



ITEM# UJTA068

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

A TOSHINAGA TANTÔ

SIGNED & DATED, 5TH YEAR OF MEIJI (AUGUST 1872, AGED SIXTY NINE)

Swordsmith:	Toshinaga (翁寿長)
Measurements:	Length: 21.5cm (<i>ubu</i>) Sori: 0cm Moto-haba: 2.19cm Weight: 145g
Jihada:	<i>Expertly forged ko-itame with glittering ji-nie and plenty of chikei</i>
Hamon:	<i>Superb gunome-notare-midare & kinsuji, inazuma, sunagashi, haikikake in nie-deki</i>
Certificate #1:	NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon (sword Especially Worthy of Preservation)
Certificate #2:	NBTHK Hozon (<i>koshirae</i> Worthy of Preservation)
Fujishiro rank:	Jôjô-saku (ranked as a highly superior swordsmith)
Included:	Shirasaya, Meiji period koshirae, fabric bags, kit, printed description

\$15,500

Toshinaga, the final name of the celebrated *Yamaura Saneo*, was a *jôjô-saku* swordsmith of the *shinshintô* period and elder brother of the legendary *Kiyomaro*. This exceptional *tantô*, dated August 1872 in his sixty ninth year, is one of his last works, forged at the very twilight of the samurai age. The *jihada* is a tightly grained *ko-itame* with pronounced *nagare* with a wildly electric *gunome-notare-midare* hamon in the *Sôshû* tradition – a delicious cocktail of brushed *sunagashi*, with slices of *kinsuji*, *hakikake bôshi* and a thunderstorm of *inazuma*. The stunning silver *nashiji-nuri koshirae*, certainly original to the *tantô*, is unified in matching *Four Gentlemen soroi-kanagu* fittings with a remarkable *shishi kurikata* in *katachibori* with gilded eyes. Two brothers, one forge, a shared devotion to the Japanese sword. This is a blade bursting with activity, a *koshirae* of quiet luxury, and a story that could not be more compelling. A marvellous collectible from the early years of the Meiji period.

Moto-kasane: 6.7mm

Omosa: 145g

Nakago: 8.86cm

Moto-haba: 2.19cm

Nagasa: 21.5cm

Mekugi-ana: 1



Toshinaga (寿長) is the name used in the final years by *Yamaura Saneo* (山浦真雄), a celebrated master of the *shinshintô* period and a *jôjô-saku* smith. Born in the first year of *Bunka* era (1804) in *Shinano* province, he was the elder brother of *Minamoto Kiyomaro*, arguably the most celebrated swordsmith of the entire *shinshintô* period. He trained first under *Hyôshinshi Hideyo* and then, alongside *Kiyomaro*, under the *Ueda* domain smith *Kawamura Toshitaka*, signing in turn as *Kanri* and *Toshimasa* before settling on *Masao* and later *Saneo* during the *Tenpô* era (1830~1844). In his final years he took the name *Toshinaga*, under which he died in the seventh year of *Meiji* era (1874).

Saneo served successively as a retained smith to *Komoro*, *Ueda*, and *Matsushiro* domains, the majority of his surviving work dating from his fifteen years under *Matsushiro*. In the sixth year of *Kaei* era (1853), at a test-cutting of hard materials commissioned by *Matsushiro* lord *Sanada Yukinori*, his blade alone withstood *eighteen blows* against an iron anvil after the blades of *Taikei Naotane* and others had broken, a feat that established his reputation for toughness, and the year from which he began signing "*Saneo*." The name is written with two characters: *Sane* (真), meaning "true" or "genuine," and *o* (雄), meaning "man" or "hero," together "*a true man*." This episode embodies the very nature of the Japanese sword itself, unbreakable and unbending.

