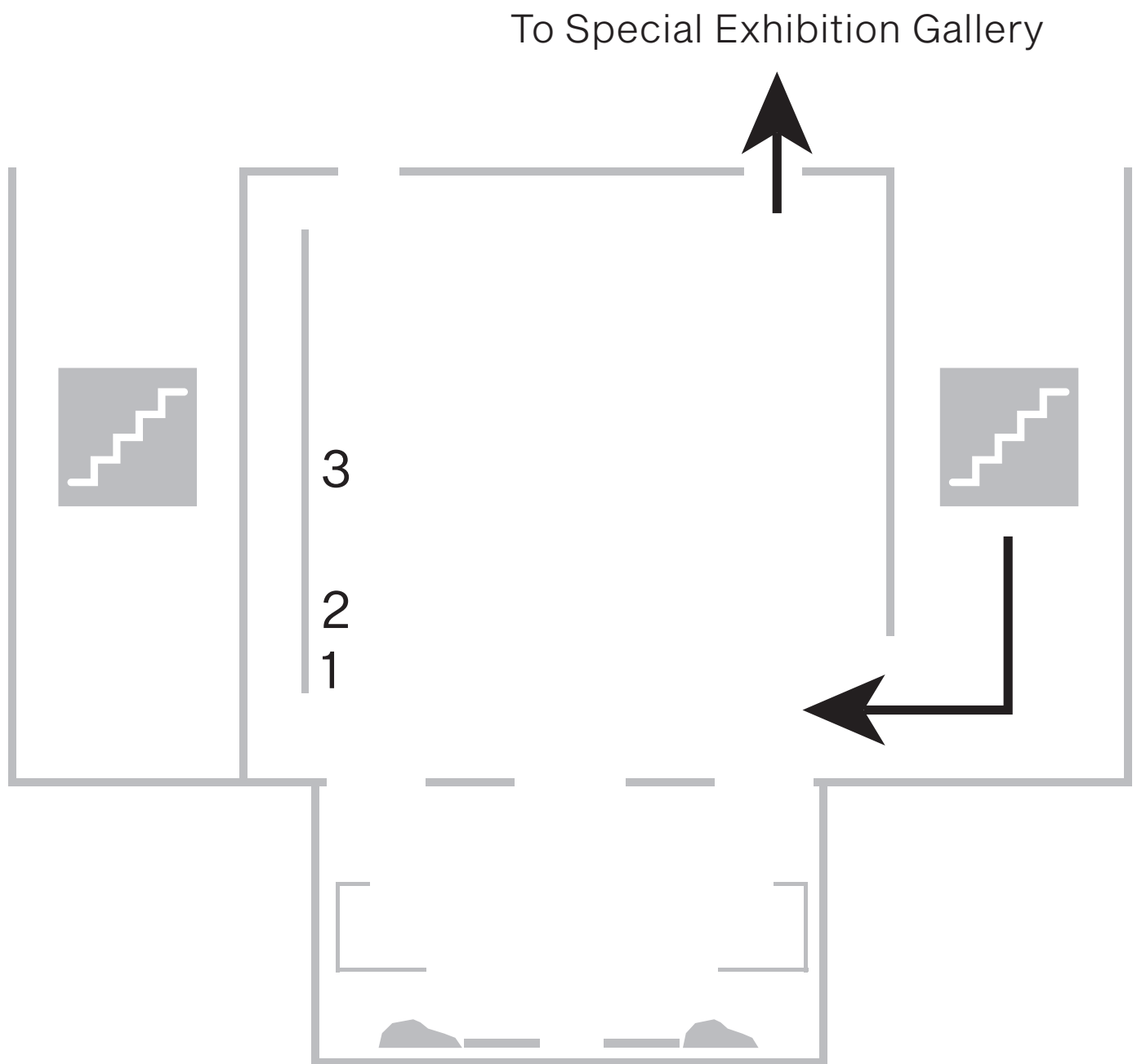


TEXT TRANSLATIONS

# Russel Wong | Life IN KYOTO | IN EDO





PLAN OF THE FOYER

# LIFE IN EDO X RUSSEL WONG IN KYOTO

## 1 Ukiyo-e

Ukiyo-e – “pictures of the floating world” – is a genre of Japanese painting, printmaking, and book illustration that originated in the Edo period (1603–1868). Popular in its own time, the work of ukiyo-e artists is now exhibited across Japan and around the world. These works show Edo period city-dwellers in all aspects of life. “Floating” describes the constantly varying subject matter of these printed pictures. But those woodblock prints were also “fleeting” in the literal sense, as they were printed on paper, and meant as media conveying current information, thus of short-lived relevance.

