

# Magical Elements of the Floating World

Japanese Prints from the  
Mills College Art Museum Collection



December 3, 2014-May 31, 2015  
Mills College Art Museum

This catalogue is published on the occasion of *Magical Elements of the Floating World*, an exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints from the Mills College Art Museum Collection. The exhibition is organized by members of the Fall 2014 course *Japanese Paintings and Prints* taught by Dr. Mary-Ann Milford: Joel Frank, Zana Ito, Alexis Jimenez, Emily Landry, Abby Massarano, Sadie Padial, and Anjele Underwood.

The exhibition was presented at the Mills College Art Museum, December 3, 2014 through May 31, 2015, and is made possible by a gift in memory of Jacquelyne Weitzenhoffer Branch '48.

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The Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. As a teaching museum at a dynamic liberal arts college for undergraduate women and co-ed graduate studies, the museum is dedicated to engaging and inspiring the intellectual and creative life of Mills students through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections.

COVER: Koho Shoda, *Traveler in Snow*, early 20th Century

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## INTRODUCTION

Dr. Stephanie Hanor

Featuring Japanese woodblock prints from MCAM's collection, this exhibition is curated by students in Dr. Mary-Ann Milford's Fall 2014 course *Japanese Paintings and Prints*. Featured are a selection of over twenty *ukiyo-e* prints and books from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, including works by noted woodblock print masters Hiroshige (1797-1858), Hokusai (1760-1849), and Yoshitoshi (1839-1892). MCAM has collected Japanese woodblock prints since its founding in 1925. Albert Bender, the patron who helped realize the art museum at Mills, was an avid collector of Japanese prints and donated several works that form the central core of the museum's Japanese print holdings. This area of the collection has grown steadily through major gifts including the donation of Yoshitoshi's complete *100 Aspects of the Moon* series by William P. Wentworth in 1986.

Japanese woodblock prints are known as *ukiyo-e*, which translates as "pictures of the floating world." The exhibition examines aesthetic and conceptual considerations of woodblock print production. Including depictions of landscapes, women, natural disasters, and mythological figures, the works in the exhibition demonstrate the artists' innovative uses of pictorial space, color, and printing processes to create dramatic compositions and a sense of otherworldliness.

The exhibition's curators, Joel Frank, Zana Ito, Alexis Jimenez, Emily Landry, Abby Massarano, Sadie Padial, and Anjele Underwood, participated in all aspects of the exhibition. Together, they established the theme of the exhibition, designed the layout of the work to effectively convey thematic and formal connections between the prints, as well as researched the works on view, contributing their own analysis in this accompanying exhibition catalogue.

The museum would like to give special thanks to Ann Folz for her gift in memory of Jacquelyne Weitzenhoffer Branch '48. Her support helps provide valuable experience for the exhibition's student curators as well as the opportunity for visitors to see the wonderful holdings of the Mills College Art Museum.



Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *The Moon at Gojo Bridge, Yoshitsune*



## TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI

### *100 Aspects of the Moon, The Moon at Gojo Bridge, Yoshitsune*

Joel Frank

This print is a depiction from Japanese folklore where a man named Minamoto no Yoshitsune boldly jumps out of the reach of Benkei, a notorious thief said to steal the weaponry of warriors who crossed the Gojo bridge. In this depiction of the story from Yoshitoshi's *100 Aspects of the Moon* series, we see the artist interestingly omit Benkei all together, just focusing on the heroic jump of Yoshitsune. The sense of height and movement of the jump is masterfully captured in the body position and flowing garments trailing the figure as it appears to be floating over the impending danger with ease.



Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *The Moon on a Hazy Night*, Kumasaka

## TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI

*100 Aspects of the Moon, The Moon on a Hazy Night, Kumasaka*

Joel Frank

This beautiful piece depicts the ghost of a renegade priest named Kumasaka who was killed during a failed attempt to rob a merchant at an inn. This amazing design is unlike most Japanese prints in that it brings attention to the actual material space of the print. We see the figure of Kumasaka's pants and sword jutting out over the traditional bounding box of blue background. In addition to this, the flattened use of design on the garments is interestingly juxtaposed between the very rounded, almost realistic, mask the figure wears. Yoshitoshi's attention to the contrast between flatness and volume, coupled with the vibrant colors, creates real tension in the piece.





