
Uchiwa-e have a distinct shape directly related to their function. Normally these prints were cut and mounted onto stiff, flat wooden frames with handles and sold as fans. Fans had been used in Japan for centuries, but during the Edo period (1615-1868) they came to be seen everywhere in Japanese prints: held by kabuki actors, courtesans, and ordinary folk.

Very few examples of fan prints survived because they were used and discarded. The museum’s collection is unusual for its variety and quality.

In Japan, seasonal references are of great importance. In making a selection at the fan shop, the buyer would certainly consider the symbolism of the individual designs and the seasonal appropriateness of their imagery. Irises and peonies represent summer, morning glories and cotton roses (a type of hibiscus) late summer and early fall, and chrysanthemums the full bloom of autumn.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Utagawa Sadahide, Japanese, 1807-1878 or 1879
Ayu fish and bell flowers (Ayu to kikyo), 1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.319

Kikyō (balloon flower) is one of the “seven flowers of autumn” in Japan.

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Sanoya Kihei, Japanese
Canary and rose mallow (Fuyo ni kanaria), Yellow Bird and Cotton Rose, 1852
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.300

The cotton rose (fuyō) is a type of hibiscus that blooms in late summer and fall. The bird here may be a canary.
Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

*Kingfisher and peonies (Botan ni kawasemi), Bird and Cotton Rose*, 1830s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.301

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

*Golden pheasant and snow-covered pine (Setchu komatsu ni kinkei)*, 1830s
Polychrome woodblock fan print (uchiwa-e)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.302

This print shows signs of wear, indicating that it was probably actually used as a fan.

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Aritaya Seiemon, Japanese, ca. 19th century

*Morning glories (Asagao), Fashionable refreshing summer flower gardens*, 1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.303

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Ibaya Sensaburo, Japanese, 19th century

*Sparrow and winter camellias (Kantsubaki ni suzume), Collected flowers of the four seasons*, 1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.304

Camellia (tsubaki, or camellia japonica) blossoms in the late winter or early spring, just around the season of the New Year. In this print, Hiroshige has chosen to emphasize its endurance in a season of unpredictable and snowy weather.
Utagawa Sadahide, Japanese, 1807-1878 or 1879
Honya Kyusuke, Japanese
*Java sparrow and rice plants (Kome no hana ni suzume), A set of birds and flowers*, 1834
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.307

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Aritaya Seiemon, Japanese, ca. 19th century
*Rose mallow (Fuyo), Fashionable summer flower gardens*, 1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.299

Utagawa Sadahide, Japanese, 1807-1878 or 1879
Iseya Soemon, Japanese
*Peonies (Botan)*, 1835
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.317

These are tree peonies (*botan*). Both herbaceous and tree peonies are cultivated in Japan.

Gakuki, Japanese, 19th century
*Mount Fuji and pine (Matsu to Fujisan)*, 1820s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.335

Dreaming of Mt. Fuji on the morning of the first day of the New Year was considered an auspicious omen for happiness during that year. This theme is represented by the pine, a symbol associated with the New Year’s celebration, combined with Mt. Fuji and the rising sun, indicate the dream.
Utagawa Sadafusa, Japanese
Iseya Soemon, Japanese
*Chrysanthemums (Kiku)*, 1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.316

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865
*Cuckoo and Moon (Tsuki ni hototogisu)*, 1828
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.311

The cuckoo (*hototogisu*) is associated with summer. In this lovely fan with its highly evocative composition, the moon and the cuckoo complement each other beautifully.

Utagawa Kunisada II, Japanese, 1823-1880
Tsujiya Yasubei
Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865
*Herbaceous peonies and great tits (Shakuyaku ni shijukara)*, 1858
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.312

These are herbaceous peonies (*shakuyaku*). Both herbaceous and tree peonies are cultivated in Japan.

Katsukawa Shunzan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1782-1798
*Cockerel, hen and plum (Ume ni niwatori)*, 1790s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.321

The plum blossoms indicate that this fan was intended for the New Year’s season, when the plum flowers. The Japanese New Year typically falls in late January or early February according to the traditional lunar calendar.
Katsukawa Shunzan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1782-1798
Shunzan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1782-1798
*Rising sun and Takasago pine (Hinode to Takasago no matsu),* 1790s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.322

The story of the pine spirit Takasago (identified by the rake), who every night visited his love (represented by the broom) at Sumiyoshi, is taken from a famous Nō play. In addition to symbolizing the pines for which these two places were famous, the two spirits also stand for eternal fidelity and longevity.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861
Ibay Sensaburo, Japanese, 19th century
*Chrysanthemums under the moon (Tsuki ni kiku),* ca. 1830
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.324

Tsukioka Tanka, Japanese, 19th century
*Descending geese and flying swallows (Kaeru gan to kuru tsubame),* 1825
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.334

Utagawa Sadahide, Japanese, 1807-1878 or 1879
Tsuiya Yasubei
*Reed warblers, iris and Indian strawberries (Kakitsubata yoshikiri hebiichigo),* 1834
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  34.314

This type of iris is known as *kakitsubata,* or “rabbit-ear” iris, because of its shape.