

Netsuki - Japanese Kimono Toggles
Weekly Times Column
By Warren Joel

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First, what is a Netsuke and how would you know if you had one?

We need to look to the 18th and 19th century Japan to find out what this item is and how it was used. The traditional Japanese robe or more correctly termed Kimono had no pockets, so a small container was hung from a belt and the netsuke was used at the top of the belt to stop it slipping off the belt. One simple way to know if you have a Netsuke as opposed to simple Japanese carving is that all Netsuke have two small connected holes where the cord was connected through. The design of the Netsuke can be in any form from a simple face or button to the most finely carved animals, birds, fish, to plants and everything in between. Some of the most valuable and highly collectable may have a sexual reference. The material used in Netsuke is as varied as the subject matter, from inlaid ivory and bone through to simple timber and nuts. Firstly designed as a practical item it quickly developed into an art form that is still practiced today.

Netsuke has become highly collectable on the international market. Now like most collectables there are some important rules that need to be followed for the collector. One of the most important elements of the collectability of the Netsuke is who carved the item. The good Netsuke will have a small signature carved onto the lower side of the item. Now unless you can read traditional Japanese writing and signatures you will need to have it translated before you can look up the artist and even then you may need to know which generation of carver as these skills were passed down through the family.

The value of the Netsuke can vary from a few hundred dollars up to tens of thousands of dollars depending on age, subject matter, material used, condition and signature.

Next week: Fountain Pens

Free Valuation for Weekly Times readers.

Byjoel will do a free valuation of your collectables via email. If you send a photo and description of your item to valuations@byjoel.com.au I will access the item and respond.

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Warren is a third generation auctioneer and valuer specialising in Art, Antiques and Collectables, accredited by the Commonwealth in 35 different areas of collectables.

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