



322 *Morning Haze at Asakusa*, from the set "Eight Sophisticated Views of Edo," by Suzuki Harunobu. c. 1769. Polychrome woodblock print on paper; chūban size: 10 x 7 1/2 in. (25.4 x 19 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

Harunobu's favorite contemporary subjects were the two great beauties of the day in Edo, Osen and Ofuji. The first was a daughter of the proprietor of a teahouse on the grounds of Kasamori Shrine and the second of the owner of a toothpick shop behind Asakusa Kannonji. In the print "Morning Haze at Asakusa," from the set *Eight Sophisticated Views of Edo*, Ofuji is shown flirting with a young samurai (Fig. 322). Like all of Harunobu's female figures, she is depicted as a slender, graceful girl, innocent and untouched by the rigors of life. Harunobu never tries to individualize his young women; they are presented without unique features. Ofuji was known as the "ginko girl" because of the ginko trees near her father's shop, and Harunobu has made reference to this by including several ginko leaves in the foreground of the print. However, he has gone a step beyond this cliché by placing Ofuji against the backdrop of a willow tree, again a reference to her youth and pliability, and to the "willow world," another euphemism for the pleasure district.

UKIYO-E ARTISTS

Torii Kiyonaga

The *ukiyo-e* artist who best depicts the elegant surface of Japanese life in the late eighteenth century is the great master

of the Torii school, Torii Kiyonaga (1752–1815). Although not a blood relation of the Torii family—his official surname was Sekiguchi—Kiyonaga assumed leadership of the Torii school in 1785, when his master Kiyomitsu (1735–85) died suddenly. At the time there was no male heir who could take over, and Kiyonaga was Kiyomitsu's most accomplished pupil. He accepted the position with reluctance and forced his son to abandon thoughts of a career as an artist, presumably to prevent any disputes about who would succeed him, his own kin or Kiyomitsu's grandson. His work demonstrates a quality of reticence in the assertion of his own personality and of gentility in the depiction of his subjects. In the years 1781 to 1785, Kiyonaga developed a style of *bijinga* which became the preferred form for the genre for the remainder of the century. In his prints the women—whether important figures from history or literature, geisha, or wives of the merchant class—are depicted as tall, elegant creatures engaged in gentle, decorous activities. After 1787, Kiyonaga mainly produced actor prints in accordance with his role as head of the Torii school, and by 1800 he seems to have retired from the active production of prints, contenting himself with drawings for his own and his friends' amusement. A particularly interesting pair of New Year prints shows two groups of women meeting on the Edo bridge called Nihonbashi (Fig. 323). The group on the left is presumably returning from a pilgrimage to Enoshima, an island off the coast of Kamakura, as the figure at the head of the group is holding a hat with the word "Enoshima" written on it. The women in the right half of the diptych cannot be so specifically identified, but they appear to be acquaintances of the returning figures. The setting for their chance meeting affords the artist an opportunity to depict the environs of the Nihonbashi River, with Edo Castle and Mount Fuji visible in the background.

A copy of another Kiyonaga diptych, called *Interior of a Bathhouse* (Fig. 324), was owned by the nineteenth-century French painter Edgar Degas (1834–1917), who hung it in his bedroom. Degas admired it a great deal, and not only for the obvious reasons, but also for its spatial dissonances, which he attempted to integrate into his own work. The diptych depicts a familiar Japanese scene, the public bathhouse. These bathhouses, which became such a feature of Japanese culture, were first recorded in the fourteenth century, in the Gion district of Kyoto, and by the early seventeenth century most urban neighborhoods were equipped with one. The undeniably prurient nature of this print highlights the numerous regulations regarding bathhouses of the eighteenth century, most of which seem aimed at separate bathing for the sexes. In the right panel a mother washes her child's face, and in the left panel two squatting women chat as they rinse their bodies. In the upper left the head of the proprietor can be seen. In addition Kiyonaga used a couple of compositional elements that, although natural outgrowths of the Japanese illustrative tradition, were profoundly challenging to Western artists of the late nineteenth century. He created an impression of space within the enclosed area of the building by using the oblique



323 *New Year's Scene: Women Meeting on Nihonbashi Bridge*, by Torii Kiyonaga. 1786. Polychrome woodblock print diptych on paper, each *ōban* size: 15 x 9 1/8 in. (38.1 x 23.2 cm). The Honolulu Academy of Arts. Gift of James A. Michener. 1991 (21, 801).



