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Beauty Given By Grace

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The University of Dayton will experience the interaction of Japanese culture and Christianity when a traveling exhibition visits the Marian Library this fall.

Sadao Watanabe's "Beauty Given by Grace" will be on display Monday, Sept. 16, through Friday, Nov. 15, at the Marian Library Gallery, located on the seventh floor of Roesch Library. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Saturday and Sunday by appointment by calling 937-229-4214.

Watanabe, a Japanese Christian, wanted to create art that could be accessed by everyday people. With this goal in mind, he chose scenes from the Bible as his primary subject matter in order to communicate the truth of Scripture in a Japanese context. For example, he portrays Peter in a formal Samurai hadama worn over a kimono, and he depicts the Last Supper with sake wine bottles and cups and a meal of fish, rice and sushi.

The artist also believed that beauty does not come from the skills of the craftsman, but from the grace of God shining through the natural materials used. Watanabe fulfilled this belief by using a Japanese folk art technique called katazome — or stencil dyeing — where all-natural pigments are applied onto momigami or washi, two types of Japanese paper.

His work can be grouped into representations of the Old Testament, the Life of Christ, the Passion, the Miracles and the Teachings of Jesus. The Marian Library exhibit will feature a selection of 50 original Watanabe momigami and washi prints, cards, and calendars from the collections of Sandra Bowden and John A. Kohan.

"It is important that the Christian community and the culture at large become aware of this remarkable artist," says Bowden. "Against all odds in a culture that was less than 2 percent Christian, he chose to dedicate his life to being an artist that depicted biblical stories. [His] work is beautiful, has a charm and humor in many instances, and is an example to artists of today how it is important to be an artist who is Christian."

Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA), an organization dedicated to cultivating the relationship between art and Christianity, curated a traveling exhibition of Watanabe's work that will visit universities, churches and small museums. The University of Dayton is the fourth stop on the exhibit's path.

The University of Dayton's Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute is a globally recognized center for the study of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and it holds the world's largest collection of printed materials and artifacts devoted to her. The collection includes more than 100,000 books and pamphlets in more than 50 languages, and a vast collection of nearly 3,000 Nativity sets and Marian art from around the world.

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu.