

UKIYO-E WOODBLOCK PRINTING
AND
SUZUKI HARUNOBU

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Grateful acknowledgement is due to the staff of the Chester Beatty Library for their help in compiling this thesis.

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UKIYO-E WOODBLOCK PRINTING

AND

SUZUKI HARUNOBU.

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INTRODUCTION

Japanese woodblock prints possess a special charm in their flat and simplistic appearance. Of all aspects of Japanese art, woodblock prints have had the greatest appeal for the western world. This appeal probably resides in the portrayal of a world alien to our own. In this essay I will show the sociological and historical background from which this popular art form evolved. In the second chapter the most common subjects of ukiyo-e prints that of the courtesans of the Yoshiwara and the Kabuki theatre are discussed. Both these subjects provided the ukiyo-e artists with endless material for print compositions. The craftsmanship and technical excellence involved in producing woodblock prints is discussed in chapter 3 , I feel a knowledge of the technique of woodblock printing is essential to the appreciation of the ingenuity of the print artists. Finally during my research it was brought to my attention, apart from catalogues of artists prints very little material is written on specific artists. Through a personal analysis of some prints of Suzuki Harunobu I hope I will give an insight into the characteristics and style of his work, showing elements of ukiyo-e yet an individuality that cannot be denied.

CHAPTER I

EXHIBITION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Japanese decorative arts which have a nationwide and special appeal to their own citizens, and which have a reputation throughout the world, have been the subject of many exhibitions. The first of these was the exhibition of the Japanese decorative arts in the Tokyo Museum in 1907. This exhibition was the first to bring the Japanese decorative arts to the attention of the world. The exhibition of the Japanese decorative arts in the Tokyo Museum was the first to bring the Japanese decorative arts to the attention of the world. The exhibition of the Japanese decorative arts in the Tokyo Museum was the first to bring the Japanese decorative arts to the attention of the world.

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CHAPTER 1.

SOCIOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The famous Japanese prints which have a splendour and special appeal in their flat, simplistic quality and which had a tremendous influence on western painters were perfected in the Edo period 1615 - 1867. This period is ranked as being the most brilliant era in the history of Japanese painting. The emergence perfection of the woodblock print attracted an interest in Japanese Art in general. During the Edo period the development of the middle class stimulated a type of popular art know as Ukiyo-E.

The feudal structure of Japanese society clearly provoked the development of the middle class and the emergence of a sub-culture. This rigid social system brought with it a hierarchy not only of language and manners, but also of art. All art was the exclusive possession of the aristocrats at the imperial court at Kyoto, who developed distinct kinds of writing, drama and painting. Theoretically this strict feudal society prevented any kind of social mobility, the most extreme of which was the position of the successful tradesmen in the big cities. The tastes and inclinations of the merchant class were determined by it's inferior position in the feudal society. The mer merchant class had no active participation in the political life of Edo, they were considered the lowest social class. Due to these factors they did not feel any strong ties of loyalty, devotion or duty. They were not particularly inclined to follow the strict code of behaviour for no matter how excellent their conduct they were still looked upon with disdain.

Inflation and speculation resulted in enormous wealth for the merchant class when cash had superseded the barter system of exchange. The rigidity of the Japanese social system disapproved of the financial position of the merchants and introduced laws, designed to curb their influence and prevent their masquerading as aristocrats. These laws resulted in the merchants although the most wealthy yet the least privileged, unable to use their

financial success to buy power, influence or social advancement.

Naturally the wealthy merchants were anxious to display their financial position and since restricted by the feudal structure they went in pursuit of enjoyment and this became foremost importance. They involved themselves in lives of self-indulgence and ostentation and their expenditure in pursuit of such enjoyment and entertainment was truly extravagant. Picnics, festivals and outings to the countryside or to famous shrines became the rage and fashion of the day. It was not long before the trends and pastimes of the merchant class together with prosperous craftsmen and artisans of Edo crystallised into a definite sub-culture. This formidable culture was a definite bold departure from the aesthetic norms and conventions of the ancient classical traditions.

This tremendously vital sub-culture that developed saw an increase in the literacy of the merchant class and resulted in the publication of books. Another essential element was the woodblock print. The formation of this new culture was the genesis of the woodblock print. An intimate bearing on the prints is the character of the merchant class, their customs and daily life and their culture naturally enough as it was created by and for the urban merchant class. An epoch-making event in the history of Japanese art was the mass production of pictures by woodblock printing as it allowed the merchant class to enjoy art previously the monopoly of the upper classes.

Ukiyo or the floating world was the name given to the pursuits and achievements of the formed merchant class. The term Ukiyo originally was used in the Buddhist religious sense of the "transient and sad world". But when Japan became a society in which the merchant class achieved success, the term came to be used in the worldly sense the "floating world", in which the fleeting pleasures of life were prized. From Ukiyo derived the Ukiyo-E which was the term used to describe the school of genre painting and print making that flourished. This school whose methods were sufficiently different from those of the established schools to earn a name of its own that developed the

woodblock print into a major art form.

