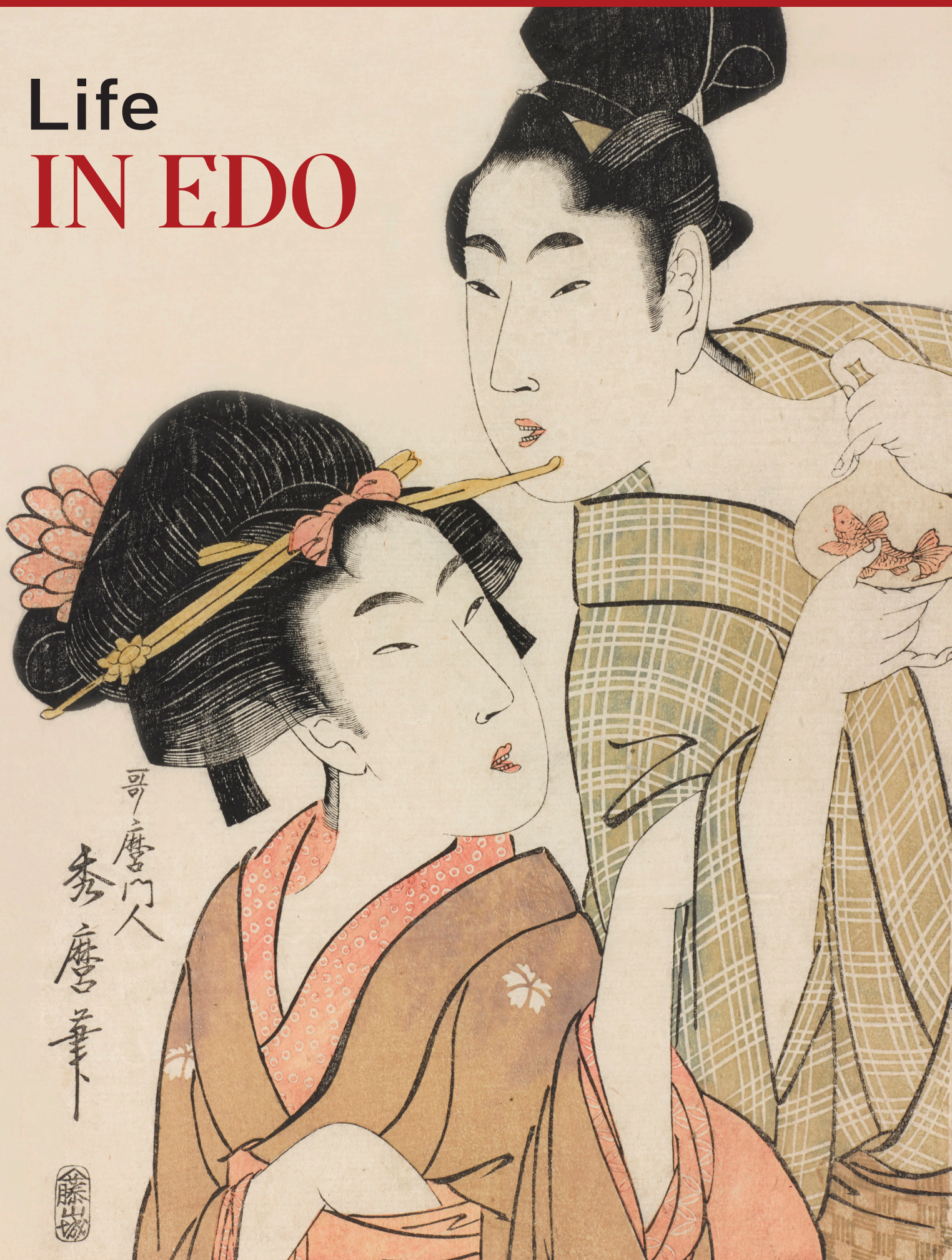


TEXT TRANSLATIONS

# Life IN EDO

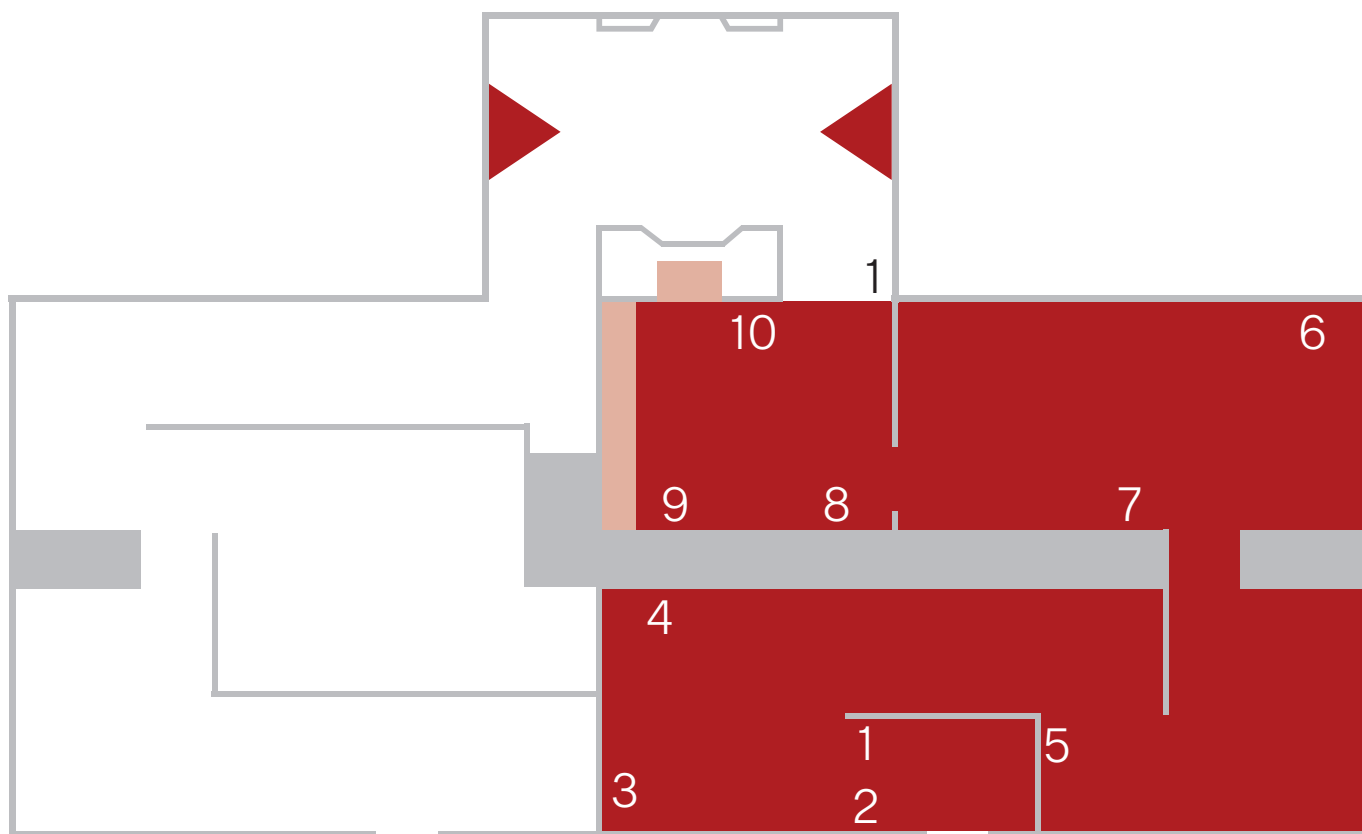


哥磨門人

秀磨筆







PLAN OF THE GALLERY

# LIFE IN EDO X RUSSEL WONG IN KYOTO

## 1 Life in Edo

Edo (today's Tokyo) grew into a metropolis after the Tokugawa Shogunate established it as their seat of government in 1603. One hundred years later, it was one of the largest cities in the world – with over a million inhabitants. Edo became a magnet for literati, merchants, artists, craftsmen, entertainers, and others attending to the needs of samurai and leisured townsfolk. Over the 250 years of Tokugawa rule (1603–1867), Japanese art was shaped by developments in Edo and Kyoto, which remained the capital, home of the emperor, until 1869.

## Ukiyo 浮世

In the most literal sense, ukiyo means “transient world”, and has the spirit of “going with the flow of the current, modern style”. Scholars of the time defined it as a realm of the imagination, where the passing moment

and temporal flux were cherished for their own sake. Thus, the pleasure quarters and theatre districts of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka captivated the popular imagination. A genre of Japanese prints and paintings known as ukiyo-e (“e” means picture) was born to capture these fleeting moments.