This *tantô* bears a date of the fifth year of *Meiji* era (1872), eighth month, with the smith recording his own age of sixty nine within the signature. The *nakago* is aging beautifully, its patina forming naturally as the steel breathes, the silver tone of the original forging still shining through. The *jigane* is a well-forged, tightly grained *ko-itame* with pronounced *nagare*. The *hamon* is a wildly electric *gunome-notare-midare* formed in the *Sôshû* tradition, the *nie* thick and illuminating, and what a cocktail it presents: brushed *sunagashi* sweeping through the *hamon*, slices of *kinsuji* and a thunderstorm of *inazuma*. This is *nie-deki*. The *bôshi* turns back widely with a dramatic *hakikake* brushed effect.

Its stunning *koshirae*, which is certainly original to the *tantô*, in silver *nashiji-nuri* lacquer is a perfect companion to the blade itself. *Aikuchi* style, unified throughout with matching 'Four Gentlemen' *soroi-kanagu* fittings. Of particular note is the *nomikomi* construction, where the *tsuka* slots inside the mouth of the *saya*, thought to reflect the higher formality of the piece. The *kurikata* is a *shishi* in *katachibori* with gilded eyes, a design with no parallel elsewhere. Comes with NBTHK Hozon certification.

This is a marvellous opportunity to own a premier *tantô* forged at the very twilight of the samurai age and of *Toshinaga*'s own life. Two brothers, one forge, a shared devotion to the Japanese sword. A blade bursting with activity, a *koshirae* of quiet luxury, and a story that could not be more compelling.





Swordsmith: *Toshinaga* (first generation)
Crafted when he was 69 years old

ubu-nakago (original, unaltered tang)
sujikai-yasurime (slanting file marks)

六 (Roku)

十 (jû)

九 (kyû)

翁 (sai)

寿 (Toshi)

長 (naga)

Rokujû (60)

+

kyû (9)

sai (age)

=====

Crafted at the age of 69.

Meiji go-nen hachigatsu-hi

Dated on a day in the eighth month in the fifth year of Meiji era [August 1872]

(Mei) 明

(ji) 治

(go) 五

(nen) 年

(hachi) 八

(gatsu) 月

(hi) 日

Ha-agari kurijiri - a form in which the rounded tip of the *nakago* rises toward the cutting-edge.



特保
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№ 1021709



公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協会

令和五年十二月十五日

右は當協會に於て審査の結果特別保存刀剣と
鑑定しこれを証する

長七寸一分

一短刀 銘

六十九翁寿長(山浦真雄同人)
明治五年八月日

鑑定書

東京都教育委員会
第 326239 号
令和5年5月9日

NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon Certificate of Designation

A sword designated as *Especially Worthy of Conservation*
by the Society for the Preservation of the Japan Art Sword

Issued in the 5th year of Reiwa (2023), December 15th

One, Tantô

Mei (signature)

Rokujûkyû-sai Toshinaga (Yamaura Saneo dôjin)
Meiji gonen hachigatsu hi

Nagasa (length)

7-sun 1-bu (21.5cm)

Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)

This *tantô* was forged in the fifth year of *Meiji* era (1872), a transitional moment when Japan's samurai society was rapidly moving toward dissolution. It had been barely four years since the *Meiji Restoration*, yet the era was already shifting at speed. The previous year, the fourth year of *Meiji* era (1871), had seen the abolition of the *han* (domain) system, known as *haihan-chiken*, through which the domains that samurai had served for generations, including *Matsushiro*, to which *Yamaura Saneo* himself had long been attached, were formally dissolved. The lord-vassal relationships that had sustained the samurai class lost their legal standing overnight, and the status and livelihood of samurai across the country had already begun to erode.



Beginning in the fourth year of *Meiji* era (1871), the mission travelled to the United States and Europe to negotiate revision of the unequal treaties. The delegation observed firsthand the realities of modern Western civilisation, an experience that would exert a major influence on the *Meiji* government's subsequent efforts to build a modern nation-state.

In the fifth year of *Meiji* era (1872), eighth month, the mission visited Boston in the United States and Liverpool in England. The delegation's own rather stylish attire likewise reflected the shift from traditional Japanese dress to Western clothing.