The Ukiyo-E or pictures of the floating world depicted everyday life in the city of Edo (now Tokyo), with its theatres, restaurants, street festivals and sports arenas. Actors, geisha girls and merchants were portrayed in picturesque costumes and poses. These Ukiyo-E are realistic representatives of the actual world of the day. The Ukiyo-E artists portrayed the actual, verifiable city and activities of its public not a remote past, no exotic land far from the Japan of the day. Ukiyo-E woodblock prints were a very popular art form for its realistic portrayal one can assume that this is how populace knew Edo and wanted to see it. Another reason for their great popularity is because each print reflected the current trend of the moment, they served as a sort of gazette, providing information that the populace was curious to know, about actors, and who were the most popular courtesans.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF UKIYO-E WOODBLOCK PRINTS

CHAPTER 2.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF UKIYO-E PRINTS.

Although it is said that Ukiyo-E was always concerned with genre representations of scenes from daily life, the artists were soon to choose as it's special domain and fascination the courtesans of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters and the Kabuki actors, heros and heroines from the past. These were not the only portrayed by Ukiyo-E artists but they provide the basis for a large majority of the prints.

The courtesans and the Yoshiwara provided the print artist with an inexhaustible supply of designs. Yoshiwara in Edo was the most legendary of all brothel districts in Japan. The Yoshiwara literally meaning "moor of rushes" was so named because of the reedy swamp where it was first situated. The Yoshiwara was the only courtesan quarters licensed by the government. The Yoshiwara formed into a miniature city with the full development of the government licensed courtesan quarters and it was the only area of its kind licensed. It had its own network of parks, shops, restaurants and gardens and the courtesan was, in all senses of the word, a very prominent public figure. Behind the shutters of the Yoshiwara, the courtesans would entertain their clients, not only by allowing themselves to be made love to, but also by singing, telling stories, playing musical instruments, dancing and elaborately preparing tea.

To understand and accept the enormous success of the Yoshiwara one must look at the social and economic circumstances surrounding Edo at the time. Firstly all roads led to the Shogun's capital, it seemed to beckon and men from all walks of life were drawn to it. Also large numbers of officials quartered in Edo without their families. Finally the Japanese males, his marriage arranged for him, by his parents while he was still in puberty, for economic reasons and for the purpose of raising children, needed some outlet for his urge to experience romantic adventure. Although it would appear that love was purely a commercial item in these quarters, at least a man was free to choose his own sweetheart and if he could afford it reserve her for

his own pleasure exclusively.

The career of a courtesan required a long apprenticeship. They bore themselves like princesses, carrying their gorgeous apparel with regal grace. They were also women of high intelligence, learning to speak the ancient poetic language and practising the arts of music, painting and poetry.

The apprenticeship of a courtesan began when she was recruited and bought by an agent from parents who needed money. From the age of about eight the girl had to be trained as a Kamuro. She would then become a servant to a particular courtesan. When she reached the age of thirteen or fourteen she then left the oiran and began to receive instruction from the brothel madam in the elementary mysteries of her craft. At about the age of fifteen this part of her training finished and she worked as Shinzo, or understudy to another courtesan. However, during this period she was not supposed to have contact with clients. At the age of eighteen she graduated and was not only required to master the most elaborate techniques of sexual intercourse. Her clients would employ her as all-round entertainer, as well as the sexual and physical relief she offered.

The courtesans were an active part of the life of Edo, there was great public demand for pictures of the reigning beauties and this is one of the factors which led to the popularity with the woodblock print artists for the pleasure quarters. Often the real purpose of such prints was not so much to depict an oiran but rather to display an especially sumptuous intricately decorative kimono or the set of a girls hair. Japanese artists seemed to have a pre-occupation with the fashions of costume and hair dressing displaying their attention and sensitivity to detail and decoration. The features of a girls face are often reduced to the essentials, while the set of her hair seems of greater concern, with its complement of combs and often eccentric shapes into which it was forced. One could easily believe that with the Japanese the hair was in truth "a womans crowning glory".

FIG. 1.



This print by Kitagawa Utamaro depicts the courtesan Yosooi writing a love letter. It is obvious in this print the fascination with Ukiyō-E artists for the Yoshiwara. Utamaro displays his ingenuity and attention to detail in the depiction of the kimono and the set of her hair.

FIG. 2.



This print is a portrait of the courtesan Midbrigi rendered by Chokosai Eisho. The courtesan is portrayed holding an ornamental sculpture of an ox. She is set against a highly decorative background. The preoccupation with patterned kimono and intricate set of her hair is obvious. Eisho seems to concentrate more on the fashion and hair rather than the features of the face which is reduced to essentials.

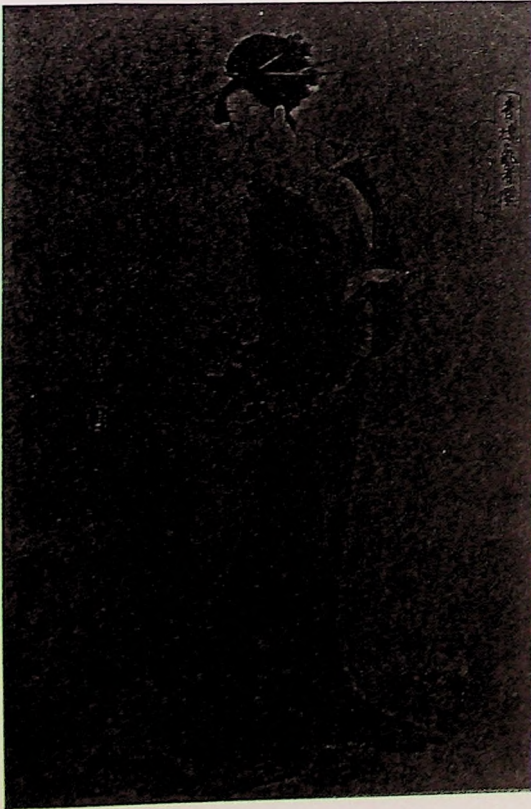
At other times the function of these prints is to give the viewer a glimpse of their interiors of the Yoshiwara, with its series of verticals and horizontals. Or these proud and beautiful women are seen alone, idling the day away, writing long love letters, displaying a new dress to companions, amusing themselves with pet animals.

