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Visions of People: The Influences of Japanese Prints—Ukiyo-e Upon Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century French Art

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During the 1860's Japanese art flowed into France as a result of the reopening of trade relations between Europe and Japan, brought about by Commodore Matthew C. Perry's diplomatic trips to Japan and a subsequent trade treaty. The art of Japan, especially the *ukiyo-e* print, was to have a special appeal to some of the French Impressionistic artists of the time, particularly Edgar Degas and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec. In order to understand the lure of the *ukiyo-e* print it seems best to return to the early seventeenth century in Japanese history.

Following a period of welcome to Portuguese and Dutch missionaries and traders, as well as internal military conflict, the Tokugawa family ruled Japan, beginning in 1603. The Tokugawa Shogunate remained in power for two hundred and sixty-five years, during which time Japan became closed to foreigners. Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, gave his energies to the consolidation of power guarding against inner revolt and outside influences. He rewarded his supporters with additional land while his enemies were permitted to have poorer land in more remote areas, but were powerless to hold any government office. All of these feudal lords, known as *daimyo* had to spend time each year in the new capital Edo (Tokyo), as well as leaving their families as hostages in Edo for the entire year as a means of preventing any conspiracy. ¹

With the death of Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1616 and the succession of the second Shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada, any presence in Japan of foreign missionaries and traders became firmly and at times cruelly forbidden. During this period of time no Japanese were permitted to leave Japan without facing the death penalty. By the 1640's only a few Dutch traders were allowed to remain. They were confined to a small island in Nagasaki Bay named Deshima under very strict regulations. The primary fears of the Shogunate towards Christianity and the European influence was not religious in origin, but based upon the danger of revolt by strong feudal lords who might conspire with the Europeans for military assistance in overthrowing the Shogunate. ² The possibility of any conflicting political loyalties from converts to Christianity added to fear of invasion. As a result all books in any way connected to or written by missionaries or traders in Chinese were burned or secretly stored by the government.

Books written in European languages were not prohibited, since so few Japanese were able to read them. Small numbers of books of European scientific work written in Chinese were acceptable because of their practical application. These restrictions continued for almost one hundred years, and as a result severely limited Japanese scholars seeking to study European accomplishments. ³

Japan remained isolated until the early nineteenth century. During this period the Shøogunate became the practicing the ruling system while the emperor was the absolute monarch who delegated authority to the Shogun. This was the first time in Japanese history that a central authority ruled the entire country. While the emperor in Japan delegated power to the Shogun as feudal overlord, Europe of the same period had earlier transferred power from a feudal system to a national government under a crown. Influenced by strict Confucian teaching that derived from a code of loyalty, Japanese government established firm standards of conduct based upon discipline and obedience. This code of behavior applied to everyone: from the highest officers of the Shogun down to the lowest *samurai* warrior, the farmer, the artisan and the trader. Class structure was clearly defined and did not change until the growth of the city, especially the thriving Edo(Tokyo) and Osaka. ⁴

The growth of cities such as Edo(Tokyo) and Osaka gradually brought about changes in the strict feudal structure of Japanese social class divisions, that eventually gave rise to a prosperous mercantile class. In a feudal agrarian society that was so dependant upon the farmer for his production of rice, the trader was considered the lowest in social position. The tradesmen and artisans of seventeenth and eighteenth century Japan struggled to gain social and economic power with its accompanying freedom of expression. It was this class, known as *Choønin* , that was to play an important role in the nineteenth century overthrow of the Shøogunate. ⁵

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Tokugawa Shøogunate legislated within rigid class codes of behavior. Tradesmen and artisans were told to live frugal and industrious lives unsuccessfully. They had money to spend which was earned from services provided to the feudal lords of the Shogun(*daimyo*) on duty in Edo, including their wives and servants as well as the Shogun's officers. The *daimyo* were encouraged to spend their money on the material pleasures of life rather than on military defenses. As the population of the cities (Edo and Osaka) increased it became more difficult for the Shøogunate to control every aspect of urban life. A new middle class was developing a taste for the theater, romantic or comic novels and the visual arts which in the past were the privileges of the wealthy upper class. Also influencing the development of the arts for and by the middle class was the changing position of the *samurai* (warrior).

