Masterpieces from the
SHIN’ENKAN
COLLECTION
Japanese Painting of the Edo Period
Introduction

The Shin'enkan Collection is remarkable for its scholarly depth and for its vibrant beauty. The collection focuses on paintings of the Edo period (1615–1868), a time of rich artistic diversity in Japan.

The Edo period takes its name from the city of Edo (modern Tokyo), from which the Tokugawa shogunate ruled Japan for nearly 250 years. Tokugawa Ieyasu moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo after he was proclaimed the first of the Tokugawa shoguns in 1603. During the Edo period the capital grew as an important commercial and cultural center with a population of approximately one million residents. The period is noted for its stable rule and for the emergence of a wealthy middle class, which joined the imperial court, the shogunate, and the feudal lords as patrons of the arts. It was a period in which a wide range of styles coexisted.

At the beginning of this period, the dominant school of painting was the Kanō School, based on Chinese painting techniques combined with Japanese decorative tendencies. But as the period progressed native styles began to emerge. Fostered by the shogunate's isolationist policies, many artists sought inspiration in earlier Japanese painting styles. As a result, genre painting, the Rimpa School, and ukiyo-e painting flourished as native expressions of a new vitality and affluence. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of a new school of painting, the Maruyama-Shijō School, and of individualistic painters who received stimuli from indigenous styles, Chinese art, and even Western painting.

The decorative paintings of the Edo period were not widely appreciated when Joe D. Price began building the Shin'enkan Collection twenty-five years ago. As a young engineer, Price had been instilled with a deep appreciation for nature by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and he
Decorative, Genre, and Narrative Screens

Following the rise of richly decorated screens established during the Momoyama period (1568–1615), this early Edo-period screen is painted on a brilliant background of gold. The squares of gold leaf applied to the surface create a flat picture space, which has allowed the artist to emphasize powerful foreground elements. The asymmetrical composition, with its truncated forms and thrusting branches, increases the forcefulness that is characteristic of many screen paintings. The artist has balanced the composition, however, with the ethereal use of a cloud as the branch delicately ends in the last panel. The broad, sweeping brush strokes of the pine tree and bamboo contrast with the meticulously naturalistic rendering of the pears.

Folding screens served both functional and decorative purposes within a domestic setting. They were used to divide a room or to provide suitable decoration for a special event. Folding screens were used outdoors as well to create an enclosed space during festive occasions. Screens were generally made in six panels and were often paired to form twelve panels. They were also made in two, four, eight, and ten panels. Gold leaf on screens provided some additional light within the domestic space, but more importantly it conveyed to the viewer the power and grandeur of the scene. Decorative screens frequently depicted the four seasons, plants, and animals; genre screens portrayed towns or events (see nos. 10–11); and narrative screens drew upon literary subjects such as the Tale of Genji (see no. 12).
Rimpa School

Suzuki Kiitsu was among the last exponents of the Rimpa School, which was characterized by decorative brilliance and bold abstract designs. Rimpa School painting was begun by Tawaraya Sōatsu (fl. 1600–40) and Hon'ami Köetsu (1558–1637), whose patrons from Kyoto's imperial court and wealthy middle class sought a style befitting their luxuriant tastes. The Rimpa School, however, is named for the artist Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716), who rejuvenated the style and introduced it to Edo at the beginning of the eighteenth century. (*Rim* comes from Kōrin, and *pa* stands for "school." Rimpa hence means "school of Kōrin.")

Kiitsu came from a family of dyers, but in 1813 he left the family business to become a pupil of Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828), the artist most closely associated with the Rimpa style during the nineteenth century (see nos. 17–21).

_Paulownia and Maple_ is one of Kiitsu's finest works. It embodies the essence of late Edo Rimpa in its delicate and subtle elegance. Kiitsu has depicted faint green leaves of the paulownia with accents of white seen through a sheet of pouring rain. The atmosphere serves to accentuate the delicacy of the pale leaves. The maple is also seen in a veil of rain, but here Kiitsu has suggested the rain by washes of grey that merely hint at its existence. The maple leaves are arranged in a decorative design of abstraction and simplicity, which Kiitsu enhanced by the changes of color. For Kiitsu's bolder and more colorful style see no. 24.

(Text continues on reverse.)
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Related Events

Docent Tours

Docent tours of the exhibition are offered at 3:15 p.m. daily except Mondays. Tours meet at the Ahmanson Gallery desk.

Lectures

Sunday, March 2, 3:30 p.m.
“Festivals, Tales, Birds, and Flowers: Screen Paintings in the Shin’enkan Collection,” Robert T. Singer, research fellow, Kyoto University

Sunday, March 16, 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 6, 3:30 p.m.
“Masterpieces of Rimpa Painting in the Shin’enkan Collection,” Howard A. Link, curator of Asiatic Art, Honolulu Academy of Arts

Sunday, April 27, 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 11, 3:30 p.m.

All lectures are presented in the Leo S. Bing Theater. Admission is free to museum members and included in the general admission fee for nonmembers. No seating is reserved.

