

Kabuki Theater in Edo-Period Japan, June 8, 2001-September 2, 2001

The distinctive combination of music and drama known as kabuki was one of the major sources of entertainment in Edo-period Japan. Often flamboyant and overly exaggerated in its tone, its heroes and villains were drawn from a stock repertory of stories familiar to the audience. Actors were touted and performances advertised through the medium of prints produced by some of the greatest printmakers of the Edo period (1600-1868). These works immortalize the actors, frequently depicting them at a key moment in the action of the play to be performed. Convention called for the actor to hold his pose (*mie*) at such times; the measure of his acting was displayed through his execution of such tableaux.

Kabuki had its traditional beginnings in the early seventeenth century, when a Shinto dancer and prostitute and her troupe improvised mimes and dances on the bank of the Kamo River in Kyoto. These performances offended the strict Confucian morality of the ruling shogunate; they were banned in 1629 and women were forbidden to perform in public. Consequently some male actors began specializing in female roles (*onnagata*). As this theatrical art form developed, its repertory of plays was consolidated and became less improvisatory. Families of actors evolved who played particular stage roles; they are identified by the personal emblems or crests on their garments.

The prints on exhibition here are a highly varied selection of depictions of actors extending in date from the eighteenth to the late nineteenth century. Scale, palettes of colors, the inclusion of settings all vary, but the portrayal of the exaggerated conventions of kabuki acting remains. The most outstanding example of such conventions occurs in representations of Danjuro, a name associated with the Ichikawa lineage; Danjuro was known for his dramatic entrance at a climactic moment in the play *Wait a Minute (Shibaraku)*, when he thwarts the villain's attack. The small portrait of him (accession no. 34.366) conveys the drama of that moment, whereas the lively and crowded street scene of the theater district (accession no. 1997.90.12a-c) expresses the continuing vitality and popularity of kabuki in the late 19th century, at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912).

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Minatoya Kohei, Japanese

Yokogawa Takejiro, 19th century

Shiojiri: Ichikawa Danjuro VIII (1823-1854) as Takasaka Danjo at Kikkyo no Hara (Shiojiri: hachidai Ichikawa Danjuro/Takasaka Danjo/Kikkyo no Hara), The sixty-nine stations of the Kisokaido, 1852.11

Polychrome wood block print

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.043.3

This series illustrates the stations of the Kisokaido using actors paired with distant views of landscape.



Torii Kiyomitsu I, Japanese, ca. 1735-1785

Yamashiroya, Japanese

Segawa Kikunojo II as the princess Usuyukihime (Nidai Segawa Kikunojo Usuyukihime), ca. 1760

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1073

Segawa Kikunojo II (1741-73, active under this name 1756-72) was renowned for his skill in playing female roles (*onnagata*). Since women were banned from kabuki theater from the seventeenth century on, certain actors such as this one learned to specialize in female roles. This type of print is known in Japanese as *benizuri-e* ("red-print picture") because it is printed with a limited number of color blocks, one of which is always red (*beni*); such prints were made in the mid-seventeenth century, before full-blown "brocade pictures" (*nishiki-e*) were developed.



Katsukawa Shunzan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1782-1798

Igaya Kanemon, Japanese

The actors Osagawa Tsuneyo II as a woman and Matsumoto Koshiro IV as a samurai (nidai Osagawa Tsuneyo; yondai Matsumoto Koshiro), ca. 1789

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1157

Osegawa Tsuneyo II (1753-1808, active under this name 1768-1808) also played female roles (*onnagata*). In this performance, Matsumoto Koshiro IV (1737-1802, active under this name 1772-1801) depicts a samurai in court robes. Both actors are identified by the crests (*mon*) on their costumes.



RISD MUSEUM

Kitao Masanobu, Japanese, 1761-1816

The actor Ichikawa Danjuro V as Enya Hangan in Chushingura (Enya Hangan Ichikawa Danjuro godai), late 1770s-early 1780s

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1116

This very effective composition shows Ichikawa Danjuro V (1741-1806, active under this name 1770-91) about to pull a sword.



Tōshūsai Sharaku, Japanese

Matsumoto Koshiro IV as the fishmonger Sanya no Sakanaya Gorobei in the play Katakuchi noriaibanashi (A medley of tales of revenge)

performed at the Kiri Theater 1794.5, 1794

Polychrome wood block print with dark-silver mica ground

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1132

The role of the fishmonger Gorobei, from the play *Katakuchi noriaibanashi*, was played by Matsumoto Koshiro IV (1737-1802, active under this name 1772-1801), here depicted holding a pipe. Gorobei assists the heroine of the play in obtaining revenge for her father's death.



