

Kushi Kanzashi Museum

A collection of more than 4,000 traditional hair accessories is held at the Kushi Kanzashi Museum. It started with Okazaki Chiyo (1924–1999), who was born in Gion (the Kyoto geisha district) and is said to have worked as a geisha. She spent around 40 years collecting hair ornaments and accessories, and her collection was later acquired by the proprietors of a restaurant in Ome. Rather than keep the pieces in storage, the new owners created a museum for the collection. There are usually around 400 accessories on display at a time.

The collection includes *kushi* combs and elaborate *kanzashi* hair ornaments from the Edo period (1603–1867) to the Showa era (1926–1989). Many of the accessories were custom-made for wealthy clients by artists including Ogata Korin (1658–1716), the father of the Rinpa style of painting which features subjects from nature (such as flowers) on gilded backgrounds.

The collection highlights the influence of social change on Japanese fashion. Early combs made of tortoiseshell (a banned import during the Edo period) could cost as much as a house, and were a statement of wealth. As architectural styles became more complex and decorative during the Edo period, hair styles became larger and more ornate. Elaborate accessories were crafted from ivory, tortoiseshell, and glass, and embellished with lacquer, inlaid with semi-precious stones, or sprinkled with gold. Visitors can see the differences between the understated designs for women of the daimyo and samurai classes, the more eye-catching accessories worn by the wives of wealthy merchants, and the colorful, playful accessories of *maiko* (apprentice geisha).

As Japan modernized in the Meiji era (1868–1912), hair ornaments became smaller and less showy as women adopted more European hairstyles. The collection continues right through to the postwar years, when new materials like celluloid made it possible to offer ornate hair accessories reasonably.

The museum also has a display of portable writing sets (*yatate*) from the Edo period, which were owned by high-ranking samurai and wealthy merchants. Many of these were custom-made from wood, metal, or ivory, with intricate carvings and inlays. The shapes, from gourds to guns, were limited only by the imagination and the need to fit a brush and an inkstone

inside. Alongside the permanent collection, the museum hosts seasonal exhibitions of related items, such as small decorative containers (*inro*) that were worn on the sash of a kimono.

The museum building is designed to resemble a traditional *kura* warehouse, with a larger-than-life *kanzashi* comb on the front. The museum is built on a bluff above Mitake Gorge, with large windows framing views of the Tama River, and a stroll garden.

The Kushi Kanzashi Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (The museum is closed on Mondays and Fridays.)