

# A Parisian Love Affair

## with Japanese Art

Japan had been virtually isolated for 200 years when Commodore Matthew Perry brought his steamships into Edo (Tokyo) Bay in 1854. This opened Japan to international trade, and soon Japanese art began trickling into Paris. By the end of the century, Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, screens, scrolls, ceramics, metalwork, fans, and kimonos were all the rage in Paris. French artists saw Japanese art at International Expositions in Paris in 1867, '78, '89, and 1900, as well as in art galleries and private collections. Japanese works were collected and shared among artists such as Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and James McNeill Whistler.

Artists working in Paris at the end of the 19th century were moving away from the rigid rules of academic art and longed to create art that depicted their own era and interests. They found inspiration in the stylistic conventions and subject matter of Japanese art. Parisian artists did not simply mimic Japanese art, but found in it a confirmation of the ideas that had been percolating in their vibrant artistic environment of the time. In 1885, the art critic Théodore Duret proclaimed *ukiyo-e* artists “the first and most perfect of the Impressionists.” Nearly every major artist at work in Paris at the end of the century benefited from contact with Japanese art; however, each artist included in this exhibition interpreted Japanese art in his or her own unique manner.