

these factors—the dislocations within the society and the pressure from technologically more advanced nations—led to a mood of discontent and uncertainty among the Japanese that is reflected in the arts of this period, which is known as the *bakumatsu*, (or waning of the *bakufu*). While there were no major artistic innovations in the years before the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868, the foremost artists of each school of painting were rethinking their approaches to pictorial expression and seeking fresh inspiration in an effort to revitalize their work.

Images of the Floating World: *Ukiyo-e*

Ukiyo-e is the type of pictorial expression most characteristic of the Edo period, depicting as it does the world of the theater, the pleasure district, and the *chōnin* and samurai who frequented both. The word *ukiyo* had first appeared in the context of Buddhism, where it was used to describe the impermanence of the world of humans—the sense that all things are illusory and ephemeral—but in the Edo period the word took on a different tone: now this ephemeral character was to be savored with gusto by a society devoted to sensual pleasures all the more exciting for their constantly changing nature. In addition *ukiyo* was used to refer specifically to the demimonde of the pleasure district—a quarter of the city which housed courtesans, their attendants, and the theaters, where Kabuki plays and Bunraku performances were presented. By the Genroku era the principal vehicles for literary and artistic expression were the *ukiyo zōshi*, prose stories of the floating world; *ukiyo-e*, paintings and woodblock prints of genre subjects; *bijinga*, paintings and prints of courtesans; and Kabuki and Bunraku plays.

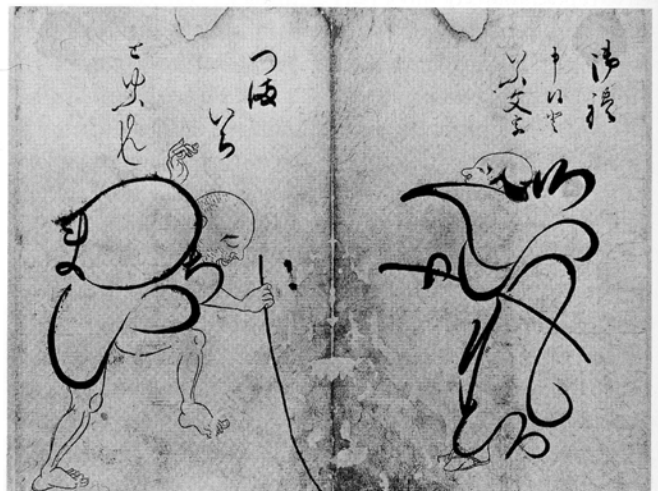
The artist traditionally credited with parentage of the entire *ukiyo* genre of illustration is Iwasa Matabei (1578–1650), although the only extant works attributed to him are paintings. The best explanation yet advanced for the references in Edo-period documents to “Ukiyo Matabei” is that the artist pioneered a style of painting in which wiry black outlines and bright colors were combined with themes depicting human beings in moments of extreme emotion—caught in the noise, excitement, and confusion of a festival, or even crimes of passion—and that this mode of painting was transmitted by him from Kyoto to Fukui prefecture, where he worked for the daimyo Matsudaira Tadanao (1595–1650) and his son, and finally to Edo, where he moved in 1637. Matabei was the illegitimate son of the samurai Araki Murashige, a trusted adviser to Oda Nobunaga. However, the year after Matabei was born his father rebelled unsuccessfully and had to flee for his life. His wife and legitimate offspring were put to death, but Matabei escaped with his wet nurse and was allowed to live in hiding in Honganji in Kyoto. Thus he grew up in the capital and probably established a painting studio there before he left for Fukui in 1615.