324 *Interior of a Bathhouse*, by Torii Kiyonaga. 1780s. Polychrome woodblock-print diptych, ink and color on paper, *ōban* size: as mounted, 15 1/4 in. x 20 1/8 in. (38.7 x 51 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection. (30.46-7).

lines of the floorboards to lead the viewer's eye deep into the inner room. The figures are arranged in an asymmetrical pattern, with a recess at the center of the composition.

Tōshūsai Sharaku and Kitagawa Utamaro

The artists who best reflect a change in mood in popular taste in the shogunal capital at the end of the eighteenth century are Tōshūsai Sharaku and Kitagawa Utamaro, who attempted to show the figures of the *ukiyo-e* world, the actors and courtesans, as they really were, even when vain, frivolous, and addicted to sensual pleasures. Sharaku is one of the most famous creators of woodblock prints, and also the most enigmatic—the dates and events of his life are unknown. He appeared on the scene in the spring of 1794, produced a series of nearly one hundred and fifty print designs of Kabuki actors, and disappeared again after the New Year's performance in 1795. However, in that brief period he created some of the most extraordinarily insightful pictures of players, showing them in the act of portraying a specific dramatic character and at the same time revealing the personality of the actor behind the makeup and elaborate costumes.

The print depicting Segawa Tomisaburō II as Yadorigi, the wife of a *chōnin*, is a superb example of Sharaku's work



(Fig. 325). The man, often called “Nasty Tomi” because of his ascerbic offstage personality, is shown tight-jawed, glaring meanly through tiny, hard eyes as he mincingly pulls up one sleeve of his *kosode*. The truthful and unflattering quality of the portrait and the glistening gray mica background combine to create an incisive and vital image, an actor in a *mie* pose—a moment frozen in time expressing the character's emotional state—in the glimmering light of a stage illuminated by lanterns placed along the front edge of the platform. Thwarted by the sumptuary law of 1794 forbidding the use of mica as well as other luxury items, Sharaku was forced in his later prints to use a flat yellow ground to suggest the atmosphere of the stage on which his figures moved, but it was never as successful as the gray mica grounds. His last works show a distinct decline in quality, which may have been the reason he gave up printmaking.

Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) was a more lasting and versatile artist who turned out picture books on insects, the libretti for Kabuki plays, and prints based on the plots of such famous stories as *Chūshingura*—the revenge of the forty-seven *rōnin*. His favorite subject matter seems to have been beautiful women: not only those resident in the pleasure districts, but ordinary *chōnin* wives and daughters as well, engaged in everyday activities such as bathing their children or cooling themselves by the river on a warm summer evening. Little is known about Utamaro's early years, but he studied art with Toriyama Sekien (1712–88), an *ukiyo-e* artist who trained in the Kanō school, and who is known today primarily for his illustrated volumes of humorous verse. With Sekien's death, Utamaro adopted a signature, which suggested that he considered himself to be an artist in his own right, and no longer a disciple.

Throughout the last decade of the eighteenth century, he was the dominant presence in the production of *ukiyo-e*. In 1804, he made a three-panel print depicting Hideyoshi in the midst of a party with his five concubines under the cherry blossoms at Daigoji. The *bakufu* took exception to the print because it violated the prohibitions against identifying famous historical figures and punished Utamaro with a three-day jail sentence and fifty days in hand chains, an ordeal that contributed directly to his death. Sharaku's forte was the personality behind the makeup of the Kabuki actor; Utamaro's was the female psyche in all its nuances. In his series *Hokkoku goshiki sumi* (*Five Kinds of Ink from the Northern Provinces*), Utamaro has penned a title cleverly punning on the five different classes of courtesan, from one of the highest, the *geigi*, a kind of geisha, a charming and coquettish young woman carefully dressed in elegant garments, to the *teppō*, the lowest and most debased of prostitutes (Figs 326 and 327).

325 Segawa Tomisaburō as Yadorigi, *Ōgishi Kurando's Wife*, by Tōshūsai Sharaku. 1794. Polychrome woodblock print with mica background on paper; *ōban* size: 15 x 9 1/4 in (38.1 x 23.2 cm). Tokyo National Museum.



