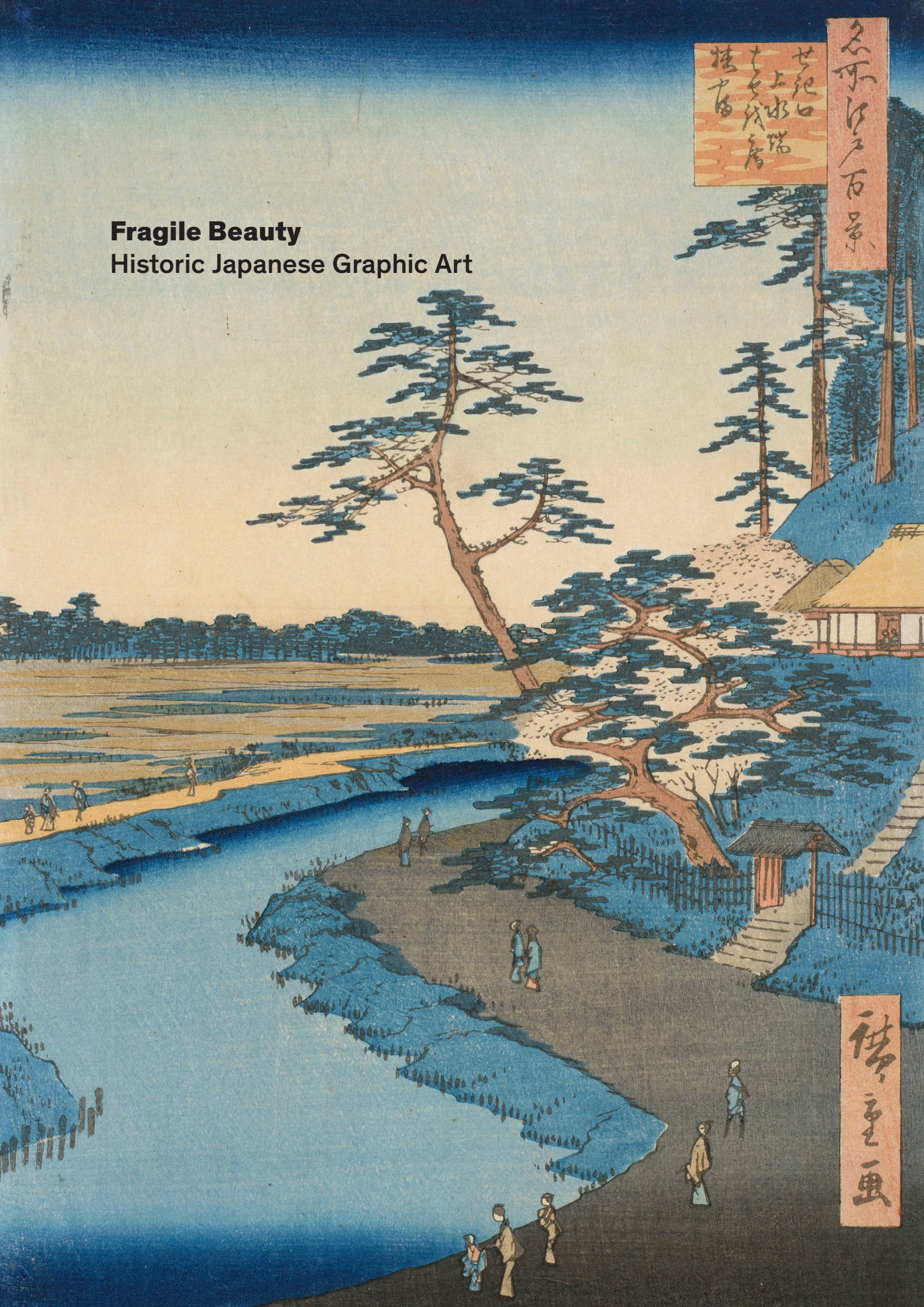


Fragile Beauty
Historic Japanese Graphic Art



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Cover

Andō Hiroshige, *Sekiguchi jōsui-bata Bashōan Tsubakiyama* (Bashō's Hermitage and Camellia Hill on the Kanda Aqueduct at Sekiguchi), 1857, colour woodcut print, from: *Meisho Edo hyakkei* (One Hundred Famous Views of Edo), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

AUCKLAND
ART GALLERY
TOI OTĀMAKI

Fragile Beauty

Historic Japanese Graphic Art

近世日本のグラフィックアート、浮世絵
繊細な表現美

Contents

5 Lawrence E Marceau

*Woodblock Prints and the Culture of the
Edo Period (1600–1868)*

12 Mathew Norman

*From the Collections: Historic Japanese
Woodblock Prints*

24 Doris de Pont

*Picturing Beauty: Ukiyo-e, Kimono and
Their Manifestations in Western Fashion*

Overleaf

Figure 1
Katsukawa Shunsen (later known as **Katsukawa Shunkō II**) [The Publisher and His Circle], from: *The Treasure Ship and Its Mast of Gold*, 1818, woodblock print, Hōsa Library collection.

Woodblock Prints and the Culture of the Edo Period (1600–1868)

Lawrence E Marceau

After over a century of civil war, Japan entered a period of relative peace and social stability in the early 17th century. The monarch and court continued to maintain rites and rituals in Kyoto aimed at ensuring good harvests and fending off epidemics and natural disasters, while the Tokugawa line and their allies established a military administration in Edo (now Tokyo), a newly established city lying roughly 495 kilometres to the east of Kyoto. The Tokugawa designated their head as 'shogun' or 'barbarian-quelling generalissimo'. He derived his authority directly from the monarch, who, ironically, lived under the shogun's control. The first century of Tokugawa rule featured the establishment of a comprehensive system of power sharing by which the Tokugawa and their allies controlled much of Japan's rice production, the basis upon which taxes were levied and samurai (bureaucrats hailing from the military class) stipends were paid. The loyalty of non-allied military houses was ensured through a system of alternate attendance on the shogun in Edo. Under this system, regional domain lords called *daimyo* needed to spend half of their time (every other year, for instance) in residences they maintained in the military capital of Edo, and the rest of their time spent in their home domains. Wives and children spent all their time as de facto hostages at the Edo *daimyo* residences.