His style, fully mature by the time he reached Edo, probably had great appeal for the rough, brawling *chōnin* and

low-ranking samurai of the early city, with their taste for action-packed Kabuki plays, and may well have influenced artists there who were working with block-printing techniques, enabling them to create designs of greater intensity and forcefulness. A pair of word pictures (*moji-e*) attributed to him displays the kind of witty imagery and brush technique that came to be identified with the man and his painting style (Fig. 316). At first glance they seem to be caricature sketches of a beggar and a samurai retainer. However, the thick black outlines of each are in fact *hiragana* characters; one forms the word for beggar (*tsu ma ichi*), while the one of the samurai official forms the phrase “I humbly thank you” (*orei o moshi sōrō*). Christine Guth in her study of these images, and the concept of *asobi* (or playfulness) in Edo-period art, has pointed to *moji-e* images as evidence also of the growing literacy amongst the general population.

A second step toward the formation of true *ukiyo-e* was a type of painting, *bijinga* (or alternatively, *bijin-e*), depicting a single courtesan against a flat, neutral background, which became popular in the Kanbun era (1661–72). These paintings, generally executed by artists who did not sign their works, were presumably produced as expensive souvenirs for purchase by well-to-do *chōnin* or samurai patrons of the pleasure district. In contrast to Matabei’s work, Kanbun *bijinga* display delicate brushwork and elaborate textile patterns in restrained colors combined with a characterization of the women as remote and elegant creatures. An excellent example of this style of painting is the hanging scroll of a Kanbun-era beauty (Fig. 317). A slender young woman stands with her knees slightly bent, her arms drawn into her sleeves. Her mouth is hidden by an undergarment that has been pulled out of place, and her eyes are directed to the left. Whether her attitude denotes shyness or the coy allure of a courtesan is left for the viewer to decide, and therein lies much of the painting’s charm.

316 Pair of word pictures (*moji-e*), attributed to Iwasa Matabei. Edo period, 17th century. Album leaves, ink on paper; each: 11 ½ x 8 ¾ in. (29.2 x 22.2 cm). The Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, New York.





of society. One particularly charming example is an image of a samurai falconer (*takajō*), a type seen traveling in the retinue of a great daimyo (Fig. 318). The image of the warrior has a sweet simplicity, and the glum-looking bird on his upraised arm adds a note of whimsicality. However, by far the most representative art form of *ukiyo-e*, and indeed of the entire period, is the woodblock print.

UKIYO-E WOODBLOCK PRINTS

The man generally credited with bringing the woodblock-print artist out of the shadows of anonymity into the light of public acclaim was Hishikawa Moronobu (1618–94). Born into a family that made its living by designing and executing embroidery on textiles, Moronobu began his artistic career making underdrawings on cloth. It was a short step from this to the designing of woodblock prints, utilizing supple black lines on the white ground of the paper. It is important to remark here that the great woodblock print artists are, in fact, designers of the images. That is, they produce the cartoons which the printer's workmen would then carve onto a wooden block, rub with ink, and then impress onto paper. Sometime after the great Edo fire of 1657, Moronobu is thought to have moved from the Chiba region to Edo, where he began to design prints. His period of greatest activity was from 1673 to 1687, although few prints have survived from this time. Primarily employed in book illustration, his great innovation was the production of sets of single-sheet illustrations without any accompanying text, depicting such Edo themes as the pleasure districts, flower-viewing in the municipal gardens, and the like. He was also the first print designer to append his name to his prints. A particularly fine example of his work is the single sheet from the 1678 set *Yoshiwara no tei* (*The Appearance of Yoshiwara*), Yoshiwara being the city's principal pleasure quarter. The print shows the interior of a teahouse, with several patrons sitting on the floor watching as a courtesan dances to the accompaniment of a drum and two *samisen* (Fig. 319). To the left is a two-panel screen with Moronobu's signature clearly visible as part of the surface decoration.

A group of artists known as the Torii school benefited not only from the new prominence that Moronobu brought to individual woodblock-print designers, but also from certain elements of his style and the new standards of excellence he set for the medium. Torii Kiyomoto (1645–1702), the founder, was an *onnagata* (performer of female roles) in the Kabuki theater. In 1687, he moved with his family from Osaka to Edo, where he was asked to design a poster for one of the Kabuki theaters. His work received such favorable comment that he was asked to do posters for other theaters in the city, and gradually he developed a monopoly on the designing of theater posters and programs. Kiyonobu I (1664?–1729), Kiyomoto's

318 Falconer (*Takajō*). Edo period, 18th century. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 23 1/2 x 8 3/4 in. (58.7 x 22.5 cm). The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota. Gift of Harriet and Edson Spencer. (99.59.2).

