



BRUCE MUSEUM
One Museum Drive • Greenwich, CT 06830-7100
203.869.0376 • www.brucemuseum.org

Press Release

Floating Beauty: Women in the Art of Ukiyo-e

September 1 – November 1, 2020

Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut



Utagawa Kunisada (Japanese, 1786 – 1865),
Standing Courtesan, 1828, ink on paper, 14 7/8 x 10
1/8 inches, Gift, Mr. and Mrs. Jenckes through Mrs.
Wendell Jay, 1956.70.1. Reading Public Museum,
Reading, Pennsylvania.



Kitagawa Utamaro (Japanese, 1753 – 1806),
Courtesan Hanaogi in Ogiya with Attendant,
18th century, ink on paper, 14 3/4 x 10 1/8 inches,
Museum Purchase, 1928.30.1. Reading Public
Museum, Reading, Pennsylvania.

GREENWICH, CT, August 10, 2020 – Opening on Tuesday, September 1, in the Bruce Museum's recently renovated art gallery, *Floating Beauty: Women in the Art of Ukiyo-e* examines historical perspectives on women and their depiction in art in Edo Period Japan (1615 – 1858).

Featuring more than 40 woodblock prints on loan from the permanent collection of the Reading Public Museum in Pennsylvania, this exhibition highlights female characters in literature, kabuki theatre, and poetry; the courtesans and geisha of the Yoshiwara district; and wives and

mothers from different social classes performing the duties of their station, in order to gain some insight into the lives of women in pre-modern Japan.

The Bruce will host a special exhibition preview for Museum members on Sunday, August 30. Admission to the Museum is currently by advance reservation for timed ticketed entry; visit brucemuseum.org.

The Bruce is pleased to participate in the **Blue Star Museums** program, offering free admission to all active-duty U.S. military personnel and their families with identification, as well as **Museums for All**, an initiative of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Through Museums for All, those receiving food assistance (SNAP benefits) are welcome to visit the Bruce with their family free of charge.

The Bruce Museum also partners with Bank of America's **Museums on Us** program. On the first full weekend of every month, admission to the Bruce is free for Bank of America cardholders. The Museum is free to all visitors every Tuesday. Call 203-869-0376 for more information or to make a reservation utilizing these special-access programs.

More about *Ukiyo-e* and the Edo Period

Ukiyo-e, literally translated as “pictures of the floating world,” is a Japanese art form that flourished during a period marked by drastic social, political, and economic change as the country was brought under military control of the Tokugawa shogunate.

The new regime delivered peace and prosperity to the island nation and reordered the social structure, dividing citizens into four classes, between which mobility was forbidden. At the top of the system were the samurai warriors, below them were the farmers, then artisans, and finally, the merchants. The aristocratic class, made up of the ruling family and his *daimyos*, or regional lords, lived outside of this new system.

The shogun's societal restrictions created tension and fostered resentment toward the ruling class. In order to prevent a revolt, the regime authorized the creation of Edo's pleasure district, known as the Yoshiwara, in 1617.

The Yoshiwara was a small, walled section outside of the city. It was in the Yoshiwara that the courtesans lived and worked, *kabuki* theatre was performed, and the lower classes could show off their wealth and engage in decadent activities otherwise banned in conservative Japanese society.

This new urban culture came to be known as “the floating world,” a term which described the hedonistic lifestyle of frequenting the Yoshiwara, attending *kabuki* plays, and patronizing brothels.

The *ukiyo-e* art form emerged within this floating world. Artists depicted a range of subjects, including samurai warriors, *kabuki* actors, folklore, literary scenes, landscapes and travel series, and historical events. But, no genre was as popular or well-represented as the *bijinga*, “pictures of beautiful women.” The image of the *bijin* (beautiful woman) was the feminine ideal, and these beauties were passive, attentive, and demure. Looking beyond the *bijinga*, the *Floating Beauty* exhibition shows that women in Edo society took an active role in their own lives.



Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige I (Japanese, 1797 – 1858), *Village by the Tamagawa River*, 1858, ink on paper, 8 ¾ x 13 ½ inches, Museum Purchase, 1979.584.1C. Reading Public Museum, Reading, Pennsylvania.

The dynamic urban culture of the floating world led to the celebration of new art forms. *Ukiyo-e* artists most commonly produced their work in the form of woodblock prints, which were inexpensive to create, cheap to purchase, and lent themselves to producing large quantities of each image. The production team for a woodblock print was comprised of four individuals: the artist, who designed the image to be printed; the engraver, who would carve the image onto the block of wood; the printer, who inked and printed the image; and the publisher, who marketed the images and commissioned reprints when a print or series was successful.

Among the woodblock prints featured in the exhibition are works by *ukiyo-e* masters Suzuki Harunobu, Kitagawa Utamaro, Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Kunisada, Kikugawa Eizan, and Utagawa Hiroshige.

Floating Beauty: Women in the Art of the Ukiyo-e is organized by the Reading Public Museum, Reading, Pennsylvania. The Bruce Museum is grateful for exhibition support from Sue Moretti Bodson and Michael Bodson, Maryann Keller Chai and Jay Chai, Tracy and Mark Holton, Deanna and Steve Mulligan, Candace and Chris Procaccini, The Charles M. and Deborah G. Royce Exhibition Fund, and the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

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About the Bruce Museum

The Bruce Museum is a community-based, world-class institution highlighting art and science. Changing galleries for art and permanent galleries for the natural sciences encompass regional to global perspectives. Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and voted the best museum in Fairfield County by area media in recent years, the Bruce plays an integral role in the cultural life of area residents. The Museum attracts approximately 70,000 visitors annually, including 24,000 schoolchildren, and also has special programs for families, seniors, students, and community organizations. Located in a park setting just off I-95, exit 3, at 1 Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut, the Museum is also a 5-minute walk from the Metro-North Greenwich Station. The Bruce Museum reopened on June 27 in accordance with state and local guidelines and with advance reservations for timed ticketed entry. To make a reservation or for additional information, call the Bruce Museum at 203-869-0376 or visit brucemuseum.org.

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