

Speech

Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo, Ambassador of Japan to Australia

On the occasion of the Opening of

the Golden Shells and the Gentle Mastery of Japanese Lacquer Exhibition

at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

24 November 2021

Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau,
Governor of Victoria, and Mr Anthony Howard,
Mr John Gandel and Mrs Pauline Gandel,
Professor Veronica Taylor,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

It is my absolute pleasure to finally be here for the official opening of this exquisite exhibition.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau, Governor of Victoria for her warm welcome extended to my wife, Kaoru and me earlier today.

It will be nearly one year next month since I started my posting as Ambassador to Australia.

I was told Melbourne is the cultural, sporting and fashion capital of Australia and I have been really looking forward to visiting Melbourne!

However, my official visit to Victoria has been postponed many times due to COVID-19, and the scheduling difficulties.

I sincerely thank you all for accommodating my schedule so that I could attend tonight's event.

Earlier this year, I met with a famous Victorian in Canberra, Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg (– but please be assured that I am not favouring a particular party at all!)

Between you and me, he suggested that I meet with Mr and Mrs Gandel before anyone else!

And from looking around at the Pauline Gandel Gallery of Japanese Art, I now understand why Mr Frydenberg strongly suggested so.

I did ask myself, “Where does Mrs Gandel’s love for Japan and Japanese art come from?”

In 1987, Mrs Gandel presented her husband with a beautiful Japanese urushi lacquered letterbox. And she was captivated by the beauty of urushi and since then Mrs Gandel’s Japanese art collection has kept growing and growing.

So much so they had to build their very own private gallery in their home to house all the art, eventually leading to this very gallery!

On behalf of Japan, I must thank Mr Gandel for supporting his wife’s exquisite taste!

But as a husband, I beg you to stop setting the bar so high!

Fascinated by the beauty of the many forms of Japanese art, Mrs Gandel has worked tirelessly to promote Japanese art to the world.

For this, she was awarded Japan’s highest honour, the Order of the Rising Sun in 2014.

I heard the Gandels rocked up to Canberra for the ceremony in their very own private jet.

Perhaps - I could ask you for a lift back to Canberra?

Jokes aside, I congratulate Mrs Gandel for commissioning this important project to recreate the traditional Japanese pastime of Kai-Awase or ‘shell matching’.

Not only is it simply beautiful to look at, this art project was a significant opportunity for the Japanese artists involved and to learn about the beauty of Australian flora.

Mrs Gandel's passion has ignited interest in this centuries-old art and will preserve the ancient techniques for future generations.

Historically, a set of Kai-Awase was presented to the bride-to-be as a wedding gift as the matching of two shells, symbolises the unity of a husband and wife.

And Mr and Mrs Gandel are a perfect example of this.

Although they may say otherwise if we ask them separately.

Japan and Australia's relationship is like Kai-Awase.

We've become the best of mates and our mateship is the envy of many.

Melbourne wears many crowns, but it is also the home of many Japanese companies.

The presence of Toyota, Asahi, Muji, Uniqlo and NEC can be seen all over the state.

Mitsui and Mitsubishi established their businesses in Sydney at first, but decided to move their headquarters to Melbourne.

This speaks volumes about the importance of Melbourne.

I will keep coming back to Melbourne, as the Victorian Premier is the only one in Australia that I am yet to meet.

Besides, the large-scale energy project in the Latrobe Valley is underway to send hydrogen to Japan and I will certainly be back to see the progress.

To conclude, I sincerely wish this wonderful exhibition, Golden Shells and The Gentle Mastery of Japanese Lacquer, all the success and hope many visitors to this gallery will enjoy the centuries-old Japanese art form of Kai-Awase.

Thank you.