

Samurai At Leisure, November 26, 2019-May 24, 2020

Beginning in the 1100s, the warrior class gained authority and importance in Japan, holding political and military power across the country. In 1615, the samurai warrior Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) won a decisive battle to unify Japan, ending a period of continuous warfare between feudal lords.

In the 250 years of peace that followed, the elite samurai class no longer waged battles, turning instead to cultural pursuits and leisurely pastimes. Hawking and falconry were popular activities, as were plant cultivation and the art of flower arrangement. The tea ceremony, too, was an important interest that nurtured collecting and connoisseurship practices.

Peace also brought about rapid urbanization and the development of a lively town culture with a broad variety of entertainments. Idle samurai enthusiastically embraced these offerings, indulging in theatrical performances and frequenting designated pleasure quarters in urban areas to enjoy musical performances, the company of courtesans, and the various spectacles on display.

Wai Yee Chiong
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Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948), a daughter of Rhode Island senator Nelson W. Aldrich and the wife of John D. Rockefeller Jr., was a lifelong supporter of the arts. Mrs. Rockefeller assembled a remarkable collection of Asian woodblock prints, donating more than 700 Japanese prints to the RISD Museum. Architect Philip Johnson was commissioned in 1952 by Mrs. Rockefeller's sons, Nelson and David, and her sister, Lucy Truman Aldrich, to design a room for the continuous exhibition of Japanese prints at the RISD Museum. Originally located on the east side of this floor, the room has been recreated here to Johnson's specifications.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Edo; Japanese
Seto Ware Tea Caddy, 1615 - 1858
Glazed stoneware with wooden lid
Gift of Isaac C. Bates 09.045

The preparation and drinking of tea was an important practice for the warrior class. A pleasurable pursuit that invoked multiple senses, tea was an art form that nurtured the collection of a range of beautiful implements. Grouped here are a variety of ceramic vessels that were produced for the tea ceremony. Carefully hand-built into meaningful forms and embellished with carvings, slips, and glazes, each of these vessels functioned not only as a tea-making utensil but, more importantly, as an object to be appreciated and displayed.



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Kitagawa Utamaro, Japanese, 1754-1806
Tsutaya Jūzaburō, Japanese, 1750 - 1797
Shells (Kaigara), Gifts of the Ebb Tide. 1788
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic
embellishments
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.588



Seashells scatter along the lower half of two pages of this luxuriously produced poetry anthology. Each of the crustaceans is wonderfully detailed, embellished with glittering mica and fine embossing. Six poems weave across the top of the page, echoing the marine life depicted. This exquisite illustration reflects a collaboration orchestrated by the visionary publisher Tsutaya Jūzaburō (1750–1797) between skilled artists, carvers, printers, and poets. Akera Kankō (1740–1800), the leader of the poetry group and editor of this compilation, was a samurai in the service of the Tokugawa shogunate. His wealth and position undoubtedly lent much prestige to the publication.

Ryuryukyo Shinsai, Japanese
Turtle Netsuke and Cloth, 1822
Polychrome woodblock print with metallic embellishment
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.22



This still-life depicts objects commonly found in affluent Japanese homes in the 1700s. Here a few volumes of books, a stenciled cloth, and a potted plant are grouped with a lacquered and painted ornamental box (*inrō*) attached to a carved turtle toggle (*netsuke*).

Samurai were encouraged to pursue literary studies and civilian arts, and many engaged in connoisseurial activities, collecting finely carved *inrō* and *netsuke* as well as ornately decorated blue and white porcelain. These *surimono* prints, produced on thick paper using complex techniques, were most conducive for conveying the textures of these treasured objects.

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Rintei, Japanese, 19th century

Japanese

Camellias and tea-utensil box (Seika: Tsubaki to chabako), 1820's
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing and metallic
embellishments

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.386

Rintei's still-life depiction of a flower arrangement and a lacquered tea-utensil box aptly conveys some of the implements essential to the tea ceremony. Avidly pursued by members of the warrior class, the ritual of tea fostered the appreciation and collection of related objects made in diverse materials, such as the ceramics across the room. Decorated with landscape scenes, the lacquer box is a portable set that would have held tea bowls, tea caddies, and other tea-making equipment, including the bamboo tea scoop lying beside it. The hanging vase of blue and white porcelain with a blossoming camellia adds to the aesthetics of the assemblage.



