

Wall Text and Extended Labels

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

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UTAMARO

and the Lure of Japan

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THE OPENING OF JAPAN TO THE UNITED STATES



Commodore Matthew C. Perry, U.S.N., published 1854. Glass negative, 7.5 x 5 in. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

For over two hundred years, Japan had virtually closed its borders to all foreign countries. In 1853, President Millard Fillmore sent Navy officer Commodore Matthew Perry on an expedition to Japan with orders to force the opening of Japanese ports to American trade.

Perry steamed into the bay of Edo (today Tokyo) in early July 1853, backed by two frigates and two sloops, nearly 1,000 men, and sixty-six guns. The troops landed with great ceremony, Perry delivered a letter from President Fillmore to the Japanese delegation, and quickly withdrew.

In February 1854, Perry was back with a fleet twice as powerful to receive the Japanese response. After lengthy negotiations, a treaty was signed that opened several Japanese port cities to American trade and initiated diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Soon after, a rich narrative was produced with illustrations after William Heine, an artist who had accompanied the expedition. The book became an immediate bestseller—an astonishing 34,000 copies were published between 1856 and 1858. Less lavish editions and individual prints followed, all celebrating the new connection between the United States and Japan.

HARTFORD AND THE LURE OF JAPAN

Collecting Japanese art in the Hartford area began with firearm magnate Samuel Colt. When Japan opened its doors to trade with the United States in 1854, a pair of Hartford-made Colt revolvers was among the gifts Commodore Matthew Perry presented to the shogun. In return, the Colts received gifts that started their collection of Japanese material. Over the next decades, Colt and his wife, Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, assembled a remarkable collection of Japanese weapons, ceramics, and lacquered objects

Following Colt's lead, other Hartford residents developed a fascination with Japan's civilization and culture, inspired by exhibitions such as the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia that provided a showcase for Japanese art.

By 1900, regularly scheduled passenger ships connected the two countries. Tourists from the Hartford-area brought back art and keepsakes from their travels east and gave public lectures about their experiences. Miss Mary Amelia Terry, a Hartford patrician, stayed in Japan for five months during the 1890s and built up a fine collection of sword guards, on view in this exhibition. Industrialist Alfred Atmore Pope lined his dressing room at Hill-Stead in Farmington with Japanese prints that he had purchased in Paris. Other fine local collections survive at Saint Joseph's University in West Hartford and Trinity College.

William Heine

German-American, 1827–1885

Landing of Commodore Perry, Officers & Men of the Squadron, to meet the Imperial Commissioners at Simoda, Japan, June 8th 1854, 1855

Color lithograph

Courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum

This lithograph documents Perry's final demonstration of American military power in Japan. In March of 1854, Perry signed the treaty opening Japanese ports to American trade. In June of that year he visited the small port city of Shimoda with about three hundred men and four cannons to stage infantry and artillery exercises on the grounds of the major temple. Shimoda, as agreed to in the treaty, became an important base for American interests. The strategically located city, only about seventy miles to the southwest of Edo (now Tokyo), was opened to American trade and housed the first United States consulate in Japan.

William Heine

German-American, 1827–1885

Passing the Rubicon, 1855

Color lithograph

Courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum

A tense moment is depicted here. Upon their arrival in Japan in early July of 1853, Perry's squadron dropped anchor in Edo Bay. When Lieutenant Silas Bent took several boats to survey the area, he came dangerously close to a Japanese patrol boat. In a display of military prowess, Bent's men dropped their oars and raised their rifles. This dramatic confrontation was named "Passing the Rubicon," in reference to Julius Caesar's fateful river crossing in 49 BCE — a point of no return. It foreshadowed the success of the American military mission to open Japan's ports to American trade.

William Heine

German-American, 1827–1885

Return of Commodore Perry, Officers & Men of the Squadron from an Official Visit to the Prince Regent at Shui, Capitol of Lew Chew, June 6th 1853, 1855

Color lithograph

Courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum

Before reaching Japan, Perry landed with four ships at Nuri, the chief port of the Ryūkyū Islands. The Islands were an independent kingdom south of Japan. The print whitewashes the event, which in fact was a diplomatic embarrassment for Perry. It shows Perry returning with his forces from a visit to the Royal Castle of Shuri, playing down the fact that he had only been granted an audience with the prince regent, not the king himself.

