

Edo Theater: The Drama of Kabuki, January 18, 2008-May 18, 2008

Kabuki theater thrived in Edo-period (1603-1867) Japan. It had all of the necessary elements for successful and popular stage performance: dramatic narrative, music, vocals, and dance. Its subject matter often consisted of historical narratives, revenge plays, and plots borrowed from the repertory of Nō and the puppet theater.

According to tradition, the form originated in early 17th-century Kyoto with performances by a female dancer associated with the Izumo Shrine. The first government edicts regulating kabuki were issued in 1629, when female performers, many of whom had resorted to prostitution, were banned for moral reasons. The same injunction was issued against young male performers in 1652, and from 1653 on, all kabuki troupes consisted only of male performers. Female roles came to be played by female impersonators (*onnagata*), and by the early 18th century, kabuki had become an intimate part of the world of entertainment and pleasure so closely identified with "the floating world" (*ukiyo*). Patrons included members of all levels of society, and despite periodic government censure, this theatrical form retained its enormous popularity.

Focusing on the acting conventions of kabuki theater - elaborate costumes and facial make-up, dramatic acting, and exaggerated body language - these prints convey some of the excitement and pleasure that kabuki theatergoers experience to this day. Such works served as advertisements and as records of performances, as well as providing insight into the hidden world of the theater. Many of the prints in this exhibition are portraits of specific actors, while others depict the theater and the theater district. One group focuses on the Ichikawa lineage of Danjūrō actors, who were famed for their bravura roles. This reputation derived from the classic *shibaraku* role, in which the protagonist yells "Wait a moment!" ("*Shibaraku!*") and proceeds to resolve the action of the play by killing the evildoers. First written by Danjūrō I (1660-1704) in about 1697, versions of this performance became an integral part of the Danjūrō-lineage repertory. Idolization of actors and patronage by fans, as well as the cultivation of the audience through modified repetition of familiar narratives, all point to the strength and enduring popularity of this highly entertaining theatrical tradition. Savor these prints as an introduction to the enjoyment of kabuki theater.

RISD MUSEUM

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Dai Xi, Japanese
 Gayuken Shunsei, Japanese
Scrapbook album of Onoe Tamizō II of Osaka (nidai Onoe Tamizō)
 (1799-1886), mid 1820's
 Polychrome wood block print
 Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1054

This album is a scrapbook assembled by a dedicated fan of the actor Onoe Tamizō II of Osaka. Most of the works were designed by Shunshi, an Osaka printmaker. This scene shows Tamizō watching his teacher, Onoe Kikugorō III (1784-1849), and another actor, Arashi Kitsusaburō II (1788-1837), exchange portraits in Kikugorō's dressing room. The diptych, by Tamikuni (n.d.), provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse of kabuki theater life. The opening image in the album depicts Tamizō asking his fans for support at the opening of the theater year.



Utagawa Toyokuni, Japanese, 1769-1825
 Izumiya Ichibei, Japanese
Sawamura Sojuro III (1753-1801) as Ume no Yoshibei (sandai (III))
Sawamura Sojuro Ume no Yoshibei), ca. 1796
 Polychrome wood block print
 Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1404

The performance by Sawamura Sōjūrō III (1753-1801) as Ume no Yoshibei set the standard for subsequent actors playing the role. He debuted it at the Kiri Theater, January 1796, in the play *Sumida no haru geisha katagi* by Namiki Gohei. The character is an *otokodate*, a type of street tough glorified on the kabuki stage as a hero of the common people. The blue area on this actor's forehead is exposed skin, a convention used in depicting kabuki actors, who had to shave their heads. This is the left panel of a diptych whose right panel shows Segawa Kikunojo III (1751-1810) as Chokichi.



Utagawa Kunitaru II, Japanese, 1830-1874
 Daikokuya Kinosuke shi
Flowers of Tokyo: Bustling opening of the three kabuki theaters in Saruwaka-cho (Tokyo hana saruwaka sanro hanei kaikan zu), 1871
 Polychrome woodblock print
 Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.12



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Saruwaka Street, located near the Asakusa Kannon Temple in Tokyo (formerly Edo), was the home of the three licensed kabuki theaters beginning in 1841-42. Here you see the Nakamura, Ichimura, and Morita theaters, with each entrance marked by a canopy with large advertisements, including banners of actors hung above the door. Crowds fill the streets as the theatrical season begins in the eleventh lunar month of 1871.

Jukōdō Yoshikumi, Japanese, fl. ca. 1803-1840

Actors passing Mount Fuji between the Yoshiwara and Hara stations on the Tokaido (Yakusha dochu yoshiwara hara fuji enbo), 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.15



This print depicts an actor troupe on the Tōkaidō (Eastern Sea Route) as they travel to Edo (modern Tokyo).

