

Defying Boundaries: Women in Japanese Art

April 27, 2024 - November 4, 2024

This exhibition addresses often-overlooked histories and stories of women in Japanese art. Marginalized in modern and historical accounts that focused on men, these women were nevertheless very much present in Japanese visual culture. From warriors and poets memorialized in prints to pioneering Japanese artists, these works offer glimpses of those who broke boundaries and inspired generations of artists and illustrators.

Also portrayed in this exhibition are famous performers of female roles, or onnagata 女方. When women were banned from acting in the Kabuki theater in 1629, some male actors began specializing in women's parts, redefining the concept of femininity in their time. Female impersonators became arbiters of style and models of femininity, both onstage and offstage.

–Wai Yee Chiong, curator of Asian art

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Keisai Eisen 溪斎英泉

1790–1848; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Sanoya Kihei 佐野屋喜兵衛, publisher

1717–1875; Edo, Japan

Ono no Komachi at Sekidera (関寺小町 Sekidera komachi), from the series *Seven Komachi in the Modern Style* (今やう七小町 Imayō nana Komachi), ca. 1825

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1386



Utagawa Toyokuni 歌川豊国

1769–1825; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Komachi on the Gravepost (とは小まち Sotoba Komachi)

From the series *Modern Girls as the Seven Komachi* (今やう娘七小町 Imayō musume nana Komachi), 1810

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1401



Utagawa Toyokuni 歌川豊国

1769–1825; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Parrot Komachi (あふむ小まち Ōmu Komachi)

From the series *Modern Girls as the Seven Komachi* (今やう娘七小町 Imayō musume nana Komachi), 1810

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1405



Utagawa Kunisada 歌川国貞 (Toyokuni III)

1786–1865; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Edo

Visiting Komachi (かよひ小町 Kayoi Komachi), from the series *Parody of the Seven Komachi* (見立七小町 Mitate nana Komachi), 1847–1852

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.39.1



In each of these prints, the ninth-century poet Ono no Komachi is transformed into a young woman from the 1800s. Komachi was one of the Six Poetry Immortals (六歌仙 Rokkasen) of Japanese *waka* poetry. Little is known of her life, but tales of her legendary beauty and wit are abundant. Today, the name Komachi has come to be synonymous with feminine beauty. In the late 1300s to early 1400s, Komachi was memorialized in several popular Nō plays known as the Seven Komachi (七小町 nana komachi). During the Edo period (1615–1868), images from the Seven Komachi were frequently parodied in prints.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳

1798–1861; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Tsujiya Yasubei 辻屋安兵衛, publisher

1842–1863; Edo, Japan

Nitta Tadatsune and the Goddess of Mount Fuji (仁田四郎忠常 富士権

現に遇ふ図 Kennin sannen Minamoto no Yoriie-kyō Fuji no mikari), ca.

1844

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Bequest of Issac C. Bates **13.2332**



Standing in a grotto, her white dragon coiling around her, Konohanasakuyahime (木花咲耶姫), the goddess of Mount Fuji, praises the warrior Nitta Tadatsune for his courage. Utagawa Kuniyoshi skillfully stages this ethereal encounter in this dynamic triptych. Mount Fuji, an active volcano, is the tallest and most sacred mountain in Japan. Shrines honoring the goddess are found all around the mountain.

Attributed to Okumura Toshinobu 奥村利信
active 1720–1740 in Edo, Japan
Murataya Jirōbei 村田屋治郎兵衛, publisher
1659–1844; Edo, Japan
Segawa Kikunojō I 瀬川菊之丞, 1740s
Woodblock print (*urushi-e*)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke **20.1058**



Torii Kiyomitsu I 鳥居清満
ca. 1735–1785; worked in Edo, Japan
Yamashiroya 山城屋, publisher
1750s; Edo, Japan
Segawa Kikunojō II as the Princess Usuyukihime (うすゆきひめ 瀬川菊之丞 Usuyukihime Segawa Kikunojō), ca. 1760
Polychrome woodblock print (*benizuri-e*)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke **20.1073**



Katsukawa Shunshō 勝川春章
1725–1792; worked in Edo, Japan
Segawa Kikunojō III, 1770s
Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke **20.1106**



These prints depict Segawa Kikunojō I, Kikunojō II, and Kikunojō III, famous *onnagata* (女方), or actors who portrayed legendary beauties and heroines in the Kabuki theater of the 1700s and early 1800s. *Onnagata* set trends and broke boundaries beyond the theater. Kikunojō I was said to have lived like a woman, imbuing his performance with realism; Kikunojō II was so popular, fashion items were named after him; and Kikunojō III, said to have excelled in courtesan roles, had cosmetics branded after him. The actors appear here dressed as women, their hair arranged according to the latest styles of the day. For many Japanese people, they symbolized the pinnacle of femininity and womanhood.

