

Exhibition: *Living for the Moment: Japanese Prints from the Barbara S. Bowman Collection*

On View: October 11, 2015–May 1, 2016

Location: Pavilion for Japanese Art, Level 3, and Ahmanson Building, Level 2



Image captions on page 5

(Los Angeles—October 5, 2015) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Living for the Moment: Japanese Prints from the Barbara S. Bowman Collection*. The exhibition features over 100 prints of transformative promised gifts of Japanese works to LACMA, representing the work of 32 artists. Included are examples of rare early prints of the *ukiyo-e* genre (pictures of the floating world); works from the golden age of *ukiyo-e* at the end of the eighteenth century by Suzuki Harunobu, Kitagawa Utamaro, and Katsukawa Shunshō; and nineteenth century prints by great masters such as Utagawa Hiroshige, Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and others.

Barbara S. Bowman (née Safan) was born in Los Angeles in 1925 and attended the University of Southern California (USC) for a degree in fine art. Barbara became captivated by Japanese woodblock prints early on after receiving two prints as a gift from her mother. She and her husband Morton visited Japan for the first time in 1962, and by 1978 she began actively collecting Japanese woodblock prints. Never intending to have an encyclopedic collection, Barbara sought out scenic designs in superb condition with stellar impressions, as she held the printing process in high esteem. The power of line and the importance of color were and remain defining factors of the collection. Assembled over 35 years, the Barbara S. Bowman Collection includes some of the finest impressions available.

“*Living for the Moment* represents a momentous gift to the Japanese Art Department of LACMA, in that we can now present the history of Japanese prints with high-quality works of art,” remarks Hollis Goodall, Curator of Japanese Art at LACMA.

About the Exhibition

Living for the Moment is presented in two locations at LACMA. Commercially printed *ukiyo-e*, mostly produced in Edo (modern Tokyo), will be displayed chronologically and by artistic group in the Ahmanson Building, level 2. Privately published *surimono* and theatrical prints of Osaka are installed in the Pavilion for Japanese Art, level 3.

***Ukiyo-e* and the Art of the Print in Japan**

Ukiyo-e developed as an independent genre in painting and book illustration by the late 1600s. The idea of the “floating world” (*ukiyo*), initially based on a Buddhist phrase referring to the transience of life, was adopted by popular writers to evoke fleeting moments of beauty and pleasure that provided distraction from the cares of a regimented society. Book illustrations on these topics gained such popularity that artists began creating single-sheet woodblock prints to sell. Edo became the center for the production of *ukiyo-e* prints.

In response to government restrictions placed on floating world subject matter in the early 1800s, artists explored new topics such as travel and heroes of ancient lore. Prints were also a perfect medium for artistic experimentation. After a breakthrough by Suzuki Harunobu in 1765, which allowed the production of multiblock color prints, artists explored realism, nature, perspective, framing, and light with a level of intensity that spread their influence not only across Japan but also, after the country opened to foreign trade in 1868, to Europe. There, the Impressionists, struck by the Japanese printmakers’ use of color, atmosphere, and composition, created a watershed style embarking upon Modernism.

The artist Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) was from a samurai family with an inherited position as a fire man in Edo Castle. In 1823 he passed on this job to a relative and became a full-time artist, having been trained by the Utagawa school master, Toyohiro (1773–1828). Hiroshige excelled at evoking the human experience of the landscape, with its varying seasons, times of day, and weather events. His sensitivity toward shifting light is best seen in early impressions of prints where he supervised color choice, as exemplified by his finest print in the Bowman collection entitled, *Minowa, Kanasugi, and Mikawashima* (1857). In this print, a broad strip of pink marks the horizon. The still-dark middle ground indicates light at daybreak which has not reached the nearby plains, and roofs in the distance already reflect the growing daylight. In his late years, Hiroshige developed a unique viewpoint,

looking beyond an object set close at hand to a landscape which receded into deep distance. His framing of subjects directly influenced the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists in Europe, and later Frank Lloyd Wright in the United States.