Suzuki Harunobu, Japanese, 1724-1770

*The Kagura Month [11th month] (Kagurazuki), Customs of daily life
with poem of the four seasons* ca. 1767

Polychrome wood block print with embossing

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1083

Here Harunobu ably captures a samurai's casual family outing. The samurai carries his young daughter on his shoulder as he walks with his family into a shrine to view sacred dances. The young child affectionately places her hand on her father's head while her mother carries the train of her sash behind them. During the Edo period, strict regulations governed samurai conduct and dress code. Even on a casual excursion, as depicted in this print, a samurai was required to carry his sword.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Moriya Jihei, Japanese

*Iris Garden at Horikiri in the Eastern Capital (Toto horikiri hana
shobu)*, 1857

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2333

A collaboration between Utagawa Hiroshige, an artist famed for his landscapes, and Utagawa Kunisada, a specialist in figural depictions, this print visualizes the popular Japanese pastime of flower viewing.



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Seated in a relaxed pose with one foot tucked under, a samurai holds a wine cup as he watches the activities of his companions. Dressed in richly decorated robes that match the blooming irises in the garden, the women and children are as much a spectacle as the flowers they are enjoying.

Torii Kiyonaga, Japanese, 1752-1815

The beloved wife: chapter 10 [man playing Sugeroku in a teahouse] (Koi nyobo judanme), Ongyokushuca. 1789

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1119

The popularity of *e-sugoroku*, a board game resembling snakes and ladders, is illustrated in this print depicting a samurai engaging in play with a young servant. As the ladies of the house look on, the samurai pays rapt attention to the printed board game in front of him. An inexpensive diversion, these games appealed to all classes of Japanese society. Printed on paper, they were extremely portable and could be unfolded quickly for play.



Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Tsutaya Kichizō, Japanese

The dandy (wakashu) Koshō Kichiza (Kasho Kichiza), Two legendary dandies (wakashu) 1843-1847

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.28

Depicted here is the famous Kabuki character Koshō Kichiza, who epitomizes the young samurai dandy. Wearing resplendent robes decorated with the character *kichi* (吉) from his name and sporting two richly ornamented swords marking his upper-class status as a samurai, the young man cuts quite the dashing figure of elegance as he holds his fan aloft. Samurai enjoyed urban diversions and often followed the latest trends in fashion, despite continuous edicts regulating their dress code and behavior. Dressed in such finery, Kichiza is likely heading to the theater or to other entertainments in the pleasure quarters.



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Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848

Moritaya Hanzō, Japanese

Beauties of the floating world as three musical instruments (Ukiyo bijin mitate sankyoku), 1820's

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1393

Sitting underneath cherry blossoms that match her soft pink robe, a young woman strums her *shamisen*. This three-stringed instrument was ubiquitous in the pleasure quarters, often combined with drums to entertain at parties and performances. For many of the samurai elite, courtesans accomplished in the art of music and poetry were considered highly appealing.

This print, the right part of a triptych, would have been combined with depictions of two other women playing the zither and the fiddle.



Kitagawa Utamaro II, Japanese, 1804-1855

Flower arrangement with loquat, mid 1700s-early 1800s

wood block print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.578

These woodblock prints by Utamaro II illustrate a selection of flower arrangements from the Edo period (1615–1868). Like the tea ceremony, the art of flower arrangement (*ikebana* or *kadō*) was much pursued by the warrior class. Considered a refined pastime, the tradition flourished in the 1500s. *Ikebana* emphasized the attention to form and line as dictated by the natural inclinations of various flowering plants. Practitioners studied not only the different types of plants but also considered how their compositions were affected by the shapes of various vessels.



