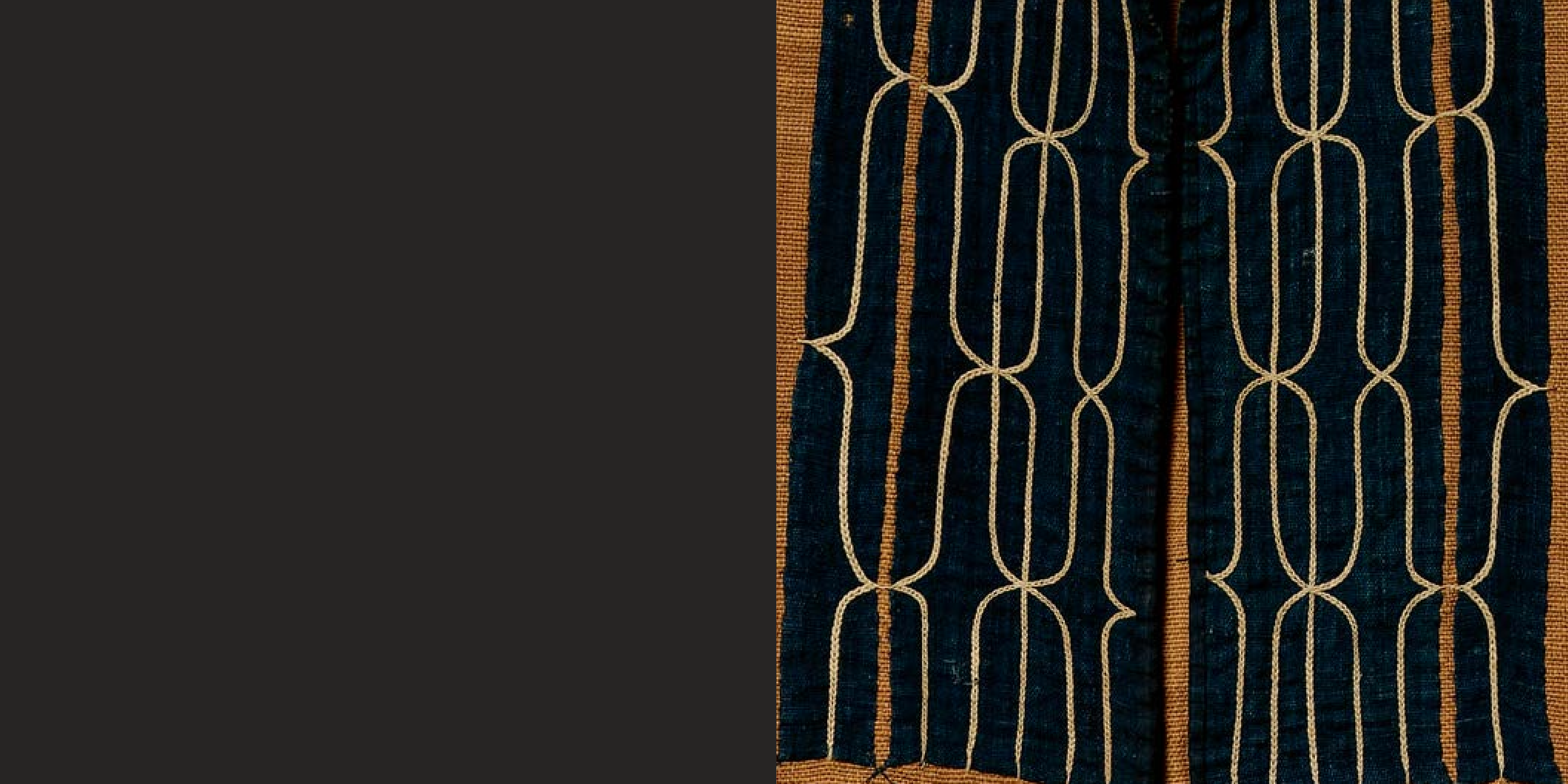


Spoon  
Made by the  
Hiro Tijo  
Glaniginas  
or Hokkaido  
Japan  
Oct. 1907





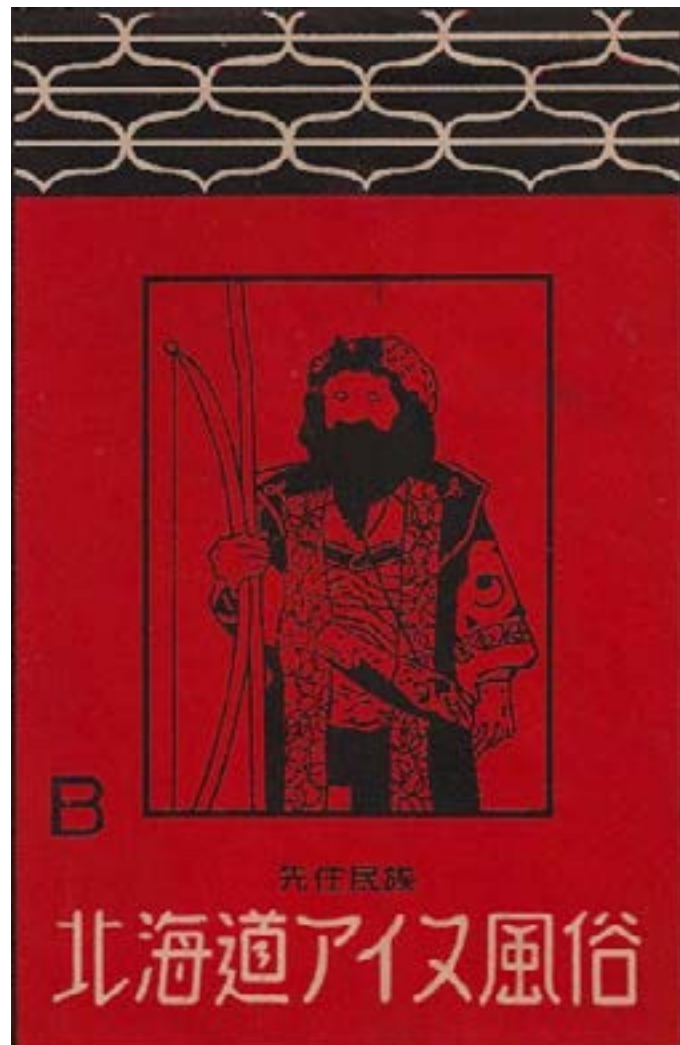
# UTARI: AINU

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF JAPAN

THE COLLECTION OF JOSEPH G. GERENA  
PATRICK AND ONDINE MESTDAGH GALLERY

For Marcus and Simon





## INTRODUCTION

Indigenous to Hokkaido, the northernmost island of the Japanese archipelago, the Ainu are a Paleo-Mongoloid people who share genetic heritage with Amerindians, Tibetans, and Okinawans. The Ainu are probably related, as well, to the Jōmon (14,000-300 BC), the original people of Japan pushed north by the arrival from Korea of the Yayoi from whom the greater present day Japanese population descends.

In their language Ainu means *the people*. Today, however, ethnic Ainu refer to themselves as *Utari*, meaning comrade. Historically Ainu men were tall, wavy-haired, and