Without major internal wars to fight and reorganization of the feudal lands many of the *samurai* became masterless. Though some of *samurai* resorted to criminal lives, many became farmers, tradesmen or became involved in scholastic, literary, and artistic pursuits. ⁶

A popular and realistic form of theater, known as the Kabuki, became one of the most important modes of entertainment during the Tokugawa Shøogunate in Edo. The Kabuki plays and actors were to influence the subject matter of the *ukiyo-e* printmakers. Most of the plays dealt with themes of heroism, tragedy and loyalty, and were performed upon large stages with a clever use of theatrical illusion that included special lighting and movable scenery. Music and dance was combined with dramatic events. The performers were men after females were forbidden by the government to act in the Kabuki. Women's parts were played by male actors known as *onnagata* (female impersonators). Performances would last about twelve hours, from dawn to dusk. ⁷

Ukiyo-e printmakers utilized themes from daily life in a large city as well as drawing from the beauty of the Japanese landscape. Another situation common to the culture of a large city such as Edo, and to contribute to the motifs of the *ukiyo-e* printmaker was the area of the city given over to pleasure. Known as the Yoshiwara; the district was organized and regulated by businessmen with government approval. Some of the most beautiful women in Japan provided their services at very high prices. The women of the Yoshiwara district

were not acquired by their own choice. Women were sentenced to the Yoshiwara by judges. Daughters and wives were sold by their fathers or husbands. Once a girl or woman became a courtesan in the Yoshiwara, escape was near impossible, since the area was walled and guarded. Economic freedom was unlikely, because the women had to pay high interest rates on small loans that took a lifetime to repay. A chance for freedom occurred only if a very wealthy man bought a courtesan. In a society that did not offer women many opportunities in life, the courtesan had the chance of a few rewarding years in Edo. They were highly trained in appearance, and dressed beautifully in expensive and colorful gowns. Those that rose in rank were talented poets, painters or highly skilled conversationalists. *Ukiyo-e* printmakers went to the Yoshiwara to sketch, lounge in the tea rooms, talk and enjoy the company of the courtesan. ⁸

The *ukiyo-e* woodblock print in Japan flourished as a popular art for the masses during the approximate time period of 1660 to 1860. The word *ukiyo-e* means a picture of “the floating world”. It was derived from Buddhist religious interpretation that described man’s life on earth as unhappy, a stage to go through along the road to salvation. It came to depict a portrayal of the pleasures of life that helped to relieve the restraints of urban Japanese life. ⁹

The *ukiyo-e* print contains many design elements that are in contrast to Western art of the same time period. Western illusion of depth (perspective) usually does not exist. The Japanese print is flat space on a flat piece of paper meant to be unframed and without any illusion of Western style of depth. Japanese mastery of flat space was derived in its art from Chinese classical painting. The Asian artist usually sits cross-legged above his paper and sees it as flat. His finished work is intended to be held close to the eyes, in contrast to the Western canvas intended to be stood in front of at eye level and at a distance. *Ukiyo-e* artists were experts at the handling of line drawing gained from the value placed upon fine handwriting. Writing as calligraphy and painting are inseparable for the Japanese. The same Japanese word is used for both processes: the skill of handling line with a pointed brush and black ink to form ideographs is taught from early childhood. *Ukiyo-e* prints use clear color in a flat, opaque and two-dimensional manner. The prints usually tell a story with scenes from life in the houses of prostitution or in the theater, posed as a tableau or scene. Details such as fabric and hair style had to reflect the current fashions of the time. The emotional content of the *ukiyo-e* involves the use of a very complicated system of iconography. Symbols are represented through color posture, and use of animals: birds, fish. ¹⁰

Japanese compositional devices utilize the Chinese system for suggesting perspective which can be quite the reverse of Western art. One of the most important rules to be followed was that the bottom of a picture must represent the point nearest the spectator; the higher up positions in a picture denote space further away from the viewer. Secondly, lines must converge as they approach the foreground. Lines grow wider as they recede into the flat background. This technique created diagonal planes that was later employed by the French Impressionists. Lastly, shadows must not be used to convey three dimensional form for they would destroy the effect of flatness. ¹¹

The process of creating a *ukiyo-e* woodcut print was not the work of one artist. Four different and highly skilled people were necessary to complete the beautifully decorated sheets: the painter who designed the print by making a drawing, and indicating the color choices, the woodcutter who produced the wood engraving, the printer who applied the actual colors used, and the publisher who financed and planned each print. The close collaboration of these four craftsmen was required for the successful completion of each print.