### Wide range of subjects

These prints had a practical function – as fliers, theatre playbills, posters, or invitations. They documented and popularised scenic vistas, famous landmarks, and popular travel



destinations. Kabuki actors, courtesans, and geisha were popular subjects. Teahouses, gourmet food, famous regional products, pets and exotic animals, gardening, and seasonal festivals can be seen in the prints. This diversity reflected Edo's growing economic vitality and increased consumer spending on leisure, shopping, and other pleasurable pursuits – including viewing and purchasing ukiyo-e prints.

## **2 Meet the artists**

In the Edo period, the audience for ukiyo-e prints was mostly the common people. Ukiyo artists were expected to anticipate trends and always stay a step ahead of what was in style. Brilliant talents emerged, generation after generation to meet those demands, in what seems an almost miraculous phenomenon, from the perspective of Japanese art history.

Here is a selection of the famous ukiyo artists you will meet in the special exhibition. Many are known best by their given name alone – Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro. Many took on professional names, in tribute to famous artists, poets, or their teachers and master artists.

### **Suzuki Harunobu 鈴木春信 (1725–1770)**

Harunobu played the leading role in developing the multicoloured woodblock prints known as nishiki-e. These were first created as picture calendars. They were the first prints for which separate blocks were used for each colour (this became the standard technique).

Harunobu's pictures of beautiful women (bijin-ga), distinctive for unisex faces and slender bodies, made him famous.

### **Kitagawa Utamaro 喜多川歌麿 (1753?–1806)**

Utamaro was one of the best-known artists specialising in the bijin-ga genre (pictures of beautiful women). A master at conveying

feminine beauty and grace in his designs, his half-length portraits presenting large-scale views of his subjects were very popular.

Utamaro's prints are varied: he depicted the world of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter – courtesans, streetwalkers, geisha; and other belles of Edo – as well as waitresses, housewives, and mothers with children. He drew them with fresh, neat features, and brilliantly expressed the full range of their inner lives and emotions.

### **Who was Utamaro?**

We know little about the artist's life. Where was he born? What was his social status – a samurai, a peasant, a trader? Did he have a wife and children? His publisher Jūzaburō Tsutaya suggested he use the “art name” Utamaro, based on his actual name. We do not know whether or not “Kitagawa” is his birth name. We do know that Utamaro died in 1806 at the age of 53.

## **Tōshūsai Sharaku 東洲斎写楽 (active 1794–95)**

Sharaku is the most mysterious artist in the woodblock print world. His name appeared suddenly in May 1794, along with a series of twenty-eight original, expressive actor portrait (yakusha-e) prints, released by the famous publisher Jūzaburō Tsutaya. Ten months later, Sharaku had vanished. Who was he? His true identity has been much discussed. The current theory is that he was probably Saitō Jūrobei, a noh actor from Awa province (today's Tokushima Prefecture).

### **Mysterious persona, but highly skilled**

Sharaku was an insightful observer, capable of capturing the characteristic poses of specific actors. His unusual portraits sought to reveal the actors' true personalities but not idealise them. In the early period, he used the kira-zuri technique in portraits (adding mica to pigments to create a sparkle effect in the backgrounds). Later he moved on to depicting full human figures, using the narrow hosoban

size papers, and abandoned kira-zuri. Initially, he signed his works with a name seal reading Tōshūsai Sharaku, and later just Sharaku.

### **Who was Sharaku?**

Nothing is known about his life except his few artistic masterpieces. What was his date of birth? Family name? How old was he when he was active? Where did his pseudonym come from? Why did he vanish after such a short period of creative work? We do not know.

### **Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760–1849)**

Hokusai was born in 1760 in Edo's Honjō district on the Sumida River. His childhood name was Tokitarō. He was born in the city borough of Katsushika, which is probably where his pseudonym came from.

### **Training and long career**

As a pupil of Katsukawa Shunshō, Hokusai produced yakusha-e (actor prints). At the age of 20, his first prints were published, under



the art name Shunrō. At about the age of 35, he left Shunshō's studio and began exploring his own style in a wide variety of genres.

In addition to illustrated books of satirical poems and illustrations for popular fiction, he published Hokusai Manga (Sketches by Hokusai), a primer for aspiring artists, when in his mid-50s. He launched the landscape print genre with his Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji – when he was over 70 years old!

### **Influence on Western art**

Hokusai is undeniably the most famous woodblock print artist in the world. Europe was introduced to Hokusai accidentally. In the 1850s, the French printmaker Félix Bracquemond saw a volume of Hokusai Manga – it had been used as packing material (!) for some porcelain imported by his printer. He was charmed by the power of the sketches and innovative artistic compositions. His chance discovery and designs he made based on what he had seen

sparked the Japanese style-influenced Western art movement called “Japonisme”. Vincent van Gogh, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, and Gustav Klimt are among the many artists influenced by Japanese prints.