wore thick beards, hence the sobriquet “the hairy Ainu.” Ainu women displayed deep blue tattoos around the mouth, a process first begun in childhood and fully completed when a girl came of age.

A hunter-gatherer society, the Ainu survived mainly by deer hunting and salmon fishing, with some limited agriculture. Their deeply animistic belief system holds that spirit forces, *kamui*, permeate all natural things – fire, earth, mountains, land animals, fish, and plants.

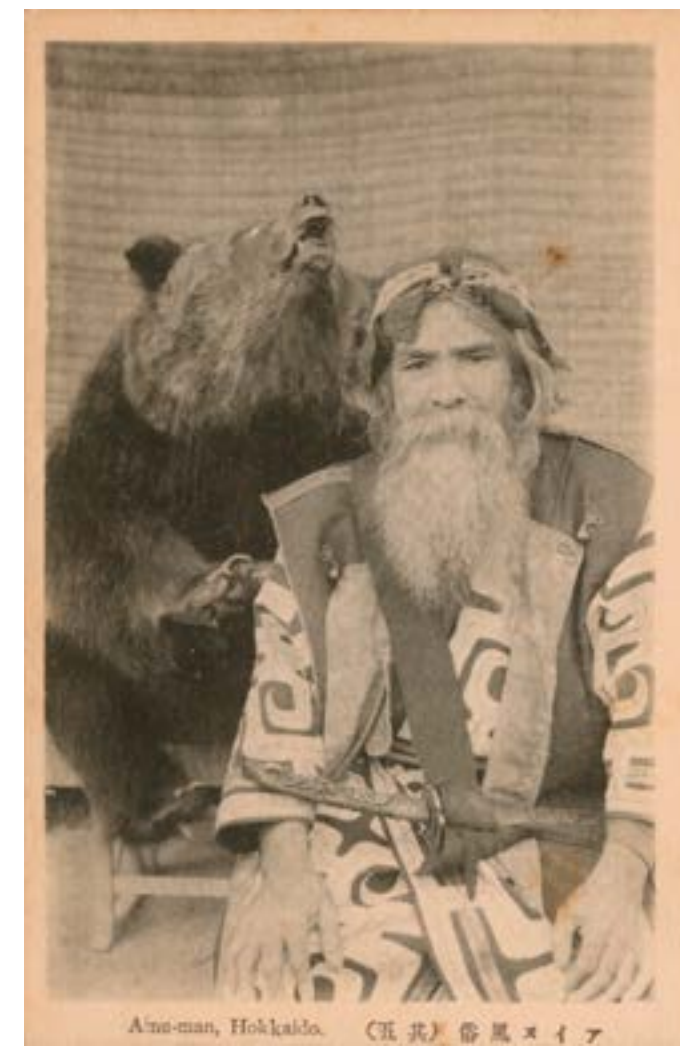
Central to their spirit world, bears were worshiped and also sacrificed. Malevolent spirits were kept at bay through rituals that included the use of *ikupasuy*, finely carved wood prayer sticks ornamented with protective spiral patterns, *morew*. These patterns were carved onto other wood objects such as ritual trays and bowls, as well as embroidered or applied onto costumes such as the renowned Ainu robes.