Army Ministry Building in Tokyo (1870s)

Japan established the policy of *fukoku kyôhei*, a wealthy nation, a strong military, in order to prevail against the Western powers. On February 28, 1872, the Army Ministry and Navy Ministry were established. The following year, the *Conscription Ordinance* was introduced, setting Japan on the path toward militarism.

Amid this upheaval, *Saneo*, then sixty nine years old, continued to forge blades. He had already passed headship of the family to his son *Kanetora* in the fourth year of *Meiji* era (1871) and written his memoir, *Oi no Nezame*, yet before the ink had even dried, he produced this very *tantô*. It was an age in which the samurai class itself was being dismantled by law, and the sword was steadily losing its meaning both as a weapon of war and as a symbol of status. And still, he devoted himself wholly to the forging of a single blade. It's admirable. And maybe a little stubborn. Stubborn is good.

It should be noted that the *Sword Abolishment Edict*, the *haitôrei*, which banned the wearing of swords outright, was not issued until the ninth year of *Meiji* era (1876), four years after this *tantô* was made. Yet by the fifth year of *Meiji* era, its approach was already unmistakably near. This work may thus be understood as a blade born in the last glimmer of light before the culture of the Japanese sword, a culture that had walked hand in hand with the samurai for centuries, quietly drew toward its close.



Yamaura Saneo Residence Site
Nagano Prefecture Designated Historic Site

Location: *Akaiwa, Shigeno, Tōmi City, Nagano Prefecture*



The site sits on a scenic bluff above the *Chikuma River*, looking out across the water to *Nunobiki Rock*, the famous landmark tied to the legend of a bull leading a blind woman to the great temple of *Zenkōji*.

The main house is long gone, but the ground still has a voice. A stone lantern erected by *Saneo* in the second year of *Tenpō* era (1831) stands quietly, inscribed with the characters for "*lasting military fortune*", dedicated in prayer for the *Makino* clan, lords of the *Komoro* domain. Beside it, the remains of a storehouse-style forge, just over two metres square, and two stone water cisterns. And a monument marking the birthplace of the brothers *Yamaura Saneo* and *Kiyomaro*.

It was here, after their duties as village headman and farmers were done, that the brothers forged swords through the night. This is not legend, it is recorded in Saneo's own late-life memoir, *Oi no Nezame*. Two men, a small forge, and pure dedication to the craft.

In the seventh year of *Meiji* era (1874), Saneo returned to *Akaiwa* to deal with the aftermath of a fire that had destroyed the family home. He collapsed in the surviving storehouse and died there shortly after, at the age of seventy one. The same ground where he had forged, for so many years, by night.