### **Eccentric or an oddball? Hokusai, unmasked**

Hokusai is known for his unusual personality and eccentric behaviour. He often changed his pseudonym and place of residence. He moved house 93 times during his life! He also created a huge painting of Daruma (Japanese name for the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma), measuring 120 tatami (about 200 square metres). Sadly, it was destroyed by bombs in World War II. And he repeatedly transformed his style and the genres he chose to work in.

Hokusai passed away in 1849 at Shōtenchō in Asakusa, at the age of almost 90. He was laid to rest at Seikyō Temple, in Taito-ku, Tokyo.

## **Female ukiyo artists?**

Katsushika Hokusai's daughter assisted her father, and also produced her own artworks. She was particularly skilful with images of beautiful women. Her works often play with contrasts between light and shadow. Only a few examples survived.

The work of another female ukiyo artist is included in this exhibition. Her name is Utagawa Torijo or Yoshitorijo (born 1839), was the daughter of Kuniyoshi. Look for the prints she made in collaboration with her father in the special exhibition gallery.

## **Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重 (1797–1858)**

Andō Tokutarō was born in 1797 into the family of a low-ranking samurai, in Edo's Yayosugashi district. His father served as the fire safety inspector at the shogun's castle nearby. Orphaned early, Hiroshige entered apprenticeship training at the age of 13 with master print artist Utagawa Toyohiro.

## **Travel series makes him famous**

Hiroshige's series Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō, published in 1833, brought him fame. The series was based on sketches made in 1832, during a trip he made alongside officials heading to Kyoto to pay the annual tribute (and gift of horses) to the emperor on behalf of the shogun. The series was a major success because of the tremendous interest in travel at that time.

## **Innovative artistic style**

The Tokaido series established Hiroshige as the most illustrious creator of landscape images. His use of space, with masterly application of Western linear perspective, was superb. And graduated colour printing gave his landscapes gorgeous, rich tones when newly printed.

## **A window into the world of Edo**

Hiroshige and Hokusai loved to travel. They desired travel; they talked to people they met on their way – and cried out when they met them again. Their landscape prints together make up a kind of Edo travel diary.

Hiroshige's landscapes are filled with emotion and yearning, sadness, and joy. He was sometime called a “wanderlust painter” because he travelled to every nook of his country, at different times of the year, in search of Japan's beauty. He passed away suddenly, during a cholera epidemic in 1858.

## **Utagawa Kunisada, aka Toyokuni III 歌川国貞 (1786–1864)**

As Utagawa Toyokuni's pupil, Kunisada worked mainly in the actor print and beautiful women genres. Towards the end of his life, he adopted Toyokuni as an art name and became the leader of the Utagawa group of artists. He created tens of thousands of works in his lifetime, making him



the most productive of ukiyo-e artists (he's the artist with the most prints in ACM's exhibition). In his day, he was more highly regarded than even Hokusai, Hiroshige, or Kuniyoshi.

### **Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1797–1858)**

Kuniyoshi was born in Edo's Nihonbashi district. As a child, he helped his father in his workshop dying textiles. Named Yoshizō or Yoshisaburō in childhood, around 1810 he apprenticed under the name Ikusa Magosaburō, in the studio of Utagawa Toyokuni (1769–1825). Around the age of 17, he obtained the right to sign his works with the name Utagawa Kuniyoshi.

### **Experience in many media**

His Suikoden series (108 Heroes of the Water Margin), published in 1827, made him famous. He was praised for his dynamic pictorial compositions, full of energy and motion, and original colour schemes. He also capitalised on his childhood dyeing experience and the rising fashion for tattoos.

## Unusual subject matter

The great popularity of Suikoden gave Kuniyoshi a prominent position in the art scene. He was called “musha-e Kuniyoshi” (“warrior-picture Kuniyoshi”), which attracted fans of that genre. Some of his most interesting works are depictions of ghosts, apparitions, and demons. His landscapes using Western-style elements, comic prints with animals acting like people, and satirical prints ridiculing society also attracted considerable interest. Not to mention that he was a great cat lover!

Kuniyoshi passed away at the age of 63 in his home at Genyadana, in Edo City.

## 3 Russel Wong

Russel Wong (born 1961) is an internationally renowned, Singaporean, fashion and portrait photographer with 25 years of experience working with Oscar-winning directors and

Hollywood celebrities, including Richard Gere, Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, and Isabella Rossellini. Russel is one of an elite group assigned to photograph covers for Time magazine. In addition to his portrait photography, his body of work includes still-life compositions, architecture, landscapes, and more.

Here, we offer you a preview of Russel Wong's photographs of Kyoto. Immerse yourself in the rich colours of the city across the four seasons!