

The Lure of Ink: Japanese Monochrome Prints and Books, March 6, 2009-July 5, 2009

In the mid-eighth century, printing reached Japan, probably by way of Korea, and for much of the next millennium, Japanese books and single-sheet prints were made in black ink (*sumi*) using the woodblock printing technique. These monochromatic works continued to be produced even after the technique of color woodblock printing was fully developed in the mid-eighteenth century. Some of the early examples in this exhibition, including the prints by Okumura Masanobu (1686-1784) and Mori Ransai (1740-1801), either predate or overlap with the development of color woodblock printing. Their compositions are dependent on the Chinese painting tradition, whereas other nineteenth-century designs in this gallery draw more specifically on various schools of Japanese painting for their inspiration.

The works in this exhibition all belong to the category of bird-and-flower prints (*kachō-ga*), which developed somewhat independently of the mainstream of *ukiyo-e*, or printed depictions of the "floating world" of pleasure quarters, kabuki theater, and other delights of Edo-period (1603-1868) urban entertainment. Makers of *kachō-ga* sought inspiration in composition, technique, and meaning by drawing heavily upon earlier Chinese and Japanese painting traditions. They attempted to simulate the textures of painted brushstrokes in their designs, and these experiments were transposed to the printed medium by block cutters who learned to manipulate the tonalities of ink in the prints, creating rougher and more uneven lines and at times even dissolving outlines. Monochrome ink painting was highly regarded in Japan. The appreciation of monochrome prints-which were both less expensive and more widely available-was a natural extension of that aesthetic.

Monochrome prints in blue ink, known as *aizuri-e*, or "blue-printed pictures," were probably first made in the city of Edo (now Tokyo) in 1829. Until that time, Japanese artists had used dayflower petals or indigo plants to create blue pigments. Berlin blue (*bero-ai*, also known as Prussian blue), a synthetic pigment first made in Berlin in about 1704, was introduced into Japan during the eighteenth century by Dutch traders at Nagasaki. It was this pigment that inspired printmakers to create *aizuri-e*. In the 1810s and 1820s, the distinctive new preference for indigo-dyed fabrics and blue-and-white ceramics in Japan may also have inspired printmakers to experiment seriously with this more malleable and lasting synthetic pigment. Some of the most well-known "blue prints" were part of the Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji series created by Hokusai (1760-1849) between about 1830 and 1833. Keisai Eisen (1791-1848) is another innovator whose works are included in this exhibition.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Kamisaka Sekka, Japanese, 1866-1942
Whirling Snow, page from *Flowers of a Hundred Worlds*, 1909-1910
Woodblock prints on paper
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2006.38



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In the period 1271 to 1274, the Buddhist priest Nichiren (1222–82) was exiled to Sado Island, which was known for its harsh winters. This image of him walking through a snowstorm conveys how determined he was to communicate his teachings and denounce all other forms of Japanese Buddhism.

Kōno Bairei, Japanese, 1844-1895

Myna (possibly a Crested Myna [Hakkacho]), 1844-1895

Woodblock print on paper

Gift of Elizabeth Stabler in memory of George Howard Parker and Louise Merritt Parker 2007.106.12

This vividly rendered depiction of a myna is probably a page from a printed album of sketches by Bairei, who was trained as a painter.



Ogino Issui, Japanese, early 20th century

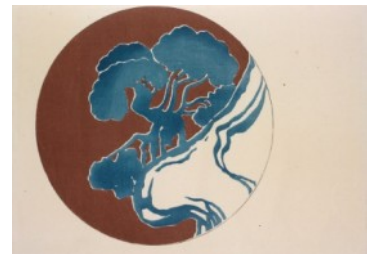
Unsōdō, Japanese

Sketches of a Hundred Subjects, volume 1, 1910

Volume one of woodblock prints, ink and color on paper, with accordion-style binding in modern binder

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2007.77.1

Little is known about this artist, but the book was printed by Unsōdō, the same publisher that issued the *Kamisaka Sekka* (1866–1942) volume in this case, and the quality of the printing is equally high.



