

Remarks by H. E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
for the virtual event for the opening of
"Tokyo: Art & Photography" at Ashmolean Museum
on 29th July, 2021

Let me begin by expressing my congratulations to all who have been involved in bringing *Tokyo: Art and Photography* to life. This ambitious show, displaying more than 200 works spanning 400 years, is what we have been eagerly waiting for.

I am very much aware of the illustrious history of the Ashmolean Museum, which is around 350 years old and has the distinction of being Britain's first university museum and the world's first such facility open to the general public. I have long wanted to visit the museum myself, especially since its highly-acclaimed refurbishment in 2009, and hope to do so soon.

Japan has enjoyed a special relationship with the Ashmolean Museum over the years, not least in the wake of the 1960 Cultural Agreement, signed between Japan and the UK, which paved the way for the donation of 40 prints to the Museum by the Japanese Government, with these works now the core of the Ashmolean's contemporary print collection. Not only that, but Prince Chichibu, who was the second son of Emperor Taishō and Empress Teimei as well as a younger brother of Emperor Shōwa, studied abroad at Magdalen College Oxford and later donated a ceremonial suit of armour to the college, which is now housed at The Shikanai Gallery at the Ashmolean Museum. It is most fitting that the venue for the current exhibition is the very same as that which hosts those wonderful objects.

While the traditional court culture that developed around Kyoto may be well known to those in the UK, this exhibition places front and centre Edo: that immutable hub of the avant-garde, performance, art and popular culture. As Edo developed into the international hub of Japan, the culture of the capital captured the imagination of people in Europe, and the aesthetics of a generation have become epoch-defining symbols with lasting effects on art globally. Thus, with Tokyo now hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games for the second time, there has never been a better

moment to turn our attention to the culture of the city, and *Tokyo: Art and Photography* does just that.

The Olympic Games began last week and this is, of course, a daunting challenge, with the world reeling from the devastation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Nonetheless, Japan is determined to present to the world an example of how, with human effort and ingenuity, we can overcome the obstacles in our way. Through sport, we can look to a brighter future, inspiring our children and young people with the vision and the passion to fulfil their dreams.

These Games are also an occasion to show the world how we in Japan, blessed with tremendous support and encouragement from our friends all over the world, have been able to bounce back from the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that struck in 2011.

Now that the Games are unfolding in a safe and secure environment where every effort has been made to guard against infection, let us enjoy the skill and artistry of the world's leading competitors in their fields, who have gathered in Tokyo to show us what they can do.

With Tokyo in the minds of Olympic and Paralympic fans and those all over the UK, it is my hope that this exhibition will give people in the UK a taste of that vibrant city, and drive home the diversity, innovation and creativity that makes itself felt there.

I would like to conclude this message by reaffirming my congratulations and gratitude to all involved in this marvellous exhibition: the director of the Ashmolean Museum Alexander Sturgis and the curators Lena Fritsch and Clare Pollard, whose tireless efforts have made the exhibition possible, and the collectors and rights holders, who have generously released the pieces for display. My thanks also go to the supporters of this wonderful project, many of whom are with us today. I have no doubt the exhibition will be a resounding success! In fact, I am determined to witness its success for myself in the very near future.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.