

Zurich, July 25, 2022

Press Release

**Lines from East Asia: Japanese and Chinese Art on Paper
August 17 – November 13, 2022**

The fact that the ETH Zurich owns a high-caliber collection of works of art on paper often elicits admiration and curiosity. Even experts, however, are frequently unaware that the collection—famous above all for its world-class holdings of Old Masters—also includes important prints by Japanese and Chinese artists. The Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich was one of the first public institutions in Switzerland to actively acquire East Asian art on paper. A selection of these works is now on view in an exhibition together with examples of European modern art.

The Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich began purchasing East Asian prints as early as 1904, thereby embracing a global approach to art history. That same year, the woodcuts by East Asian masters were shown in what until now has been the only exhibition of these holdings, along with works by European heroes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries such as Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach.

In a review of the exhibition from October 18, 1904, the newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* noted that “the eminence of these works consists in their fabulous conciseness and elegance of line, their fine taste in coloration, and their astonishing freshness and liveliness of characterization—their ability to grasp what is seen in mid-flight, as it were, and capture it.” Despite significant changes in habits of seeing, this assessment of the qualities of East Asian prints has lost nothing of its validity.

The present exhibition, however, is more than a mere repetition of the one from 1904. Now, 118 years later, we are aware of the crucial significance of Japanese colored woodcuts for the birth of modern art. Thus in this exhibition, the collection of East Asian works is shown alongside late nineteenth and early twentieth-century European master prints from the ETH’s own holdings, by artists such as Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Emil Orlik, and Martha Cunz.

The heterogeneity of the East Asian holdings of the Graphische Sammlung allows us to show the most diverse facets of Japanese and Chinese printmaking: from the famous landscapes of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), to the beautiful women of Utamaro Kitagawa (1753–1806) and the influential *manga* volumes of Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), to images of actors, detailed studies of plants and insects, and entertaining shunga prints with their often surprisingly explicit erotic content.

In accord with one of the founding ideals of the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, Hans Bjarne Thomsen from the Section for East Asian Art History at the University of Zurich and Susanne Pollack, Curator for Old Masters at the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, actively involved students throughout the entirety of the project, from the study of the originals in the context of courses, to discussions of the exhibition concept, to the writing of texts for the exhibition catalogue.

With this exhibition, the goal was to build bridges not only between European and East Asian art, but also between different generations of scholars and between the worlds of university and museum.

Information on the Exhibition

Curators	Susanne Pollack, Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, and Hans Bjarne Thomsen, Section for East Asian Art, University of Zurich
Events	Information on the program of events is available at www.gs.ethz.ch/agenda/
Opening hours	10:00 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. daily closed: Monday, September 12, 2022, after 12:00 p.m. and Friday, November 11, 2022
Admission	free
Press contact	Julia Burckhardt, Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich Tel +41 44 632 40 46 presse@gs.ethz.ch
Website	www.gs.ethz.ch
Publication	The exhibition is accompanied by a full-length catalogue published by Michael Imhof Verlag (German / English), Price: CHF 39.00