

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Japanese Print Collection, November 13, 2015-May 1, 2016

The Japanese and Chinese woodblock prints on view in this gallery include both historical and recent examples, demonstrating the continued use of traditional printmaking techniques in 20th-century contemporary practice.

The exhibition reflects ongoing research on Chinese color printing processes by Brian Shure, assistant professor in the Printmaking Department at RISD. As a master printer at the San Francisco print shop Crown Point Press from 1987 to 1994, he coordinated the China Print Project, assisting Western artists who were invited to collaborate with Chinese block carvers and printers. Shure also worked with a similar program in Japan. In 2015, Shure returned to the Rong Bao Zhai Studio in Beijing with RISD printmaking student Laura Post (MFA 2016) to study the douban method of printing (see center case), with the goal of developing a related studio at RISD.

Some of these prints were given to the Museum by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948), a daughter of Rhode Island senator Nelson W. Aldrich and the wife of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. A lifelong supporter of the arts, Mrs. Rockefeller assembled a remarkable collection of Asian woodblock prints. In all, she donated more than 700 Japanese prints to the RISD Museum.

The exhibition was coordinated by Britany Salsbury, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, in collaboration with Brian Shure and with the assistance of Jeffrey Moser, assistant professor in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Brown University.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Keisai Eisen

Japanese, 1790-1848

The fickle type: Takanawa (Uwakiso takanawa), from the series
Twelve Views of Modern Beauties (Imayo bijin junikei), 1820s

Polychrome woodblock print

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1387

This print shows a courtesan fashionably dressed with patterned robes and decorative hair combs. Behind her a rectangular scroll shows the Takanawa district of Edo, known for its nightlife.

As in the print by Alex Katz at left, an identically sized block was used to print each color in this image. Special wiping techniques would have been used by the printer to achieve multi-tonal effects, such as the patterning and texture seen on the woman's robes.



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Utagawa Kuniyoshi
Japanese, 1797-1861
Ibaya Sensaburo, publisher
Japanese, 19th century
Scribblings on the storehouse wall (Nitakaragura kabe no mudagaki),
1843-1847
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1998.72.7

This print contains caricature portraits of various actors, identified in the band of graffiti along the bottom. The block carver carefully rendered the sketchy, free-form graffiti text so that it printed as a negative image, whereas the portraits were carved more conventionally, to print as positive images. The brushstrokes in the bottom section suggest the water-based ink was painted by hand onto the woodblock, as in *The Green Cap* (at left).



Utagawa Hiroshige
Japanese, 1797-1858
Takenouchi Magohachi, publisher
Japanese, late 18th century-mid 19th century
The Seven-Mile Beach (Distant view of Enoshima) (Shichirigahama (Enoshima enbo), from the series *The Route to Enoshima off the Tokaido (Tōkaidō no uchi Enoshima michi)*, ca. 1834
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1275

Like the print at right, this image employs a prominent diagonal. It depicts Shichirigahama, or Seven-Mile Beach, offering an expansive view of the water and the island of Enoshima. The site was popular in the 19th century among Japanese printmakers and travelers alike for its shrines and dramatic landscape, and it is regularly featured in print series from that era.



Alex Katz
American, b. 1927
Crown Point Press, publisher
Tadashi Toda, printer
The Green Cap, 1985
Color woodcut on Tosa kōzo paper
Gift from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Barnet Fain 2001.80.109

This print originated as a drawing by Alex Katz of a woman wearing a green bathing cap. Printer Tadashi Toda replicated the drawing by hand-painting transparent pigments onto dozens of carved woodblocks, in a process that was influenced by the Chinese douban technique. To evoke the luminous tones of watercolor, the image was



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printed on Tosa kōzo, a smooth handmade paper produced in Japan from mulberry fiber. Before the final edition, Katz worked extensively with Toda to refine the color, texture, and composition of the image.

