

4-25-2014

## Nō Theater Costume (Karaori)

RISD Museum

Anais Missakian

*Rhode Island School of Design*, [amissaki@risd.edu](mailto:amissaki@risd.edu)

Michelle Liu Carriger

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/risdmuseum\\_channel](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/risdmuseum_channel)



Part of the [Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

RISD Museum; Missakian, Anais; and Carriger, Michelle Liu, "Nō Theater Costume (Karaori)" (2014). *Channel*. 14.  
[https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/risdmuseum\\_channel/14](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/risdmuseum_channel/14)

This Transcript is brought to you for free and open access by the RISD Museum at DigitalCommons@RISD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Channel by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@RISD. For more information, please contact [mpompeli@risd.edu](mailto:mpompeli@risd.edu).

Hello. My name is Anais Missakian, Professor of Textiles and Interim Dean of Fine Arts at the Rhode Island School of Design. I'm thrilled to be able to talk about a robe from the Noh Robe Collection at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum.

The Noh robes, used for the Noh lyrical theatre, are remarkable technically. They were woven on standing draw looms. Imagine a loom, an ancient, very old wooden loom, where there's a weaver sitting at the loom, weaving what is the background of the cloth, and a draw boy, standing or even hovering above the loom. The weaver is sitting in front of the loom and weaving the background patterns with discontinuous supplementary weft.

The background of this cloth happens to be the natural fabric, natural colored ground, which is a natural silk; and the lattice work, which represents bamboo fences, is woven with the ground in gold-leafed paper by the weaver. That gold-leafed paper is floating everywhere behind, on the back side of the fabric. So this fabric that used a lot of gold-leafed paper and silk is obviously very extravagant and very important as far as what it represented in a certain level of society.

A fabric like this would have taken months, if not longer, to create. And I think it's very important to always value the hand and the sort of craft that goes into making, it is that hand that can give a piece a sustained life.

My name is Michelle Liu Carriger and I have a Ph.D. from Brown University in Theatre and Performance Studies, where one of my specialties is Japanese performance. And I'm looking here at a Noh theatre robe from the RISD collection, and it's a form of brocade called Kataoti, which means, literally, Chinese weaving.

Noh theatre costumes are, famously, fabulously decorated, and when they're on the body of the actors, they actually change the shape of the body of the actor quite a lot, so that actors are kind of superhuman looking. They're really wide, they're really voluminous.

Imagine being in layers and layers of this. This robe is not the bottom layer, but it's also not the top layer of all of the things that the person might be wearing. You've got this tiny little person inside the middle of all of these layers of clothing so that they become a huge, slow, ponderous, regal presence and move very slow and stately.

I think it is valuable and interesting for us to hold on to these pieces of material culture, especially when it comes to something that you put on your body. It reminds us both how close and how far away we are from the other people who have worn this item, right? We have to imagine this is an incomplete piece of work. This piece of work is not complete unless a person is wearing it.

So for me to look at this, I think, yeah, there was a person in here, there were many, many people in here, there were generations of people in here. And not only does this start as a costume for the Noh theatre but it moves on. And here it is today, sort of holding all these secrets of all the people.