

Poets, Heroes, and Courtiers: Literary and Narrative Traditions in Japanese Prints,
September 6, 2002-December 1, 2002

Poets who express one's most intimate feelings, heroes whose glorious feats resound through the ages, courtiers whose grace and elegance are perpetuated through written descriptions: poetry and prose reflect the emotions and aspirations of the society that produced these literary forms. The Japanese narrative tradition is full of tales of heroism, power, glory, and the vicissitudes of life and reversals of fortune, whereas more personal expressions of feeling are relegated to the serious genres of poetry. Both the prose and poetic forms are important components of the Japanese literary tradition.

The Japanese printmaking tradition evolved, at least in part, from a tradition of book illustration. The prints that are included in this exhibition demonstrate the various ways in which Japanese printmakers referred back to and utilized the richness of this literary tradition. In addition to depictions of poets, an illustration for the poetic cycle *The Eight Views of Ōmi* (*Ōmi hakkei*) is included here. Illustrations of narratives or tales, known in Japanese as *monogatari*, form the major part of this exhibition. Some of the samurai tales depicted here derive from the *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*), which chronicles the conflict between the Taira and Minamoto clans as they vied for political power at the end of the twelfth century. Others derive from legends surrounding the great heroes of the past, like Minamoto Musashi. Whatever their source, the printmaker's images make it clear that the literary tradition was a rich source of inspiration for Japanese printmakers of the Edo period (1600-1868).

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Utagawa Sadahide, Japanese, 1807-1878 or 1879
Yamamotoya Heikichi, Japanese
Miyamoto Musashi and Kasaahara Shinzaburo (*Miyamoto Musashi to Kasahara Shinzaburo*), 1840s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Jesse H. Metcalf 23.042



During his wanderings as a masterless samurai (*rōnin*), Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645) encountered an old man to whom he boasted about his exploits. When the old man laughed, Musashi attacked him. The old man, who was a great swordsman, defended himself very successfully with a wooden pot lid. Recognizing the old man's skill, Musashi apologized and became his pupil.

RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865
 Hayashiya Shogoro, Japanese
Hahakigi, Lasting impressions of a late Genji collection, 1857.11
 Polychrome woodblock print with gold leaf
 Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1410

Prince Genji is the hero of the great early eleventh-century Japanese novel of courtly life, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), written by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. From the late 1820s on, Kunisada designed variations of the Genji theme based upon an extensively reworked version of the text called "the rustic Genji." This print is probably a later impression of a series that Kunisada designed toward the end of his life.



Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849
 Nishimuraya Yohachi, Japanese
Abe no Nakamaro [701-770] (Abe no Nakamaro), The hundred poems explained by the nurse, ca. 1835-1836
 Polychrome woodblock print
 Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1228

Abe no Nakamaro (698/701-779) went to China to study in 717 and remained there permanently. Legend has it that his ship was blown off course and he was unable to return to Japan. Given the infrequent contact between the two countries in that period, this outcome is not surprising.

The poem inscribed next to the title cartouche in the upper right corner of the print is the famous set of verses recorded in the thirteenth-century anthology, *Hyakunin issu*. In it, the poet apparently expresses his longing for his native country:

*When I look abroad
 O'er the wide-stretched "Plain of Heaven,"
 Is the moon the same
 That on Mount Mikasa rose,
 In the land of Kasuga?*



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Wakasaya Yoichi, Japanese

Azumaya, Lasting impressions of a late Genji collection, 1858.12

Polychrome woodblock print with gold leaf

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1407

Prince Genji is the hero of the great early eleventh-century Japanese novel of courtly life, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), written by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. From the late 1820s on, Kunisada designed variations of the Genji theme based upon an extensively reworked version of the text called "the rustic Genji." This print is probably a later impression of a series that Kunisada designed toward the end of his life.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Sumiyoshiya Masagoro, Japanese

Yokogawa Horitake, Japanese

Nakamura Kansuke Masatatsu warding off a jar of hot ashes hurled at him (Nakamura Kansuke Masatatsu), Portraits of the Faithful Samurai of True Loyalty, 1852.12

Polychrome woodblock print

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.043.4

This series of portraits by Kuniyoshi depicts the forty-seven *rōnin*, or masterless samurai, who diligently plotted to avenge the death of their master, Asano Naganori. Asano was humiliated by Kira Yoshinaka, an official at the court of the shogun; after Asano drew his sword against Kira, he was ordered to commit suicide. Two years later, Asano's loyal retainers stormed Kira's mansion and killed him. This story is narrated in numerous forms and is known as the *Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (*Chūshingura*).



Hosoda Eishi, Japanese, 1756-1829

Nishimuraya Yohachi, Japanese

The Well Curb, Episode 23 from Ise Monogatari, ca. 1790

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1134



RISD MUSEUM

Once again the subject here is Prince Genji, the hero of the great eleventh-century Japanese novel of courtly life, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji-monogatari*), written by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. The figures in this print, however, are dressed in Edo-period (1600-1868) costume.

Kitagawa Utamaro, Japanese, 1754-1806
Wakasaya Yoichi, Japanese
Print; nishiki-e; triptych, 1790's
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1144



Ushiwaka is the youthful name of Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159-1189), one of the great warrior heroes of the late Heian period (794-1185). The story of his love for Jōruri is told in the fifteenth-century *Tale of Jōruri* (*Jōruri monogatari*). The figures in this rendition of the story, however, are dressed in Edo-period (1600-1868) costume.

Each panel of this three-part print bears the signature of Utamaro (1753-1806), but if you look carefully you can see that the signature has been tampered with. Stylistically also the print does not agree with Utamaro's other works, thus the attribution to Eizan.

Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849
Ezakiya Kichibei, Japanese
Poet Ono no Komachi (Ono no Komachi), Untitled (known as The Six Immortal Poets), mid 1810s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1178

A handful of poems by Ono no Komachi (active 834-857) are preserved in the tenth-century *Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems* (*Kokin waka-shū*). It is the legends about her life, however, that have perpetuated her fame and immortalized her beauty.

In this rendition of the alluring poetess, Hokusai has used the characters of her name to draw her form. The print, although faded, still preserves the elegance and grace of Hokusai's original design.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Horikane, Japanese

Joshuya Juzo, Japanese

Wada rebellion: Asahina Saburo Yoshihide attacking with superhuman strength (Wada kassen Asahina Saburo Yoshihide moyu kairiki), 1857.5

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff 85.197.8



Asahina Saburo, son of Wada Yoshimori (1147-1213) and Tomoe Gozen, was known for his great strength. In 1213, Asahina's father, Yoshimori, was provoked to revolt unsuccessfully against the Hojo regents of the Kamakura shogunate. The battle depicted here occurred during that revolt.

RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

The Warrior Matano Goro Kagehisa Dropping a Rock on the Youth Sanada Yoichi Yoshisada (Matano Goro Kagehisa Sanada Yoichi Yoshisada), 1810s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1299

During a hunting party, the strong man Matano Gorō, who served Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199), tossed a huge rock over the edge of a cliff. At the base of the cliff stood Sanada Yoichi, a sixteen-year-old who was known for his strength. Sanada Yoichi had inspired Matano Gorō's jealousy, so the strong man aimed the rock directly at the youth. Sanada Yoichi simply caught it and hurled it right back.



RISD MUSEUM

Nishimura Shigenaga, Japanese, ca. 1697-1756
Akuta River (Akutagawa), Tales of Ise, ca. 1720's
 Polychrome wood block print
 Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1065

This illustration appears to refer to a story in *The Tale of Ise (Ise monogatari)* that describes the abduction of a beautiful woman by a man who became enamored of her.



Nishimura Shigenaga, Japanese, ca. 1697-1756
 Kichiemon Emiya, Japanese
Autumn moon, Ishiyama Temple (Ishiyama shugetsu), Eight views of Omi [Lake Biwa], ca. 1720s
 Polychrome woodblock print
 Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1063

Since this subject is one of the eight standard poetic themes associated with illustrations of the *Eight Views of Ōmi (Ōmi hakkei)*, originally this was probably part of such a set



Kitao Shigemasa, Japanese, 1739-1820

Chapter 7 of the 11 chapters of Chushingura (The treasury of loyal retainers) (Chushingura shichidanme junimaizoku), 1780s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1092

The *Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Chūsingura)* tells the tale of the forty-seven *rōnin*, or masterless samurai, who diligently plotted to avenge the death of their master, Asano Naganori. Asano was humiliated by Kira Yoshinaka, an official at the court of the shogun; after Asano drew his sword against Kira, he was ordered to commit suicide. Two years later, Asano's loyal retainers stormed Kira's mansion and killed him.



In this illustration, Yuranosuke, one of the plotters, realizes that he has been observed reading a secret letter and leads Okaru, the young woman spying on him, down a ladder. Okaru has just been sold as a courtesan and is in service at the Ichiriki Teahouse in the Gion district in Kyoto, where Yuranosuke had been pretending dissipation and complete indifference to revenge.

Kitao Masayoshi, Japanese, 1764-1824

Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848

Tsutaya Kichiemon, Japanese

Chapter 8 from Perspective Pictures of the Syllabary Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Kanadehon Chushingura), Perspective Pictures of the Syllabary Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Kanadehon Chushingura), 1790s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1153



The *Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Chūsingura)* tells the tale of the forty-seven *rōnin*, or masterless samurai, who diligently plotted to avenge the death of their master, Asano Naganori. Asano was humiliated by Kira Yoshinaka, an official at the court of the shogun; after Asano drew his sword against Kira, he was ordered to commit suicide. Two years later, Asano's loyal retainers stormed Kira's mansion and killed him.

Here Tonase and her daughter Konami journey to Yamashina to seek out Rikiya, one of the plotters, who was broken his engagement to Konami.

RISD MUSEUM

Katsukawa Shuntei, Japanese, 1770-1820

The Warriors Sato Tadanobu and Yokawa Kakuhan (Sato Tadanobu; Yokawa Kakuhan), ca. 1800

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1158

Sato Chūshin (1161-1186) was one of the great warriors who served the tragic hero Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159-1189).



Torii Kiyomitsu I, Japanese, ca. 1735-1785

Yoshitsune koshigoejo (Yoshitsune's Koshigoejo letter), Published Horeki 4, 1754

woodcut illustrated book with sewn binding

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.413

This book tells the story of the great hero Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159-1189), whose exploits are often celebrated in Japanese prints as well. A depiction of the youthful Yoshitsune is found in Eizan's print in this exhibition.

RISD MUSEUM

Sumiyoshi

The Tale of Genji, late 1600s

Ink, slight color, gold and gold leaf on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund, Jesse Metcalf Fund, and Helen M. Danforth
Acquisition Fund 82.103.1



This album is an example of the highly refined paintings produced to illustrate *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*). These works often predated the printmaking tradition by centuries and were a point of inspiration for Japanese printmakers.

This chapter of *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*) shows Genji in exile at Suma, far from the court life in Kyoto to which he was so accustomed. This painting is similar in composition to renditions of the same subject in the medium of print.

Japanese

Sumiyoshi

The Tale of Genji, 1600s

Ink, slight color, gold and gold leaf on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund, Jesse Metcalf Fund, and Helen M. Danforth
Acquisition Fund 82.103.2

