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UTAMARO: A Chorus Of Birds



Synopsis

The "Book of Birds" was published about 1790, when the Japanese colored wood-block print was at its finest and the artist Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) was at the height of his career. The most widely admired painter and print designer of his day, Utamaro is probably best known in the west for the sensuous beauty of the female face and figure that he perfected in single-sheet color prints. Although he often depicted the everyday world of housewives and young mothers, his favorite subjects were the women of the Yoshiwara, the licensed pleasure quarters on the outskirts of Edo (modern Tokyo), a world he knew and loved intimately. By the 18th century the center of Japanese culture had shifted from the old capital of Kyoto, home of the imperial family and titled aristocracy, to the burgeoning new metropolis of Edo. Here a prosperous and well-educated urban populace, comprising samurai intelligentsia, shopkeepers, artists, and craftsmen, stimulated the production of illustrated printed books. One of the largest book publishers was Tsutaya Juzaburo (1748-1797), a major patron of promising print artists and novelists. He and Utamaro becomes close friends. Like many in Edo, he enjoyed composing 'kyôka', the comic verse form that was just reaching the pinnacle of its popularity and brilliance. He began publishing the 'kyôka' anthologies using Utamaro as his principal illustrator. The "Book of Birds" is one of the great achievements of their collaboration. Entitled 'Momo-chidori kyôka awase' (literally "One Hundred Birds in a Competition of Humorous Poetry"). A CHORUS OF BIRDS reproduces in facsimile size and in the fold-out format of the original a copy of Utamaro's "Momo-chidori kyôka awase" in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Book Information

Hardcover

Publisher: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Viking Press; 1st edition (January 1, 1981)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0670220094

ISBN-13: 978-0670220090

Product Dimensions: 20 x 20 x 20 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #661,304 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #197 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Graphic Design > Printmaking #3820 in Books > Arts & Photography > Individual Artists #16632 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Crafts & Hobbies

Customer Reviews

Text: English, Japanese --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

THIS BOOK CONTAINS BEAUTIFUL WOODBLOCK PRINTS OF JAPANESE BIRDS. POSSIBLY, ITS MOST UNIQUE FEATURE IS THAT THE PAGES ARE UNCUT AND THE BOOK PAGE OPENS IN ONE CONTINUOUS SHEET OF ILLUSTRATIONS. IT IS WORTH EVERY PENNY OF THE PRICE.

Kitagawa Utamaro was one of the premier woodblock artists in Japan during the 18th century. This Book of Birds was published at the height of his career in around 1790. This is a reproduction of the series of three books of bird woodblock prints by the artist in the metropolitan museum of art in New York. The reproduction is presented in a folding format similar to that of old Japanese books or screens. It is a beautiful work of art. The only thing that hasn't been able to be reproduced is the embossing and gold speckles in the paper of the original work, but you can still see where they are in the reproduced pictures. The front of the book gives us an introduction to Utamaro and the back of the book translates the poetry on each page (by the greatest poets of the era) and identifies each of the birds in all the prints. If you love birds and Japanese art then this a book you should put some effort into finding. It's a rare treat for those lucky enough to have seen this reproduction.

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