

Nature, Pleasure, Myth Animals in the Art of Japan

JAPANESE ARTISTS have always looked to the natural world for inspiration, and animals—domestic, wild, and fantastical—play an important role in the culture of Japan. They are salient characters in folklore, literature, and drama; they romp playfully through paintings, across textiles, and in woodblock prints; they are symbolic of the changing seasons and movements of the heavens; and they provide comfort, companionship, and even sustenance. This special exhibition explores the myriad ways that animals have contributed to the arts of Japan, showcasing a diverse array of objects from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries.

In Japan, animals are revered as vital contributors to the progress and prosperity of the nation. Indeed, the teachings of Buddhism and Shintō emphasize their kinship with humans, endowing them with sentience and even divinity. Their importance to the artists featured in this gallery cannot be overstated. While at first glance they may appear as mere decorative elements, admired for their exoticism and beauty, on further examination, it is clear they are more than simple beasts: they permit innovative—and at times humorous—reinterpretations of proverbs and stories; they challenge artists in pursuit of naturalistic realism; they cleverly subvert societal mores and rules of censorship; but most of all they offer valuable insight into man's relationship with nature and the complexities of the human condition.

This special exhibition is the result of the seminar "The Curation and Exhibition of Japanese Prints," taught by Bradley M. Bailey, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Postdoctoral Curatorial and Teaching Fellow in Japanese Prints at the Mead Art Museum, and has been organized by Natasha Blackmore (Amherst College '15), James Kelleher (Hampshire College '17), Gabriela Ramirez (Mount Holyoke College '15), Siyu Shen (Amherst College '15), Lillian Patierno Stafford (Mount Holyoke College '15), and Katherine Zhu (Amherst College '15E).

Arita Jirō
Japanese, active ca. 1883–1884

Brand New Beasts (“Shinpan kemono ga”), 1884
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.868

In this example of an *omocha-e*, or “toy picture,” which was designed and published by Arita Jirō, animals move and pose in a fantastical and exciting manner. The artist has exaggerated their colors and features. The mountain cat (a kind of leopard from the Japanese island of Iriomote) at upper left, for example, is almost golden in color, its tail enlarged to show its characteristic center stripe, while the elephant is white, an auspicious and sacred Buddhist symbol. The scarcity of intact *omocha-e* points to the wide influence of woodblock prints in Japanese society. Not precious objects to be preserved, these works were meant to educate and delight young children, who often cut them up for play.



Evolution and Technique

The display on this wall traces the history of Japanese woodblock printing from its origins, showing in particular the technological developments in printing and the increasing influence of Western cultures.

The first woodblock prints were made in the late seventeenth century using one block. The image was printed in black on light-colored paper. In 1765, artist Suzuki Harunobu developed the technique of using multiple blocks to print polychromatic images. It was around this time that “ukiyo-e” (floating world) prints—images of earthly pleasures and idealized worldliness—became popular.

The birds and elephants shown here offer a unique opportunity to examine the ways in which artists treated the same subject at different times. Over time, the number of colors in a single print increases, as artists refined methods of polychromatic printing. In the 1800s, dyes and pigments from Europe became available, leading to even more-vivid prints. Artists soon began veering away from stylized images toward the representational, leading, in the later nineteenth century, to photorealistic effects, a result of exposure to European influence. Last, the variety of printing techniques expanded, making color gradations, complex patterns, and the variety of line all possible.

Tachibana Morikuni (attributed to)
Japanese, 1679–1748

Elephant, 1750–1800
Woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.745



Ichiryūsai Yoshitoyo; Fujiokaya Keijirō, publisher
Japanese, 1830–1866; Japanese, active ca. 1843–1923

A Picture of a Large Elephant Imported from India
("Chūtenjiku hakuraidaizō no zu"), 1863
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Dr. Edward F. Babbott (Class of 1945)
AC 1975.83



Miyagawa Shuntei; Akiyama Buemon, publisher
Japanese, 1873–1914; Japanese, active ca. 1882–1920s

The Zoo ("Dōbutsuen"), from the series "Children's Customs"
("Kodomo fūzoku"), 1897
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2004.189



These three prints feature elephants, an animal that was first brought to Japan in the late nineteenth century, for the new Imperial Zoo (as illustrated in the print at the end of this section). Morikuni's print gives evidence of the single-color printing technique and stylized lines characteristic of early ukiyo-e prints. Although Morikuni took on the task of illustrating an animal he had never encountered, his elephant is reasonably similar to the real thing.

The port of Yokohama, meanwhile, was one of the only Japanese ports open to foreign trade (albeit very limited) in the first half of the nineteenth century. The small influx of exotic curiosity gave rise to a Yokohama print industry centered on depictions of the foreign. Exemplary of this tradition is the second elephant print on display, executed in a less fantastical style than Morikuni's earlier work, and likely inspired by the artist's exposure in Yokohama to Western styles of pictorial representation. The print also depicts Dutch visitors who, with their European customs and attire, would have been as much a spectacle as the elephant in the foreground.

Of the elephant prints displayed here, *The Zoo* best shows the influence of technological innovation and European style. The elephant depicted may have been in the collection of the Ueno Zoo, founded in 1882. The subtly differing shades of gray on the elephant's skin add volumetric dimension to the creature, a carryover from Western pictorial styles. The color gradation, known as *bokashi*, in the background and on the elephant's face signify the degree to which the printmaking process had been technically refined by the late nineteenth century.