In the late 19th century the Japanese government essentially enslaved the Ainu, forced them to take Japanese names, confiscated their land, forbade them to hunt deer or fish salmon, and outlawed the practice of the Ainu religion including bear sacrifice, tattooing, and use of the Ainu language itself. Consequently, very little of Ainu material culture survives.

Joseph Gerena was a New York dealer with a particular love for the un-categorizable object and who time and again pioneered collecting in offbeat or neglected areas.



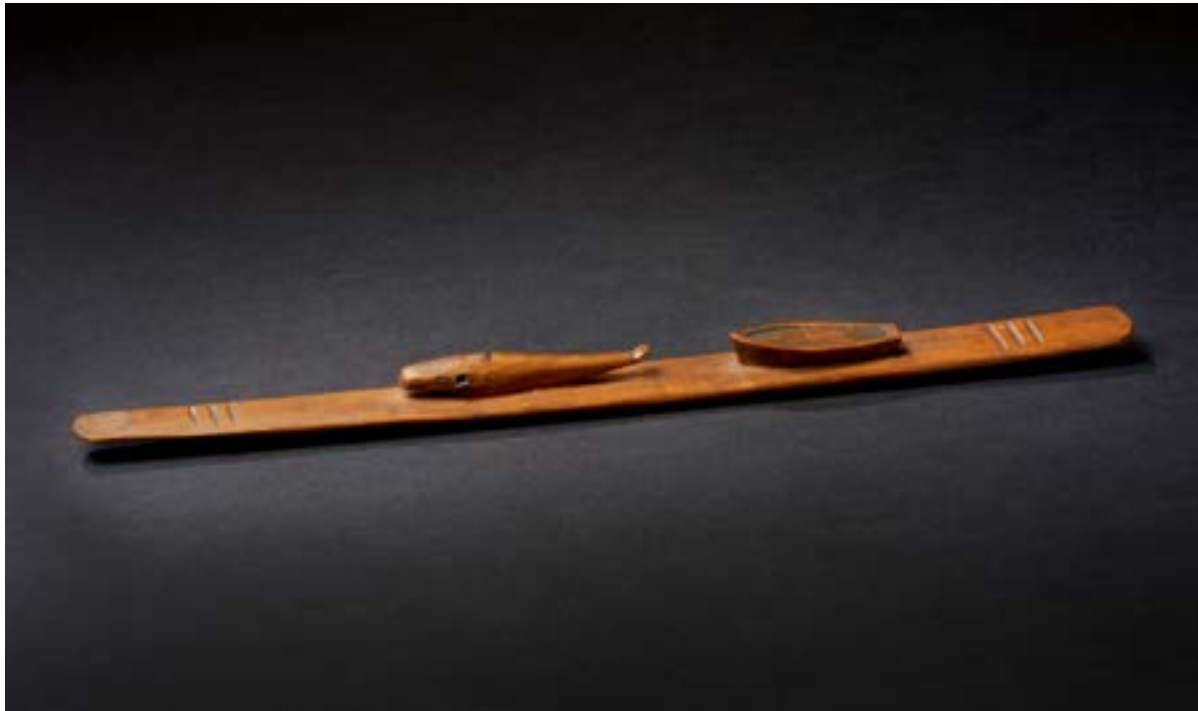
Following page:  
 Makemono of Ainu men preparing bear  
 for sacrifice by carving wooden sticks  
 (after Shimanojo Murakami)  
*Inaws*  
 Late Edo Period, Mid 19th century



Photographs and postcards  
 Early 20th century







Wood ritual prayer stick  
with whale and boat motif  
*Ikupasuy*  
Late Edo, c. 1850-1868

#### IKUPAUSY PRAYER STICKS

The Ainu did not pray directly to their gods but used an *Ikupasuy* prayer stick to channel their spiritual links with the animistic world. Ainu people did not own many material possessions and a man revered and prized his ikupausy.

