

Suishinshi MASAHIDE

Suishinshi MASAHIDE was born in 1750, the 3rd year of the Kanen era, in Motonakayama-Suwahara, Okitama District, Dewa Province (present-day Nanyō City, Yamagata Prefecture). He began his career as a blacksmith, first making farming tools, and later transitioned into swordsmithing. Initially, he used the smith's name "IEHIDE" (宅英), and later adopted the name "HIDEKUNI" (英国). His formal training began in 1771 (the 8th year of the Meiwa era), under the guidance of Yoshihide Shimohara in Hachioji, Musashi Province (present-day Hachioji City, Tokyo). After returning to Dewa, in 1774 (the 3rd year of the Anei era), he was employed by the Akimoto family, the lords of Yamagata Domain. At this time, he changed his smith's name to "MASAHIDE" (正秀), and began using the "Suishinshi" (水心子) title. Around 1783 (the 3rd year of the Tenmei era), he settled in Edo (present-day Tokyo), seeking out the descendants of famous swordsmiths to learn from them. He acquired the Sōshū and Bizen traditions, gaining valuable skills.

Masahide's sword-making period lasted for approximately fifty years, until 1824 (the 7th year of the Bunsei era). In the early part of his career, he was influenced by the "Osaka Shin-tō" (new swords of Osaka) of the early Edo period. He emulated the hamon designs after famous swordsmiths, such as the tōran-ba of Tsuda Echizen-no-Kami SUKEHIRO, and the sugu-ha of Inoue SHINKAI. Occasionally, he also made hamon in the style of the swordsmith Ikkanshi TADATSUNA. Later, during the Bunkai era (after 1804), he began advocating for and practicing the theory of "Fukko-tō" (restoration swords), which called for a return to the sword styles of older times. His work in this period focused on producing swords with narrower ko-chōji-like hamon following the Bizen tradition. In the final years of his life, he changed his name to "AMAHIDE" (天秀) in 1819 (the 2nd year of the Bunsei era).

In his later years, alongside his sword-making, Masahide wrote works such as *Kenkō Hiden-shi*, *Tōken Jitsuyō-ron*, and *Tōken Buyō-ron*. He dedicated himself to educating over 100 disciples, shaping many future swordsmiths. His influence on subsequent generations of swordsmiths is immeasurable, as many contemporary swordsmiths trace their lineage back to these disciples. Thus, the legacy and contributions of Suishinshi Masahide have endured for over 200 years since his death.

Throughout his life, Masahide continued to fuel his passion for sword-making, opening a new chapter in the history of Japanese swords, known as the "Shin-shin-tō" (new-new swords) period. He passed away on September 27, 1825 (the 8th year of the Bunsei era), at the age of 76.

No.1

Katana Mei Bushū ni oite Dewa-jūnin Gorō Masahide

Anei roku nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 6th year of the Anei era)

This sword is a valuable example of Masahide's early work. The year 6 of Anei is the oldest known date for his surviving works, and the inscription "Bushū ni oite" (於武州) confirms that he was already making swords in Edo by that time. The style of this piece is judged to be Osaka Shintō which he sought to emulate up until his middle age, particularly resembling the tōran-midare hamon of Sukehiro. However, at this stage, the style had not yet been fully perfected, and it is clear that Masahide was still experimenting in his early years.

No.2 Wakizashi Mei Suishinshi Masahide

Tenmei roku nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 6th year of the Tenmei era)

This wakizashi shows a short yakidashi-style (short straight hamon) at the base of the blade. The overall hamon is wide, incorporating a mix of gunome, ko-gunome and chōji, but also displaying some tōran-like wave patterns here and there. It is clear that this piece is inspired by the Osaka Shintō style, showing the characteristics of an early work of Masahide. The fine ko-itame pattern in the jigane is well-defined, and the delicate craftsmanship indicates his skill. It is a work clearly demonstrates the high level of craftsmanship of Masahide, whose skill is evident, and marks the beginning of his later works, many of which became highly regarded.

No.3

Katana Mei Shuishinshi Masahide

Togidaseba sensenkōbō hana no gotoshi

Futakoshi ryōwan ikkatsu uri no gotoshi

The inscription on the back of this sword reads: "Togidaseba sensenkōbō hana no gotoshi. Futakoshi ryōwan ikkatsu uri no gotoshi" (出刃閃々光芒如花二腰兩腕一割若瓜), which means, "When sharpened, it gleams with a brilliant radiance, like a flower. When tested for cutting ability, it is as flawless as slicing through a melon."

This indicates that, along with its sharpness, the sword emulates the tōran-midere hamon of Echizen-no-kami Sukehiro, showcasing its craftsmanship and perfection. It is clear that this sword was a work that Masahide was particularly proud of. Although there is no explicit date, based on the style of the inscription, it is believed to have been made around the first year of the Kansei era.