FIG. 3.



This very elaborate print depicts the courtesans Hitomoto and Tagosode idling the time away in trivial pursuits. It shows Kitao Masanob's genius with pattern and detail. The kimonos of the courtesans are elaborately patterned. The print also gives the viewer a glimpse at the interior.

FIG. 4.



This is a portrait of the courtesan Itsutomi by Chobunsai Eishi. It is an exceptionally graceful composition of a single figure holding a plectrum. The figure seems to possess all the elegance her training had taught and required.

The courtesans and the pleasure quarters provided the Ukiyo-E artists with inexhaustible ideas whether it be her activities, a magnificent kimono, an eccentric hairstyle, her decorous pursuits yet always portrayed this subject with delicate sensitivity and sensuality.

Many print artists favoured the Kabuki Theatre as a subject for their design.

The Kabuki Theatre originated in the 17th century only a few decades before the Ukiyo-E began to flourish. O-Kuni, a shinto priestess is honoured as the founder of Kabuki. O-Kuni formed a small troupe in Kyoto to perform popular dances and mimes. The actual plays were only adaptations of traditional shinto and folk dances, but they satisfied a need and O-Kuni's troupe gradually grew in renown.

Like Ukiyo-E, Kabuki was the theatre of the common people and was a typical product of the new sub-culture. Therefore it is not surprising that Ukiyo-E was drawn to this subject, since they, appealed to the same public. The Kabuki Theatre in Edo was part of the gay life of the merchant class.

Kabuki was entirely new and popular in conception. It was a combination of features from the old dances of Japan, from the classical No drama of the aristocracy, and from the already popular puppet stage. However, the stiff and ritualistic dance of the No plays were replaced by greater freedom of movement. The main repertoire of the Kabuki consisted of either historical pieces (jidaimono) or plays of ordinary life (sewamono), interspersed with musical performances, dancing and tricks of various sorts.

The Kabuki provided magnificent material for the colour print artists with its striking make-up, ostentatiously rich costumes and magnificent sets. In their prints, rarely an attempt is made to give the scene of a play, normally the prints depict either a single actor, or less often, two in character.

FIG. 5.



Katsukawa shunsho in this print depicts the actor Otani Hiroemon IV in character. The character of the actor is that of a highway man and is swinging a lantern. There is great subtlety in the colour scheme but black predominating which conveys the evilness of the character.

FIG. 6.



This print by Toshusai portrays the Kabuki actors Bando Zenji and Sawamura Yodogoroin character. It is a very dramatic composition and reflects the tension and drama in Kabuki. Both characters appear dynamic and energetic.

FIG. 7.



This is a bust portrait by Utagawa Kunimasa and depicts the actor Ichikawa Ebizo. It is a very dramatic print both in its colour and expression of character. There is a definite ferociousness in the face of the actor and the beauty and drama of the Kabuki is conveyed magnificently.

FIG. 8.



This print again portrays two actors in character. It is rendered by Toshusai Sharaku and depicts the actors Nakamura Konozo and Nakajima Wadaemon. The character on the right is rather unpleasant and evil and the wrestler on the left appears rather bemused. The composition again depicts the drama of Kabuki.

Actors of the Kabuki Theatre were prominent members of urban society, arbiters of fashion and taste in artistic matters generally. This is one of the factors which led to their great popularity, the populace was always anxious to know, who were the most recent actors and what they wore. Theatre management realised the popularity of the actor prints and plays and that they were good for business. Therefore print publishers did their best to keep up to date with new portraits of actors providing the print artists with endless material for their designs.

THE TECHNIQUE OF WOODBLOCK PRINTING

CHAPTER 3.

THE TECHNIQUE OF WOODBLOCK PRINTING.

The appeal of Ukiyo-E prints lies in their flat simplistic appearance, readily understood content and depiction of a civilisation alien to our own. However to truly appreciate the prints, one must look at the technique of woodblock printing to understand the beautiful craftsmanship and technical excellence of these prints.

The origin of this art form is to be found in China, where printed designs and inscriptions had existed for many centuries, so the technique of printing from wood-blocks came to Japan from China. Wood-block printing in Japan goes back to about the 8th century. It was used for dyeing cloth but not paper. Later wood-blocks were also used for the text of books brought by Buddhist missionaries. So the wood-cut medium came naturally to the Ukiyo-E artists.

At first colour was restricted to black alone, or black with one other hue, usually pink or green. The polychrome wood-block technique was perfected in the 18th century by Suzuki Harunobu. As many as ten or more blocks were used for a single print. This however, is not to say that prior to the 18th century no colour prints were in existence, many prints in fact were hand-coloured.

