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Fluid Lines: Tracing Ryakuga-Shiki in Japan and France

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FLUID LINES: TRACING *RYAKUGA-SHIKI* IN JAPAN AND FRANCE

by

Selena Erdman

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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by

Selena Erdman

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018
Under the Supervision of Professor Sarah Schaefer

Ryakuga-shiki, or ‘abbreviated picture style,’ woodblock prints were first published and circulated widely in Edo period Japan (1615-1868). The style, created and popularized by Kitao Keisai Masayoshi (1764-1824) was not only admired and studied in its own time, but these Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints continued to influence style in the West. The work of artists in Paris, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) and Henri-Gabriel Ibels (1867-1936) present undeniable similarities (both in style and subject matter) with the *ryakuga-shiki*. Rarely studied and exhibited, the *ryakuga-shiki* are a part of the story of *japonisme* in France. This exhibition presents these prints in the context of work by Lautrec and Ibels for the first time, arguing that the French artists were indeed familiar on some level with and influenced by Keisai’s work. Beyond the obvious stylistic borrowings, the appropriation of Japanese prints styles and subject matter and their translation into French works has far more problematic cultural implications. By examining the legacy of the *ryakuga-shiki* beyond Japan, this exhibition and catalogue provide an opportunity to explore what it means to imitate and appropriate, collect, and value artwork from cultures that are not one’s own.

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Introduction

After a long period of seclusion, in 1853 western powers forcibly lifted the ban Japan had placed upon trade with them. Among their many new goods and exports, were woodblock *ukiyo-e* prints.¹ This genre and style is characterized by images of fleeting moments in everyday life displayed flatly and with attention to feeling and impressions. The most popular subject matter of *ukiyo-e* prints were landscapes and cityscapes, actors and scenes from theater, and commonly, women—from geishas to mothers and wives. As these prints were flooding the West, Japanese print artists like Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Kitagawa Utamaro (1754-1806) became renowned. Their names remain to this present day familiar among audiences worldwide.

While less well-known today, Kitao Keisai Masayoshi (1764-1824) was just as influential on French printmaking. A popular *ukiyo-e* artist in his own time, Keisai gained most of his fame with the creation of the *ryakuga-shiki* or ‘abbreviated’ print style. While still adhering to the *ukiyo-e* tradition of depicting common scenes of everyday life, the *ryakuga-shiki* were an aesthetic departure from the more polished scenes of familiar *ukiyo-e* prints. Instead of a complete scene with figures engaged in a single narrative, the *ryakuga-shiki* are indeed ‘abbreviated’ narratives of a kind. A single print or page may depict four or five different animals or figures, small and abstracted from one another, laid out on the page similar to a sketchbook. Each single figure, group, or animal tells its own brief story, the entire print never just one cohesive scene. Unlike in a sketchbook however, these images were created as individual woodblock prints bound in thematic volumes. As noted by Keisai himself in a description of the ideas behind these prints, “Without contrivance or manipulation, it has the

¹ Phylis Floyd, “Documentary Evidence for the Availability of Japanese Imagery in Europe in Nineteenth Century Public Collections,” *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (1986): 105-141.

taste of nature... [*ryakuga-shiki*] depict the spirit without relying on form.”² ‘Abbreviated’ vignettes grouped on a page, each figure more a feeling than a solid or firm outline, the *ryakuga-shiki* were indeed a unique departure from the traditional crisp outlines and narrative scenes of the *ukiyo-e* style.

While originally created centuries earlier, *ukiyo-e* appealed to the aesthetic trends evolving in France at the time. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth-century, *ukiyo-e* continued to make a lasting impression on French printmakers, notably among them Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) and Henri-Gabriel Ibels (1867-1936). These artists represented a new generation that was interested in making artwork accessible and affordable to the general public while still pushing the boundaries of contemporary aesthetic tastes. *Ukiyo-e* prints appealed to these artists stylistically, with their simple lines and bold colors, and also in terms of subject matter, with their emphasis on popular scenes of everyday people, performers, and geishas. The *ryakuga-shiki* particularly, with their looser lines and more abstracted figures, align with the aesthetic of the sketch that flourished among Impressionist artists in the 1870s and 80s. *Ryakuga-shiki* that encourage the viewer to, as Keisai says, feel the ‘spirit’ of what is being depicted would have connected well with an audience and artistic community that valued feeling and ‘impression’ over more solid and crisp detailed images.

Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki* volumes, while frequently recognized for their popularity and influence on his contemporaries, are largely unstudied in the context of the French culture and print styles that also encountered them.³ While my research has not revealed whether or not

² Quoted in Henry D. Smith, “World Without Walls: Kuwagata Keisai’s Panoramic Vision of Japan,” in *Japan and the World: Essays on Japanese History and Politics*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein and Haruhiro Fukui (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1988): 11.

³ Phylis Floyd, “Documentary Evidence of the Availability of Japanese Imagery,” *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (1986): 106.

Lautrec and Ibels came into direct contact with Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki*, the prints would have been imported along with other more traditional styles and collected just as obsessively in France. In fact, as art historian Phylis Floyd has noted, the *ryakuga-shiki* were present in French public collections even before the trade ban was lifted.⁴ In 1843, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris acquired an immensely important collection of Japanese books, which included an album by Kiato Masayoshi, *Sōka Ryakuga-Shiki* or 'Sketches of Plants and Flowers'.⁵ As Floyd has stated, the acquisition of these works by the Département des Manuscrits suggests that they were purchased for both their ethnographic and aesthetic significance. It also demonstrates, I would argue, that Kitao Keisai Masayoshi's *ryakuga-shiki* volumes were exceptionally important and well-known among educated audiences in France by the mid-nineteenth-century.⁶ Furthermore, in 1855, records show that a second large group of printed albums were donated by another prominent collector, W.L. de Sturler, Minister of Public Instruction, to the Département des Manuscrits, including an additional copy of Keisai's *Sōka Ryakuga-Shiki*.⁷

This evidence that Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* volumes were at least collected and known in Paris further supports the connection between his work and French prints. As Lautrec and Ibels themselves were fascinated by Japanese prints and not only collected them themselves but were in close contact with many other collectors, it is not out of the realm of possibility that they could

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁶ The collection was amassed by Philipp Franz von Siebold, a fascinating collector of Japanese prints on whom much more could be said. For further reading on his writings, his collection, and his as well as his son Alexander von Siebold see: Matthi Forrer, "The Discovery of Japanese Illustrated Books in Europe and the United States," *The World of the Japanese Illustrated book*, Smithsonian Museum of Art, accessed May 19, 2018, <https://pulverer.si.edu/node/172>. And Jennifer Harris, "The Formation of the Japanese Art Collection at the Art Gallery of South Australia 1904-1940: Tangible Evidence of *Bunmei Kaika*" (PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2012), 55-60, 107, 217.

⁷ Ibid.

have encountered works like these by Keisai. The visual similarities between the different artists' prints in fact make it almost impossible to argue they did not come into contact with them in some form.

Key to this discussion of the *ryakuga-shiki* and their context in France is the concept of *japonisme*. The nineteenth-century critic, collector, and printmaker, Phillipe Burty, first named the French obsession with Japan *japonisme* in 1872.⁸ In its original context, the term connoted a deep appreciation for Japanese decorative arts, prints, and more. It was largely meant simply as a categorization of the new art that the French were producing to imitate Japanese styles. Indeed, the influence reached all aspects of French culture in the late-nineteenth century and extends still today. *Japonisme* is studied today in more expanded terms with links to the historical context of French imperialism. This larger picture of French nineteenth-century opinions of Japanese art makes clear that the practice of *japonisme* was about more than simply an appreciation of aesthetics. The reach of *japonisme* and the kind of cultural appropriation that it reflects is both important and problematic, as will be discussed further on in this essay.

Through this catalogue and exhibition, I will explore several examples of Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* and their relationship to late-nineteenth-century French printmaking through the examples of Lautrec and Ibels. Examining these prints within their original context as well as the context of nineteenth-century France gives greater depth to the current understandings of *japonisme* in France and the influence that woodblock prints of all kinds have had on French styles. Japanese prints, imported by France in particular, were not only influential for print artists and their development of style, but were appropriated and collected, divorced from their original

⁸ Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Aspects of Japonisme," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 62, no. 4 (1975): 120.

context, and used often as fascinating, but secondary source material for inspiration. While they serve as striking comparisons and illustrations of a particular time in nineteenth-century France, the story these prints have to tell goes beyond their surface connections to those of Lautrec and Ibels.

By studying these works in this context, discussions of their collection and perceived value in contrast to French prints come to the forefront. Beyond the similarities that can be seen between these disparate prints, sharp contrasts in their current conditions are visible. Through exploration of the potential histories of each of these prints sets and the context of their contemporary audiences and collectors over time, a new facet of *japonisme* as it relates to the consumption of *ukiyo-e* prints and imperialistic collecting tendencies in nineteenth-century France becomes evident.

