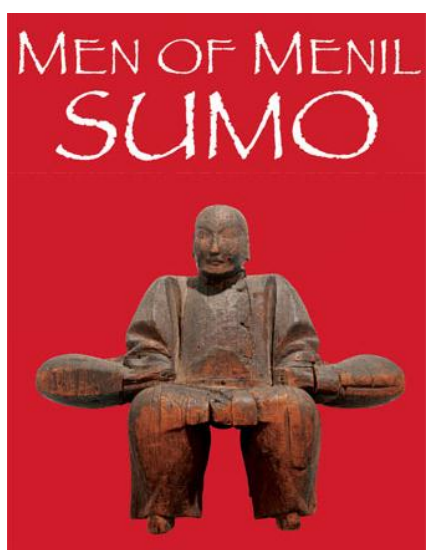


THIRD ANNUAL *MEN OF MENIL* EVENING LOOKS EAST:

THE ART OF SUMO

Extraordinary event chaired by David D. Fitch, W. Gregory Looser, and Harry C. Pinson



Houston, January 31, 2012 – On Thursday evening, March 8, *Men of Menil*—the black-tie event for gentlemen whose contributions provide funds for the Menil Collection’s general operations and education and outreach programs—will feature a rare import from Japan: a demonstration of the sport and ritual of sumo wrestling.

Guests will observe sumo master *rikishi* (wrestlers) in a tournament performance, which will be presided over by a *gyōji* (referee), who will also officiate related ceremonies and rituals. This presentation of Japan’s *kokugi* (national treasure) will be only the fourth time in the past twenty years that professional Japanese *rikishi* have performed sumo live in the United States.

Each year *Men of Menil* presents a unique form of entertainment. For the inaugural gala in 2010, professional billiards players demonstrated their astounding skills, and sleight-of-hand artists conjured all manner of magic and marvels last year. This March, guests will be privileged to witness an evening of sumo, a rarefied and splendid melding of athleticism and cultural heritage. Four sumo wrestlers, dressed in traditional robes, will mingle with guests before dinner. Among them will be Waka (Keisuke Kamikawa), Noro (Takuji Noro), and Yama (Ryuichi Yamamoto)—all traveling to Houston from Japan—as well as Byamba (Byambajav Ulambayar, a former world champion who has appeared in more than twenty television shows and three films, including *Ocean’s 13*).

After dinner, the wrestlers will then enter a *dohyō*, or ring, assembled in the middle of the hall for the bouts, creating a spectacle like none ever before seen in Houston. One would have to travel to Japan to witness a sumo performance of this caliber, featuring athletes at their elite level. A fusion of art and athleticism, sumo traces its history to the seventeenth century, when it was devised as an entertainment or offering for the pleasure of Shinto gods to ensure bountiful harvests.

Men of Menil takes place in an extraordinary setting, inside the museum's Richmond Hall annex, which houses a remarkable light installation by the renowned Minimalist artist Dan Flavin. Lead sponsor Gulf States Toyota and a group of distinguished guests have already helped raise more than \$400,000 to date in advance of the event. Please join us for an unforgettable evening of superb cuisine catered by Jackson and Company, libations, and fine cigars, and witness this stunning exhibition of the art of sumo.

THE MENIL COLLECTION opened in 1987 and is widely considered one of the most important privately assembled collections of the twentieth century. The museum's holdings, ranging from the prehistoric to art of the present day, are housed in a modern landmark designed by the renowned architect Renzo Piano. In the quarter-century since it opened to the public, the Menil has established an international reputation for presenting acclaimed exhibitions and producing many scholarly publications; pioneering partnerships with other cultural and educational institutions across Houston, Texas, and the U.S.; and conducting groundbreaking research in the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The Menil charges no admission fees.

SUMO (相撲 *sumō*) is a competitive full-contact sport where a wrestler (*rikishi*) attempts to force another wrestler out of a circular ring (*dohyō*) or to touch the ground with anything other than the soles of the feet. The sport originated in Japan, the only country where it is practiced professionally.

Many ancient traditions have been preserved in sumo, and even today the sport includes many ritual elements, such as the use of salt purification, from the days when sumo was an important aspect of the Shinto religion. Even certain Shinto shrines carry out forms of ritual dance where a human is said to wrestle with a *kami* (a Shinto divine spirit).

Life as a *rikishi* is highly regimented, with rules laid down by the Sumo Association. Most sumo wrestlers are required to live in communal "sumo training stables," known in Japanese as *heya*, where all aspects of their daily lives—from meals to their manner of dress—are dictated by strict tradition. Most elite wrestlers are highly trained athletes between 20 and 35 years old. There are no weight restrictions or classes in sumo, meaning that wrestlers can easily find themselves matched off against someone many times their size. As a result, weight gain is an essential part of sumo training.

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