

Triptychs in Japanese Printmaking, June 6, 2003-August 31, 2003

This exhibition focuses on three-panel prints (triptychs) in Japan during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Printmaking was a commercial as well as an artistic venture. In the printer's workshop, speed and efficiency were essential for cost-effective production. To facilitate the process, the image was usually printed from a single carved woodblock onto a stand-size sheet of paper.

Toward the end of the 18th century, artists began to combine two or more sheets to expand the surface area available for their compositions. The end result was a more sweeping design in which panoramic views of landscape and more elaborate figural arrangements were possible.

The examples in this gallery illustrate how Japanese printmakers learned to manipulate the multi-panel format to unify and dramatize their subjects. Kiyonaga was one of the first artists to experiment with the triptych. In his print of *Women Visiting Mimaguri*, 1787, the female figures assume a monumentality because of their placement in the foreground. The Toyohiro pentatych (five-panel print), although smaller in scale, exhibits the same visual effect. These early works with subjects at close range contrast with the deeper space of Eizan's *Elegant Banquet by a Winding Stream* and the dramatic image of the skeleton brought to life by Princess Takiyasha in Kuniyoshi's triptych of ca. 1844. The depiction of new subject matter such as landscape also worked well on the grander scale of the triptych. These very striking and powerful designs demonstrate how Japanese printmakers constantly revitalized their tradition through innovations in format, composition, and subject.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Liu Songnian, Chinese, Late 12th Century-Early 13th Century
The Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion, 1800s
Ink and color on silk
Bequest of Senator Theodore Francis Green 66.281.3



This painting illustrates a scholarly gathering that is said to have been held at the Orchid Pavilion in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province (southern China) in 353 AD. In the pavilion on the far right is Wang Xizhi (303-361 AD), one of China's most famous calligraphers, writing out the text of the "Preface to the Lanting Collection" (*Lanting ji xu*). This text commemorates the poetry competition being held. When a cup of wine floating in the stream stopped before an individual, that person had to compose a poem or forfeit his turn and drink the wine – certainly not a bad option!

RISD MUSEUM

Dai Xi, Japanese
Gayuken Shunsei, Japanese
Scrapbook album of Onoe Tamizō II of Osaka (nidai Onoe Tamizō)
(1799-1886), mid 1820's
Polychrome wood block print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1054

Most of the prints in this album, a scrapbook with depictions of the Osaka Kabuki actor Onoe Tamizō (1799-1886), are by Shunshi, a printmaker also active in the city of Osaka. This page illustrates Tamizō in his dressing room, smoking and chatting with three other actors. Albums such as this one illustrate one way in which multi-panel prints were stored and used by their owners during the 19th century.



Utawaga Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861
Sumiyoshiya Masagoro, Japanese
Yokogawa Takejiro, 19th century
Parody of the Sixteen Disciples of Buddha (Mitate Juroku rakan),
1843-1847
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1311

Arhats (Japanese *rakan*), or sages who have achieved complete understanding in the Buddhist tradition, are very much admired in East Asia and are frequently depicted in painting. It is possible that this is not a religious depiction at all, but instead presents the most famous actors of the time. In periods when censorship was strictly enforced, Japanese printmakers resorted to such subterfuges to evade the restrictions imposed on illustrating their favorite themes of actors and courtesans.



Utawaga Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Yamadaya Shojiro, Japanese
Enjoying the Evening Cool with Fireworks, Ryogoku Bridge (Ryogoku noryo ohanabi), 1847-1852
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.293.11



RISD MUSEUM

On summer evenings, the Ryōgoku Bridge in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) was a focus for entertainment that occasionally included dramatic displays of fireworks. This spot was also known for its prostitutes, women who plied their trade on pleasure boats that rode up and down the Sumida River.

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese

Yokogawa Takejiro, 19th century

The Eighth Month: Moon Viewing on the Fifteenth Night (Hatsuki: Tsukimi), Twelve Months, 1854

Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.9



The eight month of the lunar calendar is the second month of autumn and overlaps the Western month of September. This moonlit scene is set against autumn grasses. In Japan, the seven autumn grasses commonly symbolize this season.

Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese

Yokogawa Takejiro, 19th century

The Seventh Month: Waiting for the Moon (Fumizuki: Nijurokuya machi), Twelve Months, 1854

Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.6



Since spring marks the beginning of the lunar year, the seventh month, which is the first month of autumn, usually falls in August in our calendar. These women are seeking to escape the heat on a veranda above the river, while other residents of the city are seen in the distance cooling themselves by boating in the moonlight.

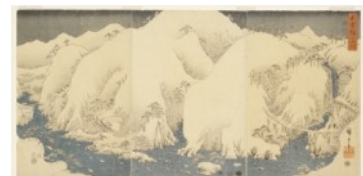
Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858

Okasawaya Taheiji, Japanese

Mountains and Rivers Along the Kiso Road (Kisoji no yamakawa), 1857

Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1295



RISD MUSEUM

Hiroshige's stark snow scene fills all three panels, demonstrating how effectively the triptych format may render an impressive and unified landscape.

Torii Kiyonaga, Japanese, 1752-1815
Takatsuya Isuke, Japanese
Hosoda Eishi, Japanese, 1756-1829
Bush-Clover Garden, Ryoganji, Mimeguri Shrine (Hagi no niwa: Ryoganji Mimeguri), ca.1787
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1121



Mimeguri was a popular spot for outings on the Sumida River on the outskirts of Edo (modern-day Tokyo). The gate visible in the far distance in the left panel probably marks the entrance to the Mimeguri Shrine, a famous landmark.

Toyohiro Utagawa, Japanese, 1773-1828
Parody of the Korean ambassador's procession (Mitate chosen tsushinshi), 1810s
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1159



This scene plays upon depictions of processions of nobility by showing courtesans as the attendants to a young boy traveling in a wooden palanquin similar to the one in the adjacent gallery. By having courtesans imitate the behavior of the upper classes, Toyohiro has created a parody, or what is known in Japanese as *mitate*. The use of *mitate* as social commentary is common in Japanese prints.

Katsukawa Shuntei, Japanese, 1770-1820
Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese
River Battle (Kassen), 1808
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2329



RISD MUSEUM

This early battle scene in three-panel format is striking in its deep space and its dense figural composition.

Kikukawa Eizan, Japanese, 1787-1867
Sanoya Kihei, Japanese
Fashionable Winding-Water Banquet (Furyu kyokusui no en), 1810s
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1062



These women are engaged in a poetry competition known as “the winding water banquet,” dating to as early as the Heian period in Japan (794-1185). Wine cups were floated on the water, and the guests were expected to drink from a cup and recite a verse or compose a few lines of poetry to complete someone else’s verse.

This competition had its roots in China, where a similar gathering was held at the Orchid Pavilion in Shaoxing in Zhejiang province in southern China in 353 AD. A Chinese painting in the case behind illustrates the story.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japanese, 1797-1861
Hachi, Japanese
Apparition of the Large Skeleton Summoned Before Otake Taro Mitsukuni and His Retainer by Takiyasha, Daughter of Taira no Masakado in His Haunted Soma Castle, ca. 1844
Three-paneled polychrome woodblock print
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.2336



Takiyasha, daughter of a 10th-century provincial warlord who rebelled against the Kyoto court, is depicted in her ruined palace invoking a monster skeleton to frighten Kyoto’s representative, Mitsukuni. The brave emissary, to the left in the central panel, courageously faces the fearful specter and eventually overcomes the princess’s spells.