MEDIA RELEASE – for immediate release

6 – 28 June 2008

black robe white mist

ART OF THE JAPANESE BUDDHIST NUN RENGETSU

RMIT Gallery, 344 Swanston Street, Melbourne
Opening: Thursday 5th June, 6pm.

Black Robe White Mist brings to the RMIT Gallery Melbourne, the elegant calligraphy, rustic pottery and fine scroll paintings of one of the most successful female Japanese artists and poets of the 19th century, Otagaki Rengetsu (1791 – 1875).

Rengetsu, whose name evocatively translates as Lotus Moon, was a Buddhist nun, renowned for her inspired poetry, pottery and calligraphy. Her early life was one of extreme difficulty, but her poverty encouraged her to explore many avenues and in her mid forties, she began to make tea ceramics, inscribed with her own poetry.

Her work has a strong sense of the region around Kyoto where she lived and her brushwork has been described as unique, using fine lines without variation, a delicate writing with an inner tension. Her delicate, modest poetry is transcribed onto every item which appears in this show.

Rengetsu made a living through her art, and her idiosyncratic, personal aesthetic engendered a strong following that continues today. According to legend, she produced more than 50,000 works of art in her life, and the inexpensive work proved so popular that almost every household in Kyoto owned pieces.

This National Gallery of Australia touring exhibition was curated by Melanie Eastburn, Lucie Folan and Robyn Maxwell. It reveals the beauty of the understated and unconventional and is significant as the first major exhibition of Rengetsu’s work to be held outside Japan.

The works of art have been drawn from private international collections in Europe, Japan and America, as well as works from the National Gallery of Australia’s collection.

Catalogue Black Robe White Mist: art of the Japanese Buddhist Nun Rengetsu $39.95; Edited by Curator Melanie Eastburn features essays by some of the world’s foremost scholars of Japanese art and Buddhism. This is the first English language book on Rengetsu’s work.

Website: www.rmit.edu.au/rmitgallery

Media enquiries, information and images
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Images left to right:
Otagaki Rengetsu or Kuroda Kôryô Let us consider our aging, teapot 1870.
Morimoto Kiyoko, Portrait of Rengetsu, hanging scroll.
Otagaki Rengetsu My thoughts, teabowl c. 1870. Photo: Ian Brilley

Spring and autumn
As if on a field of dreams
The bamboo grasslings
Have endured the hoarfrost
One night quickly turns to two
Like white hairs multiplying
Otagaki Rengetsu
Public Programs June 2008

BLACK ROBE WHITE MIST
Art of the Japanese Buddhist nun Rengetsu

Curator Talk
Friday 6 June 12.00 - 1.00 pm
Join Robyn Maxwell, curator of the exhibition, in an introduction to Black Robe White Mist. Free event.

Wabi Sabi, Japanese Aesthetics
Thursday 12 June 12.00 - 12.30 pm
Edie Young, Public Programs NGA, explores the origins of wabi sabi, finding beauty in the old, worn and the imperfect, and discusses it in the context of Rengetsu's work. Free event.

Japanese Calligraphy
Thursday 12 June 12.30 - 2.30 pm
Drawing inspiration from the exhibition Black Robe White Mist, calligraphy teacher Junko Azukawa, conducts a practical workshop. $25; or $15 concession (includes materials). Bookings essential | Limited places