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Ibaya Sensaburo, Japanese, 19th century

Scribbblings on the storehouse wall (Nitakaragura kabe no mudagaki), 1843-1847

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1998.72.7



Kuniyoshi has very cleverly caricatured seven actors in these "scribbblings." Moving from the center clockwise, the performers may be tentatively identified as follows: Azuma Tōzō (?); Bandō Hikosaburō; Ichikawa Shinsha (?); Bandō Mitsugorō IV as Shunkan (?); unidentified actor; Mimasa Daigorō (?); and Ōtani Tomoemon III.

Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764

Okumura Genroku, Japanese

Ichikawa Ebizo II as a priest; Otani Hiroji as a priest; Segawa Kikunojo as a Shirabyoshi (performer); a scene from Momochidori musume Dojoji (a myriad of birds: the maiden of Dojoji Temple), part of the play Sazareishi Hirogenji, the New Year's performance 新年, Perspective pictures of theater stages, ca. 1744

Polychrome woodblock print with hand applied color

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1056



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This is a perspective picture (*uki-e*) based upon modified application of the Western system of one-point perspective. It depicts the interior of the Nakamura Theater, one of most famous and enduring kabuki theaters of Edo (modern Tokyo). The heroine of the play, an angry spirit disguised as a temple dancer (*shirabyōshi*), is entering from the left on the raised walkway. The monk who has rejected her advances is hiding under the bell, where he will be immolated after she performs her dance, turns into a serpent, and breathes fire on the bell. The scene is from *Suehiro Soga, a Myriad of Birds: The Maiden of Dōjō Temple* (*Suehiro Soga yonbon tsuzuki momochidori musume Dōjōji*), part of the play *Sazareishi Hirogenji*. This 1744 performance was part of the cycle of plays put on to celebrate the lunar new year.

Look at the crowd in the theater. What are they doing, and are they acting in ways that are familiar to you as a theatergoer?

Torii Kiyotomo, Japanese, fl. 1720-1740s

Actor as a street vendor selling hand towels and scent pouches in the shapes of kimono sleeves (Sanogawa Ichimatsu?), mid-1720s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1061

The inscription on this actor's backpack identifies his merchandise as "fashionable scented hand towels with actor's crests." These objects were souvenirs or collector's items that recalled one's favorite actors. In an illusion to the pleasure quarters so closely identified with the "floating world" (*ukiyo*), this female impersonator's robe is patterned with entrances to brothels in the pleasure quarters.

Do you collect objects that remind you of your favorite actors or performers?



RISD MUSEUM

Nishimura Shigenaga, Japanese, ca. 1697-1756

Omiya Kyuhei, Japanese

The actors Ichimura Takenojo as Kudo Suketsune and Sanjo Kantaro as the princess Tatsuhime in the play Hinazuru unagasu Soga performed at the Ichimura Theatre 1722.11, late 1730's

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1064

This scene is from a kabuki play based on the medieval revenge story of the Soga brothers, *Hinazuru unagasu Soga*, which is known in over 300 staged versions.

Suketsune is the villain responsible for the death of the brothers' father and Tatsuhime, the beautiful princess. The butterfly emblem on the back of Kantarō's robe is both his own crest and that of the younger Soga brother, Goro.

This print commemorates a performance of the eleventh lunar month of 1722 at the Ichimura Theater, but was made later. The inscriptions give the actors' names and the names of the people whom they portray.



Ishikawa Toyonobu, Japanese, 1711-1780

Ishikawa Danjuro III (Sandaime Ishikawa Danjuro), 1740's

Polychrome wood block print with marbled background

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1067

This rare print depicts Ishikawa Ebizo III (1712-78) in his classic *shibaraku* role, in which he yells "Wait a moment!" ("*Shibaraku*") and proceeds to resolve the action of the play by killing the evildoers. First written by Danjūrō I (1660-1704) in about 1697, versions of this performance became an integral part of the Danjūrō-lineage repertory. Danjūrō is readily identified by his red garment and his crest (*mon*) of three squares, one within another. The marbled background accounts for the unusual pattern of the paper. The text above the actor is a poem.



RISD MUSEUM

Torii Kiyomitsu I, Japanese, ca. 1735-1785

Yamashiroya, Japanese

Segawa Kikunojo II as the princess Usuyukihime (Nidai Segawa Kikunojo Usuyukihime), ca. 1760

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1073

Segawa Kikunojo II was a famed female impersonator (*onnagata*) on the kabuki stage. The two columns of inscription in the upper right give his name and that of his role. The remainder of the text is a poem.



Torii Kiyoshige, Japanese, fl. 1720s-1760s

Nishinomiya Shinroku

Otani Hiroji II (Nidai Otani Hiroji), Collected nicknames of the floating world, 1750s-1760s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1074

Dance is an important part of kabuki. Here, Otani Hiroji II is depicted in lively motion. Not only is he named on the print, but he is also identified by the crest (*mon*) below his extended left hand, two crossed white bars within a white circle.



RISD MUSEUM

Katsukawa Shunshō, Japanese, 1725-1792

The actor Ichikawa Danjuro V in a straw raincoat (godai Ichikawa Danjuro), 1770s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1100

Here Danjūrō V (1741-1806) is identified by the crest (*mon*) of three squares, one within another, on his sleeve. This striking portrait was made by Shunshō, founder of the Katsukawa school of printmakers. Works by the Katsukawa artists often depicted actors and kabuki-related subjects.

