

人間  
讃歌

Autumn  
Special  
Exhibition

# In Praise of Humanity: Genre Paintings of the Edo Period

September 24 (Sun.) - November 5 (Sun.), 2023  
The Hōsa Bunko Galleries & The Original Wing Galleries

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\*Some of the artworks on display in the first term  
will be changed in the second term.  
First term: September 24 (Sun.) - October 15 (Sun.)  
Second term: October 17 (Tue.) - November 5 (Sun.)

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## Introduction

Marked by the arrival of a new era of peace following upon the end of the Warring States period, the early Edo period witnessed the production of a large number of genre paintings that vividly depicted people at leisure in lively urban settings, reflecting the trend of the time for playfully reframing the formerly pessimistic worldview of *ukiyo*—a “sorrowful world”—instead as a homophonous but more positive *ukiyo*—a “floating (lively) world.”

Eventually, these genre paintings turned their focus to the human figure, eliminating background settings and featuring just the images of the people themselves indulging in various pleasures, striking beautiful poses and dressed in *kosode* robes adorned in elaborate patterns. On the other hand, folding screens and illustrated handscrolls depicting people's daily lives through the changing seasons were painted one after the other, with renowned artists developing a fresh new world of genre painting.

Genre paintings of the Edo period focus on people living in the real world and enjoying peacetime, making them full of universal appeal. This exhibition displays a number of masterpieces of genre painting along with actual *kosode* robes and furnishings from their time, inviting visitors to enter the fascinating world of these paintings.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all of the lenders to the exhibition for their generosity and cooperation as well as to the many other involved individuals and institutions without whose support this project would not have been possible.



<No.27 in the Hōsa Bunko galleries>

**National Treasure:**

**Various Amusements, known as the "Hikone Screen"**  
(portion)

Edo period, 17th c.

Hikone Castle Museum, Shiga

# Lives of the Townspeople

[Hōsa Bunko Galleries]

Genre scenes depicting aspects of human life have appeared within illustrated handscrolls and painted folding screens for many ages, but from the 16th century onward, images specifically addressing this theme appeared as a class of painting in themselves, reflecting a positive attitude toward the *ukiyo* (“floating world”) culture of the day. In the 17th century, with the arrival of an extended era of peace, genre paintings celebrating the pleasures of peacetime and depicting people basking in the joys of life further increased in numbers.

With Tokugawa Ieyasu’s construction of Nijō Castle in Kyoto in 1603, the genre painting cityscapes referred to as “Scenes in and around Kyoto” (*Rakuchū rakugai zu*) that had been produced since the Muromachi period also underwent a transformation. These panoramic paintings were sensitive to the trends of the times and incorporated depictions of all the latest social events around town, such as the newly popular “kabuki” dances of the dancer Izumo no Okuni, which became the talk of Kyoto that same year, the bustling activities of the new entertainment district on the riverbank at Shijō, or the splendid revelry of the seasonal festivals that were held around the city.

The genre paintings of this period, including the dynamic portraits by the painter Iwasa Matabei—who was later acclaimed by the nickname “Ukiyo Matabei”—are filled with a sense of such vitality and enthusiasm that one can almost hear the cheerful, joyful voices and feel the breathless excitement of the people.

## Artworks registered as National Treasure, Important Cultural Property or Important Art Object in this section are:

Exhibit No.3

**National Treasure:** Scenes in and around Kyoto (Funaki ver.)

Pair of six-fold screens by Iwasa Matabei

Edo period, 17th c.

Tokyo National Museum

Exhibit No.4

**Important Cultural Property:** Scene of an Okuni Kabuki Performance

Six-fold screen

Edo period, 17th c.

Kyoto National Museum

Exhibit No.5

**Important Cultural Property:** Scenes of a Kabuki Performance

Two handscrolls

Edo period, 17th c.

The Tokugawa Art Museum

Exhibit No.6

**Important Cultural Property:** Customs of the Townsfolk

Four sliding door panels from Nagoya Castle by painters of the Kanō School

Edo period, 1614

Nagoya Castle

Exhibit No.10

**Important Cultural Property:** Festival of the Hōkoku Shrine

Pair of six-fold screens by Iwasa Matabei

Edo period, 17th c.

The Tokugawa Art Museum

Exhibit No.16

**Important Art Object:** Tobacco Tray

Design of grapevines in *maki-e* lacquer

Edo period, 17th c.

Suntory Museum of Art, Tokyo

## Devotion to Ultimate Pleasure [Original Wing Galleries]

The prolonged peace and stability in the realm drew people to the pleasures of the floating world, and in the paintings of the times as well, we begin to see numerous depictions of people engaged in a variety of recreational amusements set in the sprawling interiors of grand city residences. In locations that could just as easily be a geisha house in the pleasure district as the residence of a respected dignitary, in Kyoto, the “Capital of Flowers,” or in the emerging town of Edo, people dressed in gorgeous attire, drink, eat, dance, and pursue a variety of pleasures, in scenes rich with an air of indulgence and pleasure-seeking. At the same time, others engage in the refined arts of tea, flowers, and incense, or practice elegant pursuits modeled after the four accomplishments of the Chinese educated gentleman: the lute, chess, calligraphy, and painting. Even scenes of people playing *kemari* football and seated archery and other aristocratic pastimes appear, interweaving the high-class with the mundane almost indiscriminately.