The Display of Japanese Art during the Gilded Age

This imposing library cabinet originally lived at Armsmear, the Colt family's Hartford residence. Adorned with the Colt crest, it was used to display some of their Japanese objects. This installation is not an exact recreation of the Colt collection. Instead, we have brought together objects from local collections to try and capture the *idea* of "Japan" in the minds of Hartford residents around 1900.

Americans in the Victorian era felt that displaying high quality Japanese objects gave their homes a worldly touch. The millions of visitors to the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia would have had the opportunity to see objects like the ones in this display, igniting a widespread craze among Gilded Age collectors for Japanese art.

Library cabinet, fireplace components, and overmantle mirror from Samuel Colt's Armsmear mansion, Hartford, CT

Wadsworth Atheneum, INV.2012.51, .53, .54, .55, .57, .58, and .60



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UTAMARO

and the Lure of Japan

Step into the sumptuous world of Japan through the works of Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806). Two of his masterpieces, reunited here for the first time in over 100 years, bring the famous pleasure districts of Edo (now Tokyo) alive. In vivid color and with great detail, Utamaro created complex architectural settings, filled with gorgeously dressed women ready to provide a variety of pleasures to their male clientele.

The Wadsworth Atheneum's *Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara* hangs alongside the recently-rediscovered *Fukagawa in the Snow*, on loan from the Okada Museum of Art in Japan.

This reunion gives us the opportunity to reassess Utamaro's art — and compare his paintings with his prints and those of his contemporaries — while also providing a period view into the demimonde of urban life in Japan's capital around 1800.

Complementing the large paintings are Japanese screens, prints, pottery, and textiles, almost all of them assembled by Connecticut collectors in the later nineteenth century. The story of these Connecticut collections is part of the larger history of the relationship between Japan and the West. Some of the first objects to reach Hartford were gifts from the Japanese shogun to Commodore Matthew Perry during his 1853–54 expedition to Japan, which officially opened trade between Japan and the United States. Through these objects we see a portrait of Yankee taste for Japanese art and craftsmanship during New England's Gilded Age.



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UTAMARO AS PRINTMAKER

In his own day Kitagawa Utamaro's work was well-known. His personal life, however, remains a mystery. He probably spent most of his career in Edo (today Tokyo), home of the pleasure quarters that provided the basis for so many of his works. Extremely productive, from the 1780s to his death in 1806, Utamaro designed at least 2,000 prints and numerous book illustrations. Edo's 1.3 million inhabitants provided a hungry market for these works on paper, making Utamaro a leading artist of his time.

The Japanese government prohibited artists from illustrating sensitive subjects such as politics or history. Instead, artists created images of popular subjects, like picturesque scenes of nature, portraits of courtesans and actors, and public festivals. Utamaro's specialty was striking prints of women.

Beginning in the late 1780s, the publisher Tsutaya Jūzaburō hired Utamaro to produce prints of beautiful women, a kind of guidebook used to market the Yoshiwara brothel district. Utamaro excelled in depicting the well-known courtesans, geisha (cultured hostesses), and the female entourage surrounding these women: novices, waitresses, and attendants. He also expanded his subject range to include women of different social backgrounds such as wives of shop owners and aristocratic women. Utamaro illustrated them in portraits, scenes of everyday life, and splendid parades. What made his women stand apart was his combination of idealized beauty with keenly observed realistic details.

Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

Two Geisha Preparing for a Fancy Dress Procession (from the series “Female Geisha Section of the Yoshiwara Niwaka Festival”), 1783

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.40

With the aid of an attendant, two well-known geisha, Shimatomi and Tomikichi, get ready to perform in the Niwaka Festival. The festival, celebrated with performances and parades, took place each year in the Yoshiwara pleasure district of Edo.

While one of the women uses a mirror to apply her make-up, the other is helped with her elaborate robes. Depicted against a blank background, the women seem to float in the space, creating a diagonal pattern. Utamaro juxtaposed the flat, ornamental subjects with the empty space to emphasize the central composition — an artistic device commonly employed in his prints.

Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

*The Courtesan Wakatsuru with Attendant (from the series *Mu Tamagawa*, “Six Jewel Rivers”), 1793*

Color-printed with brass filings

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.41

This quiet scene shows the courtesan Wakatsuru and her attendant. The two women study a scroll illustrated with birds flying in an undulating swirl. Wakatsuru's position and elegant accessories demonstrate her prominent place within courtesan culture.

