



Color Woodcut International: Japan, Britain, and America in the Early Twentieth Century (Chazen Museum of Art Catalogs)

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Color woodcut printmaking was not new to Britain, America, or Japan in the late eighteenth century. Yet after Japan was opened to the West in 1854 and deeper cultural exchange began, Japanese prints captured the European and American imagination. The fresh colors, simplicity of materials, and departure from traditional compositions entranced western artists and the public alike. Likewise, Japanese audiences and artists were intrigued by the styles and techniques of western art, which was broadly available in Japan by the end of the nineteenth century. Artists there created images of the strange foreigners and imagined what American cities looked like.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, artists were not content to merely imagine what the other side of the world looked like. As prints traveled around the globe for study so did artists, and with them spread the tricks and techniques of color woodblock printmaking as well as appreciation for the prints. Woodblock printmakers in the West started to investigate Japanese processes, and Japanese publishers began to seriously seek out the print market outside of Japan. Important themes began to emerge; scenes of nature and old-fashioned architecture outnumbered modern city views, and images of animals were nearly as popular as those of human figures. Imagery was often idyllic and beautiful, attractive to an international audience.

Twentieth-century art, however, moves at a furious pace, and the ferment of the international woodcut style quickly ran its course. Artists appropriated what they needed from the color woodcut, then developed techniques, subjects, and styles in their own ways. An ever-expanding range of prints became indebted to the artists of the previous generation who had reinvigorated woodblock printmaking styles and practices around the world.

This full-color catalogue includes many prints from this colorful exhibition and shows how the progression of styles became more similar as international artists learned from and competed with each other, then stylistically diverged as artists of each country took what they learned in new directions. The three essays each focus on the influences and contributions made to the international style by three countries: Japan, Britain, and America.

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