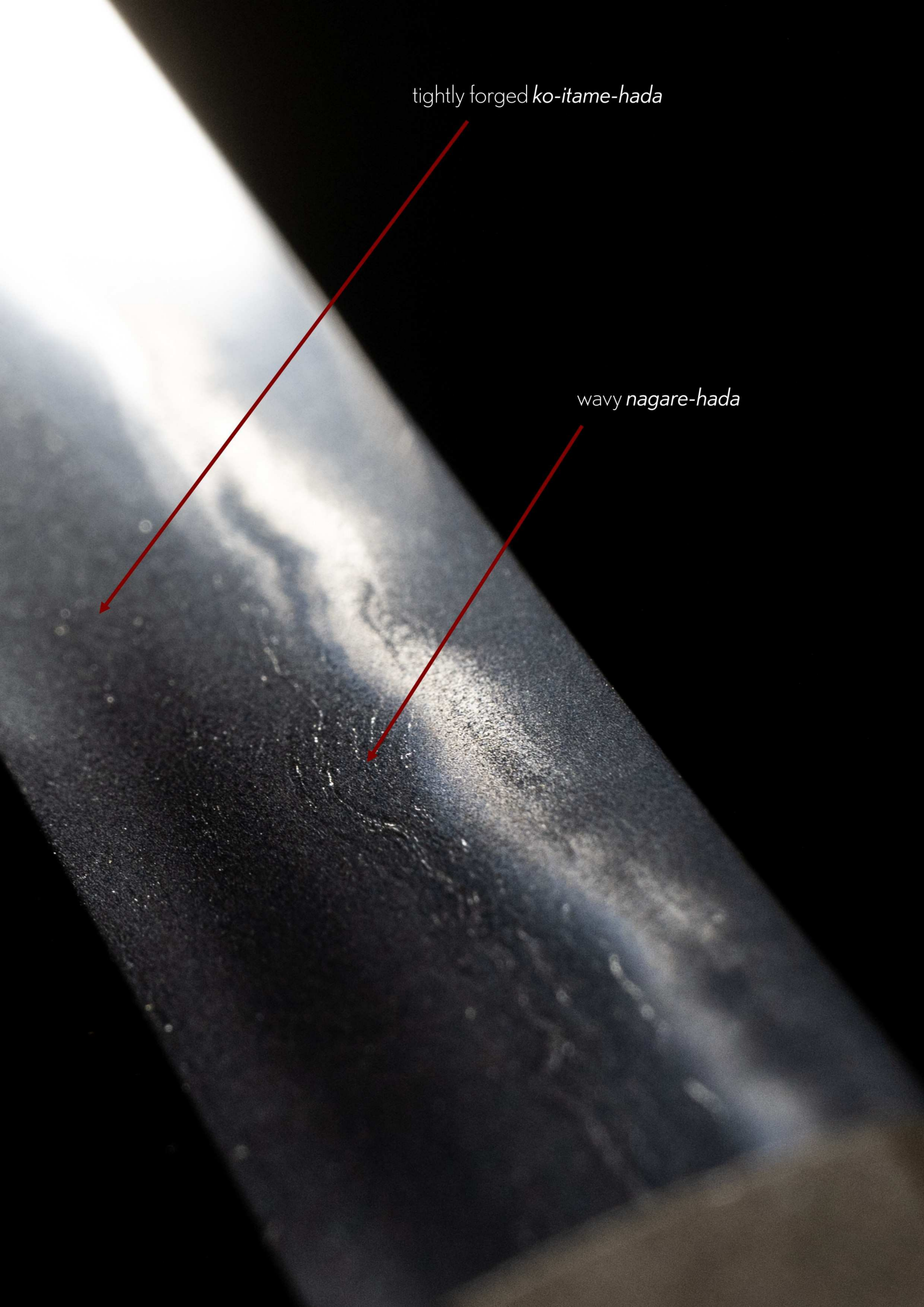
The site was designated a **Nagano Prefecture Historic Site** on March 30, 1964.





tightly forged *ko-itame-hada*

wavy *nagare-hada*



What an extraordinary *bôshi*.
The brushed effect is called *hakikake*.





A thunderstorm of activity includes crooked lines of *nie* crystals in the *hamon* known as *inazuma* (bolts of lightning).



mega kinsuji

inazuma

A delicious cocktail of brushed
sunagashi and slices of *kinsuji*.





king *kinsuji*

The *nie* crystals are out
of this world impressive.

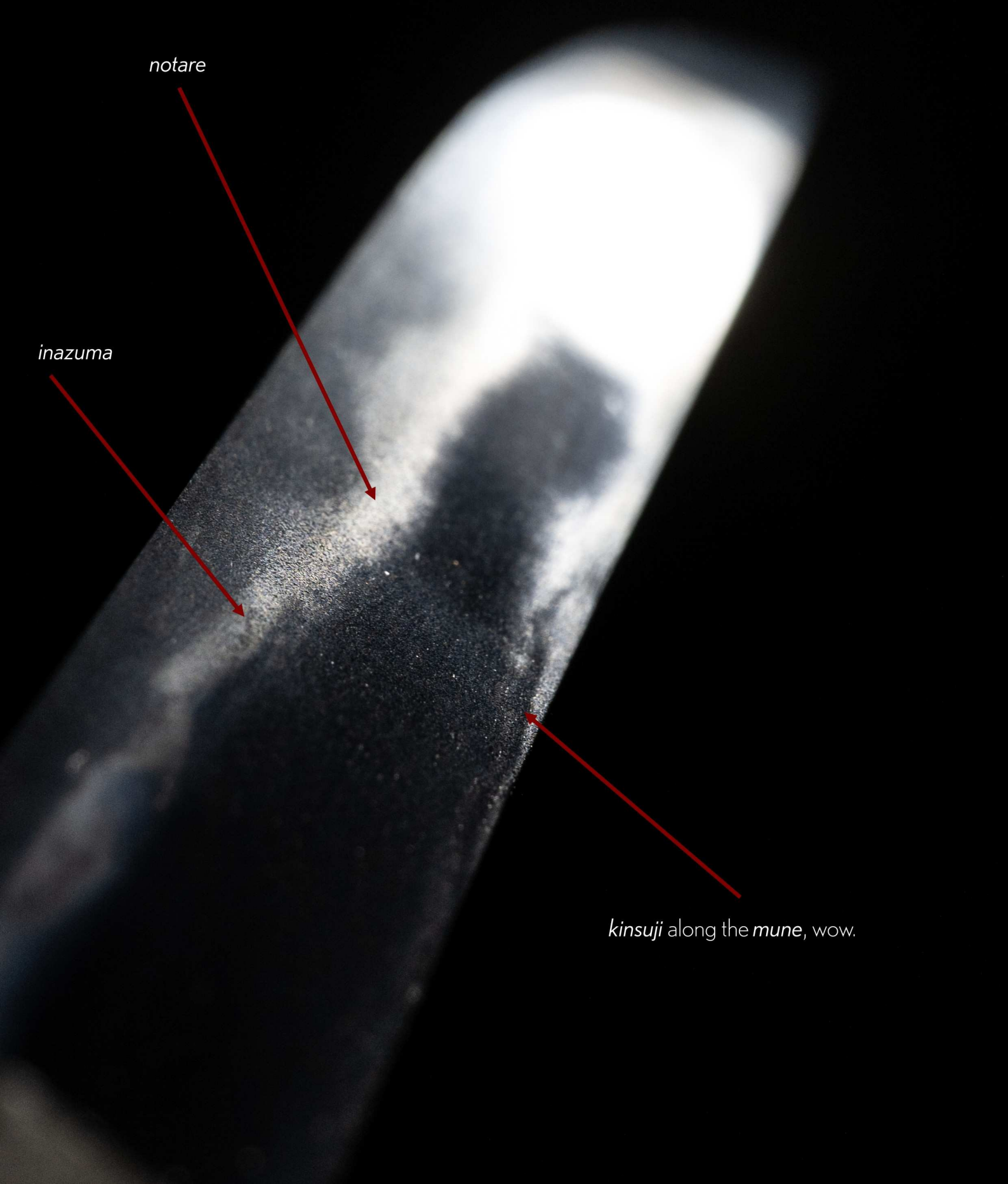
This is *nie-deki*.

A wildly electric *gunome-midare* mixed with *notare* hamon formed in the *Sôshû* tradition.

notare

inazuma

kinsuji along the *mune*, wow.





Unbreakable

Although a swordsmith by trade, *Saneo* also wrote a personal memoir, and both its content and calligraphy reveal him to have been a man of first-rate intellectual and cultural standing, not merely a craftsman - something unusual for the feudal era, when swordsmiths were regarded as artisans and little more. Where *Saneo* is often praised as a man of sound judgment and strict self-discipline, with a life largely free of dark episodes, his brother Kiyomaro embodied the archetype of unrestrained genius: his work is highly celebrated, but his character as a person is rarely discussed in the same terms.

From the age of twelve, *Saneo* studied swordsmanship under the *Komoro* domain locally. It was during this training, it is said, that his passion for swords first took root. From around age thirteen he began eagerly acquiring any blade that caught his interest, testing its cutting ability and studying the Japanese sword from a practical standpoint - by some accounts trying more than two hundred blades. Where *Kiyomaro* would come to be admired for the beauty of his work, *Saneo* would instead be valued for a robust, battle-ready style suited to practical use.

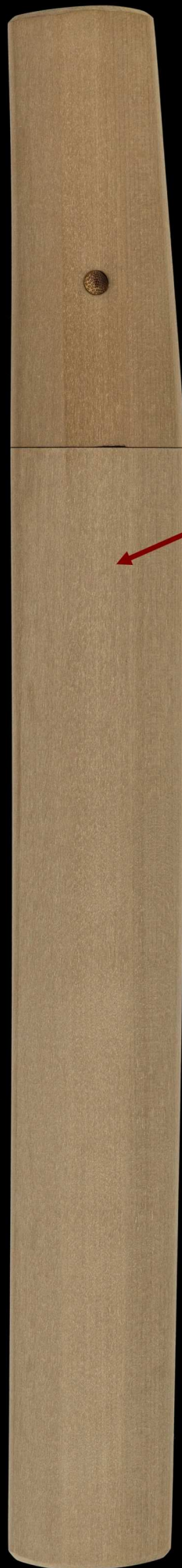
Years later, in the sixth year of *Kaei* era (1853), a test-cutting demonstration was held before the *Sanada* family of *Matsushiro* domain, with *Saneo* himself in attendance. Rather than cutting through the bodies of executed criminals, the targets on this occasion were bundles of straw, iron armor, and the like. While the blades of smiths including *Taikei Naotane* broke one after another, the blade made by *Saneo* - 21.5 sun (roughly 65 cm) in length, in an *ara-nie deki* - left the following record:

Bundle of straw: 11 cuts
Bamboo and straw combined: 8 cuts
Iron plate (3mm thick): 1 cut (cleanly severed)
Deer antler: 6 cuts
Iron kasa (helmet-hat): 2 cuts
Iron dô (cuirass): 2 cuts
Shibuichi tsuba: 2 cuts
Wrought iron: 1 cut
Kabuto (helmet): 1 cut

Only at this point did the blade finally bend, and it was straightened with an iron hammer. The blade was then fixed in place and struck with other implements to test how much further punishment it could withstand:

Struck on the *mune* with an iron rod: 7 times; on the *hira-ji*: 5 times
Struck on the *mune* against an iron anvil: 13 times; on the *hira-ji*: 5 times

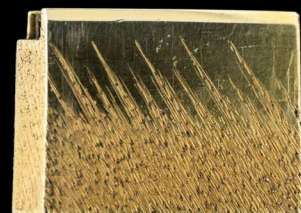
Only then did the blade finally break! In total, it had cut through targets thirty-four times and withstood a further thirty blows.



Tanobe-sensei sayagaki potential



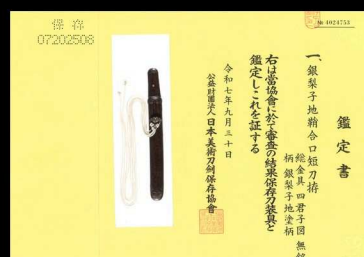
Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



gold *habaki* with
copper ground

Gin-nashi-ji-saya
aikuchi-tantô-koshirae
 (銀梨地鞘合口短刀拵)

Aikuchi-tantô-koshirae
 lacquered in silver
 with nashi-ji texture



NBTHK Hozon Certificate

保 研
07202508

No 4024753



鑑定書

一、銀梨子地鞘合口短刀拵

総金具四君子図無銘
柄銀梨子地塗柄

右は當協會に於て審査の結果保存刀装具と
鑑定しこれを証する

令和七年九月三十日

公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協會



NBTHK Hozon Certificate of Designation

A koshirae designated as *Especially Worthy of Conservation*
by the Society for the Preservation of the Japan Art Sword

Issued in the 7th year of Reiwa (2025), September 30th

One,

Aikuchi-tantô-koshirae with silver nashi-ji texture

*Sô-kanagu: depicting the four noble plants of orchid, bamboo,
chrysanthemum, and plum, unsigned*

Tsuka: hilt lacquered in silver with nashi-ji texture

Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)



Unlike the ordinary type made of plain silk, an unusually long cord is fitted as the *sageo* for this *tantô*. Beyond its standard function of being tied to the *obi* to prevent the *saya* from slipping loose, this exceptional length suggests it was intended to allow the *sageo* to also be worn slung over the shoulder, rather than tied to the *obi* alone.

The swirling pattern depicted on the head of the *shisa* lion represents the sun - the all protective symbol of divinity and royalty in Japan.





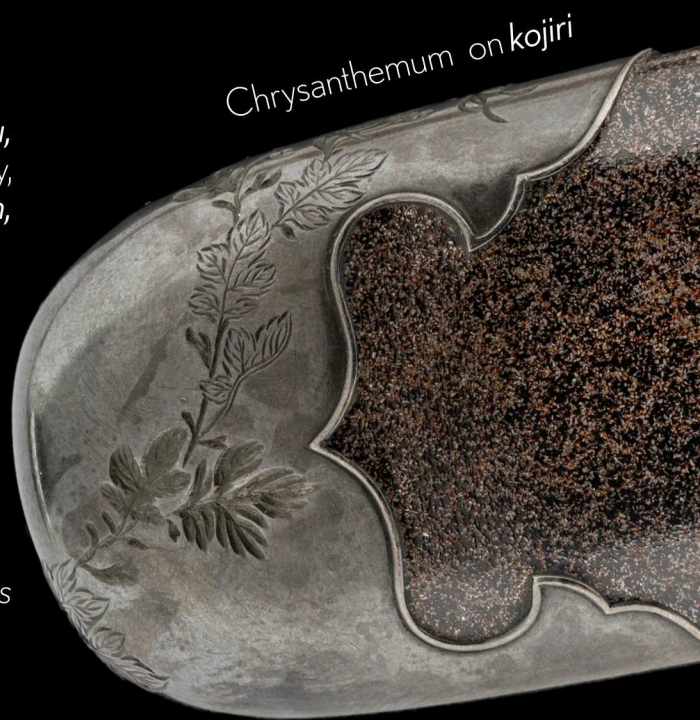
Bamboo on kozuka & kôgai

These beautiful matching fittings known as *soroi-kanagu*, are each decorated with a different motif. Collectively, these represent the "Four Gentlemen" (*shikunshi*) - plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum.

As they represent the four different seasons:

Orchid for spring
 Bamboo for summer,
 Chrysanthemum for autumn
 Plum blossom for winter

The four are used to celebrate the unfolding of the seasons throughout the year.



Chrysanthemum on kojiri



Plum on *kashira*



Orchid on *fuchi*

kozuka (utility knife)



The *kozuka* and *kogai* were handy tools of the Edo period *samurai*. They were both fitted into specially made slots in the *saya* (scabbard).



kogai (hair pick)



The *kôgai* is made in the split form known as *wari-kôgai*, dividing into two separate pieces.

Like an ordinary *kôgai*, it served as a hairpick, though one theory holds that it was also used in place of chopsticks.



The *tsuka*, like the *saya*, is finished in silver *nashiji-nuri* lacquer.

Of particular note is that it is fashioned in a *nomikomi* style, where the *tsuka* slots inside the mouth of the *saya* rather than meeting it flush. In a standard *aikuchi-koshirae*, *saya* and *tsuka* sit flat against one another. This *nomikomi* fitting is thought to reflect the higher formality of the piece.





六 (Roku)
 十 (jû)
 九 (kyû)
 翁 (sai)
 寿 (Toshi)
 長 (naga)



Tsunagi

A handcrafted duplicate wooden sword blade that holds together the *koshirae* when the blade is resting in *shirasaya*.



Koshirae bag





I protect you.

ARIGATO!

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