

Anonymous

Woman Playing the Shamisen

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca 1760s

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mrs. Robert P. Griffing, Jr., in memory of her husband
(3333.1)

One of the genres of painting that gained favor with Edo socialites was *bijinga*, or “paintings of beautiful women.” As the genre developed, it moved from images of beauties contextualized by a landscape, city, or interior setting to a focus on the isolated, monumentalized figure of the woman herself. By eliminating the surroundings, attention was focused on the individual merits and aesthetics of the subject, primarily her fashion, composure, and in the case of geisha from the pleasure quarters, her skill as an entertainer. The *bijinga* genre also led to the development of woodblock prints romanticizing life in the pleasure quarters and capturing the extreme decadence characteristic of the Edo period.

Shop Sign Depicting Beautiful Woman

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1800

Color on wood

Purchase, 1961

(2926.1)

The courtesan on this sign is painted in the style of Utagawa Toyokuni (see *Courtesan and Attendant* by Toyokuni on display nearby). She is pointing to the entrance of a teahouse, and on the right there is a Chinese poem that can be loosely translated as:

“Beautiful women can lead a nation to ruin, but why shouldn't everyone enjoy the same pleasures as great rulers?”

This signboard most likely marked the entrance to a brothel in the Yoshiwara district. In 1617 the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu established the Yoshiwara, a separate district outside Edo for licensed prostitutes. The famous teahouses (*hikitejaya*) that came to embody the decadence of the pleasure quarters were established a few decades later, about 1760.

Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815)

Three Drunken Women

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1785

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Robert Allerton, 1957

(2389.1)

Inscription:

“How boisterous those intoxicated women are! One is merrily laughing and another is bullying the others.”

- Yomo no Akara

This painting depicts three women of the pleasure quarters. Together, they are meant to signify the three stages of drunkenness. The woman on the left is the angry drunk. She crossly gestures with her pipe at the woman in the middle, who represents the crying drunk. The third woman is the giggling drunk, shown reeling backwards with laughter.

This work is an interesting collaboration between two very influential artists in Edo. The painter, Torii Kiyonaga, was the most significant ukiyo-e artist of the 1780s. He is best known for his woodblock prints and book illustrations of elegant, tall, and slender women of the pleasure quarters. In addition, Kiyonaga was the last famous artist of the Torii School, which dominated the Kabuki print genre in the 18th century. The poem was written by the famous humorist Ōta Nampo (1749-1823), one of the most popular comic poets and fiction writers of his time.

Katabira

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 19th century

Ramie, silk, gilt paper-wrapped thread

Gift of Mrs. Elizabeth M. Adams, 1948

(622.1)

A *katabira* is a summer robe (*kosode*) originally worn by the aristocracy. It was traditionally made of unlined silk or ramie (*asa*). However, during the Edo period, the *katabira* was incorporated into the wardrobes of the samurai class and wealthy merchants. Merchant class women strove to outdo each other in their flamboyant fashions, although as the lowest ranking class, their clothes were supposed to be simple.

To enforce class boundaries, the Tokugawa government began issuing sumptuary laws limiting the techniques, colors, and fabrics used to create clothing according to social rank. Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu issued 42 sumptuary laws; his successor issued another 59 edicts. These laws were often poorly enforced, leading to the nickname “three-day laws.” Although this garment does incorporate gilt threads, the effect of the sumptuary laws is evident in the dye techniques used. Instead of using the expensive dappled tie-dye technique (*shibori*), the look was imitated through the use of stencils.

Anonymous

Scenes of Common Pleasure

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), late 18th century

Pair of six-fold screens; ink, colors, and gold on paper

Gift of Mrs. L. Drew Betz, 1981

(4891.1)

Right screen, right to left:

1. Samurai, priest, and a blind musician with a group of *wakashū* in a palatial teahouse. *Wakashū* were young men who impersonated female Kabuki characters.
2. *Wakashū* Kabuki stage with audience.
3. Outdoor pleasure trip: *wakashū* and warriors.
4. *Wakashū* Kabuki stage.
5. *Wakashū* dancing solo with audience watching.
6. Stage of a *wakashū* Kabuki theater with four actors sitting on tiger skin-covered Chinese-style chairs playing the shamisen.

Kabuki Theater was the most popular form of entertainment in the Edo period, and figures prominently in this screen. Kabuki began with a theatrical group led by a woman named Okuni in 1603. She and her dance troupe gained a tremendous following. As Okuni's innovative, wild, and uninhibited style of dance gained popularity and began to be copied, female performers attracted many suitors. Prostitution and fights over the dancers during performances led to the eventual banishment of women from Kabuki Theater in 1629. To fill in female roles, attractive young men called *wakashū* became popular and are depicted in this screen entertaining samurai. However, similar problems eventually developed with the *wakashū*, and they too were banned from Kabuki in 1652 to be replaced by older adult male actors who impersonated female roles (*onnagata*).