This is from a set of prints representing the Six Jewel Rivers of Japan, which had been a classic literary theme. The birds on the scroll are plovers, symbolizing the Noda or Plover Jewel River. A poem appears in the cartouche in the upper left-hand corner: “Plovers dance / As if sewing / Over the Jewel River / The glistening frost / Bright as golden thread.”

Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

Hour of the Snake (from the series *Fuzoku Bijin Tokei*, “Customs of Beauties Around the Clock,”) c. 1798–99

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.42

A servant holds a washbasin for a courtesan who has a toothbrush in her mouth, a packet of toothpowder in her hand, and a towel at the ready. Her disheveled hair indicates that she has just awoken.

This is one of twelve prints representing the twelve divisions of the Japanese clock — each symbolized by an animal from the zodiac. The Hour of the Snake corresponds to 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Utamaro subtitled this image “The Kept Woman,” which prompts the viewer to imagine why the courtesan may be slow to rise and what may have kept her up the night before.

Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

Woman Reading a Letter (from the series *Fujo ninso juppon*, “Ten Classes of Female Physiognomy”), c. 1792–93

Color-printed woodcut with mica background

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.43

Tightly grasping a letter close to her face, a woman reads transfixed. Her simple dress and shaved eyebrows indicate that she is married to probably a restaurant or shop owner. Yet, her entranced expression and the way she holds the letter so that its content is hidden from the viewer suggest that the correspondence may be from a secret lover. This is from a series in which Utamaro attempted to depict women from different backgrounds through their expressions, activities, and gestures.

Woman Reading a Letter is printed on a mica background. The pulverized mineral creates a metallic sheen that isolates the figure, enhancing the print's visual impact.

KITAGAWA UTAMARO'S LARGEST PAINTINGS

The many elegant women, shimmering colors, and enormous scale of Utamaro's *Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara* (c. 1793) and the later *Fukagawa in the Snow* (c. 1806) create an overwhelming sensory experience. These elaborate paintings on paper were originally mounted as hanging scrolls and required a large space for display. They were probably commissioned by Zenno Ihei, a wealthy merchant from the provincial town of Tochigi, a city to the northeast of Edo (now Tokyo). A third painting of similar subject and size known as *Moon at Shinagawa* (c. 1788, Freer Gallery, reproduced nearby) may also have been made for Zenno Ihei. Thematically the three works belong together, depicting the traditional Japanese themes of "snow," "moon," and "flowers," and in 1879 they were exhibited as a trio at the Jōganji Temple in Ihei's home town.



Since the paintings are unsigned and unusual for their large scale, this series raises some thorny questions. How were these paintings used? When exactly were they created? And what was the involvement of the artist's studio? The paintings' different styles lead us to believe they were executed at different times, probably between the late 1780s and 1806. Reuniting the works provides an opportunity to compare and explore their intricacies.

Utamaro's monumental trio was brought to Paris during the 1880s where Japanese art had become fashionable. It was the Parisian art critic Edmond de Goncourt who wrote the first biography of Utamaro in 1891, in which he cultivated the romantic notion of Utamaro as a fixture in the brothels of Yoshiwara. This idea fueled the interest in Utamaro among Western artists and collectors who have devoured his art ever since.

Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara, c. 1793

Painting mounted on panel; color on paper

The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner
Collection Fund, 1957.17

Cherry trees blossom along the central boulevard of Yoshiwara, one of Edo's licensed pleasure districts where night life is in full swing. Women of all classes and ages celebrate the annual spring cherry blossom festival. Poems written on slips of paper decorate the trees while paper lanterns illuminate the scene.

Several courtesans with bulky *obi*, or sashes, tied at the front gather by a tea house. It was at such tea houses that they would meet their clients. The courtesans' rank is highlighted by their sumptuous dresses, elaborate hairstyles, and large retinues. To the right, a figure with a brown robe is dressed as a man, but is in fact a cross-dressed woman. Upstairs, a dance performance entertains a group of geisha and other women.

By using an elevated perspective, Utamaro is able to show the first and second floors of the tea house simultaneously. The conspicuous lack of men — the fifty figures are all women — creates a fantasy world fabricated for male viewers.