No.4

Wakizashi Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kaō)

Kansei kyū nen hachi gatu-jitsu (August in the 9th year of the Kansei era)

This wakizashi features a suguha (straight hamon) at the base of the blade, and the overall hamon has a robust structure with notare mixed with gunome and partially displaying tobiyaki. It exhibits the tōran-style midare commonly seen in works from this period. The prominent nioi and nie are clearly visible, with some patches of mura-nie, making the nioiguchi bright and clear. The jigane is meticulously tight, and the craftsmanship of Masahide, skilled in steel refinement, is fully demonstrated in this piece. It should also be noted that, starting the following year, he began adding a stamp to the tangs.

No.5

Wakizashi Mei Kawabe Gihachirō Fujiwara Masahide (Kokuin)

Kansei jū nen hachi gatsu-jitsu Masamune saku daishinbō-hori no zu
(August in the 11th year of the Kansei era)

As stated in the inscription, this wakizashi emulates the composition of the blade carvings by the renowned Sōshū-bori master, Daishinbō, which were applied to the works of Masamune from the Kamakura period. These carvings are reproduced on both sides of the blade. With a dynamic hitatsura-yaki hamon and the end of the tang shaped in the Iriyama-gata, showcasing the style of Sōshū tradition. Masahide is generally known for making fukko-tō (restoration swords) inspired by kotō (old swords) which he held in high regard, and he produced many such swords after the Bunka era. This piece is particularly valuable as it precedes the production style.

No.6

Wakizashi Mei Oite Tōdaijō no shita Suishinshi Masahide kore-wo tsukuru
Kyōwa ni nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 2nd year of the Kyōwa era)

This wakizashi features a jigane with well-formed, tight ko-itame hada and thick jinie. The hamon displays a ō-gunome-midare in tōran style, with wide nioiguchi and prominent nie, creating a bright and clear appearance that at first glance resembles the Osaka Shin-tō style. However, the blade carvings, in particular, are remarkably similar to those of Ikkanshi Tadatsuna, making it one of Masahide's rare Ikkanshi-utsushi (replicas of Ikkanshi). The sword is a superb reproduction of the original, with excellent craftsmanship and impressive carvings.

No.7

Wakizashi Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)
Bunka roku nen hachi gatsu kichijitu (An auspicious day in August of the 6th year of the Bunka era)
Takizawa Gihei no yoshimini ōji Fujisan no mizu wo motte ha wo niragu

This wakizashi features a clear and distinct ō-gunome-midare hamon in the tōran style. Interestingly, the inscription reveals that "Fuji-san no mizu" (water from Mount Fuji) was used during the tempering process. This was likely done in accordance with the wishes of the person who commissioned the sword, "Takizawa Gihei." The carvings also include "Narita-san" (Mount Narita), suggesting that the owner was a devout follower of Shinshō-ji Temple. Additionally, the sword reflects the Mount Fuji faith that was popular at the time, making it an invaluable work.

No.8

Wakizashi Mei Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)
Bunka hachi nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 8th year of the Bunka era)

This wakizashi, featuring a hira-zukuri (a flat blade without any ridgelines) construction and a slightly extended length, is relatively rare among Masahide's

works. The bright hamon displays a tight nioiguchi with a chū-suguha (A medium-sized straight hamon), which is uncommon for his style, possibly indicating it is a replica of another piece. The blade is further enhanced by inscriptions, with "Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō" (南無妙法蓮華經), the chant of Nichiren Buddhism, carved on the back, and "Hachiman Daibosatsu" (八幡大菩薩) on the front. In Nichiren Buddhism, Hachiman Daibosatsu is regarded as the guardian deity of the Hokke-kyō, and the carvings clearly reflect the faith of the Nichiren sect.

No.9

Katana Mei Kawabe Gihachirō Fujiwara Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)

Bunka ku nen hachi gatsu-jitsu Nakamura Mototada no motome ni ōji tsukuru
(August in the 9th year of the Bunka era)

Throughout his entire sword-making career, it can be said that in the latter half of his work, Masahide proposed and personally practiced the idea that swords should return to the kotō (old-style swords) of the Kamakura period. The characteristics of his work, particularly the hamon featuring a series of ko-choji **in shin-tai style**, are distinctly different from those of his earlier swords. This particular piece can be considered a prime example of this shift. Although little is known about the person who commissioned the sword, Nakamura Mototada, it is worth noting that in the previous year, Bunka 8, a sword commissioned by Mototada with similar size, design, and inscription arrangement also exists.

No.10

Katana Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)

Bunka jū nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 11th year of the Bunka era)

This sword features a well-forged ko-itame jigane, with a tight surface from the tang to the tip, demonstrating the characteristic texture of shin-shin-tō (new new swords). The narrow hamon, with prominent nioi, is suguha (straight hamon) and incorporates kuichigai-ba (an over-lapping break in the hamon) and uchinoke (small crescent shapes appearing like niju-ba), making it an unusual example of the Yamato

tradition for Masahide. Even though it was made in the later years of his career, it remains a superb piece, with both the jigane and hamon being bright and sharp, showing no signs of a decline in skill. The kurikara carved on the front of the blade and the sankozuka-ken (three-pronged sword) on the back enhance the sword's overall appeal.

No.11

Katana Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kaō)

Bunka jūni nen gasai kinoto-i ni gatsu kichijitsu tsukuru (An auspicious day in February of the 12th year of the Bunka era)

Hyakuren seigō jōsō yōki (Kokuin)

Although Masahide proposed the theory of “Fukko-to” (restoration swords) in his later years, he continued to produce swords influenced by the Osaka shin-tō (new swords) style. This particular piece appears to be modeled after the suguha (straight hamon) of the early Edo period swordsmith, Echizen-no-kami Sukehiro. The jigane has a plain, almost featureless style, with dark nie spilling out, reflecting the craftsman's unique technique. However, the prominent nioi and thick nie, giving the hamon a bright and sharp appearance. The hamon also shows five subtle notare, which slightly expanding the width from below the yokote (the dividing line between the tip and the body of the blade), indicating that his intended design was successfully realized.

No.12

Katana Mei Kawabe Gihachirō Fujiwara Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)

Bunka jūni kinoto-i ni gatsu kichijitu (An auspicious day in February of the 12th year of the Bunka era)

Yo no Ishii-shi ni okeru kōjō no hi furuku Ishii-shi no

Tōken ni okeru shikō makoto ni atsushi. Koko ni oiteka kitaete-motte kore wo okuru

The primary goal of Masahide’s “Fukko-tō” (restoration swords), as demonstrated by this piece, seems to have been a return to the chōji-midare hamon of Bizen

swords. It clearly distinguishes itself from the chōji of the Ishidō school, with its overall small patterns forming a gentle wave, occasionally slanted, which is characteristic of what one might call “Masahide chōji.” This particular sword has a wider hamon compared to the typical chōji-midare, showing various activities. The inscription suggests a strong connection to a person named Ishii, and it is believed to be a carefully crafted piece.

No.13

Katana Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)

Bunka jūni nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 12th year of the Bunka era)

The jihada of this piece is composed of well-defined ko-itame, presenting the characteristic plain jigane of the shin-shin-tō (new-new sword) period. The hamon incorporates ko-gunome, gunome-chōji, and slanted chōji, with long ashi and prominent nioi, demonstrating a unique structure in line with Masahide’s “Fukko-tō Ron” (Restoration Sword Theory). This reflects the typical features of the period. This particular sword is a late work in the Bizen tradition of Masahide, showcasing his distinctive chōji-midare without any flaws, and it is crafted with an idealized vision of the Kamakura period's swords.

No.14

Katana Mei Rokujū-hachi Okina Suishinshi Masahide ha wo niragu

Bunka jūyo nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 14th year of the Bunka era)

Suikanshi Sadahide kore wo kitaeru

Wakizashi Mei Rokujū-hachi Okina masahide yakiba-watari (Kokuin)

Bunka jūyo nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 14th year of the Bunka era)

Suikanshi Sadahide kore wo kitaeru

Although a considerable number of swords by Masahide are confirmed, few exist as dai-shō (katana and wakizashi set). These pieces are precious as they are recognized as dai-shō, as indicated by their inscriptions and carvings. Additionally, the inscriptions note that they were forged by his son, Sadahide, while Masahide himself

performed the tempering. The pieces feature Masahide's distinctive ko-chōji-midare hamon without any flaws, along with the rich carvings. The value of these swords is further enhanced by the accompanying koshirae (sword mounting), which were made in the same period.

No.15

Dai-shō

Katana Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kaō) (Kokuin)

Bunsei gan-nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 1st year of the Bunsei era)

Wakizashi Mei Suishinshi Masahide (Kokuin)

Bunka jūgo nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 15th year of the Bunka era)

Although these two pieces have different years of inscription, the year Bunka 15 corresponds to the year of the era change to Bunsei, meaning they were made in the same year. In addition, the style, the arrangement of the carvings, and the fact that both feature the same theme of “Nami ni Ryūjin” (Wave and Dragon God) carved into the hitsu (a recess carved in a rectangular shape) on the front side of the blades, suggest that they can be recognized as a dai-shō (katana and wakizashi set).

Masahide’s distinctive chōji-midare is composed of several types of hamon that change irregularly. Even though it was made in his later years, the craftsmanship shows no signs of decline, demonstrating his continued skill.

No.16

Katama Mei Nanajū-ni okina Amahide

Busei san nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 3rd year of the Bunsei era)

Masahide changed his name to “Amahide” the year before making this piece, and it was created four years before his final work. The hamon of this sword, primarily composed of ko-chōji, also incorporates square waves and pointed waves, clearly demonstrating the distinctive characteristics of Masahide's style. Additionally, the inscription’s “nanajū-ni (seventy-two)” (七十二) does not align with his actual age, but it is understood in the sword-making community as “Kirō-heki,” a celebration of

long life, where ages are added out of joy for longevity. A similar practice has been confirmed with his disciple, Naotane.