

# NEWS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ***Splendors of Edo On View August 7–October 10***

The Elvehjem's Van Vleck Collection of 3800 Japanese prints is one of the premier collections in this country and a highlight of the permanent collection. As popular as these marvelous Japanese prints are, the delicate inks do not allow them to remain on permanent view. Thus the Elvehjem curator of prints, Andrew Stevens, selects prints for the visitor's viewing pleasure at least once a year. *Splendors of Edo: Japanese Prints, 1750-1930* focuses on the center of production of this popular art form.

When Edo, now called Tokyo, became the seat of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603, the country entered a long period of peace and prosperity that resulted in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in great appreciation for woodblock prints. The city was a center for trade and government, and all provincial lords, or daimyos, were required by the Shogun to live in Edo for half the year. The new law brought a huge population of wealthy lords and their retainers to the city. The wealth of the city allowed for the production and consumption of many products that were geared to the tastes of the devotees of the floating world, or Ukiyo.

The floating world, a Buddhist concept, is ephemeral, whereas enlightenment is eternal. However, in secular life, the term came to imply approval of its ephemeral qualities; its beauties became all the more attractive for being short-lived. The woodblock prints of the period, sometimes called Ukiyo-e, or pictures of the floating world, celebrate many of these passing joys.

Edo was the main market and manufacturing center for these prints, and life in Edo, the big city, is a frequent subject. The prints celebrate the busy streets of the capital and its thriving shops and businesses, as in Hiroshige's print, *Crowded Street at Saruwaka-cho*. This print shows a busy street thronged with liveried messengers and other pedestrians and lined with tea shops occupied by customers, waitresses. Hiroshige made many prints of Edo; his best-known series, *100 Views of Famous Places in Edo*, is a visual tour of the city, including the Yoshiwara, an area reserved for the licensed prostitutes, employed by tea houses. In his charming image *Celebration of the Cock Festival in the Rice Fields near Asakusa*, Hiroshige shows the interior of a room where a cat looks out a window. In the field beyond is a procession of

people carrying long poles topped with stylized roosters, while on the floor in the foreground, a set of hairpins, each topped with a miniature version of the rooster, is laid out.

Views of Edo are only one aspect of the vast popular culture of the city; other important parts were the sporting and cultural events: sumo wrestling and the kabuki theater. Sumo wrestlers and actors were often portrayed in prints. Prints of actors often record a particular role. The actors, who were always men, are not particularly realistically depicted, but it is generally possible to tell the particular actor in a print by the identifying crest, or *mon*, that appears on the costume. Most often the *mon* is as subdued as in Katsukawa Shunko's portrait of Segawa Kikunojo III in a female role, where the actor's *mon* is half-hidden by a fold in the robe. However, in Katsukawa Shunsho's image *The Actor Ichikawa Danjuro V as a Samurai*, the Danjuro crest, comprised of three concentric squares, is repeated over and over again in the bold pattern in his robes.

Katsukawa Shunei's *The Wrestlers Tanikaze Kajinosuke and Onogawa Kisaburo Receiving the Rank of Yokozuna* commemorates an important ceremony in the sport of sumo. The rank of Yokozuna is the highest rank a sumo wrestler can attain. In the history of the title, which spans some three hundred years, only sixty-two wrestlers have achieved the title. Unlike the other titles of sumo wrestling, which change as the wrestler's ranking rises or falls, Yokozuna is a permanent title, and depends not only on the wrestler's success, but on his character as well.

Alongside the popular actors and wrestlers, images of the women of Edo are a staple subject. The features of famous courtesans, idealized geisha, and pretty waitresses all are commemorated in Ukiyo-e such as Ichirakutei Eisui's image of the courtesan Takigawa, a woman whose attentions would be far beyond the reach of all but the most well-connected clients. It is a fantasy image, like Utagawa Kunisada's image of spring in which a spectacularly robed man stands in his elaborate house while beautiful women bring him books and scrolls. These are images of the pinnacles of success in a thriving community.

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The Elvehjem Museum of Art is open Tuesdays-Fridays 9-5 pm; Saturdays and Sundays 11-5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located at 800 University Avenue on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the Murray Street (north) entrance. Parking is available at the city of Madison's Lake Street and Frances Street ramps, university lot 46 on Lake Street between Johnson and University Avenue, university lot 47 on Johnson Street between Park and Lake streets. Evening and weekend parking is also available under Grainger Hall with entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson streets. The Elvehjem Museum of Art will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, 608 263-4421 (voice).

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