

Text, Paratext, and Images, September 1, 2020-February 28, 2021

As a form of communication, text conveys information and meaning. It also presents an opportunity for interpretation and artistic engagement. Paratext—literally “beside text”—includes the more subtle associations a text carries, including reference notes, inscriptions, and the style of lettering chosen. When artists combine image with text and paratext, new layers of interpretation are introduced, and new spaces of discourse are created.

This exhibition examines the relationships between text, paratext, and image. Examples from Qur’an manuscripts to historical Japanese prints to contemporary works explore text as decoration and reveal the aesthetic qualities manifested in stencil, print, and manuscript forms. These works also highlight how different manipulations of texts and images signal social class, education, and other cultural hierarchies and norms, and how intercultural exchange can take place through the juxtaposition of different languages and the circulation and interpretation of works that pair text and image.

Text, Paratext, and Images is curated by Kuan-Hung Liu (Brown PhD 2023, History of Art and Architecture) and Kimia Rahnavardi (RISD MDes 2020, Interior Architecture, Adaptive Reuse).

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868
Court Lady at a Writing Table, possibly 1828
Polychrome woodblock print
Shikishiban: 24.3 x 18.4 cm (9 9/16 x 7 1/4 inches)
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.34

These two works show the circulation of text through storytelling, and they present narrating, reading, and writing as signifiers of social status.

At the top of the Persian painting at left, a storyteller captivates his audience with a tale that unfolds in the scene below. The story of the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar’s wife is found in the Qur’an, the Hebrew Torah, and many Muslim storybooks from the 1500s.

In the Japanese print at right, made in the 1800s, a woman dressed in the elaborate garments of an aristocrat from the 1300s sits at a desk with writing utensils, surrounded by books. Besides highlighting the



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importance of reading and writing, this anachronism signifies the high regard for classical poetry in Edo-era Japanese society.

[see also 17.497]

Indian

Poem, 1700s

Ink and color on paper

18.1 x 10.5 cm (7 1/8 x 4 1/8 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 17.469B

When collectors mounted miniature paintings in albums, they often paired them with poems. The pages presented here each have an image on one side and a Turkish or Persian poem on the other. The generic nature of these images and texts suggests they were easily mixed and matched in an album format. For instance, the image at right of a praying woman is easily complemented by the poem at left, which emphasizes the importance of being good. [see also 17.477A]



Turkish

Qur'an Pages, ca. 1335-1350

Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper

Height: 28.9 cm (11 3/8 inches)

Gift of Mrs. Celia Robinson Stillwell 84.038

These pages, part of the Qur'an, are written in two different languages: Arabic and Farsi. Because the original language of the Qur'an is Arabic, the main script is always written in that language. Here, a Farsi translation has been added at the bottom, allowing a wider readership, as well as complementing the aesthetics of the main text. Verses from the Hadith (a narrative account of what the Prophet Muhammad said and did) are expressed in a different Arabic script, blending into the border scrollwork and adding to both the meaning and decoration of the work.



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Japan

Page 24 from Volume 12 of *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*,
Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji) ca. 1600s

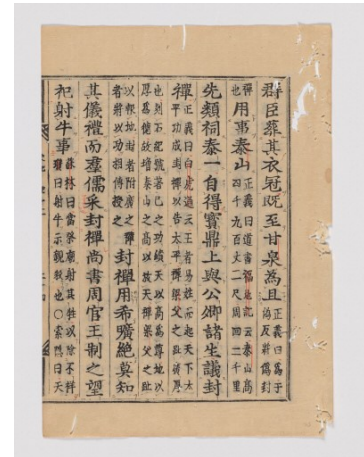
Woodblock print

29.7 x 42.1 cm (11 11/16 x 16 5/8 inches)

Gift of Roger Keyes 2010.114.83

Here Chinese classical script is printed in vertical rows, with red and black annotations along the side that convert it into Japanese. *Kanbun kundoku*—these red lines and small marks, which indicate punctuation and reading sequence—is a system still used today. Depending on the placement of the annotations, the text can be read and interpreted in different ways.

This page, which probably dates to the 1600s, was printed in Japan. The main text (*Shiji*), seen here in the larger characters, was first written in the first century BCE by a Chinese scholar documenting 2,500 years of Chinese history. The smaller characters serve as commentary.