Each prayer stick is unique, but favorite elements such as fish scale patterns, magic eyes, animal and fish forms are often seen as surface decoration.

Ikupausy have often been mistakenly called ‘mustache lifters’ because of their use while consuming alcoholic drinks as part of Ainu rituals of ancestor worship. The sticks are physical manifestations of prayers, which when placed close to the mouth are involved with the process of shamanic transformation. The effects of the alcohol helped carry the soul to another state of being.



Wood ritual prayer sticks with  
varied forms, motifs, and finishes  
*Ikupasuy*  
Late Edo/Meiji Periods, c.1850-1880





Wrapped cotton and reed backrest  
*Chitarpe*  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880





Grass net bag with Russian  
glass bead  
*Ketush*  
Meiji Period, c.1890-1912



Embroidered elm bark fiber bag  
*Ketush*  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880



Elm bark fiber and appliqued cotton  
man's sword sash  
*Emushat*  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880



Elm bark fiber and cotton bag  
*Keush*  
Edo/Meiji Period, c. 1860-1880=



#### ROBES AND TEXTILES

The best known object from AINU culture is the long robe made from strips of elm bark- *attush*. Woven on looms by women in winter, robes were made from bark harvested in summer and softened by chewing. Around the neck and sleeves, areas that deteriorate with use, blue cloth is appliquéd in the same spiral patterns that appear on household and ritual objects. Thus, the spiral patterned blue cloth served equally as practical protection from wear and as magical protection from evil spirits.

Beginning in the 19th century the AINU obtained cotton and silk trade cloth from the Japanese that offered new possibilities for creative expression in garments, resulting notably in the elaborately embroidered cloth robe with delicate appliquéd- *ruunpe*.

The Gerena Collection presents classical examples of both *attush* and *ruunpe*, each featuring morew, curvilinear motifs corresponding to decorative elements found on ancient Jōmon figural pottery of the first millennium BC.

Elm bark fiber and  
cotton robe  
*Attush*  
Meiji Period, c.1880





Elm Cotton appliqué robe  
*Ruunpe*  
Meiji/Showa Period, c.1910-1920



Woman's necklace,  
copper and glass  
*Shitoki*  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880





Three incised bone  
toggles or amulets  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880

Incised bone necklace  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880

Incised bone needlecase  
*Chispa*  
Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880



Carved wood tray  
*Ita*  
Late Edo Period, c.1850-1868



Carved spoon  
*Sorunpe*  
Meiji Period, c.1900

Decorated Spoon, dated 1907  
*Sorunpe*  
Meiji Period, c.1880-1900





HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS

Trays, bowls, and utensils were carved with fine decoration to please the eye. At some point in ancient history, such patterns may have served to protect against food spoiled by black magic. The patterns are consistent in the use of the talismanic *morew* motif known to us from the curvilinear patterns on Ainu textiles.

Ethnographers have noted that such designs were most likely intended solely to be aesthetically pleasing and have often been compared with the dishes and spoons of the Pacific Northwest Coast

Carved wood tray  
*Ita*  
Late Edo/Meiji Period, c. 1860-1880  
Wood bowl with decorated lug  
Chepenipapo  
Late Edo/Meiji Period, c. 1860-1880



Wood bowl with decorated handles  
*Mikiri*  
Late Edo Period, c. 1850-1868

Wood pipe holder and tobacco box  
*Tampaku-op*  
Late Edo/Meiji Period, c.1860-1880



Man's workbox/pillow  
*Pon Suop*  
Late Edo Period, c.1850-1860





Knife with laquer and bone  
decorated sheath  
*Mikiri*  
Late Edo Period, c.1850-1868

#### KNIVES AND SWORDS

An Ainu male never went anywhere without his dagger, *makiri*, which could be used as a cutting tool as well as for defense. The classical form of the knife might be personalized with patterns found pleasing to the owner.

The Ainu short ritual sword, *pons emush*, and the longer, *emush*, display greater similarities to the dominate Japanese culture samurai style sword but with uniquely Ainu features. Because metal blades were suppressed by the Japanese governments and made illegal to own, we often encounter swords that have wooden blades instead.

Weapons were often included in Ainu burial to accompany the dead into the next world.



Knife with laquer and bone  
decorated sheath *Mikiri*  
Late Edo Period, c.1850-1868







Lacquered wood ceremonial sword *Emush*  
with iron and brass *Tsuba*, no blade  
Late Edo Period, c. 1850-1868

Lacquered wood ceremonial sword  
*Pons Emush*, no blade  
Late Edo Period, c. 1850-1868

## COLOPHON

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