

Kimonos, a very Japanese Art











Last weekend a very special exhibition of over 40 kimonos came to the St John's Church in the West End of Edinburgh designed by the doyenne of Japanese embroidery, Mrs Shizuka Kusano.

This was the first time that Mrs Kusano had exhibited her work outside of Japan, ever!

The last time she exhibited her work in Tokyo, around 60,000 people came to see it. The event was set up by the Japanese Consulate General, in Melville Street to celebrate the establishment of their office there. The event was certainly very popular, even for the Japanese, because they very rarely see forty ladies in kimonos all at one time! These ladies are students of Mrs Kusano, and many had embroidered their own kimonos to designs created by their teacher.

The Lord & Lady Provost, George Grubb and his wife, Elizabeth, made an official visit on Friday and were presented to Mrs Kusano who showed them her intricate work. The Lord Provost and Mr Tarahara, the Consul General, spoke of their pride at staging the exhibition in Edinburgh, and also their pleasure in receiving such a distinguished guest. Mrs Kusano presented Mrs Grubb with a personally embroidered piece.

Frea Webster of the Edinburgh branch of the Embroiderer's Guild, who specialises in the Japanese art, gave an insight into the history of the Kimono.

She said:- "Embroidery came to Japan from China through Korea, about the same time Buddhism entered Japanese culture. Embroideries were made to show in pictures the teaching of Buddha, like stained glass windows in Christian cathedrals.

The earliest reference in literature to an embroidered Buddha figure is a passage in 'The Chronicles of Japan' (604) This embroidery did not survive. The oldest piece is dated to 622, these are only fragments and are an official national treasure in Japan.

In the latter half of the 10th century the aristocratic class started to adorn their clothing with embroidery. This did not serve to protect the wearer from the cold but was to indicate personal status. It was only available to a select few; only the highest ranks of society could afford such costly work.

I think it was not until the 16th century that it started to be used for a wider group of people, but I have not found any proof of this."

For those of you interested in the Embroiderer's Guild it meets at the Girl Guide Headquarters, 33 Melville Street, Edinburgh on the 1st Tuesday of each month @ 7.15 pm, coffee available from 6.30pm
