

**Spring 2024 Arts of Asia Lecture Series**  
**Echoes of the Past, Visions of the Future**  
Sponsored by the *Society for Asian Art*

**Japanese Aesthetics of Subversion: *Basara, Wabi Sabi, Kabukimono***

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Relevant Japanese era names:

- Azuchi/Momoyama (1573-1603)
- Edo (1603-1868)

“Warriors” in Japanese:

- **saburai (also samurai)**: derives from the word “*saburau*” or “to serve”; those who served the imperial princes, courtiers, temples, and shrines.
- **tsuwamono**: Weapons of war, skills to use such weapons, or those who use them.
- **bushi**: Literally, “those who serve with arms.”
- **mononofu**: Originally, those who served the great kings; those who served their master with arms and fought in wars.
- **musha**: Individuals or groups specialized in martial arts, and their social class; Imperial or courtly bodyguards.

Key terms:

- **basara**: Origin of the term unknown, but possibly derived from *vajra* (divine weapon and Buddhist ritual tool). Refers to an attitude or conduct of outrageous extravagance that nevertheless exudes unique aesthetic and moral principles.
- **wabi sabi**: Roughly, “rusticity and austerity.” An aesthetic principle primarily associated with a type of tea ceremony established by the great tea master, Sen no Rikyū (1522-91).
- **kabukimono**: *Kabuku* means to be “slanted” or “skewed.” *Mono* means “folks.” *Kabukimono* refers to the urban residents dressed and acted outrageously in the cities of Kyoto and Edo at the transitional moment from the medieval to the early modern era (roughly 1596-1643).
- **kabuki**: Among the most revered and globally recognized traditional forms of Japanese theater today. *Kabuki* has its roots in a theater troupe led by a female performer, Okuni, that performed at the bank of the Kamo River in Kyoto circa 1600. By the 1650s, *kabuki* became the all-male art form we see today.
- **Ichikawa Danjūrō**: The hereditary *kabuki* actor name of the lead actor in the main lineage of the Ichikawa family. Renowned for the “rough act” (*aragoto*) that characterized the Edo *kabuki* (as opposed to *kabuki* in Kyoto and Osaka), inheriting the Danjūrō name promised the actor stardom but it also comes with tremendous pressure to embody the Edo-esque aesthetic of dandyism and chivalry.

- **Sukeroku:** Protagonist of a popular *kabuki* play, *Sukeroku: Flower of Edo*, traditionally performed by Ichikawa Danjūrō. Based loosely on a legendary dandy, Hanakawado Sukeroku.

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