Hu Zhengyan, compiler

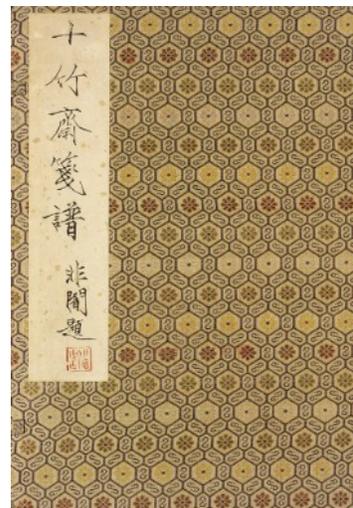
1584-1674

Rongbao zhai, Beijing, publisher

Models of Letter Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio (Shizhuzhai jianpu), 1952

Woodblock-printed book with illustrations in ink and color on paper
Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2005.1

This book is a 20th-century reproduction of embossed and printed letter papers produced by the Ten Bamboo Studio in the mid-17th century. The original four-volume set catered to the ready market for luxury stationery designs in 17th-century China. Many of the designs play on the juxtaposition of brightly printed color and sculptural embossing, rendering patterns and details three dimensional. Printers used the traditional gonghua (embossed design) method, placing paper between two dry, uninked blocks and applying strong pressure to push the sheet into the mold.



Hu Zhengyan, original editor and compiler

1584-1674

Rock in a Stream, from Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Paintings and Calligraphy (Shizhuzhai shuhua pu), 1800s

Polychrome woodblock print
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 32.016

This image of a rock with a circular border was taken from a volume devoted to fan designs in the Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Painting and Calligraphy. First published between 1619 and 1633, this series was the earliest picture collection in China to be printed in color. The books were later printed in various “states” and “substates” using recut versions of the original woodblocks, sometimes alongside the original prints.



The images in the volumes are noted for their lack of outlines—often described as “boneless color”—and their use of contrasting hues to delineate form.

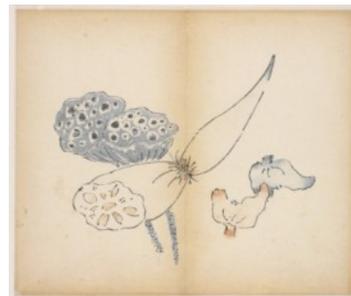
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Hu Zhengyan, original editor and compiler
1584-1674

Lotus Plants, from *Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Painting and Calligraphy (Shizhuzhai shuhua pu)*, 1800s

Polychrome woodblock print
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 32.020

This print showcases lotuses in various stages of development, including two small pods at right, two plants growing upward at left, and a full lotus extending across the center of the composition. The lotus is one of the most popular subjects in the East Asian visual canon. The sacred flower of Buddhism, it is renowned for its capacity to blossom from muddy waters, like the enlightened mind. The lotus also gathered a host of other auspicious associations because its Chinese names (lianhua or hehua) are homophones for terms associated with peace, plentitude, and harmonious union. The lotus motif recurs across the Chinese, Japanese, and American prints shown on this wall.



Utagawa Hiroshige

Japanese, 1797-1858

Maruya Jinpachi, publisher

Japanese

Butterfly and peonies (Botan ni cho), 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.393

The petals of the peonies in this print showcase the different methods of color printing available to Japanese artists. While the petals of the blue flower are composed of dense lines carved into the keyblock (see the example in the case) to create the illusion of three-dimensionality, the pink peony is shaded using layers of ink printed with multiple color blocks. The thin pink line that extends across the top of the composition features gradated effects that by this time had become a hallmark of Japanese and Chinese printing.



Mori Shunkei

Japanese, active ca. 1800-1820

Wasp and cicada on lotus, from the series *Things Creeping under Hand (Chuka senzen)*, 1820

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.606

This print, which hails from a series depicting insects in natural settings, is a 19th-century Japanese iteration of a trans-Asian tradition of insect representation that stretches back to the "grass-and-insect" (caochong) painting of the Song dynasty (960–1279).



