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La Salle University Art Museum

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Japanese Prints: Twentieth Century

La Salle University Art Museum
October 9th - November 29th, 1992
Japanese Prints: Twentieth Century

The tradition of graphic arts in Japan (especially the color woodcut, which makes up the majority of works in this exhibition) is a long, rich and distinctive one. Beginning in the mid-17th century, the color woodcut print has always dominated the Japanese visual arts, though there are marked differences between the classical and the modern print in execution, style and subject matter. The La Salle Art Museum is fortunate to have a collection, donated by Benjamin Bernstein, of classical
woodcut "Ukiyo-e" (floating world) prints from the last quarter of the 19th century with which to make this comparison (see #1-3).

The bold flat decorative patterns, exquisite design, subtle gradation of color harmonies and refined but complex method of execution and printing (up to fourteen separate color blocks) that distinguishes these traditional color prints continue to this day but with notable differences. Until the twentieth century, the creation of Japanese woodcut prints involved three principals: the artist who designed the image, the woodblock cutter, and the printer, the latter two remaining anonymous. Modern and contemporary artists perform all three of these creative processes. Moreover, the Japanese 20th century print is no longer mass produced; rather its output is controlled, as in the West, by a limited edition and so indicated by the artist in the margin of the print. But perhaps the most significant difference between the old and the new lies in the unlimited range of expression, with regard to both subject matter and style, available to the modern artist. Though having a profound influence on French
Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists, the Classical Japanese color woodcut was executed in an essentially similar, representational, and insular style reflecting no influence of Western art until the end of the 19th century. The subject matter was confined to Japanese landscape and figurative scenes of everyday life—essentially the courtesans, lovers, geisha and bathhouse girls who patronized and serviced the city pleasure districts or actors in the popular Kabuki theater. Modern Japanese artists are clearly influenced by the West as well as the East, and their works may be considered international in style and content, whether of an abstract or representational nature. The connection between East and West is especially close in the Fine Arts Department at La Salle. James Lang (see #22-23), La Salle’s professor of graphic art, spent eight years of graduate research and teaching at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo. There he practiced and studied printmaking in the studios of Messrs. Higawara, Toshi Yoshida, and Tajima, all of whose works are represented in this exhibition. Mr. Lang, in turn, has influenced scores of La Salle students in the essentials of Japanese
print craftsmanship, and such influence can be seen in the graphic work of one of his pupils, James Colbert, class of 1979 (see #24). It is interesting to note that graphic artists in Japan usually do not receive formal training in art institutions unless they do so in the West, as indeed many of them do. Rather, their training typically consists of an apprenticeship in the studio of a master artist(s) such as Mr. Lang experienced.

Although Japanese modern prints, called "Sosaku hangai" (creative prints) are widely represented in the West today in both private and public collections, their artists are unfortunately accorded little respect in Japan. Consequently their professional life is difficult and frustrating, and most are forced to make a living elsewhere. This unfortunate circumstance, however, is balanced by the reputation and respect the Japanese print has acquired in the West, as reflected in this exhibition. With an economy of means and refined technical control, representational images seem to capture the essence of a particular object, whether the natural beauty of a plant or tree or the symbolic or essential character of a person or animal. Ab-
Abstract images, which appear to dominate the contemporary print, embody a contemplative, serene, poetic but controlled expression—the very essence of the traditional Japanese spirit of Zen.

The La Salle Art Museum is pleased to offer this exhibition as an introduction to our Japanese print collection and to mark the establishment of the Japan Studies Program at La Salle University.

Caroline Wistar
Curator
Selected Bibliography


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All of the prints in the exhibition are color woodcuts unless otherwise noted.

Three Japanese traditional "Ukiyoe" woodcuts by

1. Toyoharu Kunichika, 1835-1900

2. Kuikusui Shigehiro

3. Utagawa Kunsida (Toyokuni III), 1786-1864
   Given by Benjamin D. Bernstein

4. Hideo Higiwara (b. 1913- )
   Emptiness
   Lent by James Colbert
5. Kunihiro Amano (b. 1929- )  
Castle Gate 1966

6. Matsumoto Akira  
Gogai ga Deta 1964

7. Tomoo Inagaki (b. 1902- )  
Cats in the Moonlight 1966

8. Joichi Hoshi (1913-1978)  
Red Branches 1973  
Purchased with funds provided by Benjamin D. Bernstein

9. Hideo Higiwara (b. 1913- )  
Germination #5 1965
10. Hiroyuki Tajima
   *White Vestige*
   Lent by James Colbert

11. Umetaro Azechi (b. 1902- )
   *Village*
   *Pisces*
   Both lent by James Colbert

12. Shogo Okamoto
   *Trees in Winter* 1973
   *Etching*

13. Nagao Ueno (b. 1904- )
   *Recollection of the Past* 1964
14. Joichi Hoshi (1913-1978)
   *Evening Scene* 1977
   Purchased with funds provided by
   Benjamin D. Bernstein

15. Ansei Uchima (b. 1921-)
   *Cerulean Space #2* 1970

16. Shigeki Kuroda (b. 1953-)
   *Bicycle R-55* 1980
   Etching

17. Yoshitoshi Mori (b. 1900-)
   *Warriors* 1967
   Stencil dye-print

18. Joichi Hoshi (1913-1978)
   *Blue Limbs* 1978
   Purchased with funds provided by
   Benjamin D. Bernstein
19. Sadao Watanabe (b. 1913- )
    Woman of Canaan 1964
    Stencil dye-print

20. Hitoshi Nakazato (b. 1936- )
    (Head of the Graphics Department at the University of Pennsylvania)
    Thonga A 1977
    Silkscreen with Carborundum
    Given by Benjamin D. Bernstein

21. Toshi Yoshida
    June A 1962
    Lent by James Colbert

22. James Lang (b. 1931- ), American
    The Revolution
    Lent by James Colbert
23. Beyond the Cosmos  1972
Color lithograph

24. James Colbert (b. 1949- ), American
   *Iphigenia*
   Collograph