

## **Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Prints**

*On view October 30, 2011–January 8, 2012*



Kabukidō Enkyō, Japanese, 1749–1803, *Ichikawa Yaezō III as Umeōmaru*, 1796 color woodblock print, Bequest of Richard P. Gale 74.1.192

**“Edo Pop” reveals the powerful allure of ukiyo-e prints through the MIA’s extensive collection, and includes exciting ukiyo-e-inspired contemporary works of art.**

### **MINNEAPOLIS, MN, OCTOBER 19, 2011**

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) is home to one of the world’s great collections of *ukiyo-e* (“pictures of the floating world”) prints. The museum’s new exhibition, “Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Prints,” opening October 30, 2011, and running through January 8, 2012, features more than 160 masterworks that reveal the great breadth of ukiyo-e production as well as the individual artistry of about 40 artists. Organized thematically, the exhibition provides a kaleidoscopic view of popular culture in pre-modern Japan.

“Pop Art” usually describes the artistic movement of the 1950s, when artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein gleaned inspiration from contemporary urban life, mass-produced consumer products, and slick advertising. Picturing film stars and comic-book heroes in bright colors and crisp forms, Pop Art referred largely to the popular culture from which the movement emerged.

“Pop” also aptly describes ukiyo-e produced in Japan during the Edo period (1615–1868), which reflected the tastes and proclivities of a rising class of urban commoners, known as *chōnin*. Chōnin merchants and artists grew rich providing goods and services to the inhabitants of Japan’s rapidly growing cities. Strict

stratification of Japanese society, however, prevented prosperous townspeople from advancing socially despite their wealth. As a result, many pursued hedonistic pleasures and pastimes.

Most ukiyo-e artists created both paintings and designs for woodblock prints, depicting the pleasures and pastimes associated with the floating world. Fine paintings commanded high prices, but mass-produced woodblock prints were within the reach of almost everyone. Low cost alone, however, did not account for the immense popularity of ukiyo-e prints. The subversive subject matter made them irresistibly intriguing. Images of women, especially entertainers and the denizens of the licensed (and unlicensed) brothels, were purchased as reminders of their sex appeal and fashionable style. Depictions of actors were procured by devotees of Kabuki, the robust and lowbrow theater.

Other figural themes included sumo wrestlers, dandies and male prostitutes, ghosts and demons, mythological and legendary heroes, and ordinary townspeople engaged in seasonal pastimes. Consumer products were featured in these images, including the latest fashions and textiles, makeup, elegant pipes, lacquers, ceramics, clocks, rare plants and flowers, and even pets. Landscapes, too, became an important sub-genre, first in the form of illustrated guidebooks in the 18th century and then as single-sheet prints in the 19th. Interest in landscapes reflected the government's loosening of restrictions on travel, prompting city dwellers to take to the road in search of adventure and exotic pleasures.

Ukiyo-e masters evolved a distinctive style that featured fluid yet descriptive outlines, novel vantage points, bold areas of clear color unimpeded by *chiaroscuro*, and audacious compositions with off-center subjects and dramatic cropping. Meanwhile, block carvers and printers developed innovative printing techniques. Consequently, ukiyo-e images were fresh and contemporary, appealing to the popular tastes of the townspeople.

"Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Prints" also features works by contemporary artists inspired by ukiyo-e and the social and conceptual underpinnings that inform them. Iona Roseal Brown, based in Washington, D.C., sees parallels between hip-hop culture and the floating world. Graffiti artist Gajin Fujita portrays East Los Angeles gang members as Japanese warriors against a backdrop of heavily tagged walls. Nagano-based artist Tabaimo focuses on notions of transience and estrangement in her animated video "Hanabi-ra" (Flower Petal), which appropriates imagery from ukiyo-e prints. Yoshitomo Nara playfully adulterates copies of historic prints to create new meaning and social commentary. By digitally stitching together hundreds of images, Londoner Emily Allchurch creates breathtaking views inspired by prints in Utagawa Hiroshige's series *100 Views of Edo*. Other contemporary artists in the show are Julian Opie, Akira Yamaguchi, Chiho Aoshima, Gus Foster, and Bidou Yamaguchi. Their works demonstrate that ukiyo-e remains a vital artistic force, as relevant today as when it was created by Japan's pre-modern Pop artists.

The exhibition is curated by Matthew Welch, Ph.D., the MIA's deputy director and chief curator, and curator of Japanese and Korean art. The museum has nearly 3,000 ukiyo-e prints, the best of which are featured in the catalogue, *Worldly Pleasures, Earthly Delights: Japanese Prints from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* (Minneapolis: 2011), which accompanies the exhibition.

*This exhibition is organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Lead Sponsorship provided by the Friends of the Institute.*

## **BONJOUR JAPON: A PARISIAN LOVE AFFAIR WITH JAPANESE ART**

**Opening October 1, 2011**

"Bonjour Japon: A Parisian Love Affair with Japanese Art" examines the infatuation with Japanese art among French artists during the last half of the 19th century. These artists did not simply mimic Japanese art, but confirmed ideas that were percolating in the vibrant artistic environment in Paris at the time.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, French, 1864–1901, *Ambassadeurs: Aristide Bruant dans son cabaret*, 1892, color lithograph, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund P.13,197

the Eiffel Tower for the 1889 World's Fair in Paris through its eventual incorporation into the landscape of the city. An interactive computer screen will allow visitors to see all 36 of Rivière's views. This option is also available on the museum's Web site ([artsmia.org](http://artsmia.org)) and visitors' smart phones.

"Bonjour Japon" is curated by Lisa Michaux, Ph.D., former associate curator in the Department of Prints & Drawings at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

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