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Tsukioka Kōgyo, *The Hat Maker (Etsuji no)*, 1925-1928 from the series "One Hundred Noh Plays."
Color woodblock print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Roland A. Way.

Presenting Noh Drama Theater Prints of Tsukioka Kōgyo

On View February 12 – May 15, 2011

February 15, 2011 - Tsukioka Kōgyo (1869-1927) was a painter and master print designer of Japan at the turn of the 20th century. He is best known for creating hundreds of woodblock prints depicting Noh plays, a highly stylized, classical form of performance dating from the 14th century. Influenced by Western watercolors and photographs, as well as an interest in representing movement and three-dimensionality, Kōgyo developed a unique artistic style and created a new vision of the actors in the Japanese print tradition.

Drawn primarily from the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's (SBMA) Roland A. and Mary Louis Way Collection, this exhibition showcases approximately 50 prints from Kōgyo's celebrated series "One Hundred Noh Plays" with supplemental loans and related objects. This series, created in 1922 and completed in 1926 shortly before Kōgyo's death, defines Kōgyo's artistic genius in creating a new vision of actors within the Japanese print tradition. Through the compelling portrayal of main characters, Kōgyo captures in the woodblock medium the refined beauty embodied by Noh: its spare stage, sumptuous costumes, masked actors, and emotionally-charged plots. The exuberant colors and exquisite surface quality of the artist's prints are the result of skillful carving and superb printing which were possible because Kōgyo worked in the tradition of the color woodblock print established since the beginning of the Edo period (1615-1868)—a collaborative production between the designer, publisher, woodcarver, and printer.

The word "Noh," literally "skill" or artistry, was originally attached to the names of several performing art traditions. As a form of performance, Noh combines the arts of dance, chant, and mime and is colored by Buddhist philosophy. In the world of Noh, the living and the dead often interact and many characters are seekers of Buddhist enlightenment, that is, detachment from desires and an end to worldly suffering. Plots are drawn from legends, history, or classical literature and play texts favor poetry and evocative language over straightforward communication. Through a combination of masks, gorgeous costumes, stately dances, sonorous chanting of poetic texts, and the sounds of drums and flute, Noh aims to create deeply refined and elegant beauty, an aesthetic Kōgyo captured most impressively in his prints.

By Kōgyo's time, and today, about 250 plays remained in the active Noh repertoire. For much of Noh history, attending a performance entailed a full program of five plays, one from each category—including gods, ghosts of warriors, women (played by men as only men act on the Noh stage), miscellaneous figures (typically living), and demons—in order, and performed over many hours. The arrangement was intended to provide variety and to increase the tempo and excitement as the performance progressed from plays that were stately and otherworldly to ones that were more lively and this-worldly.



Left image: Tsukioka Kōgyo, *Nightbird (Nui)* from the series "One Hundred Noh Plays." Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Roland A. Way.
Right image: Tsukioka Kōgyo, *The Iron Crown (Kazawa)* from the series "One Hundred Noh Plays." Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Roland A. Way.

In one example, a brave warrior, Minamoto no Yorimasa, shoots into the black clouds and brings down the **nu** monster, which was said to have afflicted a 12th-century Emperor: "...His Majesty had a fear night after night... The pain would come upon him... deep black clouds, in one huge mass, arose, and, hovering above the royal palace, they covered all; without fail, His Majesty would be gripped by fear." Kōgyo has portrayed the creature in the customary black wig, indigo costume, and angular, gold-eyed **ayakashi** mask (a mask used to represent vengeful wraiths or violent gods). Through nocturnal hues and a masterful painterly technique, Kōgyo has provided a true sense of the ominous, hovering black clouds that so distressed the Emperor.

In another example, based on an account in *Tale of the Heike*—a narration of the rise and late 12th century fall of the Heike clan—a woman whose husband abandons her for a new wife prays for revenge. She receives an oracle that "she must put a tripod on her head, with torches attached to its legs, daub her face with red and wear scarlet clothing. And she must let her heart be consumed with anger." In this description, she wears the inverted tripod and follows the oracle, sitting resolutely in the calm before the impending storm of her attempted revenge, indicated by the looming darkness.



Noh Robe with Chrysanthemum, Autumn Grasses, and Butterflies Japanese, 18th century. Silk twill weave with **ikat**-dyed (**kasuri**) warp in alternating blocks of beige and orange with silk and gold-leaf paper supplementary weft patterning. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Anonymous Donor.

Supplemental objects are also included in the exhibition, including this example of a Noh robe, richly adorned with colorful designs that may have functioned as visual clues for the audience's understanding of a character.

Chrysanthemums, autumn grasses, and butterflies are emblems of autumn that evoke both the beauty of nature and the evanescence of time. The exquisite fabric is known as *karai* or “China weave,” a complex brocade weaving technique that produces patterns resembling embroidery and that is used exclusively in making Noh costumes.

In Japan's rush to modernize during Kōgyo's time, many traditional arts underwent dramatic changes and were challenged by new artistic expressions from the West. Noh theater faced an uncertain future and the danger of extinction. Kōgyo's prolific production of Noh prints was integral to the revival of Noh theater. As Noh gained recognition as one of Japan's iconic cultural traditions, at home and abroad, Kōgyo's elegant images of Noh actors became his artistic legacy and have profoundly influenced the way in which Noh is depicted even today.

This exhibition is co-curated by Susan Tai, Elizabeth Atkins Curator of Asian Art and Katherine Saltzman-Li, professor of Japanese literature and theater at the University of California at Santa Barbara with the assistance of her students.

Related Programming

Sunday, February 20, 2:30 pm

Lecture

Kōgyo and His “One Hundred Noh Plays”

The Noh theater prints of Tsukioka Kōgyo mark both significant change and continuity in the Japanese print tradition in early 20th century. At the same time, they parallel the innovations in theater and elsewhere in Japanese society as Japan looked westward in an effort to modernize. In conjunction with this exhibition, Katherine Saltzman-Li, professor of Japanese literature and theater at the University of California at Santa Barbara and co-curator of the exhibition, will present a lecture on the art of Kōgyo and the artist's career-long interest in Noh theater.

Mary Craig Auditorium

Free with Suggested Admission

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.

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