All of the materials used in the *ukiyo-e* print making process were derived from plant life or minerals. The artist initiated the process by a drawing with a brush sketch in sumi ink on a very thin tissue like paper that

was very sturdy, and made from the fibers of the paper mulberry plant. Sumi is black pigment obtained from lampblack or the soot of burnt pine needles. The pigment was combined with glue and shaped into little slabs of ink. When dry the slabs of ink were rubbed on an inkstone and mixed with water to produce the intensity of black needed. Once the sketch was completed it was carefully glued with *dosa*, a mixture of alum and glue, to specially selected blocks of cherry wood. Alum, a mineral salt, worked in the *dosa* mixture as a sizing that helped to prevent the paper from wrinkling when it was pasted to the woodblock. The cherry woodblock had to be without imperfections. It was always cut with the grain, stored for a number of years to season, and finally planed to a very smooth surface. ¹²

Following the gluing of the sketch to the cherry woodblock, it was given to the engravers. Usually there were at least two engravers; one who carved the delicate lines of heads, hands and feet, and another who engraved the remaining areas of the block. Engravers were considered to be the most highly skilled of the *ukiyo-e* artisans. They cut away the unneeded areas and left only the lines and shapes to be printed. Engravers worked by sitting on their ankles in front of a wooden desk that sloped into their laps. Another important job of the engraver was to carve the *kento* marks which would keep the blocks in register when printed. To keep in register is meant to have an exact correspondence of colors and lines on a printed sheet. All shapes, colors and lines must match on the completed print. Each color used in the printing process required a separate block with matching *kento* marks. ¹³

Before the printer could continue the process, the paper made from the mulberry plant needed to be prepared for printing. Mulberry paper has remarkable characteristics that makes it most suitable for printing. Its surface has a silky sheen, and it is extremely resilient, and resistant to tearing. It will completely absorb the ink and leave clear edges that do not run. The paper was sized with rice paste and alum. Once it had dried, it was put into piles that had damp sheets of paper placed every twenty to thirty sheets. This was done to keep the paper moist for the printing process. As a result the paper kept its shape and wrinkling was controlled. ¹⁴

The printing process took place at a low sloping table. Above the table hung a row of brushes similar to whitewash brushes, though smaller, as well as a wide variety of pots holding the pigments, a bowl of water and one that held rice paste. The woodblock was placed on the table. A combination of paste and pigment was thoroughly mixed and brushed repeatedly and smoothly over the areas to be printed. Next, a sheet of dampened paper was precisely dropped into the *kento* (register) slots and pressed and rubbed with a tool known as a *baren*. A variety of *barens* were used; each one accomplished a special effect desired by the printer. This process was repeated for each color used, since numerous blocks were needed to complete a multicolor print. The publisher would approve or suggest alterations in the color before a series of prints would be produced. Usually two hundred copies were made, a process that could take up to three weeks to complete. Greater numbers were not printed at one time because the cherry blocks would swell from the water used. This would cause the registry to become distorted; thus the blocks had to dry out for about six months before it was reused if at all. ¹⁵

The full color *ukiyo-e* woodblock print flourished during the period of Japan's isolation from the Western world. Many beautiful prints were produced by a great number of artists, commencing with the innovative work of Masanobu (1686-1764). The decline of the refined *ukiyo-e* print occurred during and following the life of the artist, Kuniyoshi (1797-1861). With the opening of Japan after two hundred years, the *ukiyo-e* print found its way to western Europe.

Five *ukiyo-e* artists have been selected for discussion since it was their work that was to have great influence upon the impressionistic artists of Paris in the late nineteenth century. They are listed chronologically and

referred to by their given Japanese names for the purpose of ease in identification. As it is customary in Japan, surnames precede given names.