A third stimulus to the development of *ukiyo-e* was the popularity of *ukiyo zōshi*, short stories and novellas written in simple Japanese about the life of townspeople and courtesans. The foremost novelist working in this genre, indeed the man often credited with developing this form of fiction, was Ihara Saikaku (1642–93), the son of an Osaka merchant. Saikaku began his career by writing linked verse (*renga*), but in his forties he turned to the production of erotic fiction, including *The Life of a Man Who Lived for Love*, *Five Women Who Chose Love*, and *The Life of an Amorous Woman*. The last mentioned, arguably the best of Saikaku's *ukiyo zōshi*, deals with a woman who began life as the daughter of a courtier, an attractive, well-trained girl with a promising future. However, allowing herself to be ruled by her sensual desires rather than by her head, she fell into one disastrous situation after another, until she ended her days as a common prostitute too old to attract a customer even in the darkness of night. In Saikaku's hands the story, which could have been a very melancholy tale, becomes lighthearted and humorous.

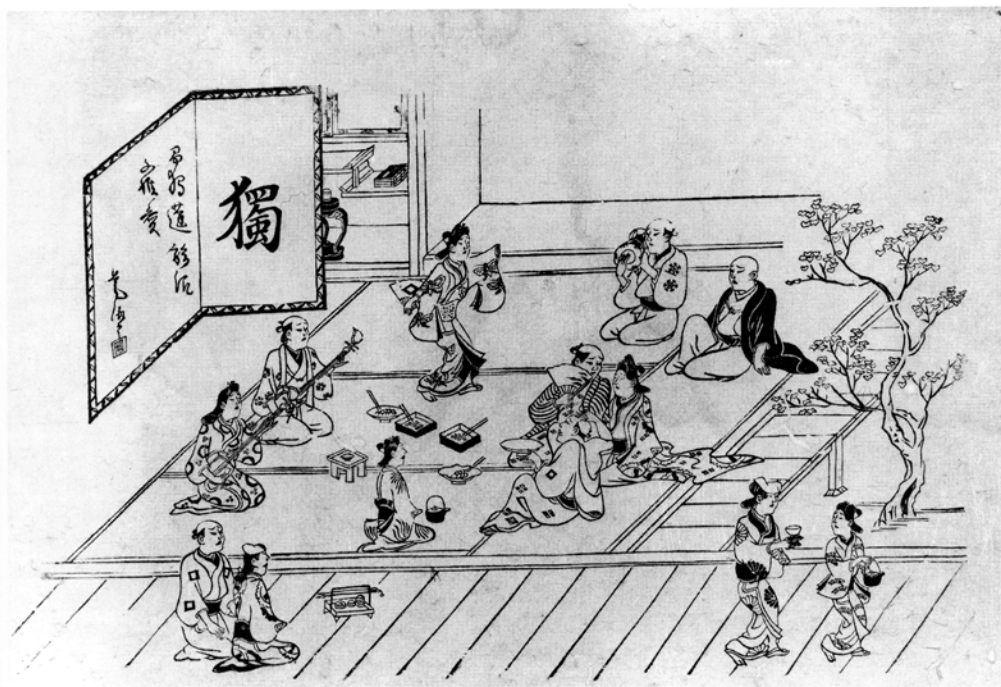
Many editions of this novel and of Saikaku's other works were published, the better editions having illustrations interspersed with the text. Saikaku even tried his hand at designing monochrome woodblock prints, both for his own and friends' books. Illustrated books were first produced and commonly circulated in the early seventeenth century, but they gained tremendously in popularity as townspeople became more interested in literature and affluent enough to purchase them. By the Genroku era the quality of the writing and of the illustrations had improved to the point that they were significant art forms.

