

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Rabbits Silhouetted Against the Moon

Japan, Meiji period, c.1880s

Color woodblock print

Part of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1977

(7111)

Zeshin's print refers to a famous Japanese folktale about a rabbit who lives on the moon and uses a mortar to pound *mochi* (sticky rice cakes). The idea of a "moon rabbit" evolved from the image people thought they would see engraved on the moon. Moon-rabbit stories exist in varying forms throughout East Asia. For example, in Chinese tales, the moon goddess makes her rabbit companion work endlessly to produce an elixir of immortality.

The rabbits in this print carry a *mochi* pounder under the background of a large, full moon. Zeshin uses this imagery to illustrate a humorous pun on the word *mochi*, which can mean either "rice cake" or "full moon."

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Carp Splashing Upstream

Japan, Meiji period, c. 1880s

Color woodblock print

Part of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1978
(7107)

In Japanese art, the image of a carp leaping a waterfall alludes to a Chinese story about a sturgeon of the Huang Ho River. The sturgeon swims upriver, crosses the rapids of the Lung Men (Dragon Gate) on the third day of the third month of the year and, in doing so, transforms into a dragon. In Japanese culture, the carp has traditionally been regarded as a symbol of courage and strength, and the embodiment of masculine ideals. In the annual Japanese festival for boys held on May fifth (now known as Children's Day), parents throughout the country use carp streamers to decorate walls and trees.

Watanabe Zeshin (1807-1891)

Watanabe Zeshin's *Watanabe no Tsuna at Rashōmon*

Watanabe Zeshin, Meiji period, c. 1850-1872

Medium: hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1983

(1994.1)

One night in 976, Watanabe no Tsuna, a Heian warlord, accepted a dare to keep vigil at the demon-haunted Rashō Gate. In the darkness, he was attacked by the demon Ibaraki and, in the struggle, he cut off Ibaraki's arm. A Shinto priest advised Watanabe that, to protect himself from the demon's revenge, Watanabe must quickly place the severed arm in a box and not see no one for seven days. Unfortunately, Watanabe broke these rules on the sixth day to accommodate a visit from his elderly aunt (in some versions, his old nurse), Mashiba. As Watanabe showed her the body contents of the box and related what had happened, Mashiba, who was really Ibaraki in disguise, grabbed her arm and escaped.

In this painting, Zeshin shows Mashiba in flight, her white kimono and the over-kimono inflated by a strong breeze. Her hair is blown forward, her skin flushed, her mouth anguished, her foot clenched, and her clawed hand tightly gripped on her amputated limb. Zeshin repeats here the same elements he used previously for a large votive plaque, preserved at the Kannon Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo. The popularity of the plaque prompted Zeshin to create other versions of the Rashōmon theme, including this one.

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Yōki Quelling Two Oni

Japan, Meiji period, 1872-1891

Medium: hanging scroll: ink and color on silk

Part of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1977

(300.1)

Yōki is the Japanese version of the Chinese demon-queller, Chung Kuei. Traditionally costumed in severe black and white, he is a towering monolithic figure set in opposition to the contorted, brilliantly-colored red and blue *oni* (the equivalent of demons, devils, or ogres in Western culture).

According to legend, Chung Kuei was originally a student who committed suicide after failing the state examination. Upon being honored with an official funeral, his spirit resolved to protect the Chinese empire from demons. Chung Kuei became a celebrated hero and protector of Emperor Ming Huang during the Tang dynasty (618-906).

Yibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Kame and an Oni

Japan, Meiji period, c. 1872-1891

Medium: hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Part of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1978 (Inventory Number: 373.1)

Okame, the goddess of mirth, and *oni* (demons) appear repeatedly in Japanese legends. Zeshin's combination of the two in this painting references the mythological origin of the *Oni Yarae*, or *Setsubun* Festival. In the legend, Okame disguised herself as a young girl and threw dried beans at devils, frightening them away for a year. It thus became a tradition, which continues even today, to cast beans in homes, temples, and shrines in order to keep evil away. On "Bean Night," people cast beans around their homes and chant, "*Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!*" (Devils out! Happiness in!")

Setsubun is customarily held on the day before spring, in accordance with the Japanese lunar calendar.

Wedding Robe (*Uchikake*)

Japan, late Edo period (19th century)

Silk, gilt paper-wrapped thread; plain crepe weave, *yūzen* (rice paste-resist and hand painting), stencil dyeing, *shibori* (tie-dyeing), embroidery

Purchase, 2007-2008

(13,781.1)

Shimmering gold threads accentuate some of the auspicious motifs on these exquisite bridal robes from the late Edo period. On the surface of these crepe garments grow *shōchikubai*—pine, bamboo and plum—ancient symbols of longevity, fidelity, and integrity. The pine is evergreen and is the dwelling place of gods. The bamboo bends under heavy snow yet never breaks, suggestive of endurance and resilience. The plum, courageously blooming in the cold season, symbolizes bravery and is also associated with wisdom.