Andō Hiroshige; Tsutaya Kichizō, publisher
Japanese, 1797–1858; Japanese, active ca. 1820–1890

A Small Bird on a Branch of a Flowering Cherry Tree, 1854
Woodcut printed in color on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Barker (Margaret Clark Rankin, class of 1908) "The Margaret Rankin Barker - Isaac Ogden Rankin Collection of Oriental Art"
Smith College Museum of Art
SC 1968:438



Nakayama Sūgakudō; Tsutaya Kichizō, publisher
Japanese, active ca. 1850–1860; Japanese, active ca. 1820–1890

No. 10: Macaw and Aloe ("Inko zuika"), from the series "Forty-Eight Hawks Drawn from Life" ("Shō utsushi shijūhattaka"), 1859
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.247



Ohara Koson; Akiyama Buemon, publisher
Japanese, 1877–1945; Japanese, active ca. 1882–1920s

Magpie, 1923
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.580



Birds and flowers are ubiquitous in Japanese prints, forming a genre, called *kachō-e*, that owes its origins to Song and Ming dynasty Chinese painting. These three examples illustrate the evolution of *kachō-e* through their changing colors, increasing naturalism, and volumetric perspective.

In the leftmost print, a little bird sitting upside down on a cherry branch shows the influence of Chinese art in its subject matter and composition. In the top left print, the bright colors of the aniline ink, the Roman letters, and the nonnative macaw are examples of the distinct changes in ukiyo-e prints—and in Japan—in the mid-nineteenth century. The replacement of traditional organic dyes with European manufactured inks allowed for more steadfast colors, especially reds and blues. Finally, the bottom left print reflects the revival of the traditional form in its subject matter and composition, but with a greatly increased naturalistic rendering of the magpie. The details of the volumetric shading reveal another aspect of Western influence, likely lithography or photography, on this classic genre.

Primates and Performance

In response to a growing population of townspeople with disposable income who sought to enjoy activities previously considered upper-class luxuries, Kabuki, a theater for the masses, came into vogue. The influence of this art form was widespread—its allure ensnared the hearts and minds of the Edo townspeople, and not a few members of the illustrious samurai class.

Kabuki theater and the woodblock print industry were closely intertwined. Actor prints, or *yakusha-e*, made up an essential part of publishers' profits, and these prints in turn were seen as free advertising for currently running plays. Prints of celebrity actors enjoyed great popularity in the Edo period.

In the Japanese theatrical tradition, the inclusion of primates can be traced to the Middle Ages, when the Chinese import of *sarugaku*, or "monkey music," was first introduced in Japan. *Sarugaku* performances, usually involving trained monkeys, consisted of combinations of pantomime, music and dance, acrobatics, juggling, and magic. Over time, monkeys made their way into the heart of Japanese theatrical tradition.

Kono Bairei; Unsōdō, publisher
Japanese, 1844–1895; Japanese, active since 1891

Monkey, from the Illustrated Book “Mirror of Paintings by Bairei” (“Bairei gakan”), 20th century
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.235

This print by the Kyoto-based designer Bairei Kono features a trained monkey in traditional garb, sitting with a leash attached to its collar. In contrast to Edo period (1603–1868) representations of monkeys in woodblock prints, Meiji Period (1868–1912) prints showed animals that were more naturalistic in style. Instead of the bold, stylized red lines that would have been used to indicate the monkey’s face during the Edo period, Kono shaded his monkey’s face with a far more realistic pink. While earlier prints in this section depict trained monkeys in situations that seem to blur the line between human and animal, these naturalistic representations reinforce that difference.



Toyohara Chikanobu; Takekawa Unokichi, publisher
Japanese, 1838–1912; Japanese, active ca. 1878–1891

A Monkey Performance in the Inner Court (“Oku oden saruhiki no zu”), 1889

Polychrome woodblock print



Gift of William Green
AC 2005.232.a–c

This *ōban* (“large sheet”) triptych depicts a monkey-trainer performance in the court of the prince regent Yoshihito. On the left, a monkey trainer and musicians guide the show, while the prince and a number of women and children in fanciful court attire look on in fascination. In the center, the monkey, dressed in the garb of a traveling samurai with two tiny swords and a straw hat, performs a dance. As a print designer of the Meiji Era, a period of rapid modernization and change in Japan, Chikanobu produced images noteworthy for their historical nostalgia. The fashions shown in this print are, in fact, somewhat out of date, and more characteristic of Edo period styles, before the introduction of Western clothing. His liberal use of bright, imported synthetic dyes and experimentation with single-point perspective, however, are a sign of the times.

Utagawa Kunisada II; Yamamotoya Heikichi, publisher
Japanese, 1823–1880; Japanese, active ca. 1812–1886

**The Actor Bandō Hikosaburō V as the Female Monkey Trainer
Oyoshi (“Onna sarumawashi oyoshi bandō hikosaburō”),**
1862
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.236



This print shows an actor playing an *onnagata*, or female role, with a finely dressed monkey on her shoulder. Although kabuki was historically staged first by women, the eroticism of the plays led to prostitution and brawls between patrons over actresses' favors. As a result, officials barred women from the stage in 1629. Erotic and immoral content persisted in all-male kabuki performances of the following decade, causing Tokugawa officials variously to forbid female and adolescent-male roles in a flurry of censorship. By 1652, however, these bans had been lifted on the condition that all actors wear a shaved forelock regardless of their role. Actors specializing in female roles thus began wearing a small purple headscarf to cover their shaved foreheads, as demonstrated by Bandō Hikosaburō V in this print.

Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III); Iseya Kanekichi, publisher;
Yokokawa Takejirō, blockcutter
Japanese, 1786–1864; Japanese, active 1840s–ca. 1875; Japanese,
active mid-19th century

**A Poem by Sarumaru Tayū: The Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Kodanji IV as the Monkey Trainer Yojirō (“Sarumaru tayū
sarumawashi yojirō”), from the series “Comparisons for
Thirty-Six Selected Poems” (“Mitate sanjūrokkasen no uchi”),
1852**

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.55

This print, by the prolific ukiyo-e designer Utagawa Kunisada, depicts Ichikawa Kodanji IV, a popular kabuki actor, in the role of the monkey trainer called Yojirō. During the Edo period, the monkey trainer became a common role in kabuki plays, the practice of monkey-training being closely intertwined with the history of performance. Performers of *sarugaku*, or “monkey music,” were outcasts who wandered the country, often staging shows at temples. In this print, Yojirō, backed by an astonishing landscape of rocky cliffs and tree-lined mountains, looks over his shoulder at the path he has trodden, his apprehensive facial expression suggesting the depth of his thoughts. In a marked contrast to Yojirō’s humanity, his animal companion, who rides on his shoulder for the length of the journey, looks only forward and seems to be completely carefree.



Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III); Kawaguchiya Shōzō, publisher
Japanese, 1786–1864; Japanese, active ca. 1824–1852

**Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII as a White-Pawed Monkey and His Son
Ichikawa Shinnosuke I as a Baby Monkey (“Tejiro no saru
ichikawa danjūrō kozaru ichikawa shinnosuke”), 1839**

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.60



This print depicts two popular actors in the role of monkeys. The inlaid square pattern on the large monkey’s robes is the symbol and crest of the Ichikawa clan. In the Edo period, most professions were hereditary, and acting was no exception. Of the various prominent acting families of Kunisada’s time, the Ichikawa family was perhaps the most renowned, and was certainly one of the most popular. Perhaps owing to the tightly intertwined nature of the kabuki and ukiyo-e enterprises, Kunisada, who enjoyed a reputation as one of the most prolific and esteemed print artists in Edo because of his opulent designs and detailed line-work, enjoyed a close friendship with Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII.

Bandō Hideko
Japanese, 20th century

**Oshiguma (Face Rubbing) of Bandō Hideko as Kozaru from
"Utsubo Zaru,"** ca. 1960–1985

Kumadori on silk mounted on paper scroll

Bequest of Howard Hamilton
AC 2009.124

Kumadori is the name for the stage makeup worn by kabuki actors when performing their roles, meant to exaggerate their features for dramatic effect beneath the stage lights. This print, a face rubbing transferred onto silk, is an authentic mirror image of the makeup worn by Bandō Hideko when he performed the role of Kozaru the monkey in the play *Utsubo Zaru*. Over time, the makeup and costumes of kabuki plays took on a canonical specificity, each tailored to a well-known role. Audiences familiar with the world of kabuki could thus recognize a character from their costume alone or makeup alone. Likewise, the character of the monkey as it was known in Edo has survived to this day, complete with the traditional red-and-white accents. In addition, the staff of the *sarumawashi*, or monkey trainer, in use since at least the early seventeenth century, appears on the silk mounting.



Fauna and Folklore

This group of prints illustrates how animals were integrated into Japanese legends, Zen proverbs, and fantastical tales. Print artists in Japan found commercial success by drawing on subjects from folklore, which they helped develop, define, and even reinvent, adding new meaning and layers to already-popular stories. Though these artists produced works in many different genres, they were best known for their most celebrated specialties.

The prints on view offer a taste of these enchanting subjects and forms, which coalesce around the animal. Yoshitoshi and Yoshifuji, for example, make use of the role that Kabuki theater played in popular print culture and the drama that was born therein, replacing human actors with animals. The artists Kunisada and Koryusai show us that foolishness is a trait shared by both beast and human alike, while Kuniyoshi reinvents traditional folklore in decadent and dramatic manner, pairing it with astrology. In each example, animals, long a staple of Japanese art and design, appear in new and innovative ways, revealing both the traditional beauty of nature and the human condition.

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi
Japanese, 1839–1892

Bats in the Fifth Act of the Chūshingura (“Kōmori no godanme”) and The World inside the Bell of Dōjōji (“Kane no sekai”), from a series known as the “Sketches by Yoshitoshi” (“Yoshitoshi ryakuga”), ca. 1880
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.919



In the top panel, two bats, one carrying an umbrella and a scarf and the other a pair of swords, parody the fifth act of the Chūshingura, a story about the 47 *Rōnin*, a famous group of samurai left masterless after the assassination of their leader. This act features the murder of Yoichibei by Sadakuro during a thunderstorm. In the lower panel, a young woman and a man tumble forth from inside the bell at Dōjōji, a Buddhist temple. According to the folktale, the monk Anchin hides inside the temple’s bell to escape the unwanted advances of the scorned woman Kiyohime, who turns into a dragon-like demon. She chases after Anchin, wraps her body around the bell, and melts, killing both Anchin and herself. These prints are indicative of a style of caricature that Yoshitoshi used to reinvent historical and mythical subjects, simultaneously maintaining and revitalizing the quality of old Edo culture at a time of sociopolitical uncertainty in Japan. Yoshitoshi is known for his fascination with the fantastic, the bizarre, and the macabre, as well as his dramatic use of line, clearly seen here.

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi
Japanese, 1839–1892

The Diving Woman of Shido Bay (“Shido no ura tamatori ama”) and Water for the Thunder God's Bath (“Raikō hikimizu”), from a series known as “Sketches By Yoshitoshi” (“Yoshitoshi ryakuga”), ca. 1880
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.918



The scene in the upper panel is from the legend of Princess Tamatori, or Ama. According to legend, Ama vows to recover a pearl stolen by the Dragon God, Ryūjin, for her husband and son. On reclaiming the treasure, she comes under attack by Ryūjin’s faithful sea creatures, here depicted as an attacking octopus. Ama wields a knife, cutting open her breast to place the pearl inside for safekeeping. Her blood loss clouds the water and aids her escape, but ultimately causes her death. In the lower half of the print, a goblin-like figure, possibly a *kappa*, draws water for the bath of the Thunder God, Raikō, who is traditionally shown beating his drums to create thunder. Here, he leaves his red and yellow drums off to the left, as he relaxes in his bath.