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Although the designer's sources are not entirely clear, significant numbers of early Chinese grass-and-insect paintings were preserved in Japanese collections, later inspiring prominent painters such as Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800). From the print designer's perspective, part of the appeal of this tradition is that it typically involved finely delineated forms and delicately graduated color, both of which were ideal qualities for showcasing the technical prowess of the carver and printer.

Wang Gai
Wang Shi
Wang Nie, editors and compilers
Chinese, ca. late 17th–early 18th century
Orchids, Butterfly, and Rock (Jiezi yuan hua zhuan), from the *Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual (Jieziyuan huazhuan)*, possibly printed in 1701
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.610



The orchid plants in this print feature gradated tones, a significant feature of the earliest and highest-quality editions of the Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual. This guide, named after the mansion of the man who commissioned it, examined technical aspects of painting and provided examples of various image types. Colored pigment was applied unevenly to the dampened blocks to achieve the gradated shading of the leaves, rocks, and yellow ground.

Kitagawa Tsukimaro
Japanese, active by 1840, d. 1830
Kitagawa Yukimaro
Japanese, 1797-1856
previous attribution Yukimaro
Japanese, 1797-1856
Magnolias and butterfly (Mokuren ni cho), 1830s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.626



This image of a butterfly next to a blooming magnolia branch is a surimono, a Japanese print commissioned and distributed privately in small numbers. This example was a collaboration between a teacher, Kitagawa Tsukimaro, and his student, Kitagawa Yukimaro. Both artists signed the print, presumably next to the parts of the composition that they contributed—the student at left, near the butterfly, and the teacher, at right, near the flowering tree. The tonal variation on the petals and in the background was created through gradated coloring; this approach is also seen in Chinese manuals such as the Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual (at left).

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Yun-Fei Ji
Chinese, b. 1963
publisher Museum of Modern Art
printer Rongbaozhai, publisher
Chinese

The Three Gorges Dam Migration, 2009

Polychrome woodblock print on mulberry paper, mounted on silk scroll

Private Collection TL123.2015.1



This printed scroll, which unrolls to a length of 10 feet, contains images related to the Three Gorges Dam, constructed in China between 1994 and 2012. Designed to prevent flooding along the Yangtze River, the structure has had dramatic social consequences, including the destruction of historical sites and private homes.

Ji's crowded composition exhaustively captures the people and places that were disrupted by the dam. The transparent layers of color that comprise this image were printed using more than 500 hand-carved pearwood blocks inked with water-based pigments. Ji's image was printed in a substantial edition of 108 copies.

Robert Bechtle
American, b. 1932
publisher Crown Point Press
printer Rongbaozhai
Chinese
printer Sun Shumei
Potrero Houses, Pennsylvania Avenue, 1989
Color woodcut printed on silk mounted on paper
Private Collection TL123.2015.2



This print shows a steeply inclined street in the Potrero Hill section of San Francisco, deserted except for several parked cars. Robert Bechtle is known for such unpeopled cityscapes, often using muted tones that closely resemble those of classic Chinese polychromatic printmaking.

To make this work, Bechtle provided the Rong Bao Zhai workshop with a drawing made in traditional Chinese water-based color on silk. Though they were unfamiliar with the subject matter and style, the workshop printers carved more than 40 blocks using the douban technique (see the case in this gallery), producing a print Bechtle favored for its juxtaposition of tradition and contemporaneity.

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Richard Tuttle
American, b.1941
publisher Crown Point Press
printer Duo Yun Xuan
Chinese
printer Lee Guiyin

Galisteo Paintings 1, from the portfolio *Galisteo Paintings 1-7*, 1993
Polychrome woodblock print with screenprinted guidelines and hand-painted border on xuanzhi paper
Private Collection TL123.2015.4.1

