

A Virtually Priceless WWII-Era Art Collection Defines Japan's Hierarchy In A Master's Works

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, UNITED STATES, April 15, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a secure, state-of-the-art facility protected by biometric access and armed security, a rare and virtually priceless collection (of original portrait drawings by the late Japanese master Kiyoshi Saito) preserves one of the most pivotal chapters in world history.

A collection of original drawings attributed to the celebrated Kiyoshi Saito, (1907–1997) one of Japan's most influential artists of the 20th century, was recently discovered by the Smithsonian Institution emphasizing the historic significance of Saito's early original works depicting prominent former Japanese political figures.

This collection consists of former Prime Ministers, Emperors, First Ladies, Military Generals, Princes, and Diplomats that served Japan in and around World War II. These were symbolic figures of the nation of Japan at a crossroads in history who made key decisions just prior to, during and after World War II which was the deadliest conflict in the history of the world.

A recent gift to the Smithsonian of an original portrait drawing by Saito Kiyoshi of Former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke is currently on exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art as the exhibition ends on April 27th 2025. This one original drawing was a gift from the (Ted M. Miller Kiyoshi Saito Historical Art Collection of Original Works) to the Smithsonian as Miller still privately owns the remainder of this historic collection.

Former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke was nicknamed the "Monster of The Showa Era. He had co-signed the declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain together with Emperor Hirohito. Later Kishi was imprisoned as a suspected Class A war criminal, but U.S. occupation authorities did not charge, try, or convict him, and released him in 1948 during the Reverse Course. Kishi later became Prime Minister of Japan and helped to bridge diplomatic relations between the US and Japan post war.

Miller believes the piece of art by itself should become an exhibition of its own in the future describing the history of Japan's political makeup as it existed to better understand the circumstances and events that led up to the war, that occurred during the war and that took place thereafter.

Through these original drawings Saito documented a country in flux by capturing the emotional

gravity worn on the faces of its most powerful figures. Each stroke in his portraits reveals psychological depth, uncertainty, resolve, and remorse that provides an alternative historical narrative told through expression. He transcended documentation and provided insight into a culture struggling with war, loss, accountability, and reconstruction.

Saito's influence of diplomacy after the war through his artwork was awe inspiring, helping to bridge post war relations between the U.S. and Japan. He promoted his artwork throughout the U.S. having been invited by the U.S. State Department and the Asia Foundation as part of a dual sponsorship initiative of cultural diplomacy. At age 74, Saito was awarded the Fourth Class Order of the Sacred Treasure by the Japanese Government. Later in 1995 he was named a Person of Cultural Merit (Bunka Korosha), one of Japan's highest honors given by the Emperor in recognition of Saito's outstanding contributions to science and culture.

Miller's dedication to this extraordinary collection is underpinned by a deeply held belief in the power of historical memory. George Santayana's adage states that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. That's why Miller and many others see the collection as an art and civic tool of responsibility to teach our younger generation and to further educate historians alike. Each portrait is a reminder of what was and some are a cautionary note for what could be.

This perspective is especially critical in today's world. In an era marked by cultural amnesia and the rewriting of historical narratives, Miller's stewardship to this collection helps ensure that the lessons of history are preserved through visual documentation and in this instance works of art by one of the most well recognized, and celebrated Japanese artists in history of former Japanese decision makers.

Miller, a true American patriot and philanthropist has spent decades advocating for and honoring U.S. military veterans having been honored nine times in the US House of Representatives, in the Congressional Record for his commitment to enhancing the national morale of our nation, promoting patriotism through song and action as a steward for our US military veterans.

Through Ted's active involvement with Military and Veterans Affairs for almost 30 years, he understands, more than most, the importance of preserving history and recognizes the many great sacrifices our nation's heroes have made for America's freedom and democracy.

Miller's collection has sparked interest among historians, curators, and collectors alike around the world. The historical, cultural and educational value of these pieces is indisputable. According to the recent market trends, their monetary value may also reach unprecedented levels.

The increasing attention to 20th-century politically charged portraiture by ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWI) adds a compelling financial layer to the story. In 2024, a damaged study of

Winston Churchill by Graham Sutherland sold for \$840,000. Similarly, in 2019, Robert Rauschenberg's Buffalo II, featuring John F. Kennedy, fetched approximately \$88.8 million at Christie's.

These staggering figures highlight the rarity & desirability of politically themed historical artwork. Miller's collection, tied to a global moment of transformation and authored by an artist of Saito's stature, represents an intersection of investment, preservation, and legacy.

Miller's continued stewardship of this scarce collection will eventually invite new audiences from around the globe to appreciate this virtually priceless art collection through either additional museum donations, national exhibitions, charitable contributions, scholarly partnerships and or a combination of some or all. It reaffirms a broader commitment to remember the past, serve the present, and protect the future.

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