

Of Clover and Chrysanthemum: Autumn Themes in Japanese Woodblock Prints,
September 1, 2010-December 12, 2010

Autumn themes decorate a wide variety of objects in Japan. Painting, lacquer work, textiles, and wood block prints are just a few of the media in which the characteristic subjects of chrysanthemums, morning glories, autumn grasses, and others appear. These motifs, like geese flying before upon observations of seasonal changes in nature. The subjects also have rich literary associations. Some themes, like chrysanthemums, are derived from Chinese literature, which was much admired and imitated by the Japanese; others, like morning glories, belong to the native Japanese literary tradition.

This woodblock print exhibition is organized by theme, with chrysanthemums and morning glories occupying the second and fourth walls. The remaining spaces are filled with various other autumnal subjects. The labels for individual prints contain more specific explanations for some of these motifs.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese, publisher
Japanese White-eyes and Maples (Benikaede ni mejiro), 1854.2
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.148.2

In Japan, the maple tree is as characteristic of autumn as the cherry tree is of spring.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Japanese Morning Glories (Asagao), 1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.185

The morning glory was cultivated as a garden flower as early as the Heian period (794-1185) and is mentioned often in Japanese literature. The inscribed poem reads:

“In the twinkling of an eye, the end to life—a flowering plant”



Utagawa Kunisato, Japanese, d. 1858
Maruya Seijiro, publisher
Japanese White-eyes and Persimmons (Kaki ni mejiro), 1843-1847
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.192



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Kawaguchiya Shozo, Japanese, publisher
Small Bird and Chrysanthemums (Kiku ni kotori), 1830's
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.217.2

A small yellow bird perches on the red and white chrysanthemums, and next to it inscribed a *kyōka* poem (light verse) which reads:

"Thoughts on an Exotic Bird
He is a great lord,
with a mind that flies as high
as that of the roc.
So he will have none of me,
who dare not fly very high."



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Kawaguchiya Shozo, Japanese, publisher
Wild Geese and Moon (Tsuki ni gan), 1830s
Color woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.227.2

A poem is inscribed on the upper left corner, and it reads:

"Will it come again—
another night like this one?
Wild geese and the moon"



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Balloon Flowers and Chinese Silver Grass (Susuki to kikyō), 1830's
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.233

Balloon- or bellflowers (kikyō), which are also counted among the "seven autumn grasses," bloom in autumn in Japan. A poem inscribed on the upper right reads:

"Chinese bellflower—
at my side, if I don't watch,
you bloom and scatter"



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Crane and autumn grasses (Hagi to susuki ni tsuru), 1830's-1840's
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.252

Of the "seven autumn grasses," two are depicted in this print. The tall grass with reddish-purple flowers is Japanese bush clover (hagi); the flower plant below it is pampas grass (susuki).

A Chinese poem inscribed on the upper left reads:

"When one dreams on the pillow of a thousand-year-old crane, it's
New Year!"



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Cockerel, umbrella and morning glories (Asagao ni tori to kasa),
1830's
Polychrome woodblock print with gauffrage
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.281

A kyōka poem (light verse) is inscribed to the left of the morning glories, and it reads:

"The cock starts to crow;
the time to part has come.
Take me to a town
where the rooster is not heard;
that's the only place for dawn!"



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
*The everlasting chrysanthemum (Toshigiku), Parody of happiness, luck
and longevity with collected flowers, 1843-1847*
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.305

The text inscription on the upper right of the fan remarks on the alternate name of the chrysanthemum, okinagusa (old man plant). This name is associated with the legend of Kikujido (the Chrysanthemum Boy), a Chinese boy exiled from the imperial court, sipped the dew of a valley filled with chrysanthemums and lived for seven hundred years. The inscription also mentions the famed Chinese poet Tao Qian (365-427) whose name closely associated with chrysanthemums. In Tao's poem on "Drinking Wine," there is a famous line about plucking chrysanthemums from the eastern hedge.



Utagawa Sadahide, Japanese, 1807-1878 or 1879
Honya Kyusuke, Japanese, publisher
*Java sparrow and rice plants (Kome no hana ni suzume), A set of birds
and flowers, 1834*
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.307

The theme of the autumn harvest is evoked here by rice stalks laden with grain.



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Maruya Seijiro, publisher
Moon, begonias, bell flowers and ominaeshi (Tsuki ni shukaido to kikyō to ominaeshi), 1853.1
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.329



In Japan, autumn is considered the best season for viewing the moon, and a special moon viewing party was traditionally held on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, which in this year, 2010, falls on September 22nd (according to the Gregorian calendar used internationally today).

Kobayashi Kiyochika, Japanese, 1847-1915
Matsuki Heikichi, Japanese, publisher
Morning glories on bamboo stakes (Asagao), 1879
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.395



Renzan Takanobu, Japanese, 1805-1859
Renzan, Japanese, 1805-1859
Ivy and old well (Furuido to tsuta), 1840's
Polychrome wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.415



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Sanoya Kihei, Japanese, publisher
Morning Glories (Asagao), 1854.2
Color woodblock fan print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.442



The inscribed poem reads:

"I cannot forget
your dear face for one moment
-though my path is strewn
with morning glories blooming
in spite of their confusion"

RISD MUSEUM

Shunpudo Noshiro Ryuko, Japanese, block carver
Matsumoto Zenbei, Japanese, publisher
Kitao Masayoshi, Japanese, 1764-1824
Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848
*Chrysanthemums and butterflies (Kiku to botan), A mirror of flowers
and birds (Ehon kacho kagami), 1789*
Polychrome woodblock print with embossing
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.537



Chrysanthemums are a subject borrowed from China, where they became popular through the poetry of Tao Qian (365-427). In both China and Japan, the celebration of the Chrysanthemum Festival on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, which in this year, 2010, falls on October 16th (according to the Gregorian calendar used internationally today), called for the drinking of chrysanthemum wine to achieve long life.

Nakayama Sugakudo, Japanese, fl. 1850-1860
Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese, publisher
*Golden-crested wren and sasanqua (Kikuitadori sazanka), Sho utsushi
shijuhattaka, 1859*
Polychrome wood block print with embossing
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.576



Here the golden-crested wren perched on the sasanqua tree (sazanka), which blooms in autumn, is referred to as a "chrysanthemum" in the inscription on the upper right.