

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Japanese Masterpieces Reunited for First Time in More Than a Century at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Hartford, Conn. (Dec. 14, 2016) – Two monumental scroll paintings by Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) will be reunited for the first time in more than 130 years at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in an exhibition, “Utamaro and the Lure of Japan,” opening Jan. 7, 2017. The exhibition will bring together, “Fukagawa in the Snow,” (1802-1806), from the Okada Museum of Art in Hakone, Japan, with the Wadsworth Atheneum’s own, “Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara,” (1793). In addition to the two iconic scrolls, the show will display more than 50 objects, including paintings, prints, textiles, porcelain and armaments taken from the Atheneum’s 1,000-object collection of Japanese art.

Kitagawa Utamaro was one of Japan's greatest artists of “ukiyo-e”—pictures that depicted the “floating world” of ephemeral everyday life, especially the pleasures of love and entertainment, in Edo (now Tokyo) from the early eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century. He is known for his portraits of beautiful women, and in the two monumental paintings included in the exhibition specifically celebrate the courtesans who lived in the famous pleasure districts of the time.

With its countless cherry blossoms hanging from trees, the Wadsworth Atheneum's painting depicts an idealized view of a real place: one of the tea houses that lined the central boulevard of the Yoshiwara quarter—a splendid and extravagant area of brothels, theaters, and revelry. Painted a decade apart but presented together, “Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara” and “Fukagawa in the Snow” will offer visitors a unique opportunity to witness Utamaro's artistic development and to take measure of his artistic skill. Generally considered the artist's most ambitious work, the paintings each feature many figures—“Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara” pictures over 40 women, and “Fukagawa in the Snow” pictures 25—depicted in exceptionally vibrant colors, attesting to Utamaro's fame as one of the outstanding artists of his time. In his elaborate portrayals of dining, music making, and geisha performances, Utamaro's skill as an accomplished painter of both figures and architecture is apparent. The paintings also provide visitors with a unique window into the stratified Japanese society, highlighting gender roles during the Edo Period (1615–1868).

“The sheer beauty and deeply exotic character of Kitagawa Utamaro's work captivated a curious public when it was first presented to western audiences in late nineteenth-century Paris,” said Thomas J. Loughman, Director and C.E.O. “It must have done so again in 1950s New England, when the Atheneum purchased ‘Cherry Blossoms.’ But the context of our painting and its meaning as a work of art is enriched by its presentation beside the recently rediscovered painting and amid our broader collection of Japanese art, filled as it is with works collected more than a century ago here in New England. This exhibition brings a chance to see these two paintings reunited—something we are thrilled to offer our visitors and the world through an international collaboration with the Okada Museum of Art in Hakone.”

It is little known that the Wadsworth Atheneum has steadily expanded its collection of Japanese art since the late nineteenth century. More than 1,000 objects were assembled by a number of Connecticut collectors who focused on one medium in particular, and eventually gave the museum their collections. Decorative arts—ceramics, lacquer work, armaments and costumes—from the 1905 Colt Bequest and other collections punctuate the exhibition. By contrast, “Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara” was a major purchase and is widely considered the most important object in the Wadsworth Atheneum's collection of Asian art. Casting light on the long-lasting fascination with depictions of elegant Japanese women among Western collectors, the exhibition's array of Japanese prints of scenes from pleasure districts with geisha and court women will center not only on those by Utamaro, but also on thematically and stylistically related sheets by contemporaries such as Ishikawa Toyonobu, Utagawa Toyokuni and Ando Hiroshige.

“This is an exciting moment, as this is the first time we will exhibit our wonderful collection of Japanese art comprehensively,” said Oliver Tostmann, the Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art and organizing curator of the exhibition. “This exhibition provides us the rare opportunity to explore the rich history of collecting Japanese art in Connecticut and at the Wadsworth Atheneum, and to reevaluate our holdings. Most of the objects selected for display have not been on view in decades, and through them visitors can compare Japanese artists from the seventeenth century with later artists, and see the changing tastes not only in Japanese art, but also among American collectors.”

The first record of Utamaro's “Snow” and “Flowers” being displayed together is by a wealthy merchant of the Zenno family at Jogan-ji Temple, Tochigi Prefecture, in 1879, when they were shown with a third monumental work, “Moon at Shinagawa,” or “Moonlight Revelry at Dozo

Sagami,” (c. 1788, now owned by the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.). The last time “Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara” was seen by an international audience was in 1995, when it opened the groundbreaking exhibition “The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro” at the British Museum in London and the Chiba City Museum of Art.

Tour of “Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara”

After “Utamaro and the Lure of Japan” closes in Hartford, the Wadsworth Atheneum’s painting, “Cherry Blossoms at Yoshiwara,” will travel to the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C., for an exhibition titled, “Inventing Utamaro: A Japanese Masterpiece Rediscovered.” After that, the painting will travel to the Okada Museum of Art in Hakone, Japan, for a summer exhibition.

Public Programs

The following public programs will be offered to compliment, “Utamaro and the Lure of Japan.” Please visit thewadsworth.org/events for details and ticket information.

- Sunday, Jan. 8, 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.; Jazz Brunch: Hiroya Tsukamoto
- Friday, Jan. 13, noon; Gallery Talk by curator Oliver Tostmann
- Wednesday, Jan. 18, 5 p.m.; Lecture: Utamaro’s Snow, Moon, and Flowers in Context
- Thursday, Jan. 26 – March 26; Japanese Film Series
- Friday, Jan. 27, 9 a.m.; Member Morning
- Thursday, Feb. 2, 5 – 8 p.m.; Art After Dark: The Lure of Japan
- Saturday, Feb. 11, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.; Second Saturdays for Families: Postcards from Japan
- Saturday, Feb. 18, 10 – 11:30 a.m.; Japanese Film Festival for Kids
- Sunday, Feb. 19, 1 and 3 p.m.; Kabuki-inspired Dance Performance by dancEnlight
- Saturday, Feb. 25, 2 p.m.; Demonstration: Printmaking in the Age of Utamaro
- Sunday, Feb. 26, 1 p.m.; Gallery Talk
- Sunday, Feb. 26, 2 p.m.; Sunday Serenades: Snow, Moon, and Flowers
- Saturday, March 25, 3:30 p.m.; Food and Film: “Tampopo” (1985)

Tours

Beginning Jan. 14, docent-led tours of the exhibition will be offered on Saturdays and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. A mobile tour can be accessed by using the museum’s free WiFi and visiting tap.thewadsworth.org.

Exhibition Credit

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About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continuously operating public art museum in the United States. The museum’s nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The Wadsworth Atheneum’s five connected buildings—representing

architectural styles including Gothic Revival and modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission: \$5 – 15; discounts for students and seniors. Free for members, youth under age 18 and Hartford residents with ID. Free “happy hour” admission for all visitors 4 – 5 p.m. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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Media are welcome to preview the exhibition Friday, Jan. 6. Please contact Amanda Young to schedule a time.

Note to editors: High-resolution image files to accompany publicity of this exhibition are available for download at <http://press.thewadsworth.org>. Please email media@wadsworthatheneum.org for log-in credentials.