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Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

Fukagawa in the Snow, c. 1802–06

Hanging scroll; color on paper

OKADA MUSEUM OF ART

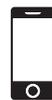
Fukagawa, one of the pleasure districts in Edo, was famous for its elegant geisha who entertained men with conversation, dance, and music, but not with physical intimacy.

The geisha are identified by their ornate hairstyles and their *obi*, or sashes, tied at the back. Their heavy kimonos protect them

from the blistering cold. Some are dining, while others play a game similar to charades. The stylized gestures, poses, and expressions create a varied display of feminine beauty.

This view into the second floor reception room of a local restaurant is a masterful depiction of architectural design. The complex structure includes railings, pillars, screens, and open spaces.

In all three paintings, Utamaro included pictures within pictures, which he painted in the earlier academic style of the Kanō school, to demonstrate his artistic skill and training. Here he illustrated Mount Fuji on a scroll, hanging in the back of the restaurant.



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REPRODUCTION OF:

Kitagawa Utamaro

Japanese, 1753–1806

Moon at Shinagawa, c. 1788

Hanging scroll; color on paper

Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Shinagawa, one of the pleasure districts in Edo, was renowned for its beautiful views. Here we see the rising autumn moon and its reflection in the nearby bay, glimpsed through the interior of an elegant restaurant.

The lead courtesan stands in the center of the reception room. The woman with the brown *obi*, or sash, seated next to her has shaved eyebrows, signifying that she is married. She may be the house madam, in charge of managing the restaurant. Another courtesan, seated at the right, leans back to a younger courtesan in training who is trying to get the associate's attention. Behind them, three geisha entertain the group with music, playing various string instruments: the *shamisen*, *koto*, and *kokyū*.

Notice the shadow on the screen at the far left. This is the only appearance of a male figure in the series.

UKIYO-E: THE FLOATING WORLD AND THE ART OF THE WOODBLOCK PRINT

Ukiyo-e means “images of the floating world” and refers to the districts of Edo (now Tokyo) known as pleasure quarters that were inhabited by beautiful courtesans, geisha, and kabuki actors. The Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867) had created walled off neighborhoods dedicated to night life and prostitution. Life pulsated in these hedonistic districts where classes mingled, and *ukiyo-e* artists specialized in depicting the inhabitants.

The world of the pleasure quarters was perhaps best captured through woodblock prints. Like Kitagawa Utamaro’s large paintings, *ukiyo-e* prints impress with their liveliness, attention to detail, and approach to perspective. Woodblock printing was originally used in Japan for texts, but *ukiyo-e* artists took this ancient technique further and applied it to the reproduction of images.

By the late 1760s, the color palette of Japanese woodcuts had broadened from monochrome prints to multiple colors. Each new color or pattern was carved from a separate block precisely printed on a single sheet.

Printmaking allows artists to create multiple copies from a single set of blocks, making the prints affordable to the growing urban population. Their vivid colors and often erotic subject matter appealed to local Japanese audiences as well as to Western collectors once Japan opened its borders to trade with the United States and France. This demand made prints a lucrative medium for Japanese artists. Suzuki Harunobu, Utamaro, and Ishikawa Toyonobu were among the most successful woodcut artists of the second half of the eighteenth century.

Akiyama Sadaharu

Japanese, active mid-18th century

A Young Man Viewing a Cherry Tree, c. 1748

White-line woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.11

A young man with an umbrella looks up at a flowering cherry tree, a sign of spring and a reminder of the impermanence of life. The accompanying poem reads, “How fragrant is the breeze coming through the branches of the cherry whose blossoms are falling in the spring shower.” Japanese artists often employed nature and the seasons to convey ideas about love and romance. Here, the cherry blossoms may allude to the fleeting nature of male love. A pendant print, also a white-line woodcut, depicts a young woman strolling beneath a maple tree, a contrasting allusion to the constancy of female love.

Utagawa Toyokuni

Japanese, 1769–1825

The Cup of Sake before Bed, c. 1798

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.39

The space in Toyokuni's triptych smoothly shifts between indoors, outdoors, foreground, and background. He depicts the story of a bride entering her new husband's home for the first time. The couple is about to participate in the marriage ritual of sharing three cups of sake before bed. She enters wearing a red kimono decorated with cranes, a traditional wedding symbol. Her groom waits kneeling in the background. Two attendants enter the living quarters from the left carrying a pot of sake for the newlyweds. The groom's dazzling garden and well-furnished house highlight his status as either a wealthy merchant or high-ranking samurai.

