

Royal Ontario Museum
Department of Museum Volunteers
Docent Data Sheet

Gallery of Japanese Art
Palanquin

Palanquin (Norimono)

- Accession # 909.216.a-b
- Lacquered wood with gold and silver, with gilt copper fittings; Edo Period; late 18th – early 19th century.
- Type of palanquin used by upper samurai class.
- Designed for one passenger.
- Exceptional quality and character of workmanship plus the crests (hollyhock leaves) indicate that this was used by the daughter of a Tokugawa shogun, possibly for her wedding.
- Enclosed compartment is relatively small but reasonably comfortable. Occupant would sit on quilts on the floor.
- Exterior is lavishly decorated in gold and silver *maki-e* with the Tokugawa crest and chrysanthemums, the Imperial flower of Japan.
- Painted scenes on gold-leafed paper decorate the interior – similar to luxurious decoration on Japanese folding screens and sliding doors.
- Bamboo blinds and sliding doors provided privacy; could be opened for ventilation and a view of the passing scene.
- Suspended from a central beam and carried on the shoulders of four to six bearers.
- Magnificent example of the official art of the Tokugawa era (1603 – 1867).
- A symbol of the opulence and power of those who ruled Japan.

- Few events of the era matched the splendour of a wedding procession. The bride was taken to the ceremony and later to her husband's residence in the *norimono* escorted by samurai, attendants, and bearers shouldering her furniture and personal effects.

- The Meiji period (1867 – 1912) brought a rapid transformation to Japanese society. European-style horse-drawn carriages quickly replaced the elite palanquins of the shogunate.

- For more than 2,000 years, lacquer has been used in Japan to protect and preserve objects made of wood and other materials.
- Lacquerware is very costly because of the extraordinary skill and time required to produce it. Multiple layers of sap from the tree, the *rhus veniciflua*, are applied to the basic core. Several layers of lacquer may be applied, and each layer is allowed to dry for several days in a dust-free atmosphere. Once the lacquer dries, it becomes an exceedingly hard, moisture and heat resistant surface that can be polished to a mirror-like brilliance, and further decoration can be added in the form of *maki-e* (scattered painting). The design is drawn with wet lacquer on the dry surface and is then sprinkled with gold or silver dust, resulting in a brilliant metallic surface tempered with subtle textures of gold and silver particles.
- This was the unique and principle method of decorating Japanese lacquer which first appeared in the late 18th century.

