

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RISD Museum Reunites Rare 19th-Century Japanese Surimono Albums in Landmark Exhibition Opening May 23

Providence, RI — May 13, 2026 — The RISD Museum presents *The Artistry and Reunion of Two Surimono Albums*, a major exhibition opening May 23, 2026, that reunites for the first time in nearly 100 years two extraordinary albums of Japanese surimono—luxurious woodblock prints that combine poetry, imagery, and exquisite craftsmanship.

Originally assembled in Osaka in the late 1820s by poet Iga Kurimi, the albums bring together more than 175 works created by designers, poets, and printmakers working at the intersection of visual art and literary culture. These intricately produced prints invite close looking and active interpretation, pairing richly layered imagery with witty *kyōka* verse—a playful and often subversive form of classical Japanese poetry.

Surimono, meaning “printed things,” were often exchanged at poetry gatherings and created to mark special occasions such as the New Year, seasonal festivals, theatrical performances, and personal milestones. Many depict treasured objects—food, textiles, tools, and symbols of celebration—rendered with remarkable sensitivity to texture and material. Through embossing, metallic pigments, and fine papers, printmakers created works that evoke not only how things look, but how they might feel, inviting a multisensory experience.

“Bringing these albums back together is a powerful reminder of how art connects people across time, place, and community,” said Tsugumi Maki, Director of the RISD Museum. “This exhibition invites visitors into the creative process of these exquisite prints—encouraging curiosity, close looking, and new ways of understanding how objects carry meaning and memory.”

The two albums were separated in the 20th century after being gifted to American geologist Raphael Pumpelly in 1863. One album, still intact in its original accordion binding, is on loan from the Chiba City Museum of Art in Japan. The other, now unbound as individual prints, entered the RISD Museum’s collection in the 1950s. Their reunion offers a rare opportunity to explore how these works were created, collected, and shared across cultures.

“Surimono exemplify a deeply collaborative form of making,” said Dominic Molon, Chief Curator at the RISD Museum. “They bring together designers, poets, carvers, and printers in a process that rewards sustained attention. By engaging with both the visual and poetic elements, visitors can uncover layers of meaning and connection that unfold over time.”

“Bank of America is honored to support this extraordinary cultural reunion that bridges continents and centuries,” said Kevin Tracy, president, Bank of America Rhode Island. “This exhibition exemplifies our commitment to fostering international cultural exchange and providing our communities with access to world-class art and education.”

“The reunion of these albums allows us to better understand their contexts, to study these deluxe prints as deliberately curated groups that represented distinct relationships and cultural milieus,” said Dr. Wai Yee Chiong, guest curator and E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Curator of East Asian Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Dr. Chiong previously served as curator of Asian art at the RISD Museum, where she began developing this exhibition, and continued her work on the project in close collaboration with the museum following her transition.

The exhibition also reflects an important exchange between the RISD Museum and the Chiba City Museum of Art. While the surimono album is on view here, Japanese bird-and-flower prints from the RISD Museum’s Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Collection that were shown at the Chiba City Museum of Art in January 2026, are touring other museums throughout Japan. Emiko Yamanashi, Director of the Chiba City Museum of Art states, “It is a great honor for us to have an opportunity to introduce a volume of surimono album in our collection in the exhibition of *The Artistry and Reunion of Two Surimono Albums* at the RISD Museum. We hope this reunion of two surimono Albums will be celebrated by a big audience and encourage interest in Japanese art. The exhibition of the ukiyo-e prints of birds-and-flowers in the Rockefeller Collection of the RISD Museum started in January at our museum and has been travelling in Japan with great success. We are very grateful for the generosity of the RISD Museum loaning many precious works for the exhibition. We hope this mutual exchange will strengthen the ties between us.”

The exhibition is organized into thematic sections that explore how surimono were made and read, how they marked seasonal and personal occasions, and how they circulated within creative communities. Together, these sections highlight the interplay of process, meaning, and connection that defines these works. By tracing how these works were made, circulated, and experienced, the presentation encourages visitors to consider not only the finished object, but the creative systems and human stories that shaped it.

The exhibition is accompanied by customized illustrations by RISD student Zimo Yang (BFA 26), who interned in RISD's Asian art department in 2025 and worked closely with these surimono.

Through themes of celebration, craftsmanship, and community, *The Artistry and Reunion of Two Surimono Albums* positions the museum as a space for exploration and exchange—where art and design become catalysts for learning, dialogue, and creative discovery.

The Artistry and Reunion of Two Surimono Albums is on view through October 4, 2026.

Exhibition Events

Private Opening

Wednesday, May 20

[Press Preview](#)

Thursday, May 21, 10:30 am–12 pm

[Public Opening](#)

Thursday, May 21, 5:30–7:30 pm

[Member Tour](#)

Friday, May 22, 12 pm

[Critical Encounters Study Day](#)

Saturday, September 19, 1–6 pm

[[BoA logo]]

The Artistry and Reunion of Two Surimono Albums is sponsored by Bank of America. The exhibition is also supported by grants from E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the Japan Foundation, with additional program support provided by the IFPDA Foundation and the Felicia Fund.

RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

About the RISD Museum

Established in 1877, the RISD Museum is a dynamic space for creative exploration, learning, and community engagement. We unlock the creative process by integrating art, design, and education, inviting active participation in the making and meaning of art. Spanning cultures from ancient times to the present, our collection fosters accessibility, inclusion, and meaningful connections across communities. For more information: 401-454-6500 or risdmuseum.org.

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