Kitao Keisai Masayoshi & The *Ryakuga-Shiki*

Working in Japan during the Edo period (1615-1868), Kitao Keisai Masayoshi was surrounded by the popular *ukiyo-e* style of the time.⁹ Edo period Japan was a time of great change, politically and socially as well as in urban structure. Within the changing cities, classes and districts began to mix, new artisans and merchants were gaining wealth, and new forms of entertainment flourished, especially within the pleasure quarters. *Ukiyo-e*, originally a Buddhist

⁹ Smith, "World Without Walls," in *Japan and the World: Essays on Japanese History and Politics*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein and Haruhiro Fukui (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1988): 10.

idea indicating the transitory nature of life, began to take on new meaning – calling for a celebration and joy of life, particularly in the pleasures it had to offer.¹⁰

Initially, Keisai produced many popular images in the traditional *ukiyo-e* or “floating world” style. He began his career apprenticing under Kitao Shigemasa, a prominent *ukiyo-e* artist at the time, and began publishing comic book illustrations for “parodic fiction” or *kibyōshi* in 1780.¹¹ As Keisai’s work evolved over time, his name changed as well.¹² Those first prints were created under the name of Sanjirō, but soon after, Keisai took the name ‘Kitao Masayoshi.’¹³

While he gained popular renown as an illustrator of *kibyōshi*, Keisai also produced work in the more traditional *ukiyo-e* style—scenes of landscape and city views, images of everyday life at the time. Marking a true transition in his work and taking him away from the *kibyōshi* style, in 1794, he was appointed the “official painter” to Matsudaira Yasuchika, a powerful feudal lord in Edo.¹⁴ By this time, he had begun producing work under the name ‘Keisai’ as well as ‘Kitao Masayoshi’, but fully transitioned to using the name ‘Keisai’ a few years later in 1797.¹⁵

Dating to 1795, the *ryakuga-shiki* in this exhibition can be attributed to his time as “official painter” to Matsudaira Yasuchika. Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki* were originally published in books that functioned as drawing manuals. According to Henry D. Smith, a prominent scholar of

¹⁰ “Art of the Pleasure Quarters and the Ukiyo-e Style,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed May 26, 2018, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/plea/hd_plea.htm.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Smith, “World Without Walls,” 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ As the *ryakuga-shiki* in this exhibition particularly are dated to 1795 and there is no signature to indicate what name they were published under, it may not be possible to correctly state what name was used. However, Smith creates a compelling argument for historical reference to the artist as Keisai – his most used name as a print artist, so I refer to him here as Keisai instead of Masayoshi (the name attached to the prints in the collection)

Keisai's work, it was this style of print, produced in many volumes over time that were his most famous and lasting legacy.¹⁶ Completely breaking from his previous *kibyōshi* work, Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* were about form “without manipulation”—the world, figures, images, as they appeared simply.¹⁷

These manuals were “strictly for beginners,” demonstrating a method of “quick sketching” to capture the spirit and essence of figures as evidenced in the prints in this exhibition, as well as birds, flowers, and landscapes in other volumes.¹⁸ While Keisai himself stated the manuals were created primarily for the use of budding artists, this type of book began to become a source of enjoyment for wider audiences as well, especially in cities such as Nagoya, Kyoto, and Osaka.¹⁹ In fact, as Floyd states, “illustrated albums [as] a format for the distribution of visual material [was] more popular in Japan than were single-sheet prints.”²⁰ Floyd describes them as “inexpensive” and easily distributed in large editions, noting that the “album format” was effectively appreciated for its ability to showcase a set of designs that all worked together in more subtle compositions.²¹ Art historian Jack Hillier adds that the intimacy and impact of viewing not just one single sheet, but pages upon pages that one could view repeatedly and in the context of other examples provided a unique personal and valuable experience for the Japanese public.²²

¹⁶ Smith, “World Without Walls,” 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, statement taken from a quote written by Keisai in a preface to one of the manuals.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Floyd, “Documentary Evidence,” 107.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Jack Hillier, *The Art of Hokusai in Book Illustrations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 11: quoted in Philis Floyd, “Documentary Evidence,” 107.