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Japan

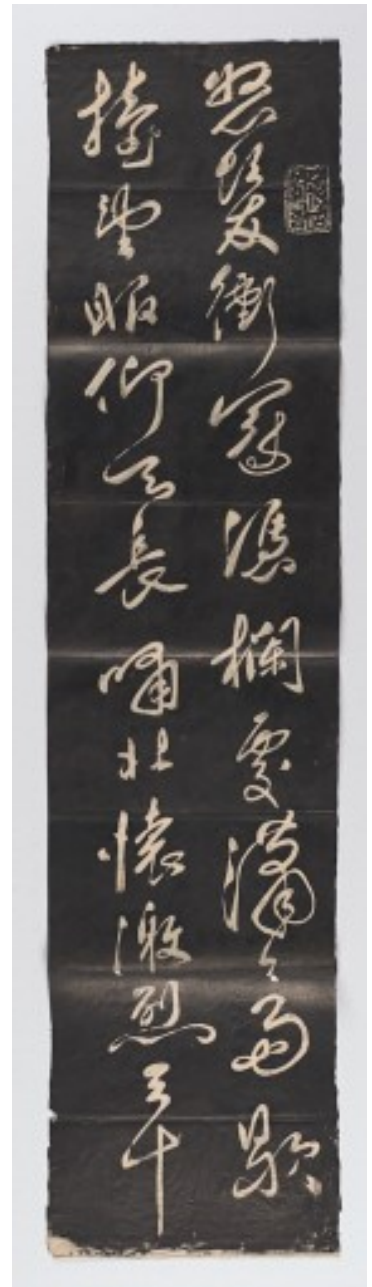
Printed Rubbing of Calligraphy Attributed to the Chinese General Yue Fei, 1700s-1800s

Woodblock print

103.8 x 24.1 cm (40 7/8 x 9 1/2 inches)

Gift of Roger Keyes 2010.114.84

Chinese calligraphy is presented on many materials, from silk and paper to wood and stone. Each medium has its own limitations, and reproducing calligraphy across materials requires complex adjustments. This work resembles a stone rubbing, but it was made using a form of Japanese woodblock printing known as *ishizuri-e*. Since both prints and rubbings can be mass-produced, this reproduction allowed greater accessibility to a work of calligraphy that would have otherwise only been seen by a select few, widening the artistic and intercultural exchange between China and Japan. The conversion to print also signifies the high status placed on the original calligraphy, as the act of reproduction signifies its importance.



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Japanese

Stencil (Katagami) with text, 1800s

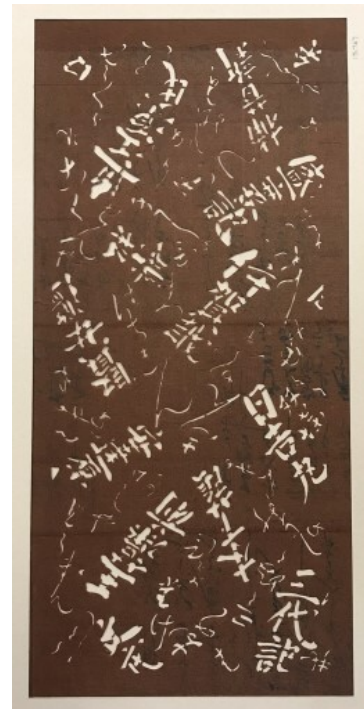
Mulberry paper with persimmon tannin

41.6 x 26 cm (16 3/8 x 10 5/16 inches)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.767

Katagami are stencils that Japanese artists have used since the 700s to create patterns and decorations on fabrics. During the Edo period (1615–1868), *katagami* designs expanded beyond floral or geometric patterns. This example includes two kinds of Japanese text—*kanji*, the characters made up of bold strokes, and *kana*, the slender script undulating around the thicker characters. The words shown here are titles from *Jōruri*, a traditional Japanese form of storytelling.

One of these titles, *Kenjo kagami*, is also featured in the print by Utagawa Kunisada at right. In it, the noblewoman Hotoke Gozen wears a robe decorated with Roman letters and Arabic numbers. Text here no longer carries meaning, but simply functions as ornament. [see also 13.1383]



Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Yamamotoya Heikichi, Japanese

Hotoke Gozen, Mirror of Virtuous and Wise Women (Kenjo Kagami), 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print

Vertical ōban: 34 x 23 cm (13 3/8 x 9 1/16 inches)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1383



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Naoko Matsubara, Japanese, 1937-
Untitled, Kyoto Woodcuts 1978
Woodblock print
25.1 x 18.3 cm (9 7/8 x 7 3/16 inches) (plate)
Gift of the Rhode Island School of Design Library 80.189

While the text on other Japanese woodblock prints in this gallery imitates handwritten calligraphy, the lettering on this print by Naoko Matsubara embraces the texture and materiality of the medium. The haiku on the top, which alludes to an iris blooming secretly out of season, combines with the image on the bottom through use of a similar carving style, creating a harmonious composition. Both the meaning and appearance of the haiku echo and blend with the scene.