Suzuki Harunobu 鈴木春信

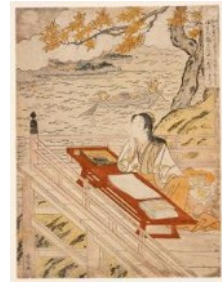
1724–1770; worked in Kyoto and Edo, Japan

Faith (信 Shin), from the series *The Five Virtues* (五常 Gojō), 1767

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1078

In this print, a young woman sits at her writing desk, gazing pensively at the view beyond her verandah. She is Murasaki Shikibu (ca. 973–ca. 1025), author of the *Tale of Genji*, an epic novel about the life of courtiers. Murasaki studied Chinese classics and literature in her youth; this was unusual at the time, as these studies were reserved for men. As an aristocrat, Murasaki enjoyed the privilege of indulging in the arts. Centuries later, Suzuki Harunobu depicts her at Ishiyama temple, where she supposedly retreated after her husband's death and was inspired to write the *Tale of Genji*.



Chōbunsai Eishi 鳥文斎栄之

1756–1829; worked in Japan

Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, publisher

1759–1869; Edo, Japan

The Daughter of Taira no Kiyomori Using a Mirror to Draw her Self-

Portrait to Send to Her Mother (清盛息女の画 自像を写母に之に送

図 Kiyomori sokujo no ga jizō o utsushi haha ni kore o okuru zu),

1790s

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1135

A seated young woman lifts her brush as she contemplates her self-portrait on the ground. The title of the print identifies her as the daughter of Taira no Kiyomori, a military general from the 1200s. According to history, Taira no Tokukō (1155–1214) became the adopted daughter of an emperor, the consort to his son, and the mother of an emperor. Her life was memorialized in literature and retold in theater. Illustrator Chōbunsai Eishi here portrays her as a courtesan from the 1800s.



Chōbunsai Eishi 鳥文齋栄之

1756–1829; worked in Japan

Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, publisher

1759–1869; Edo, Japan

A Triptych of Fashionable Disguises: The Third Princess (略三幅对 女三之宮 Yatsushi sanpukutsui: Nyosan no Miya), mid-1790s

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke **20.1136**



A young woman in elegant robes looks down at her kitten, which playfully pulls at the cord she dangles from her hands. She is Nyosan no Miya, one of Prince Genji's wives in the classic novel the *Tale of Genji* (784–1185). Married to the aging Genji, she was sexually violated by a young courtier, causing her downfall. This print was part of a triptych that depicted other famous women in literature, including Ono no Komachi.

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi 月岡芳年

1839–1892; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Akiyama Buemon 秋山武右衛門, publisher

1882–1920; Edo, Japan

Noguchi Enkatsu 野口円活, block carver

1823–1896; worked in Edo, Japan

Iga no Tsubone: Midnight Moon, Mount Yoshino (吉野山夜半月 伊賀局 Yoshinoyama yahan tsuki: Iga no Tsubone), from the series *One*

Hundred Aspects of the Moon (月百姿 Tsuki hyakushi), 1886

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Isaac C. Bates **97.018**



Here Tsukioka Yoshitoshi contrasts the calm demeanor of the heroine, noblewoman Iga no Tsubone, with the frenzied spirit of a dead courtier, Sasaki Kiyotaka. Iga no Tsubone stretches out her hand to placate the ghost, who had continuously haunted and terrified the court since his death. Her gentleness is echoed by the soft autumn moon and falling maple leaves, which add a sense of melancholy to the print.

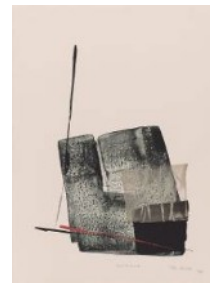
Utagawa Kunisada 歌川 国貞 (Toyokuni III)
1786–1865, b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan
Izumiya Ichibei 和泉屋市兵衛, publisher
ca. 1686–1886; Edo, Japan

Onoe Kikugorō in the Role of the Ghost Kasane (尾上菊五郎 かさねゆ
うこん Onoe Kikugorō: Kasane yūkon), 1838
Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund **1987.043.1**



In this print by Utagawa Kunisada, the ghost Kasane emerges from a trailing white wisp, cradling a child in her arms. Born disfigured and later murdered by her lover, Kasane returned as a vengeful spirit to curse those who betrayed her. Her tale was famous during the Edo period (1615–1858), when it became the subject of theater and prints. The text here describes a performance by Onoe Kikugorō III (1784–1849), the male actor who played the role of Kasane in a famous Kabuki play in the 1830s.

