

# The Rise of Photography in Late 19th Century Japan

The introduction of photography was a pivotal moment in the modernization of Japanese art at the end of the 19th century. The size and appearance of photographs resembled traditional Japanese woodblock prints in many ways, but otherwise, these two media were fundamentally different:

*The Japanese prints and paintings known as ukiyo-e...richly exploited the potential of color, shape and line. But deep dimensional space and the gradation of light and shadow, in short, the 'truth' captured in a photograph, produced a compelling kind of image.*

-Robert Stearns, *Photography and beyond in Japan: Space, Time and Memory* (1995).

In an attempt to replicate the vibrancy of polychromatic woodblock prints (*nishiki-e*), some of the early pioneers of Japanese photography, including Felice Beato (1832–1909) and Charles Wirgman (1832–1891), both foreigners living in the port city of Yokohama, popularized the production of albumen prints, to which pigments could be later applied.

This rotation includes hand-colored albumen prints by a variety of artists active in eastern Japan during the Meiji period (1868–1911): Japanese nationals, foreign residents, and several anonymous artists of unknown ethnicity. The photographs are divided into genres that underscore their similarities to Japanese woodblock prints: portraits of women (*bijin-ga*), landscapes and depictions of architecture (*fūkei-ga*), views of the Yoshiwara brothel district (a combination of the previous two genres), and images of daily life (*fūzoku-ga*).