Aside from these traditions typical of the great urban centers, the small towns of the provinces also entered very much into the spirit of *ukiyo-e*, especially those plotted along the main routes, such as the Tōkaidō, connecting major cities or pilgrimage and tourist sites. These much cruder images are known as *ōtsu-e*, after a town famous for producing them on the Tōkaidō. This "Eastern Sea Route" was the main highway that followed the east coast of Honshū from Edo to the head of Ise Bay and then turned inland towards Lake Biwa and the terminal point of Kyoto. It is clear, however, that there were artists turning out such images all over Japan. *Ōtsu-e* appear at roughly the same time as *ukiyo-e*, in the mid-seventeenth century, although for the most part these early examples are Buddhist and Shinto icons. Matthew Welch, who has worked extensively with this genre, has posited that an initial reason for the creation of *Ōtsu-e* might have been a demand by all levels of society for affordable icons to display to the Tokugawa officials, then going door to door querying religious affiliation, and checking that no one was Christian. Having an *Ōtsu-e* icon on display would have helped to quieten any suspicions on the part of the officials, and its purchase would have been

within reach of most households. By the Genroku era, the zeal of the government's social reforms had waned, and accordingly so did the demand for cheap icons. Painters of *Ōtsu-e* began therefore to copy the subject matter of the *ukiyo-e* of the cities, from *bijinga* to narrative illustrations to satirical images



317 *Kanban Beauty*. 17th century. Hanging scroll, color on paper; 24 1/8 x 9 3/4 in. (61.2 x 24.4 cm). The Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, New York.



319 Illustration from *Yoshiwara no tei* (*The Appearance of Yoshiwara*), a woodblock series by Hishikawa Moronobu, showing a teahouse scene. 1678. One-color woodblock print on paper; horizontal *ōban* size: 9 1/4 × 15 in. (23.2 × 38.1 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

son, made a singular contribution by developing a style of depiction that captured the rough, vigorous acting technique devised by the actor Ichikawa Danjurō, then immensely popular in Edo. Kiyonobu I's style has been characterized rather unflatteringly as "gourd legs, wormlike," referring to the heavy muscular legs of his male figures and to the strong line, varying considerably in width, that he uses to define the forms. A third, rather mysterious, figure in the Torii family is the artist called Kiyomasu I (act. 1697–mid-1720s). The documentary evidence regarding his birth and death dates and his relationship to Kiyomoto and Kiyonobu I presents numerous problems of interpretation. However, from the few extant works attributed to Kiyomasu I, it would appear that he was a more accomplished and versatile artist than Kiyonobu I. An excellent example of his work is the print depicting Ichikawa Danjurō in the role of "Gorō Uprooting a Bamboo Tree" (Gorō Takenuki) (Fig. 320). The actor, a stocky man with bulging arm and leg muscles, exerts all his strength as the character Gorō to pull a thick bamboo trunk out of the ground. The line that marks the contour of the body is remarkably calligraphic, resembling exuberant brushwork rather than lines cut in a block of wood. On the basis of this print, it is easy to see why the work of Kiyomasu I is greatly appreciated by connoisseurs for its vigorous and forceful style.

Nishiki-e

A major innovation of the eighteenth century was the evolution of polychrome woodblock techniques to create images known as *nishiki-e* (brocade pictures). The technology for making color prints had existed in Japan since the seventeenth century and was used in the printing of mathematical and

scientific books, but it was not until the mid-eighteenth century that single-sheet polychrome prints began to appear. The first *nishiki-e* were commissioned by a group of wealthy *chōnin* and samurai who shared an interest in the arts, literature, and particularly the composition of haiku, and who indulged in elaborate and elegant pastimes, such as the exchange on New Year's Day of ingeniously designed and expensively printed calendars. One of the reasons that amateurs of the arts had to exercise such ingenuity in the creation of these year-end gifts was that the *bakufu* held a monopoly on the printing of calendars. Since these were privately printed and distributed, they were in violation of the law, and consequently the symbols for the months were subtly introduced into the composition so that at first glance the prints seemed to be nothing more than pretty pictures. It was no doubt this intrigue that made the activity so appealing.