Ogino Issui, Japanese, early 20th century

Unsōdō, Japanese

Man viewing flowering plum, facing pages from Sketches of a Hundred Subjects, volume 2, 1910

Volume two of woodblock prints, ink and color on paper, with accordion-style binding in modern binder

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2007.77.2

Little is known about this artist, but the book was printed by Unsōdō, the same publisher that issued the *Kamisaka Sekka* (1866–1942) volume in this case, and the quality of the printing is equally high.



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Utagawa Kunisada, Japanese, 1786-1865
Kichizō Tsutaya, Japanese
*The First Month: First Dance of the New Year (Moshun: Odorizome),
Twelve Months*1854
Polychrome woodblock triptych
Gift of Marshall H. Gould 30.039.12



Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849
Moriya Jihei, Japanese
Sparrows and Rice Plants, ca. 1832-1833
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.123



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Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Tsujiya Yasubei
Sparrow and bamboo, 1847-1852
Woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.283

Bamboo is a popular subject in East Asian painting. Note how skillfully the qualities of a painted line are translated into the forms rendered in this woodblock print.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Aritaya Seiemon, Japanese, ca. 19th century
Butterfly and peonies (Botan ni cho), 1830's
Polychrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.345.1

These two prints are almost identical, but they were issued by two different publishers and have slightly different Hiroshige signatures. In addition, the first publisher's seal appears under the Hiroshige signature in the polychrome print, but on the monochrome print the seals of the second publisher appear under the inscription. The quality of the polychrome print is much higher than that of the monochrome example.



The association of the peony with status is clearly articulated by the Chinese philosopher and writer Zhou Dunyi (1017–73). In distinguishing the characteristics of the chrysanthemum, the peony, and the lotus, he writes, “[What I call] the peony flower is someone/a person of wealth and position.” It is this text that is cited on both prints.

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Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Yamadaya Sanshiro, Japanese, 18th century
Butterfly and peonies, 1830's
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.345.2

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Utagawa Kunisato, Japanese, d. 1858
Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
"Black" bamboo, 1858
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.359

The haiku poem inscribed on the print identifies this plant as a variety of black bamboo (kuretake), despite its blue tonalities. In haiku, a season word is always used; here it is the song of the water rail, a bird that evokes early summer through its sound.

*The "black" bamboo
listens to rain,
the water rail chirps.*

Note the highly effective drawing of the sharply angled leaves of the bamboo. The "flying white" textures in the trunk of the plant suggest brushstrokes.



RISD MUSEUM

Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831-1889
Nakajima Kyosai
Japanese
Cherry branches, 1821 or 1881
woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.374

This print, which may be a page from a book, is composed in subtle tones of gray. There is little information to identify the artist.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Maruya Seijiro
Turtle [in stream], ca. 1840
Woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.380



Toyohiro Utagawa, Japanese, 1773-1828
Cuckoo in Rain, 1810's
Woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.384

The theme of the cuckoo in rain evokes poetic associations of summer and unrequited love. Here the loosely rendered trees in the foreground also hark back to Chinese and Japanese ink paintings of mist-filled landscapes.



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Okumura Masanobu, Japanese, 1686-1764
Mandarin ducks, ca. 1710-1715
Woodblock print in black ink (sumizuri-e)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.444

Note how the jagged edges of the rock on the right in the woodblock medium simulate painterly brushstrokes.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Butterflies, From an untitled series of *ishizuri-e harimaze-e* 1826-69
woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.459A

This composite picture is made in imitation of a stone rubbing, where the image is printed in reverse and outlines are in white against a black ground. Popular in the nineteenth century, printed groups of designs like this were made to be cut into individual images. This is an uncut sheet.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Landscape, From an untitled series of *ishizuri-e harimaze-e* 1826-1869
woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.459B

This composite picture is made in imitation of a stone rubbing, where the image is printed in reverse and outlines are in white against a black ground. Popular in the nineteenth century, printed groups of designs like this were made to be cut into individual images. This is an uncut sheet.



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Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
*Fish and nandina berries, From an untitled series of ishizuri-e harimaze-e*1826-1869
woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.459C

This composite picture is made in imitation of a stone rubbing, where the image is printed in reverse and outlines are in white against a black ground. Popular in the nineteenth century, printed groups of designs like this were made to be cut into individual images. This is an uncut sheet.



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
*Grasses and flower, From an untitled series of ishizuri-e harimaze-e*1826-1826
woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.459D

This composite picture is made in imitation of a stone rubbing, where the image is printed in reverse and outlines are in white against a black ground. Popular in the nineteenth century, printed groups of designs like this were made to be cut into individual images. This is an uncut sheet.



