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CONTEMPORARY DRAWING | MARK ROTHKO | ITALIAN GLASS | ART IN ATLANTA



ALVIN LANGDON COBURN

Silken Silhouette

The Japanese kimono has a characteristic as enduring and remarkable as that of the tuxedo in the West—it is one piece of clothing that is bound to make any wearer look effortlessly elegant. So, too, the addition of a kimono, with its simple, rectilinear cut and sculpted silhouette, can add a note of sophistication and luxury to a general collection of textiles. Even if a particular specimen may seem spare, its fabric and construction may be subtly, unexpectedly refined. Such richness in restraint typifies much Japanese design, but as 17th-century Rinpa screens demonstrate, Japan's artisans have long known how to deliver unabashed opulence, too.

When it comes to kimonos, dealer Roger Yorke, whose Yorke Antique Textiles is based in Truro, Nova Scotia, Canada, has handled a diverse range of these colorful creations. A division of his company, The Kimono Gallery, offers some 1,000 high-quality examples, some of which date back to the latter part of the Edo period in the late 1800s. Other gems among Yorke's holdings were handcrafted in the early 20th century, when aesthetic ideas influenced the fine and decorative arts back and forth across cultures in a mutually inspiring dialogue between East and West.

With its long sleeves, vivid red lining, and ornate decoration on both front and back, this exquisite example of an *uchikake*, or wedding kimono, was made during the Taishō era, which lasted from 1912 to 1926 and is named for the Japanese emperor who ruled during that period. "Its cranes and flowers are symbols of a long, happy life," Yorke explains. "These designs were made using the traditional yuzen, resist-dyeing technique, along with the hand painting of certain details and fine, metallic-thread stitching around the edges of the birds' feathers and the flowers." The silk of which this robe is made is tightly woven and especially fine. The creators of this piece, Yorke notes, included a master dye artist who employed his challenging technique to produce deli-





cate shading in certain passages of its stylized motifs.

In the antiquities sector in general and among traditional Japanese art forms in particular, the kimono category is still relatively small and specialized, although it offers many a collection-worthy find and a broad price range. A kimono's elegance may be as irresistible as it is inescapable. For Osamu Dazai, the 20th-century Japanese novelist whose work exudes a bittersweet sense of angst, his mother's old hemp kimono meant so much to him, he asked for it to be buried with him in his coffin.