Haku Maki, Japanese, b. 1924
Wind-A, 1970s
Polychrome woodblock print with cement embossing
Plate: 59.4 x 29.5 cm (23 3/8 x 11 5/8 inches) (Mat size: 28 1/2 x 16 1/4)
Anonymous gift 1990.067

This work by Haku Maki dissolves the boundary between text and image. This character, meaning wind, is not easy to recognize because of its distortion in form and ambiguity in materiality. The use of black and white suggests calligraphy, while the strokes of the character reflect the qualities of both brushwork and woodblock printing. The texture of the deeply embossed paper draws the viewer in, enhancing the illegibility of the character by abstracting it further.



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Iranian

Ornamental Page from a Manuscript, late 1500s

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

23.2 x 19.1 cm (9 1/8 x 7 1/2 inches)

Gift of Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf 14.406

These ornamental end pages are heavily embellished with gold and what is probably ultramarine—expensive materials that emphasize the importance of the book they once belonged to. At the center, Farsi text has been so skillfully embedded into the decoration, it becomes indiscernible without close looking. This cleverly incorporated text is likely a dedication. [see also 14.407]



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Fahri of Bursa, Turkish, d. 1617

Page from a Poetry Album, late 1500s - early 1600s

Gold paper script on blue paper

17.1 x 10.5 cm (6 11/16 x 4 1/8 inches)

Anonymous gift 17.490

In this striking example of papercutting, the artist meticulously cut out calligraphic letters and adhered them onto a richly colored background. The slanted text, appearing as if it were penned in gold ink, shows the artist's virtuosity.

The script is a short poem addressed to a ruler, acknowledging his power. It reads:

"O Lord, may your felicity be daily increasing; may your noble foot be over the celestial sphere

Since you command the good and evil of the age, may your command and destiny be of the same content."

Translation by Wheeler Thackston, Harvard University, published in *Glimpses of Grandeur*, RISD Museum Exhibition Notes 8 (Fall 1999).



Indian

Portrait of a Lady, 1600s

Ink and color on paper

13.7 x 6.7 cm (5 3/8 x 2 5/8 inches)

Anonymous gift 17.477A

When collectors mounted miniature paintings in albums, they often paired them with poems. The pages presented here each have an image on one side and a Turkish or Persian poem on the other. The generic nature of these images and texts suggests they were easily mixed and matched in an album format. For instance, the image at right of a praying woman is easily complemented by the poem at left, which emphasizes the importance of being good. [see also 17.469B]



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Persian

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife Zulayka, early 1500s

Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper

18.7 x 10.8 cm (7 3/8 x 4 5/16 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 17.497

These two works show the circulation of text through storytelling, and they present narrating, reading, and writing as signifiers of social status.

At the top of the Persian painting at left, a storyteller captivates his audience with a tale that unfolds in the scene below. The story of the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife is found in the Qur'an, the Hebrew Torah, and many Muslim storybooks from the 1500s.



In the Japanese print at right, made in the 1800s, a woman dressed in the elaborate garments of an aristocrat from the 1300s sits at a desk with writing utensils, surrounded by books. Besides highlighting the importance of reading and writing, this anachronism signifies the high regard for classical poetry in Edo-era Japanese society.

[see also 56.039.34]

Gujarat; India

Leaf from a Jain Kalpasutra manuscript, 1400s

Ink on paper

11.4 x 29.5 cm (4 1/2 x 11 5/8 inches)

Gift of Roger Keyes 2010.114.79



These pages from Jain religious manuscripts were made by Indian scribes during different time periods. After paper was introduced as a lower-cost writing medium in South and Southeast Asia, it gradually replaced palm leaves, but the long rectangular form of the palm leaf was preserved. Unlike the adjacent Thai manuscripts, these pages were written in ink on paper rather than incised on palm leaves. The main text, however, is still centered between two vertical lines, with room for notes on the sides, drawing from the same layout as the palm leaves. The red circles also allude to the binding of the palm leaves. [see also 2010.114.77, .78]