Isoda Koryūsai
Japanese, 1735–1790

Child Wrestling with an Octopus, ca. 1772
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1998.60

The central figure in this design is a *wakashū*—or young boy under the age of ten, as evidenced by his traditional forelock hairstyle—who grapples with an octopus next to a fishing basket. In Japanese folklore, octopi are sometimes seen retaliating against the fisherman who cut them into pieces, and their strange appearance is meant to suggest an impish, almost human, face. More than any other sea creature the octopus is associated with human emotions, motivations, and activities. In stories, they are also often cast as healers, ghosts, lovers, subjects of ridicule, or vengeful creatures. While Koryūsai is most revered for his erotic scenes of the pleasure quarters in large cities and for his *bijinga*, or pictures of beautiful women, with this design he establishes a humorous parallel between the boy and the octopus, with their limbs intertwined and the *wakashū* displaying only eight of his fingers.



Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III); Ebiya Rinnosuke, publisher
Japanese, 1786–1864; Japanese, ca. 1832–1895

Catching a Catfish with a Gourd (“Hyotan namazu”), from the series “Dances Based on Famous Paintings” (“Meiga no uchi shosagoto”), 1857

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1996.133



The monkey, catfish, and gourd combination is based on a famous Zen *kōan*, a kind of rhetorical question or parable that students of Zen Buddhism contemplate, under the guidance of a master, in order to reach intuitive insights: “How can one catch a catfish with a gourd?” To a Zen follower, the gourd represents the state of enlightenment, which is empty of all worldly concern. Thus, trapping a catfish, a metaphor for gaining any material benefit from the attainment of wisdom, is self-contradictory. Notice the dramatic and humorous elements that Kunisada employs, such as the playful, almost-human face of the monkey, and the catfish, who seems to smile, as if aware he will never fit inside the small gourd.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi; Sakanaya Eikichi, publisher
Japanese, 1798–1865; Japanese, active ca. 1855–1866

A Lucky Day: Kaidōmaru (“Daian kaidōmaru”), from the series “Kuniyoshi's Analogies for the Six Conditions of Nature” (“Rokuyōsei kuniyoshi jiman”), 1860

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.54



The red figure, with his rippling muscular physique, is Sakata Kaidōmaru, also known as Kintarō, a wild child and Herculean figure in Japanese mythology, who was brought up in the forest under the adoption of Yama Uba. Kintarō performed prodigious feats of strength, such as wrestling and subduing a giant carp. His usual companions are the deer, the hare, and the mischievous “red back,” the monkey. His weapon is an enormous ax, which he wields here as he places his foot on the head of a prostrate bear cub. Kuniyoshi excelled at producing dynamic images, with bold colors, extensive shading, and a highly stylized rendering of the human form, especially that of warriors and sumo wrestlers, to create a heightened sense of volume, depth, and motion.

Utagawa Yoshifuji; Kitaya Magobei, publisher
Japanese, 1828–1887; Japanese, active ca. 1844–1861

The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō: The Bewitched Cat of Okabe (“*Gojūsan tsugi no uchi neko no ayashi*”), ca. 1847–1848

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1996.134



This enchanted cat’s face is a composite of several smaller cats, with its eyes made of two cat bells and its mouth the thick ribbon collar traditionally worn by domestic cats in Japan. The subject is taken from a kabuki play about a famous landmark: a cat-shaped stone, located next to a temple in the village of Okabe, one of 53 post-stations on the Tōkaidō Road. It was believed that a cat witch, disguised as a friendly old woman, once haunted the temple grounds, luring young girls into her house to kill and devour them. Eventually, the witch's evil transformed her into the “cat stone,” which remains in Okabe to this day. The slashes across this print create an energy that, coupled with the vicious expression on the cat’s face, makes the figure seem to leap out at the viewer.

Holidays and the Everyday

Throughout East Asia, animals have specific associations with time, including holidays, the zodiac, and seasons. They feature prominently in lavishly printed New Year's cards; they allow artists to subvert the censorship of the early nineteenth century in *egoyomi*, or "picture calendars"; and they become symbols of celebrations, like the carp on Boys' Day. Beyond these special occasions, however, animals also shaped the experience of the everyday, serving as motifs for useful objects such as *netsuke*, *inrō*, and even bedding. The objects displayed in this section all show the importance of animals in celebrations and everyday interaction, serving as gifts, greetings, or even fashion statements.

Katsushika Hokusai
Japanese, 1760–1849

**Wooden Horse ("Mokuba"), from the series "A Set of Horses"
("Umazukushi"), ca. 1822**

Polychrome woodblock print with metallic elements

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.704

This *surimono* print is part of a series of 30 designs commissioned by a poetry group in celebration of the year of the horse 1822, each featuring objects related to horses, such as the saddle and stirrups seen here. These still-lives, known as *takara-awase*, or "treasure assemblies," were popular amongst the poetry groups of Edo, who would hold verse contests related to them, with the winning poems inscribed on the commemorative print. This example contains three different poems. Often the winning poem was denoted by the presence of a small circle above the name of the victorious poet, as can be seen here at upper-left.



Yashima Gakutei
Japanese, 1786–1868

Black Carp, mid-19th century
Polychrome woodblock print with metallic elements

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.27

Gakutei, a student of both Katsushika Hokusai and Totoya Hokkei, was renowned for his highly technical designs, especially his incorporation of metallic inks and embossing. This *surimono* was commissioned as part of a pair — the other design features a red carp — and is typical of his output with its refined details in the face and scales of the fish, the *bokashi* (gradient) printing used to create depth in the background and to impart volume to the carp itself, and the artful arrangement of calligraphic verse and stylized seaweed, both of which are printed with metallic ink. Though now oxidized, these details would have originally glittered against the dark background, appearing almost as gold dust.