Surimono: Privately Published Japanese Prints

The majority of *ukiyo-e* prints were produced by publishers for general sale. Government censors enforced laws restricting the subject matter of prints and their price, by limiting the number of blocks and quality of pigments. These laws were not applied to private groups, who made prints called *surimono* (printed things) for distribution to a specified clientele. These groups mostly consisted of poets of *kyōka* (mad verse), which was based on courtly poetry but played with the rules of language and content. Fan clubs for musicians and actors also occasionally commissioned *surimono*.

The heyday of *surimono* lasted from the late 1700s through the first third of the 1800s, with the majority produced after 1800. These prints were most frequently distributed at the New Year to *kyōka* group members and would often bear poems related to that season. Printed on thick, luxurious paper, *surimono* often featured richly hued dyes too expensive for general use and metals such as brass, tin, and copper. Viewing these prints closely, one may also detect exquisite embossed details and areas that mimic the appearance of lacquer.

Surimono artists, led by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), his followers, and contemporaries, drew designs based on the poetry to be printed on the *surimono*, either portraying, embellishing, or playfully skewing the content with their illustrations. The design was there for the enhancement of the poetry, rather than vice versa.

Hokusai's *Salt Shells (Shiogai)* from 1821, for example, is a still life that depicts a box of open salt cakes, a pipe case and tobacco pouch attached to a netsuke container, and a small pine tree planted in a bowl. The work is from a series of 36 *surimono* that included verse by many followers of the noted contemporary poet Yomo no Magao. The series title and poem refer to the New Year game of matching bifurcated shells, each containing a segment of the same poem.

Exhibition Catalogue

Living for the Moment is accompanied by a fully illustrated 184-page catalogue by exhibition curator Hollis Goodall, and includes an essay by Joan B. Mirviss. *Living for the Moment* is available for \$65.00 at the LACMA Store [online](#) and in store at the museum.

Related Programming

Docent Tours

Saturdays, October 24, 2015–April 30, 2016 | 1 pm

Ahmanson Gallery 202

Volunteer docents lead in-focus tours of the exhibition.

Artist Demonstration: Japanese Woodblock Printing

Sunday, November 15, 2015 | 1:30 pm

Plaza Art Studio | Free, reservations required.

Artist Keiji Shinohara gives a demonstration of the traditional techniques of Japanese woodblock printmaking.

Lecture: The 28th-Annual Michele and Peter Berton Memorial Lecture on Japanese Art

Sunday, December 6, 2015 | 3:30 pm

Brown Auditorium | Free, no reservation required.

Andreas Marks, Head of the Japanese and Korean Art Department and Director of the Clark Center at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, presents the lecture “More Than Just a Moment of Success: Utagawa Kunisada, Japan's Most Prolific Print Designer.”

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes nearly 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art, Latin American art, ranging from pre-Columbian masterpieces to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over a million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives, such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement at lacma.org. Situated in Hancock Park on over 20 acres in the heart of Los Angeles, LACMA is located between the ocean and downtown.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions:

(Left) Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III) (Japan, 1786–1865), *Otsuma and Hachirobei: The Unagidani Scene of Urami no Samesaya (The vengeful sharkskin scabbard)*, *New Edition, Part One*, circa early 1830s, promised gift of Barbara S. Bowman, photo © 2015 Museum Associates/LACMA

(Center, left) Suzuki Harunobu (Japan, c. 1765–1770), *Lucky Dream for the New Year: Mt. Fuji, Falcon, and Eggplants*, circa 1768–1769, promised gift of Barbara S. Bowman, photo © 2015 Museum Associates/LACMA

(Center, right) Utagawa Hiroshige (Japan, 1797–1858), *Minowa, Kanasugi, and Mikawashima*, 1857, promised gift of Barbara S. Bowman, photo © 2015 Museum Associates/LACMA

(Right) Katsushika Hokusai (Japan, 1760–1849), *Salt Shells (Shio-gai)*; from the series: *A Genroku Contest of Thirty-Six Poets as a Shell-Matching Game (Genroku kasen kaiawase)*, 1821, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Promised Gift of Barbara S. Bowman, photo © 2015 Museum Associates/LACMA

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