Ukiyo-E prints are obtained by means of xylographic printing, using various cut wood-blocks which correspond to the number of colours required. The parts to remain devoid of colour are carved out from the surface of each wood-block, leaving the area to be printed in relief. Ukiyo-E prints were not the responsibility of an individual but rather a combined and co-operative task, it was a question of not just one image, but several related ones, for a subject was frequently conceived in terms of a long series. The artist was the designer, but his idea was turned into reality by two main processes - the cutting of the blocks and the taking of impressions from them.

The artist would make his design, having chosen his format, then would make a brush drawing in black ink. This drawing was executed on mino paper, a variety of fine-quality Japanese paper named because the best sheets originally came from Mino, a town near Kyoto. The artist merely supplied the drawing and indicated the colours by painting them in on a 'pull' from the 'key block', as the outline print was known.

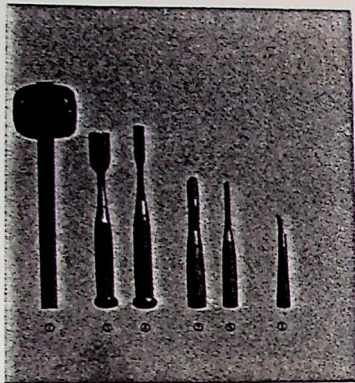
The drawing was then stuck face-down on to a block of wood with weak rice starch dissolved in water. The wood was usually wild cherry, and the drawing was placed not across the grain but parallel to it. Wild cherry tree wood was favoured for wood-blocks because it is fine grained, its hardness is moderate and uniform, it contains the right amount of moisture and does not rot easily. It was taken from a rather large trunk which had been left to dry completely and was smoothed out very carefully in the direction of fibre.

The craftsman responsible for cutting would rub the back of the mino paper to remove several layers and then apply oil to make the rest transparent. The resulting effect was as if the original design had been reversed and drawn directly on to the block, when the paper was removed.

Depending on the (col) number of colours to be printed, a separate block had to be cut for each colour required. In a print of complex tints, as many as ten or more blocks might be required, from which with over printing, a remarkable range of colour was obtainable.

The next stage was for the carvers to excise parts of the block, leaving in relief the areas which would carry the ink. The carvers used a variety of very sharp cutting tools

FIG. 9

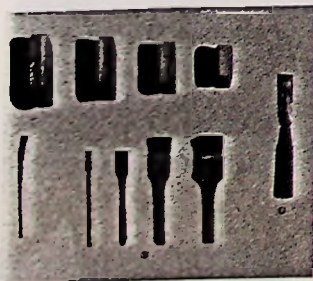


in order to give the carving the vitality and other characteristics of the original brush drawing. Without the crisp, clean cutting of the designs by the carver, no printer could produce fine, clean results.

Accuracy of register was of prime importance as a print passed from one block to another to receive its succession of colours. This problem was overcome by two marks being incised into the block after carving. The guide mark consisted of a right angle cut at one corner of each block and a straight line at the opposite side, aligned with one side of the right angle.

Nextly the block to be printed was covered with ink originally a vegetable dye and later an aniline pigment. The colours were mixed by the printer, a little size made from rice being added to give a firm consistency. The ink was then rubbed onto the raised lines with a variety of brushes

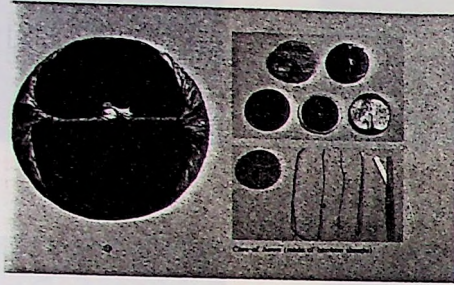
FIG. 10.



paper was then placed onto the block, the paper traditionally made from the inside of the bark of the mulberry tree mixed with bamboo fibre was kept damp for approximately six hours and then placed on the block. The printer then rubbed over the paper firmly, applying pressure with the aid of a

smooth tool called a baren. The baren,

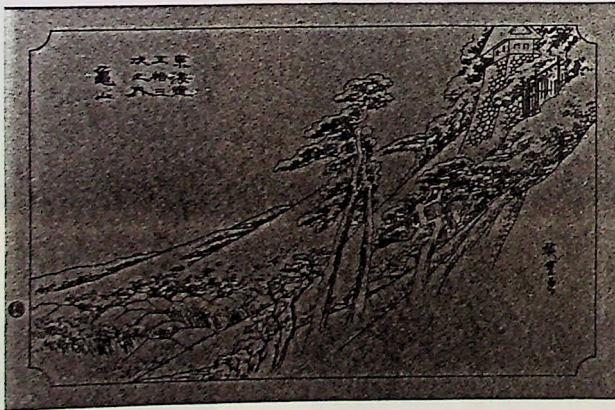
FIG. 11.

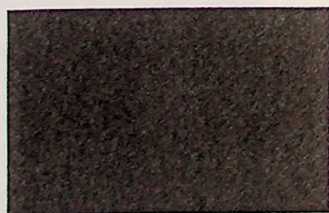
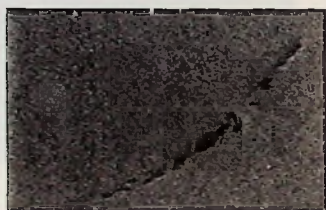
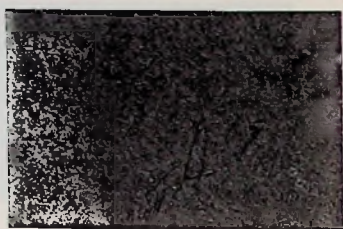


a kind of round pad, included some made of twisted strands of bamboo leaves, others made of twisted strands of treated paper and others made of twisting together iron wires. A circular movement with the baren transfers the ink to the paper producing the raised image.