1. Suzuki, *Harunobu* (1725-1770)
2. Kitagawa, *Utamaro* (1753-1806)
3. Katsushika, *Hokusai* (1760-1849)
4. Ando, *Hiroshige* (1797-1858)
5. Utagawa, *Kuniyoshi* (1797-1861)

Although Harunobu was extremely productive, very little is known of his life. He lived and worked in Edo, and is known for developing the full color print (*nishiki-e* or brocade picture). His prints portray women and girls from both the Yoshiwara and ordinary life. His is a world of love and home life. Harunobu's figures are delicate and fragile, and often set in an interior scene. In his prints he was able to use many blocks and print in ten or more colors, including half tones that had not been done before. As well as being a master of color, he is known for his depiction of night scenes in his prints. ¹⁶

Utamaro's name has become synonymous with the representation of beautiful women, usually of the Yoshiwara and the lower classes. Information of his early life is confusing, yet it is known that he wrote poetry, studied art, was married, and had a family. His chief innovation was the introduction of large head pictures known as *oøkubi-e*. These concentrated upon the head and the upper body of the sophisticated women that he portrayed. He gave an extra touch of elegance to some of his *oøkubi-e* by applying powdered mica to the print which causes the surface to sparkle. Utamaro also created touching prints of women and children. The last years of his life were influenced by his being arrested for portraying military heroes, which was forbidden by the government. This event and the shame attached to it seems to have broken his spirit, since he became ill and died soon after. ¹⁷

Another innovator of the *ukiyo-e* was the artist Hokusai. He created vast numbers of book illustrations, prints, sketches, and paintings. He lived a long and productive life. It is known that he was probably adopted, that he began his career in *ukiyo-e* at fourteen, as an apprentice to an engraver of wood blocks. He changed his name and residence very often. Hokusai devoted his life to art and is best known for his landscapes, even though he was just as proficient portraying common people, birds, fish and insects. He is admired for his series of prints that depict many views of Mount Fuji, the sacred mountain of the Japanese. It was his *Manga*, a fifteen volume series of sketch-books, that was to become an important source for French artists interested in Japanese prints. ¹⁸

Recognized as one of the great landscape masters of the *ukiyo-e* is Hiroshige. He had a fondness for the many moods of nature, especially the seasons and weather which he created in a calm and peaceful manner. His parents died when he was very young, giving him an inheritance that permitted him the freedom to pursue his artistic instruction. As a teenager his artistic abilities were recognized by the artists of Edo. Later he was to produce the well known *Fifty Three Stations on the Toøkaidoø*, a series of fifty-five prints that described the

scenes Hiroshige was impressed by on a trip along the road that went from Edo to Kyoto. Tragedy occurred again with the death of his wife and son, when Hiroshige was forty-two. He died at sixty-one, a victim of a cholera epidemic. When his prints later reached Paris; Van Gogh became fascinated with Hiroshige's landscape prints. ¹⁹

Kuniyoshi lived and worked during the period of time in which the Tokugawa Shogunate was collapsing. Over two hundred years of isolation, and the resulting lack of trade with other countries, had created serious economic problems in Japan that were affecting the standard of living. The *ukiyo-e* artist suffered from the increased enforcement of restrictive censorship laws. The government leaders, known as the *bakufu*, were worried about possible revolutions that were soon to become a reality. Wanting to nourish a martial spirit in Japan, the *bakufu* insisted that *ukiyo-e* artists must portray subject matter that glorified the country's heroic past. These restrictions led to the downfall of the *ukiyo-e* art form. Contact with the Western world during the 1850's resulted in the opening of trade; and complex internal changes caused the overthrow of the Shogunate in 1867.

Kuniyoshi was born into an extremely poor family. His sense of color and design was learned from his father who was a silk dyer. As a teenager he studied with older *ukiyo-e* artists who recognized his abilities. His productive life was hampered by censorship restrictions, yet Kuniyoshi attempted some original innovations. He loved animals, particularly cats and birds; and would dress them in human clothes to portray the weaknesses of human nature. The influence of Western art devices appears in his series of ten prints named *Famous Views of the Eastern Capital*. In order to portray the life of the activist priest Nichiren, Kuniyoshi designed a series of ten prints in his honor. With his death came the gradual deterioration of the *ukiyo-e* print in Japan. ²¹

During the period of time that the *ukiyo-e* print was suffering its demise in Japan, it was having a vital impact upon artists and writers in Europe, especially in Paris. Many reasons accounted for the appeal of Japanese art. During this time imperialism in Europe had brought about an interest in other cultures of the world. With the opening of Japan to trade its culture was revealed to Europeans as being not only unusual and strange, but refined and elegant. Japanese culture was conveyed to European intellectuals as possessing artistic values in all aspects of its life. This condition was attractive in light of some of the depressing qualities of the new industrial society in Europe. The refreshing spirit of Japanese art offered a creative alternative to artists who were weary of the Greco-Roman styles of art that were popular at the time. ²²

Examples of Japanese art appeared in the stores and shops of Paris, London, the Hague and Leiden. The mass appeal of Japanese artifacts ranged from albums of prints (*ukiyo-e*) to fans, clothing, textiles and food. One of the earliest enthusiasts was the French printmaker Félix Bracquemond. In 1856 he found Hokusai's *Manga* in a fellow printmaker's shop. It was to become an important source for French artists. *The Manga*, albums in fifteen volumes, revealed a common interest in the plants and animals of Japan along with curvilinear flower motifs. Bracquemond became known and was honored for his accomplishments in printmaking and ceramic design. He was a companion of many painters, printmakers and decorative designers, and encouraged the study of Japanese prints. ²³

Some French artists and critics organized the secret society known as the *Société du Jing-lar*. Their purpose was to further their interests in Japanese art and gain recognition for printmaking and the decorative arts. Bracquemond designed and printed the membership cards for members of the Société. The member's name appeared in the smoke of a volcano probably suggested by Hokusai's or Hiroshige's prints of Mount Fuji. Along the sides of the volcano were birds drawn in the style of *origami*, Japanese folded paper shapes. ²⁴

At least three major exhibitions were sources of inspiration for French artists: the Paris Universal Expositions of 1867 and 1878, and a major retrospective exhibition of Japanese art in 1883 at the Paris Gallery of Georges Petit. These and other exhibits displayed paintings, prints, ink drawings, bronzes, lacquers and ceramics. French artists who had not yet formulated their styles were able to incorporate Japanese artistic elements into their work. In time to be known as the Impressionists, many French artists were to combine the observations of their environment with the Japanese devices they had noticed in their study of Japanese art, particularly the *ukiyo-e*. Vivid and bright colors were applied with a looser brush stroke. Cut-off composition and the use of the silhouette occurred in photography, but it became valid in their paintings when they observed similar elements in Japanese prints. Medieval illumination and stained glass had been thought of as traditional when it used the black outline, while the Japanese handling of the black line was considered inspiring. Also very influential to the Impressionists was the Japanese handling of flat space. Also to be remembered is that some Japanese artists did use Western techniques of representing space. A few Dutch landscapes had entered Japan during the eighteenth century through Deshima, the small island where a few Dutch traders were permitted to remain. ²⁵

Though there were many French Impressionistic artists influenced and revitalized by Japanese *ukiyo-e*, five artists seem to be most appropriate for discussion, since their styles and portrayal of subject matter may be of interest to young people.

1. Edgar Degas (1834-1917)
2. Mary Cassatt (1844-1926)
3. Paul Gauguin (1848-1903)
4. Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890)
5. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901)

Edgar Degas, born in Paris to a wealthy family, almost became a lawyer. Instead he studied art at the famous Paris School of Fine Arts. As a young man he traveled to Italy to draw from the old masters. During the 1860's Degas began collecting Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints which gradually influenced his painting style. His figures are placed asymmetrically and on a diagonal with partitions. Degas studied Hokusai's *Manga* which led him to observe his own world more clearly. He sought to capture that essence behind the facade of daily living. His favorite subjects were women: performing their daily rituals, dancing in the ballet, working in the circus and the café. He became friends with the American artist Mary Cassatt. He exhibited his work with other Impressionists; often to public ridicule and hostility, since this was a new and original style of art during the 1870's and 1880's. Degas liked Gauguin and admired his work. He helped him and bought some of his paintings. Degas worked with a variety of media, including watercolor, pastels, oils, lithography, etching and monotype. Towards the end of his life he worked exclusively in pastels, wax and clay. Possibly due to failing eyesight, his forms became richer and broader, almost dissolving into each other. Degas' life ended in isolation and blindness. ²⁶