The catalogue of the exhibition Masterpieces from the Shin’enkan Collection: Japanese Painting of the Edo Period can be purchased in the Museum Shop.
Ukiyo-e Paintings

Since the work of ukiyo-e artists was popularized through woodblock prints, their paintings are often overlooked, yet they constitute the earliest examples of ukiyo-e and some of the best works by many of its artists. Katsukawa Shunshō is known primarily through his woodblock prints of actors. Some of his finest works in this genre, however, were paintings of beautiful women.

Ukiyo-e ("pictures of the floating world") is associated with the pleasure quarters of the Edo period. The most famous was the Yoshiwara in Edo, where the middle class, primarily merchants, could enjoy the entertainments of a carefree life. The theaters and pleasure houses of the Yoshiwara provided them with one of the few means to spend their wealth and to escape from the strict social order of the period. Paintings and woodblock prints commemorating famous actors or courtesans became popular mementos of this life.

*Two Beauties* typifies the ukiyo-e paintings of beautiful, idealized courtesans. The two women are placed in an interior setting, which Shunshō has expanded with a landscape outside their window. In this painting Shunshō has incorporated the current dress and hair styles, giving particular attention to the finer points of the kimonos’ designs. Such meticulous attention to detail, graceful figures, and harmonious arrangement of colors won him fame as a painter during his lifetime. His contemporaries are said to have remarked, “a Shunshō painting is worth a thousand pieces of gold.”¹

Maruyama-Shijō School

The founder of the Maruyama School, Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–95), had studied Kanō painting before turning to Chinese bird-and-flower paintings and the Western techniques of perspective and chiaroscuro. These influences combined with his belief in sketching from nature gave his works an unprecedented sense of realism (see no. 51). The Maruyama-Shijō School is named for Ōkyo and for the street in Kyoto where one of his later pupils, Matsumura Goshun (1753–1811), lived. Goshun continued the school of Ōkyo based on his own lyrical style blended with Ōkyo’s naturalism.

Nagasawa Rosetsu was perhaps the most eccentric member of the Maruyama School. He is believed to have renounced his position as a samurai retainer, changed his surname, and moved to Kyoto around the age of twenty-five to study painting under Ōkyo. His early work was strongly influenced by Ōkyo (see no. 41), although he soon left Ōkyo’s studio and began to explore unusual themes and approaches.

_Bull and Elephant_ is characteristic of Rosetsu’s independent spirit. In this powerful pair of screens Rosetsu has suggested space and volume with washes of ink and only a few lines, which are indicative of his innovative compositions. In the right screen two crows, executed in dry brush strokes, cling to the smooth and seemingly endless expanse of the elephant’s body. In the left screen Rosetsu has again juxtaposed different textures by placing the furry puppy against the massive and fluid form of the bull. The stylized puppy has a cheerful expression despite its precarious position next to a potentially overpowering companion. These screens exemplify the bold and humorous style that made Rosetsu the most independent member of this school.
Individualists

Itō Jakuchū, like other artists of the eighteenth century, was trained in traditional styles but went on to explore his individualistic interpretations apart from any conventional school of painting. Jakuchū specialized in subjects from nature and in particular, roosters. The son of a wealthy Kyoto greengrocer, Jakuchū’s interest in animals went beyond casual observation. He actually raised barnyard animals himself and thus learned to draw them in lifelike detail. His work is a blending of direct observation and decorative style. Jakuchū also worked in a monochrome style as did many of his contemporaries. In these works he often incorporated unusual techniques to accentuate his bold designs.

*Rooster, Hen, and Hydrangeas* is among Jakuchū’s earlier works, dating to his forties. The rooster, hen, and foliage are all depicted with a fidelity to detail within a masterfully orchestrated composition. Influences from Chinese paintings are reflected in the contorted Chinese-style rocks, which create a design of their own on the right side of the painting. The textures of the animals’ feathers are skillfully suggested yet sufficiently stylized to create visual patterns, as do the petals of the hydrangeas. Unlike oil painting, where it is possible to repaint and retouch, in Far Eastern ink and color painting there is no retouching. Every stroke of the brush once executed is irreversible. The skill required to create a work of this nature makes it even more visually exciting.

Jakuchū is the preeminent artist of the Shin’enkan Collection. The depth of his work that is represented in the collection enables viewers to appreciate his imagination and diversity, and to witness his development as an artist (see nos. 60–67).
Another of the eighteenth-century individualists was Katsu Jagyoku, an artist about whom almost nothing is known. *Crows and Plum Tree, Rabbits and Pine Trees in Snow* appears to be his only known work. Jagyoku’s reputation as an individualist rests on the unusual techniques he has combined in this pair of screens.

The effect of a winter scene has been achieved through the use of broad strokes of dark, uneven washes of ink over the entire surface. The pictorial elements of the scene, the rabbits, crows, plum, and pines, have all been left unpainted. Jagyoku then applied additional washes to the reserved areas to depict the bark of the trees, needles of the pines, blossoms of the plum, the crows, and the faces and fur of the rabbits. Both screens were actually spattered with white pigment to represent falling snow. This combined with the bright white areas left in reserve give the screens a vivid sensation of winter. By cutting off the pine and plum trees, in a manner similar to *Pheasants amid Bamboo and a Blossoming Plum Tree* (no. 2), Jagyoku has captured one moment in time as animals frolicked within a secluded wood.

The Jagyoku screens are located in the Ahmanson Gallery Foyer.