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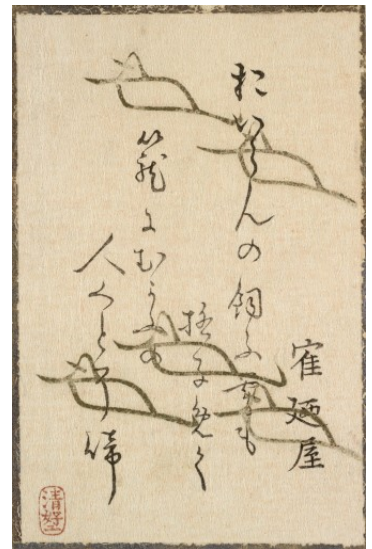
Baien, Japanese, d. 1886
Two Albums of Verse, ca. 1825-1827
Polychrome woodblock print
Length: 15 cm (5 7/8 inches)
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.63

The upper print depicts two books featuring verses accompanied by relevant illustrations. The two smaller prints below are poem cards, possibly used in playing karuta, a game in which competitors try to grab corresponding cards as soon as they hear the beginning of poems associated with those cards. Personal identity and taste were reflected through owning and using these text-bearing objects, signaling a kind of cultural capital. [see also 56.039.64, .65]



Baien, Japanese, d. 1886
Poem Card, ca. 1825-1827
Polychrome woodblock print
Length: 8.6 cm (3 3/8 inches)
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.64

The upper print depicts two books featuring verses accompanied by relevant illustrations. The two smaller prints below are poem cards, possibly used in playing karuta, a game in which competitors try to grab corresponding cards as soon as they hear the beginning of poems associated with those cards. Personal identity and taste were reflected through owning and using these text-bearing objects, signaling a kind of cultural capital. [see also 56.039.63, .65]



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Baien, Japanese, d. 1886
Courtesan, ca. 1825-1827
 Polychrome woodblock print
 Length: 8.6 cm (3 3/8 inches)
 Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.65

The upper print depicts two books featuring verses accompanied by relevant illustrations. The two smaller prints below are poem cards, possibly used in playing *karuta*, a game in which competitors try to grab corresponding cards as soon as they hear the beginning of poems associated with those cards. Personal identity and taste were reflected through owning and using these text-bearing objects, signaling a kind of cultural capital. [see also 56.039.63, .64]



Muhammed Ali, Persian, 16th century
The Poet Hafiz with Entertainers, ca. 1650
 Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
 18.7 x 10.5 cm (7 3/8 x 4 1/8 inches)
 Museum Appropriation Fund 17.432

These depictions of Asian poets reflect the connection between writers and their texts, visualized here through deliberate use of forms.

Portrayed at left is Khwāja Shams-ud-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfeẓ-e Shīrāzī (Hafiz), a Persian poet from the 1300s whose influence can be felt to this day. He is entertained by a swaying dancer and a musician playing a *daf*, a Persian frame drum. The figures' curving forms capture the rhythm of music depicted in the scene. [17.432]



At right is Ono no Komachi, a celebrated Japanese poet who lived in the 800s. Her figure is formed by the cursive characters of her name. Written above is one of her poems, which echoes the calligraphic lines of her clothes. [20.1178]

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Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849

Ezakiya Kichibei, Japanese

Ono no Komachi, untitled (known as The Six Immortal Poets) 1810s

Polychrome woodblock print

Sheet: 39.1 x 25.7 cm (15 3/8 x 10 1/8 inches)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1178

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Indian

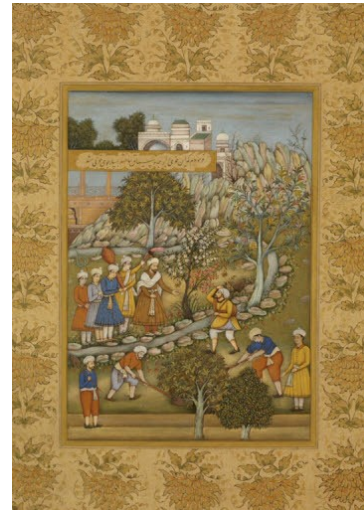
Emperor Babur Overseeing the Altering Course of a Stream, 1800s

Opaque watercolor on paper

25.1 x 17.5 cm (9 7/8 x 6 7/8 inches) (image) Mat size: B; Asian Art Department Carpenter Inventory

Gift of Mrs. Eliot Carter 1991.170.5

An illustration that accompanied a copy of the Mughal emperor Babur's memoirs, this image shows the king overseeing work in his garden. Noting that there was a stream winding its way around the garden, the emperor ordered for its course to be altered to enhance the beauty of the landscape. Pictured beside the river with both his arms outstretched as he engages with workers, Babur is given voice by the inscribed text above, which describes his order. Text and image function together here as a historical record.