The following illustrations show the various printing stages necessary for the creation of a print, carried out by means of Nishiki-E polychrome printing technique. It shows the separate blocks necessary for each individual colour. The printing process starts with light colours and with the smallest area first. The final print is the result of the individual colours and overlaying colours.

FIG. 12.







The most common print sizes were

Aiban	13" X 9"
Chuban	10" X $7\frac{1}{2}$ "
Hashirae	28" X 4"
Hosabara	30" X 9"
Kakemono-e	$22\frac{3}{4}$ " X $12\frac{1}{2}$ "
Large Obar	$22\frac{3}{4}$ " X $12\frac{1}{2}$ "
Obar	15" X 10"
(Chu) Tanzaku	15" X 5"

As techniques improved, various tricks were developed to make prints look more spectacular. Tonal gradations in a sky could be printed from one block by wiping parts of the ink with a cotton cloth. Additional subtleties could also be achieved by varying the pressure of the baren. Glue and alum were sometimes mixed with dye to add a glaze to some areas of the print. Another embellishing device was the use of mica in backgrounds or for picking out mirrors or frosty, and icy surfaces. Gauffrage or blind printing, was used especially on parts of costumes, for indicating the patterns and folds of dresses, the plumage of birds or the fur of animals, by lines in relief but void of colour. A technique also used was bokashi (shading off) which is unique to wood-block printing - in this manner a colour is applied four times and helps to give a three - dimensional effect and adds depth to the picture.

THE WORK OF SUZUKI HARUNOBU

In the latter part of the 19th century Japanese artists gradually began to study the art of the West. At first they were limited to the study of the technical aspects of painting, such as the use of oil and the study of anatomy. But as time went on, they began to study the principles of art, such as the use of light and shadow, and the study of the human figure. This was a great step forward, and it was the beginning of a new era in Japanese art.

Suzuki Harunobu was one of the first Japanese artists to study the art of the West. He was born in 1797, and he died in 1858. He was a great artist, and he was a great teacher. He was the founder of the Ukiyoe school, and he was the founder of the Ukiyoe style. He was a great artist, and he was a great teacher. He was the founder of the Ukiyoe school, and he was the founder of the Ukiyoe style.

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CHAPTER 4.

THE WORK OF SUZUKI HARUNOBU.

In the latter part of the 18th century Japanese artisans gradually adapted new materials and developed a unique and highly sophisticated art form that allminated in the technique of polychrome woodblock printing called Nishiki-E (brocade pictures). The flourishing of this print surpassed in colour and variety anything seen before. The early leadership and successful development of this full-colour revolution goes to Suzuki Harunobu. The origination of the full colour print marks an important turning point in the history of Ukiyo-E. Harunobu therefore is an epoch in the history of Japanese print making.

Suzuki Harunobu provided the public with an astonishing gallery of figures. Almot without exception the subject of Harunobu's Nishiki-E are human figures, usually women. They cover a very large range of types from famous women of ancient times, to contemporary, matrons, tea house waitresses, courtesans, geisha and children. Harunobu's prints also include a large number of domestic scenes in which women are shown with their children giving the viewer a glimpse at interiors. The choice of subjects in Harunobu's prints and their simplicity and clarity make him undoubtedly part of Ukiyo-E.

Harunobu presents us with a magnificent selection of figures in his world of love and homelife. His figures are always elegant and graceful. He seems to endow his figures with superhuman grace, they appear as weightless with tiny and ineffectual hands and wrists. The figures of women are always portrayed as frail and willowy and treated with delicate femininity. The faces of Harunobu are always easily recognizable they possess a china like quality, the features are reduced to essentials. There is no expression of feeling in the faces they seem quite remote and withdrawn. In his portrayal of men and women it is often difficult to distinguish

between the sexes. Harunobu's figures are always refined and there is a childlike quality in their simplicity.

Although Harunobu's themes seem quite narrow it is remarkable how he avoids monotony. His success here can be attributed to his skill at wonderful backgrounds. His figures are set against architectural or natural backgrounds creating atmosphere in the print. He was a genius at depicting the seasons, day and night and natural events like rain or snow. Often there is a romantic quality in a print, his beautiful creatures placed in an almost fairytale setting of flowers and winding streams, he possessed an ability to turn the seemingly hum drum into a type of never-never-land.

Throughout his work there is a great sense of movement. The figures draped in magnificent kimonos possess a definite mobility this being accentuated by the flow of the kimono, an undulating hemline or the short pace of the gait (Japanese shoes). These elements are also used to depict the posture of figures giving the essence of the body beneath.

Horizontals and verticals are skillfully used by Harunobu creating layers and giving distance in the print. It is remarkable how competent he was at contrasting his rounded figures against these right-angled elements.

Like all Ukiyo-E artists Harunobu possessed a genius at depicting kimonos. However in his rendering of kimonos they never seem to dominate the print.

