



December 2007

**Exhibition of Japanese Woodblock Prints from the Utagawa School
On View at the Brooklyn Museum from March 21 through June 15, 2008**

Utagawa: Masters of the Japanese Print, 1770–1900, on view at the Brooklyn Museum from March 21 through June 15, 2008, will present 95 Japanese woodblock prints by more than 15 artists, among them Utagawa Hiroshige, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. The exhibition is drawn from the holdings of the Chazen Museum of Art's renowned Van Vleck collection and is augmented by 22 woodblock prints from the Brooklyn Museum's Asian art collection.

The Utagawa School, founded by Utagawa Toyoharu, dominated the Japanese print market in the nineteenth century and is responsible for more than half of all surviving Ukiyo-e prints. These prolific artists created a thriving print publishing industry by mass-producing their prints for the general public. Created in a climate of strict censorship and fierce creative competition, the woodblock prints are both technically sophisticated and broadly appealing.

Ukiyo-e originated in Edo, present-day Tokyo, during the Shogunate era, when Japan was isolated from the rest of the world. Literally meaning "pictures of the floating world", the Ukiyo-e genre closely examines the pleasures of Kabuki theatres, teahouses, and the lives of geishas and courtesans. Colorful, innovative, and sometimes defiant of government regulations, the Ukiyo-e prints were created for a popular audience and documented themes of leisure and entertainment: familiar landscapes, portraits of beautiful women, Kabuki actors, and erotica.

Although the Utagawa artists paid homage to aspects of classical Japanese culture, their subject was first and foremost the modern world, ranging from portraits of the famous beautiful women of the pleasure quarters to images of Kabuki actors caught mid performance. Every artist from the Utagawa School made at least a few erotic prints. Even though these images were at times prohibited by the government, they were always in demand. Less controversial subjects, such as landscape, were modernized by the Utagawa artists, who presented views of well-known urban and suburban locations instead of the more dramatic, remote sites depicted by earlier artists.

Utagawa presents these themes through a vast selection of prints such as Utagawa Toyokuni's six-sheet print capturing the fireworks at Ryogoku Bridge, a highly detailed image crowded with spectators; Utagawa Kunisada's triptych of three elegant courtesans walking through the snow while gracefully holding

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umbrellas; and Toyohara Kunichika's print of Kabuki actor Ichikawa Sadanji dramatically posed with his sword in front of a burning courtyard. This exhibition also includes an expansive view of the Nihon Bridge by Utagawa Toyohiro and a sophisticated view of Mount Fuji from the Sea of Satta by Toyohiro's better-known student, Utagawa Hiroshige.

This exhibition has been organized by Laura Mueller, Van Vleck Curatorial Intern, Chazen Museum of Art, and Doctoral Candidate, Japanese Art History, University of Wisconsin–Madison. The Brooklyn Museum's presentation has been coordinated and enhanced with the addition of works from Brooklyn's collection by Joan Cummins, Lisa and Bernard Selz Curator of Asian Art, Brooklyn Museum.

A full-color catalogue published by The Chazen Museum of Art and Hotei Publishing of Amsterdam will accompany the exhibition. It will include five essays by an international team of scholars.

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