RISD MUSEUM

Japanese

Oribe Ware Water Jar, 1600s

Glazed earthenware with lacquer lid

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.247ab

The preparation and drinking of tea was an important practice for the warrior class. A pleasurable pursuit that invoked multiple senses, tea was an art form that nurtured the collection of a range of beautiful implements. Grouped here are a variety of ceramic vessels that were produced for the tea ceremony. Carefully hand-built into meaningful forms and embellished with carvings, slips, and glazes, each of these vessels functioned not only as a tea-making utensil but, more importantly, as an object to be appreciated and displayed.



Ippitsusai Bunro, Japanese

Bunro ga, Japanese

Ezakiya Kichibei, Japanese

Young man and woman with falcons (Danjo to taka), 1800-1810

Polychrome wood block print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1149.2

In this print, Ippitsusai Bunrō captures a young samurai with his falcon, playfully adding his female companion, who holds another falcon.

Traditionally undertaken by courtiers and the royal family, falconry (*takagari*) has a long history in Japan. From the 1100s, the warrior class also engaged in this practice, establishing different schools around the sport. During the Edo period, falconry was greatly encouraged by the Tokugawa shogunate as an important military outlet for the samurai. Strict rules governing who could practice and keep birds of prey were developed, limiting participation only to those of high rank and status.



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Edo, Japanese
Bizen Ware Tea Caddy, 1800s
Glazed stoneware with ivory lid
Gift of Isaac C. Bates 09.031

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Japanese
Tea Caddy, 1900s
Glazed stoneware
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.118

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Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Kawaguchiya Shōzō, Japanese
Hawk, Tree Sparrow, and Cream Narcissus (Suisen ni taka to suzume),
1830's
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.232

A tethered hawk perched elegantly on its stand is combined with a small tree sparrow and blooming narcissus in this print by Utagawa Hiroshige. The tension between predator and prey is softened by the inscribed poem, which references a folktale describing the sympathetic relationship between a hawk and sparrow. According to the tale, hawks held little birds in their claws to keep warm during cold winter nights, releasing them in the morning out of gratitude. In addition to symbolizing power and status, Hiroshige's hawk is portrayed as a virtuous being.



Kitagawa Utamaro II, Japanese, 1804-1855
Kitagawa Utamaro, Japanese, 1754-1806
Flower arrangement with gentian (autumn bellflower), ca. 1810?
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.585

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RISD MUSEUM

Kitagawa Utamaro II, Japanese, 1804-1855
Flower arrangement with sweet-flag iris and nuphar, ca. 1810?
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.577

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Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764
Falcon tethered to perch, 1710's
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.443

In this monochromatic print, Okumura Masanobu highlights the different textures and patterns of the feathers of a falcon tethered to a perch. Illustrated books about hawking and falconry with detailed descriptions of each species' features and characteristics were abundant in the Edo period, as were portrait paintings of treasured specimens. Capitalizing on the popularity of the sport, Masanobu likely drew on these prototypes in creating this depiction.



Ōhi Chozaemon V, Japanese, 1799-1856
Raku Ware Tea Bowl, early 1800s
Glazed earthenware
Gift of Isaac C. Bates 09.042

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Japanese

Yatsushiro Ware Tea Bowl, 1800s

Painted and glazed stoneware

Gift of Isaac C. Bates 09.065

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Utagawa Kunisada II, Japanese, 1823-1880

Tsutaya Kichizō, Japanese

Temporary quarters of the New Yoshiwara: Courtesans patronized by Owariya Hikotaro viewing cherry blossoms (Shin Yoshiwara kataku:

Owariya Hikotaro kakae yujo hanami zu), 1863.2

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Jesse H. Metcalf 23.014

Here courtesans decked out in their finery parade in decorated boats on the Sumida River in Edo (present-day Tokyo). They are embarking on a cherry-blossom-viewing party, accompanied by their young attendants, also dressed in elaborate gowns. A spectacle equal to the blossoming flowers, the women are the center of attention of boatloads of patrons, many of whom include samurai who wave and call out to them. Taking advantage of the expansiveness of the pentptych (five-part) format, Kunisada creates a panoramic view of the festivities.