RISD MUSEUM

Tōshūsai Sharaku, Japanese

Tsutaya Jūzaburō, Japanese, 1750 - 1797

Segawa Kikunojo III as Oshizu, wife of the cripple Tanabe Bunzo, in the play Hana ayame Bunroku Soga performed at the Miyako Theater in fifth month of Kansei 6, 1794

Polychrome woodblock print with silver mica ground

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1131

Segawa Kikunojo III (1751-1810, active under this name 1774-1801) plays the role of the O-Shizu, wife of Tanabe Bunzo, in the play *Hana-ayame bunroku saga*. As one of the most famous actors of his generation, he excelled both at male and female roles.



Torii Kiyotomo, Japanese, fl. 1720-1740s

Actor as a street vendor selling hand towels and scent pouches in the shapes of kimono sleeves (Sanogawa Ichimatsu?), mid-1720s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1061

The popularity of kabuki was so widespread that this street vendor is hawking handkerchiefs bearing crests (*mon*) of some of Edo's most popular actors. The most readily identifiable is the square within a square of the Danjuro lineage. Technically this print is also of interest because it is from the early period of *ukiyo-e* printmaking; only the contours and areas of black are woodblock-printed; the remaining colors are added by hand.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865
Yokogawa Takejiro, 19th century
Joshuya Kinzo, Japanese
The fifth month: Nitta Tadatsune, Soga Sukenari (Satsuki Nitta Tadatsune, Soga Sukenari), The Five Festivals, 1854.7
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.10

Actors are portrayed in this very dramatic composition intended as a match for a depiction of the seasonal festival.



Utagawa Kuniteru II, Japanese, 1830-1874
Daikokuya Kinosuke shi
Flowers of Tokyo: Bustling opening of the three kabuki theaters in Saruwaka-cho (Tokyo hana saruwaka sanro hanei kaikan zu), 1871.11
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.12

The liveliness of this street scene is an indication of the enthusiastic support of kabuki in early Meiji-period (1868-1912) Tokyo.



Ishikawa Toyonobu, Japanese, 1711-1780
Ishikawa Danjuro III (Sandaime Ishikawa Danjuro), 1740s
Polychrome wood block print with marbled background
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1067

Ichikawa Danjuro IV (1712-78, active under this name 1754-70) strikes a dramatic pose in candlelight in this very effective portrait. This type of print is known in Japanese as *benizuri-e* ("red-print picture") because it is printed with a limited number of color blocks, one of which is always red (*beni*); such prints were made in the mid-seventeenth century, before full-blown "brocade pictures" (*nishiki-e*) were developed.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

*Ichikawa Danjuro VII in the Shibaraku Role and Another Actor as
Namazu Bozu, 1820s*

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.48

Ichikawa Danjuro VII (1791-1859, active under this name 1800-1832)
is portrayed in a kabuki role as a samurai.



Sakuragawa Jihinari, Japanese, 1762-1835?

Ichikawa Danjuro VII (Nanadai Ichikawa Danjuro), ca. 1830

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.366



RISD MUSEUM

Katsukawa Shunshō, Japanese, 1725-1792

The actor Ichikawa Danjuro V in a straw raincoat (godai Ichikawa Danjuro), 1770s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1100

Ichikawa Danjuro V (1741-1806, active under this name 1770-91) is shown in a straw raincoat in this very dramatic portrait.



Ippitsusai Bunchō, Japanese, fl. ca. 1765-1792

Ichikawa Yaozo II, ca. 1770

Polychrome woodblock print

Museum collection, by exchange 47.018

Ichikawa Yaozo II (1735-77, active under this name 1763-77), alerted to some unidentified danger, holds a lantern and his sword in this very effective composition.



RISD MUSEUM

Toyohara Kunichika, Japanese, 1835-1900

Fukuda Kumajiro, Japanese

Nakamura Shikan as Hige no Ikyu, Ichikawa Danjuro IX as

Hanakawado Sukeroku and Nakamura Fukusuke as Miuraya no

Agemaki in the play Edo zakura (Edo cherry blossoms), April 1896

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.9



Ichikawa Danjuro IX (1839-1903, active under this name 1874-1903) was the most renowned kabuki actor of the Meiji period (1868-1912). In this performance he played opposite Nakamura Shikan IV (1831-99, active under this name 1860-99) and Nakamura Fukusuke IV (1865-1940, active under this name 1881-1901) in a play titled *The Cherries of Edo (Edozakura)*.

Utagawa Toyokuni, Japanese, 1769-1825

Izumiya Ichibei, Japanese

Sawamura Sojuro III (1753-1801) as Ume no Yoshibei (sandai (III))

Sawamura Sojuro Ume no Yoshibei), ca. 1796

Polychrome wood block print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1404



This powerfully conceived depiction of Sawamura Sojuro III (1753-1801, active under this name 1771-1801) shows him in the depths of night pulling out his sword to defend himself.