These screens are small in size because they probably were painted for the townhouse of a wealthy merchant. As merchants gained influence in Edo society, they became active patrons of the arts, introducing new styles and subjects of painting such as the scenes depicted here.

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Scenes of Common Pleasure

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), late 18th century

Pair of six-fold screens; ink, colors, and gold on paper

Gift of Mrs. L. Drew Betz, 1981

(4891.2)

Left screen, right to left:

7. Viewing *wakashū* Kabuki Theater at the house of a samurai.
8. The *No* play *Tsunahiki* (rope pulling), performed by *wakashū* Kabuki actors.
9. *Wakashū* Kabuki stage with audience.
10. A group of court nobles playing the game *kemari*.
11. *Wakashū* dressed as courtesans on a pleasure boat.
12. A scene of the pleasure quarters of Rokujō Misujimachi in Kyoto.

Women of the pleasure quarters were ranked in a very elaborate hierarchy. Lower ranking women are shown above in the far left panel. The appearance of being caged is close to reality, as they were placed on display in front of teahouses in barred rooms called *harimise*, allowing customers to see the selection of women available. The highest ranked women were called *Oiran*. They gained their status from birth or due to their exceptional beauty or skills as entertainers. Higher class courtesans were allowed more freedom of movement through the district and often had several attendants.

Man's Summer Kimono

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), late 18th century

Silk, dyes, pigments

Gift of Kitakamakura Museum, 1994

(7649.1)

Artisans during the Edo period often worked in more than one genre, and the same person sometimes made designs for textiles, lacquer, ceramics, and paintings. This men's summer kimono is a perfect example of the harmony between art forms, as the motif was painted directly on fabric with as much concern for aesthetics as if it had been painted on a scroll. Men of the Edo period were often as conscious of dress (as a means of communicating sophistication and wealth) as their female contemporaries. Cranes, bamboo, and pine trees are symbolic of longevity and good fortune, and were popular decoration for clothing worn during the New Year and for wedding ceremonies.

Anonymous

Women in a Garden Pavilion

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1800

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Purchase, 1963

(7421.1)

Though this artwork may instantly bring to mind ukiyo-e woodblock printing, it is actually a brush painting. At first glance it appears to be a preliminary study for a color painting; however, close examination reveals fine details that would suggest otherwise. It was painted by an artist of the Katsushika School, after Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). Katsushika Hokusai is one of the most famous ukiyo-e artists and was exceptionally talented as both a print designer and a painter. He had many students and admirers and his style was widely copied.

Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825)

Courtesan with Attendant

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), early 19th century

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Dr. Nathan Y. Hammer, 1960

(6158.1)

This painting depicts a high-ranking *Oiran* courtesan. *Oiran* could often be seen parading around the pleasure quarters with their attendants, and this became a popular subject for ukiyo-e paintings and prints. The girl attendant (*kamuro*) accompanying the *Oiran* would have received training and guidance from her appointed courtesan. Here, the women both share the same red undergarment as well as obi fabric. Red dye was considered a sign of youth, wealth, and beauty since its introduction in the 5th century from China.

The Tokugawa government sought control over fashion as a way to enforce the class structure. As a result, many sumptuary laws were issued regulating the use of this color. Perhaps as a reaction, red undergarments covered by green, gray, or brown outer kimonos became fashionable as a way to provide a demure glimpse of the prohibited color peeking from a sleeve or around the neckline. Despite the restrained use of this flamboyant color, a sense of luxury and fashion is conveyed through the strong visual impact of the wave design against a simple backdrop. The many layers of kimono as well as the tie-dye (*shibori*) technique on the under kimono also denote the sophistication of the wearer.

Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Boy Picking Cherry Blossoms

Japan, Meiji period (1868-1912), c. 1876

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James E. O'Brien, 1978
(4646.1)

Here, a boy is being lifted by a Shinto priest to pick a flowering cherry branch. The pairing of the native Shinto religion, which values natural aesthetics highly, and the cherry blossom, an important native symbol, is fitting, as both contribute to the Japanese aesthetic appreciation for nature. Cherry trees are native to Japan and represent Japanese values such as purity and simplicity. Cherry blossom-viewing was an important spring ritual with a long history. During the Heian period (794-1185), cherry blossom-viewing parties (*hanami*) were already an essential spring activity for the nobility. By the Edo period the practice gained popularity among all classes of people, and it continues today.