326 Geigi, from the series *Hokkoku goshiki sumi* (*Five Kinds of Ink from the Northern Provinces*), by Kitagawa Utamaro. Early 1790s. Polychrome woodblock print on paper; *ōban* size: 15 x 9 1/4 in. (38.1 x 23.2 cm). Private collection.

Utamaro's *teppō* is caught in the midst of her trade, her unseen client implied by her dishevelled hair, disarrayed garments, and the sheets of paper gripped in her teeth, a detail often included in erotic prints. The *geigi*, on the other hand, is a gay and animated woman who is bent on amusing her customer through conversation.

Another example of Utamaro's art can be seen in his prints of Yamauba and her son Kintarō, with their depiction of the warm maternal relationship between the beautiful, if slightly rough and unkempt, mother and the chubby, mischievous child (Fig. 328). The Yamauba theme had appeared in many different forms, ranging from folktales and songs sung to the accompaniment of the *samisen* to Nō chants, and, depending on the context, different elements of the story receive emphasis. Yamauba is either a mountain spirit or a mortal woman who married a great warrior but was left behind when he was wrongfully banished from court. A child is born of this union, and the mother is forced to retreat to the mountains to save herself and her son. When they are later

discovered by the legendary general Minamoto no Yorimitsu (948–1021), Kintarō, a chubby-cheeked, orange-skinned boy, is wrestling with a bear. The soldier is fascinated and asks the boy to introduce him to his mother. A strange but attractive woman appears, clad in a garment of leaves, her hair long and scraggly. Yet in spite of her rough appearance Yamauba speaks to Yorimitsu in the cultured manner of a noblewoman. The general, impressed by the boy's strength and his unusual upbringing, makes him a retainer, and Kintarō matures into an exemplary warrior who vindicates his father's name. The theme of Yamauba and Kintarō was still popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and became the vehicle for expressing a maternal and, in some cases, almost sensual relationship between the beautiful, rustic woman and her rather animal-like child. One of the most charming prints of Utamaro's group shows Yamauba teasing the boy by holding a twig bearing two chestnuts just beyond his reach. Frustrated, Kintarō grabs the cloth of her kimono and tries to climb up her leg. After Utamaro's death, pictures of actors and



327 Teppō, from the series *Hokkoku goshiki sumi* (*Five Kinds of Ink from the Northern Provinces*), by Kitagawa Utamaro. Early 1790s. Polychrome woodblock print on paper; *ōban* size: 15 x 9 1/4 in. (38.1 x 23.2 cm). Ohta Memorial Museum.



328 *Yamauba and Kintarō: The Chestnut*, by Kitagawa Utamaro. 1796–9. Polychrome woodblock print on paper; *chūban* size: 10 x 7 1/2 in. (25.4 x 19 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

courtesans no longer retained the master's naturalism and insight into human character. It was not until the 1820s, when a new group of artists turned to the depiction of landscape scenes in a romantic vein, that woodblock prints regained their popularity.

The Utagawa School

Ukiyo-e in the last years of the Edo period took quite a different direction from the prints produced in the eighteenth century. The most prolific school of the nineteenth century was the Utagawa, founded in the late 1700s by a rather minor artist, Utagawa Toyoharu (1735–1814), who specialized in prints using Western one-point perspective—*uki-e*. His greatest accomplishment was as a teacher, and he managed to assemble a studio of talented young artists who not only produced commercially successful prints, but were able to attract students who could continue the Utagawa line. Two outstanding printmakers of the nineteenth century, Toyokuni and Kuniyoshi, though working in their own individual styles, traced their artistic lineage to the Utagawa school.

At about the same time that Sharaku made his brief appearance as a printmaker in the 1790s, Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769–1825) developed his own style for representing single actors seen in dramatic, full-length poses against a light gray ground. His most impressive work of this period is a group of more than fifty prints entitled *Yakusha butai no sugata-e* (*Views of Actors on Stage*), produced between 1794 and 1796. Given his new-found popularity, by the end of the century he was able to include other subject matter in his prints: beautiful women, young children, and humorous scenes. However, the increasing demand for actor prints forced Toyokuni to work too quickly; toward the end of his life, the quality of his work declined markedly. Nevertheless, in his heyday he produced work of considerable intensity and power.