### **Fashionable themes**

Today, ukiyo-e prints show us what interested the people of the Edo period, and they have also shaped how we view Japan. Edo citizens consumed ukiyo-e much like how today we engage with Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and other social media platforms.

The prints and paintings in this exhibition look at cultural trends over 250 years of history under the Tokugawa Shogunate rule. Through these works of art, we celebrate the ephemeral beauty and fame of Edo’s urban lifestyles, cultural trends, as well as the city and its people. Today we can still see many of

these traditions, festivals, and art forms. They continue to adapt and survive in Japan.

## **2 Travel along the Tōkaidō**

Even before Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu took control of Japan, he began work to improve and control routes from Edo to the outer provinces. Starting with the Tōkaidō route, the Shogunate then laid Kisokaidō (aka Nakasendō), Nikkō dōchū, Oshū dōchū, and Kōshū dōchū over the following years. Together these roads are called the Gokaidō (“Five Routes”). There were stations along each route to provide services for travellers, but also to control traffic and goods.

### **Increasingly more popular**

In the early 17th century, the Tōkaidō – connecting Edo City to the imperial court at Kyoto – was mainly used by Shogunate officials, daimyos (feudal lords who were vassals of the shogun), and diplomatic

parties from China and other foreign states. Stations developed and flourished, and people prospered by offering services or selling merchandise to travellers. In the mid-18th century, travel became popular among better-off commoners. Many inns and shops sold specialty products and souvenirs.

### **Tourism industry develops**

The rise of tourism stimulated publication of route maps and guides, as well as travel memoirs and stories. One comic novel by Jippensha Ikku called Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige (Shank's Mare) was a phenomenal success. In the early 19th century, travelling was never more popular. Edo citizens visited nearby destinations such as Narita, Oyama, and Enoshima. Some would dream of making a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Ise Grand Shrine or the Konpira Shrine on Shikoku Island. These itineraries are still popular today for both local and international travellers.

Sights and stories from the Gokaidō captured the imagination of artists, who in turn produced beautiful prints and paintings that captivated the attention of people across time and space.

### **3 Beauty in Edo**

The Edo period (1603–1868) was an age of social restrictions. Strict rules regulated dress, hairstyles, and use of cosmetics according to social class, age, occupation, regional background, and marital status. Yet women – and men – still found ways to express their individuality through fashions, make-up, and accessories.

#### **Long black hair**

Changes in women's hairstyles reflect their own ideas of beauty. From the Heian period (794–1185), long black hair was essential for Japanese women, and key in assessing feminine beauty. Before Edo, women's

hairstyles were either long and unbound or tied loosely at the back, falling naturally. During Edo, hundreds of different styles emerged.

### **Actresses and courtesans set the trends**

Actresses from women's kabuki and courtesans started tying their hair up in different styles. Each style became popular with the larger public. Hair accessories became a profitable business. Women traditionally wore combs (kushi) and hairpins (kanzashi and kōgai) to decorate their hair. These accessories are still popular today.

### **Cosmetics**

Etiquette guides for women gave detailed instructions on the proper use of cosmetics. There was a palette of three basic colours: red (lips, cheeks, fingernails), white (face powder), and black (teeth, eyebrows). Teeth blackening and painted eyebrows were linked with life events –adulthood, marriage, and



childbirth. For example, blackened teeth indicated a woman was an adult or married. She would shave her eyebrows upon the birth of her first child.

## 4 **Pet boom**

Like today, Edo people loved pets. Cats, dogs, birds, and goldfish were popular. Exotic animals were also brought into Japan: ostrich (1658), canaries (1709), crocodile (1780), orang-utan (1792), white bear (1799), and lion (1865). Many were sent by foreign rulers to be presented to the shogun.

### **Cats**

Japanese people have had a long relationship with cats. The Imperial diary of Emperor Uda (867–931) devotes an entry to his black cat, noting physical characteristics and humorous behaviours. The Pillow Book (Makura no Sōshi), completed in 1002 by Sei Shōnagon, mentions a cat kept by Emperor

Ichijō. Keeping cats as pets was popular with samurai and ordinary households (good for killing rats). Ukiyo artists Utagawa Kuniyoshi and Utagawa Hiroshige often depicted cats in their works.

## Dogs

The ancient hunter-gatherer Jōmon people of Japan kept dogs as companions and gave them careful burials. Folding screens of the 15th and 16th centuries depict dogs. Edo-period woodblock prints and paintings show dogs were cared for as pets. Small dogs, particularly Japanese Chin, were extremely popular with aristocrats, samurai, and women of wealthy families.