Andō Hiroshige (Utagawa Hiroshige); Sakanaya Eikichi, publisher
Japanese, 1797–1858; Japanese, active ca. 1855–1866

**Suidō Bridge and Surugadai (“Suidōbashi surugadai”), no. 48
from the series “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo”
 (“Meisho edo hyakkei”), 1857**
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1998.38



Hiroshige’s *meisho-e*, or “famous views,” of Edo, are among the best known images in the history of Japanese art. This series not only features various sites of the capital but as it progresses, it also encapsulates a full year in the metropolis. This design, number 48 of 100, takes place on Boys’ Day (now known as Children’s Day), May 5, a fact made clear by the presence of the *koinobori*, the carp-shaped flags, which appear to “swim” as they flap in the breeze and are still used today. Due to their swimming upstream, carp are symbols of strength and perseverance and so became associated with the health and vitality of young boys. Traditionally, families would fly them in different colors, with black representing the father, red for the mother, and one blue carp for each masculine child.

Totoya Hokkei
Japanese, 1780–1850

White Plum Blossom and Carp, from the series “A Series of Flower Gardens” (“Hanazono bantsutzuki”), 1823

Polychrome woodblock print with mica dust and embossing

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.39

This print features plum blossoms, a traditional winter flower, and a wooden bullfinch toy, visible at lower-right, representative of the *usokae*, the “bullfinch exchange,” a ceremony that takes place each January, in which participants swap an old bullfinch toy for a new one at Shinto shrines. The word for bullfinch, “*uso*,” is a homophone for “lies,” so the ritual is meant to shed the falsehoods of the previous year, exchanging them for truth. If very lucky, one may receive a golden bullfinch, an auspicious sign for a prosperous and happy new year. The *usokae* became very popular in Edo starting around 1820.



Unidentified artist
Japanese, active 19th century

**Surimono of Plum Blossoms, Tobacco Pouch, and a Goat
Netsuke**, ca. 1800
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.296

This print by an unidentified artist is typical of *surimono* in that it features very stylized calligraphy and use of primarily grey, rather than black, ink. It was likely commissioned in celebration of the year of the goat, as indicated by the presence of the *netsuke*. Though this design appears less extravagant than the other *surimono* on display here, it is likely that in addition to the draughtsman, a calligrapher was hired to write the verse, adding to the expense of the publication.



Netsuke and Inrō

The objects in this case reflect the influence of animals on Japanese craft and everyday life, especially during the Edo and early Meiji periods. The box-like, multipart cases are known as *inrō* (literally, “cages for seals or stamps”) and belong to a larger category of *sagemono*, or “hanging things,” which were akin to handbags or chatelaines, suspended from sashes on men’s robes, since traditional Japanese clothing lacked pockets. As the name implies, *inrō* most often contained identity seals and medicines, but could hold anything small. The most intricate and expensive of *sagemono*, they are composed of multiple pieces, all held together with a cord and an *ojime*, a type of bead, examples of which can be seen here. They were affixed to sashes with *netsuke*, a kind of toggle, which came in a variety of forms and materials, including precious metals, hardwoods, lacquer, bone, ivory, antlers, and even whale teeth.

Makers of *netsuke* sought to maximize their profits, especially when using valuable materials like imported ivory. Thus tiny scraps left over from larger sculptural commissions were ideally suited to these small accessories, which became increasingly daring and elaborate, especially after the mid-eighteenth century, when the popularity of *netsuke* increased dramatically. Other small items, like *okimono*, a form of small decorative sculpture, an example of which is displayed here, also enabled carvers to minimize waste, though these works lacked the functional necessity of *netsuke*.

With their intricate details and charming subject matter, these objects were prized by European and American collectors beginning in the nineteenth century, when the introduction of Western-style suits—complete with pockets—led to their disuse.

Unknown artist, Japanese, active 19th century
Netsuke: Dog under a Hat, 19th century, fruitwood

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Barker (Margaret Clark Rankin, class of 1908) "The Margaret Rankin Barker - Isaac Ogden Rankin Collection of Oriental Art"
Smith College Museum of Art, SC 1968:74



Ichiritsu (?), Japanese, active 19th century
Netsuke: Kappa Carrying a Fish Trap of Octopus, 19th century, ivory

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Barker (Margaret Clark Rankin, class of 1908) "The Margaret Rankin Barker - Isaac Ogden Rankin Collection of Oriental Art"
Smith College Museum of Art SC 1968:91



Unknown artist, Japanese, active 19th century
Netsuke of Mythical Turtle, Inrō and Ojime, probably 19th century, ivory netsuke, inrō of lacquered wood and brass ojime

Gift of Marion van Vleck, class of 1911
Smith College Museum of Art, SC 1977:43-1



Ko-sei, Japanese, active 19th century

Okimono in the Form of a Ball of Monkeys, 19th century, ivory

Gift of Susan D. Bliss, AC 1959.28



Mitsu-hiro, Japanese, active 19th century

Netsuke in the Form of an Octopus around an Octopus Trap,
19th century, ivory

Gift of Susan D. Bliss, AC 1959.25



Ren-sai, Japanese, active 19th century

Netsuke, 19th century, ivory

Gift of Susan D. Bliss, AC 1959.24



Tomo-Nobu
Japanese, active 19th century
Netsuke of a Coiled Snake, 19th century, ivory

Gift of Susan D. Bliss, AC 1959.17



Shigenaga
Japanese, active 19th century
Netsuke of Two Rabbits, Inrō and Ojime, 19th century, ivory
netsuke, inrō of lacquered wood and coral (?) ojime

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Barker (Margaret Clark Rankin, class of 1908) "The Margaret Rankin Barker - Isaac Ogden Rankin Collection of Oriental Art"
Smith College Museum of Art, SC 1968:576



Oto-Mitsu
Japanese, active 19th century
Netsuke in the Form of Two Intertwined Serpents with Eggs,
19th century, ivory

