Memory and Modernity:

Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints of the Natural World

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March 3–April 15, 2023

Curated by:

Ellie Mariani

Sydney Nguyen

Ava Noel Zadrima

THE TROUT GALLERY

THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

Carlisle, Pennsylvania

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Ren Wei
Assistant Professor of Art and Art History

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Ren Wei

The idea that the Japanese have an inherent affinity with nature, and that this affinity characterizes Japanese culture, is a widespread myth. Yet, what more appropriately characterizes this relationship between nature and its representation in Japan is the concept of secondary nature (*nijiteki shizen*) proposed by the literary scholar Haruo Shirane.[1] This seeming harmony with nature is not an inherent trait of the Japanese, but a historical construction related to *waka* poetry and other literary genres. This kind of re-created or represented nature became a substitute for a more primary nature that was, in fact, rarely experienced by the elite who lived in urban centers throughout Japanese history. The pictorial conventions developed out of this culture of secondary nature persisted into the modern period, when vivid depictions of birds, flowers, insects, and other animals entered the Euro-American market in large quantities. This exhibition showcases prints depicting these living beings created between the 1890s and the 1950s. Balancing naturalism with artifice, they honored the prestigious tradition while also innovating the genre.

The curators hesitate to use the word "nature" in the context of this exhibition, in part because the word does not exist as a category or subject in East Asian art, and in part because the word "nature," or rather "naturalness" (C: *ziran*, J: *shizen*), denotes not only the spontaneous generation of geophysical and biological phenomena, but also the behavior of human beings in East Asia. The term does not imply the longstanding Western associations of nature as a divine creation, an Edenic realm, a maternal fecundity, or a place of pastoral ease.[2] None of the artists in this exhibition actually observed what they depicted. They adopted motifs from pre-existing paintings and design templates and adapted them to a more globalized audience.

The traditional term for depictions of flora and fauna is "bird-and-flower" in East Asia, however, the genre can include almost all animals and plants. The majority of Chinese paintings produced in the Song dynasty (960–1279), for example, was in this category. Rich in symbolisms, they were created to mark auspicious events, aid the composition of poetry at elite gatherings, and commemorate the passing of family and friends. In Japan, the repertoire gradually began to incorporate non-native species, whose lack of seasonal association and poetic meaning provided an opportunity for innovation. This exhibition includes a combination of iconic age-old motifs, such as the red-crowned cranes, with newer ones. One example is the java sparrow, or *bunchō* in Japanese, which appears in two prints by the designer Ohara Koson (Shōson, 1877–1945). Java

Fig. 1. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Java Sparrow and Rose Bush*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 x 6¾ in. (25.4 x 17.15 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.7 (cat. 6).

sparrow was introduced to Japan in the seventeenth century as a popular caged bird known for its distinct white cheeks and thick pink bill.[3] In the first print, Koson pairs the bird with roses against a pitch-black background (fig. 1). This java sparrow, appearing entirely white, is a color morph of the bird from controlled breeding. The fluffy white body offsets the black backdrop, creating a strong contrast reminiscent of the colorful designs on black lacquer.

In Koson's second design, the curious bird stares right at us (fig. 2). This frontal view highlights the puffy white cheeks and renders the bird almost self-conscious of our gaze. Koson, however, did not invent this kind of frontal depiction. The eighteenth-century painter Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799), for example, depicted cranes from three different viewpoints. The third image is a frontal view (fig. 3). Frontal views of humans and animals were rare, and they often served to demonstrate the painter's skills as a draftsman.[4] It also adds an

Fig. 2. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Java Sparrow and Magnolia*, 1920s.Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14½ x 7½ in. (36.83 x 19.05 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.10 (cat. 17).

anthropomorphic irreverence to the bird, much in the same way as Koson's java sparrow created in the 1920s. Since the java sparrow is not associated with a specific season or plant, it could pair more flexibly with any plant in an image to increase its visual appeal. Here, it perches on a branch of magnolia, the white petals of which resemble the shape of the bird's tail inversed.

Many prints in this exhibition would be categorized as *shin-hanga* (new prints), a revival of a traditional method of printmaking beginning in the 1910s. Traditional woodblock prints experienced a decline in the Meiji period (1868–1912) when Japan's rapid modernization process brought new reprographic mediums, such as photography and chromolithography, to compete with woodblock prints.[5]

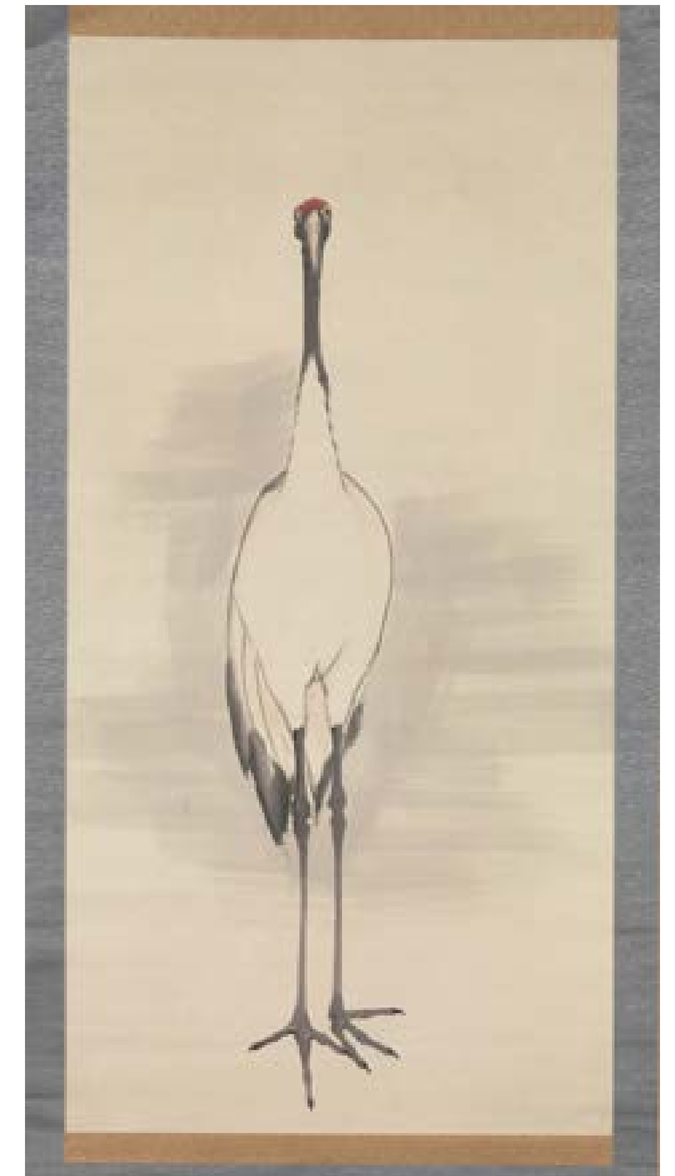

Fig. 3. Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799), *Cranes* (right scroll of a diptych), late 1780s. Pair of hanging scrolls, ink and color on paper, 61 7⁄16 x 35⅞ in. (156 x 91.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fishbein-Bender Collection, gift of T. Richard Fishbein and Estelle P. Bender, 2011, 2011.572.2a, b.

Entrepreneurs and artists, who were often trained in Western-style drawing and painting, began to revitalize the technique, producing prints that were commercially successful in Europe and the United States. The best examples of modern landscape prints by popular designers, for example, cost $5 in 1931.[6] Though less popular than the prints of landscapes and female beauties of the past, the highly decorative qualities of these new "bird-and-flower" prints were in high demand and they guaranteed a broad patron base, ensuring their economic viability. The sales of Japanese prints did not even fall off during the Great Depression. Ellie Mariani's essay articulates the extreme visual appeal of these new "bird-and-flower" prints and how these attractive images

fulfilled an artistic and cultural demand in the West. Her essay also argues that these prints, despite their labor-intensive creation process, were not unattainable for upper-middle-class collectors. They allowed the Americans wider access to Japanese art, which had only been collected by elitist patrons in the past.

Strong sales of modern prints stimulated new production by providing funds and feedback that allowed printmakers to calibrate their art to consumer desire. Dealers also played a crucial role in spreading modern Japanese prints.[7] The Shima Art Company was one such dealer, which established a shop in New York selling Japanese prints as early as 1908.[8] Since the prints in the exhibition were primarily marketed to the American audience, many were stamped with "Made in Japan" on the verso. Dealers would sometimes misattribute designers to prints. Misattribution could be a result of oversight, but a more likely scenario would be to attribute a design of a lesser-known designer to a well-known one, whose work had commercial success. The print attributed to the designer Kōno Bairei (1844–1895) by the Shima Art Company, for example, bears remarkable resemblance to a print designed by Ohara Koson (figs. 4, 5). Bairei was the best-known artist in the field of "bird-and-flower" designs. Many of his illustrated books were exported to the West starting in the late nineteenth century.[9] It is, therefore, perfectly sensible for the Shima Art Company to attribute the design to the established artist, despite the fact that the actual design was more innovative than Bairei's own repertoire.

Fig. 4. Attributed to Kōno Bairei (1844–1895), *Owl Perches before Full Moon*, 1920s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15 x 10¼ in. (38.1 x 26.04 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.9 (cat. 4).

The stylistic diversity in the group contributed to their extreme popularity in the United States ever since their introduction in the early twentieth century. Sydney Nguyen's essay examines the wide range of innovations in these prints, arguing that print publishers and designers kept abreast of the latest trends in global modern art. Nguyen also proposes to soften the binary opposition between *shin-hanga* and *sōsaku-hanga* (creative prints), an opposition that often led to the dismissal of *shin-hanga* as less creative and less progressive than *sōsaku-hanga*. As her essay demonstrates, *shin-hanga* and *sōsaku-hanga* shared commercial qualities and became intertwined in the postwar period. Far from a formulaic revival of older art, *shin-hanga* reflected various cultural and economic concerns in 1920s and 1930s Japan.

In addition to style, the size of these prints also varies. For example, four prints in this exhibition come in the square format, or *shikishiban*, which was a popular format in *surimono*, luxurious, privately commissioned prints in the Edo period (1603–1868). The square format allowed the text and image to appear together in an intimate frame, well suited for images created to accompany poems. It is, therefore, no accident that the frog, one of the most represented creatures in Japanese haikai poetry, appears in a print in the highly poetic square format (fig. 6). In the context of export art, however, this particular format may have had more to do with the illusion of resembling a more luxurious edition and the publisher's desire to offer different sizes for different space needs. After all, it was dominantly a Western practice to frame and hang these prints on walls.

Fig. 5. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Owl*, c. 1928–1930. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9 ¼ x 9 ¹³⁄₁₆ in. (23.5 x 25 cm). The Minneapolis Institute of Art, gift of Paul Schweitzer, P.77.28.41.

