



MAK

Press Release

KUNIYOSHI + Design and Entertainment in Japanese Woodblock Prints

Press Conference	Friday, 25 October 2019, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Friday, 25 October 2019, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK DESIGN LAB MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	26 October 2019 – 16 February 2020
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

For the 150th anniversary of Austrian-Japanese friendship the MAK exhibition *KUNIYOSHI +: Design and Entertainment in Japanese Woodblock Prints* is devoted to the late period of the *ukiyo-e*. The show's main spotlight is on one of the most important and innovative artists of the nineteenth century, Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861). Selected prints from the extensive woodblock print collection in the MAK show his works so to speak as creative response to the great political and social changes in Japan in the nineteenth century. The exhibition also deals with Kuniyoshi's collaboration with contemporary artists, including Hiroshige and Kunisada, also his impact on the themes and style of the following generation in the Meiji period. Kuniyoshi's multifaceted and innovative oeuvre is illustrated in eight sections.

Kuniyoshi is the central personality in the history of woodblock prints at the end of the Edo period (1603–1868). Together with other masters of the Utagawa school, including Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) and Utagawa Kunisada I (= Utagawa Toyokuni III, 1786–1864) and often in cooperation with the entertainment industry, he produced created prints that were ground-breaking in both artistry and technique and enormously popular with the general public.

Kuniyoshi, Kunisada, and Hiroshige were all acclaimed *ukiyo-e* designers of their era; together they created extensive series such as had never been possible before. Cooperation and not competition was also the motto of the major publishing houses that made these extensive series possible. The works of the Utagawa school also attained hitherto unencountered sizes. For instance, a six-part, 38 x 150 cm print by Kuniyoshi from the MAK Collection gives us an idea of this new scale.

From the late eighteenth century on, the woodblock print is the form that most notably and frequently displays the increasing interest in the art scene outside Japan—despite the restricted access to information and originals. In his large series *Twenty-Four Chi-*

nese Paragons of Filial Piety (ca. 1848), Kuniyoshi combines a traditional Chinese theme with European stylistic elements and compositions and uses western printed graphics from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as models.

Further sections in the MAK exhibition show life in the great city of Edo—today Tokyo: fashion, theater, pleasure quarters, and nocturnal entertainment are reflected in the popular works of the Utagawa school. Kuniyoshi was a master in manoeuvring his way round the ever more restrictive censorship, which made direct allusions and even portrayals of well-known personalities impossible. Designers and publishers therefore opted for innocuous historical motifs with cryptic contemporary references.

Reality and fiction also intermingle in dream pictures and ghost stories—these types of pictures especially have a long tradition in the *ukiyo-e*, newly revitalized by Kuniyoshi and Kunisada.

Synthetically produced pigments enriched the color palette of the Japanese woodblock prints at the latest since the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (post-1830) by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), with their use of “Prussian blue” imported from Europe. The MAK exhibition shows Kuniyoshi’s use of this new, synthetically produced coloring, which made him the central figure in the technical renewal of the *ukiyo-e*.

Woodblock Prints from the MAK Asia Collection

The holdings of woodblock prints by Kuniyoshi and his contemporaries in the MAK Collection were mostly compiled around 1900. Occupying a special status here are the two collector personalities Heinrich Siebold (1852–1908) and Richard Lieben (1842–1919). Siebold’s collection entered the MAK Asia Collection between 1892 and 1905; this was supplemented in 1922 with Lieben’s extensive and superlative *ukiyo-e* collection.

The exhibition is accompanied by the catalog *KUNIYOSHI +: Design and Entertainment in Japanese Woodblock Prints* by Mio Wakita-Elis and Johannes Wieninger, edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Mio Wakita-Elis, and Johannes Wieninger. German/English, ca. 144 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK/Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna 2019. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at MAKdesignshop.at for € 27.

Simultaneous to the exhibition *KUNIYOSHI +. Design and Entertainment in Japanese Woodblock Prints* in the MAK DESIGN LAB, the show *UKIYOENOW: Tradition and Experiment* is opening in the MAK GALLERY, a contemporary treatment of the *ukiyo-e*. Masumi Ishikawa (b. 1978 in Tokyo), Megumi Ōishi (b. 1985 in Shizuoka) and Andrew Archer (b. 1986 in Auckland) combine traditional motifs and techniques with new subjects and potential offered by digitalization, updating as it were the aesthetic of

the *ukiyo-e*.

The main feature of MAK DAY on 26 October 2019 is the anniversary *150 Years of Austrian-Japanese Friendship* and will present numerous program items relating to the two newly opened MAK exhibitions.

Program details at MAK.at

Press photos are available for download at MAK.at/en/press

Supported by



Press Data

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Curator	Mio Wakita-Elis, Curator, MAK Asia Collection
Guest Curator	Johannes Wieninger
Publication	<i>KUNIYOSHI+. Design und Entertainment im japanischen Farbholzschnitt/KUNIYOSHI+: Design and Entertainment in Japanese Woodblock Prints (MAK Studies 27)</i> , ed. by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Mio Wakita-Elis, and Johannes Wieninger, German/English, MAK/Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna 2019. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at MAKdesignshop.at for € 27.
Supporting Program	For details see MAK.at
MAK Admission	€ 12 / Reduced € 9 / Family Ticket € 15 Every Tuesday 6–10 p.m.: admission € 5 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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Vienna, 6 September 2019