Anonymous

Festival at Sumiyoshi Shrine

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 17th century

Handscroll; ink, gold leaf on paper

Gift of the Robert Allerton Fund, 1960

(2789.1)

Genre painting (*fūzokuga*) first appeared in the early Edo period and provided an interesting glimpse into the activities of local people and events in the various cities and their institutions, such as Shinto shrines. Sumiyoshi Shrine is located in Osaka. The shrine houses four deities and is thought to offer protection for fishermen, *waka* poets, and merchants. The shrine buildings, visible in the painting, characterize a distinctive type of architecture known as the Sumiyoshi style. To the right, a crowd of festival-goers carry a *mikoshi* (portable shrine), which houses the deity, across the river towards the shrine. Traditional Japanese festivals not only served religious purposes, but also took on a carnivalesque atmosphere, allowing for a temporary escape from social and class restrictions. The festival is still held on July 31 each year.

Anonymous

The Black Ship Scroll

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 1854

Handscroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mrs. Walter F. Dillingham, in memory of Alice Perry Grew, 1960
(2732.1)

The arrival of Commodore Mathew Perry opened Japan after over 250 years of isolationist policy. This isolation had allowed Japanese culture and the arts to develop with minimal foreign influence, giving the Edo period a highly sophisticated and individual sense of aesthetics and culture. However, this isolation created widespread curiosity for things foreign, which intensified after the arrival of Perry's fleet. This scroll features fully illustrated descriptions of Perry's crew and all of their accoutrements. The foreigners' peculiar behaviors and adventures throughout Edo are humorously recorded. In the scene above, one of Perry's crewmen accidentally tastes hair oil, mistaking it for something edible. In the following scene, an American is shown in a teahouse interacting with the geishas.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Vegetables

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1811-1820

Fan painting; ink and color on paper

Gift of Robert Allerton, 1957

(2388.1)

Katsushika Hokusai was one of the most famous ukiyo-e artists of the late Edo period. A prolific artist, he continued to study and improve his skill even until the last year of his life. He is best known for his landscape designs for woodblock prints, including such famous series as *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, which includes the *Great Wave*, perhaps the most famous Japanese image ever made. However, during his lifetime he was equally if not more famous as a painter. This charming still life is a casual, light-hearted composition from the hand of the great master.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Ferry Boat on New Year's Day

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 19th century

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Gift of Robert Allerton, 1957

(2381.1)

This painting was acquired by the Academy as a genuine Hokusai, but its authenticity was later questioned, and for many years it was thought to be perhaps a later work in Hokusai's style with a spurious signature. However, recently a top Japanese Hokusai expert reevaluated the painting as a genuine, and important, work by one of ukiyo-e's most influential artists. Under Hokusai's leadership, and followed quickly by his junior Hiroshige, ukiyo-e began to shift emphasis from beauties of the pleasure quarters and Kabuki scenes to landscapes, as there developed an increasing interest in travel in Japan during the 19th century. This painting of impressive scale portrays a ferry boat on New Year's Day in vibrant colors characteristic of Hokusai's mature style.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Mimeguri Shrine in Snow

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1820-1830

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Gift of Nathan Y. Hammer, 1953

(1769.1)

Like *Ferry Boat on New Year's Day* nearby, the authenticity of this painting was questioned in the 1950s, and for five decades it has been thought to be a forgery. However, recent examination by a top Hokusai expert in Japan has suggested that the painting may in fact be an authentic, if minor, work by this artist. Hokusai's style was widely admired and often copied, and later artists were not above occasionally copying Hokusai's signature as well as his manner.

The painting depicts the Shinto Mimeguri Shrine on the east side of the Sumida River in Edo (modern Tokyo). A popular pilgrimage site, this shrine was a favorite subject for ukiyo-e artists in the 19th century.

Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Badger Studying a Buddhist Text

Japan, Edo–Meiji period, ca. 1833-1872

Hanging scroll; lacquer and color on paper

Gift of the James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1978
(4650.1)

The depiction of human activities transposed to the animal world is a long-standing tradition in Japan that was widely practiced during the Edo period. It was often used as a means to satirize contemporary culture. In this case, a badger (*tanuki*), a magical animal traditionally believed to be able to take on human shape, is shown in the guise of a monk reading a Buddhist text. However, badgers were symbols of gluttony, and Zeshin may have been implying here that many Japanese Buddhist monks were far from the ideal of freedom from worldly attachment.

Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Mouse Procession

Japan, Meiji period (1868-1912), ca. 1872-1891

Hanging scrolls; ink and color on paper

Gift of the James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1977
(4590.1-2)

Like many artists of the 19th century, Zeshin frequently made paintings showing animals mimicking human practices. Here we see a procession of mice dressed in formal Japanese costumes. The elegant composition, stretched generously over two hanging scrolls, makes use of empty space and lack of context to convey a sense of otherworldliness, as though the viewer was spying on a scene distinctly human, but not intended for human eyes.