Gift of Susan D. Bliss, AC 1959.26



Unknown artist

Japanese, active 18th century

Netsuke: Two Monkeys, 18th century, ivory

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Barker (Margaret Clark Rankin, class of 1908) "The Margaret Rankin Barker - Isaac Ogden Rankin Collection of Oriental Art"
Smith College Museum of Art, SC 1968:77



Egoyomi

While there were hundreds of licensed print publishers in Edo, only about a dozen publishing houses were permitted to print calendars. In response to this near-prohibition, artists and their publishers created *egoyomi*, literally "picture calendars," a kind of *surimono* in which the sequence of long and short months, which changed annually as part of the lunar calendar, was cleverly hidden in the design. Animals played an important role *egoyomi* as they could, through their presence alone, convey the year of the zodiac. For example, the work by Shinkei represents the year of the rat, with the long and short months communicated through the relative size of the jewels, each of which is inscribed with a number. Similarly, the print by Hokusai is meant to represent the year of the monkey, with the long and short months denoted by the marks on toy, which are read from left to right. The design of the wooden horse is known as a *moji-e*, or "word picture," for the way in which the characters for numbers actually serve as the outlines of the figure.

Tawaraya Sōri
Japanese, active mid- to late 18th century

Egoyomi of an Ox Dreaming of Men, ca. 1800
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.169



Shinkei
Japanese, active 19th century

Egoyomi of Daikoku's Mallet with White Rats and Jewels,
1840
Woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.172



Unidentified artist
Japanese, active 19th century

Egoyomi Moji-e of a Toy Horse, 19th century
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.128



Katsushika Hokusai
Japanese, 1760–1849

Egoyomi of a Monkey Playing with a Monkey Toy, 1800
Polychrome woodblock print on laid paper mounted on card

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.175



Shōzan (?)
Japanese, active 19th century

Egoyomi of a Boy Playing Flute on Back of Ox, 19th century
Polychrome woodblock print with metallic elements

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.136



Sakuragawa Jihinari
Japanese, 1767–1830

**Surimono of Votive Painting of Bats in a Shibaraku Scene,
Likely the Kabuki Actors Ichikawa Danjūrō
VII and Ichikawa Raizō III, ca. 1821**
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.73

Shibaraku, literally “Wait a Moment!,” is one of the “Eighteen Great Plays” of kabuki theater. In an amusing variation, Sakuragawa’s portrayal of the characters as bats in flight lends the scene a sense of movement, liveliness, and humor. The play, written and first performed by Ichikawa Danjūrō I in 1692, is named for the repeated and pivotal line “Wait a moment!,” which marks a change in the situation from evil to good. In this scene, the evil daimyō Kiyohara Takehira and the powerful warrior Kamakura Gongorō Kagemasa face off in a flashy confrontation. Takehira holds the stolen official seals out of the warrior’s reach, while Gongorō, who sports the three concentric squares of the Ichikawa crest, challenges him. Sakuragawa, also an accomplished poet, has placed the bats in an *ema*, a kind of votive plaque used in New Year’s celebrations.



Courtesans and Animals

The prints in this section reveal the importance of animals in both textile and print design. In some cases they are embroidered on the kimono of courtesans, revealing playful aspects of their personalities, while in other works, domestic animals appear almost as metaphors for the women of the Yoshiwara, or pleasure district, who were themselves adored, admired, and confined, much like a cherished pet.

The Yoshiwara, an exclusive world with its own set of social rules and customs, was the area of Edo in which, beginning in the seventeenth century, prostitution was legal. The area became a popular subject in ukiyo-e, especially in the genre of *bijinga*, or “pictures of beauties,” which featured women from all walks of life, but especially courtesans.

Designers and publishers profited from Yoshiwara imagery, which ranged from luxurious portraiture to humorous satire, and was popular with members of almost every echelon of society. The Yoshiwara similarly benefited from the fantastic pictures that obscured the harsher realities of its primary trade: sex. Beneath the glittering public image of the pleasure district lay a darker world of disease, misery, and contractual obligations. Nevertheless, the courtesans of the Yoshiwara became an incredible influence on urban society, fashion, and art of the Edo period.

Beginning in the Genroku era (1688–1704), dramatic improvements in textile manufacturing resulted in lavishly decorated kimono that became widespread. Next to her hair, the kimono was a courtesan’s greatest possession, and the public display of her robes was incredibly important to her status. Ukiyo-e trace the increasingly ornate of styles of kimono and hair through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by the time the Genroku era drew to a close, the courtesans of the Yoshiwara had become trendsetters in Edo.

As the publishing industry grew and the influence of the Yoshiwara on society increased, the government sought to control ukiyo-e through restrictions and sumptuary laws. In 1793, and again in 1795, censorship edicts prohibited names of women who were not licensed courtesans of the Yoshiwara in ukiyo-e. The Tenpō Reforms of 1841–1843 banned all *bijinga*—even those of geisha—and although this was easily circumvented by both publishers and artists in numerous creative ways, by the nineteenth century, the Yoshiwara was in decline and little resembled the magnificent world it had been in earlier centuries. The last traces of its refinement and elegance were lost along with its exclusive prostitution license in 1872, when the Yoshiwara finally came to an end.

Yashima Gakutei; Tani Seikō, publisher
Japanese, 1786–1868; Japanese, active ca. 1830s

Surimono of an Oiran Making New Year Visits, ca. 1832
Polychrome woodblock print with metallic details and embossing

Gift of William Green
AC 1998.71

This print of an elaborately dressed *oiran*, the highest-ranking courtesan at the time, is an ornate and lavish commission meant to celebrate the New Year. As private commissions, *surimono* were not beholden to the sumptuary edicts limiting the materials and techniques of commercial woodblock printing, and the resulting higher quality is evident. The luminescent shine of *kirazuri* (mica printing), commonly used as decorative effect, draws the eye to the silver waves, flowers, and emblem backgrounds of the kimono. Careful observation also reveals detailed embossing of the robe's designs. In addition, although the lines at the top of this print have since oxidized because of exposure and age, when this card was first given they would have glistened, to judge from the metallic ink that is still visible.



