



THE FLOATING WORLD

A COLLECTION OF JAPANESE WOODCUTS

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FIG. 1



JAPANESE PRINTMAKING AND THE WORLD OF TOKUGAWA

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FIG. 2



Woodcut printing is perhaps the best known of all Japanese art forms. A quick perusal on Amazon.com, for example, allows one the opportunity to purchase a myriad of items adorned with Hokusai's famous print *The Great Wave off Kanazawa* (c. 1829-1833) (FIG 2.). There are *Great Wave* bed sheets, t-shirts, shower curtains, game controllers, socks, and cell phone cases readily available all adorned with the image of Hokusai's cresting wave and hapless boats, Mt. Fuji serene in the background. No other Japanese art form, whether the kabuki theatre, the films of Kurosawa, or even haiku poetry has stood for so long as a marker of "Japan" in the Western mindset.

It is unfortunate, then, that so many of us in the West know so little about this art form and the world wherein it emerged and flourished. In displaying the Martin Museum's collection of Japanese prints it is our hope that Baylor and central Texas populations can gain a greater appreciation of this art form and its role in Japanese history and culture.

These prints are images from the history, theatre, and the "Floating World" of the Tokugawa era; they serve not only as exquisite works of art but also as cultural artifacts illustrating the lives and world of Tokugawa Japan.

FIG. 3



UKIYO-E AND PRINTMAKING

Woodcut printing has a long history in Japan. The earliest known prints were religious Buddhist scrolls from the eighth century CE; other Buddhist texts continued to be printed throughout the years. With the rise of the Tokugawa shogunate (1600-1868) and the resultant growth in literacy and the middle class, printmaking grew in popularity and consumption. Initially, secular prints and books were created illustrating classical Japanese literary works such as the *Tale of Ise*. By the mid-Tokugawa era, woodcut printing was used to create a variety of products such as travel guides, advertisements, and souvenirs.



FIG. 6



THE FLOATING WORLD

Japanese woodcut printing is most often associated with *ukiyo* (浮世) the “floating world” of urban Edo (now Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka. The Tokugawa era saw a tremendous growth in these urban centers as well as the rise of a merchant middle class and its attendant economic consumption. All three cities had associated pleasure quarters or red light districts (*yūkaku* 遊廓)—Yoshiwara in Edo, Shimabara in Kyoto, and Shinmachi in Ōsaka—where townspeople could drink, gamble, attend the theatre and engage in other pursuits. Originally created by the shogun as a method of social control (by setting up areas of legal prostitution he hoped that the merchants would spend their money and thus lose economic and political influence), Yoshiwara and its counterparts became areas where the strictly controlled social hierarchy of Tokugawa Japan was disrupted; as long as they had money, commoners and samurai stood on equal footing. Samurai, in fact, had to leave their weapons at the gate to Yoshiwara.

FIG. 7



As a result of the amount of money flowing through the red light district, other entertainers and services sprang up in these areas. This nighttime entertainment—which included comedians, teahouses, bars, kabuki theatre, bathhouses, courtesans, geisha, dancers and artists—became known as the *mizu shōbai* (水商売) or water trade. This world provided a treasure trove of source material for the *Ukiyo-e* artist—many woodcut prints were of notable kabuki actors, courtesans, and geisha. The combination of rich subject matter as well as middle and upper class patrons interested in purchasing prints made the floating world an obvious choice for Japanese artists.

The prints belonging to the Martin Museum of Art reflect the diversity of the floating world as well. There are prints of courtesans and bathhouses, actors and samurai. They present a broad look at the inhabitants of this world and provide a fascinating snapshot of 19th-century urban Japan.





FIG. 8

IMAGES

COVER: *Sawamura Tanosuke III as the Geisha Sankatsu*, ca. 1863, Toyohara Kunichika (1835-1900), Color woodcut on mulberry paper, 14.25" x 9.25", Martin Museum of Art 1983.04.005.

FIG 1: *Kanbara Ferry at the Fuji River* from the series, *53 Stations by Two Brushes*, ca. 1855, Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III) (1786-1865), Colored woodcut on mulberry paper, 13.5" x 9", Martin Museum of Art 1983.01.002.

FIG 2: *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (Kanagawa oki nami ura), also known as *The Great Wave*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (Fugaku sanjūrokkei), ca. 1830-32, Katsushika Hokusai. Image courtesy of metmuseum.org.

FIG 3: Poem #100 from *Ogura Nazorae Hyakunin Isshu*, 1845-1847, Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), Colored woodcut on mulberry paper, 14.25" x 10", Martin Museum of Art 1983.04.002.

FIG 4: *Actors Sawamura Yodogoro II as Kawatsura Hōgen and Bandō Zenji as Onisadobo*, 20th Century Impression, Original 1794, After Tōshūsai Sharaku (Active 1794-1795), Colored woodcut on mulberry paper, 16" x 9.75", Martin Museum of Art 1978.03.005.

FIG 5: *Courtesan* from the series *Serīō Bijin Awase* [*Beautiful Women of the Yoshiwara*], ca. 1770, Suzuki Harunobu (1725-1770), Colored woodcut on mulberry paper, 10.5" x 7.25", Martin Museum of Art 1991.174.001.

FIG 6: *The Actor Bandō Hikosaburo*, Mid 19th Century, Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1864), Colored woodcut on mulberry paper, 13.5" x 9", Martin Museum of Art 1983.04.001.

FIG 7: *View of Imaki Point from Maizaka* from the series *53 Stations of the Tokaido Road*, 1833-34 Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), Colored woodcut on mulberry paper, 9.25" x 14.25", Martin Museum of Art 1991.173.001.

FIG 8: *Bijin* [*Beautiful Women*], Late 19th Century, Attributed to: Yoshu Chikanobu (Toyohara) (1838-1912), Color woodcut on mulberry paper, 13.75" x 9", Martin Museum of Art 1983.04.004.

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Allison Chew, Director
Martin Museum of Art, Baylor University



MARTIN MUSEUM of ART

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