One of the most marketable features of these modern animal prints—a feature that was absent in all other genres—is their touching depiction of humor and intimacy. Ava Noel Zadrima's essay explores the enduring theme of humor and intimacy in the representations of the animal world. It demonstrates that these non-anthropocentric depictions of living beings represent a cultural continuity with Japan's past, and that they offered a desirable visual solace with which to temper the rapid modernization in the early twentieth century.

Modern prints produced in the first three decades of the twentieth century were reimagined as a revival of the great prints designed by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) in the 1800s. The two Edo-period designers became popular in the West in the middle of the nineteenth century and their work emerged as the metric against which later prints were judged. Indeed, many designs in the exhibition took inspiration from works of Hokusai and Hiroshige. But the memory of these two designers stopped at similar choices of motif. These modern renderings of the natural world are distinctively different from Edo-period designs. As all three essays in this catalogue demonstrate, they are bold, diverse, and freed from poetry.

Fig. 6. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Frog on Lotus Leaf*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10⅞ x 11⅛ in. (27.62 x 28.26 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.14 (cat. 8).

1 Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 4.

2 Robert L. Thorp and Richard E. Vinograd, *Chinese Art and Culture* (New York: Abrams, 2001), 243.

3 Kawakami Kazuto and Kanouchi Takuya, *Gairaichō handobukku* [The Handbook of Introduced Birds in Japan] (Tokyo: Bun-ichi sōgō shuppan, 2012), 71.

4 Midori Oka, "Maruyama-Shijō: Poetic Symbolism in Naturalistic Painting," in *The Poetry of Nature: Edo Painting from the Fishbein-Bender Collection*, ed. John T. Carpenter (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), 154–55.

5 Amy Reigle Newland, "Shin-hanga: Innovation from Tradition," in *Printed to Perfection: Twentieth-Century Japanese Prints from the Robert O. Muller Collection*, ed. Joan B. Mirviss et al (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004), 19.

6 Joan B. Mirviss, "A Tribute to Robert O. Muller (1911–2003)," *Impressions* 25 (2003): 112.

7 Kendall H. Brown, "Marketing Shin Hanga in North America, 1920 to 1940," in *Waves of Renewal: Modern Japanese Prints*, 1900 to 1960, eds. Chris Uhlenbeck, Amy Reigle Newland, and Maureen de Vries (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2016), 47.

8 Kotaro Sumii, "Shima Art Company, The History of My Grandparents' Business." http://shotei.com/publishers/shima/history.htm.

9 Jun Suzuki and Ellis Tinios, *Understanding Japanese Woodblock-Printed Illustrated Books: A Short Introduction to Their History, Bibliography and Format* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 31.

Selling Shin-hanga

Ellie Mariani

Collectors and artists in the West loved *shin-hanga* (literally, "new prints") when these modernized Japanese woodblock prints flooded the European and American markets in the early twentieth century. The surface beauty and technical virtuosity of *shin-hanga* were unmatched by anything that the West had produced by that time. The print titled *Irises* by the designer Ohara Koson (1877–1945) from the 1920s in the exhibition best demonstrates these qualities (fig. 1). Fine gradation of several hues of blue and the buildup of pigments on the delicate veins in the petals render the flowers palpable. The flowers on either side of the print are shown in full bloom with prominent sepals, whereas the middle one is yet to bloom. A light shade of blue displays the underside of their leaves. The saturated flowers contrast vividly against the light beige backdrop and the light green stalks.

Irises are one of the most depicted motifs in Japanese art. *Shin-hanga* prints recycled many such popular subjects rich in symbolisms associated with poetry. As a print exclusively created for the Euro-American market, the irises' traditional symbolisms mattered less than their visual appeal in the design. This essay argues that modern prints of the natural world produced in Japan for the export market fulfilled a cultural and artistic gap in Euro-American art. Despite losing their rich poetic and seasonal meanings, these images served as inspiration for artists, designers, and architects in the West. They also allowed less privileged enthusiasts to access modern Japanese visual art.

Fascination with All Things Japanese

Japonisme is a term coined by the French art critic, Phillippe Burty (1830–1890), and it refers to a phenomenon that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when the West was fascinated by all things Japanese. The craze for Japanese art coincided with the trend of moving away from the conservative academic mode of painting. Modern-minded European artists yearned to learn new techniques, forms, and ideas in order to steer away from the dominant illusionistic principles of Greco-Roman art that had been the primary basis for European art up until that point.[1] Japonisme was a major movement in Western art that encouraged the appreciation and systematic study of Japanese art. The influence of Japanese art became a trademark in many works produced in the West at the time.

The craze for modern Japanese prints depicting the natural world in the early twentieth century is a continuation of nineteenth-century Japonisme. In order to understand this fascination, we need to trace the historical influences of bird-and-flower images consumed or produced in the Euro-American context. First, Japanese art had a great impact on ceramics and lacquerware. An example of bird-and-flower work in Europe is a set of necklace, earring, and broach designed by the French goldsmith and jeweler Alexis Falize (1811–1898) (fig. 2).[2] Produced in 1867, the set took inspiration from Japanese bird-and-flower prints, borrowing iconic animal motifs such as the rooster and the bamboo in the pendants. The enameling technique is known as *cloisonné*; the precise outlines on the design are the result of tiny "cloisons." They are small cells of soldered wire which the enamel has been applied to and fired. Falize had gone to the Japanese Court at the London Exhibition in 1862 and became enamored with Japanese art.[3] His set was shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, where the art collector and dealer Siegfried Bing (1838–1905) promoted Japanese art and furthered the phenomena of Japonisme. Falize's adoption of Japanese bird-and-flower images exemplifies Japonisme in Europe during the late nineteenth century.

Fig. 1. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Irises*, 1926. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15¼ x 10¼ in. (38.74 x 26.04 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.13 (cat. 15).

The second example of Japanese art's influence is the famous Peacock Room, now on display at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The Peacock Room was originally commissioned by the shipping magnate Frederick Leyland (1831–1892), who asked his friend, the expatriate American painter James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) to complete the renovations on his dining room.[4] Inspired by Japanese art, Whistler designed two dark blue murals depicting peacocks in golden pigment. The flamboyant peacock, or peafowl, has auspicious and religious symbolisms in traditional Japanese art, often denoting fecundity and wealth. Peacocks in Buddhist iconography are considered to be guardians from disaster and hardship due to their ability to safely consume poisonous plants, snakes, and insects.[5] The stunning contrasting colors and the use of peacocks in the room reflect the influence of Japanese art in Whistler's creation.

One of the most famous Japanese works depicting the natural world is Kitagawa Utamaro's (1753–1806) *Picture Book of Crawling Creatures* (*Ehon mushi erami*). This illustrated book was first collected in the West by the Englishman Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who was an avid botanist and collector of natural history specimens. His presidency of the Royal Society enabled him to support foreign expeditions to collect specimens from all over the world, including Utamaro's illustrated book of insects. The book contains illustrations of plants and insects, as well as *kyōka* poems, a parodic poetic style popular in Japan's Edo Period (1603–1868). In total, the book contains 15 woodblock prints and demonstrates Utamaro's incredible skill at drawing, as well as the virtuosity of woodblock printing techniques at this time. Sir Banks, however, did not understand the book's usage in the poetic context in Japan, treating it solely as a meticulous study of nature. Utamaro's book ushered in a new interest in illustrated books depicting what was considered as flora and fauna in the West.

Fig. 2. Alexis Falize (1811–1890), *Suite of Jewellery*, 1867–ca.1880. Cloisonné enamel on metal, necklace, earrings, brooch. Victoria and Albert Museum, bequeathed by Lady Lane, M.5:1to5-2016.

One of most prominent proponents of Japonisme in Europe was the painter Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890). He was hired as a sales representative by the aforementioned Japanese art dealer Siegfried Bing, whose gallery was filled with Japanese paintings, prints, and decorative art. Van Gogh also depicted the most iconic plant in Japanese art, the iris, in a painting from 1889 (fig. 3). It reflects van Gogh's knowledge of older Japanese works depicting the flower, such as the painting *Irises at Yatsuhashi* (Eight Bridges) created by the painter Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716) (fig. 4). The abstract flowers in Van Gogh's painting pay homage to Kōrin's work in their astonishing flatness.

Bing was instrumental in the collection and dealership of Japanese artworks.[6] For example, he held the first-ever *ukiyo-e* exhibition in Paris, which featured more than 700 prints and more than 400 books from different periods in Japanese art. To further circulate Japanese art, he published the journal *Le Japon Artisique* from 1888 to 1891. Bing's display of Japanese objects also included furniture and complete model interiors. He sold Japanese art and objects to many prominent museums and collectors, influencing the

Fig. 3. Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), *Irises*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 29¼ x 37⅛ in. (74.3 x 94.3 cm). The J. Paul Getty Museum, 90.PA.20.

taste of these institutions and individuals with regard to Japanese art. This early exposure to Japanese art and decorative art ensured the later popularity of Japanese modern prints in the West.

Collecting Shin-hanga

This section explores how businessmen and artists in Japan capitalized on this fascination with all things Japanese, which emerged in the nineteenth century, and brought it to new heights in the modern period as they tailored to Western taste. The term *shin-hanga* literally means "new prints," but can also be translated as "revival prints." After the First World War, Japan emerged as a successful ally of the victorious nations; this might have been the moral boost artists needed to continue their craft. Prints were aimed at both the domestic and foreign markets and evolved through cross-cultural influences between Japan and Western countries. Two great advocates of *shin-hanga* were the publisher Watanabe Shōzaburō (1885–1962) and the Western-style painter Yoshida Hiroshi (1876–1950).

The publisher Watanabe Shōzaburō was the inventor of *shin-hanga*. His publishing company not only produced new prints, but also reproduced old *ukiyo-e* prints. *Ukiyo-e*, or images of the floating world, depicted the world of entertainments and famous places in Japan. *Shin-hanga* prints continued the traditional labor-intensive process that involved a publisher, a designer, a carver, and a printer. First, the designer would conceive the design in consultation with the publisher. Once the design was finalized, the carver would then carefully carve it onto a key block, which contained all the lines of the design. The printer would then use a printing pad (*baren*) to print the image, controlling the gradations with subtle changes in hand pressure. The printer could enhance the texture and sheen of the image by using various techniques such as embossing and the application of mica powder. Each color would require a separate color block to be carved and printed. In Koson's irises, for example, at least five color blocks were used in addition to the key block. In the West, critics and artists often misunderstood the process, believing that the artist alone was responsible for the creation. Attributing all of the effort to the artist alone also enabled these prints to be considered closer to fine arts, rather than something that was mass produced.

