

CHRIST BEFORE US

Faithful Witness Through the Biblical Art of Sadao Watanabe



Jesus Carrying the Cross
1994, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on washi handmade
paper, 9 x 13 in.
John 19:17



Noah's Ark
1982, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on momigami wrinkled
paper
Genesis 7:13-18



Pentecost
1965, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on washi
handmade paper,
13 x 8 7/8 in.
Acts 2:1-4



Good Shepherd
1968, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on washi handmade
paper, 12 x 8 7/8 in.
John 11:11, 14-15



Jesus Washing Peter's Feet
1987, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on momigami
wrinkled paper, 30/100,
25 x 18 1/2 in.
John 13:4-15



The Boat in the Storm
1981, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on momigami
wrinkled paper, 27 1/4 x 24 1/4 in.
Matthew 8:23-27



The Last Supper
1990, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on momigami
wrinkled paper, 50/50,
25 1/4 x 22 in.
Matthew 26:26-30



Well in Samaria
1970, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on momigami
wrinkled paper, 2/50,
27 x 21 1/2 in.
John 3:6-14



Miraculous Draught of Fish
1968, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on washi
handmade paper, 13 x 8 3/4 in.
John 21:1-14



Jonah
1979, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on washi
handmade paper, 13 x 8 3/4 in.
Jonah 1:11-17



Christ at Emmaus
1971, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on momigami
wrinkled paper, 51/70,
27 1/4 x 23 1/4 in.
Luke 24:30-32



Prodigal Son
1983, hand colored kappazuri
stencil print on washi
handmade paper, 13 x 9 in.
Luke 15:11-32



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CHRIST BEFORE US

Faithful Witness Through the Biblical Art of Sadao Watanabe

As you consider the simple phrase, *Christ Before Us*, you discover layers of meaning: *Christ is preeminent. Christ is present to us. Christ goes ahead of us. Follow Christ.*

It seems a fitting title for our show featuring the restrained, masterful work of Japan's foremost Christian artist, Sadao Watanabe (1913-1996), selected from the [Bowden Collection](#). Through the vernacular of traditional Japanese stencil drawing and dying, Watanabe bears powerful, beautiful witness to the nature, work, and ministry of Christ.

In the sparingly-applied colors, simple, elegant forms and compositions, and earthy symbolism on the crinkled, momigami paper, Watanabe reveals deep truths in a way that is readily accessible - consider the simple arc and incline of Christ's body and head toward those he loves and serves. And in creating within the Japanese folk art tradition, we also see one of Watanabe's chief desires on display - to, in the words of collector, Sandra Bowden, "create art that could be enjoyed by common people and displayed in ordinary settings."

Though internationally renowned, with his work in top collections, including the Vatican Museum, National Galleries in Washington, DC and London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, Watanabe's primary goal was simply to lead others to Christ, to place Christ before us as an act of thanksgiving, sparking faith, devotion, and, ultimately, joyful obedience.

I owe my life to Christ and the gospel. My way of expressing my gratitude is to witness to my faith through the medium of biblical scenes. - Sadao Watanabe

- David Lutes, Gallery Director

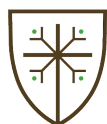
Sadao Watanabe (1913-1996)

Japan's foremost Christian artist, Sadao Watanabe converted from Buddhism to Christianity at 17 years old. He soon combined his new faith with an interest in preserving the complicated, traditional Japanese folk art of stencil dying, or *katazome*, formerly used for dying kimonos. Each hand-cut print is a colorful representation of biblical scenes that he hoped would speak to his people. He said, "my task is to stand within the artistic tradition of Japan...theology will not take deep root in Japanese soil if it is merely an import."

Within the framework of his Christian faith, Watanabe was able to translate the biblical narratives into Japanese settings, thereby giving them broad resonance. For instance, he clothed all the biblical characters in the Japanese dress of kimonos, Noah's Ark looks like a Japanese cricket cage filled with a menagerie of animals, and he depicted the Last Supper with a spread of fish and sake, all familiar, traditional foods of his people.

Watanabe was less concerned with representing visual reality than with finding ways to communicate his Christian beliefs to other Japanese. The result is a body of art that is an expression of deep faith as well as a valuable contribution to the history of Christian art.

- Excerpt from the *Bowden Collection Show Description*, edited for clarity (Sandra Bowden, Curator)



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