Utagawa Kunisada, Actor as Prince Inafune  
Standing Beneath a Maple Tree



## UTAGAWA KUNISADA

### *Actor as Prince Inafune Standing Beneath a Maple Tree*

Zana Ito

Kunisada's print of a beautiful woman posed elegantly under a maple tree is an excellent example of the way *ukiyo-e* artists portrayed the ideal woman. The subject in the print, in fact, is not a female courtesan or a lady of the high court, but rather an actor from the *kabuki* theater scene. Because *kabuki* theater strictly banned women from the stage, men were required to dress for the female roles. These actors, called *onnagata* (female figures), dressed in their feminine attire and makeup not only on the stage, but off it and in their daily lives as well. Many doubled as elite courtesans for men who could afford their company, and as a result of their lifestyle, they were the subject of many *ukiyo-e* portrait prints. The *onnagata* actors depicted the idealized woman through the male gaze, and because of this they were often more "perfect" than the perfect woman.



## TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI

### *100 Aspects of the Moon, Reflected Moonlight*

Zana Ito

This print, at first look, depicts a beautiful woman in high court clothing playing serenely in a small boat at moonlight. However, the scene has a much sadder and pitiful background. The woman is Ariko, from the *Noh* play *Ariko no Naishi*, in which her ghost tells the story of her unrequited love. The print is a depiction of the scene of Ariko's death, as she weeps for her love while preparing to drown herself. She recites lines from a poem as she cries:

Hakanashiya  
nami no shita nimo  
irinubeshi  
tsuki no miyako no  
hito ya miru tote

How hopeless it is  
it would be better for me  
to sink beneath the waves  
perhaps then I could see  
my man from Moon Capitol

The poem is written in the upper right-hand corner of the print.





Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Moon and Smoke*

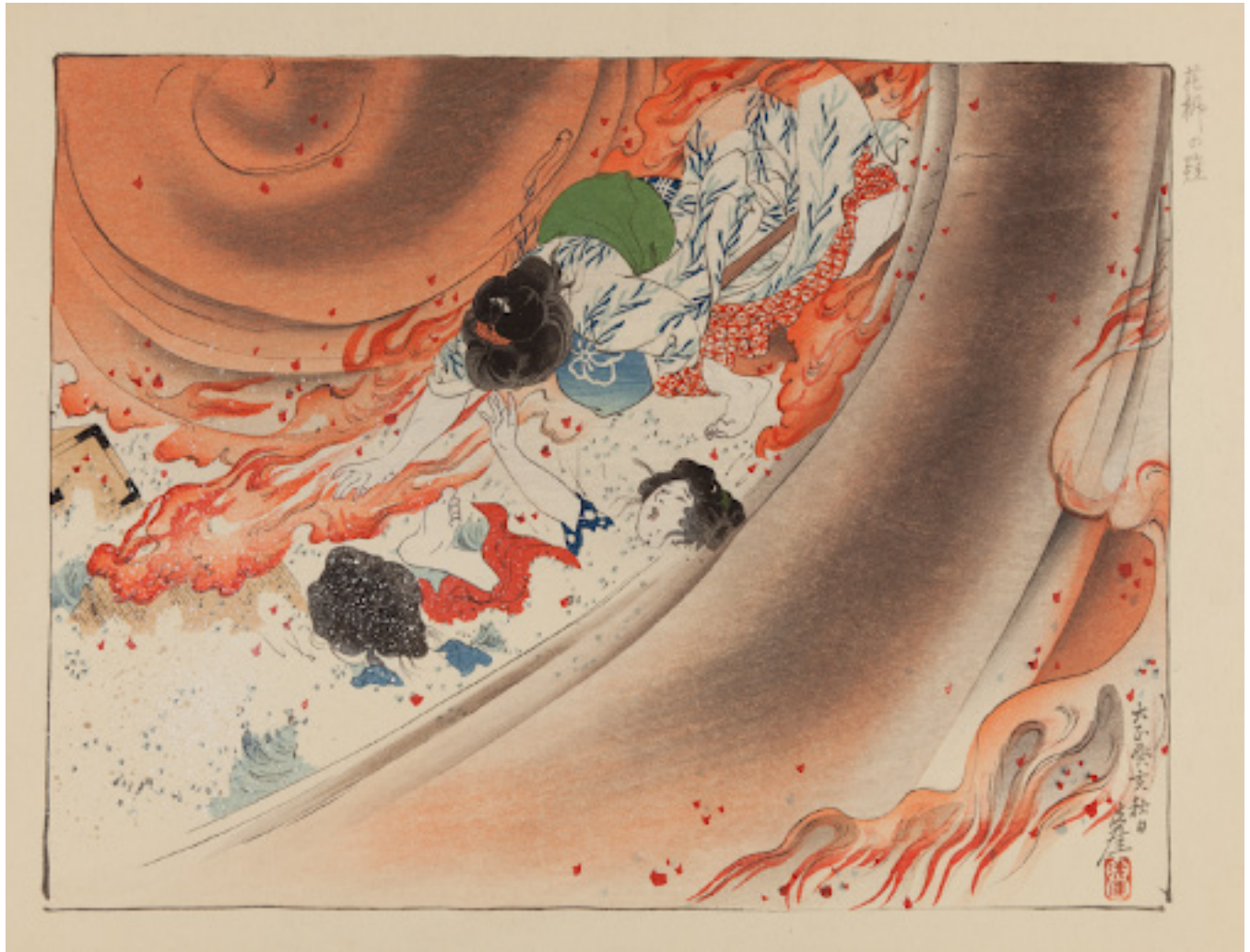


## TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI

### *100 Aspects of the Moon, Moon and Smoke (Enchu no tsuki)*

Emily Landry

The print *Moon and Smoke (Enchu no tsuki)* is from one of Yoshitoshi's best-known series *100 Aspects of the Moon*. It depicts two Edo-period fire fighters standing fiercely toward each other amidst great flames. Fire fighters enjoyed much esteem during this period because buildings were constructed of wood and paper and therefore susceptible to the slightest embers. Yoshitoshi elegantly describes the ferocity of fire, ash, and smoke. They consume much of the picture frame, but gracefully drift through it. The geometric detailing of clothing hint at structure amongst the billowing flames but they ultimately meld into abstraction.



Sengai Igawa, *Disaster in Karyu-Gai (at Yanagi Bridge)*

## SENGAI IGAWA

### *Disaster in Karyu-Gai (at Yanagi Bridge)*

Emily Landry

In Sengai Igawa's print depicting the devastation caused by an earthquake in the early part of 20th century Japan, beauty is not sacrificed in his depiction of violence. All semblance of a realistic setting is lost. People and objects are lifted into a whirling cyclone in a sweeping circular composition, the delicate colors and line-work evoking a sense of otherworldliness. Despite the emotionally intense and violent subject matter, the artist manages to produce a mystic and somewhat gentle interpretation.



Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Konkai (The Fox's Cry)*,  
Hakuzo-shu



## TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI

### *100 Aspects of the Moon, Konkai (The Fox's Cry), Hakuzo-shu*

Abby Massarano

Part of the *100 Aspects of the Moon* series, this Yoshitoshi print depicts a scene from a well-known *kyogen*, short interludes in a *Noh* play. A fox, in order to convince a hunter not to kill foxes, transforms himself into the hunter's uncle, the priest Hakuzosu, warning the hunter of the evils that await murderers of sentient beings. The hunter, suspicious of the fox, sets a trap after the disguised fox leaves. The scent of the trap is so strong that the fox reverts to his original form and falls into the lure of the trap and is captured. The scene depicted in this print is the moment at which the fox starts reverting back to his original form from his priestly disguise at the smell of the trap.

Characteristic of Yoshitoshi, and Japanese art in general from this period, there is no strong sense of ground. The grey of the assumed foreground blends nearly seamlessly into the dark background of the sky, the only real indicator of spatial tangibility and orientation coming from the reedy grasses framing the fox's path and the crescent moon giving a sense of lighting or spotlight to the unfolding scene.



Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*

Japanese reproduction after

KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI

*Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji, The Great Wave Off  
Kanagawa*

Abby Massarano

This work is arguably one of the most well-known images in Japanese and modern American cultures. Part of Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* series, we are treated to an active and dynamic depiction of enormous cresting waves jostling fishing boats off the coast of Kanagawa, Japan. The focus, as with many of the *Mount Fuji* prints, is not strictly on the mountain, but on the everyday life surrounding the iconic landmark. The image of Fuji sits in the trough of the wave, a small and sturdy contrast to the dynamic and violent movement of the water. The body of the wave frames the mountain, at the same time both drawing the viewer's eye toward the small depiction and eclipsing it, as if to partially hide the mountain within the context of the world—man-made or otherwise—surrounding it.

Hokusai's *Mount Fuji* series contains many varied and distinct depictions of the iconic and almost overbearing figure of the great mountain, ranging from Fuji as the only image in the scene to Fuji as a simple outline somewhere off in the background. However, all of these works, *The Great Wave* very much included, portray Fuji as a mainstay and part of the life of Japan.





## UTAGAWA KUNISADA

### *Woman Trying to Read in Bed*

Sadie Padial

Utagawa Kunisada was the most prolific and financially successful designer of *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world) woodblock prints in 19th century Japan. One of his most common subject matters was *bijin*, beautiful women. Several of Kunisada's more typical *bijin-e* are displayed in this exhibition, but in this piece he takes the subject a step further. We see a traditional Japanese woman, surrounded by brightly colored and intricately patterned fabric. While the foreground is very solid and detailed, the background is left largely free of ink, creating the ambiguity of setting and floating effect that *ukiyo-e* prints are known for. The woman tries to read in bed, but her son, peeking out from underneath the covers, bothers her and prevents her from completing the task. While the subject matter seems innocent enough, Kunisada, who also produced erotic prints, would have been aware of an erotic element to the piece: the implications of depicting a woman in bed with another figure, even her son, would have been viewed as very risqué at the time.



Two examples from an album triptych by an unknown artist

## UNKNOWN ARTIST

### Album Triptych

Sadie Padial

This collection of three woodblock print books creates 22 triptych scenes of the floating world. Like the other images in the exhibition, many of the scenes lack a defined ground plane or background. The subject matter is typical of *ukiyo-e*, depicting scenes of beautiful women and powerful men. These albums often contain images with similar themes, like battle scenes or mythic figures. They can contain artwork by a single artist or have several contributors. Objects similar to this in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection were made in the 19th century, allowing us to approximate the time period that this album was made. Each individual book creates a complete image and can stand on its own, a sign these books could be sold separately or in pairs.





Above: Japanese reproduction after  
Katsushika Hokusai, *Travellers Crossing  
Over the Oi River*

Right: Katsushika Hokusai, *Kusatsu*

草津

五十三







Utagawa Kunisada, *Young Woman Holding a Lacquer Box*



Utagawa Kunisada, *Woman with a Lantern*



## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works in *Magical Elements of the Floating World* are from the collection of the Mills College Art Museum, unless otherwise specified.

Japanese reproduction after  
UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE  
(Japan, 1797-1858)

*Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido, #40 Summer Horse Market at Chiryu*, mid 20th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
10 in. x 15 in.  
Gift of Roi Partridge, UX83.132

Japanese reproduction after  
UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE  
(Japan, 1797-1858)

*Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido, #47 Clear Weather after Snow at Kameyama*, mid 20th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
9 3/8 in. x 15 in.  
Gift of Roi Partridge, UX83.140

TOYOTA HOKKEI  
(Japan, 1780 - 1850)

*Beauty (Lady of the Imperial Court)*, ca. 1890  
Color woodcut on paper  
8 1/4 in. x 7 3/8 in.  
Gift of the Myron Starkey Collection, 1998.6.5

KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI  
(Japan, 1760 - 1849)

*Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road, Kusatsu*, ca. 1806  
Color woodcut on paper  
8 3/4 in. x 6 in.

Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.75

Japanese reproduction after  
KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI  
(Japan, 1760 - 1849)  
*Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, Fuji from Mishima Pass in Kai Province*, late 19th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
10 1/8 in. x 14 7/8 in.  
Gift of Roi Partridge, UX83.65

Japanese reproduction after  
KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI  
(Japan, 1760 - 1849)  
*Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*, ca. late 19th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
10 in. x 14 7/8 in.  
Gift of Roi Partridge, UX83.67.2

Japanese reproduction after  
KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI  
(Japan, 1760 - 1849)  
*Travellers Crossing Over the Oi River*, ca. late 19th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
10 in. x 14 7/8 in.  
Provenance Unknown, 1974.16

SENGAI IGAWA  
(Japan, 1876 - 1961)  
*Disaster in Karyu-Gai ( at Yanagi*

*Bridge)*, 1926  
Color woodcut on paper  
8 5/8 in. x 11 1/4 in.  
Provenance Unknown, 1995.15.i

HASUI KAWASE  
(Japan, 1883 - 1957)  
*Twenty Views of Tokyo, Moon at Magome*, 20th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
15 1/4 in. x 10 1/4 in.  
Gift of the Myron Starkey Collection, 1998.6.8

UTAGAWA KUNISADA  
(Japan, 1786 - 1864)  
*Mother Combing Boy's Hair*, ca. mid 19th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
27 1/4 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Mrs. M. C. Sloss, 1945.68.a

UTAGAWA KUNISADA  
(Japan, 1786 - 1864)  
*Woman Trying to Read in Bed*, early 19th Century  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 7/8 in. x 10 1/4 in.  
Gift of Mrs. M. C. Sloss, 1945.113

UTAGAWA KUNISADA  
(Japan, 1786 - 1864)  
*Illustration for a poem by Saki no*



Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *The Moon of Sumiyoshi*

*Chunagon Masafusa #73, Woman with a Lantern*, ca. 1850  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 3/4 in. x 10 in.  
Provenance, 1980.21.14

UTAGAWA KUNISADA  
(Japan, 1786 - 1864)  
*Young Woman Holding a Lacquer Box*, ca. 1850  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 1/8 in. x 9 3/4 in.  
Provenance Unknown,  
1980.21.16

UTAGAWA KUNISADA  
(Japan, 1786 - 1864)  
*Actor As Prince Inafune Standing Beneath a Maple Tree* (panel of a triptych), ca. 1850  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 in. x 9 3/4 in.  
Provenance Unknown,  
1980.21.17

KOHO SHODA  
(Japan, 1871 - 1946)  
*Traveler in Snow* (with accompanying Haiku), early 20th Century  
Woodcut on paper  
9 1/8 in. x 4 1/8 in.  
Gift of the Myron Starkey Collection, 1998.6.2.a

SAITEN TAMURA  
(Japan, 1889 - 1933)  
*Human Catastrophe*, 1926  
Color woodcut on paper  
8 5/8 in. x 11 3/16 in.  
Provenance Unknown,  
1995.15.d

UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI  
(Japan, 1769 - 1825)  
*Folding Album Diptych*, early 19th Century  
Color woodcuts on paper  
7 1/8 in. x 10 in.

Gift of June Schneider, B.A., 1943,  
1987.30

UNKNOWN ARTIST  
*Album Triptych*, ca. late 19th Century  
Color woodcuts on paper  
Collection of Dr. Mary-Ann Milford

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, The Moon at Gojo Bridge: Yoshitsune*, 1888 (April)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 9 7/8 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.33

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, The Moon of Sumiyoshi*, 1887 (June)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.42

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, Moon of the Obon Festival*, 1887 (January)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 3/4 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.47

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, The Moon on a Hazy Night: Kumasaka*, 1887 (January)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.49

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, Reflected Moonlight*, 1886 (September)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 9 3/4 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.54

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, Genji: Yugao Chapter*, 1886 (March)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 9 7/8 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.64

TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, Moon and Smoke (Enchu no tsuki)*, 1886 (February)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.66