The other celebratory motif is *tsurukame*, or crane and turtle. The crane is believed to live for 1,000 years and the turtle for 10,000 years; therefore the pair represents a long and happy life. The black robe also displays imagery from the legends of Takasago (introducing the theme of a long and fruitful married life) and Shojo (a mythical, sake-loving water sprite and an inexhaustible sake jar that represents everlasting good fortune). These robes (probably worn by brides from high-ranking samurai or wealthy merchant families) combine weaving, dyeing, and embroidery into cohesive, elegant images, demonstrating the superb craftsmanship of textile artisans of this period.

Yibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Cranes and Waves

Japan, Meiji period, ca. 1855

Pair of six-panel screens

Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1976

(406.1)

Many Japanese myths, such as those about cranes, have Chinese origins. The Chinese traditionally believed that a person who achieved immortality would be carried off by a crane, and Chinese art often portrays immortals riding on the backs of cranes. Cranes were also thought to inhabit the mythical Penglai Island, known in Japan as Mt. Yonai, a mountain on an island paradise where immortals lived. The Japanese adapted the mythical crane to their own aesthetic, making the crane a symbol of longevity and fidelity.

On the six-panel folding screen (*byōbu*) to the right, Zeshin portrays crane couples as the monogamous ideal. They are happy in their family life, caring for their young. The Japanese believe that cranes mate for life, and crane imagery has become ingrained in wedding attire and decorations.

Wedding Kimono

Japan, Meiji period, late 19th century

Silk, silk and gilt yarn

Gift of Mrs. Marvin Jay Berenzweig, 1979

(733.1)

This short-sleeved wedding kimono displays stylized motifs of pine, bamboo, plum blossoms, cranes, tortoises, rocks, and water, all embroidered in white, black, green, blue, and pink silk yarn and gilt yarn. The *shōchikubai* (literally meaning “pine, bamboo, and plum blossoms”) is an auspicious grouping commonly seen in Japanese wedding attire and East Asian art as well, symbolizing longevity and happiness. The crane and tortoise represent longevity, too; in Japanese *Noh* plays the crane lives for 1,000 years and the tortoise for 10,000 years. Thus, images of pine, bamboo, plum blossoms, cranes, and tortoises are thought to inspire a long and joyful marriage.

Yūbata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Sōjōbo Teaching Ushiwaka-Maru

Japan, Meiji period, c. 1872-1891

Horizontal scroll; ink and color on silk

Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1977
(Inventory No. 586.1)

In this painting, Zeshin alludes to the historical legend of the young Ushiwakamaru, who grew up to become the famed hero Minamoto no Yoshitsune. Raised in a monastery, Ushiwakamaru vowed revenge against the Taira clan for the death of his father and two elder brothers. At night, he would secretly travel alone into the woods to practice fighting with a wooden toy sword. Old Sōjōbo, King of the mythical *tengu* (demons who dwelt on Mt. Kurama near Kyoto), took notice of the boy and was sympathetic to the Minamoto family's struggle against the Taira. Sōjōbo trained Ushiwakamaru in the warrior arts of acrobatic skill and horsemanship. As a man, Yoshitsune eventually defeated the Taira. Yoshitsune and his second-in-command, Benkei (who also was rumored to have *tengu* companions as a youth), became linked in history and legend as two of Japan's finest warriors.

In the painting, Zeshin depicts Sōjōbo bending over the scroll of his young pupil, Ushiwakamaru. Sōjōbo's flowing white eyebrows and beard, along with the small cap of the *yamabushi* (mountain warriors), are typical attributes of the Tengu King.

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Portrait of Oto-Gozen

Japan, Meiji period, c. 1872-1891

Horizontal scroll: color and ink on silk

Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1978

(370.1)

A smiling Oto-gozen gathers her sumptuous kimono and bows toward the viewer. Oto-gozen is also known as Okame, or Otafuku, the latter literally meaning “big breasts” and used to refer to large, overly plump women. The goddess of mirth is often comically portrayed with puffed-out cheeks, a smiling mouth, and a narrow forehead ornamented with two black dots. Zeshin painted a number of these humorous depictions of Oto-gozen, similar in appearance to the popular images of the goddess carried on floats by Edo townsmen during the festival of Tori-no-ichi.

The purpose of the Tori-no-ichi Festival, held since the Edo period (1603-1868) in the 11th lunar month on the days of the Rooster, was to pray for abundant harvests yielding successful sales. The most important celebration today is at the Otori Shrine in Asakusa, Tokyo. Thousands of visitors buy *kumade*, colorfully decorated rakes in various sizes often inscribed with auspicious wishes and the image of Oto-gozen, with the hopes that they will help to “rake in” prosperity.

Yūbata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Jurōjin, Deer and Tortoises in a Landscape

Japan, Meiji period, 1889

Medium: hanging scroll: ink and color on silk

Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1977

(344.1)

Jurōjin, god of longevity and one of the seven gods of luck, is seated under an evergreen tree. He is surrounded by several symbols of extended old age: the pine at his back, a tortoise at his feet, and a stag at his side. In his hand, he holds one of his traditional attributes, the sacred *shaku* (staff), and he wears the gray, blue, and white robe of a scholar. He is portrayed holding a blue handscroll, on which the wisdom of the world is recorded.

