

## *Marking the Occasion: Surimono from Edo and Osaka,*

September 15, 2000-December 3, 2000

*Surimono* (literally “printed objects”) are distinguished from polychrome woodblock prints by the presence of a variety of texts integrated into their overall compositions. Privately commissioned and published as announcements, commemorations, or most often as New Year’s greetings with poems, they exhibit elaborate printing and embossing techniques and the application of metallic dusts and colors on thick paper. The specialized division of labor common in the Japanese woodblock printing process was sometimes overlooked, as painters and poets designed prints and printers both engraved and printed their designs.

The link between text and image in *surimono* is an important one. By the early nineteenth century, when most of these objects were made, the image and the accompanying poem were conceived together in what is now regarded as the characteristic format. Whether the poetry referred directly to the visual subject of the print or played upon it through word puns and allusions, the artwork was always infused with meaning and a sensuous beauty meant to be savored and enjoyed by its educated recipient.

Most of the selections in this exhibition are from a group of 88 prints presented to the Museum as a gift by George Pierce Metcalf in 1956. The group came from a single Osaka album, one of at least two that were presented as gifts to Raphael Pumpelly, a well-known geologist, during his travels in Japan in 1862-1863, soon after that country opened its doors to the West. Not only are these some of the earliest prints to leave Japan, but the album’s unique association with Osaka is confirmed through the inclusion of Osaka poets and printmakers whose works are not as well-known as those from Edo (modern Tokyo). The numerous *kyōka* (“mad verse”) poems by Tsurunoya Osamaru (d. 1839) and members of his circle, as well as the appearance of a *tsuru* (“crane”) seal on many of the prints, make it clear that his patronage and that of his fellow poets provided the impetus for the creation of many of these works.

### CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Bokutei (?) Hyakuba

*Stirrup*, 1822

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.72

The subject of the horse stirrup probably identifies the print as a New Year’s greeting for the year of the horse, 1822.



Jukōdō Yoshikumi, Japanese, fl. ca. 1803-1840

*Actors passing Mount Fuji between the Yoshiwara and Hara stations on the Tokaido (Yakusha dochu yoshiwara hara fuji enbo), 1820s*

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Roger S. Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs 1997.90.15



Announcements were often printed in the form of long *surimono*, such as this example by the Osaka printmaker Yoshihuni.

Mori Shunkei, Japanese, active ca. 1800-1820

*Camellia and narcissus (Tsubaki to suisen), ca. 1810'S*

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.609



This large *surimono* is a self-commemoration of the sixty-first birthday (*kanreki*), probably of this first writer who inscribed a poem after the introductory preface on the right. Both of these flowers blossom early in the year, and the camellia in particular is associated with the New Year, the day on which everyone became a year older in premodern Japan.

Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868

*Fan Ceng and Tomoe Gozen, 1820s*

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.32



The female warrior Tomoe Gozen was Japanese. Fan Kuai (d. 189 BC; Japanese Hankei) was a Chinese follower of Liu Bang (247—195 BC), who became the first Han emperor. Fan saved the emperor's life by getting drunk at a banquet and creating a diversion that allowed the emperor to flee from an assassin. The poems, which were composed by Asaka Katsumi, Hokusō (Baikō Kitamado or Umeyoshi), and Mochizuki Kagenari, members of the poetry group led by Tsurunoya, all allude to the Boys' Day Festival traditionally celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. The print was probably made for that festival because Hankei was considered a hero and an appropriate role model for children.

Nagayama Kōin, Japanese, 1765-1849

*Cakes Wrapped in Oak Leaves*, possibly fifth lunar month of 1822

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.54

These rice cakes, known in Japanese as *kashiwamochi*, are filled with sweet bean paste and wrapped in oak leaves for the celebration of the Boys' Day Festival, a traditional holiday that fell on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. In modern Japan, the holiday is now called Children's Day and falls on May 5.



Mochizuki no Kagenari

*Statue of Buddha and a Lily*, mid-1820s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.68

It is likely that this *surimono* was made to commemorate Buddha's birthday, which falls on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month in the traditional Japanese calendar (it is now celebrated on April 8). On that day, religious Buddhists wash a statue of the child Buddha in perfumed water.



Tokatei Toyu

*A Sumo Wrestler's Apron*, early to mid-1820s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.78

The plums refer to the New Year, which in this case is likely to have been 1822, the year of the horse. Allusions to an "untamed horse" (*ara-uma*) in the inscribed poems suggest such a date.



# RISD MUSEUM

Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849  
*Hatakeyama Shigetada Carrying a Horse*, 1822  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.41

Once again, the subject of the print probably identifies it as a New Year's greeting for the year of the horse, 1822.



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 turtle, the cranes perched on top of the Isle of the Immortals (Hōrai), and the isle itself all convey the conventional New Year wish for long life.



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

Prints of this type were often intended as New Year's greetings, as indicated by the presence of cranes, which are symbols of longevity, and pine ornaments, traditional New Year's decorations.



