

# RISD MUSEUM

**Japanese Print Rotation**, December 1, 2017-May 20, 2018

This installation presents ten of Utagawa Kunisada's three-paneled (triptych) woodcuts from the series *Twelve Months*. The set depicts seasonal activities related to each month, alternating between the specialness (*hare*) of religious festival days and the mundane pursuits of everyday life (*ke*). Print series of the twelve months were introduced in Japan in the 1700s in Japan, and in the 1800s Kunisada resourcefully took advantage of the triptych format, printing each section separately and aligning them to create a more expansive surface. His monumental compositions brought new levels of graceful complexity and dynamic unity to a popular subject.

Until 1873, the Japanese used a lunar calendar, in which the rotation of the seasons began with spring. The new year, which marked the first day of spring, usually occurred between late January and mid-February in the solar Western calendar.

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948), a daughter of Rhode Island senator Nelson W. Aldrich and the wife of John D. Rockefeller Jr., was a lifelong supporter of the arts. Mrs. Rockefeller assembled a remarkable collection of Asian woodblock prints, donating more than 700 Japanese prints to the RISD Museum. Architect Philip Johnson was commissioned in 1952 by Mrs. Rockefeller's sons, Nelson and David, and her sister, Lucy Truman Aldrich, to design a room for the continuous exhibition of Japanese prints at the Museum. Originally located on the east side of this floor, the room has been recreated here to Johnson's specifications.

We are grateful to Deborah Del Gais, former RISD Museum curator of Asian art, for her research on the prints displayed here.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Utagawa Kunisada  
Japanese, 1786-1865  
Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher  
Japanese  
Yokogawa Takejiro, block carver  
19th century  
*The Eleventh Month: The Cock's Fair (Shimotsuki: Tori no machi)*, 1854  
Polychrome woodblock triptych  
Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.1



Three women in warm clothing make their way to the Washi Great Shrine in Asakusa, carrying offerings for the Shintō deity Okuninushi no Mikoto, whose festival falls on the first "cock" day of the eleventh month. (The Japanese associate days of the month with the twelve animals of the zodiac.)

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Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

*The Second Month: Seasonal Change of Clothes: Plum Viewing*

(*Koromogae umemi*), 1854

Polychrome woodblock triptych

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.10



Here Kunisada decided against depicting the seasonal change of clothing described in the traditional title associated with the second month. He instead chose to illustrate a group of women in beautiful robes, picnicking in a garden under flowering plum trees. Flowering plum is usually associated with the first month of the year.

Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

Yokogawa Takejiro, block carver

19th century

*The Third Month: The Doll Festival (Yayoi: Hina matsuri)*, 1854

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.11



The Doll Festival, which celebrates the young girls of the household, takes place on the third day of the third month, when the flowering peach trees (*momo*) are in bloom.

Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

*The First Month: First Dance of the New Year (Moshun: Odorizome)*,

1854

Polychrome woodblock triptych

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.12



Two dancers and a Japanese lute (*shamisen*) player celebrate the arrival of the lunar new year in front of pine trees, which traditionally welcomed ancestral spirits (*kami*) to the holiday.

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Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

Yokogawa Takejiro, block carver

19th century

*The Tenth Month (Indian summer): First snow (Koharu: hatsuyuki)*,

1854

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.2



Although *koharu*, the traditional name for this month, refers to the end of summer, Kunisada chose to depict the first snow rather than a sunny, warm autumn day.

Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

*The Fourth Month: The first cuckoo (Uzuki: Hatsu hototogisu)*, 1854

Polychrome woodblock print

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.3



A seasonal cue appears in the window at the left of this busy kitchen scene: the appearance of the cuckoo bird is a sign that the rainy season is about to begin and the rice should be planted.

Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

*The Ninth Month: Chrysanthemum (?; character illegible) Party in the Ninth Month (Choyo: Kiku (?) no tsuki utage)*, 1854

Polychrome woodblock triptych

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.4



The Chrysanthemum Festival, one of the five ancient seasonal festivals in Japan, is held on the ninth day of the ninth month, as changing maple leaves mark the arrival of autumn.

Utagawa Kunisada

Japanese, 1786-1865

Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher

Japanese

*The Twelfth Month: Making Mochi Cakes (Shiwasu: Mochitsuki)*, 1854

Polychrome woodblock triptych

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.5



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In the final month of the year, the figures make rice cakes (*mochi*) in the kitchen in preparation for new year festivities.

Utagawa Kunisada  
Japanese, 1786-1865  
Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher  
Japanese  
Yokogawa Takejiro, block carver  
19th century  
*The Fifth Month: The Ikebana Gathering (Satsuki: Ikebana no kai)*,  
1854  
Polychrome woodblock triptych  
Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.7



The iris, which blooms in the fifth month, is the central feature in the flower arrangement (*ikebana*) in this print.

Utagawa Kunisada  
Japanese, 1786-1865  
Kichizō Tsutaya, publisher  
Japanese  
Yokogawa Takejiro, block carver  
19th century  
*The Sixth Month: Summer airing of clothes (Minazuki: doyoboshi)*,  
1854  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.8



The woman with the loosened robe fans herself, a bowl of watermelon at her feet, trying to keep cool in the heat of the last month of summer. Meanwhile, the servant at left airs kimono before the arrival of autumn.