Watanabe's prominence as a publisher enabled him to discover and recruit artists to work for him, including Itō Shinsui (1898–1972), Kawase Hasui (1883–1957), and Ohara Koson. Shinsui concentrated on the subject of female beauties and reworked older traditions to spark a revival in the craft. Hasui primarily worked on landscape prints, creating picturesque images of Japan. Koson was hired to design bird-and-flower prints that would appeal to Western viewers. Koson was born in 1878 and used the name "Koson" up until 1912, when he changed it to "Shōson." Koson studied Japanese style of painting during his training. Watanabe approached him to start designing bird-and-flower woodblock prints in 1926 and his designs proved to be extremely popular among Western viewers.[7]

Fig. 4. Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716), *Irises at Yatsuhashi* (Eight Bridges), after 1709. Pair of six-panel folding screens, ink and color on gold leaf on paper, image (each screen): 64 7⁄16 in. x 11ft. 6¾ in. (163.7 x 352.4 cm), overall (each screen): 70½ in. x 12 ft. 2¼ in. (179.1 x 371.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, Louisa Eldridge McBurney gift, 1953, 53.7.2.

The works of these artists were featured in two *shin-hanga* exhibitions held in Toledo, Ohio, the first in 1930, and the second in 1936. Other than Watanabe, the aforementioned artist, Yoshida Hiroshi also aided in these two occasions to market *shin-hanga* to the American audience. Yoshida was trained as a Western-style painter in Japan. He visited the United States between 1923 and 1925 trying to sell his paintings. During his sojourn in the United States, he realized the great appeal of Japanese woodblock prints among the American viewers. Once back in Japan, Yoshida began to produce woodblock prints, and he participated in organizing the two exhibitions of *shin-hanga* in Toledo.[8] These shows reflected a nationwide permeation of intercultural exchange and interest between American artists and collectors and Japanese artists. The success of the 1930 exhibition of *shin-hanga* at the Toledo Museum of Art led to the consummation of a second exhibition. The exhibitions featured bird-and-flower prints by Ohara Koson, whose prints were cheaper than landscapes, female beauties, and kabuki actors, further allowing a wider access to his designs.

Fig. 5. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Barn Swallow Over Waves*, 1920s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14½ x 7½ in. (36.83 x 19.05 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.11 (cat. 1).

In the United States, the emergence of middle-class consumers in the 1920s paved the way for new collectors of non-Western art, something that had only been possible for the wealthy. The 1920s witnessed vigorous economic growth in the United States. Automobiles and passenger rail vastly improved economic development. The suburbs started to grow and prosper with the help of these new modes of transportation. The expansion of the electric utility network led to new consumer appliances. Many new jobs were created, and more people began to have disposable income that could be used to buy non-essentials. Japanese art, a long-time luxurious object accessible only to wealthy collectors, was now made available in the print form, which, despite the elaborate process, was attainable for middle-class consumers in the United States then.[9]

The U.S. Occupation of Japan between 1945 and 1952 further increased the collecting activity of Japanese prints among those stationed in Japan. Prints became the most appreciated, and easily transportable form of Japanese art among non-Japanese art enthusiasts.[10] Many individual collectors were able to cultivate and develop relationships with museums and galleries in America through their collecting of Japanese modern prints. As a result, major art institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the British Museum, to name a few, were gifted with large collections of modern Japanese prints.[11]

What, then, were the most attractive features of *shin-hanga* depicting the natural world for non-Japanese viewers in the early twentieth century? A work that showcases many characteristics of modernized images of birds and flowers is the print *Barn Swallow over Waves* designed by Ohara Koson in the 1920s (fig. 5). Though Koson did not design this scene from observation, he filled the image with action to capture a fleeting, energetic moment. The barn swallow is depicted between two flaps of its wings. We are allowed a view of its head from underneath, its downward-pointing beak suggests that it is ready to dart down toward the tumultuous swirling ocean waves. The eyes of the swallow are fixated on the whirlpool, perhaps at a prey below the surface of the water. But barn swallows are not fish eaters, they feed on insects and are known to catch them in mid-flight.[12] Therefore, they are particularly known for their aerobatic skills and ability to fly very fast and low over water, with the capability to drink

water and catch prey without stopping. The churning of the wave might be a good drinking spot for this barn swallow.

Three features are responsible for its universal appeal among non-Japanese viewers. First, the bird exists in both East Asia and the United States, making it a popular sight in real life. The print's ability to visualize the bird's acrobatic skills, therefore, is universally appealing. Second, the level of verisimilitude in this print is remarkable. The swallow has smooth, fluid wing strokes, pulling its wingtips back at the end of each flap. The action is full of tension and energy. In contrast to more abstract works produced by the avant-garde artists around this time, this kind of verisimilitude and seeming naturalism could have been more accessible for the viewers. Third, the depiction of the whirlpool is also beautifully stylized, reminiscent of the wave patterns designed by the Edo-period designer Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), a name that many collectors were familiar with by the early twentieth century in the West.

In Hiroshige's print *Naruto Whirlpool, Awa Province,* from the series *Views of Famous Places in Sixty-Odd Provinces* (ca. 1853), we witness a near identical wave and whirlpool pictorial scheme that may have inspired Koson's depiction here (fig. 6). Hiroshige was greatly admired by European and American artists and critics. His reputation in the United States was especially elevated by the modernist architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), who was also an avid collector and dealer of Japanese woodblock prints. At the time of his death in 1959, Wright had 6,000 Japanese woodblock prints in his collection, along with 300 other Japanese and Chinese art pieces including textiles, ceramics, bronzes, and sculptures. Wright spent six years in Tokyo overseeing the construction of the Imperial Hotel between 1916 and 1922, and during that time he acquired many Japanese objects. Later in his life, he used Japanese woodblock prints as a teaching aid for his apprentices and even gave them as gifts.[13] Wright particularly admired Hiroshige's landscape prints, putting many of them up on the walls at Fallingwater, a famous home he designed for the Kaufmann family in 1935. Koson's borrowing from Hiroshige, therefore, connected his modernized design to the works of the, by now, well-known designer. The reference to Hiroshige's depiction of the whirlpool ensured its appeal in the West given the long history of Japonisme and the effort of those like Wright in promulgating Hiroshige's prints.

Irises and More Irises

The iris is a traditional motif in Japanese art filled with rich meanings. Koson's beautifully rendered irises call to mind not just Van Gogh's painting of the same flower, but also the aforementioned famous painting by Ogata Kōrin, *Irises at Yatsuhashi*. On a pair of six-panel folding screens, he depicted

Fig. 6. Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), *Naruto Whirlpool, Awa Province*, from the series *Views of Famous Places in the Sixty-Odd Provinces*, ca. 1853. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14 × 9⅝ in. (35.6 × 24.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1919, JP1198.

irises using ink and color on gold leaf. The irises are positioned alongside an angular bridge, and they are reminiscent of a story from the famous *Tale of Ise*. The tale is a love story that describes the protagonist's long journey in exile from Kyoto after having a forbidden love affair with a high-ranking court lady. While in exile, the protagonist stops at Yatsuhashi, where a multi-directional bridge crosses over a stream. After seeing the irises, he is inspired and feels nostalgic for his forbidden lost love, so he composes a poem expressing his longing for his lover. In the poem, the first syllable of each line forms the Japanese word for irises (*kakitsubata*). Koson's depiction of the irises pays homage to Kōrin's famous work, but among a largely non-Japanese audience, the poetic association with the *Tale of Ise* is no longer necessary for the image to have meaning. Unlike Kōrin's panoramic view of a bed of irises, the viewer is brought up close to the flowers in Koson's print, thus offering a very intimate encounter with them. Inspired by older Japanese art, Van Gogh's depictions of the same flower had also created a currency for such intimate depictions of the plant in the West. In Van Gogh's rendering, the close-up view suggests the artist's observation and direct contact with the flowers. Van Gogh's work paved the way for the tendency to have direct encounters with the natural world in modern art. So, in 1926, when the European and American viewers saw Koson's irises print, they saw something rather familiar: a close-up, intimate encounter with realistically rendered flowers. In order to achieve this level of realism and intimacy, however, Koson did not need to observe nature directly. Given the rich history of paintings, prints, and illustrated books depicting the iconic flower in Japan and modern depictions of it in the works of Van Gogh, Koson was able to merge these influences into his design and modernize its depiction.

Unbeknownst to Koson, irises became a trademark motif for the American female painter Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) in the 1920s, around the same time as the creation of Koson's print. The highly sexualized depiction of irises, often provocatively suggesting the shape of the female genitalia, further intensified the visual impact of this particular plant among viewers in the West. Koson's design, therefore, might even appear more sensual to our contemporary eye today than it did for its audience in the 1920s.

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1 Janet A. Walker, "Van Gogh, Collector of 'Japan'," *The Comparatist* 32 (May 2008): 84.

2 Lionel Lambourne, *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings Between Japan and the West* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 73.

3 Caption of "Suite of Jewellery," Victoria and Albert Museum. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1360731/suite-of-jewellery-falize-alexis/.

4 "Making the Peacock Room," Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art. https://asia.si.edu/peacock-room/making-the-peacock-room/.

5 Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 319–21.

6 Gabriel P. Weisberg, "The Creation of Japonisme," in *The Origins of L'Art Nouveau: The Bing Empire*, eds. Gabriel P. Weisberg, Edwin Becker, and Évelyne Possémé (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratif; Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 2004), 60, 62.

7 Dorothy Blair, *Modern Japanese Prints: Printed from a Photographic Reproduction of Two Exhibition Catalogues of Modern Japanese Prints Published by The Toledo Museum of Art in 1930 and 1936* (Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art, 1997), 48.

8 Lawrence Smith, "Japanese Prints 1868–2008," in *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868–2000*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 374.

9 Gene Smiley, "The U.S. Economy in the 1920s," Economic History Association. https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-u-s-economy-in-the-1920s/.

10 Smith, "Japanese Prints," 382.

11 Smith, "Japanese Prints," 383.

12 "Barn Swallow Life History," All About Birds, The Cornell Lab. https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barn_Swallow/lifehistory.

13 Julia Meech, *Frank Llyod Wright and The Art of Japan: The Architect's Other Passion* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 10, 14, 16, 22, 175, 230–31, 233, 237–28.