The first to produce *nishiki-e* was Suzuki Harunobu (1725–70), an Edo artist with a relatively undistinguished career until he was commissioned by a group of connoisseurs to design a multicolor calendar print. By 1766, these polychrome prints were being marketed commercially—minus their calendric markings. From then until his death four years later, Harunobu turned out hundreds of multicolor prints dealing with contemporary and classical themes. One of his favorite subjects, of which he made five different versions, was *Fūryū nana Komachi*—the seven major events in the life of the most beautiful Heian poet, Ono Komachi (act. mid-ninth century), treated in a modern style and in modern dress. The subject was drawn from a group of *Nō* plays about Komachi by the great Muromachi-period playwrights Kan'ami and Ze'ami. One of these plays, *Kayoi Komachi* (*Komachi of the Hundred*



320 *Gōrō Uprooting a Bamboo Tree*, by Torii Kiyomasu I. 1697. Polychrome woodblock print on paper, with hand coloring; ōban size: 15 x 9 ½ in. (38.1 x 23.2 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

Nights), focuses on one of the poet's would-be lovers, with whom she made the agreement that if he would visit her house without seeing her for a hundred successive nights then she would grant him a rendezvous. According to Kan'ami's play, the youth came faithfully for ninety-nine nights, passing the time on the mounting block of her carriage, but died before nightfall on the last night. Harunobu's modernization chose a less melancholy ending: the young man's father died on the hundredth day, and therefore the young man could not come. In the print illustrated here, Komachi is shown as a beautiful and elegant, but heartless, courtesan of the Edo period, standing on the veranda of her house while her maid-servant counts off on her fingers the number of nights the would-be lover has kept his promise (Fig. 321). The poem she wrote to him on the day after his nonappearance appears in a cartouche in the upper-right corner, written around the shape of the young man shielding himself from the elements as he struggles to meet her demands:



321 *Kayoi Kamachi*, from the series *Fūryū nana yatsushi komachi* (*Seven Modern Dandified Komachi*), by Suzuki Harunobu. 1766–7. Polychrome woodblock print on paper; hosoban size: 13 x 5 ½ in. (33 x 14.2 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

In the early dawn
 You marked up a hundred nights
 On the mounting block—
 But the night you failed to come
 It was I who counted that

D.B. Waterhouse, *Harunobu and his Age*, London, 1964, 85.