Ishikawa Toyonobu

Japanese, 1711–1785

The Riding Lesson, c. 1763

Hand-colored woodcut with
marbleized background

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.10

A young man learns to ride a horse at the center of this print. Toyonobu creates a balanced composition by placing the rider's attendees on either side. The gray marbleized background, often used by Toyonobu, offers a subtle, decorative backdrop to the dancing procession of the new rider.

The inscription carries a double-meaning. It translates as “The first riding practice of the year to continue the lessons in love too.” The translation links horseback riding with love, perhaps implying that just as we may have a first ride and riding lessons, so we experience a first love and an ensuing romantic education.

Kubo Shunman

Japanese, 1757–1820

The Six Jewel Rivers *[Mu Tamagawa]*, c. 1787

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.44

A group of elegantly dressed women and one man stand by the shore of a river, observing local women at work. The local women perform their daily tasks: beating their clothes, washing laundry, and gathering branches. This might simply appear to be an encounter between people from urban and rural spheres, but the image is actually part of a series dedicated to the Six Jewel Rivers, or *Mu Tamagawa*, located in various parts of Japan. Already celebrated in classical poetry, the topic became popular in prints during the Edo period (1615–1868). These three sheets are part of a set of six prints, which had originally formed a continuous composition.

Okumura Masanobu

Japanese, 1686–1764

An Actor as Yaoya Oshichi holding a Song Book, 1740s

Two color woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.6

Kabuki is a form of Japanese drama that combines singing and stylized dancing, popular in the pleasure districts.

The plays were originally performed by women, but the erotic content and the prostitution of the actors led to a government ban on female performers in 1629. After that, male actors played both male and female roles. The actors often became celebrities and their portraits circulated among fans.

This still-unidentified actor holds a song book containing one of the period's most popular and tragic love stories.

Yaoya Oshichi (c. 1667–1683), a young girl, fell in love with a page in a temple. Desperate to see her love, she attempted arson in order to draw him out. For this, she was arrested and executed.

Suzuki Harunobu

Japanese, 1725–1770

A Modern Version of Ono no Komachi at Kiyomizu-dera Temple, c. 1768

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.22

Ono no Komachi (c. 825–900) was a famous literary figure, celebrated for both her poetry and her beauty.

This woodcut illustrates one of seven episodes from her legendary life in the ninth century, but set in the eighteenth-century present. The recycling of classical sources in prints was a form of *mitate-e*, “look and compare pictures.” The scene references an exchange of poems between Ono no Komachi and Henjou, a priest of the Kiyomizu-dera Temple in Kyoto. One of her poems associated with this exchange reads, “For what reason should you remove your sash or act heedlessly / The beauty of the waterfall is unchanging.”



Suzuki Harunobu

Japanese, 1725–1770

A Women Playing with a Monkey, c. 1768

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.21

This elegant woman dangles a cluster of cherries over a pet monkey. Pictures of beautiful women, called *bijinga*, were a staple of *ukiyo-e* art. The women came from all backgrounds — from courtesans to married women.

Monkeys, particularly the Japanese macaque or snow monkey, are still part of the cultural life of Japan. They appear in folktales, proverbs, and religious texts. In prints, they can indicate the hour of the day, the month, or the year. This print might be part of a larger set of images depicting daily life.

Harunobu produced the first full-color prints in Japan during the mid-1760s.

Ippitsusai Bunchō

Japanese, active c. 1765–1792

The Actors Ichikawa Monnosuke II and Yamashita Kinsaku II in an unidentified Kabuki Play, 1779

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.25

Bunchō illustrated the leading *kabuki* actors of his time. An art form created specifically for commoners, *kabuki* was especially popular in Edo's pleasure districts.

Here, the actor Yamashita Kinsaku II (1733–1799) stands dressed for the stage in an elaborate kimono, arresting make-up, and perfectly styled hair. With his talent for switching gender roles on stage, Kinsaku II became one of the most celebrated *onnagata*, a male actor in a female role, of his time. He was particularly well known for his performances as courtesans and lovers. Kinsaku II is standing behind his frequent acting partner, Ichikawa Monnosuke II (1743–1794), who specialized in male roles.