Does this actor resemble the actor in the print to the left?



RISD MUSEUM

Katsukawa Shunshō, Japanese, 1725-1792

Nakamura Nakazo I as "The luminary and leading Rokujurokubu Pilgrim in Japan" (Nakamura Nakazo: Nihon ichi Rokujuroku bu kokin meijin), 1780

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1102

The performance by Nakamura Nakazō I (1736-90) in this role at the Nakamura Theater occurred in the eleventh lunar month of 1780. The print is dated on that basis, and demonstrates how an actor's reputation and great performances were commemorated in the print medium. The inscription on the box reads: "the luminary and leading pilgrim of Japan contributing to 66 temples" (*Nihon ichi rokujurokubu bu kokin meijin*).



Kitao Masanobu, Japanese, 1761-1816

The actor Ichikawa Danjuro V as Enya Hangan in Chushingura (Enya Hangan Ichikawa Danjuro godai), late 1770's-early 1800's

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1116

In this print, Kitao Masanobu depicts Danjūrō V (1741-1806) as one of the heroes of the Treasury of Loyal Retainers (*Chūshingura*). This tale, known in an assortment of versions, recounts the efforts of the forty-seven masterless samurai (*rōnin*) to revenge their lord's death. The inscription gives the actor's name and that of the person whom he is portraying.

Does this actor resemble the actor in the print to the right?



RISD MUSEUM

Tōshūsai Sharaku, Japanese

Tsutaya Jūzaburō, Japanese, 1750 - 1797

Segawa Kikunojo III as Oshizu, wife of the cripple Tanabe Bunzo, in the play Hana ayame Bunroku Soga performed at the Miyako Theater in fifth month of Kansei 6, 1794

Polychrome woodblock print with silver mica ground

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1131

The work of the printmaker who signed himself Sharaku dates to a very short period of ten months in the years 1794-95. His actor portraits are exceptional because of their innovative style. By creating a bust-length image of the subject, he focused on the facial expression and physiognomic details of the actor portrayed in a way never before done. This portrait is for the play *Hana ayame Bunroku Soga*, which was performed at the Miyako Theater in the fifth lunar month of 1794.



Compare this portrait to the full-length actor portraits on the walls. Do you think that Sharaku's print is more effective?

Katsukawa Shunzan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1782-1798

Igaya Kanemon, Japanese

The actors Osagawa Tsuneyo II as a woman and Matsumoto Koshiro IV as a samurai (nidai Osagawa Tsuneyo; yondai Matsumoto Koshiro), ca. 1789

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1157

Osagawa Tsuneyo II and Matsumoto Kōshirō IV (1737-1802) are depicted against the background of the stage in an unidentified play. The inscription in the upper right gives the date autumn, Kansei 1 [1789] (Kansei ga aki).



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Toyokuni, Japanese, 1769-1825

Sumimaruya Jinsuke, Japanese

Sawamura Tanosuke II as the lady-in-waiting? Takigawa (Koshimoto? Takigawa Sawamura Tanosuke), 1811

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1161

Sawamura Tanosuke II (1788-1817), a female impersonator (*onnagata*), may be playing a lady-in-waiting, which would explain the presence of a sword in his hands. The inscription gives the actor's name, but the name of the role he plays is illegible.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Sumiyoshiya Masagoro, Japanese

Yokogawa Takejiro, 19th century

Parody of the Sixteen Disciples of Buddha (Mitate Juroku rakan), 1843-1847

Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1311



This is a parody (*mitate*) of famous actors, some of whom were contemporary with Kuniyoshi, while others lived in much earlier times. The actors are shown dressed as the Buddha's sixteen disciples (Sanskrit: *arhats*; Japanese: *rakan*) and other figures. Since the Tenpō Reforms of 1841-43 forbade the representation of actors, it is possible that Kuniyoshi depicted the performers in a religious context as a simple means of circumventing these government regulations.

RISD MUSEUM

Ippitsusai Bunchō, Japanese, fl. ca. 1765-1792

Ichikawa Yaozo II, ca. 1770

Polychrome woodblock print

Museum collection, by exchange 47.018

Bunchō utilizes a colorful palette in this depiction of Ichikawa Yaozō II (1735-77).

What kind of role do you think that this actor is playing?

Do the artist's color choices affect your reaction to this actor portrait?



Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Ichikawa Danjuro VII in the Shibaraku Role and Another Actor as Namazu Bozu, 1820s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.48

This print depicts Danjūrō VII (1791-1859) in his classic *shibaraku* role, in which he yells "Wait a moment!" ("*Shibaraku*") and proceeds to resolve the action of the play by killing the evildoers. First written by Danjūrō I (1660-1704) in about 1697, versions of this performance became an integral part of the Danjūrō-lineage repertory. Danjūrō is readily identified by his red garment and his crest (*mon*) of three squares, one within another.