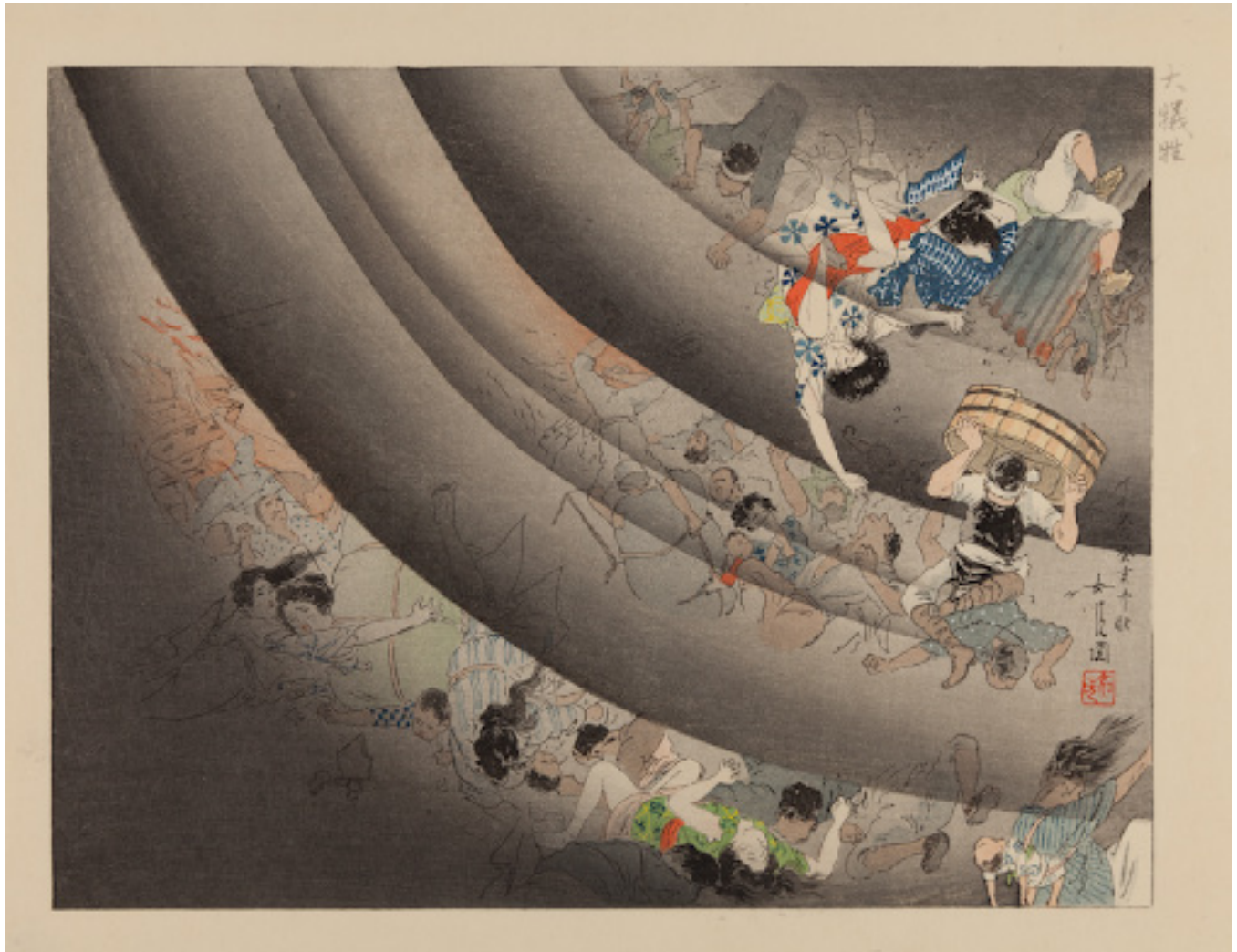
TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI  
(Japan, 1839 - 1892)  
*100 Aspects of the Moon, Konkai (The Fox's Cry); Hakuza-shu*, 1886 (January)  
Color woodcut on paper  
14 5/8 in. x 9 7/8 in.  
Gift of William P. Wentworth,  
1986.1.73