Totoya Hokkei
Japanese, 1780–1850

A Treasure Assembly: Sazō Looks Out for the Jewel That Shines in the Night (“Takare awase sazō ban yakō tama”),
1830s
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing

Gift of William Green
AC 1990.36



The bare feet of the beauty in this *surimono* indicate that she is a courtesan. By depicting her and her male companion, Sazō, walking furtively at night, the artist reveals an important facet of the lives of courtesans and their patrons: nearly all their interaction took place after dark. At lower left, two dogs—one groomed and pure white, the other darker and seemingly flea-ridden—are possibly a humorous reflection of the human pairing of refined beauty and potential lout.

Many prints of this genre were commissioned by poets as gifts for their friends. Because these works combine text and image and were meant for specific occasions, they required coordination of both delivery and design, and often the employment of a calligrapher.

Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III); Moriya Jihei, publisher
Japanese, 1786–1864; Japanese, ca. 1797–1886

**An Unidentified Courtesan, from the series “A Comparison of
Flowers at Night in the Cherry Blossom District” (“Hana
kurabe kuruwa yo sakura”), 1858**
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.211



In Japanese tradition, the long-tailed tortoise, here seen on the courtesan's robe, is a mythical figure that holds up the world and guards the northern quadrant of the universe. Believed to have incredible longevity, the tortoise is said to eventually develop a flowing white tail and the ability to conjure sacred jewels. On the tortoise's back the same seal is visible in the cartouche with Kunisada's name at lower right. In addition to the artist's signature, this print bears a publisher's seal (in white) as well as the mark of a blockcutter (in yellow). By the mid-nineteenth century, blockcutters, who were vital in ukiyo-e production, began to place their names alongside those of the artist and publisher, further evidence of the immensely collaborative nature of Japanese woodblock printing.

Utagawa Kuniyasu
Japanese, 1794–1832

Umewaka Mound at Mokubo Temple (“Umewaka tsuka mokuboji”), from the series “Among the Famous Sites of the Eastern Capital” (“Tōto meisho no uchi”), 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.321



In this design, a beautiful woman stands near the snow-covered Umewaka Mound, a sacred Buddhist pilgrimage site. According to legend, the young boy Umewakamaru, for whom the locale is named, was kidnapped and smuggled north in order to be sold. He died on the banks of the Sumida River, here visible in the background. The memorial mound named after him became a place where mothers prayed for their children’s good fortune. In the river, Kuniyasu has placed three mandarin ducks, a divergence from their conventional pairings in East Asian art, in which they figure as symbols of eternal fidelity. The addition of the third duck could be a reference to the story of Umewakamaru’s once-complete and happy family. The circular *kiwame* seal of the censor, a necessity in publicly sold prints, is visible at the lower left.

Teisai Senchō; Tsutaya Kichizō, publisher
Japanese, active ca. 1830–1850s; Japanese, active ca. 1820–1890

**The Courtesan Nanabito of the Sugataebiya with
Ochanomizu (“Sugataebiyamai nanabito ochanomizu”), from
the series “Views of the East in All Its Glory” (“Zensei azuma
fūkei”), 1830s**

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1996.123



The tiger and dragon on this courtesan’s kimono are a common pairing in East Asian art, representing the duality of the universe. The earthly tiger’s fierce nature is evident through its lifelike pose, with its paws and tail coming off the obi, as if it is ready to pounce. In contrast, the heavenly dragon, more patient and wise, lies in wait for its adversary. Interestingly, the inner layer of robes incorporates the courtesan’s name as a stylized print, which, along with her name and the identification of her *ageya*, confirms that this is a depiction of an active courtesan, while also enhancing the symbolic use of the robes as markers of her identity. The kimono, which was certainly custom-made, indicates her success, though not necessarily her wealth: many courtesans’ robes were gifts from their rich patrons.

Keisai Eisen; Moritaya Hanzō, publisher
Japanese, 1790–1848; Japanese, active ca. 1825–1835

The Syllable “Ro”: The Courtesan Suganosuke of the Okamotoya as Nihonbashi (“Ro okamotoyanai suganosuke nihonbashi”), from the series “The Wandering Beauties of Edo” (“Keisei edo hōkaku”), early 1830s
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1994.96



The front-tied obi, decorated with the back of a cat watching a butterfly, indicates that this beauty is a *yūjō*, an officially licensed courtesan of the Yoshiwara. Along with her sumptuous attire, her numerous hairpins signify success and popularity—and thus the high prices she commands. The text identifies Suganosuke by her received name—like actors and artists, courtesans were given names symbolic of their professional lineage—as well as her place of employment, an *ageya*, or pleasure house, called the Okamotoya. The *Nihonbashi*, a landmark bridge near the pleasure district, is visible at the upper left. Courtesans were not free to roam outside the Yoshiwara except for one day each year. Perhaps somewhat ironically, despite her confined status and her work as a courtesan, both the butterflies and dragonflies that decorate her clothes are traditionally auspicious symbols of joy.

Utagawa Kuniyasu; Maruya Bun'emon, publisher
Japanese, 1794–1832; Japanese, active ca. 1793–1834

**Pet Rat, from the series “Elegant Young Girls and Their
Playthings” (“Fūryū musume teasobi”), ca. 1825**

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 2004.180

Unlike many of the other *bijinga* in this section, this work features an unnamed woman. The official guild of censors restricted the naming of women in woodblock prints to only those courtesans who worked at licensed pleasure houses. In addition, commercial prints with overtly sexual subject matter were prohibited. This series, while ostensibly a selection of girls and their pets, is really an opportunity for Kuniyasu to display creative subversion of the censors and their laws: the addition of the girl's pet rat gives the scene a playful and domestic quality, while also allowing Kuniyasu to offer the viewer a glimpse of the girl's bosom. In addition, by organizing the series about “playthings,” Kuniyasu and his publisher put a new spin on a ubiquitous erotic subject, a necessity in the highly competitive industry of print publishing.