Harunobu being the originator of the full colour print it is natural that his harmonious colours are a factor which added to the success of his prints. There is a delicate freshness in his use of colour always adding to the atmosphere of the composition.

Credit for the favourable achievement of Harunobu's prints rests in his portrayal of figures, the creation of his atmospheric background and the harmony of his colours.

In their simplicity and clarity Harunobu's prints are undoubtedly characteristic of Ukiyo-E. In the following prints the individual elements of his style will be apparent which mark them as being unquestionably the work of Harunobu.



FIG. 13.



風流子一七所
とつや
山のり
うれ
てん
ずん
あし
天か
とん

鈴木春信画

"Praying for Rain".

The composition of this print is common to Harunobu's style depicting a pair of figures against an atmospheric background of rain. Two women stand at the edge of a river dressed in traditional kimonos, one holding a magnificent yellow umbrella whilst the other uses her pipe to draw a toy boat in the river towards her. Both women seem quite undisturbed or concerned by the vivid rain depicted. In the top right hand corner of the print is an inset containing a poem which reads "This may be the land, that lies beneath the sun, but its light torments us surely, what we call this earth, lies under the rain". This poem praying for rain accompanied by the illustration of an umbrella are obvious references to the title. The tall, narrow hosoban is used in this print by this format our vision is drawn directly to the two women in the composition and all other details seem superfluous. It requires a second glance to see the activity of the woman stooped towards the river. Initially the composition seems concerned with two figures and large umbrella.

There is a strong sense of line in Harunobu's depiction of the rain. It shows his ability to portray dramatic natural events. He extracts elements of rain which make it clearly recognisable, even when reduced to essentials. The rain is shown as a series of heavy straight slanting lines. The threads of rain stand out sharply and individually from the background, portraying unquestionably - rain.

The curvilinear lines of the women and the umbrella are in complete contrast to the dynamic diagonals of the rain. The fine line of the body on the right seem to flow from the back of the neck to the droop of the kimono on the ground and about her feet. Both these women appear fragile their bodies seem weightless, their hands and wrists willowy and it is difficult to perceive the delicate hand supporting the large umbrella. Harunobu's sensitivity to femininity is obvious in the faces of women they are childlike and delicate, the features are reduced to essentials two slits for the eyes, hook for the nose and red dot for the lips set against

a delicate pearly skin. His faces may appear as having no individuality but they have a charming quality in their simplicity. Hairstyle being of great importance to the Japanese and featuring dominantly in the work of Ukiyo-E is treated by Harunobu with equal significance and shows his gift for creative ornamentation. The black hair is forced in curcilinear shapes at the top and back of the head into an almost semi-circular shape and hair ornaments are placed on the crown of the head.

The umbrella was an article much loved in Japan, in this print the pretty woman her delicate sinewy body holding up her gay umbrella seems in great contrast to the black teeming rain. The umbrella is brightly coloured in yellow and treated by Harunobu in detail. The black line of the beams and decorative panel are in complete contrast to the overall gay yellow and cross pattern. His attention to detail is obvious in his rendering of the inside of the umbrella following every beam to its end. This detail is not lost in his illustration of the tiny umbrella in the inset. Mobility in the print is apparent by the curve of the woman's body stooping towards the river and manner in which her delicate hand clutches the drooping sleeve of her kimono.

Harunobu's depiction of the river is in keeping with his linear style and reduction to essentials. The river with its water ripples is shown as a series of wavy lines, one following the other giving a stylised sense of movement. Its portrayal is realistic and functional but at the same time decorative.

Harunobu's mastery at the kimono design is evident in this print. He favours a floral pattern on both, repeated throughout. There is a scheme of the white flowers yet a certain irregularity. The folds and sleeves of the kimonos following the curves of the body beneath, are treated with great delicacy. Harmony of colour is dominant in the woman's kimonos, a rusty tone tinged throughout with white and yellow is favoured. The two

figures their gaily coloured yellow umbrellas are set against contrasting subtle grey background giving an overall harmonious quality to the print.

FIG. 14.



The title of this print "The Fifth-Month Rains" from "Seasonal Poems in Contemporary Settings" and its contents make it obvious. The composition is evident of Harunobu's amazing gallery of figures. It depicts three youthful women in torrential rain with the grace and delicacy of Harunobu's females. Two young women under one umbrella are on their way to the bathhouse as is evident by the towel draped over the centre woman's arm. They are seen passing the time of day with a young girl going in the opposite direction apparently opening her umbrella. The figures are set against an architectural background dominated by teeming rain. In the doorway of the building lie a dog and puppy. The top section of the print is shadowed by a stylised cloud band which contains a poem. This poem reads "Although there may be pauses in the torrential rain, the clouds in the rainy season skies show no sign of breaks of blue".

The print showing three women meeting seems a simple idea but Harunobu treats it with exquisite simplicity and freshness and shows his treasuring the humility of life. The theme of a visit to the bathhouse an ordinary activity shows the Ukiyo-E idea of focusing on reality.

Although the figures are very stylised there is a tremendous feeling of movement within them. The turn of their heads and the obvious distraction of the younger women from opening her umbrella. The short-paced spread of the womens feet in walking position, the trailing and gathered hemline of the kimono contribute to this mobile appearance all elements of Harunobu's style.

