

Ukiyo-e

Prints from the Blanden Permanent Collection

Second Floor Gallery

January 2, 2021 - January 30, 2021

“I think I will be able to, in the end, rise above the clouds and climb the stairs to Heaven, and I will look down on my beautiful life.”

Yayoi Kusama

Ukiyo-e or "Floating World" are woodblock prints of the Edo period, which most frequently depicted the seductive courtesans, sumo, and exciting Kabuki actors of the urban pleasure districts. With time, their subject matter expanded to include famous romantic vistas and eventually, in the final years of the nineteenth century, dramatic historical events. These pictures could be made in great quantity and featured popular scenes that appealed to the period's wealthy townspeople. (1)

Ukiyo-e prints are full of color with bold compositions that have a delicate balance between humanity and nature. These prints present unique artistic narratives linked by a traditional look and style that utilized aerial perspectives, precise details, clear outlines, and flat color. A unique style and look that would later influence artists such as Edgar Degas, Vincent Van Gogh, and Mary Cassatt, to name a few.

Reflective of a Buddhist concept of life as a transitory illusion involving a cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth, these types of prints become a visual manifestation of a floating illusion of reality in an infinite space caught in a loop cycling forever. These Ukiyo-e prints brought joy, delight to people during the Edo period and can be admired for their beauty, providing inspiration and appreciation today.

(1) https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ukiy/hd_ukiy.htm