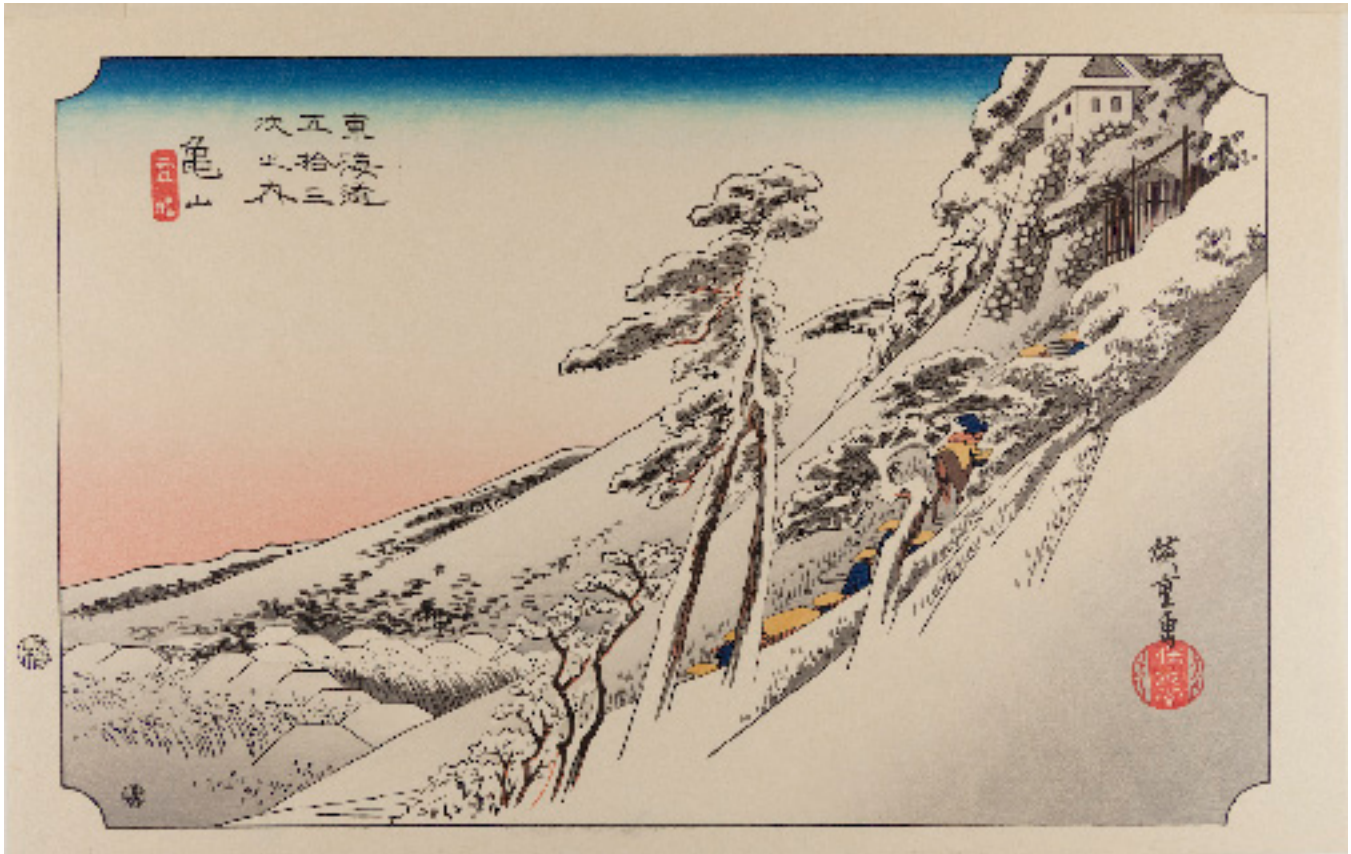


Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Moon of the Obon Festival*





Saiten Tamura, *Human Catastrophe*



Japanese reproduction after Utagawa  
Hiroshige, *Clear Weather after Snow at  
Kameyama*



Japanese reproduction after Katsushika  
Hokusai, *Fuji from Mishima Pass in Kai  
Province*





Japanese reproduction after Hiroshige,  
*Summer Horse Market at Chiryu*





Toyota Hokkei, *Beauty (Lady of the Imperial Court)*







月夜の松  
昭和五年作