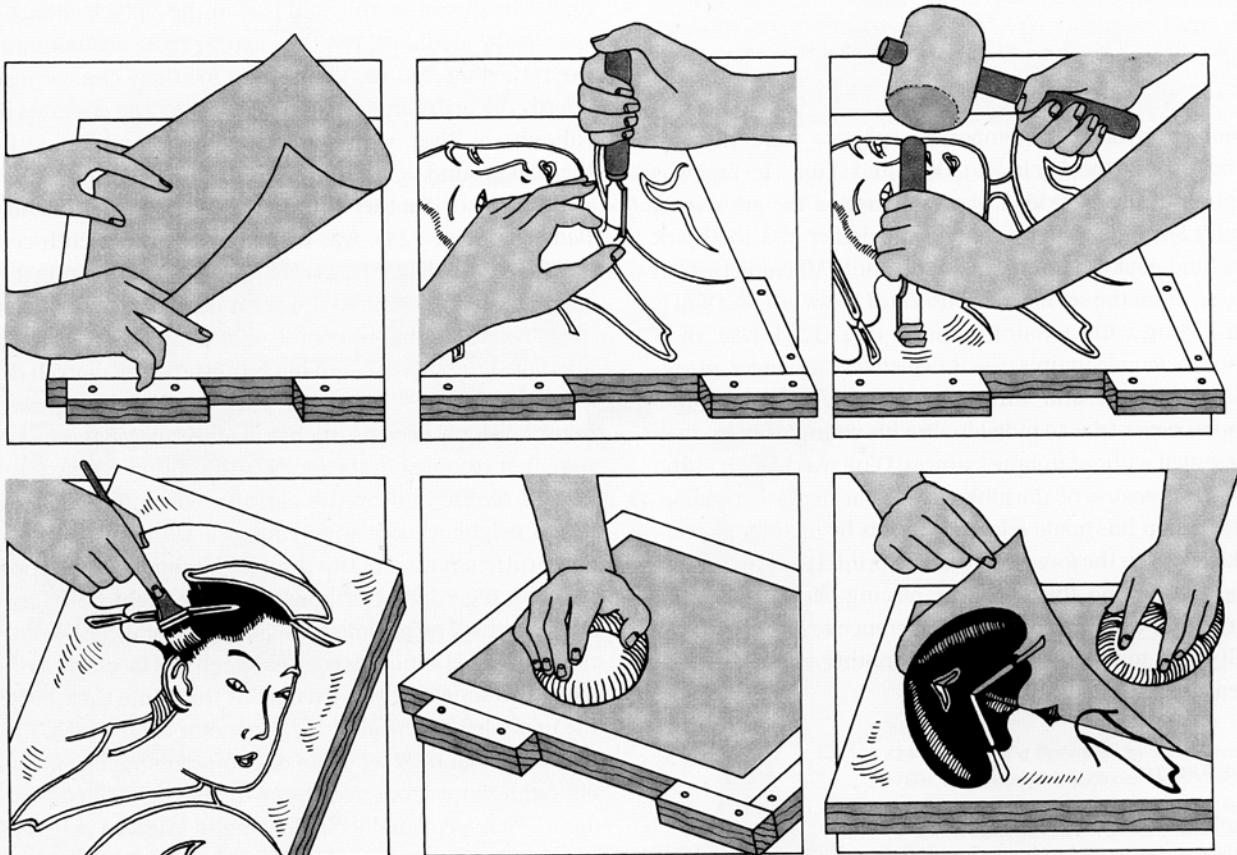
Woodblock Printing

Woodblock prints are made by transferring an image carved into the surface of a wooden block—for traditional Japanese prints usually of cherry wood—to a sheet of paper. The artist first makes a design on ordinary paper and has it transferred to a special thin, semi-transparent paper, which is pasted face down on the wood block. The surface of the block is cut and chiseled away to leave a design formed of raised lines and solid areas. Ink is applied to this surface and a piece of paper placed over it. The reverse of the paper is rubbed with a *baren*, or disk-shaped pad, which causes the transfer of ink from the block to the obverse of the paper.

Early woodblock prints used only black ink, but by the 1760s techniques for printing in many colors—up to twenty—had been developed and were in wide use. In order to apply several colors to a single sheet of paper by mechanical means, as opposed to hand coloring, a separate block was carved for each color. Furthermore, it was necessary to develop a system for aligning

each block so that it would register a single color within the initial black outlines printed on the sheet. *Kento*, a set of two cuts on the edge of each block, accomplished this. To stand up to many rubbings, the paper used for woodblock prints has to be strong and absorbent. Traditionally, the favored paper has been *hoshō*, made from the inner layers of the bark of the mulberry tree.

The sizes of Japanese woodblock prints were largely determined by the stock papers available for printing. Thus paper dimensions have provided the terminology for print sizes. Among the most frequently found are *oban* (large print), about 15 x 10 inches (38 x 26 cm); *chūban* (medium print), about 6.5 x 7 inches (15.5 x 18 cm); *hosoban* (narrow print), about 14 x 6 inches (35 x 15 cm); and *hashira-e* (pillar print), about 28 x 6 inches (70 x 15 cm). In the late eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, *oban* sheets were frequently joined together to form triptychs and even pentiptychs.





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