Tōkō Shinoda 篠田桃紅, designer
1912–2021; b. in Manchuria, China; worked in Japan
Kimura Kihachi 木村希八, printer
1934–2014; worked in Japan
Quiescence, 1985
Lithograph with metallic pigments and hand-brushed color on paper
Ernest and Pearl Nathan Fund **1992.044**



Richly textured with a few expressive lines, *Quiescence* reflects Tōkō Shinoda's experimentation with tone and her investigation of the nature of ink. Here, the artist's design is articulated by the printer, Kimura Kihachi.

Schooled in traditional Japanese calligraphy, Shinoda turned to abstract expressionism in the 1940s as an outlet for creative freedom. Marginalized in Japan's male-dominated calligraphic world, Shinoda carved a niche for herself with her bold works. She continuously broke boundaries, transforming traditional calligraphy into new forms and mediums.

Yōko Ono 小野 洋子

b. 1933 in Tokyo, Japan; works in the US

Imagine Peace, 2007

Rubber stamp, button, key-chain flashlight housed inside a box

Gift of Roger and Gayle Mandle **2008.95.23**



This work is composed of a box with a rubber stamp, button, key-chain flashlight, and instructional cards. It represents conceptual artist Yōko Ono's desire to promote peace and imagine a world without borders. The key-chain flashlight is known as the Onochord; examples like this one were given out at Ono's talks, where the audience was encouraged to flash the light in a particular way to signal "I Love You." Ono was a trailblazer among Japanese conceptual artists, playing an important role in the development of the Fluxus art movement in addition to putting Japanese female artists on the global stage.

Toyohara Chikanobu 豊原周延

1838–1912; b. in Echigo, Japan; worked in Tokyo, Japan

Female Legend of the Water Margin (Onna suikoden 女水滸傳), 1883

Polychrome woodblock-printed triptych (*nishiki-e*)

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund **2022.20.2**



Depicted amidst lightning bolts and falling petals, six armed female figures are dressed in vibrant robes decorated with fantastical creatures. These dramatic figures take center stage in this visualization of the Chinese martial-arts novel *The Legend of the Water Margins* (Suikoden 水滸傳). Considered as one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature, this book relates the exploits of 108 bandits esteemed for their bravery. During Japan's Edo period (1615–1868) the *Suikoden* was highly popular, and readapted for theater productions and illustrated in woodblock prints. This triptych presents a readaptation in which the male bandits are all replaced with heroic females.

Toshiko Uchima 内間俊子

1918–2000; b. in Dalian, China; worked in Japan and the US

Phinix (不死鳥 fushichō), 1958

Woodcut; ink and color on paper

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2024.2.1



Chizuko Yoshida 吉田千鶴子

1924–2017; b. in Yokohama, Japan; worked in Japan

Mambo B, 1956–1959

Woodcut; ink and color on paper

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2024.2.2



Designed, carved, and printed by Toshiko Uchima, *Phinix* is an abstraction of the mythical phoenix, long revered in Asian art. Uchima blends vibrant colors with different patterns to evoke the textured body and brilliance of this majestic creature. In *Mambo B*, Chizuko Yoshida integrates music into her work, transforming geometric shapes and undulating lines into a rhythmic and lyrical piece.

Uchima and Yoshida are pioneering women printmakers in Japan. In 1956, with seven other female printmakers, they co-founded the Women's Print Association (Joryū Hanga Kyōkai), the first Japanese printmaking society for women artists. This organization held annual exhibitions and provided emerging young artists with a place to show their works.

Natori Shunsen 名取春仙

1886–1960; b. in Yamanashi, Japan; worked in Japan

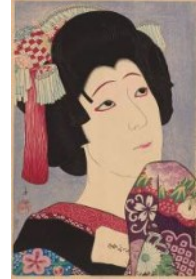
Watanabe Shōzaburō 渡辺庄三郎, publisher

1885–1962; worked in Japan

Actor Nakamura Fikusuke V as Ohan, 1928

Woodcut; ink and color on paper

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2024.3.1



Famed for outstanding dancing skills, Nakamura Fikusuke V was an *onnagata*, or an actor who portrayed female roles. Natori Shunsen depicts the performer with delicate lines, emphasizing the feminine grace that defined Nakamura's work. The actor is shown in the role of Ohan, a young woman about to commit suicide. Shunsen captures Ohan's poignant expression as she holds her sleeve close to her lips, her eyes upcast.

As a *Shin-hanga* (New Print) artist, or a revivalist of the traditional woodblock printing tradition, Shunsen incorporated elements of Western realism in his designs. Here he enlarges the actor's face to capture their expression.