## 5 Goldfish

Brought by Chinese traders around 1500, goldfish were first sold to aristocrats and samurai as exotic pets then soon became more broadly popular. In the heat of summer,

festivals still include a traditional game where players scoop up live goldfish with a paper ladle. Fancy glass and ceramic bowls to keep and admire goldfish were produced.

Goldfish were popular in woodblock prints. Their elegant movements could represent the “floating world”. Some were bred to have long, elegant fins to enhance that floating aesthetic. Utagawa Kuniyoshi is well-known for goldfish in his pictures.

### **Other animals**

Animals less perceived as pets also appear in woodblock prints. Falconry (takagari), hunting with birds of prey, was a popular pastime for samurai. Monkey trainers (sarumawashi) performed tricks for entertainment. Cows and horses were used for farming and transportation in the countryside. Parrots, camels, and elephants were depicted as exotic animals imported from foreign lands.

## 6 Gastronomy in Edo

The Gokaidō (Five Routes) highways made it easy for regional products to be brought into Edo. This allowed everyone to enjoy new foods and inspired new cuisines. Woodblock prints show us many of the gastronomic delights well-loved by Edo citizens. Fresh seasonal seafood could be sourced along the north bank of Nihonbashi River. The fish market there set up in the early 17th century served the people for over 300 years before Tsukiji Market opened in 1935.

### Soul food

When it comes to Edo “soul food”, what comes to mind is soba (buckwheat noodles) and nigirizushi (what we call “sushi”) – fresh fish served over vinegared rice, with or without nori seaweed. These cuisines are ancient, but the methods were polished and refined in the Edo period. Soba gained popularity for the simplicity of its ingredients and the many ways to enjoy it. Specialised knives (soba kiri) were



created and used to make the noodles. Every neighbourhood in Edo City had one or two soba shops.

### **High-end restaurants and food stalls**

The style of today's sushi became popular in the late Edo period (1820s–30s). In those days, there was already a mix of high-end sushi restaurants and plenty of food stalls also serving sushi, as well as eel kabayaki and tempura stalls, making these foods accessible for the masses.

### **Kaiseki and gourmet guides**

A surge in fancy restaurants specialising in rare and luxury ingredients lead to the establishment of kaiseki-ryōri (traditional Japanese multi-course haute cuisine). Many of these restaurants were in the outskirts of the city and some had second-floor seating overlooking a garden. A multi-sensory experience was curated by the chef or restaurateur. The highly competitive food

industry was supported by gourmets and travellers, and they generated demand for guidebooks. Prints and paintings by ukiyo artists played a major role in spreading gourmet culture.

## **7 Gardens – Love of flowers**

Admiring plants for their beauty has a long history in Japan. With the political stability of the Edo period, a gardening culture developed. People collected plants, and some became obsessed with rare curiosities or finding just the right vessel in which to cultivate a plant. Illustrated books were published to document special collections.

### **Chrysanthemums – kiku**

Chrysanthemums, autumn-blooming flowers, are extremely popular in Japan. A symbol of longevity, they are forever associated with the imperial family. Chrysanthemums were brought from China in the Nara period

(710–94). A chrysanthemum design became the symbol of the imperial family during the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

### **Becoming gardeners**

Led by the samurai class, who managed daimyō estates, gardening was quickly taken up by the general public. Three generations of Tokugawa (Ieyasu, Hidetada, and Iemitsu) were great lovers of flowers – especially camellias. Many daimyo (land-owning feudal lords) also took up the hobby. They transformed their estates, growing vegetables and medicinal plants alongside ornamental plants and flowers. Flowers, potted plants, and seedlings were exchanged as gifts between the shogun and daimyo. Gardening became a serious hobby among working-class commoners too. The sight and sound of plant and flower vendors, their baskets of wares balanced on poles over their shoulders, became a common sight across the city.

## **Hanami – flower viewing**

Between the Muromachi period (1336–1573) and early Edo, flower viewing (hanami) excursions became popular. Daimyō held large lavish events, including the famous Daigo-no-hanami, a cherry blossom viewing extravaganza at Daigo-ji Temple in Kyōto. Hanami began much earlier but took off when Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (reigned 1716–45) planted areas of cherry trees for the people to enjoy.