Mori Ransai, Japanese, 1740?-1801
Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831-1889
Owada Yasubei, Japanese
Suwaraya Mohei, Japanese
Inoue Seifu, Japanese
Inoue Shofu, Japanese
*Complete illustration of a magpie in a tree, from the illustrated book Ransai gafu (Picture book by Ransai)*1740-1801
woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.465A



Mori Bunchō, a painter who called himself Ransai, was trained in the style of Shen Quan (1682–1760?), a Chinese artist active in the

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Japanese port of Nagasaki between 1731 and 1733. Ransai studied painting with Shen's pupil, Kumashiro Yūhi (1713–72), and this 1801 edition is the continuation of Ransai's 1782 compilation of their painting instructions and compositional models. The inscription at the bottom right distinguishes this bird from another illustration because it has "an entirely skinny and long body and also a long tail."

Ransai is one of the earliest Japanese artists to design prints that translate the nuances of the painted brushstroke into the medium of the woodcut. By emphasizing surface patterning in the seemingly naturalistic Chinese compositions on which his compositions were based, Ransai also heightened the abstract qualities of line in his illustrations. These studies reflect the Chinese professional painting tradition, as it was transmitted to Japan in the eighteenth century and imitated there.

Mori Ransai, Japanese, 1740?-1801

Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831-1889

Owada Yasubei, Japanese

Suwaraya Mohei, Japanese

Inoue Shofu, Japanese

Inoue Seifu, Japanese

Complete illustration of a magpie in a tree, from the illustrated book Ransai gafu (Picture book by Ransai) 1740-1801

woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.465B



Mori Bunchō, a painter who called himself Ransai, was trained in the style of Shen Quan (1682–1760?), a Chinese artist active in the Japanese port of Nagasaki between 1731 and 1733. Ransai studied painting with Shen's pupil, Kumashiro Yūhi (1713–72), and this 1801 edition is the continuation of Ransai's 1782 compilation of their painting instructions and compositional models. The inscription at the bottom right distinguishes this bird from another illustration because it has "an entirely skinny and long body and also a long tail."

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Mori Ransai, Japanese, 1740?-1801

Inoue Seifu, Japanese

Cormorants searching for fish, from the illustrated book Ransai gafu (Picture book by Ransai) 1740-1801

Woodblock-printed page

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.471



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Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831-1889

Japanese

Crow on Snow-covered Plum Branch, 1870s-1880s

Color woodblock print

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.473



The contrasting shades of black in the crow's body and the mica scattered over the surface of this finely rendered print indicate the care with which it was made. Kyōsai often painted crows, and this print closely resembles his painted works. The poem inscribed on the left reads as follows:

*The plum accompanies their squawking forms;
Its fragrance assaults their feathers.
Beautiful shadows of the branches in the moonlight
Climb towards the study curtains.
The pair of crows that have lodged in my house
Cry and make to fly away,
Under the bright moon in the depths of the night.*

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Translated by Timothy Clark in *The Demon of Painting: The Art of Kawanabe Kyōsai* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), p. 148

Japanese
Moon and Bamboo, 1800s
Monochrome woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.478

Here the nuanced tonalities of ink create the impression of bamboo lit by moonlight.



Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848
Takenouchi Magohachi, Japanese, late 18th century-mid 19th century
Peonies, 1830s
Color woodblock print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.509

The unusual intense blue of the flowers in this print may have been enhanced by the addition of black ink to the Berlin-blue pigment.



Soshuya Yohei
Keisai Eisen, Japanese, 1790-1848
Summer, 1830's
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.510

The unusual intensity of the blue in some areas of this print may have been enhanced by the addition of black ink to the Berlin-blue pigment.



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Kitagawa Utamaro II, Japanese, 1804-1855
Kitagawa Utamaro, Japanese, 1754-1806
Flower arrangement with plum, ca. 1810?
wood block print
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.579

This print belongs to a group of black-and-white flower arrangement illustrations made in the early nineteenth century. Although all are signed Utamaro, they are now attributed to Utamaro II. The single line of Chinese poetry can be translated as "Blossoms of [white] plum fly over the zither (koto)."