The samurai class, including the shogun, some 250 *daimyo* and their families, and retainers down to the lowest foot soldier, accounted for about seven per cent of the population of Japan, estimated at about 30 million in 1750. The vast majority of Japanese (roughly 84 per cent) were engaged in agricultural production, while another six per cent lived in urban areas working at a variety of crafts or, to the dismay of those who followed the Confucian ideology of non-commercialism, trading goods and services as merchants. The final three per cent of the population included the nobility and aristocracy in Kyoto, Buddhist and Shinto clergy, and actors, courtesans, prostitutes, entertainers, beggars, and those engaged in occupations deemed ritually polluted, such as leather workers and executioners.

The establishment of urban centres throughout the country, combined with the development of roads, post stations, port towns and other infrastructures, led to a rise in commercial activity on a national basis. Consumers first included members of the upper echelons of the military/bureaucratic class and wealthy merchants. Eventually, the continued urbanisation of the country as well as a rise in the general

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standard of living led to a huge increase in the number of consumers from all walks of life. Furthermore, nearly all urban Japanese needed to demonstrate basic literacy in order to make a living, which led to a revolution in the production of printed books and single-sheet woodblock prints. Such prints were not limited to graphic images, but contained a surprising amount of text, including the identification of persons depicted, the location of the image, poetry added in conjunction with the image, the signature of the print designer, and the identity of the publisher himself. In other words, printed images were not only to be viewed, but they were also to be read by consumers.

Throughout the Edo period texts continued to be copied by hand, and pictures drawn using brush and ink. These activities, while important, could not satisfy the needs of a consumer base, which demanded the production of texts and images in increasingly great numbers. For books, offset printing using bronze or wooden moveable type served as a major technique of production. Over much of the 17th century this printing technique led to the publication of the Chinese and Japanese classics, Buddhist texts, didactic or informative nonfiction, and a variety of other works. However, the very success of moveable-type printed books led to the need for reprints and illustrated editions, which could much more easily be created by carving text and images directly into wood blocks. With space for storage available, and a renewable supply of cherry timber to serve as blocks for carving, woodblock printing eventually eclipsed moveable type as the preferred mode of text, as well as image, production.

Figure 1 portrays a publisher (top centre), who determines the subject of a print or series and funds the project, and the other three members of the so-called 'woodblock quartet'. The publisher's head is depicted as a large gold coin, underscoring the desire for profit driving his enterprise. From the publisher, we see, moving anti-clockwise, the print designer, who draws and colours the image that will be transferred to the woodblocks; the block carver or engraver, who carves the lines of the original image onto the woodblocks, and the printer, who applies ink to the woodblocks and then rubs the back of each sheet of paper in order to transfer the image and text to it. Because the subject of this particular illustration is a book publisher, we see with him two more collaborators: the author to his left and, below the author, the calligrapher, who is responsible for taking the text the author has written and copying it legibly onto the page. In the dialogue 'balloons', the publisher as well as each collaborator discusses his particular role in the production process.

Single-sheet woodblock prints developed with the rise of book printing and publishing in the 17th century. At first published only in black and white, full-colour printing techniques appeared in the 1760s in works designed in Edo by Suzuki Harunobu (c1725–1770). These works, which required the use of a separate block for each colour, were known as 'Brocade Pictures from the East' or '*Azuma nishiki-e*'. Attractive and inexpensive, they soon became popular souvenirs for people of all classes returning to the provinces from visits to or

residence in the Shogun's capital city. The prints celebrated the special treats the metropolis had to offer: the so-called 'floating world' or *ukiyo*. As a genre, woodblock prints and related drawings of courtesans, actors, sumo wrestlers and other popular 'stars' of urban recreation have come to be known as 'pictures of the floating world' or *ukiyo-e*. The 'floating' world indicates a world of escape: the society of the pleasure quarters, such as the Yoshiwara, an expansive 'nightless city' on the northeast edge of Edo; the theatre district, where extravagant *kabuki* plays focusing on star-crossed love affairs or vendettas against evil wrongdoers; and other environments where urbanites could find release from the stresses of everyday life.

In Figures 2–4, *Nagato no kuni Akama no ura ni oite Genpei ōgassen Heike ichimon kotogotoku horobiru zu* (In the Great Battle between the Minamoto and the Taira in Akama Bay in Nagato Province, the Taira Clan Is Utterly Destroyed), a triptych produced c1845 by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861) and published in Edo by Maruya Tetsujirō (Marutetsu), we see an initially confusing image of a large, heavily embellished ship surrounded by a number of smaller boats. The scene is from *Heike monogatari* (Tales of the Heike, circa early 13th century), and serves as the great climax of the entire work, when the young Emperor Antoku (1178–1185), grandson of the leader of the Taira line, Kiyomori (1118–1181), jumps ship with his nurse and other female attendants, and drowns, thus ending Taira claims to the throne. Antoku is visible in the middle panel, in the arms of his nurse on the imperial phoenix ship, and waiting for the right moment to follow his nurse into the depths. In the left panel the victorious Minamoto general, Yoshitsune, leaps high above the waves as he boards one of the defending boats. In the foreground of the left panel Yoshitsune's loyal lieutenant, Musashibō Benkei, grapples with an enemy. Benkei, ostensibly a monk, has an elaborate white cloth tied around his head in the 'militant cleric' style.

Works such as *In the Great Battle* seem far from what we might expect considering that these prints were supposed to be dealing with the *ukiyo*, the floating world of the pleasure quarters, the theatre districts, and the sumo arenas. However, when we consider that plays focusing on the themes of impermanence and loyalty raised in the *Tales of the Heike* were common on the *kabuki* stage, then we can see how theatregoers would have wanted to collect prints on this subject, in particular vividly coloured scenes of the tragic Battle of Dannoura, or as it is called here, Akama Bay. Such epic scenes allowed large numbers of viewers to escape into the worlds of literature and history in ways that other, more private and exclusive genres were not prepared to handle.





