



4537 A kawabaori (leather fireman's coat) decorated with hares leaping among waves and with the Ishikawa mon (family crest) on the reverse.

Japan 19th century Edo Period

Dimensions: L. 108cm x W. 132cm (42³/₄" x 52")

These coats were made of deerskin or the imported hide of Indian water buffalo and were worn by firemen of the samurai class during the Edo period. Organised into brigades each group had its own insignia, name, and hierarchy. After successfully fighting the blaze fireman would don their best coats for a celebratory parade through the town or village.

The design on these robes was created using a particular smoking process which seems to have been introduced to Japan from India in the Momoyama Period (1568-1603). This technique added colour to the leather and also rendered it waterproof. Before the smoking process rice paste was applied with a stencil to the surface creating a pattern reserved in white on the brown smoked leather

The hare and the moon are often linked in East Asian folklore. Japanese legends describe the shadows

on the surface of the moon as hares pounding mochi (sticky rice cakes) while an ancient Chinese Taoist tale tells of a hare that resides in the moon and pounds magic herbs in order to make the elixir of eternal life. In Japan the full moon and the hare have become associated with autumn, a time when the moon is deemed to shine brightest. The hare is also associated with the sea and high tides, another natural phenomena caused by the lunar cycle.