Sydney Nguyen

Amid a pale gray microcosm, two cranes stand rigidly, facing opposite each other as they gaze into the ambiguous beyond (fig. 1). Their thin, angular necks are echoed by the geometric lines throughout the background that perhaps represent a babbling stream, feathery grasses, or a wafting breeze. The print designer Ide Gakusui (1899–1982) delights in this atmospheric uncertainty, as it directs the viewer's focus to his two regal subjects. Known to mate for life, this pair of red-crowned cranes symbolizes fidelity, prosperity, and longevity in East Asia.[1] Published in the 1950s, *Two Cranes* exemplifies the modernization of the traditional woodblock print medium by rendering the scene in abstraction. While Japanese bird-and-flower prints stem from a long-established artistic convention, they began to incorporate Euro-American pictorialism amid the nation's Westernization and modernization since the late nineteenth century. This image represents the major challenge facing midcentury print designers as they worked to develop a medium-specific visual language that reflects the modernity of Japanese prints. While figural abstraction denotes a crucial marker of modernization in Western art, it is only one of the many markers of visual modernity in Japanese design. This essay demonstrates how the innovations in Japanese prints are diverse; they shaped and were shaped by the evolving transcultural trends in modern art and design. It argues that the artistic achievement of these modern prints has been obscured by their binary categorization into *shin-hanga* (new prints) and *sōsaku-hanga* (creative prints).

Fig. 1. Ide Gakusui (1899–1982), *Two Cranes*, 1950s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15¼ x 10½ in. (38.74 x 26.67 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2022.11 (cat. 21).

Adapting Traditional Subjects to the Modern Age

In order to understand how modern Japanese print designers innovated within the medium, we must first examine the distinction between "new prints" and "creative prints." Initiated by the prominent print publisher Watanabe Shōzaburō (1885–1962), s*hin-hanga*, or the new print movement, emerged during the 1920s in an effort to revitalize the traditional woodblock medium for contemporary Japanese and Western audiences. Typically depicting landscapes, birds and flowers, kabuki actors, and beautiful women, s*hin-hanga* integrated Western pictorial elements, such as linear perspective and the atmospheric effect associated with Impressionist painting, while retaining the medium's traditional division of labor between the designer, carver, printer, and publisher.[2]

By contrast, designers of *sōsaku-hanga*, or creative prints, would design, carve, print, and sometimes even publish their own works. Critics in the West considered such an individualized endeavor more conducive to self-expression. The modernist view that art reflected the artist's mind, and that the artist was a sole hero of his creation, therefore, caused the bias against s*hin-hanga* as less creative. Indeed, *sōsaku-hanga* artists intended to elevate prints from a widely accessible, commercial product to a highly regarded fine art after the concept of fine art was introduced to Japan in the late nineteenth century.[3] Both s*hin-hanga* and *sōsaku-hanga* were intended, at least partially, for non-Japanese private collectors and institutions. As we shall see, designers working in both trends strived to modernize in order to appeal to the global print market.

Due to the long tradition of *kachō-e*, or bird-and-flower images, this genre provides a thorough visual timeline for us to track pictorial innovations across recent centuries. Both *sōsaku-hanga* and *shin-hanga* designers explored *kachō-e* in their initiatives to create a modern visual language. This genre has enjoyed popularity since it was distinguished as a stand-alone category in the Song dynasty (960–1279) in China. In East Asian art, nature subjects were imbued with seasonal, social, and spiritual symbolisms (e.g., pomegranates stood for wealth, cranes for longevity, and lotuses for self-preservation).[4] However, these associations shifted in Japan's Edo period (1603–1868) when the genre became closely tied to haikai poetry. For example, the Rinpa school painter Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1829) was deeply influential in Japan's use of bird-and-flower imagery. In his paintings, Hōitsu used nontraditional combinations of plants and birds to create new networks of symbolism.[5] By departing from Chinese tradition, Hōitsu imbued *kachō-e* subjects with a sense of timelessness, laying the aesthetic foundation for twentieth-century print designers who were looking to rejuvenate the traditional woodblock print medium. In the early twentieth century, the most prominent departure from the older tradition of bird-and-flower images is the separation of *kachō-e* motifs from their poetic, seasonal associations. As I will discuss in the next section, print designers discovered pictorial innovations that retained bird-and-flower subjects' inherent cultural value without relying on their poetic symbolisms. By removing animals and plants from their traditional contexts, designers and their publishers strove to make their images universally understood.

Regardless of their symbolic qualities, or lack thereof, Western critics favored *sōsaku-hanga* over *shin-hanga*; however, the distinction between the two and the historical value assigned to each might be overstated. As with *sōsaku-hanga*, innovations within *shin-hanga* reflect modern Japan's complex socio-economic and cultural conditions. A brief summary of Japan's rapid process of modernization is necessary for us to understand the production and reception of early-twentieth-century prints. In 1858, the United States forced Japan to open its borders to international trade, lifting the country's 219 yearlong *sakoku*, or secluded country policy. The Meiji emperor ushered in a new era of Japanese culture, signing Article Five of the Imperial Oath, which stated that "knowledge shall be sought for throughout the world, so that the foundations of the empire may be strengthened," thus beginning the nationwide Westernization initiative.[6] Japan's newfound globalization resulted in an influx of European influences in all aspects of everyday life.

Relevant to the subject of this essay are the different trends in modern art that influenced both *sōsaku-hanga* and *shin-hanga* designs at the time.[7] Although *sōsaku-hanga* conceptually aligns with Western preferences for the artist's individual expression, the movement draws on the same European pictorial influences as *shin-hanga*. The persistent theoretical separation between *sōsaku-hanga* and *shin-hanga* designers stems largely from differing cultural approaches regarding the direction of the woodblock print medium, rather than irreconcilable pictorial innovations.[8]

Gakusui's *Two Cranes* exemplifies the creative similarities between these two print movements. While this print follows the traditional, four-person production process, Gakusui depicts the traditional Japanese subjects in painterly abstraction reminiscent of the figural abstraction seen in prints and paintings by European avant-garde artists.[9] Additionally, *Two Cranes* was an export commodity for middle-class Western audiences despite containing motifs associated with East Asian poetry. Many designs like Gakusui's that integrate qualities from both *shin-hanga* and *sōsaku-hanga* emerged during this period, diminishing the significance of being labeled as one or the other. By the 1960s, *sōsaku-hanga* fully regressed into *shin-hanga's* commercialized marketing model, inhibiting the movement's unilateral advancement. The umbrella term *hanga,* meaning prints, was popularized to account for *shin-hanga, sōsaku-hanga,* and prints like *Two Cranes* that straddled the divide.[10] After decades of animosity between the two movements, *hanga* acknowledged their similarities and provided audiences a unified medium through which they could understand Japanese pictorialism in light of the nation's political and cultural globalization. *Hanga* designers continued to depict natural subjects; the genre's roots in East Asian tradition provided a pictorial and conceptual backdrop for them to overlay with bold, uniquely modern innovations.

The Diversification of Print Design

The modernization of Japanese design hinged primarily on Japanese and Western socio-economic conditions, which, in turn, shaped the print markets. One such factor was the drastic increase in international travel to and from Japan during the Meiji period (1868–1912). As print designers gained increasing exposure to Western influences in the decades following *sakoku*'s lift, they developed a diverse array of approaches to modernize the woodblock print. In order to understand these approaches, we must first examine the West's growing exposure to Japanese woodblock print. The Western concept of fine art was introduced to Japan in the late nineteenth century; although woodblock print was not included in the new taxonomy of objects, the medium aspired to become visually diverse, mimicking the field of painting in Japan. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Japanese government strived to elevate the nation's global profile by promoting prints to international audiences, consequently creating a multitude of markets for these modern designs.[11]

Fig. 2. After Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), *Horned Owl, Pine, and Crescent Moon*, 1830s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14⅜ x 5 in. (36.5 x 12.7 cm). The Trout Gallery, 190.2.14.q.

The medium had already gained Western visibility one century prior, thanks to the steady outpouring of prints by prominent Edo period designers like Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858).[12] Designing more than 500 *kachō-e* prints, Hiroshige contributed heavily to the genre's popularization toward the end of the Edo period. Experimenting with a range of woodblock cutting and printing techniques, Hiroshige's carver and printer referenced the pedagogy of the Maruyama-Shijō school in their works, which sought to express Western-style realism through traditional Japanese subjects.[13] Accompanying many of his images with excerpts from classical poetry, Hiroshige aimed to capture the serendipitous relationships between different plants and animals. His prolific production of *surimono*, which are deluxe prints designed for private patrons, met the growing demand for lavish woodblock prints that reconciled the sophistication of traditional Japanese culture with pictorial innovations.[14]

Admired for his ability to capture ambiance in nature, Hiroshige became a key reference for all future designers, including modern designers working to develop a new visual vocabulary that both evokes and departs from Edo-period prints. Decades later, during the Meiji period, designers referenced Hiroshige's bird-and-flower images; his lyrical prints depicting natural motifs offered a respite from Japan's rapid modernization through which early-twentieth-century viewers could appreciate the allure of classical Japan through a familiar lens. Designers continued to experiment with the woodblock print medium, often reworking pre-Meiji designs to appeal to evolving commercial trends.

Socio-economic developments during Japan's Taishō era (1912–1926) also informed the production and marketing of woodblock prints. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 destroyed much of Tokyo and leveled the nation's largest port city, Yokohama, which had served as Japan's gateway to the West. Because the Japanese economy relied heavily on the export of traditional crafts, Yokohama's destruction resulted in nationwide economic decline.[15] Among the wreckage was Watanabe's shop, containing his entire stock of woodblocks and prints. Although he was miraculously able to resume production shortly after the disaster, his re-creations of the lost designs fell short of their original forms.[16] While Watanabe, along with many other Tokyo-area designers struggled to recover from the earthquake, the process of mass rebuilding presented an opportunity for them to redefine their craft and advance in the modern period.

In the earthquake's aftermath, labor unions emerged, as many workers demanded increased pay and recognition for their contributions to Japanese industry. Their success resulted in the emergence of a large urban middle class that

Fig. 3. Attributed to Kōno Bairei (1844–1895), *Owl Perches Before Full Moon*, 1920s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15 x 10¼ in (38.1 x 26.04 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2022.9 (cat. 4).

created a new market for commercial prints. As literacy grew more widespread in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Japan's publishing industry flourished, resulting in a surge of print media.[17] Illustrated books and magazines played a major role in the dissemination of Western pictorialism among Japanese designers. Increased access to foreign artistic influences and the work of domestic designers enabled a national dialogue regarding the role of modern Japanese print design within world art.[18]

As a result of Japan's economic and cultural expansion since the Meiji period, by the 1920s, print production diversified to meet the needs of different markets. This exhibition features three images of owls: one after Hiroshige from the 1830s, one attributed to Kōno Bairei (1844–1895) from the 1920s, and a third by Tsuchiya Koitsu (1870–1949) from the 1930s. By depicting the same subject, Bairei and Koitsu's prints demonstrate two diametrically opposed approaches to modernizing Japanese woodblock print (figs. 2–4).

Fig. 4. Tsuchiya Koitsu (1870–1949), *Owl*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 13¾ x 7¼ in. (34.93 x 18.42 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2021.15 (cat. 5).