The god's elongated, wrinkled brow is generally associated with another deity of luck, Fukurokuju, who also combines qualities of intelligence and longevity. (Because it is often difficult to distinguish between the two gods, some believe that Jurōjin may be a variant of Fukurokuju.) The artist's signature may playfully relate to the subject of the painting, as the Japanese nature loosely translates to "The age I have attained so far is eighty-seven years. The old man, Zeshin."

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Shichifukujin (The Seven Gods of Luck)

Japan, Meiji period, 19th century

Color woodblock print

Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1977
(7115)

The seven gods of good luck and happiness march across the sheet, from top left to lower right. Daikoku, the god of wealth, leads the procession with his purported son, Ebisu, followed by Benten, Kurokuju, Hōtei, and a barely visible Jurōjin and Bishamon. These seven household deities originate from different religious sources. Daikoku, for instance, is of Indian origin; Ebisu is of Shinto descent; and Hōtei and Bishamon have Buddhist associations. Each god is ascribed magical attributes, which gave rise over the years to many mystical tales. For example, Daikoku has a mallet that can grant mortals' wishes; Hōtei has a sack of endless food and toys for children; and Benten, the only female among the seven, has domain over the sea and is often portrayed riding on the back of a dragon.

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Daikoku Beckoning to a Group of Mice

Japan, Meiji period, c. 1880s

Color woodblock print

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James E. O'Brien, 1978

(7116)

Zeshin presents Daikoku, the god of wealth and guardian of farmers, dressed in the guise of an affluent Chinese man. All the attributes associated with Daikoku appear: his mallet-shaped hammer that grants wishes to worthy mortals is by his left foot; his bag of precious objects lies against him; and the bales of rice referencing his agricultural patronage are in the background. Daikoku good-naturedly extends his hand to a group of mice; he is often depicted in the act of letting rodents eat from his rice bales. This simple gesture conveys the deeper moral that true wealth is revealed through compassion and generosity.

Utagawa Zeshin (1807-1891)

Seven Deities of Luck

Japan, Meiji period, 19th century

Color woodblock print

Gift of Drs. Edmund and Julie Lewis, 2003

(7611)

Over the years, the seven gods of luck and happiness have been assigned various personality traits and symbols. Bishamon, the guardian god, or god of wealth, is dressed in full armor, his combination of warrior skill and religious zeal suggested by his spear in one hand and a miniature pagoda in the other. Hōtei, the jolly deity, has a protruding stomach to represent his large soul, and is often depicted in the company of children, giving them gifts from his never-depleting sack. Jurōjin, the god of longevity, is usually dressed as a scholar and depicted with canes, tortoises, or stags to symbolize contented old age.

Kurokuju, the god of wisdom and old age, tends to have a large, bald forehead juxtaposed with a very short body. Daikoku, the god of wealth and guardian of farmers, has his wish-granting mallet or is surrounded by signs of agriculture. Ebisu (perhaps the son or brother of Daikoku), the patron of merchants and fishermen, carries a fishing rod and sea bream. Benten, the goddess of the sea and daughter of the Dragon King, rides on the back of a dragon or plays the *biwa*, a Japanese string instrument, to show her patronage of the fine arts.

licking Animals and *Tengu* Goblins

pan, Edo period, 18th century

indscroll

ft of John Gregg Allerton, 1958

472.1)

tengu feature in some of the oldest Japanese legends, and are among the strangest-looking mythological creatures. They are the purported descendants of the brother of Amaterasu, the sun goddess. *Tengu* are portrayed with the body of a man and the head of a bird, as seen in this scroll, or with bird-like attributes, such as wings for arms and long beaks and noses. Sometimes they are red in color, and frequently they wear masks made of feathers or leaves and the small black hats of the *mabushi* (mountain warriors). Though they are minor deities, they are still to be feared and respected, even though their nature is more mischievous than harmful.

tengu are associated with Shintoism, and these bird-men are said to inhabit the trees in mountainous areas near Shinto shrines. According to folklore, they live in colonies ruled by a King (often painted with a long, hooked nose, flowing white beard, and huge piercing eyes), and those who serve the King are known as “leaflet” *tengu*. They are skilled warriors—a skill they are credited with imparting to the legendary hero Ashitama. Belief in *tengu* persists even today.

Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Crows in Flight at Sunrise

Japan, Meiji period, 1888

Color woodblock print

Gift of Drs. Edmund and Julie Lewis, 2003
(27651)

In Japan, crows are associated with the sun. This connection was borrowed from ancient Chinese mythology, in which a three-legged crow was said to live on the sun. In Japan, the three-legged crow was called a *yatagarasu*. Believed to have carried a message to the first emperor, Jimmu, the *yatagarasu* is linked with Shinto shrines as well.

However, crows are also associated with *tengu* (the mythical and mysterious “bird men” depicted in the *Frolicking Animals and Tengu Goblins* handscroll in the standing case at the other end of this gallery). Furthermore, they are sometimes linked with ill fortune, winter, and death. For these reasons, although crows are occasionally found on works of art, they have not historically been as popular as other birds (such as the highly auspicious crane) as a design motif.