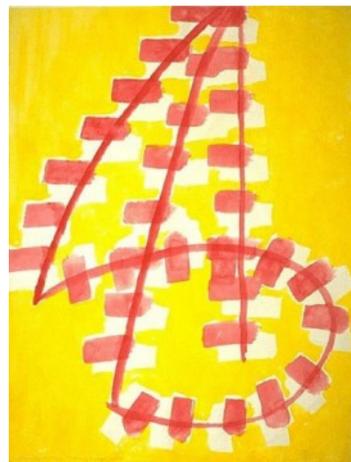


To produce the abstract yellow image seen here, the woodblocks were painted with modulated washes of water-based ink. The painterly quality of the image is emphasized by the unique border; rendered in glossy enamel, this green framing brings out the iridescence and fine surface of the xuanzhi, a soft, high-quality paper favored by traditional painters and calligraphers.

This work is based on watercolor paintings Richard Tuttle produced at his home in Galisteo, New Mexico, after traveling to both China and Japan. While in Asia, he became familiar with traditional Chinese printmaking techniques that incorporated aspects of watercolor painting.

Richard Tuttle
American, b.1941
publisher Crown Point Press
printer Tadashi Toda
printer Shi-un-do
printer Duo Yun Xuan
Chinese

Trans Asian, 1993
Polychrome woodblock print on silk, backed with a woodblock print on xuanzhi paper
Private Collection TL123.2015.5



The title of this work refers to the multiple sites of its printing. When Tuttle was invited in 1989 by Crown Point Press to print in China or Japan, he suggested a collaborative project between printers in the two countries. Tuttle produced a watercolor of this abstract image, which was meant to, in his words, "at the slightest angle . . . [seem] alive." The red and yellow portions of the work were printed in Shanghai, while the underlying white marks were completed in Kyoto. The use of silk backed with a sheet of Chinese xuanzhi paper gives the work a distinct luminosity.

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Pat Steir

American, b. 1938

publisher Crown Point Press

Seascape, 1989

Polychrome woodblock print with hand painting on silk, mounted on rag paper

Private Collection TL123.2015.6

This abstract image vaguely references the moon in a landscape, a favored subject in both Chinese and Japanese painting. It originated from a drawing Pat Steir made on a scrap of silk using the same inks as in the subsequent print, so that the block carver and printer were able to translate the image faithfully. After a line in the original image was left out in the woodcut, Steir hand-painted the colored brushstrokes above the circle on each of the 65 prints in the edition. The painted and printed forms are almost indistinguishable when seen on the highly absorbant traditional silk ground.



Janis Provisor

American, b. 1946

publisher Crown Point Press

printer Ji Qiz Heng

Long Fall, 1991

Polychrome woodblock print on silk, mounted on rag paper

Private Collection TL123.2015.7

This print is Janis Provisor's abstract and personal response to work of Bada Shanren and other Chinese painters she studied before making prints in China with Crown Point Press. After viewing examples of traditional Chinese landscape painting—an experience she described as “like opening up a box . . . a window that I was able to slide through”—she began to adapt the elements in those works. The black circular forms and undulating lines of *Long Fall*, for example, were meant to loosely reference water and plants.



Brian Shure

American, b.1952

Dream of a Langsam Sea, 2015

Graphite on tracing paper

Collection of the Artist TL123.2015.9.2

This print (1)—which takes its title from the poem “Last Night’s Moon” by Anne Michaels—was produced earlier this year by RISD professor Brian Shure while he studied traditional Chinese douban at the Rong Bao Zhai Studio.

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Brian Shure
American, b.1952
Dream of a Langsam Sea, 2015
Ink, watercolor, and graphite on silk
Collection of the Artist TL123.2015.9.7

Brian Shure
American, b.1952
Dream of a Langsam Sea, 2015
Color woodcut on paper
Collection of the Artist TL123.2015.9.8

Yamamoto Shōun
Japanese, 1870-1965
Keyblock for Enjoying the Evening Cool (Yūsuzu), from the album
Views of the Four Seasons (Shiki no nagame), 1906
Carved cherry woodblock
Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2005.2



Miscellaneous printmaking blocks and tools,
Private Collection TL123.2015.10