Katsukawa Shunshō

Japanese, 1726–1793

The Waitress Osen of the Kagi Tea Shop Adjusting a Hairpin, c. 1769/70

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.34

Osen (1751–1827), a waitress in a teahouse, was one of the most admired beauties of her time. Her celebrity status attracted many visitors, and she was often depicted by the leading *ukiyo-e* artists. The poem in the upper left reads, “The evening-glow on the red maple, it is here at Kasamori.” It alludes to the location of the teahouse, next to the Kasamori shrine in Edo. You can see one of the posts of a *torii*, or gate, to the shrine in the background.

Suzuki Harunobu

Japanese, 1725–1770

A Courtesan with her Retinue, c. 1766

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.15

Moving slowly through the streets, a splendidly dressed courtesan is on her way to meet with a client. A daily event in the pleasure quarters, these public street processions attracted crowds of onlookers and were an effective means of advertising the beauty of the courtesan. Following the courtesan are two girl attendants, called *kamuro*, and two lower ranking courtesan attendants, called *shinzo*. The lavish kimonos worn by this fashionable group attest to the wealth and standing of the clientele.

Katsukawa Shunshō

Japanese, active 1780–1801

Chozan of the Choji-ya and Kamuro Yoshino and Hagino, c. 1784

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.32

Wearing her voluminous *obi*, or sash, tied in front rather than behind marks the lead figure as a courtesan. The inscription identifies her as Chozan of the brothel Choji-ya. The two younger girls are identified as Yoshino and Hagino. They are *kamuro*, Chozan's servants, who she will train to become courtesans when they reach sexual maturity. Chozan was among the most expensive and popular courtesans in the pleasure quarter of Yoshiwara. She was often praised in the printed guidebooks of the day—which might have featured a print like this one.

Utagawa Toyokuni

Japanese, 1769–1825

The Courtesan Yosooi of the Matsubaya House

Color-printed woodcut

Source unknown, N.N.1995.433

A high-ranking courtesan, Yosooi was one of the great celebrities in the Yoshiwara quarter. She was the star of the famous brothel Matsubaya, where she demanded the highest fee of the day. Numerous artists, such as Kitagawa Utamaro, Kikugawa Eizan, and Eisen Keisai, depicted her. Here, Toyokuni shows her unfurling a letter from a client. Prints like these functioned much like celebrity magazines do today, bringing images of famous and glamorous people to a mass audience.

Utagawa Hiroshige

Japanese, 1797–1858

Mountains and Streams in Winter, 1857

Color-printed woodcut

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.50

Like Utamaro, Utagawa Hiroshige illustrated the traditional theme of “snow,” “moon,” and “flowers.” Hiroshige’s depiction of “snow” is set in a mountainous landscape rather than the urban world of the pleasure quarters seen in Utamaro’s *Snow at Fukagawa*. The print depicts Kisokaidô, an important mountain road linking Edo with Kyoto, the capital. Tiny, isolated figures are dwarfed by the vast scale of the environment, emphasized by the blanket of snow. Hiroshige’s radical use of cropping and white space creates a sense of abstraction that captures the viewer. Hiroshige specialized in these poetic landscapes and is considered to be the last great master of *ukiyo-e* art.

Japanese Arms and Armor

In Japan, the sword was traditionally a symbol of the Samurai, the aristocratic warrior class. Swords were usually worn as a pair, one short and one long. The sword guard, or *tsuba*, protected the hand from slipping down the blade. On Japanese swords, *tsuba* were usually round and made of cast metal, decorated with figural, abstract, or symbolic designs.

By 1900 Japanese arms and armor were highly desirable to Western collectors. Swords had recently become available to Western markets because of an 1876 edict in Japan that changed their status from a symbol of elite power to a decorative object. Victorians collected *tsuba* and knife handles because of their intricate metalwork and great diversity in their design.



Katana blade, c. 1840s

Japanese

Ishido Unju Korekazu

Steel and wood

The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.1042

Katana blade, c. 1840s

Japanese

Takenaka Kunihiko

Steel and wood

The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.1037

These swords were diplomatic gifts from Japan to the Hartford firearms manufacturer, Samuel Colt. On March 24, 1854, Commodore Perry presented a number of Colt revolvers to the Japanese treaty delegation. Colt received these swords in return, and proudly displayed the blades in his office at his Hartford armory. The most precious gifts from the Japanese delegation were presented to the President of the United States. Today they are preserved in the White House Collection.

