

## *Prints for the Japanese New Year*, December 17, 2010-April 17, 2011

New Year's holiday celebrations are the most significant of the seasonal observances in Japan. These festivities were originally associated with the agricultural calendar, the greeting of the deity for the New Year (*toshigami*), and wishes for health, prosperity, and happiness. Today the purification ritual that precedes the deity's arrival is still observed in the form of a thorough housecleaning. Traditional foods are eaten, games are played, New Year's cards are exchanged, and old rituals are repeated. Woodblock prints of the 18th and 19th centuries depict the customs, beliefs, and auspicious symbols associated with New Year's festivities.

In modern Japan, the Gregorian calendar is used; thus, the New Year now falls on January 1. Until 1873, however, these celebrations were based on the lunar or Japanese civil calendar (according to which the incoming New Year will fall on February 3, 2011). In that calendar, each year was also identified with a zodiac animal equated with one of the twelve heavenly branches used to name the years. The year 2010 is the third in the cycle, the year of the tiger; the year 2011 is the fourth, the year of the rabbit.

### CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Japanese

Ezakiya Kichibei, Japanese, publisher

Kozan, Japanese, fl. ca. 1800-1820

*First dream of the New Year (Hatsuyume)*, 1811.5

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1364

The "First Dream of the New Year" (*hatsuyume*) can foretell one's fortune or misfortune in the coming year, and this print depicts all of the auspicious omens that might appear in a New Year's dream. The falconers with falcons perched on their hands are Daikoku and Ebisu, two of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (*Shichifukujin*). An eggplant is growing next to them. The scene is set against Mount Fuji, with the sun rising behind its right slope. Two treasure boats are visible on the lake. On the sail of the one on the right is the character for "treasure," while the one on the left reads "happiness." The boats are presumably piloted by the other five Gods of Good Fortune. The two characters for hatsuyume are inscribed in the upper right corner of the print.



# RISD MUSEUM

Ryuryukyo Shinsai, Japanese  
*Monkey at the New Year (Saru no shogatsu)*, 1810's  
Polychrome wood block print  
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1421

The monkey depicted here wears a black eboshi hat and a happi coat marked with the character of "good fortune" (*fuku*). It also carries on its shoulder a gohei, a staff decorated with plaited paper streamers and used in various Shinto blessing and purification rituals. The monkey's costume refers to the saru-mawashi show, a New Year's performance in which monkeys, believed to have the power to exorcise evil spirits, purified the stables of samurai and rich villagers. The word "monkey" is pronounced "saru" which also means "to expel" in Japanese.

The inscribed poems refer to drinking from the red sake cup depicted in the upper right corner.



Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764  
Okumuraya Genroku, Japanese, publisher  
*Ichikawa Ebizo II as a priest; Otani Hiroji as a priest; Segawa Kikunojo as a Shirabyoshi (performer); a scene from Momochidori musume Dojoji (a myriad of birds: the maiden of Dojoji Temple)*, part of the play *Sazareishi Hirogenji, the New Year's performance* 導, Perspective pictures of theater stages, ca. 1744  
Polychrome woodblock print with hand applied color  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1056

This perspective picture (*uki-e*) is based upon a modified version of the Western system of one-point perspective. It depicts the interior of the Nakamura Theater, one of the most famous and enduring kabuki theaters in Edo (modern Tokyo). The heroine of the play, an angry spirit disguised as a temple dancer (*shirabyōshi*), is entering from the left on the raised walkway. The monk who has rejected her advances is hiding under the bell, where he will be burned to death after she performs her dance, turns into a serpent, and breathes fire on the bell. The scene is from "Suehiro Soga, a Myriad of Birds: The Maiden of Dōjō Temple," which is part of the play *Sazareishi Hirogenji*. This 1744 performance was among the cycle of plays that celebrated the New Year.



# RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Toyoharu, Japanese, 1735-1814

*The Seven Gods of Good Fortune in Their Treasure Ship (Shichifukujin takarabune)*, 1770s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1095

Prints illustrating the Seven Gods of Good Fortune were often placed under one's pillow on New Year's Eve to guarantee auspicious dreams. The long, vertical format of this example, however, probably indicates that it was used to decorate the pillar of a house.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

*Prawn and Duckweed (Mo ni tenagaebi)*, 1840's

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.113

Shellfish such as prawns, shrimps, and lobsters (called *ebi*) are associated with old age and long life, and thus they often appear as part of New Year's decorations.



# RISD MUSEUM

Yashima Gakutei, Japanese, ca. 1786-1868

*Caged Bird and Plum Branch (Ume ni torikago)*, Two sheets for the *Bizen Circle*, 1820s

Polychrome wood block print with embossing and metallic highlights  
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.351

In this print, the inscribed poems as well as the image of blossoming plums allude to the New Year.



Totoya Hokkei, Japanese, 1780-1850

*Cranes and young pines (Komatsu ni tsuru)*, A collection of 36 birds, ca. 1820

Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic embellishment

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.370

The presence of cranes and pine branches — traditional New Year's decorations and symbols of longevity — indicates that this print was probably a New Year's greeting. The symbols of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune printed in gold across the top convey additional auspicious wishes.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

Maruya Seijiro, publisher

*Turtle [in stream]*, ca. 1840

Woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.380

The text on the left compares the tortoise with a Daoist immortal (*sennin*), thus alluding to the tortoise's great longevity.



Katsukawa Shunsen, Japanese, 1762-ca. 1830

Izumiya Ichibei, Japanese, publisher

*Cranes, pines and rising sun (Hinode to matsu to tsuru)*, 1810's

Polychrome wood block print with embossing

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.404





# RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858  
*Flying Cranes (Hikaku)*, 1860s  
Color woodblock print  
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.412



Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848  
Soshuya Yohei, publisher  
*Mount Fuji, falcon and eggplants (Ichi fuji ni taka san nasubi)*, 1830's  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.508

To dream of falcons, eggplants, or Mount Fuji on New Year's Eve is considered an auspicious omen for a happy year. This print is called a "Three Lucky Dreams" image because it combines all three omens at once.



Isoda Koryūsai, Japanese, active ca. 1764-1788  
*Crane's nest and rising sun (Hinode sugomori no tsuru)*, 1890's  
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing  
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.539

The crane is a symbol of longevity. When depicted against the background of the rising sun on the first day of the New Year, it is associated with wishes for long life and happiness.



# RISD MUSEUM

Ryuryukyo Shinsai, Japanese  
*Lobster and Cup*, 1820s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.21

The red boiled lobster (*ebi*) is shown here along with other traditional New Year's symbols, including a pine branch, a straw bundle, and a mirror. The lobster tail is filled with boxed delicacies for the day's celebration. The character on the plate is the word for long life, *su*.



Nagayama Kōin, Japanese, 1765-1849  
*Tortoise Carrying the Isle of the Immortals on His Back*, mid-1820s  
Privately commissioned woodblock print (surimono)  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.55

The Japanese have a saying that "the crane lives for a thousand years and the tortoise for ten thousand." The long-tailed turtle, the cranes perched on top of the Isle of the Immortals (*Hōrai*), and the isle itself all convey the conventional New Year's wish for long life. Poems inscribed on the print and composed by Horikawa Utanari, Ki no Tsukunari (active 1820s) and Tsurunoya Osamaru (ca. 1751–ca. 1839) also contain allusions to the New Year.



Yuitsusai, active early 19th century  
*Lacquered Box of Poem Cards*, early to mid-1820s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.82

Karuta, a matching card game, was a traditional New Year's pastime. Here, Yuitsusai depicted cards for the game derived from the poetry anthology *Single Poems by One Hundred Poets*, where players matched excerpts from the poems.



# RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

Uoya Eikichi, Japanese, 19th century, publisher

*Mount Atago, Shiba (Shiba Atagoyama), One hundred views of famous places in Edo, 1857.8*

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.849

This figure wears the ritual costume of "the messenger of Bishamon," who performed the Heaping Rice Ceremony at the Atago Shrine in Edo (modern Tokyo) on the third day of the New Year.