These scenes of people indulging in temporary pleasures seem far removed from normal everyday life, becoming tinged with an air of illusion. Perhaps they reflected an idealistic pleasure paradise where dreams and desire converge, and where people could find release from the concerns of everyday life.

**Artworks registered as National Treasure, Important Cultural Property or Important Art Object in this section is:**

Exhibit No.18

**Important Cultural Property:** Pleasures and Amusements, known as the “Sōō-ji Screens”

Pair of eight-fold screens

Edo period, 17th c.

The Tokugawa Art Museum

## In Pursuit of Consummate Beauty [Original Wing Galleries]

As the shogunate and feudal system became more firmly established, licentious behavior and dressing above one’s social class were outlawed, and revelry was confined to dedicated entertainment districts and theater spaces. As though following the spirit of these prohibitions themselves, genre paintings became narrower in their field of view, cutting out background scenery and limiting the types of subjects in their depictions, focusing more closely on the beauty of the figures and costume in scenes of beautiful women or figures of the pleasure quarters.

While normally portraiture seeks to highlight the beauty of an individual’s figure or appearance, the focus of images of figures of the pleasure quarters and beautiful women of this time turned more toward the beauty of their makeup and their upswept, variously tied hairstyles, the beauty of the colors and patterns in their clothing and their graceful hand gestures and bodily movements. The detailed rendering of their garments, in particular, reflected the remarkable developments in dyeing and weaving techniques that began in the 17th century and continued through this period. Through their depictions of *kosode* robes, which represented the most beautiful and cutting-edge designs of the day, genre artists sometimes also served to convey the spirit and aesthetic sensibilities of those wearing them, embodying the ethos of the times.

## Artworks registered as National Treasure, Important Cultural Property or Important Art Object in this section are:

Exhibit No.26

**Important Cultural Property:** Genre Figures, known as the "Honda Heihachirō Figure Screen"

Two-fold screen

Edo period, 17th c.

The Tokugawa Art Museum

Exhibit No.27

**National Treasure:** Various Amusements, known as the "Hikone Screen"

Six-fold screen

Edo period, 17th c.

Hikone Castle Museum, Shiga

Exhibit No.29

**Important Cultural Property:** *Yuna*, Public Bathhouse Attendants

Hanging Scroll

Edo period, 17th c.

MOA Museum of Art, Shizuoka

Exhibit No.34

**Important Cultural Property:** Dancers

Six-fold screen

Edo period, 17th c.

Kyoto City

Exhibit No.35

**Important Cultural Property:** *Kosode* (Short-Sleeved Kimono)

Flowering plants and pine-bark lozenge bands design

Edo period, 17th c.

Kyoto National Museum

Exhibit No.36

**Important Cultural Property:** *Kosode* (Short-Sleeved Kimono)

Cranes and pine design

Edo period, 17th c.

Agency for Cultural Affairs

Exhibit No.37

**Important Cultural Property:** *Furisode* (Long-Sleeved Kimono)

Bamboo, squirrel, and plum blossoms design

Edo period, 17th c.

Agency for Cultural Affairs

Exhibit No.38

**Important Cultural Property:** *Katabira* (Summer Kimono)

Chrysanthemums and hemp palm leaves design

Edo period, 17th c.

Agency for Cultural Affairs

## *The Pleasures of Peacetime* [Original Wing Galleries]

After the mid-17th century, the word "ukiyo" or "floating world," which had been used to refer to the present world—as opposed to the realms of previous or future incarnations—also changed. The floating world took on associations with shifting winds or tides, i.e., current trends and fashionable customs. Furthermore, it became a word that suggested the underworld of the theater districts and pleasure quarters and in the painted arts two major genres of Ukiyo-e arts, portraits of stage actors (*yakusha-e*) and images of beautiful women (*bijin-ga*), emerged. While Ukiyo-e took a unique trajectory, developing in the form of printed books and single-sheet woodblock prints, at the same time artists continued to produce painted screens and handscrolls depicting people's daily lives through the changing of the seasons, and famous painters brought life to a new world of refined genre paintings.

Unlike Ukiyo-e that targeted the masses, screens and scroll paintings were often commissioned by the privileged classes, reflecting their

ideals, aspirations, and sometimes their political agendas. These paintings depicted a peaceful world in which the tranquil daily lives of the people unfolded amidst the scenery of the changing seasons. The quiet lifestyles of the people depicted here seem to celebrate the times of peace and suggest the people's desire for this calm to continue far into the future.

**Artworks registered as National Treasure, Important Cultural Property or Important Art Object in this section are:**

Exhibit No.51

**National Treasure: Cooling Off**

Two-fold screen by Kusumi Morikage

Edo period, 17th c.

Tokyo National Museum

Exhibit No.60

**Important Cultural Property: Genre Scenes**

Handscroll by Miyagawa Chōshun

Edo period, 18th c.

Tokyo National Museum

Exhibit No.64

**Important Art Object: Pastimes and Observances of the Four Seasons around Kyoto**

Two handscrolls by Maruyama Ōkyo

Edo period, 18th c.

The Tokugawa Art Museum

Official  
Exhibition  
Catalogue

3,000yen



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