It is a very graceful composition Harunobu employing a very suave flowing line to delineate the figures and folds of their garments. The figures seem to have a superhuman grace. They are agile, with slim physique, tiny hands and feet. One must marvel that their diminutive ankles can support their bodies and thin wrists their hands. The faces of the women are very stylised and undoubtedly the work of Harunobu, the pearly skin with little facial distinction or expression. The figures are extremely frail and have an almost porcelain appearance. Harunobu's ability in depicting combs and hairpins is exercised, the jet black hair being pulled severely back and decorated with brightly coloured combs shows his sensitivity to detail.

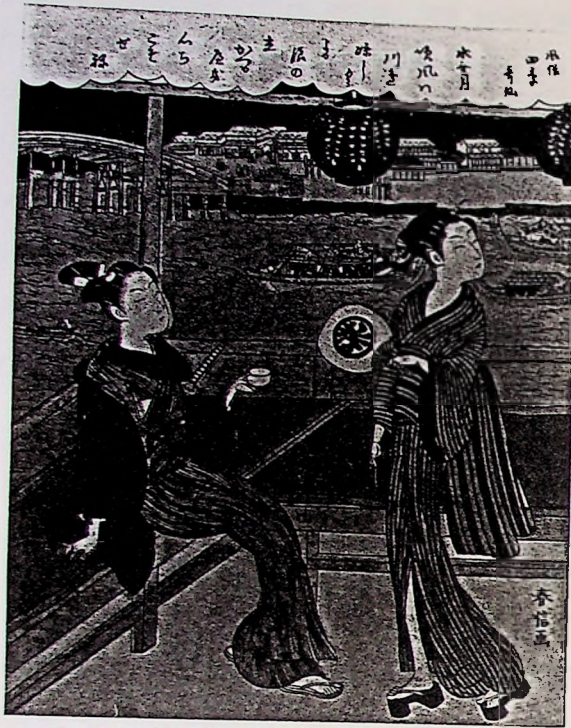
The amber and green umbrellas add a certain charm to the composition while accentuating the body movements of the young women. Detail of the umbrellas is treated to equal attention as any part of the composition the complete form taken into consideration.

The figures are draped in lavish, flowing kimonos which have a fresh and bright quality in their colour combinations. Harunobu's genius and understanding of portraying kimonos, although they are

somewhat simple and not dominated by pattern they show his knowledge of the garment, with its folds and trailing hems. Red, green, white and grey are the colours chosen, which have a contrasting effect. The younger woman on the left wears a red and white finely striped kimono, the stripes seem to echo the lines of the body, a bright green and white geometric pattern binds the kimono. The other two figures wear simple kimonos of contrasting red, green, white and grey, patterning on the green kimono is reduced to a linear design. Although the kimonos may not be exotically decorated they are nevertheless dramatic in their rich bright colours.

These three vivid figures are set against the heavy strands of slanting rain and a somewhat architectural background. The rain is depicted as before in a series of black diagonals curving through the subtle shades of the wall behind. Verticals and diagonals seem to dominate the background and divide the composition into levels. Firstly a set of grey diagonal speckled with white and green vertical post present a level behind the figures. Then another level is created by the red vertical doorway and diagonals of the wall. This sequence of verticals and slants contrast the curvature of the figures lending them even greater flexibility.

FIG. 15.



"The Sixth Month" from "Seasonal Poems in Contemporary Settings".

In this composition Harunobu renders a pair of figures, this time that of a young man and woman. It depicts the height of Summer, a young samurai is relaxing the evening at a teahouse overlooking the river, while gay pleasure boats go past outside. Above the black evening sky inset in the grey billowy cloud band is the poem "Here by the river, the waves lap at the bank and the breeze is cool : How should one feel like going home?" The two figures in a teahouse are set at a magnificent, gay picturesque setting.

Here it is obvious how within his comparatively narrow range of themes comprising most of figurative compositions Harunobu avoids monotony. The wonderful skill of his background can be attributed to this success and is rendered exquisitely in this print, depicting gay pleasure boats, against a pretty landscape of bridge and houses. It also shows Harunobu's treasuring and glorifying the delights of life.

The figures hold naturalistic poses, the young samurai seated with a delicate cup in hand, the young woman with her head turned but obviously walking towards him. The pose of the young woman is both elegant and graceful and her obvious sinuous flexibility is portrayed by the generous spread of the kimono hemline and the short pace of the gait. Realistic is the pose of the young samurai, the line of the body curves from the back of the neck to the ground. The sitting position is accentuated by the draping of his black coat into the vivid green seat.

These are undoubtedly the pearly faces of Harunobu, childlike and delicate. There is a doll - like quality in the idealised youthful faces with no individuality. There is no distinction made even between the sexes, the features merely reduced to essentials with a remote withdrawn quality. The frail, willowy bodies and ineffectual wrists, hands and ankles are retained in this print. Delicately, the young samurai holds a cup in his tiny fragile hand and the young woman holds a white flat fan with a dramatic red motif in her equally small frail hand.

Harunobu's attraction to detail and gift for creative ornamentation, is apparent in not only the attention of the woman's hair but also that of the man. The black hair is forced into somewhat eccentric geometric shapes and decorated with contrasting red and white accessories. Contrasting of colours is dramatic in the green, white, red and black of the figures garments. The young woman's kimono is a green and white striped kimono flowing and echoing every movement of her body. This is lined with vibrant red contrasting it magnificently setting the kimono and accentuating the woman's tiny waist is a striking broad black and white striped obi. The young man's mauve garment follows his sitting and the pattern echoes the linear style of the kimono. The patterning flows with the body and gives insight into the figures narrow legs. A black draped coat contrasts the vivid green and mauve splendidly.