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Persian

Isfandiyar and the Dragon, ca. 1680

Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper

Sheet: 34.9 x 21.9 cm (13 11/16 x 8 5/8 inches)

Museum Appropriation Fund 17.450

In this scene, the hero Isfandiyar confronts a dragon during a journey to rescue his sisters. Isfandiyar had a horse-drawn cart fitted with spears and hid himself in a box within. The dragon swallowed the cart and the embedded blades. According to the Farsi text below the image, Isfandiyar then “came out of the box and struck the dragon’s brain with his sword, and a poisonous smoke rose from the dragon’s head.”

The painting was probably once bound in a copy of the *Shahnameh*—stories written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi that describe Persian kings and heroes and their conflicts with various enemies, including mystical creatures.



Ochiai Yoshiiku, Japanese, 1833-1904

Omiya Kyusuke, Japanese

Hakayawa Sashichi, Japanese

Yoshiiku Ochiai, Japanese, 1833-1904

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861

Utsusemi: Watanabe no Tsuna, Chapter 3 from the series Modern Parodies of Genji (Imayō nazaroe Genji), Modern-style Imitations of Genji

Modern Parodies of Genji (Imayō nazaroe Genji) 1864, 7th month

Polychrome woodblock print

Vertical ōban: 37.5 x 22.9 cm (14 3/4 x 9 inches)

Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff 85.197.2

This artist playfully connects classical Japanese literature with contemporary tales, pairing texts and images to form clever similes. Watanabe no Tsuna, a samurai known for his adventures, is pictured with an amputated arm of a demon in this scene. The dismembered arm is likened to the cast-off robes mentioned in a chapter from the *Tale of Genji*, a narrative from the 1000s referenced in the text above the image. Utagawa Yoshiiku’s series includes 54 prints, each pairing a chapter from the *Tale of Genji* with a contemporary story.



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Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Iseya Rihei, Japanese

The Ōdori Village Scene in Meguro hiyoku zuka, from an untitled series of jōruri libretti, A collection of joruri libretti

Joruri zukushica. 1832

Polychrome woodblock print

Vertical ōban: 38.4 x 26.2 cm (15 1/8 x 10 5/16 inches)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1385

The female figure depicted here is the protagonist of the *jōruri* play written in the background. *Jōruri*, a narrative form that originated in Japan in the 1400s with stories sung by blind musicians, was later incorporated into puppet theater. The rounded and exaggerated calligraphic strokes seen here, formed with turns of the brush, are a style said to have been developed for writing *jōruri* text. The combination of image and text in this example provides visual and aural experiences for viewers familiar with its references.



Thai

Manuscript and Covers, 1800s

Palm leaves and silk cord

6.4 x 57.5 x 10.8 cm (2 1/2 x 22 5/8 x 4 1/4 inches)

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 33.247

This manuscript, written in Pali, a language used for sacred Buddhist sutras, is lettered in Khmer, a script widely used in Southeast Asia. Palm leaves have long served as a writing medium in Southeast and South Central Asia. This example from the 1800s likely references more ancient manuscripts in its material and form.



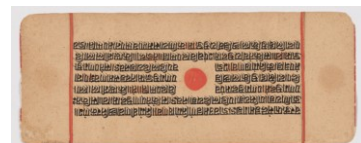
Because palm leaves are long and narrow, they inform the orientation and appearance of the text written on them. Words are incised with an iron stylus, and in order not to break the fiber, each letter is rounded to avoid sharp and abrupt turnings. The surface is then treated with lacquer sap or oil to make the text more legible as the liquid sinks into the incisions.

Gujarat; India

Leaf from a Jain Kalpasutra manuscript, 1800s

Ink on paper

11.1 x 29.8 cm (4 3/8 x 11 11/16 inches)



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Gift of Roger Keyes 2010.114.77

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Persian

Page from a Manuscript, probably 1500s–1600s

Ink, watercolor, and gold on paper

32.4 x 20.3 cm (12 11/16 x 8 inches)

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.844

Text becomes decoration on this manuscript page. Framed by scrolling vines and flowers that echo the rhythmic calligraphy, poetic verses are further animated through their style and composition. Written in *nasta'liq*, an elegant and lyrical script from Central Asia, the text is laid out in horizontal and diagonal orientations, emphasizing aesthetics as well as content. Out of respect for the Muslim belief that no one is capable of painting a human being as beautiful as God, many Persian artists channeled their creativity into developing non-figural decorations.