Left

Figures 2–4

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Nagato no kuni Akama no ura ni oite Genpei ōgassen Heike ichimon kotogotoku horobiru zu* (In the Great Battle between the Minamoto and the Taira in Akama Bay in Nagato Province, the Taira Clan is Utterly Destroyed), c1845, colour woodblock prints, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



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From the Collections: Historic Japanese Woodblock Prints

Mathew Norman

Left

Figure 1

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Actors Ichimura Uzaemon XII as Ōboshi Yuranosuke, and Iwai Kumesaburo III as Ōboshi Rikiya Yoshikane*, 1847, colour woodblock print, from: *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Of all the subjects which featured in Japanese woodblock prints during the Edo period (1600–1868), it is the *bijin-ga* (pictures of beauties) which are perhaps best known in the West. Fascinating for their colourful descriptions of young women in exotic costumes, *bijin-ga* exercised a powerful influence on the Western imagination. However, *bijin-ga* represent only one theme among the many which animated the artists and print-collecting public of Edo-period Japan. By way of an introduction to the field, this essay provides an overview of just six of the main themes, including pictures of beauties and actors, depictions of warriors, landscapes, birds and flowers, and privately printed *surimono*.

Published to accompany the exhibition *Fragile Beauty: Historic Japanese Graphic Art*, the themes explored in this essay stem from the approximately 300 Japanese woodblock prints in the collections of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Most of these works date from the last century of the Edo period when Japan was largely closed to the outside world. The majority of the prints belong to the Mackelvie Trust Collection, an important permanent loan of historic international works of art. The date and circumstances under which the Trust acquired those works is unclear, but a number were shown at the Gallery in two exhibitions of private collections held in 1927 and 1934.¹ Those works acquired by the Gallery have been limited to a small number of gifts and purchases, the latter apparently made without a view to the structured growth of that aspect of the collection: one major lacuna is the erotic *shunga* (spring pictures) which were so widely available in pre-Meiji Japan.² Despite this, the Gallery is able to present an informative cross-section of thematic interests from the period in question and illustrate the richness of the wider tradition.

Japanese Woodblock Prints in Context

Commonly known as *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world), the Japanese colour woodblock print is the product of a long tradition of graphic art that travelled to Japan from China, perhaps as early as the 7th century. *Ukiyo* (floating world) has its origins in a Buddhist term which characterised life as both fugitive and sorrowful. However, by the mid-17th century, different characters had been used to form a homonym which, inverting the meaning of the term, instead emphasised the joy of temporary pleasures and even a certain hedonism.³ This pleasure in evanescent or ‘perishable’⁴ things is

part of a Japanese aesthetic which has no analogue in Western culture and is perhaps best illustrated by the annual celebrations of blossoms in spring and maple leaves in autumn.

Having come to signify pleasure, *ukiyo-e* would be inextricably linked with the rise of the new urban middle class which characterised the rapidly developing city of Edo (now Tokyo). The seat of the head of the Tokugawa clan, Tokugawa Ieyasu, from 1590, and of his shogunate (military dictatorship) from 1603, Edo grew swiftly during the course of the 17th century, drawing in migrants from all over Japan. In addition to the growing population of *chōnin* (townspeople), from 1635 Edo played host to each of the provincial *daimyo* (lords) who were required to spend half their time at the shoguns' court. While this shift was motivated by the centralising policies of the Tokugawa, it was mirrored in the provinces by the increasing number of the military caste, the samurai (those who serve), who had left their own country estates to settle in towns and cities as salaried vassals of their *daimyo*.

The changing relationship between lord and vassal, at both national and local levels, resulted in corresponding changes in the economy. The samurai were salaried in rice, which they were obliged to sell through merchants in order to fund their newly urban lifestyles. While nominally at the top of the social hierarchy – summarised as *shi-nō-kō-shō* (samurai, farmers, craftsmen, merchants) – the samurai were increasingly reliant on the system of exchange controlled by the merchants. Viewed as parasitic, merchants occupied the lowest rank in the hierarchy (below even peasants). Despite this, the new cash economy favoured merchants at the expense of their social superiors.⁵ The financial success of this urban middle class was viewed with suspicion by the authorities, whose use of sumptuary laws was calculated to limit public expressions of wealth incompatible with class. Rivaling the traditional elites in resources, the merchants were nonetheless excluded from the sites of political power and high culture. Partly as a result, they resorted to novel forms of culture, including the popular *kabuki* theatre and woodblock prints.

Alongside *kabuki* theatre, with its origins in the early 17th century, and to which it remained closely linked, the woodblock print became one of the foremost expressions of the burgeoning but disenfranchised urban population. What the mirror of official society did not reflect, *ukiyo-e* recorded in dramatic detail: from *kabuki* to courtesans, erotica to actors, *ukiyo-e* were central to the developing sense of identity for a community whose pleasures were both more earthy and tinged with an official approbation which, doubtless, added a certain frisson to their enjoyment. As a result, both *kabuki* and *ukiyo-e* were subject to repeated interventions by the shoguns' government, which sought to control and even suppress entirely these expressions of popular culture. It is a measure of the popularity of the prints and inherent flaws within the Tokugawa shogunate that few such measures enjoyed lasting success, and both prints and the popular theatre thrived.



Above

Figure 2
Keisai Eisen, *Nakamanji-rō Yatsushashi*
(Courtesan Yatsushashi of the Nakamanji-rō
House), 1815–42, colour woodblock print,
from: *Keisei Gokenjin* (Courtesans of Five
Houses), Mackelvie Trust Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Given the market economy, the themes which occupied the imaginations of woodblock artists reflected the interests of their public and covered a wide range of topics. Perhaps most notable of the themes selected for this exhibition are images of actors from the *kabuki* theatre (fig 1) and courtesans of the Yoshiwara 'pleasure district' of Edo (fig 2). Closely connected to *kabuki*, portrayals of great warriors from Japanese and Chinese history were also firm favourites. Landscape came into its own as a distinct and highly popular genre only in the late 1820s, while depictions of flowers and birds and the privately printed *surimono* reflect an aesthetic informed by, and coupled with, literary and poetic interests. Regardless of its subject matter, each print was the product of a highly specialised production process.

Woodblock Printing

The production of Japanese woodblock prints required the collaborative efforts of four people: the *ukiyo-eshi* (artist), designer of the image; the *horishi* (block-cutter), who cut the design onto the blocks; the *surishi* (printer), who inked and printed the blocks; and the *hanmoto* (publisher), the commissioner and coordinator of the project.⁶

Working to the publisher's commission, the artist would produce a design in ink on thin paper which was then adhered face down on the prepared surface of a block of fine-grained wood, often mountain cherry (*Prunus donarium* Sieb. var. *spontanea* Makino). This facilitated the cutting of the keyblock which carried the overall design. The block-cutter would rub away much of the paper, leaving the design exposed, before cutting around the artist's lines, removing the wood from areas that did not need to print. Fine tools were used to cut around delicate lines, such as those depicting hair, while broad areas of wood were removed with larger chisel-like tools.

Proofs from the keyblock were then printed, enabling the artist to establish his choice of colours. As each colour required the cutting of a separate block, the marked proof impressions would then go through the same process. The print would only be complete when each block was printed on the prepared sheet, carefully aligned with the aid of *kentō* (registration marks).

This system had been perfected by the mid-18th century, enabling multiple colours to be printed on one sheet and reaching a high-point in the *nishiki-e* (brocade pictures) in the 1760s, so-called because of the similarity to richly coloured, figured silk brocades. Techniques including *karazuri* (gauffrage or blind printing), *kimedashi* (embossing) and burnishing presented artists with the opportunity to mimic textures as diverse as fabrics and feathers, through to the highly polished finish of lacquer. Such expensive and time-consuming techniques were limited to high-status items, notably the privately printed *surimono*.

Surimono: Art of Poets

The examples of *surimono* (printed thing) in this exhibition are all in the *shikishiban* (square paper size) format and are largely representative of the *saitan* (New Year's Day) *surimono* which were popular gifts at that time of year (fig 3). Each is inscribed with one or more poems in the *kyōka* ('witty' or 'crazy') format of 31-syllables, mimicking the ancient structure of courtly *waka* (Japanese verse) poetry. *Kyōka* poetry often parodies the conventional subjects of *waka*, while the complex relationship between image and text elicits unexpected meanings.

Among the most refined of Japanese prints, the *surimono* occupies a special place in the history of printmaking. Unlike the majority of prints in this exhibition, which were produced for the mass market, *surimono* were not subject to the same commercial imperatives. Produced for private circulation, often among *kyōka* poetry groups, but also as announcements and for commemorative purposes, *surimono* show some of the finest printmaking techniques which were simply too expensive or labour-intensive for those prints intended for the general market. In addition to conventional colour printing, *surimono* were printed on thick and absorbent paper, embossed, burnished and enriched with reflective metallic powders, giving voice to the fullest extent of creative expression in Japanese printmaking.

While the word was first recorded in the 11th century, *surimono* – in the modern sense – appear to have come of age in the mid-18th century, before adapting in the 1810s to the *shikishiban* seen in the exhibition, which itself succumbed to the economic turmoil of the 1830s.⁷ Japanese enthusiasm for these prints was emulated in the West later in the 19th century when *surimono*, along with other *ukiyo-e*, were widely collected and had a marked impact on European avant-garde art. Perhaps as a result of this enthusiasm, an industry evolved to cater for demand by reproducing early *surimono*, including Katsushika Hokusai's *Vases, Trays and Materials for Flower Arrangement; The Flower Shell*, originally published in 1821 (fig 4). Of varying quality, some of these reproductions were sold in wrappers with English labels, pointing to an external market.⁸

Bijin-ga: Pictures of Beauties

Perhaps the best known of the themes represented in the exhibition are prints of beauties. Generally these images capture the self-conscious splendour of the Yoshiwara, the walled district of Edo in which prostitution was licensed by the shoguns' government from 1617 – ceasing only in 1958. Elegant young women, often in dazzling costumes, are represented in conformity with ideals of beauty which only applied within the confines of the Yoshiwara, a prime locus of the 'floating world' (fig 5). Manufactured traditions, distinctive modes of dress and deportment, and even a unique patois, characterised the closed nature of the community into which girls as young as seven were sold for training as *kamuro* (apprentices). Having graduated to one of the three ranks of *shinzo* (newly constructed) in her early teens,



Above

Figure 3
Utagawa Kunisada, *Woman from a Samurai Household on a Visit to a Shrine*, early 1830s, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Above

Figure 4
Katsushika Hokusai, *Vases, Trays and Materials for Flower Arrangement; The Flower Shell*, Unknown artist after 1821, colour woodblock print, from: *Genroku kasen kai-awase* (A Matching Game with the Genroku Poem Shells), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Above

Figure 5
Keisai Eisen, *Imayō sugata kagami* (Voluptuous Forms in the Mirror Following the Latest Trends), 1815–42, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Above

Figure 6
Keisai Eisen, *Ōgiya uchi Hanaōgi Yoshino Tatsuta* (Courtesan Hanaōgi of the Ōgiya House and Her Two Apprentices Yoshino and Tatsuta), 1815–42, colour woodblock print, from: (*Shin-Yoshiwara zensei*) *Shichikenjin* (Seven 'Sages' of the Seven Houses, at the Pinnacle of Shin-Yoshiwara), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

a girl might be a prostitute in her own right, or wait upon an *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan) as part of a larger retinue (fig 6).

The formative years of these indentured children were spent being instructed in the social graces and cultural attainments deemed necessary for a courtesan whose clientele might include the elite of Edo society. Calligraphy and the composition of poetry featured on the curriculum, sometimes under the tutelage of respected teachers. However, such intellectual cultivation was only the corollary of instruction from a *yarite* (brothel supervisor) in the sale of sex.

Mythologised in the West and often mistakenly conflated with geisha (entertainers – who did at times function as prostitutes), the courtesans of the Yoshiwara drew visitors from all over Japan. *Ukiyo-e* promoted the cult-like following of these women, idealising their beauty, praising their accomplishments and, almost without exception, ignoring the unsanitary and unsavoury aspects of life in the Yoshiwara. Nonetheless, combined with the *yoshiwara saiken* (Yoshiwara guidebooks) and *yūjo hyobanki* (courtesan critiques), providing detailed information of the brothels and their denizens, *bijin-ga* provide a detailed picture of life within the 'pleasure quarter'.

Musha-e: Warriors

Whereas the Heian period (794–1185) had been marked by relative stability and the efflorescence of aristocratic culture, the following centuries of Japanese history were punctuated by military disturbances as the power of the throne dissipated and provincial warlords vied for power. Despite the founding of the first, Kamakura, shogunate in 1185, it was not until the founding of the third shogunate, that of the Tokugawa in 1603, that Japan would enjoy a prolonged peace.

The intervening period of instability saw the rise of a military caste, the samurai, whose feudal relationships with provincial lords became one of the defining characteristics of Japanese society. But Tokugawa Japan had little need for the hereditary samurai, whose militancy and feudal ties were at odds with the prevailing centralisation of power. And though the name of the shoguns' government, *bakufu* (tent government), pointed to the military origins of the system, Japan's continuing internal peace made the inherited duties of the samurai caste increasingly redundant.

Nevertheless samurai had come to occupy a special place in the popular imagination and tales of heroic deeds were repeated in literary accounts, including the *Kanadehon Chushingura*, the *Heike Monogatari* and tales of the exploits of the 12th-century hero Minamoto no Yoshitsune. The latter figure appears in the design for a triptych by Utagawa Yoshitora (active 1850–70), seated at the apex of the appropriately titled *Eiyū-zoroi* (A Gathering of Heroes) (fig 7). Not all subjects were exclusively Japanese: the rich legacy of Japan's historic relations with China included numerous literary accounts of ancient heroes, one of whom, Chohi (Chinese: Zhang Fei), features in an



Left

Figure 7
Utagawa Yoshitora, *Eiyū-zoroi* (A Gathering of Heroes), 1860, ink, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1971.



Left

Figure 8
Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Sangokushi Chōhan hashi no zu* (The Three Kingdoms: Chōhan Bridge), 1852, colour woodblock prints, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the relatives of Mr TV Gulliver, 1939.



Far left

Figure 9
Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Nakamura Utaemon IV as Kō no Moronao, under Attack by Onoe Kikugorō III as Oboshi Yuranosuke*, 1847, colour woodblock print, from: *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Left

Figure 10
Utagawa Kunimori II, *Actor Sawamura Gennosuke II*, 1817-31, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

impressive triptych by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861), showing the battle of the Chohan Bridge from the 3rd century (fig 8).

Yakusha-e: Actors

Closely related to *musha-e* are the pictures of actors of the *kabuki* theatre. Performing plays which often draw on historic events (albeit carefully altered in order to avoid censorship by the government, such as the *Kanadehon Chushingura* (fig 9)) *kabuki* was the object of widespread enthusiasm among the *chōnin*. As a result, *yakusha-e* were the most popular of all *ukiyo-e* prints.

Unlike the elite *nō* theatre, *kabuki* had its origins in popular open-air dances performed on the dry bed of the Kano River in Kyoto in the early 17th century. While it borrowed from the traditions of both *nō* and the comic *kyōgen* theatres, *kabuki* rapidly evolved its own conventions and repertoire, even diversifying to include regional variations: the *aragoto* (rough stuff) of Edo and *wagoto* (soft stuff) of the Kamigata (Kobe, Kyoto and Osaka). Such was the popularity of *kabuki* that, as early as 1629, the government banned actresses; only to then ban, in 1652, the attractive youths who had taken their place in the affections of the audiences. As such, *kabuki* relied on an all-male cast featuring *onnagata* (woman person; men cast in female roles) (fig 11).

Appearing at the very end of the 17th century with the first single-sheet *ukiyo-e* prints, images of *kabuki* actors remained a perennial favourite with fans of theatre and *ukiyo-e* in general. Popular actors enjoyed ‘rock star’ status among devotees, who collected images of their idols both in and out of role (fig 10). The government periodically sought to stifle the cult around the theatre and its stars, targeting related *ukiyo-e* during both the Kansei (1790s) and Tenpo (1841–3) reforms. In the former, close-up portraits in the *ōkubi-e* (large head pictures), such as those depicting actors, were banned; while in the latter, portraits of actors were banned outright. It is a measure of the popularity of such prints that publishers and artists saw fit to risk punishment by circumventing the law – placing their subjects in historic or literary settings in order to overcome the prohibitions of the shogunate.

Fūkeiga: Landscapes

In marked contrast to the internecine strife of the preceding centuries, the prolonged peace of the Edo period (1600–1868) made travel through the country relatively safe. At the same time, the development of the Gokaidō (five highways) facilitated the regular movement of *daimyo* between their provincial seats and the capital and made travel much easier. A network of inns and restaurants sprang up, forming an association in 1804, servicing travellers who, defying the government’s opposition, often concealed their leisure travel under the guise of pilgrimages (fig 12).

Fūkeiga (landscape pictures) developed into a distinct genre from the late 1820s, in part reflecting the growing interest in domestic tourism, itself stemming from an older tradition of *meisho* ('named' or famous places), but prompted in the main by the widespread availability of the synthetic, fade-resistant dye *bero-ai* (Berlin or Prussian blue).⁹ Landscape elements had long been incorporated in prints of other subjects, notably as backdrops to depictions of beauties. The emergence and sudden perfection of the genre in the work of Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Ando Hiroshige (1797–1858), and the subsequent spread of their prints to the West, has given the genre worldwide fame.

An example of Hokusai's masterly union of subject and technique is seen in the print, *Sōshū Shichiri-ga-hama* (Shichiri-ga-hama [beach] in Suruga Province) (fig 13) from the *Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, of which the famous *Kanagawa-oki nami-ura* (*Under the Wave, off Kanagawa*, also known as *The Great Wave*) is also part. The view of Shichiri-ga-hama terminates in the monumental form of Mount Fuji, floating upon a bank of clouds, while the tension between the scale of the trees and huts in the middle ground reveals a certain playfulness. Executed entirely in *bero-ai*, the careful gradations of the single colour – achieved through *bokashi*, the judicious wiping of ink over the surface the block – demonstrate the painterly potential of this graphic art.

Kāchoga: Pictures of Flowers and Birds

Of the themes canvased in the exhibition, *kāchoga* perhaps best illustrates the influence of the historic schools of painting that flourished in Japan, including Kanō, Rimpa and Shijō. Each school was part of a long tradition influenced by examples of Chinese painting imported into the country, and through the small number of Chinese artists who had been active in Japan. In both countries, paintings of flowers and birds formed one of the three principal genres in traditional painting, alongside landscape and human figures.

In turn, *ukiyo-e* masters of *kāchoga* drew on these traditions to form a unique vision in print, revealing flowers, birds and other animals in vivid forms. However, recording the physical reality of any subject was not the sole intent of the *kāchoga* artist, who also sought to capture the spiritual and cultural significance of the subject. Freightened with meaning, images of flowers, birds and other animals fulfil dual functions. On the one hand, these images give expression to an aesthetic interest in nature, though not for the purposes of botanical or ornithological accuracy. On the other, subjects were linked to times of the year (the seasons and the months of the lunar calendar), the Chinese zodiac, personality traits and specific events such as festivals.

The small number of *kāchoga* in the Gallery's collections permit only a narrow view of this rich genre. Nevertheless, the four woodblock examples included in the exhibition draw our attention to the finesse



Left

Figure 11
Utagawa Kunisada, *Actors Sawamura Tanosuke III as Koshimoto Okaru, Bandō Hikosaburō V as Hayano Kanpei, and Nakamura Gantarō as Sagisaka Bannai*, 1862, colour woodblock prints, from: *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the relatives of Mr T V Gulliver, 1939.



Left

Figure 12
Andō Hiroshige, *Ōyama, Fujisan, Kōrai-ji-yama* (No. 8, Hiratsuka: Mount Ōyama, Mount Fuji and the Mountain of Kōrai-ji), 1850–1, colour woodblock print, from: *Tōkaidō-Gojūsan tsugi no uchi* (The Tōkaidō Road – The Fifty-three Stations), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Left

Figure 13
Katsushika Hokusai, *Sōshū Shichiri-ga-hama* (Shichiri-ga-hama [beach] in Suruga Province), 1830–33, colour woodblock print, from: *Fugaku sanjurokkei* (Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji), Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Far left

Figure 14

Andō Hiroshige, *Swallows and Iris Blossoms*, 1853, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Middle left

Figure 15

Andō Hiroshige, *Sparrow and Wisteria*, 19th century, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Left

Figure 16

Utagawa Toyoshige, *Falcon on a Pine Branch, Rising Sun Above*, 1790–1804, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

with which individual animals (in this case, all birds) were wrought in print, capturing the lively movement of swallows on the wing (fig 14), or the playful glance of a sparrow perched on dangling wisteria in bloom (fig 15). The much larger impression of *Falcon on a Pine Branch, Rising Sun Above* by Utagawa Toyoshige (1777–1835) presents a view of the elaborate arrangement of feathers on the wings and tail of a falcon (fig 16), apparently mimicking the *mikaeri* (looking back) pose used in *bijin-ga*. Each, in its own way, evokes distinct moments in time and, in the last case, the noble mien of an animal long associated with the aristocratic and military elites.

Like the related exhibition, this essay points to the richness of Japanese woodblock prints and the milieu in which they were generated. *Ukiyo-e* enjoy a close relationship to painting in the same genre, and it is worth noting that the sensibility that animated woodblock artists drove the work not only of contemporary painters (and the two were often one and the same), but also writers, poets and playwrights. And while Japan had been forced to open to the world in the mid-1850s, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 fundamentally altered the complexion of Japanese society through a radical policy of modernisation which drew heavily on European models. As such, the six thematic groups examined here provide a compelling record of Japanese culture during the closing phase of the Edo period.

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1. The first exhibition drew on the collections of Harry Sproston Dudley and Captain G Humphreys-Davies, but only works from the latter collection can be safely identified among the Gallery's collection. Of the 121 catalogue entries, 39 can be securely identified against works currently in the Mackelvie Trust Collection. See *Catalogue of a Loan Collection of Japanese Colour Prints Owned by Mr H S Dudley and Capt G Humphreys-Davies*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, 1927.

Some of the works identified in the 1927 catalogue, and which are now in the Mackelvie Trust Collection, featured again in the 1934 exhibition, indicating that they had not been acquired by the Mackelvie Trust at that time. See *Catalogue of a Loan Collection of Japanese Colour Prints from the Collection of Capt G Humphreys-Davies*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, 1934. Dudley died in 1933 and his collection did not feature in the 1934 exhibition where, again, the catalogue enables us to identify works from Humphreys-Davies' collection which are now in the Gallery's collection.

2. For a recent study of *shunga*, see Timothy Clark, C Andrew Gerstle, et al (eds), *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, The British Museum Press, London, 2013.
3. Amy Reigle Newland (ed), *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, Hotei Publishing, Amsterdam, 2005, vol 1, p 47, vol 2, p 500.
4. Donald Keene, *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, pp 18–22.
5. Harold Bolitho, 'The Edo Period, 1603–1868' in Reigle Newland, *The Hotei Encyclopedia*, vol 1, p 22–3.
6. For a detailed account of the production process of woodblock prints in the Japanese tradition, see Shiko Sasaki, 'Materials and Techniques', in Reigle Newland, *The Hotei Encyclopedia*, vol 1, pp 325–50.
7. For a concise introduction to *surimono*, see Roger Keyes, *The Art of Surimono: Privately Published Japanese Woodblock Prints and Books in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin*, Sotheby Publications, London, 1985, vol 1, pp 13–40.
8. For an analysis of the different types of copies, and a list of relevant examples: as above, pp 509–21.
9. Ellis Tinios argues that, alone, the growth of leisure travel and publications depicting *meisho* ('named' or famous places) cannot account for the sudden popularity of landscape prints, instead emphasising the newly affordable *bero-ai*, which was both fade-resistant and more stable than traditional blue dyes. See Ellis Tinio, 'Diversification and Further Popularization of the Full-colour Woodblock Print, c1804–68', in Reigle Newland, *The Hotei Encyclopedia*, vol 1, pp 204–5.

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三浦屋揚巻



曲立國色

佐野喜

哭

正

Picturing Beauty

Ukiyo-e, Kimono and Their Manifestations in Western Fashion

Doris de Pont

Left

Figure 1

Utagawa Kunisada, *Miuraya Agemaki*
(*Courtesan Agemaki of the Miuraya House*),
1855, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust
Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Japonism, resulting from an occidental perception of the Japanese aesthetic, emerged in fashionable Western dress in the later part of the 19th century and brought about essential changes in the prevailing ideals of beauty. In stark contrast to the physical strictures of European fashion, which encased the body, kimono, with their loose-cut sleeves and trailing hems, draped around the body and cocooned it. These exotic garments, decorated with bold pictorial images of dragons, blossoms, butterflies and chrysanthemums, and their representations in Japanese woodblock prints or *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world) – specifically the *bijin-ga*, (pictures of beauties) – were catalysts for fundamental change in Western dress.

Japan's self-imposed isolation meant that little was known in the West of Japanese culture prior to the 1860s. When *ukiyo-e* arrived in Europe they were literally a revelation, and these images became central to forming the West's perception of Japan. While the images of landscape, nature, urban life and entertainments inspired the artists of the day, it was the full-colour illustrations of courtesans posing in their opulent layers of printed, painted and embroidered finery that inspired the fashion makers.

This essay examines manifestations of kimono in Western fashion from the influence on fabric design and embellishment to the impact on clothing construction, and considers the use of *bijin-ga*'s visual language to sell this new aesthetic.

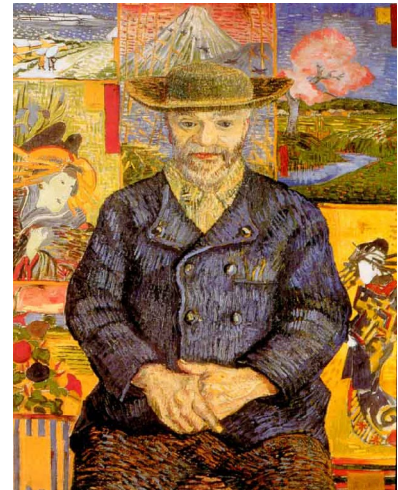
Interest in the Orient was stimulated in the mid-19th century by a new phenomenon – the World Expositions. With the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, London in 1851 as a model, expositions provided an opportunity to show off and sell the industrial prowess of the West and to showcase arts and crafts from far-flung corners of the world, bringing them to the attention of new audiences. So it was that when Japan abandoned its isolationist policy in the mid-19th century all manner of Japanese decorative wares found a ready market in Paris and London. Included in these exports were ceramic pieces which were sometimes wrapped in discarded *ukiyo-e*. Originally produced in multiples for broad consumption, it was these incidental arrivals that came to influence many of the European artists of the day. The prints offered a different aesthetic to Western artists in search of new ways to represent the world. Many of these artists chose to emulate the formal qualities of *ukiyo-e*, abandoning perspective, working with flat

areas of colour, and attempting to catch the experience of movement so richly represented by the images of courtesans and *kabuki* actors, flowing kimono and restless animals. For example, in 1887, Vincent van Gogh painted the portrait *Père Tanguy* (fig 2), showing Tanguy, a dealer of art supplies to the Parisian avant-garde, before a backdrop of *ukiyo-e*, including one which became the subject of Van Gogh's *The Courtesan after Eisen* 1887 (fig 3).

Not only images of kimono but real exemplars also became readily available and entered Western fashion as items of clothing and as textiles for creating new garments. Kimono, which translates simply as 'thing to wear' includes a variety of traditional Japanese garments. In the West in the latter half of the 19th century, however, the kimono was understood only as the loose outer robe seen in *ukiyo-e*. Because of the association with Tokyo's pleasure district, the Yoshiwara, kimono were considered to be not only exotic but also erotic, and were initially relegated to the private realm. Worn loose or loosely tied they became popular as at-home gowns allowing a level of freedom and comfort suited to the informality of that space. With this designated domestic role, images of kimono had not yet made it onto the fashion pages. However, they were sometimes depicted in contemporary paintings, evoking erotic connotations, as in James Tissot's *La Japonaise au bain*, 1864 (fig 4), or a more prosaic cultured ease, such as in Maud Sherwood's intimate *Reading*, 1921 (fig 5).

Silk kimono fabrics, however, did enter the visible fashion story being used for evening dresses and capes by couturière and dressmakers in France and in England. The kimono fabric makers of Japan, some of whom had attended the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, realised the potential in the European market for their products and were actively engaged in selling original Japanese textiles. Meanwhile in Paris, Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895), the first couturier (male dressmaker), had motifs from kimono copied by the silk houses of Lyon for his collections. Bold Japanese style designs of cherry blossoms, irises and chrysanthemums were popular, but also more abstract motifs such as undulating lines representing flowing water. Worth also had fabrics embroidered in the manner of kimono, taking a picturesque approach to this embellishment, visualising the whole garment as a single canvas and allowing asymmetric placement of the design. The silk satin dress with sunbeam and clouds bead embroidery is a fine example (fig 6).

Worth came to fashion via his experience as a textile merchant, first in England and then in Paris. When he opened his own couture salon in 1858 he styled himself as artist and *auteur* presenting entire collections of his own ideas in his salon. While Worth is credited with some modifications to the fashionable form, he generally adhered to the highly corseted hour glass figure of the time. It was his introduction and mastery of asymmetry in decoration and the consequent need to drape and close garments off-centre that permanently changed the Western fashion aesthetic and is his enduring design legacy.



Above

Figure 2
Vincent van Gogh, *Père Tanguy*, 1887, oil on canvas, Musée Rodin, Paris.



Above

Figure 3
Vincent van Gogh, *The Courtesan (after Eisen)*, 1887, oil on canvas, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



Above

Figure 4
James Tissot, *La Japonaise au Bain*, 1864, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon.

Top

Figure 5
Maud Sherwood, *Reading*, 1921, oil on canvas, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Mr and Mrs W J Hutchinson, 1966.



Above

Figure 6
Charles Frederick Worth, 1894, Kyoto Costume Institute, photo by Taishi Hirokawa.

Until this time the ideal was predicated on the classical idea of beauty with its qualities of symmetry and harmony. Left-right asymmetry occurred rarely in either textile or clothing design before Worth began to draw inspiration from the decoration and form of the kimono for his creations. His celebrity client list meant these new designs were seen at public events such as the theatre and opera as well as at the horse races at Longchamp, one of the glamour events of the annual social calendar. This ensured that his work was written about in women's magazines, sketched, photographed and circulated widely. In this way Worth's stylistic reach was considerable, extending as far as the United States and even to New Zealand where we can see, in this 1892 two-piece dress with its simulated overdress, a nod to the draping, wrapping and asymmetric closure of kimono (fig 7).

The Japanese *kimono* is constructed from a single length of woven fabric about 36 centimetres wide and 11 metres long, which is cut into seven straight pieces. Two panels extend up the front, over the shoulder and down the back. These are joined by a seam which is visible in Keisai Eisen's *Nakamanji-rō Yatsuhashi* (Cortesan Yatsuhashi of the Nakamanji-ro House) (fig 8) and is the reason for the distinctive neckband which stands proud of the neck. Two lengths form the sleeves and two more form the front overlaps while the final panel is folded to form the neckband. These pieces are joined together with straight seams which produces a flat garment most appropriately stored folded as seen in Eisens, *Imayō sugata kamagi* (Voluptuous Forms in the Mirror Following the Latest Trends Image) (fig 9). The kimono is a two-dimensional garment that requires a body to animate it and give it its third dimension.

In contrast, Western garments are made by cutting out shapes from fabric which are sewn together with curved and shaped seams to create a three-dimensional object that approximates the human form. The arrival of kimono in the West therefore impacted fundamentally on Western fashion design at the beginning of the 20th century by providing a template for refashioning the relationship between the body and clothing. Evident in *bijin-ga* kimono creates a certain understanding of the body as something to be wrapped, not bound. The liberation of the female body from the constrictions of the corset, first proposed by the rationalists and clothing reform movement of the second half of the 19th century, moved from fringe activism into the realm of fashion.

With ever-expanding industrialisation growing the economy, the 20th century saw an increasing and broadening demand for fashionable attire, which was stimulated by the emergence of a fashion industry and new forms of marketing and retailing. Shops and the new department stores installed large picture windows in order to display the latest fashions, creating demand for a constant flow of new styles. Fashion was driven by a combination of social emulation and inspiration from illustrators such as those who contributed to the *Gazette du Bon Ton*, a French publication that sought to compose



Above

Figure 7
Unknown maker, c1892, Two-piece Dress worn by Julia Torrens. Image from the New Zealand Fashion Museum collection online, courtesy of Felicity Jill Barry.



Above

Figure 8
Keisai Eisen, *Nakamanji-rō Yatsuhashi* (Courtesan Yatsuhashi of the Nakamanji-ro House), 1815–42, colour woodblock print, from: *Keisei Gokenjin* (Courtans of Five Houses) Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Above

Figure 9
Keisai Eisen, *Imayō sugata kamagi* (Voluptuous Forms in the Mirror Following the Latest Trends), 1815–42, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Above

Figure 10
Paul Iribe, *Les Robes de Paul Poiret (Plate II)*, 1908, pochoir print.

the silhouette of the time by inviting couturiers and painters to collaborate with illustrations in a new minimal visual style characterised by strong delineations and flat colour surfaces of Japanese *ukiyo-e*.

The image of a beautiful woman looking back over her shoulder, familiar from Japanese *mikaeri bijin*, appears frequently in Western fashion drawings and photographs. These appeared in magazines, which also carried advertisements and described the appearance of celebrities at the theatre, the races and fashionable summer resorts. In an interesting parallel, woodblock prints had been the most common mass medium in Japan with artists creating images for both decorative and commercial purposes. Kimono makers, purveyors of cosmetics, *kabuki* performances and even the pleasure houses of the Yoshiwara district commissioned prints from artists such as Eisen to beguile their audiences and to promote their wares (fig 9).

Into this booming fashion environment Paul Poiret introduced his radical new silhouette in 1906 (fig 10). Freed from the corset for the first time since the Renaissance (with the brief exception of the Regency period), his garments draped and wrapped the natural body. While Poiret drew creative inspiration for his designs from the Orient more generally, the creation of his ‘column’ silhouette had its origins in the physical female form as depicted in *ukiyo-e* (fig 11).

The unemphasised bust and unconstrained waist, enveloped rather than encased in material, proffered a new youthful line. Poiret adopted the obvious external characteristics of the kimono: layering; the creation of volume; sleeves with a loose cut; trailing hems; and asymmetry by way of a crossover closure or the irregular distribution of colours and pattern on sections of a garment. Features from kimono were widely applied in various combinations by Poiret, and a cohort of his contemporaries, to create evening toilettes and day dresses which swathed the body (fig 12).

It is, however, the deconstruction of the kimono that is more significant than the adaptation and incorporation of its details into the Western fashion lexicon. By reducing kimono to its original flat panels of fabric Poiret was seeking to drape and stitch together a new fashion narrative that privileged the fall of the fabric over the fit, and simple lines over tailoring. This meant that the emphasis and structure no longer centred on the waist but on the shoulders, which now carried the garment. With rectangles of cloth falling from the shoulders it was the natural drape of the fabric and the body beneath it which provided the garment with a third dimension. Transforming flat panels of fabric into simple dresses fundamentally changed fashion, freeing women from the physical constraints imposed by corsets and rigid construction, allowing for unfettered physicality and participation in an active life. The modern woman who began to engage in work outside the home and to participate in sport and physical leisure pursuits, such as dancing, had a new wardrobe to accommodate that change in lifestyle. Fluid dresses were adorned



Above

Figure 11
Utagawa Kunisada, *Woman Trimming Her Nails*,
 1843–5, colour woodblock print, Mackelvie
 Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki.



Top

Figure 12
Paul Poiret, Evening Dress, 1910–11,
 Kyoto Costume Institute, photo by Takashi
 Hatakeyama.



Above

Figure 13
Unknown maker, c1926, Flapper Dress owned
 by Josephine McGuire, image from the New
 Zealand Fashion Museum collection online,
 courtesy of the Brown Family.

with sequins, fringing and tassels to emphasise motion while draped straight or bias cut panels allowed movement (fig 13).

The simplification of cut also paved the way for mass production, which now required a less tailored fit, reducing the cost and making the latest styles widely accessible. Poiret introduced a way of dressing which invited a new way of being and at the heart of this modern fashionable identity was kimono and its representations in *ukiyo-e*.

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