Probably the most fascinating aspect of this print is the scenic background. It shows Harunobus success contrasting the soft and rounded forms of figures with the right angles of architectural elements. The background is both naturalistic and architectural. The structure of the teahouse with its horizontals and verticals cuts off the foreground from the landscape and creates a spatial effect. The river is reduced to recognisable elements a series of wavy lines representing water ripples gaily coloured boats speckle the greeny hue of the river. Perfectly integrated with the vertical posts of the teahouse a bridge is illustrated. The vertical line of the bank of the river creates another layer and a small town is depicted. Attention to detail is apparent in the rendering of the houses with their linear structure. Overall the scene is depicted in a somewhat subdued tone of grey but with its splashes of green and red there is a fresh and lighthearted quality about it.

FIG. 16.



"The Eight Month" from "Seasonal Poems in Contemporary Settings". The composition depicts two young women and captures a perfectly romantic view of Autumn. The two young woman are relaxing and partaking in the pleasure of moon-viewing, the full moon depicted in the top right hand corner. In the graceful setting of the Autumn hagi blossom in full bloom, the flowing stream, and full moon a tranquil atmosphere pervails. There is a delicate romanticism in the print and shows how Harunobu can transform an everyday activity like moon-viewing into a fanciful almost fairytale land. It also portrays his love for the idyllic peaceful life.

The young women are rendered in reclining poses one lying and the other bending back her frail hand supporting her body. There is a suave flowing quality in the line depicting the figures. The folds of the garments playing an important role in accentuating the pose as the bodily features are submerged. Harunobu's ideal of eternal girlhood is obvious in their faces and they have a remote withdrawn quality.

One must marvel that Harunobu saw these women about him for in his art of portraying them they seem to grow wings and belong to a remote world of frivolity and fantasy. One figure has her head turned obviously watching the moon. She wears a magnificent purple kimono patterned with maple leaves a bold indication of the season. The maple leaves of harmonious green and red rendered in panels on the base and drooping sleeves. A wide green obi binds the kimono showing the narrow waist of the girl. The lying figure behind wears a concordant green and white linear kimono bound with a deeper green obi spectacled with a white circular design. Both figures blend together magnificently against the vibrant red bench.

These graceful creatures are set in a tranquil atmospheric background of Autumn. The use of the full moon and the hagi blossom are obvious references to Autumn. Supreme delicacy is employed in rendering the blossom. The branches are depicted with splintery strokes, the leaves and bloom have a fragile quality in their speckled appearance. The curving of the stream in its series of curving lines contributes to the calm atmosphere. A subtle subdued grey is used in the background and the harmonious vibrant colours of the figures contrast it strikingly.

FIG. 17.



"Two Young Women Reading a Letter".

This composition depicts a courtesan and her companion reading a love letter. Probably the most striking point is its vivid colours. It is a fine example of Harunobu's skill of the techniques of Nishiki-E, the effective colours and the use of embossing on white areas. Also it shows Harunobu's style in that it gives us a glimpse at the interior.

In the composition a striking courtesan is clad in sumptuous kimono. Her china doll like face with essential recognisable features makes her undoubtedly the work of Harunobu. The pose of the figure is both dignified and graceful as she turns toward her companion, her delicate hand holding the letter. The black flowing line of the kimono emphasises the curve of the body. It seems to curve from the undulating hemline to the face. This suave black line also indicates every fold and crease of the generous flowing kimono. The colours are contrasting deep purple and brilliant red. The outer purple garment is patterned at the end with bright yellow maple leaves.

The figure of the courtesans companion is seen in profile but a delicate pearly face is still obvious. Probably the most striking feature of this figure is her kimono. It shows Harunobu's skillful use of embossing and the grain of the paper to give depth to the essentially two dimensional woodblock print.

These figures are set against a magnificent gaily coloured interior. The use of the diagonal beams on the gay yellow floor and the right-angled screen give a quality of distance and depth to the print. The left hand corner of the print is dominated by a decorative deep blue screen patterned with a vibrant white geometric design.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have examined the sociological and historical background which gave rise to the popular art form of woodblock printing. The development of a subculture stimulated an interest in art and made it no longer the exclusive possession of the imperial court and changed the world of art in Japan.

Also I have examined the major subjects depicted in Ukiyo-E woodblock prints that of the Yoshiwara and the Kabuki theatre. The Ukiyo-E artists rendered compositions that interested the masses and provided them with what they desired.

I have also given an insight into the craftsmanship and technical excellence involved in the technique of woodblock printing, I felt this was necessary to appreciate these flat simplistic works of technical brilliance.

Finally through the work of Suzuki Harunobu, the originator of the full colour print, I discussed characteristics and the individuality of his style yet retaining many elements of Ukiyo-E in their composition content. Harunobu's magnificent gallery of willow figures always avoid monotony and this is attributed to his ingenuity at depicting marvellous backgrounds, turning the seemingly humdrum into a type of never-never land.

Ukiyo-E woodblock prints continue to retain their charm, they may depict a world alien to our own but it must be remembered they depict the real verifiable life of Japan at the time not a never never land. They have influenced artists in the past and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the future.

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