Both Bairei and Koitsu's designs depart from the poetic Edo-period rendering of the owl seen in Hiroshige's print, *Horned Owl, Pine, and Crescent Moon*. Hiroshige's print represents the tradition associated with *kachō-e* motifs; accompanied by two lines of inscription, the print demonstrates the close relationship between poetry and image in East Asia. The poem in the print reads: "The long-eared owl / in the crescent-moon boat / On the third night / Longs to hear the koto float slowly to its ears / Through the wind in the pines."[19] The owl, depicted fast asleep, conjures serenity in its viewers as they imagine the bird falling into a deep slumber to the ambient music of the *koto*, a Japanese zither instrument.

Hiroshige hides the crescent moon behind a pine branch, softening the scene's illumination to emphasize its meditative, poetic quality.

Independent of poetry, *Owl Perches Before Full Moon* exemplifies the transition between tradition and modernity that characterized early-twentieth-century prints. Without the poetic context, the visual interest of this great-horned owl relies on the animated rendering of the fluffy raptor. The owl's individually defined feathers, disproportionately large eyes, expressive eyebrows, and sharp, glistening talons contrast the tranquil, introspective quality of Hiroshige's owl. The print represents Japan's introduction to Western pictorialism in the late nineteenth century, namely the European Post-Impressionists' emphasis on expression achieved through distinct style, abstraction, and vivid colors.[20] However, the print still recalls Japanese tradition in the subtle gradation throughout the branch, the night sky, and the full moon. Edo-period designers like Hiroshige often employed this technique to imbue their prints with atmospheric effects. The image represents the modern period's artistic expansion as print designers began to diverge from pictorial traditions to accommodate the tastes of urban consumers both within and outside Japan. Though attributed to Bairei by its publisher, the Shima Art Company, the print is, in fact, more likely to be a work by the designer Ohara Koson (1877–1945), on stylistic ground.

Published in the 1930s, Koitsu's *Owl* manifests a full embrace of influences from Western art and photography, particularly in its eerie rendering of the great-horned owl as if it was seen at night through artificial illumination. The crescent moon differs from the full moon usually depicted in night scenes, suggesting that the powerful illumination comes from an artificial light source. The seemingly staged light reflects the influence of photography in Japan throughout the early twentieth century as cameras became more widely accessible. Photography was valued for its high index of realistic representation, making it a suitable reference for *kachō-e* designers striving to depict their subjects in almost scientific realism.[21] Koitsu's design also references the French Impressionist movement, which focused on depicting light as it was experienced at a given moment.[22] Koitsu's design demonstrates his keen understanding of light refraction by rendering the feathers as they might be viewed from a distance; the numerous short lines on the bird's chest resemble hatching marks, and the subtle beige-to-brown shading renders the fluffy texture palpable. Koitsu worked closely with the publisher Doi Teiichi (d. 1945) to create *Owl*, as well as a variety of landscape prints intended for export. Capturing Japanese sites in picturesque, yet realistic renderings, Koitsu's designs for Doi appealed to 1930s Americans seeking respite in their romanticization of Japanese culture during the Great Depression's economic devastation.[23] By reimagining traditional *kachō-e* motifs and taking advantage of their Western appeal, modern print designers like Koitsu worked to distinguish woodblock printing on a global scale as a medium with unique pictorial qualities.

Developing Medium-Specific Modernity

In the 1920s and 1930s, print designers faced pressure as they received influences from the field of painting while working to develop certain visual markers of modernity specific to the medium itself. They strived to distinguish prints amid dominant, more prestigious forms of fine art such as painting and drawing. Additionally, designers employed modern pictorial techniques to inject new life into decorative prints depicting traditional *kachō-e* subjects. For example, Art Nouveau, a European decorative arts movement which had absorbed influences from older Japanese art and became popular in the late nineteenth century, features heavily in Imao Keinen's (1845–1924) print, *Egrets in Night Rain,* published in the 1930s (fig. 5). While the design is accredited to Keinen, it bears high resemblance to a print by the designer Komori Soseki, who worked in the 1920s and 1930s (fig. 6). The similarity between the two designs, especially the high black-and-white contrast which appears in several other egret designs from the period, demonstrates the wide-reaching trends in modern woodblock print. This print exemplifies modern Japanese designers' push for high contrast as one of their methods of developing medium-specific innovations. The print's intentionally narrow, vertical format and the egrets' elongated forms echo Art Nouveau's long, sinuous style. Although the egret motif harkens back to classical Japanese poetry, it aligns with Art Nouveau's emphasis on natural subjects, a characteristic previously adapted from Japanese art. The bright, dynamically curved grasses by the egrets' talons also reflect the movement's extensive use of arches and curvilinear forms.[24] Although the print gleans inspiration from domestic and foreign art, it unleashes print-specific advantages to set it apart from both East Asian tradition and Western pictorialism.

Fig. 5. Attributed to Imao Keinen (1845–1924), *Egrets in Night Rain*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15 x 7½ in. (38.1 x 19.05 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2021.10 (cat. 20).

Fig. 6. Komori Soseki (act. 1920s–1930s), *Herons in Rain*, 1920s–1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15 x 8½ in. (39 x 21.6 cm). The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, gift of Mr. & Mrs. William Hepler, 1992.044.009.

Depicting two watchful egrets standing on the lookout on a rainy night, *Egrets in Night Rain* immediately captivates the viewer by starkly contrasting the white egrets against a pitch-black sky. The opaque background achieves a dramatic immersion that would be difficult to attain outside of the woodblock print medium.[25] Not only does the pictorial flatness lack the gestural appearance of brushwork seen in painting, but it also diverges from naturalism, sending the print into highly decorative abstraction. Fragmented white lines speckle the black background, indicating torrential rain; these thin, vertical streaks create a serene atmospheric effect, immersing the viewer in the scene by suggesting the surrounding pitter-patter of falling raindrops. The rain's visibility against the velvety background further lends itself to the explorations of abstraction and of the medium-specific color block layering technique. Also unique to the medium is the printer's use of embossing to create the fluffy texture of the egrets' plumage. By pressing the paper into the woodblock's fine grooves, the printer gives the egrets dimension without applying additional ink.[26]

This depiction of the egrets departs dramatically from Hiroshige's print from almost 100 years prior titled *Egret in Iris and Grasses* (1837) (fig. 7). Hiroshige's print captures a more naturalistic view of two egrets standing slightly apart from one another in their natural riverside habitat, abloom with bearded irises and reeds. More specifically, Hiroshige animates his subjects through the egrets' gaping mouths, contorted postures, and outstretched legs, as if to capture a fleeting moment of their evening hunt. His naturalistic representation reflects East Asian art's longstanding tradition of capturing movement, serendipity, and the spirit of animals. Gleaning inspiration from this convention, Hiroshige's print provides a traditional point of comparison to highlight the modern print's divergence from naturalism, which imagines the two egrets huddled next to each other. Although egrets do not naturally cluster, depicting the birds together emphasizes the tonal contrast between their white bodies and the black background.

Fig. 7. Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), *Egret in Iris and Grasses*, ca. 1837. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10⅛ x 7½ in. (25.7 x 19.05 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1918, JP248.

This trend of pushing for more medium-specific innovations is also seen in Yamamura Kōka's (1885–1942) print, *Pelicans*, published in 1924 (fig. 8). Like the egret print, *Pelicans* incorporates abstraction through its highly contrasting and planar application of colors. The printer of Kōka's image also embossed the birds' feathers to create texture and surface beauty. The background's subtle sheen indicates the printer's use of mica powder; popularized during the Edo period, this technique imbues the image with a dreamy quality and elevates its market value.[27] Both abstract and representational of a misty haze, the horizontal, parallel white lines throughout the background further contribute to this design's play on the medium. These marks are visibly connected to the idea of carving and mark-making. They also bear similarities to the gestural marks created in woodcut in the West. By manipulating medium-specific materials to achieve abstraction, both prints maximize the printing process' intrinsic qualities to reinvigorate the traditional medium.

Midcentury Hanga

Print designers' incentives to develop medium-specific modernity increased in the latter half of the twentieth century as they faced new challenges to project a kind of national pictorialism in the wake of World War II. The war's

Fig. 8. Yamamura Kōka (1885–1942), *Pelicans*, 1924. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10¾ x 15½ in. (27.3 x 39.4 cm). The Toledo Museum of Art, gift of Hubert D. Bennett, 1939.294.

devastation heavily impacted commercial industries, including the woodblock print market. During this period, designers sought to redefine the nation's artistic culture in order to garner universal appreciation and offer the Japanese a sense of national pride.[28] In the years of recovery, the woodblock print medium embodied a unique cultural identity amid international conflicts and socio-economic upheavals. Because modern prints reconciled Japan's cultural foundation with its recently Westernized profile, they contributed greatly to the nation's fight for cultural reestablishment. After the war, new prints and creative prints were absorbed into a single *hanga* production as the nation re-created its new national identity through visual culture. Japan made great strides toward this goal in 1953 with the founding of the International Print Association, which signified woodblock print's official recognition as a world art.[29] Additionally, the 1957 inception of the Tokyo Print Biennial resulted in an influx of international printmakers in Japan. This opportunity for woodblock printers to work alongside specialists in lithography, silk-screen, and other printing techniques created new possibilities for cross-cultural exchange.[30] Japan's exposure to the latest Western printmaking developments, therefore, inspired new ways to innovate the medium and elevate its global status.

As Japanese print designers gained increasing exposure to contemporary Western pictorialism, they experimented with a diverse array of both modern and traditional subjects and styles. Gakusui's *Two Cranes* represents such embrace of bold departure from the medium's tradition in light of Japan's newfound desire to define and assert its visual culture internationally. Despite removing symbolisms from the image of the cranes, Gakusui's print still conveys the nation's unique artistic contribution to midcentury modernity.

In the print, the cranes' dynamic, gestural outlines visually signify sharp cutting motions; this overt mark-making recalls the medium's process and materiality while also serving to abstract the birds. This abstraction is especially noticeable in the cranes' black tail feathers, which are rendered with flat, overlapping polygons. The cranes' angular necks, extended beaks, and long, jointed legs also lend themselves to Gakusui's exploration of geometric pictorialism. This exaggerated angularity alludes to origami, the long-practiced Japanese craft of paper-folding that rose to international popularity during the second half of the twentieth century.[31] Japanese artistic influence appears once more in the printer's use of gray ink for the image's sharp outlines; this understated color theme translucency is reminiscent of *sumi-e*, or traditional Japanese ink painting. Despite the design's many allusions to traditional Japanese art, the numerous diagonal marks in the background also communicate a universal modern quality. These dynamic strokes exude a similar energy as the armatures of bold strokes seen in midcentury paintings created in the West. By intertwining midcentury artistic trend with traditional domestic craftsmanship, this print bolsters the medium's global reputation, contributing to the nationwide efforts to redefine Japanese cultural identity.

No design better reflects midcentury Japanese designers' ongoing challenge of developing modern pictorialism than Gakusui's *Two Cranes*. His design bridges the traditional *hanga* distinctions, accentuates the medium's unique materiality, pays homage to the traditional process, and incorporates contemporary pictorial language to appeal to both domestic and international audiences. This timely print bears witness to Japan's complex cultural struggle during a period of recovery and resurgence.

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1 Yukio Lippit, *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2012), 61.

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Ava Noel Zadrima

The depiction of birds, insects, flowers, and animals is part of a long tradition in East Asia. Known as the genre of "bird-and-flower," the artists were usually more concerned with the inner spirit of animals than anatomical accuracy derived from direct observation. In Japan, bird-and-flower images originated in a deeply poetic tradition connected with the four seasons and contained auspicious meanings. The Japanese woodblock print represents an ideal medium with which to disseminate popular images of animals to a wider audience. In the Edo period (1603–1868), the playful intimacy of the animal world can be seen in the works of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858). In his design *Mallard Ducks in Snow-Covered Reeds* created in the 1840s, two ducks bob atop soft waves, one with his mouth agape, presumably quacking to his mate (fig. 1). The intimacy of the couple creates a lighthearted humorous scene that delighted Edoites. The theme of humor and intimacy persisted in prints produced in the early twentieth century, but they took on new meanings against a backdrop of growing international influences in Japanese art and culture. While the rich symbolisms and auspicious meanings are lost on Western audiences, who often classified these works as decorative arts or studies of nature, the amusing depictions of various animals could be universally understood and appreciated. This essay explores the endearing depictions of monkeys, puppies, cats, chickens, and mice, arguing that these images connect modern Japanese artistic production with its past not through poetic nuances, but through a touching intimacy and humor. These unique depictions of the natural world also gained widespread appeal in the age of rapid modernization worldwide.

Animals in Japanese Art: Anthropomorphosis and Allegory

Unlike the Euro-American context, Japanese paintings and prints depicting animals were rarely meant to be studies of nature. In order to understand the role of their depiction in the modern period, it is necessary to first delineate three unique ways in which animals were traditionally depicted in East Asian art. The first type is the animals of the 12 zodiacs, which was an enduring popular motif in East Asian art. Originated in early China, the 12 zodiac animals were used to divide the day into 12 hours (one hour equals two of our contemporary hours). The animals were also divided into a yearly cycle based on the lunar calendar. They come in the order of the rat or mouse, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster or chicken, dog, and pig.[1] The humorous depictions of the zodiac animals often served to mask political messages, while simultaneously creating psychological distance from painful events.

One such example is a fifteenth-century *emaki*, or handscroll, that inspired centuries of animal tales. This *emaki* tells the popular story of the *Twelve Zodiac Animals at War* (fig. 2). A deer and a *tanuki*, or racoon dog, happen upon a poetry contest among the 12 zodiac animals that hesitated to allow them into the exclusive event.[2] Amused by the deer, they ultimately accept it as a judge, declining the *tanuki*, much to its dismay. This conflict eventually leads to an epic battle between the animals of the zodiac and those that are not included in the cycle like the *tanuki*. At the end of the tale, the dragon and its two sons defeat the *tanuki*. Each battle consists of a humorous and familiar element of animal characteristics that makes light of a darker, true event. The battles between the animals closely mirror the battles between the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (c. 1368–1394) and local feudal lords in the Muromachi period (1338–1573). Yoshimitsu was aided by his two sons to quell the uprisings, much in the same way as the dragon's alliance with its sons.[3]

A second unique type of representation of animals in Japan is *iruimono*, or narratives using animals as main characters. A genre of folktales known as *otogizōshi*, or narrative literature, became popular between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The images produced from *otogizōshi* literature depict animals alongside humans, often portraying them as central characters re-enacting legendary or historical events.[4] For example, in Ukita Ikkei's (1795–1859) *Tale of a Strange Marriage* (c. 1858), a fox wedding is depicted as a parody of human events (fig. 3).[5] A fox from a noble but poor family marries into a wealthy one. In folk belief, foxes could transform themselves into people, and even had the power to make rain or light on dark nights. They were also associated with the power of determining successful harvests and marriages.[6] In Ikkei's painting, the foxes are cloaked in fancy human frocks, some even display their godly powers by setting the tips of their tails on fire. Despite the playful antics of the creatures, this *iruimono* sends a political message of desperate attempts to secure power through marriage. Attributing human characteristics to animals is a common approach in Japanese art.

The third unique depiction of animals exists in the field of illustrated media, produced in large quantity during the Meiji period (1868-1912). These comically illustrated materials often visualized people's daily habits and superstition through animals.[7] An example is *ponchi-e,* or punch pictures, that combined funny words and images.[8] Deriving

Fig. 1. Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), *Mallard Ducks in Snow-covered Reeds,* ca. 1843. Woodblock print, ink, and color on paper, 14⅞ x 5$^{1}/_{16}$ in. (37.8 x 12.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, JP1895.

Fig. 2. Studio of Kanō Seisen'in, after Tosa Yukihiro, *Twelve Zodiac Animals at War*, 1840. One scroll from a set of three handscrolls, ink and color on paper, 15⅜ x 347¼ in. (39.05 x 882.01 cm). Tokyo National Museum, A-1749.

Fig. 3. Ukita Ikkei (1795–1859), *Tale of a Strange Marriage*, 1858. Handscroll, ink and color on paper, 11¾ x 306 in. (29.8 x 777.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1957, 57.156.7.

Fig. 4. Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847–1915), *Ajia no Kaisanbutsu (Marine Products of Asia)*, *Marumaru chinbun*, no 513, 1885.

Fig. 5. John James Audubon (1785–1851), *Whooping Crane, Study for Havell pl. 226*, 1821–1822; 1829–1833. Watercolor, oil, gouache, graphite, white lead pigment, black ink, and pastel with selective glazing on paper, laid on Japanese paper, 37¼ x 25¾ in. (94.6 x 65.4 cm). New York Historical Society, purchased for the Society by public subscription from Mrs. John J. Audubon, 1863.17.226.

Fig. 6. Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), *Japanese Crane and Wave*, 1830s. Woodblock print, ink, and color on paper, 4 15/16 x 7¼ in. (12.5 x 18.4 cm). The Rhode Island School of Design Museum, gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 34.040.

from the oral culture of the Edo period, *ponchi-e* relies on the layering of puns that consist of the same or similar sounds. The images do not reproduce the visual features of the object faithfully, but rather employ the technique of drawing objects with a similar sounding name. For instance, in *Marine Products of Asia* by Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847–1915), an anthropomorphic shellfish, pronounced as "kokkai," is used to express the word parliament, which shares the same pronunciation (fig. 4). Thus, oral culture and visual expression offered readers a comical riddle in an illustrated format. This example also demonstrates the use of woodblock prints for mass image production, making print the best available medium to disseminate these images.[9] Japanese artists understood the vital role humor played in communicating universal experiences. In addition, the wild imagination and open-mindedness of the comedic genre allowed a repose from the rigidity and seriousness of Neo-Confucian dogma in the Edo period.[10]

Naturalism vs. Natural History

In contrast to the lively depictions in East Asia is the scientific representation of the natural world in the West. One famous example is the work of John James Audubon (1785–1851), who worked in the tradition of ornithological illustrations that were scientific in nature.[11] He aimed to portray his subjects with emphasis on anatomical and behavioral accuracy rather than the inner spirit or personality of the subject. In Audubon's print *Whooping Crane*, for example, the bird's plumage is rendered with absolute realism. Audubon's shading technique depicts the feathers as waxy and waterproof, appropriate for a bird that lives in a marsh environment (fig. 5). The contorted pose helps express the bird's anatomy.[12] Furthermore, the adoption of linear perspective in the background aids in the creation of an illusional space.

Contemporaneous with Audubon is the Japanese print designer Hiroshige. His images have a strong desire to convey the inner spirit and personality of the animals. For instance, in his print *Japanese Crane and Wave* from the 1830s, a crane twists its body to a curve similar to that of the crest of the wave (fig. 6). The playful bird is full of life in this dynamic rendering. The focus here is not the detail of the bird's plumage, but its elegance and majesty in the way it echoes the shape of the wave. Hiroshige's design brings out the gracefulness of the animal, which was an auspicious symbol of longevity. For those acclimated to seeing nature represented realistically as in Audubon's print, Hiroshige's print, when seen outside Japan, offered a refreshing depiction of birds beyond naturalism and realism.

Fig. 8. Ogata Gekkō (1859–1920), *Monkey Reaching for the Moon*, 1920s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9¾ x 10¼ in. (24.77 x 26.04 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.12 (cat. 11).

Monkeys: From Daoist Sage to Unenlightened Fool

The monkey is one of the most depicted animals in East Asian art due to the animal's association with mischief and misguidedness. The image of the monkey is particularly connected with parables in Zen Buddhism. In Zen Buddhism, unlike in other schools of Buddhism, enlightenment is achieved not through laborious, extraordinary effort, but through spontaneous daily actions.[13] This belief is reflected by the energetic quality of the ink work and dramatic compositions in Zen painting. One of the most popular stories associated with the monkey tells of their reaching for the reflection of the moon in a well. The story can be traced to the earliest Buddhist collection of writings, the *Tripitaka*. In the *Vinaya Pitaka,* or Book of Discipline, the Buddha tells of 500 monkeys venturing into a forest and coming across a well with the reflection of a full moon in it.[14] Believing that the moon has fallen, the leader of the monkeys directs them to form a chain from the tree branches in order to reach down into the well to rescue the moon. The sheer weight of all 500 monkeys snaps the frail branch, causing them to plummet to their doom. The story is interpreted as a warning against mistaking illusion for truth in Buddhist belief.

Kusumi Morikage's (c. 1620–1690) painting *Gibbons Reaching for the Moon's Reflection* vividly renders this story.

Fig. 7. After Kusumi Morikage (c. 1620–1690), *Gibbons Reaching for the Moon's Reflection*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15¼ x 6½ in. (38.74 x 16.51 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.4 (cat. 10).

To connect modern viewers to Japan's painting tradition, this painting was reproduced as a woodblock print in the 1930s by the Shima Art Company (fig. 7). The print depicts seven monkeys dangling down from a gnarled tree. The monkeys banter and argue amongst themselves in a lively manner, locked in a dynamic, noisy disagreement. The older-looking monkey gives out directions, inciting disagreement between the monkeys at how they should save the moon. Their thin arms intertwine with the branches, and one has trouble telling them apart. The difficulty in discerning the monkeys from the branches forces the viewer to contemplate the message in the work more thoroughly. Moreover, the image portrays the monkeys with comical expressions by squeezing the eyes and nose closer together, as if in confusion over their daunting task.

The continued popularity of the fable into the modern period is demonstrated by Ogata Gekkō's (1859–1920) design, published posthumously in the 1920s (fig. 8). In this print, *Monkey Reaching for the Moon*, a lone monkey hangs from a tree with its arm reaching out to the reflection of the moon. By reducing the number of monkeys to one, Gekkō's print encourages the viewer to ruminate on the long dangling arm, executed in a quick curved line, mimicking the spontaneous brushwork seen in traditional monochrome Zen painting. Zen traditions aside, Gekkō's print still generates meaning and visual appeal. The thin arm and the even thinner branch make the viewer worry about the fate of the monkey. Furthermore, in creating a simpler composition containing only the key elements of the tale such as the frail branch and the lone monkey, the image elicits feelings of sympathy. Other details work to further render the monkey endearing, such as the fine gradation on the body of the monkey, and the short lines carefully drawn along the outline, that give the animal a fuzzy, soft texture.[15] Making visual and narrative changes to the original story, Gekkō crafts a modern image capable of connecting with the viewer's psychology without the knowledge of the Buddhist tale and Japanese painting tradition. Moreover, the print brings this event to the level of an individual's action, further allowing the viewer to appreciate the work without prior knowledge of the motif's religious and cultural significance.

Monkey See, Monkey Who?

The monkey is a versatile motif in East Asian art. In the print *Two Monkeys and Two Butterflies* by Ohara Koson (1877–1945), we encounter a monkey gazing intently at a butterfly that rests gently on its hand (fig. 9). The monkey's face almost touches the butterfly. The depiction evokes the famous story of the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (4th

Fig. 9. Ohara Koson (1877–1945), *Two Monkeys and Two Butterflies*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink, and color on crepe paper, 12 x 5¾ in. (30.48 x 14.61 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.2 (cat. 12).

century BCE) dreaming himself as a butterfly. In the story, Zhuangzi dreams he is a butterfly and is living contently, unaware that he was ever a man. When he awakens, he wonders if he is Zhuangzi dreaming of a butterfly, or if he is a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuangzi.[16] What is most striking about this print is the human-like nature of the monkeys, especially felt in the absorbed gaze at the butterfly.

Fig. 10. After Yi Am (Korean, 1499–1566), *Birds, Cat, and Puppies*, early twentieth century. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14⅝ x 7⅜ inches (37.15 x 18.73 cm). The Trout Gallery, gift of Col. & Mrs. R. Wallace White, 1985.2.6 (cat. 9).

The carver's emulation of *mokkotsu*, or boneless technique, in painting, where a subject is rendered with diluted ink and no outline, creates a soft texture in the fur.[17] The crepe paper upon which the image was printed enhances their furriness. This mammalian furriness is starkly contrasted by the anthropomorphic, boldly outlined hands and facial features. The juxtaposition of their furry texture with the fine delineation of their hands and feet serves to highlight the dichotomy in the parable. In other words, the print points to the human qualities in the monkeys and the animalistic qualities of humans, rendering them as equal living beings.

The monkey was also associated with maternal love because its cry was thought to be a histrionic grief over the loss of a child.[18] Such association with inconsolable heartbreak further characterizes monkeys as emotionally complex. In the work, another butterfly is seen fluttering above the head of a second, smaller monkey, whose tight grip on the back of the larger one suggests that it may be a child clinging onto the mother, who is otherwise occupied. In essence, Koson's image reflects a non-anthropocentric worldview that is unique to East Asian depiction of animals. By using a monkey in place of Zhuangzi, Koson's design reasonably demonstrates that animals and humans are similar in their cognizant abilities, an extension of the Chinese philosopher's warning against anthropocentrism. The knowing gaze at the butterfly and the playful intimacy between the mother and the child create visual interest for the viewers in the West, despite their unfamiliarity with the embedded philosophy.

Puppies: Buddha Nature

Similar to the monkey print, *Birds, Cat, and Puppies* by the Korean painter Yi Am (1499–1566) is a modern reproduction of an earlier work with Buddhist connotations (fig. 10). The central subject of Yi Am's design is the two puppies that playfully run around the base of a tree. The depiction of dogs is often associated with Zen *kōan*, paradoxical riddles used to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning. Here, it calls to mind the famous *kōan* "A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature."[19] In the *kōan*, a monk asks the Chinese master Zhao Zhou (778–897) if a dog has Buddha-nature, to which he swiftly replies "nothingness." The meaning of this *kōan* is intentionally difficult to discern. The function of *kōan* in Buddhist teaching was to open the mind through intense meditation on the punchline phrase or word.[20] The long-term meditative questioning would usher Zen practitioners to an understanding of the meaning beyond words, thus leading to awakening.

In Yi Am's image, two puppies frolic beneath a tree while a cat sits perched above them looking at the sparrows fluttering around. The cat, showing apparent interest in the birds, draws back its ears and turns its body preparing for an attack. The cat and the birds engage in an intense hunting scene while the puppies are depicted in a lighthearted fashion. One holds a feather in its mouth, happily trotting away while the other sits curiously looking up at the cat. The innocent nature of the dogs is revealed through their lack of interest in the hunt. Their inability to climb the tree and reach the cat or birds creates a visual and theoretical barrier between them and the cat. In opposition to the quarrelsome and crafty cat, the puppies are carefree

Fig. 11. Édouard Manet (1832–1883), *Tama, the Japanese Dog,* c. 1875. Oil on canvas, 24 x 19 11/16 in. (61 x 50 cm). The National Gallery of Art, collection of Mr., and Mrs. Paul Mellon, 1995.47.12.

and innocent. The decision to reproduce Yi Am's image for a modern audience illustrates the print industry's desire to create unassuming, playful motifs for both domestic and foreign audiences, regardless of their knowledge of Buddhist stories. Reproducing a Korean print during the period of Japan's colonial rule of the country also suggests an attempt to absorb traditional Korean art into modern Japanese visual culture.[21]

In contrast, the portrayal of dogs is carried out differently by artists in the West. For instance, in *Tama, the Japanese Dog* created around 1875 by Édouard Manet (1832–1883), a small scruffy black-and-white dog stands in a wood-paneled room (fig. 11). Manet focuses on the directionality of his loose brushstrokes to emulate real fur. Modeling reveals a clear light source directed from the right side of the composition. The dog stands in a position that reveals its hind legs, exhibiting the artist's attention to anatomical details. It is clear that Manet created this image from direct observation. Paintings such as this one exemplify the painting techniques that dominated salons of Paris in the late nineteenth century even as artists began to move away from illusionistic realism and toward more abstract forms. By the early twentieth century, for an audience that had acclimated to the painting style of Manet, the simple, yet endearing image of Yi Am's work must have been refreshing.

Chickens: Family Life

Much like puppies, chickens are a common domesticated animal in East Asia. The depiction of hens, roosters, and chickens is, therefore, abundant in East Asian art. Chickens are popular motifs because they could symbolize a refined scholar. In Japan, the basic vocabulary of painting chickens was established by the eighteenth-century painter Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800) whose paintings demonstrate his familiarity with Chinese prototypes.[22] His 1792 painting *Hen and Rooster with Grapevine* demonstrates the mating dynamics between the rooster and the hen (fig. 12). In the painting, the two birds balance on a branch; the hen admires the rooster's gallant pose, head cocked to the sky as if about to crow. The flamboyant tail is highlighted in shell white powder (*gofun*) to draw our attention.[23] The work demonstrates the focus on mating display in the depiction of chickens.

Such depictions of mating display fell out of favor in the modern period. In Itō Sōzan's (b. 1884) print of a rooster, hen, and chicks from the 1910s, the designer renders an endearing intimacy in family life (fig. 13). A family of eight is seen grazing seeds and worms by a few stalks of chrysanthemums. The rooster's stature and confrontational gaze demonstrate his strength and his role as the family protector, and he is not depicted as narcissistic or self-indulging as earlier images of the rooster. The print departs from earlier depictions of the subject by showing the rooster participating in raising the young. The hen stands in front of the rooster, bowing down to feed while one of her babies has playfully jumped on top of her. Another chick looks to their mother, in anticipation to be fed and cared for. The intimate connection between the family members contrasts significantly with earlier depictions of chickens in Japanese art, such as the aforementioned painting by Jakuchū.

Sōzan likely adapted his design from illustrated books that served as design templates for modern designers. Katsushika Hokusai's (1760–1849) illustrated book featured in this exhibition is one such design template to which Sōzan would have access (fig. 14).

Mice: Pest or Pet

The endearing image of intimacy during mealtime is also reflected in depictions of mice. The mouse, the first of the 12 zodiac animals, is depicted frequently in Japanese art. Historically, they appeared in *iruimono*, where mice are portrayed in an anthropomorphic manner. Modern Japanese prints, however, tend to adopt a more individualized perspective that enhances the creature's cuteness. For instance, in Takahashi Hiroaki's (1871–1945) *Mice, Radish, and Carrot* from 1926, two mice nibble on a daikon radish (fig. 15). The hungry mice are close to one another, creating a sense of comfortable closeness. Their large whiskers draw

Fig. 12. Itō Jakuchū (1615–1868), *Hen and Rooster with Grapevine,* 1792. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 40⅛ x 16¼ in. (101.9 x 41.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Harry G. C. Packard Collection of Asian Art, gift of Harry G. C. Packard, and Purchase, Fletcher, Rogers, Harris Brisbane Dick, and Louis V. Bell Funds, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and The Annenberg Fund Inc. Gift, 1975, 1975.268.69.

Fig. 13. Itō Sōzan (b. 1884), *Family of Chickens,* 1910s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 x 7 in. (25.4 x 17.78 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.3 (cat. 14).

Fig. 14. Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), *Album of Original Drawings by Katsushika (Katsushika shinso gafu)*, vol. 1, 1890. Woodblock-printed book, ink and color on paper, 9⅝ x 6½ in. (24.45 x 16.51 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.13 (cat. 13).

Fig. 15. Takahashi Hiroaki (1871–1945), *Mice, Radish, and Carrot,* 1926. Woodblock print, ink, and color on paper, 10 5/16 × 15¼ in. (26.2 × 38.7 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1929.477.

Fig. 16. Watanabe Seitei (1851–1918), *Mouse and Turnip*, 1930s. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10¼ x 7¾ in. (26.04 x 19.69 cm). The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.20 (cat. 19).

attention to their small, wide eyes, and pink noses. Similarly, in Watanabe Seitei's (1851–1918) *Mouse and Turnip*, a grey mouse is seen nibbling the root vegetable (fig. 16). Pointy on one end and plump on the other, the mouse and the turnip are almost mirror images of one another. The short lines along the outline of the mouse's body create a palpable sensation of fur. The turnip, too, has white highlights that represent the thin hair that echoes and is echoed by the mouse's whiskers. The vulnerability and inherent innocence of the small creature elicits affection and a sense of protectiveness from the viewer. In both Hiroaki and Seitei's prints, the mice activate the viewer's instinct to nurture and protect the delicate creatures, rather than seeing them as a pest. Seitei's design, however, does not depend on the more abstract renderings as seen in the depiction of Kusumi's monkeys. The print of the mouse differs from older Japanese art in its remarkable level of realism. This realism reflects Seitei's understanding of shape, volume, movement, light, and shade associated with *yōga*, or Western-style painting that emerged in Japan since the country's modernization in the Meiji period.[24]

The dominant appeal in Japanese images of birds, flowers, and other animals distinguishes them from the studies of nature produced by artists in the West. The rich stories told by the depictions of animals and their humorous rendering in East Asia offers a non-anthropocentric worldview that stands in opposition to a human-centered world—an anthropocentrism escalated during the process of modernization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Non-anthropocentric depictions of animals also represent a cultural continuity with Japan's past. In the age of rapid modernization that focused on science and technology, the cute and intimate scenes offered an antidote to the unpleasant aspects of modernity. These prints provided a universal visual solace and repose for both domestic and Western audiences. The cuteness of the animals in these prints greatly contributed to the success of Japanese woodblock prints in the West.

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2 Singer and Masatomo, *The Life of Animals*, 61.

3 *The Roles and Representations of Animals in Japanese Art and Culture, Part 1—The War of the Twelve Animals: Anthropomorphosis and Allegory in Medieval Japan,* Symposium lecture provided by Sarah E. Thompson, Curator of Japanese Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, at the National Gallery of Art, aired June 7, 2019. https://soundcloud.com/nationalgalleryofart/the-roles-and-representations-of-animals-in-japanese-art-and-culture-part-1?si=cb6a1fe699b34019854457389c53b3eb&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing.

4 Singer and Masatomo, *The Life of Animals*, 139.

5 Singer and Masatomo, *The Life of Animals*, 140.

6 Singer and Masatomo, *The Life of Animals*, 141.

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10 John M. Rosenfield, "The Anatomy of Humor in Hokusai's Instruction Manuals," in *Hokusai and His Age: Ukiyo-e Painting, Printmaking and Book Illustration in Late Edo Japan,* ed. John T. Carpenter (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2005), 299–310.

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13 Robert L. Thorp and Richard E. Vinograd, *Chinese Art and Culture* (New York: Abrams, 2001), 275.

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17 Penelope E. Mason and Donald Dinwiddie, *History of Japanese Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 314.

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20 Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen,* 112.

21 Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 122–23.

22 Yukio Lippit, *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2012), 29.

23 Sasaki, "Materials and Techniques," 333.

24 Suzuki and Tinios, *Understanding Japanese Woodblock-Printed Illustrated Books*, 31.

Memory and Modernity:

Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints of the Natural World

Exhibition Catalogue

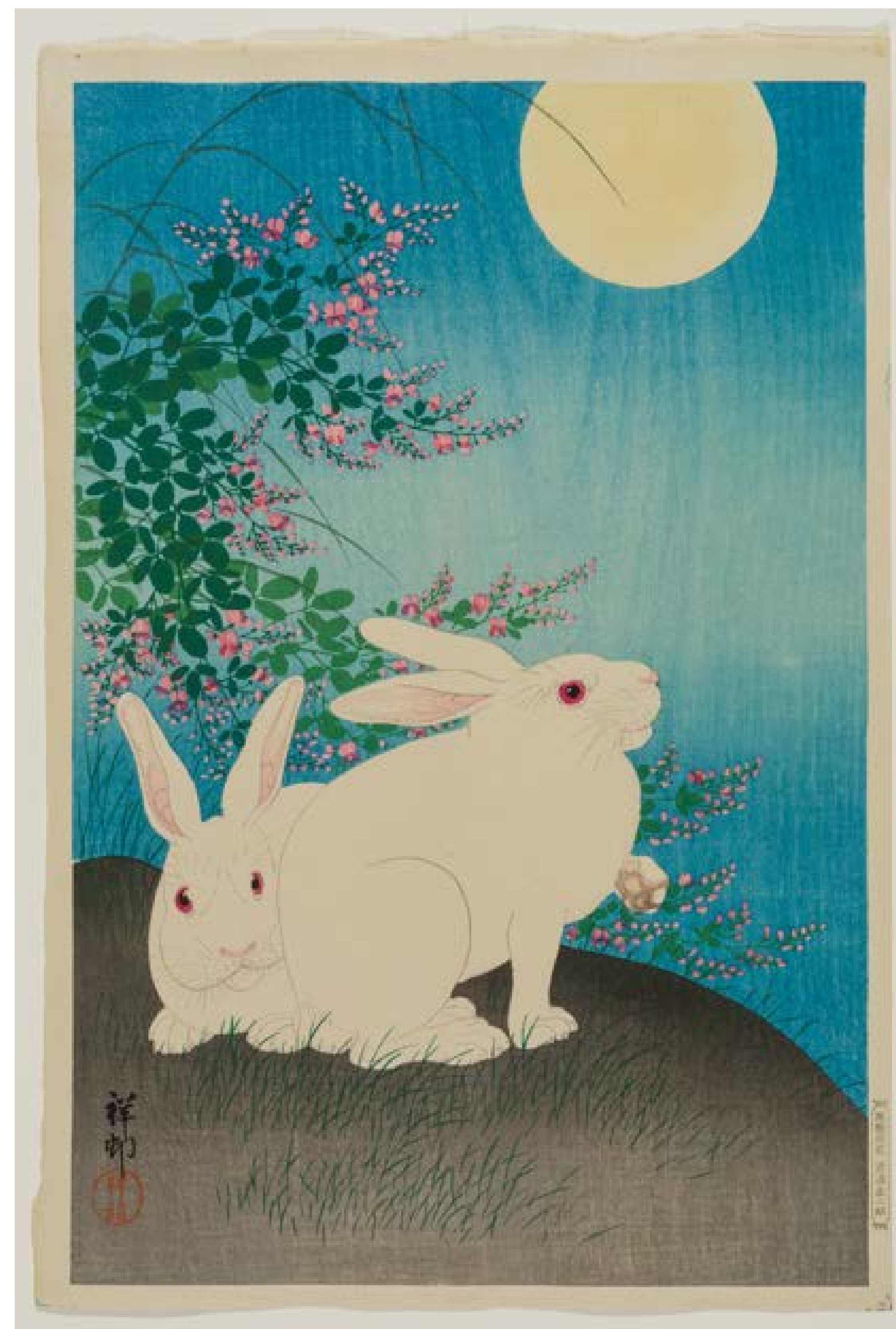
All works from The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College
unless otherwise noted

1. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Barn Swallow Over Waves*, 1920s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14½ x 7½ in. (36.83 x 19.05 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.11

2. Shibata Zeshin (1807–1891)
***Crows in Flight*, early twentieth century**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9¾ x 10⅛ in. (24.77 x 25.72 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.8



3. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Rabbits under Bush Clover and Full Moon*, 1931**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15¼ x 10¼ in. (38.74 x 26.04 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.1

4. Attributed to Kōno Bairei (1844–1895)
***Owl Perches before Full Moon*, 1920s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15 x 10¼ in. (38.1 x 26.04 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.9

5. Tsuchiya Koitsu (1870–1949)
***Owl*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 13¾ x 7¼ in. (34.93 x 18.42 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.15

6. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Java Sparrow and Rose Bush*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 x 6¾ in. (25.4 x 17.15 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.7

7. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Praying Mantis and Full Moon*, 1920s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9⅝ x 10 in. (24.45 x 25.4 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.5

8. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Frog on Lotus Leaf*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10⅞ x 11⅛ in. (27.62 x 28.26 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.14

9. After Yi Am (Korean, 1499–1566)
***Birds, Cat, and Puppies*, early twentieth century**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14⅝ x 7⅜ inches (37.15 x 18.73 cm)
Gift of Col. & Mrs. R. Wallace White, 1985.2.6

10. After Kusumi Morikage (c. 1620–1690)
***Gibbons Reaching for the Moon's Reflection*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15¼ x 6½ in. (38.74 x 16.51 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.4

11. Ogata Gekkō (1859–1920)
***Monkey Reaching for the Moon*, 1920s**

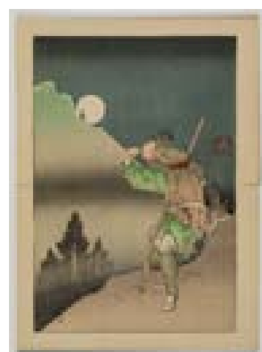
Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9¾ x 10¼ in. (24.77 x 26.04 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.12

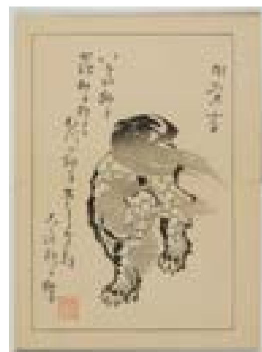
12. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Two Monkeys and Two Butterflies*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on crepe paper, 12 x 5¾ in. (30.48 x 14.61 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.2

13. Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)
***Album of Original Drawings by Katsushika* (*Katsushika shinso gafu*), vol. 1, 1890**

Woodblock-printed book, ink and color on paper, 9⅝ x 6½ in. (24.45 x 16.51 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.13





14. Itō Sōzan (b. 1884)
***Family of Chickens*, 1910s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 x 7 in. (25.4 x 17.78 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.3

15. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Irises*, 1926**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15¼ x 10¼ in. (38.74 x 26.04 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.13

16. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Dragonfly and Lotus*, 1920s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14¼ x 7¼ in. (36.2 x 18.42 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.6

17. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Java Sparrow and Magnolia*, 1920s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14½ x 7½ in. (36.83 x 19.05 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.10

18. Ohara Koson (1877–1945)
***Silhouetted Bird and Begonia in Rain*, 1920s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14⅝ x 8½ in. (37.15 x 21.59 cm)
Private collection

19. Watanabe Seitei (1851–1918)
***Mouse and Turnip*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10¼ x 7¾ in. (26.04 x 19.69 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.20

20. Attributed to Imao Keinen (1845–1924)
***Egrets in Night Rain*, 1930s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14⅞ x 7⅝ in. (37.78 x 19.37 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2021.10

21. Ide Gakusui (1899–1982)
***Two Cranes*, 1950s**

Woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 15⅜ x 10½ in. (39.05 x 26.67 cm)
Museum purchase with funds from the Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2022.11

THE TROUT GALLERY
THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE