



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ARTS & ANTIQUES

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**Japan, Meiji Period**

End of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

**LARGE  
IVORY EAGLE**

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**Japan, Meiji Period**  
End of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

***Large Ivory Eagle***

Signed

Total height: 192 cm. (75 5/8 in.)

Without base: 100 x 140 cm. (39 3/8 x 55 1/8 in.)

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Fig. 1 *Large ivory sculpture of an eagle*, Japan, Meiji Period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, signed. Private Collection.

## Art in the Meiji Period

Art in the Meiji period was incredibly versatile, and closely linked to the historical circumstances in which it came about. The ongoing artistic evolution taking place in Japan at the time was the result of the cultural revolution initiated by the Emperor Meiji in 1868. The Japanese islands, which during the long Edo period (1603/1615-1868) were completely closed off from all outside influence, threw their doors wide open to the West at this historic juncture. When, in 1868, Japan rejoined the rest of the world's nations after three centuries of isolation, it had to embark on a frantic race to catch up with them, and quickly assimilate everything relating to the modern era. It also had to open up to the new lifestyle of the industrial revolution, which the Western nations had already been through. This meant a tremendous internal upheaval that would shake the very foundations of its so closely-guarded ancient tradition, and which could only be compared to the shock of the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries with the arrival of Chinese influence. In the years following the decision taken by the Emperor Meiji in 1868, Japan would become enriched by outside cultures different to its own, which would lead it to change its most deeply-rooted structures. After a period of rapid assimilation, in which new forms and ideologies mixed with those that already existed on the archipelago, a new and immensely interesting product came into view. The piece of sculpture we are introducing here is a clear example of this new way of making and understanding art (Fig. 1).



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Figs. 3 & 4 *Large ivory sculpture of an eagle*, Japan, Meiji Period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, signed. Private Collection.



Fig. 4 *Large ivory sculpture of an eagle*, Japan, Meiji Period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, State Museum of Oriental Art of Moscow.

This work is sculpted with exquisite realism, its head leaning forward and its wings unfurled, ready to take flight. The sculpture, with encrustations in its eyes (Fig. 2) and bearing a signature (Fig. 3), is perched on a tree made of rootstock.

A number of similar pieces are currently housed in major museums and private collections. Of particular interest is the eagle on display at the State Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow. This sculptural composition, with an eagle on a huge piece of old pine rootstock and a four-part double-sided screen, was a gift from the Emperor of Japan during the Meiji period to the Russian Emperor Nicholas II to mark his coronation in Moscow. The sculpture was delivered by the official delegation, led by the prince of Japan, in the spring of 1896 (Fig. 4).

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Another important Japanese ivory eagle sculpture was almost certainly created for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, marking one century of American independence. With a wingspan of nearly a metre, this majestic predator displays the depth and richness found only in the finest Japanese carved ivory masterpieces. Purchased directly from the Japanese exhibitor at the end of the fair, and passed on down through the generations by a prominent Philadelphia family, this unique sculpture is absolutely the finest Meiji-period work of art we have ever had the pleasure to offer (Fig. 5).

As an indication of the importance of this art form, we would mention its presence at the Tokyo National Museum, or the major sales of comparable pieces that have taken place in recent years on the private art market (Figs. 6 & 7).



Fig. 6 *Ivory sculpture of an eagle*, Japan, Meiji Period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Philadelphia, USA.



Fig. 8 *Large ivory okimono of an Eagle*, Meiji period (1868-1912), late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bonhams.



Fig. 7 *Japanese Meiji period sectional ivory model of an eagle*, 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Nicholson's Fine Art Auctioneer & Valuer.



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