japan by military rulers and Zen priests, who exalted Chinese culture and its heroes. This set of panels formed part of a much larger suite of paintings made for a temple in Kyoto. In the 1640s, Kano Sansetsu and his studio created hundreds of panel paintings for this temple. A devastating fire in the 1800s destroyed all but eight—the four panels you see here and four paintings that decorated their reverse, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. (artsmia.org, Daoist Immortals label)

The sliding doors opposite the tokonoma would have opened onto a slightly less formal room. The abbot would have sat alone with an attendant in the Shoin looking out into the adjacent room where the audience sat along the side walls in rows determined by their rank and status. Japanese rooms have a spare, spacious feeling, naturally without furniture the visitors would focus more on the art. (Sumptuous and Sublime) Just outside the main sliding doors would have been a view to a garden (see prop photo). Generally, Zen Buddhism cherishes simplicity and straightforwardness in honoring what is real, thus the focus on unadorned natural materials. This hall is filled with honor, reflecting the practices of the Abbot and Zen Buddhism.

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

The opulent spirit of Momoyama Japan is exhibited in this formal audience hall, a replica of a 17th century room at the Konchi-in, a temple within the vast Zen monastery of Nanzenji in eastern Kyoto. Such elegantly proportioned and decorated rooms are known as shoin, which literally means study or writing hall, even though Japanese used them as reception rooms for visiting guests and official government messengers. As is typical of Japanese residential architecture, this shoin has exposed posts

and beams, which exhibit the natural beauty of rare, clear-grained wood. It also features other elements commonly found in such structures including a raised alcove (tokonoma) and staggered shelving unit (chigaidana) both for displaying works of art. Finely woven tatami mats with decorative brocade borders and fusuma (lightweight, paper-covered sliding doors) embellished with gold were also standard elements of these subtly ornate rooms. The Japanese usually sit directly on the tatami flooring, making most furniture unnecessary. To Western eyes, such rooms can seem extremely spare. Close examination, however, reveals many exquisite details, like the gilded bronze door pulls and lotus-shaped nail-head covers, which have both been further adorned with embossed floral designs.

In 2001, the museum commissioned the Yasuimoku Komuten Company, an architectural firm that has operated in Kyoto since the mid-17th century, to construct this room. Using traditional Japanese building and woodworking methods, their skilled carpenters first assembled the room in Japan, and then carefully dismantled it for shipment to Minnesota. A team of craftsmen then spent three months reassembling and finishing the room here, in the museum's gallery.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Formal Audience Hall, in Art of Asia: <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/architecture/japanese-audience-hall.cfm>

Interview with Matthew Welch, previous Curator of Japanese and Korean Art: <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/architecture/japanese-audience-hall-interview.cfm.html>

Official website of Nanzenji Temple: <http://nanzenji.com/english/index.html>

Tatami: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatami>

Shōin Room, Metropolitan Museum of Art: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/shoin_room/

Docent files, Tour Office

Sumptuous and Sublime: Two Japanese Rooms, Teacher's Guide (posted on the IPE site, search for Japanese Audience Hall)

Show picture of the temple exterior or the gardens, see below: http://www.gardenvisit.com/gardens/nanzen-ji_zen_temple_garden

