

Black on White: Monochromatic Japanese Prints, December 8, 2000-March 4, 2001

The fully developed art of Japanese color woodblock printing had its roots in a variety of sources, including Buddhist printing and the illustration of printed books. Early *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of the 17th and early 18th centuries were executed in black ink only, and their subject matter was often tied to the tradition of illustration from which they were evolving. Even after artists were able to produce “brocade pictures” (*nishiki-e*) from numerous color blocks, their interest in black ink as a medium for depiction nevertheless remained.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Sawa Sekkyo, Japanese, fl. late 18th century-early 19th century

Setsukyo, Japanese, fl. 1804-1818

Two Cranes and Pine, ca. 1790s

Wood block print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.451

Cranes and pine denote longevity, and are often combined in prints made for the New Year. See the print entitled *Cranes and a Pine Tree*, also on view in this gallery.



Japanese

Moon and Bamboo, 1800s

Monochrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.478

This painterly rendition of bamboo utilizes shades of pale gray to convey the effect of moonlight illuminating the leaves.



RISD MUSEUM

Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831-1889
Crow on branch, ca. 1880s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.463

Kyōsai's most famous image of a crow was exhibited in 1881, and after that date his prints and paintings of that subject became even more numerous.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Fudesute Peak, Yaso Segawa River, Sakanoshita, 1850s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.126

These rapids occur at the base of the mountain, as the inscription at the bottom right ("at the bottom of the hill": *saka no moto*) makes clear.



RISD MUSEUM

Toyohiro Utagawa, Japanese, 1773-1828

Hawk attacking goose, late 1820s ?

Woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.449



Toyohiro Utagawa, Japanese, 1773-1828

Cuckoo in Rain, 1810s

Woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.384

The cuckoo, which is associated with summer, is depicted here in a torrential downpour.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
From an untitled series of ishizuri-e harimaze-e, ca. 1850s
 Monochrome woodblock print
 Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.459

This uncut sheet of four prints (*harimaze*) illustrates how precisely and economically an artist's designs were transferred onto a woodblock that would be printed on a standard-size sheet of paper. This is a typical sheet of *ōban* size (approximately 15 by 10 inches), which in this case would have yielded four prints from each impression taken.



Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831-1889
White Heron in the Rain (Uchu sagi), 1880s
 Color woodblock print
 Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.464

This print is signed "Tōiku," a name that Kyōsai received when he was nineteen years old and used until he was twenty-seven. It is likely that the work dates to this very early stage of his career.



Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764
Horses, 1710s
 Monochrome woodblock print (sumizuri-e)
 Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.447



RISD MUSEUM

Jukusai, Japanese, 19th century
Small Bird and Plum (descriptive), 1840s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.080



Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764
Falcon tethered to perch, 1710s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.443

The hawk usually symbolizes martial strength, but here the tethers restraining it may indicate a diminution or restraint of such power.



RISD MUSEUM

Torii Kiyomitsu I, Japanese, ca. 1735-1785
Nishimuraya Yohachi, Japanese
Cranes, pine, plum and moon, 1760s
Monochrome keyblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.292

This keyblock impression, identified by the black guide marks (*kento*) visible at the upper and lower right corners, would have served as a proof sheet in the printing process. The black contour lines of the keyblock generally define the compositional format of any Japanese print.



Japanese
Nishikawa Sukenobu, Japanese, 1671-1750
The geisha Okura and Wakamurasaki, ca. 1730s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1076

Sukenobu illustrated many books, and it is likely that this print was originally intended for such a purpose.



RISD MUSEUM

Kaigestsudo Dohan, Japanese
Watanabe Shōzaburō
Igaya, Japanese
Courtesan, 1916.10
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1054

This very striking portrait of a courtesan is a close copy of an authentic composition by Dohan, whose prints were all monochromatic.



Yosa Buson, Japanese
Iwataya Kisaburo, Japanese
Rock ptarmigans and pine (Matsu ni raicho), 1810s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.448.1

This print was probably made in the second decade of the nineteenth century, based on the evidence of its censor's seals. The color-printed version to the right, which appears to have been made soon after the monochrome print, points to the possibility that prints sometimes were produced in both monochrome and polychrome versions.



RISD MUSEUM

Yosa Buson, Japanese

Iwataya Kisaburo, Japanese

Rock ptarmigans and pine (Matsu ni raicho), 1810s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.448.2

Although very close in the composition to the black-and-white print to the left, the black contour lines of these forms are thicker and the artist's signature has been eradicated. It appears that this is a color-block printed version made after the artist's original black-and-white composition.



Japanese

Kitagawa Tsukimaro, Japanese, active by 1840, d. 1830

Cranes and pines, 1810s

Monochrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.461

The signature Tan 'yūsai is unidentified, but the print may be dated stylistically to the early 19th century. The cranes and pine tree both allude to long life. When combined, as they are in this print, the subject may indicate the advent of the New Year as well. See the print by Setsukyō entitled *Cranes and Pine*, also on view in this gallery.