Matchlock gun, c. 1853

Japanese

Caliber .92 in., barrel 29 $\frac{3}{8}$ in., overall length 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.1019

Matchlock gun, c. 1853

Japanese

Caliber .75 in., barrel 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ in., overall length 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.1018

When Commodore Matthew Perry visited Japan in 1854, he was given these matchlock guns to present to Samuel Colt. They represented the latest development in firearms in Japan before contact with the West.

Inrō, Netsuke, Okimono, and Card Cases

Japanese men carried small containers, called *inrō*, to hold everyday items like medicinal herbs and personal seals.

Suspended from a sash around their waist, *inrō* were held in place with toggles known as *netsuke*. *Okimono* are a nonfunctional variation of *netsuke*, which lack the two holes for the cord sash. Carved from ivory or wood, both *netsuke* and *okimono* often take the form of elaborate miniature sculptures.

Card cases [used to hold playing cards] were modeled after *inrō*, but made specifically for the Western market during the late nineteenth century.



Japanese Lacquerware

Lacquer has been used in Japan for more than two thousand years. Made from the resin of the *Rhus verniciflua* tree, lacquer serves as both a protective and decorative finish for leather, wood, and metal objects. Applied to a prepared surface, the lacquer acts like a natural plastic, hardening in warm, humid conditions. When dry, it forms a surface that can be polished. Lacquer work is considered among the most complex of traditional Japanese industries, demanding a team of highly skilled workers. During the Gilded Age, lacquerware was so popular in the United States that it was simply referred to as *Japan*.

Unidentified Artist

Japanese

Scenes of Craftsmen in their Workshops, [Shokunin Zukushi-e], early 17th century

Painted on gold ground paper,
mounted on silvered panels

The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner
Collection Fund, 1965.222A

Images of artisans in their workshops became popular during the seventeenth century. The subject reflects a new interest in the every-day world of urban Japan, rather than traditional courtly scenes and classical illustrations. The two screens depict twelve occupations, including an armor maker and a Buddhist rosary bead maker. The illustrations were painted on paper and then glued to the panels.

Japanese screens, called *byōbu*, were both decorative and functional. Essential furnishings, they were used to alter the useable size of a room for any number of occasions.

Unidentified Artist

Japanese

Scenes of Craftsmen in their Workshops, [Shokunin Zukushi-e], early 17th century

Painted on gold ground paper,
mounted on silvered panels

The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner
Collection Fund, 1965.222B

Each of the six panels of this screen reflects a different theme. The trades on this screen, reading from right to left, relate to domestic life: brush maker, lacquer artist, yarn maker, dyer, pharmacist, and Buddhist rosary bead maker. In contrast, the adjacent screen, reading from right to left, illustrates trades that relate to warfare: blacksmith, armor maker, sword polisher, bow maker, chaps maker, and metal caster. This combination of the martial and the mundane suggests that the two screens may have been meant for a samurai residence. Samurai were the Japanese class of military elite. By the seventeenth century, they were on the top of Japan's social hierarchy.

Wall hanging, c.1853

Japanese

Silk and silver metallic brocade

The Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt Collection, 1905.1384

This silk brocade was among the gifts the Japanese shogun sent to Samuel Colt in 1854. Americans became enamored with the bright colors and rich texture of Japanese fabrics during the late nineteenth century. Unlike this wall hanging, most Japanese silk brocade was used for curtains or furniture upholstery during the Gilded Age. With rising demand in the West for such textiles, Japan became the largest silk exporter in the world by 1900.

Kesa, c. 1780

Japanese

Brocade and silk

Gift of Julian J. Leavitt, 1952.435

Kesa are robes worn by Buddhist monks diagonally over the left shoulder and under the right arm. *Kesa* comes from the Sanskrit word *kashaya*, meaning “the color of dirt and the idea of humility.” They were originally stitched together from old rags. This *kesa*, created from more than forty-eight pieces of fabric, reflects the traditional idea of using recycled material. However, with its elaborately woven silk, this robe does not exactly exemplify humility. Instead it is an example of aristocratic refinement. Such sumptuous *kesa* were common among elite monks during the Edo Period (1615–1868).



Kosode, 19th century

Japanese

Silk and brocade

Gift of Mrs. Jared K. Morse, 1954.125

The *kosode* is a T-shaped Japanese robe with small sleeve openings (*kosode* literally means “small sleeve”). It can be worn in a single layer as an undergarment or outer garment. *Kosode* are the precursors of kimonos, and can be worn by both men and women. Women wear the *kosode* belted with a small sash, or *obi*.

