



# Masterpieces of Japanese Prints: Ukiyo-e from the Victoria and Albert Museum

*Rupert Faulkner*

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Ever since Japan opened its doors to the West in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Westerners have been fascinated by the exquisite art forms that flourished during the previous two hundred years of self-imposed isolation. Among the most intriguing were the bold yet refined paintings and prints known as ukiyo-e, which portrayed the popular pursuits of the time with extraordinary power. Such was the appeal of this unique art in the West that tens of thousands of superb prints eventually found their way into museum collections around the world.

The present volume highlights over 130 outstanding examples from the vast holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Strikingly original and sumptuously colored, the ukiyo-e in these pages recapture the spirit of the period in which they were created. Here can be found the glamorous courtesans of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, the flamboyant vigor of kabuki theater, and the diversities of the Japanese landscape.

The prints form a breathtaking panorama of the world of ukiyo-e from its inception to its final flowering at the end of the nineteenth century. Complementary texts by Rupert Faulkner and Richard Lane illuminate the craft of woodblock print making and explore the emergence of such versatile geniuses as Hokusai and Hiroshige.

The lasting appeal of Japanese woodblock prints may be rooted in the richness of their imagery and the power of their innovation, or perhaps in their uncanny ability to convey the special vitality of Edo Japan. Whatever the case, this lavish volume seeks not only to pay homage to the Japanese artists and craftsmen who took the woodblock print to unprecedented heights, but also to show the range of this astonishingly versatile art form.

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