Utagawa Toyokuni (Toyokuni I), Izumiya Ichibei, publisher
Japanese, 1769–1825; Japanese, active ca. 1770s–1886

**Light Blue, from the series “The Five Elegant Colors of
Thread” (“Fūryū go iroito”), 1816**

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of William Green
AC 1996.141

In this print, the beauty’s robes are opened enticingly, just enough to offer the viewer a glimpse of bare skin. Cats, thought by the Japanese to have an ability to tempt and enthrall those who pass by them, are common tropes in *bijinga*, and are often shown pulling at the sashes of courtesans, causing them to expose themselves. At upper left are threads of the auspicious five colors—black, white, yellow, red, and blue—each with a symbolic meaning and association based on ancient ideas of how the universe is structured. In Japanese tradition, together the colors signal divinity or imperial rule. Here, in addition to revealing aspects of each courtesan, Toyokuni uses the five colors as a creative and inventive means of enticing potential buyers to purchase the entire series of five prints.



Shibata Zeshin
Japanese, 1807–1891

Cat on a Windowsill, ca. 1832–1840
Woodblock print with mica dust

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.179

The cat's wry grin and the pile of dirty dishes suggest perhaps the aftermath of a party in the Yoshiwara, Edo's pleasure district, evidenced by the green-slatted window through which courtesans would often peer, a hallmark of the pleasure houses. With this lighthearted composition, Zeshin references the privileges and vices of the wealthy merchant class, who patronized such areas during the Edo period, especially in the nineteenth century. Here, Zeshin employs mica dust on the basin to impart volume to the vessel, a possible nod to his noted skill as a maker and designer of lacquerware.



Yashima Gakutei
Japanese, 1786–1868

Number Ten: Liexian Zhuan, from the series “Courtesans Compared to Immortals by the Tochigiren” (“Tochigiren jūban no uchi keiseimitate retsusenden”), 1821–1822
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.762



That this beautiful woman is a courtesan is clear from the way her obi is tied in front and the many intricate pins in her hair. Gakutei was revered for privately commissioned prints like this one. The elegant *kamon* (crest) of cranes in the background, the luxurious robes pooling around the figure, and the poetic inscription (written by a member of the Tochigiren, the poetry group who commissioned the work) all heighten the grace and refinement of the courtesan, who is compared to a Chinese immortal. Gakutei often portrayed graceful beauties performing household tasks. Here, the courtesan’s playful nature is suggested by the presence of a cat, which lends an almost voyeuristic quality, as if the viewer is witnessing a private moment in the daily life of a courtesan.

Keisai Eisen; Matsumoto Sahei, publisher
Japanese, 1790–1848; Japanese, active ca. 1849

**Standing Courtesan with Blackened Teeth and Leaping Carp
on Her Obi**, 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print on textured paper

Gift of William Green
AC 2005.404.a,b

The carp prominently displayed on this courtesan's obi are traditional symbols of perseverance. To reflect this nature, carp—despite commonly living in placid garden ponds—are conventionally portrayed as leaping up waterfalls and overcoming rapids. The style of this print is representative of Keisai Eisen, who designed many *bijinga* (prints of beauties) with incredible richness, using varied and original colors to magnificent effect, here further enhanced by the work's *kakemono-e* format, which extends across two sheets. Eisen paid close attention to the details of a woman's kimono, and in this particular design the elaborate carp, Buddhist emblems, and morning glories highlight the courtesan's own attractive qualities. Her blackened teeth, a practice modeled after the women of the Japanese imperial court, were a symbol of adulthood and a feature considered both beautiful and refined.



Lantern-Type Clock with Double Foliot Mechanism (“Nichō tenpu yagura dokei”), 19th century

Black and gold lacquered carved wood, glass, bronze and other metals

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss

AC 1958.34

This clock is a marvel of nineteenth-century mechanical innovation. During the Edo period, the Japanese day was organized into twelve temporal units—six for daytime and six for night—that varied in length according to seasonal changes in sunlight. Japanese clockmakers cleverly adapted the inner workings of European clocks to compensate for these changes, resulting in an exceedingly complicated mechanism consisting of weights and two balances. Though the numbers of the six temporal units were repeated, each unit was assigned a unique zodiac animal. Indeed, the face of this clock is inscribed with both numbers (on the inner ring) and the characters for animals (on the outer ring). Emphasizing the importance of the zodiac animals on a daily basis, the names of the fauna are more prominent than the numbers.



Unknown artist
Japanese, active 19th century

Bedding Cover (futon) with Design of Lion and Peonies, 19th century (Meiji era)
Cotton, paste-resist dyed (**tsutsugaki**)

On loan from the Julia Meech Collection

Unknown artist
Japanese, active 19th century

Bedding Cover (futon) with Design of Two Baku, 19th century (Meiji era)
Cotton, paste-resist dyed (**tsutsugaki**)

On loan from the Julia Meech Collection

Tsutsugaki—literally, “tube drawing”—is a method of textile decoration that involves extruding rice paste from a tube, not unlike a pastry bag, onto cloth, usually cotton or hemp, which is then dipped in dye, traditionally indigo. The areas covered with the starchy paste are sealed, and thus remain unaffected by the pigments in the dye. Once dry, the textile is then washed, revealing a two-toned design. These examples, which make use of several different colors, are the result of multiple stages of washing and dyeing. Both feature mystical animals: the lion, or **komainu**, is an auspicious guardian of temples and private residences who wards off evil spirits, while the elephant-like **baku** are known as shy and friendly chimeras who subsist by devouring nightmares, making them an excellent and witty subject for a bedding cover.