This *kosode* is decorated with cranes carrying sprigs of kiri flowers; both are symbols of long life. It might have belonged to a young nobleman.

LEARN!

The Kyôka Craze: Poetry And Painting

Ukiyo-e prints were often accompanied by poetic verses. Poetry has a long history in Japan, dominated by the traditional forms of *haiku* and *tanka*. Classical Japanese poetry was composed by professionals following strict rules of form, content, and tone.

During the Edo period, a style of poetry called *kyôka* became popular. Translated as “playful” or “mad” verse, *kyôka* poetry was all about humor and satire. Like *ukiyo-e* art, *kyôka* poetry played with traditional Japanese artistic forms to reflect the tastes of the new middle-class patrons. There is even a *kyôka* poem included on a plaque in the *Moon at Shinagawa* painting. It reads:

*Putting out the shining moon of the mirror,
And taking the lids off the sake casks we'll use as pillows,
We swap toasts myriad as flakes of snow:
“Bloom, bloom, you blossoms!
And where's that extra wine!”*

— Yomo no Akara 四方赤良

CREATE!

Write Your Own Kyôka Verse

Compose your own *kyôka* poem for one of these *ukiyo-e* prints. You may want to describe the scene in a comical way, create a funny conversation between the figures, or imagine what silly thoughts they might have. The rules are simple:

Five lines, 31 syllables total:

First line = 5 syllables

Second line = 7 syllables

Third line = 5 syllables

Fourth line = 7 syllables

Fifth line = 7 syllables

Share your poem with other visitors under the corresponding print. Take a look at other *kyôka* contributions!

LEARN!

Ukiyo-e Landscape Prints

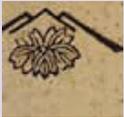
Ukiyo-e means “pictures of the floating world,” a world that was reflected in Japanese arts during the Edo period (1615–1868). *Ukiyo-e* landscape prints show Japanese vistas captured in a fleeting moment. Katsushika Hokusai and Ando Hiroshige are two of the most famous *ukiyo-e* artists to focus on landscapes. Although these prints show different places and perspectives, they share some visual qualities:

- **Flat, vibrant color.** There are almost no shadows!
- **Vertical space.** Test it out: your eye travels up the print as you explore the scene.
- **Empty space.** Notice how effectively these artists communicate the idea of water, the sky, or an empty field using nothing but a splash of color or the white of the paper.
- **Asymmetry and cropping.** These give the image a sense of movement and make the viewer feel like a part of the scene.

LEARN!

Japanese Woodblock Printing

A team of people worked together to create *ukiyo-e* color woodblock prints:

The **publisher** decided the prints' subjects and hired people for production. The artist often incorporated the publisher's seal  into the design. This is the seal of the Tsutaya publishing house in Edo. See if you can spot it in the exhibition.

The publisher commissioned an **artist** to draw a design for the print series. The artist was not part of the carving or printing process.

The artist's ink drawing was then transferred to a block of wood. The **engraver** cut around the lines, then carved a separate block for each color. A color print needed about 10 blocks.

The **printer** inked each block, then pressed each to the paper using a *baren*. Marks called *kento* ensured that the colors lined up precisely to create the finished print.

CREATE!

Construct your own Ukiyo-e “Floating World”

1. To assemble your background, fold the backdrop along the dotted line and adhere a pop-up easel back to the *blank side*.
2. Choose the cut-outs you will include in your “floating world.”
3. Play with arranging your cut-outs against the background. Think about **asymmetry**, **empty space**, and **vertical space**. Each cut-out has a tab that can be folded to make it appear higher or lower in your composition. Use the dotted lines as a guide.
4. Add color to your landscape. Keep in mind the vibrant flat colors of *ukiyo-e* prints.
5. Now it’s time to finalize your *ukiyo-e* landscape! Simply secure the folded tabs to your backdrop with glue.

Reflect: Look at your landscape directly at eye level. Does it appear almost two-dimensional? Think about how artists play with composition to create the illusion of space. Take time to look at Utamaro’s works and think about how he created “floating worlds” in his paintings and prints.

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To let the hours pass
in absolute idleness —
now, that's fun too;
a man can't spend all his time
looking at the blossoms!

YOMO NO AKARA 四方赤良