

GRETCHEN RAU'S JAPANESE MATCHBOXES

by Ken Ryesky

Gretchen Rau, born in New Orleans in 1939, had an accomplished career as a set decorator and art director in the film industry. Quite curiously, two of her three most notable films had Japanese themes.

Ms. Rau was an Academy Award nominee for her art direction and set decoration in the 2003 film "The Last Samurai." Two years later, she actually won the Oscar as Art Director in the 2005 film "Memoirs of a Geisha." Gretchen Rau fought hard against her final illness, and was fortunate enough to be able to watch, on television, her two sons accept the Oscar statue on her behalf at the Academy Awards ceremony on 5 March 2006. She died less than four weeks later, on 29 March 2006, at her home in Northport, New York.

On 20 July 2007, the contents of Gretchen Rau's Northport home were put up for sale. The chattels she owned in life were as eclectic as her films, and included several items of Japanese origin, which, no doubt, helped inspire her Oscar-winning artwork. At the tag sale, I purchased her *Adeline's Art Dictionary*, and also a jar filled with approximately 40 matchboxes and matchbooks, almost all of which were well used. Included in the jar were the Japanese matchboxes illustrated here.



Matchcover Art

Roger Shule is a retired teacher who creates paintings based on matchbook art from the 30's 40's and 50's. "They were developed from a collection my father-in-law (age 83) had acquired as a young man and in his early years of marriage. There were between 800 and 1000 of these in a plastic bag and cardboard box. I became fascinated with the concise imagery and the nostalgic flavor of the clip art used in advertising various products and services. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did creating them. All are done with acrylic paint and mostly all are done on masonite and a few on stretched canvas and a few on canvas board. I have completed over 50 at this point and will continue to create more. All are for sale and most are about 10" x 13"". Check out what he has at: http://www.shuleart.com/gallery/5311727_7o8jy