## **8 Seasonal Festivals**

Seasonal festivals and leisure activities, enjoyed by people from all walks of life, offered inspiring subject matter for ukiyo artists. Today, many of these festivals still take place and woodblock prints serve as valuable historical records, showing how traditions and customs endure or evolve.



**Gosekku 五節句** – five seasonal festivals held at the Japanese imperial court were made official holidays during the Edo period. Based on the idea that certain days in the lunar calendar have importance to one's life, these events were celebrated with seasonal food and flowers.

**Jinjitsu 人日**, “Human Day” – 7th day of the 1st month, part of New Year observances

**Jyōshi/Jyōmi 上巳** – 3rd day of the 3rd month – momo no sekku (Peach festival). Courtiers and officials floated cups of rice wine down a stream in the palace garden. Each guest would take a sip and compose a poem. Doll's Day (hinamatsuri) is still celebrated on March 3rd.

**Tango 端午** – 5th day of the 5th month – ayame no hi (Iris festival); marks the beginning of summer and the rainy season. May 5th is now Children's Day (kodomo no hi), a national holiday.

**Shichiseki 七夕** – 7th day of the 7th month  
– Tanabata; celebrated the annual crossing of the Weaver (Vega) and Cowherd (Altair) constellations.

**Chōyō 重陽** – 9th day of the 9th month –  
Chrysanthemum Festival (kiku no sekku), also associated with the autumn rice harvest

### **Other activities**

In addition to gosekku, there were other popular seasonal activities. In Spring, viewing of cherry blossoms could double up with a sightseeing trip to the mountains. In March or April, clam digging at lowtide was a favourite pastime.

In the Summer, when rivers widen, many look forward to the Sumidagawa Fireworks Festival. In late December, pounding rice for mochi (rice cakes) is another longstanding Japanese custom that marks the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one. Worshippers offer

mochi to the gods and eat rice cakes to ensure their own well-being in the coming year.

## 9 **Artist's original paintings**

Though woodblock prints captured the attention of the Western world – and there is no denying their graphic design brilliance – the artists who made them almost always thought of themselves primarily as painters. They often signed both their prints and paintings as “from my brush”. Some artists gave up designing prints in favour of painting fulltime once their reputations were established.

### **Patronage**

An artist who became popular might receive special commission jobs directly from a collector or through an agent. Usually these orders would be for hanging scrolls. Rarer commissions included paintings on wood or on folding screens. Accepting a commission for a painting was thought to be the real

test of the skills of an artist. They could fully express themselves in fine brushstrokes, play with different shades and tones, and decide how abstract or realistic to paint the subject. In Japan, this type of painting is called nikuhitsuga (original paintings).

### **Nikuhitsuga 肉筆画**

Nikuhitsuga is done with a brush and coloured ink on paper or silk. Most were produced by artists who also designed drawings for woodblock prints. Thus, many are close in subject and style to ukiyo-e prints. Today the term nikuhitsuga is broadly applied to brush-drawn genre paintings of the late 16th and early 17th century. It also describes modern works by nihonga (traditional Japanese painting) artists of the late 19th and early 20th century.



## 10 Production of ukiyo-e

Mass production allowed woodblock prints to become an element of popular culture. They were an important medium of information as well as coveted works of art. The market for ukiyo-e was highly competitive, and artists and publishers worked ceaselessly to track people's interests and invent pictures that might capture popular attention.

### Division of labour

Ukiyo-e prints were produced in large quantities and sold at bookstores (ezoshiya). They were fruit of a collaboration among a publisher (hanmoto), an artist who drew the design (eshi), an artist who carved the printing block (horishi), and an artist (surishi) who added colours to the prints by inking and pressing individual blocks for each colour.

### All powerful publishers

Artists who drew the designs tend to take centre stage, but planning by the publisher,

and skills of the carver and printer made a remarkable difference in sales. Since ukiyo-e were made to be sold for profit, in most cases the publisher had the authority to decide the subjects, which artists, carvers, and colourists to hire, and what carving and printing techniques to use. Therefore, ukiyo-e prints are creations of collaborative artistic creativity, directed by publishers out to make a profit.

### **Reception of ukiyo-e**

The audience for ukiyo-e included ordinary citizens as well as the wealthier classes. The prints were affordable and easily purchased. Artists were expected to anticipate trends and always stay a step ahead of fashions. In such a competitive environment, talented artists emerged, generation after generation, to meet the demand and challenge convention. Artists constantly sought innovative designs to please the common people.