# RISD MUSEUM

Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868  
*Minamoto no Yoritomo with a Crane*, 1820s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.33

Yoritomo (1147-99), who in 1185 established the political power of the Minamoto clan and became *shōgun* (military ruler) to the emperor, made a practice of releasing white cranes with labels attached to their legs. He asked that, when the cranes were found, he be informed and the cranes be released to fly again. The crane is a symbol of longevity. When depicted against the background of the rising sun, it indicates a wish for long life and happiness on the first day of the New Year. The poem on the left is by Tsurunoya.



Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849  
Asakusa-an Ichindo, Japanese  
Tsutaya Jūzaburō, Japanese, 1750 - 1797  
*Illustrated dances of the east: Vol. 2*, spring 1802  
Illustrated woodblock-printed book  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.395.2

This early book by Hokusai is a *kyōkaban*, an illustrated collection of the *kyōka* poetry ("mad verse") that was so often the source for the visual imagery and inscribed texts of *surimono*. Books of this type were produced beginning in the late 18th century.

Baien, Japanese, d. 1886  
Nagayama Kōin, Japanese, 1765-1849  
*Hobby Horse and Vegetables*, ca. 1825-1827  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.66

Again, the subject matter of the horse probably identifies the print as a New Year's greeting for the year of the horse, 1822. The second text from the left is a poem by Tsurunoya.



# RISD MUSEUM

Yanagawa Shigenobu, Japanese, 1787-1832

*The Poet Chiyo no Matsuhiko with a Companion*, probably spring 1823

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.4

The poem by Chiyo Matsuhiko identifies the subject of this print as a visit to Imamiya, a temple associated with Ebisu, the god of business who also signals good fortune. The bamboo branch carried by one of the servants is distributed on January 10 at a festival for Ebisu that is part of the New Year season. Finally, the character for pine (*matsu*) on the merchant's jacket is part of the poet Matsuhiko's name and adds another level of reference to the visual imagery of the print.



Ryuryukyo Shinsai, Japanese

*Lobster and Cup*, 1820s

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.21

Red boiled lobsters, set out with other New Year's foods, were used as ornamental decorations for the holiday. The character in the plate is the word for long life (*su*).



Ryuryukyo Shinsai, Japanese

*Cart with Symbols of Longevity*, 1822

polychrome woodblock print

Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.17

The peach is a symbol of long life and immortality in China and Japan.



# RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Toyokuni, Japanese, 1769-1825  
*Ichikawa Danjuro VII and Iwai Hanshiro V in Hagoromo*, 1820s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.44

*Hagoromo (Feather Robe)* is a well-known Nō play that is also performed as a dance play in the Kabuki repertory. An angel whose robe is discovered by a fisherman on Miho Beach is compelled to dance for him before he returns her robe. The beautiful feathered robe and the fisherman's basket are clues to the subject of this *surimono*.



Baien, Japanese, d. 1886  
*Pipe and Tobacco Pouch*, possibly first lunar month of 1827  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.62

Smoking was introduced into Japan in the late 16th century, probably by Spanish or Portuguese merchants, and it soon became a very popular habit. The crane (*tsuru*) on the tobacco pouch is Tsurunoya's emblem, and his poem appears at the left.



Ryuryukyo Shinsai, Japanese  
*Fan, Boxes, and Cloth*, 1820s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.26

The silk wrapping cloth (*fukusa*) is the focus of a still-life that includes a fan and several boxes, at least one of which is lacquered. The plum branch, resting on what appears to be a silk covering for a sheet of paper, certainly alludes to the New Year.



# RISD MUSEUM

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

The *netsuke* (sash toggle) in the shape of a turtle in the foreground conveys a wish for long life, while the horse imprinted on the cloth below identifies this *surimono* as a New Year's greeting probably made for a year of the horse. Other prints in the "horse" group exhibited here have been tentatively dated to 1822, but in this case Shinsai's death date might point to the previous horse year of 1810.



Koitsu  
*Woman with a Moon Lute*, mid- to late 1820s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.83



Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868  
*Glass Wine Jar*, probably made for the Dolls Festival, spring 1822  
Polychrome woodblock print with metallic embellishment  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.85

A poem by Tsurunoya appears on the left.





# RISD MUSEUM

Sadaoka Gakutei, Japanese, 1786?-1868  
*Doll on a Stand*, probably made for the Doll Festival in 1822  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.39



Yanagawa Shigenobu, Japanese, 1787-1832  
*The Poet Asaka no Katsumi with Companions*, probably spring 1823  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.6

The samurai is identified by his sword. He and the attendants are escorting two women, apparently courtesans, who are described as singers in the poem by Asaka Katsumi inscribed above.



Aoigaoka Keigetsu  
*Hobby Horse and Candies*, 1822  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of George Pierce Metcalf 56.039.51

The plums identify the print as a New Year's greeting, and the subject matter of the horse indicates that it was probably made for the year of the horse, 1822.