Degas' friend, Mary Cassatt was born in the United States. Her father was a wealthy banker and railroad

magnate in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Against his wishes, she left America to study art in Paris. Mary Cassatt developed an interest in the techniques of the French Impressionists, who were painting everyday scenes that stressed the importance of natural light and shadow in clear color. She met Degas and a close friendship developed. Cassatt posed for several of Degas' paintings and prints. In her own work she made many drawings and paintings of women and children. Her style was also partly influenced by Japanese woodcuts, especially those of Harunobi and Utamaro. She made a series of ten color etchings that permitted her to imitate the simplicity found in Japanese composition and color techniques. Mary Cassatt worked unceasingly at trying to interest Americans in Impressionism, buying pictures and giving them to her family and friends. Like her friend, Degas, she suffered from failing eyesight as she became older. Mary Cassatt died in France, where she had spent most of her life as the only American woman actively involved in French Impressionism.

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Paul Gauguin's tumultuous life and work reflects the influence of Japanese art as well as that of other non-Western cultures. He, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and other artists develop differing styles with a wide range of possibilities that derive from Japanese art. Born in Paris, Gauguin traveled widely from early childhood. His interest in painting did not develop until he was in his thirties. Previous to this he was a naval officer and worked at a stockbroking job. His painting style originated with the Impressionists, yet financial problems and poor health followed him throughout his life. In Brittany, Gauguin admired the Bretons for their apparent simplicity of life, in contrast to the more complex life in Paris. His painting reflects this admiration, combined with the techniques of Japanese line and flat color. Gauguin also noticed that shadows are not seen in most *ukiyo-e* prints; as a result, he eliminates them and his color becomes more expressive. Gauguin knew Degas and Van Gogh. Yet he did not get along with either, since Gauguin felt that paintings should be done from memory rather than real life. Dissatisfied, he left France for Tahiti, and later the Marquesas Islands in the Pacific Ocean. His most well known paintings were done while he lived among the Tahitians, even though his health deteriorated, and he was constantly in conflict with the European settlers of the islands. He died on the Marquesas in poverty, after having been imprisoned for defending the native people of the islands. ²⁸

Vincent Van Gogh was born in Holland, now known as the Netherlands. He liked to draw, yet he studied for the ministry as a young man. Since he failed his examinations for the ministry, he went to Belgium to work as a lay preacher among the miners, without much success. At the age of twenty-seven he turned to art, drawing and painting the life of the workers around him: miners, peasants, and the poor of the almshouses as well as landscapes. While he was living in Antwerp Belgium, he discovered and began collecting Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. Four years before the end of his short life, he left Antwerp for Paris; where Van Gogh came to appreciate Impressionism and develop his use of intense color applied with a much freer brush stroke. While in Paris his work was influenced greatly by Japanese *ukiyo-e* particularly the prints of Hiroshige and Hokusai's *Manga* albums. Van Gogh tried to identify with Japanese artists; he drew with the reed pen, and attempted the Japanese concept of a community of artists mutually assisting one another. This need for support did not work well for Van Gogh, beyond the exchanging of work with other artists. It was to become disastrous for him when he went to Arles in southern France to live with Gauguin. He left Paris to live and work in Arles, when his health deteriorated as a result of heavy drinking and depression. While in Arles, he painted with an intensity that was to produce some of his finest work. He used vibrant color and line in his search to express moods and feelings. As his productive life developed and his paintings and drawings were praised in exhibitions in Brussels and Paris, his emotional health deteriorated even further. He died at the age of thirty-seven from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. ²⁹

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was born in Albi, France, the son of first cousins. His early childhood was lived among a society of country squires and wealthy nobility whose chief activity was hunting and riding. From a

very young age, Lautrec had a natural facility in drawing and painting which his parents encouraged. He was physically frail, since he inherited a disease that prevented his bones from growing normally. As a young person he broke both of his legs, that was to leave him a cripple for the rest of his life. Before he was twenty he went to Paris to study painting. After a short period of time he met Van Gogh and Degas. Lautrec painted a portrait of Van Gogh and greatly admired the work of Degas. His fascination for Japanese art grew during this time, in which he studied the work of Hokusai, Utamaro, and Harunobu. Lautrec became very enthusiastic about the Moutnartre café life with its dance-halls and cabarets. His acquaintances with the prostitutes, can-can dancers, singers and characters, who frequented these colorful places; provided Lautrec with subjects and themes for his drawings, paintings, and posters. Lautrec revolutionized the art of making posters by borrowing Japanese woodcut compositional devices. His style became bold, flat and full of movement as he experimented with lithographic techniques. One method that he explored was know as *crachis* , which involves the applying of a fine spray of ink onto a lithographic stone with a toothbrush. Besides posters, he printed theater programs and menu cards; making no distinction between “fine” and commercial art. His health was seriously affected by the life of excess, particularly drinking, that he lived in Paris; he died at the age of thirty-seven, like Van Gogh. ³⁰

Art Activities

This unit’s purpose is to demonstrate the transmission of culture to middle school students. More precisely, it aims to show young people how the Japanese woodcut print developed historically, and artistically in Japan, how it reached Europe, as well as the influences *ukiyo-e* had upon the drawings, paintings and prints of selected French Impressionistic artists. Exposure to the work of the Japanese and French Impressionistic artists discussed above is possible with a chronologically organized collection of slides.

Art activities that give students an opportunity to apply some of the compositional devices of Japanese and Impressionistic art follow. They are sequenced from simpler skills to more advanced, so that they may be utilized with students of varying abilities.

I. *Decorative Patterns* : as found in *ukiyo-e* prints.

1. *Motifs* derived from plant, animal and insect life that can become grid designs.

Grid designs : a framework of lines.

square grid

brick grid

diamond grid

hexagon grid

2. *Family Crests* that are used on robes and worn on special occasions.

3. *Artist’s Monograms* that derive from calligraphy and line drawing.

4. *Japanese Zodiac Symbols*

Ne —rat

Ushi —ox

Tora —tiger

U —hare

Tatsu —dragon

Mi —snake

Urna —horse

Hitsuji —goat

Saru —monkey

Tori —rooster

Inu —dog

I —boar

II. *Japanese Compositional Devices* : as found in *ukiyo-e* prints that demonstrate flat space.

1. *Asymmetry* off center balance as compared to symmetry.

2. *Flat Space* Lower area of a picture is point nearest the spectator; the higher up on the picture is further back in space.

3. *Line* Lines come together or converge as they come to the foreground as compared to Western perspective devices. Diagonals are often used.

4. *Flat Color* as compared to the use of shadow to convey three dimensional form.

III. *Printing* : The *ukiyo-e* woodblock print influenced European print artists of the late nineteenth century in their style and techniques. The prints and posters of artists, particularly Toulouse-Lautrec, along with the development of mechanical printing processes, lead to the expansion of advertising and commercial art.

Hand printing techniques can be appropriate for middle school art classes.

1. *Simple Printing Techniques* :

Printing with found objects

Stencil printing

Styrofoam printing

Glue relief printing

Monoprint

Colla graph

2. *More Advanced Printing Techniques* :

Linoleum printing

Woodcut printing

Silk screen printing

Etching

Lithograph

Notes

1. G.B. Sansom, *The Western World and Japan* (New York, 1949) p. 170.
2. *Ibid.* , pp. 172-179.
3. Donald Keene. *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720-1830* (Stanford, California, 1969), pp. 1-3.
4. Sansom, pp. 182-185.
5. *Ibid.* , pp. 186-189.
6. *Ibid.* , pp. 190-192.
7. Bradley Smith, *Japan: A History in Art* (New York, 1964), p. 205.
8. James A. Michener. *The Floating World* (New York, 1954), pp. 42-44.
9. Harold P. Stern, *Master Prints of Japan: Ukiyo-e Hanga* (New York, 1969), p. 13.
10. Michener, pp. 96-103.
11. *Ibid.* , pp. 104-106.
12. Stern, p. 16.
13. *Ibid.* , p. 17.
14. Michener, pp. 157-158.
15. *Ibid.* , pp. 158-160.
16. Hugo Munsterberg, *The Arts of Japan: An Illustrated History* (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan, 1957), p. 155.
17. Stern, pp. 200-218.
18. *Ibid.* , pp. 260-272.
19. *Ibid.* , pp. 280-296.
20. Sansom, pp. 276-308.
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