



An American Artist in Japan Exploring the Samurai Spirit through Art

American artist David Stanley Hewett creates Japanese history- and culture-themed works of art that utilize large amounts of gold leaf, and his works have received high praise from within Japan and abroad.

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AMERICAN David Stanley Hewett is an artist based in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture whose art is inspired by Japanese culture and history. Hewett has become internationally famous for his *Bushido Series* of paintings (“bushido” refers to the code of conduct of the samurai) and more recently for his newly released series, *LIFE*. The *Bushido Series* is inspired by Japanese historical events and the spirit of the samurai.

In 2017, Hewett’s painting “Majime” from the *Bushido Series* was chosen as a gift for the First Lady of the United States by the then Prime Minister of Japan’s wife, and is now housed in the National Archives of the United States. Hewett’s works have been highly praised, with yet another work being added to the collection of the US Embassy in Japan in 2021.

Hewett explains, “The red used in the *Bushido Series* portrays passion, the black portrays discipline, and the gold portrays the elegance of the samurai. Japanese samurai were not just trained to fight, but were unusual in that they also had great cultural knowledge of the tea ceremony, calligraphy, and more, especially in the Edo period (early 17th to mid- to late 19th century).”

The gold leaf portraying the elegance of the samurai is made

in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture. Hewett applies each sheet of gold by hand and creates small cracks representing the passage of time. The painting process culminates in the throwing



“Bushido 205,” part of the *Bushido Series*

David Stanley Hewett in front of “Immortal,” a painting in his new series, *LIFE*



of the black “swoosh.” This “swoosh” represents the instant that a warrior’s character is revealed in battle.

Hewett says, “Before I start painting, I sit in meditation and focus my mind.” Each painting is the result of Hewett’s interpretation of a historical event or the emotional experience of Japanese samurai during these events.

Hewett, whose mother was also an artist, was exposed to various artistic traditions from a young age and spent much time with his mother in her art studio as a child.

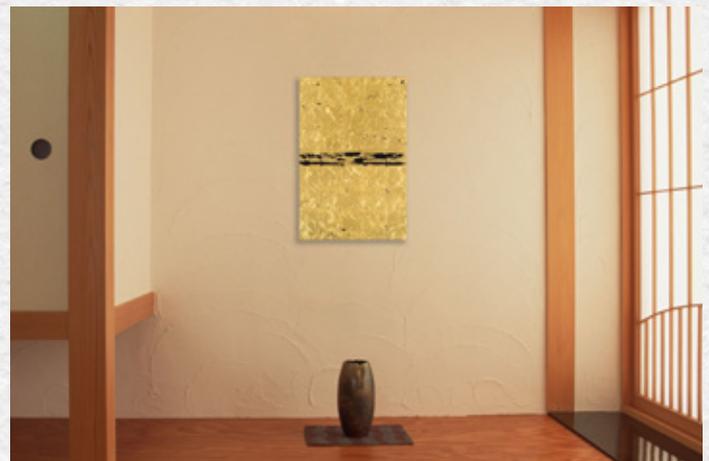
Hewett majored in Japanese history at the University of Massachusetts where he also taught ceramic arts, and spent time as exchange student at Hokkaido University. He came back to Japan in 1990 after graduating from the University of Massachusetts and studied under a



A “Hewett Luster Glaze” vessel

Japanese ceramic artist. He later joined the US Marine Corps and, after four years of service, came back to Japan and began work as an artist in earnest.

After moving back to Japan, Hewett attended many galleries to view ancient Japanese folding screens. Inspired by the resilience and strength of some of the 12th-century screens Hewett saw, he began his study of the techniques of gold leaf crafts and traditional folding screen-making. This eventually led to the *Bushido Series* of paintings. Hewett says, “While the color of the paint had faded, the gold leaf and some of the paint pigment remained on the folding screens creating a beautiful abstract piece of art.”



“Majime,” part of the *Bushido Series*, chosen as a gift for the First Lady of the United States in 2017

Hewett also makes pottery with a distinctive golden glaze. The glaze is called “Hewett Luster Glaze” and the pottery produced using it has been widely exhibited.

In 2021, Hewett was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Kumano Kotai Shrine in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture. For Hewett, this commission was one of the most important works he has been asked to paint. This enormous painting, utilizing 2,400 sheets of gold leaf, covering over 24 square meters, is viewed by thousands of visitors to the shrine every year.

In 2022, Hewett unveiled *LIFE*, a new series of paintings. These new paintings are composed of interpretations of Japanese traditional themes combined with modern influences. Bright colors and circles of gold are prevalent across the series. Hewett says, “The global pandemic that began in 2020 has been challenging and I wanted to create an optimistic worldview that focuses on the energy and resilience of life on earth.”

Fans of Hewett’s work will surely look forward to future works by this unique artist. 7