Typical of his prints depicting beautiful women is a series of fan-shaped designs of 1823 entitled *Imayō Juni-kagetsu* (*The Twelve Months of Fashion*), from which *Minazuki*, the month without water (according to the Western calendar, late July after the rainy season had ended), is illustrated (Fig. 329). Ostensibly the subject is a young woman holding a mirror behind her head so that she can check the appearance of the nape of her neck—considered by the Japanese to be an erogenous zone—by projecting its reflection onto a mirror in front of her. The double mirror image was a popular theme among Utagawa artists, but in this scene the table mirror is covered with a cloth. The print would seem to be a pun on the name of the month. *Mi* is a homonym meaning both “water” and “to see,” thus *Minazuki* could also mean, “month of not seeing” a charming and witty variation on a familiar theme.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861) studied with Toyokuni, but preferred then to branch off in his own direction. In 1827, he produced a series of warrior prints depicting one hundred and eight heroes from the sixteenth-century Chinese novel *Shuihuzhuan* (JAP. *Suikoden*), which recounts the adventures of a group of bandits who valiantly sacrifice themselves for the emperor. The images, inspired stylistically by Shoun Genkei's (1648–1710) sculptures of the five hundred *rakan* in Edo's Gohyaku Rakanji, were an instant sensation. Though Kuniyoshi worked also in other genres of *ukiyo-e*, he is best known today for such *musha-e* (warrior pictures), especially his triptychs.



329 *Minzuki (July)*, by Utagawa Toyokuni I, from the series *Imayō Juni-kagetsu (The Twelve Months of Fashion)*. 1823. Woodblock fan print; horizontal *ōban* size: 9 1/8 x 15 in. (23.2 x 38.1 cm). Private collection.

One of his most dramatic and gruesome prints is the triptych of *Takiyasha the Witch and the Skeleton Specter*, of c. 1845 (Fig. 330). The subject derives from the Kabuki play *Soma dairi (The Palace of Soma)*, performed in 1844 and based on the story of the rebellion of Taira no Masakado (d. 940). Masakado was one of the first samurai to rebel against imperial authority when in 930 he embarked on a rampage to acquire land in the northern provinces around Hitachi. The power of the court was largely ineffective in these outlying regions, and in 940 Masakado proclaimed himself emperor and appointed governors to the eight provinces he controlled. Within two months, however, he was captured and killed, his head taken back to Kyoto for display. In the mid-1800s this story found its way to the Kabuki stage, focusing not on Masakado's rebellion but on its aftermath. Masakado had left behind two children, a son, Yoshikado, and a daughter, Takiyasha. A local samurai, hearing that a ghost had appeared at Masakado's residence, the Soma palace, goes to investigate and encounters Takiyasha disguised as a courtesan. When she fails to win the samurai's affection, she summons a giant skeleton to overpower him. Skeletons have appeared in Japanese art from the twelfth century onward, but seldom have they been treated as such menacing figures. In this triptych Kuniyoshi has truly captured the late Edo period taste for the bizarre.

Katsushika Hokusai

Another aspect of popular taste at the end of the Edo period was a fondness for romantic views depicting human beings and their place in nature. The woodblock-print artist

Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) was the first to capture the attention of collectors of *ukiyo-e* with visions of the Japanese landscape. Hokusai's personality is well expressed in the signature he adopted toward the end of his life, "Old Man Mad With Painting."

Apprenticed to a woodblock-print engraver in his teens, Hokusai learned the technical and interpretive skills involved in translating the stylistic nuances of an original ink drawing into the engraved lines of the print block. As this was a period when polychrome prints were being produced in great numbers, he must also have acquired considerable knowledge of the total process. In 1778, he embarked on his creative career by becoming a pupil of Katsukawa Shunshō (1726–92), under whose tutelage he produced a wide variety of works, including single sheets depicting beautiful women, sumo wrestlers, birds and flowers, and even some landscapes in which he experimented with Western perspective. The climate of the art world in Edo at this time was such that affiliation with a particular group of artists was essential to economic survival and, as the Katsukawa school was no longer so popular, Hokusai found it advantageous to seek other connections. At one time he studied painting under the Kanō master Yūsen, but was expelled from the studio for criticizing his teacher's handling of a particular painting. Hokusai dropped from sight in 1794, the year Sharaku produced his actor prints, giving rise to speculation that he briefly adopted the name and style associated with that enigmatic artist. However, today few scholars accept this as a possibility. Later Hokusai assumed the headship of the Tawaraya school, a group of artists dedicated to the revival of the Rinpa style of decorative art. Finally, in