In this way, the *ryakuga-shiki* truly began to spread across Japan, creating, as Smith asserts, a quite impressive level of popularity for Keisai. The popularity of the new style can also be understood in the context of the work of Keisai's contemporaries. Years after his *ryakuga-shiki* had gained prestige, other artists such as Hokusai began creating similar manuals, such as *Ryakuga haya-oshie* 略画早押南 (Quick Lessons in Simplified Drawing). This book, still mostly intact though not in pristine condition, is currently housed in the British Museum and is dated to 1812, seventeen years after the Keisai prints shown here in this exhibition.²³

Despite their originally being bound and circulated in book form, Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* do not always exist in the same way today, as evidenced by the prints in this exhibition. While some intact volumes do exist, the series in the UWM Art Collection demonstrates a different kind of fate for Japanese print books that came to the West in the nineteenth-century.²⁴

Following the forced opening of Japan to the West, the journey these prints took was not always a smooth one.²⁵ Manuals and books such as Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* were often dismantled and sold as separate pieces to collectors. Evidence of this kind of treatment can be seen with the at

²³ Collection reference: Katsushika Hokusai, *Ryakuga haya-oshie* 略画早押, volumes 1-2, woodblock printed. (1979,0305,0.425.1) http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=779138&partId=1

²⁴ As mentioned, a few volumes do exist still today bound. One such is the *Gyokai Ryakuga Shiki*, or 'Simplified Forms of Drawing Fishes and Shells'. This volume is not in a collection currently, but can be found at this link and is currently for sale: <https://www.hordern.com/pages/books/3802463/masayoshi-keisai-kuwagata/gyokai-ryakuga-shiki-simplified-forms-of-drawing-fishes-and-shells>. Another is *Chōgū ryakuga-shiki*, or 'Sketches of animals and birds' dated to 1797. It can be viewed online in the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) at this link: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105_232744. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston also has a copy of *ryakuga shiki* that contains drawings of figures, animals, and various activities. It can be viewed online at this link: <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/keisai-ryakuga-495180>.

²⁵ For one source that discusses the documented journeys of prints to Western museums for example, see: Josef Kreiner, *Japanese Collections in European Museums: Regional Studies, Reports from the Toyota-Foundation Symposium Königswinter 2003, vols 1 & 2* (Bier'sche, Verlagsanstalt: Bonn, 2005).

times uneven cut lines along one edge of each print as they were divorced from their original binding. The *ryakuga-shiki* in this exhibition, while treated as single prints in their display, were never originally intended to be seen in this format. The current condition of many of the prints demonstrates that even if they were acquired by collectors, their perceived value was not only limited, but had nothing to do with a cultural understanding of their role in Japan. The consequences of this reception will be discussed in greater depth in the final section of this essay.

Nineteenth-Century France: The World of Lautrec & Ibels

The nation whose obsession with and avid consumption of Japanese prints has been most thoroughly examined is unquestionably France. Private collectors and artists amassed large volumes of woodblock *ukiyo-e* prints. Evidence of their influence can be found in comments from writers, artists, and critics at the time, but perhaps most clearly and notably in examples of the work of French artists, especially printmakers. Two such popular French printmakers of the late 1800s, were Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Henri-Gabriel Ibels – contemporaries, friends, and popular artists who were greatly intrigued, influenced, and infatuated by the so-called “new” styles flooding into Paris.

At the same moment that Japan began trading with the West, France was undergoing a dramatic period of transformation, especially in Paris. These changes affected every facet of French society—from industry and technology to social relationships, and perhaps most notably in terms of the appearance and structure of urban spaces. The modernization of Paris during the 1850s and 60s had greatly changed the landscape of the city. Boulevards became wider, encouraging people to walk about, to see and be seen, giving rise to the popular notion of

spectacle and the spectacular.²⁶ Cafés and other forms of entertainments became exceedingly more accessible and well-attended by people from all different social strata. These changes in nineteenth-century Paris echo the previous modernizing that took place in Edo Japan from the mid 1600s, leading up through the mid 1860s. After a fire that tore through the city in 1657, urban Edo's structure was been greatly altered.²⁷ The revival of the urban landscape that followed went hand in hand with flourishing economic growth and a kind of renaissance of interest in arts and culture, creating a remarkably similar “modernization” to what Paris was experiencing nearly two hundred years later.

Along with these changes in Paris's cityscape and social structure came dramatic shifts in the art world. Printmaking played a large part in these shifts as advances were beginning to alter how art was not only produced, but also disseminated and displayed. The “revolution” (as Philip Dennis Cate has defined it) of color lithography coincided with a rise in the affordable production of multiple art and advertising prints.²⁸ This in turn not only enhanced the visibility of prints, but also created new possibilities for attracting interest in acquiring art prints among those who previously saw it as out of reach monetarily. Lautrec and Ibels, among other artists, presented new, eye-catching, and bold images that were often seen as risqué, adding to the

²⁶ For a thorough discussion on the notion of “spectacle” in Modern France, see T.J. Clark, *Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999). Clark ties modernism and the changing Paris explicitly to the notion of “spectacle” as was first developed by Guy Debord in the 1960's. It encompasses more than just the idea of public performances gaining popularity, as those had already existed of course, instead referring as well to the shift to a more commodified public culture.

²⁷ “Art of the Edo Period (1615-1868)” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed April 9, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edop/hd_edop.htm

²⁸ See: Phillip Dennis Cate and Sinclair Hitchings, *The Color Revolution: Color Lithography in France, 1890-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1984).

spectacle of the street. As advertising posters flooded the streets, the entire landscape of printmaking in the nineteenth-century changed.²⁹

Known for its accessibility to the masses and the immediacy of viewing on the streets rather than galleries, the print form was especially appealing to artists like Lautrec and Ibels. Not only was it a commercial and advertising endeavor, but also an artistic one. While Lautrec did produce ‘art prints’ separately and in addition to his advertising posters, for the first time, the two were not mutually exclusive ideas. As Ruth Iskin states in her pioneering book, *The Poster: Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s*, “Lautrec belonged to a new generation of young artists who began to design artistic posters in the early 1890s.”³⁰ Indeed, everyday posters on the street were becoming collectible and desirable art objects in and of themselves. Lending to this desirability was the fact that the artists who were creating these advertisements were well-known. Lautrec, in particular, was one artist in Paris whose work was exceedingly valued in his own time.

In addition, reviewers such as Maurice Talmeyr, for example, were discussing the changes occurring in Paris and the proliferation of posters on the streets.³¹ While he did not ‘approve’ of the poster, he called it a “true art.” As Iskin notes, other reviewers and critics as well worked at the time to “elevate posters to the esteemed category of art, but at the same time distinguish them from the high art associated with the elites...”³² While there may not have been one major consensus at the time, the perception of posters as art objects was certainly one

²⁹ Ruth E. Iskin, *The Poster: Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2014), 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ For further information on perception at the time, see: Maurice Talmeyr, “L’âge de l’affiche,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 137, no. 9 (1896): 201-206.

³² Iskin, “The Poster,” 175.

adopted by the many who collected them. Similarly, in Japan, with the rise of production and popularity of *ukiyo-e* prints in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the growing wealth and prosperity of the lower classes, more and more of the public began to find value in art prints and began to collect them. For both cultures, rising prosperity along with changing art production and practices created a new market previously not in existence.

Lautrec and Ibels were certainly not the only artists from this period whose work demonstrates the influence of Japanese prints—Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, and Jules Chéret, are just a few examples.³³ Scholars like Elizabeth K. Mix, among others, have demonstrated that the French appropriated from the art of Japan for political and religious reasons in addition to aesthetics, or even as Thorstein Veblen asserted, as a result of “physical, spiritual, aesthetic, or intellectual desire.”³⁴ Lautrec in particular used the aesthetics of asymmetry, movement, and color from Japanese woodblock prints.³⁵ While Lautrec’s paintings are perhaps less tied to Japanese stylistic tendencies, his prints and advertisements relied heavily on basic Japanese print styles. Movement conveyed through simple lines and bright bold color blocks were especially influential on his prints. In fact, it is now widely accepted that Lautrec was indebted mostly to the Japanese print style in developing his own print designs.³⁶ This is clear when one compares Lautrec’s work to *ukiyo-e* styles and perhaps even more so, as I propose with this exhibition and essay, with Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki*.

³³ While various scholars have discussed specific artists and their influences in depth, for a broad overview and discussion of how multiple nineteenth-century French artists appropriated Japanese print aesthetics, see: Elizabeth K. Mix, “Japonisme and Cultural Appropriation,” In *The Orient Expressed: Japan’s Influence on Western Art, 1854-1918*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg, 127-158. Jackson: Mississippi Museum of Art, 2011.

³⁴ Quoted in Elizabeth Mix, “Japonisme and Cultural Appropriation,” 146.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁶ Iskin, 6.

Although initially a painter, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec gained his fame as a printmaker in the late nineteenth century, largely with his advertisements. While he came from a rather wealthy family, a genetic disorder that caused breaks in both of his legs to never heal, and his appearance estranged him from the society to which he was born. Lautrec became a part of the bohemian communities in Paris, particularly around the working-class neighborhood of Montmartre. His work depicted the performers of cafés and courtesans, many his close friends, and those from the communities he was a part of, the people of the everyday experience of a modernizing Paris.

Henri Gabriel Ibels, a printmaker, illustrator, and popular poster artist, can be tied just as closely to Japanese woodblock *ukiyo-e* print style as Lautrec's, if not more so. Indeed, he and Lautrec were close friends and shared a quite similar aesthetic sense, even collaborating on *Le Café-Concert* (1893) series, a large portion of which are on display in this exhibition. Ibels began his artistic career at a young age, studying at the Académie Julian and aligning himself with the Nabis, a group of French artists interested in new innovations in printmaking and Japanese art among other things. Ibels was exceptionally motivated by the desire to produce art that was relevant to society and accessible for all, creating designs for sheet music covers and theatre programs and advertisements, a few examples of which are also on view in this exhibition.³⁷

Ibels' work shares great similarities with Lautrec's in subject matter with his depictions of performers and everyday people and technique—especially in line use, shape and color work.³⁸ By first looking to the striking resemblance between these French prints and those of

³⁷ Belinda Thomson, "Ibels, Henri-Gabriel," Oxford Art Online, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000039728?rkey=9Cy5V3&result=2>.

³⁸ Ibid.

Keisai, the foundation can be laid for further analysis of the context in which these works were produced.

Aesthetics & Imitation

Perhaps the most immediate connection between Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* prints and those of Lautrec and Ibels is the use of line and contouring in their depiction of figures. Within Keisai's figures as well as Lautrec's and Ibels', bodies and forms are depicted with a kind of organic flowing line, soft in places, widening in others. In addition to the varied thickness in the black outlines, the relationships of figures in compositional space bear striking similarities. At times they are isolated from a solid background, or separated based upon style from their surroundings—a characteristic that is echoed in French prints such as Lautrec's *Yvette Guilbert*, (fig. 1) and *Paula Brébion* (fig. 2), both from "Le Café-Concert."

When one first looks at Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki*, it is easy to question whether such loose depictions of form are all done by hand or in fact are prints. Some of the prints with thinner and more consistent lines, such as *Untitled (Figure with Instrument and patterned blanket)* (fig.3), are easier to visually understand as print than painting, but others are more ambiguous. The varying thickness of the lines and outlines of form and figures in prints such as *Untitled (Four figures pulling a fifth)* (fig.4) and *Untitled (Woman laying with blanket)* (fig. 5) gives them the feel of a more loose and organic flowing hand. Lautrec's use of line and contouring in prints such as *Jane Avril*, from "Le Café-Concert" (fig. 6) shows great similarity. The flowing lines of *Jane Avril's* dress and the manner in which it stretches out behind her echoes the figure in the upper right hand of *Untitled (Woman laying with blanket)* as well as the loose form of the figure in the bottom right hand corner of *Untitled (Four figures pulling a fifth)*. Both artists' work has

the appearance of being done by a loose hand pulling a paintbrush, very much free hand, free form, and painterly.

Although they appear similar, there is a different sense of movement created by Lautrec's lines in *Jane Avril* than in the figures in Keisai's prints, which speaks to the different contexts in which they were produced. Jane's skirt billows as if she is actively dancing, caught in a single moment mid-step. Keisai's studies, his forms and figures meant to teach a kind of simplified and 'abbreviated' drawing style while almost all depicting a kind of action, are less focused on movement. In *Untitled (Four figures pulling a fifth)*, perhaps the only figure here implied to be in motion is the man fishing in the bottom right. Lautrec's use of line and contouring, on the other hand, creates more of a sense of dynamism that was appropriate for Jane Avril's profession as a dancer and the French market.

Ibels' contributions to the collaboration with Lautrec on the "Café-Concert" series shown here share a similar use of line. While perhaps less free-form than Lautrec's, Ibels' style nevertheless displays the same affinity for the contouring of figures and the calligraphic alternating thickening and thinning of outlines. This can be seen in images such as *Jeanne Block* (fig.7). The performer stands at an angle in a space not at all defined aside from the suggestion of a stage edge. Her outline is suggested by those black lines that vary in thickness and her face lacks definition.

In this print as well as in Lautrec's "Café-Concert" images, the use of space and placement of these figures in space also bears a kind of resemblance to Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki*. While in the French prints, space is typically more firmly suggested and hinted at than in Keisai's, the devotion to the form and focus on the subject over any other background details is clear. Unlike other traditional *ukiyo-e* prints, the *ryakuga-shiki* do not present a fully fleshed out

scene with figures in identifiable spaces. It is crucial to remember that Keisai created these small vignettes or windows into the actions and lives of the figures for the purposes of teaching. It was not about setting a scene in a complete manor or telling a story, but about how a figure is composed, a moment in action or repose, a snapshot of a different kind. In the French context, simply suggesting space rather than fully illustrating a background was perhaps influenced by the Japanese style, but also lent itself well to advertising. By focusing on the figure alone with such prints as *Jane Avril*, Lautrec was able to highlight the performer above all else. Isolating her from the crowded scene and making the rest of the world disappear created an illusion of what you might experience when viewing them. It was a type of escapism and spectacle that was being promoted. Lautrec's prints were not about the café itself in this series, but the abilities and appearance of the performers within those walls.

Three of Ibels' prints from this exhibition depict a strikingly similar idea to the *ryakuga-shiki*. In *Ouvrard* from the "Le Café-Concert" series (fig. 8), Ibels shows the same figure in four different moments, each one seeming to float in space on a stippled background. In another print, *Comment on S'aime* (fig. 9), Ibels creates three separate vignettes of different couples or groups. The space is used quite differently here, separated by lines as if window panes or cuts in the frames, but again, the idea bears much resemblance to the *ryakuga-shiki*. The figures, while boxed off, appear in three groups, two scenes with a couple, a man and woman, and one scene with a man and woman engaged in conversation while another woman looks off into the distance. While the similarity in composition and use of space in the French prints compared to Keisai's cannot be denied, far more narrative is being formed in this Ibels print than is seen in the *ryakuga-shiki*. The style is perhaps borrowed, but it is used in a different way. Again, unlike the purpose of the *ryakuga-shiki* as teaching materials, Ibels' prints were meant to sell a picture

of an event, proposing scenes or moments that you may see or be a part of if you attend an evening of spectacle at a café-concert.

Perhaps the most intriguing Ibels print to be compared to Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* in this exhibition is *Les Bibis* (fig. 10). While the figures depicted are primarily younger children, their poses, the contouring, level of detail, and even the loose and breaking outline of their forms is strikingly similar to Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki. Untitled (Figure with bird)* (fig. 11) of the *ryakuga-shiki* is a perfect illustration of such figures that are formed with inconsistent lines, more sketch-like and loosely bound and contained by their outlines. The figure in the upper right-hand corner of the print in particular is a useful comparison to the figures in Ibels' print. Mid-motion, the figure is more of a suggestion than anything else. Similarly, the small children in Ibels' print seem to be caught, sketched at a moment in time, and they are grouped together with little relation to one another—simply appearing on the page with only a few lines. The placement of the figures in space and their seemingly quick rendering with those inconsistent outlines recalls that of a sketchbook far more than a print. In contrast to Ibels' use of the *ryakuga-shiki* style in his "Café-Concert" prints, this print illustrates a similar purpose and context for its creation, functioning as a study more than a narrative.

The use of color strengthens the visual connection between Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* and the French artists. In Lautrec's title poster for *Elles* (fig. 12), the use of flat color blocks, applied loosely within their contoured outlines and in single solid colors, the blue and yellow, harken to the *ukiyo-e* style and tie in as well to Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki*. Many of Lautrec's color prints rely on such bright oranges and deep blues as are seen in several of the *ryakuga-shiki* on display here. Ibels also employs color in bold, large blocks as can be seen in *Au Cirque* (fig. 13).

Although the appreciation for Japanese culture among French artists is well documented, their appropriations of Japanese print styles is not without issue. Since Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* was published in 1974, many scholars have problematized issues of representation and appropriation of foreign cultures viewed as "exotic" and "primitive." The term *japonisme* has come to denote both the appropriation of Japanese culture and the problems that came with it that even the appreciation of Japanese prints in French culture demonstrates.³⁹

Whether or not Lautrec and Ibels had examples of Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* or simply saw them in a private collection or perhaps for sale, we may never be able to prove without a doubt. Regardless, the striking visual similarities make it hard to believe there was no familiarity at all, and this clear familiarity lends itself to a deeper consideration of the subject matter presented by each artist. Such a study reveals a unique paradox—for all at once there are more similarities and extreme differences based on cultural context and the intent behind the aesthetics presented—highlighting a facet of appropriation and imitation less discussed. Born of their own cultures and times, the works of the Japanese artist versus those of the French artists uses the same kind of styles and techniques in vastly different ways.

³⁹ While not specifically used within this essay, for further study and reading of various literature problematizing *japonisme*, see Kōdera, House, and more recently, Weisberg, Mix, and Rottau. For example, Elizabeth Mix's statement regarding French *japonisme* prints is a perfect summation of not only general practices in *japonisme*, but also the more specific discussions I've put forth here regarding Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* and the selection of Lautrec and Ibels prints. "When artists who practiced Japonisme appropriated from Japanese works of art, they worked referentially by adopting formal characteristics, such as form lines, flat color, cropping, shifting perspective, and also specific subject matter, including actors, women in domestic situations (including courtesans), and landscapes." From "Appropriation and the Art of the Copy: Cultural and Transcultural Appropriation in the Colonial Period," *Choice* 52, no. 9 (2015): 1433-1445.

The Everyday Experience: Women & Men Observed

Traditional *ukiyo-e* prints, or prints of the floating world, focused upon scenes of everyday life. Common subjects include cities, landscapes, theatre, actors, other famous people of the time, as well as women in many different facets (performers and geishas in particular). Both Lautrec's and Ibels' nineteenth-century prints likewise provided a different kind of cityscape view of Paris at the time—its theatres, its people, its artistic community. Like Keisai and other *ukiyo-e* printmakers, these artists illustrated the people of their own everyday experiences from cafés, circuses, and other public spectacles, inspired by contemporary urban life.⁴⁰

While these similar fascinations with city life in French art and *ukiyo-e* prints have been discussed by numerous scholars, the characteristics of the *ryakuga-shiki* shed further light on the dynamics between these disparate contexts of Edo Japan and nineteenth-century Paris. Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* differ from traditional *ukiyo-e* prints in that they don't set a full scene. Whether like the set depicted here which focuses on the human form and figures in their daily lives or his other volumes of animals, Keisai focuses his *ryakuga-shiki* on single studies of forms, divorcing them almost entirely from outside context. The same is true of the "Le Café-Concert" series Lautrec and Ibels produced together, of which several examples are included in this exhibition. The focus is placed upon the performer, the figures, the people who you would see in a café on stage, and in some cases the spectator as well. In each artist's work here, women and men are observed, "drawn" loosely together alone or in conversation, enacting some simple or everyday action.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Ibels' philosophy, see Belinda Thomson, "Ibels, Henri-Gabriel," Oxford Art Online.

In a sense, each artist's work, from Keisai to Lautrec and Ibels, is about observation and study on some level. While Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* are more explicitly about study and time spent observing form, Lautrec and Ibels work is about observation of spectacle and the performers that are providing entertainment or the audience that observes them. Such is the case with Lautrec's *A Spectator* from "Le Café-Concert" (fig. 14). In it, we see a woman in profile, seated, with performers on stage behind her. This print provides a different kind of scene from the rest of the series. Unlike most of the prints, which present performers on stage who are hyper-aware of being observed, the main focus here is someone who is there to observe others herself. This print serves to demonstrate not only the spectacle of those on the stage that one would see when attending a café, but the entire scene, including the experience of the attendees. Though Keisai's form studies were clearly influential, Lautrec and Ibels transform observations of human interaction and performance into a narrative form perfectly working within their cultural context.

With Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* depicting people in particular, as opposed to his studies on other animals or objects such as the ones in this exhibition, the figures are not performing per se. They are not on a stage or in a setting where they would necessarily be observed and recorded or attend to see or be seen. Instead, the artist, Keisai, is the main observer. In his images, women are often positioned relaxing or lounging, occasionally engaged in activities such as conversation or reading (fig. 5, fig. 3, fig. 15). Largely though, it is the men who enact more engaging actions—playing games and instruments (fig. 16), cooking (fig. 17), riding horses (fig. 18), or fishing as in one print (fig. 4). Each person in Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* are observed, the women presumably from a more private setting in most instances, and the men in more active or social contexts. These images, popular as they would have been, stand in stark contrast to the traditional *ukiyo-e* prints which focused more as Lautrec and Ibels' prints do, on scenes of life

and popular performers—perhaps a less mundane version of the everyday experience than is presented in the *ryakuga-shiki*.

Public and private spaces take on a gendered component in Keisai's prints as well as those of Lautrec and Ibels. In the French prints, women are performers as well as the men—each active in a different sense in these public spaces. With Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki*, however, the men who engage with women through conversation or observation demonstrate a different set of dynamics. Unlike other *ukiyo-e* images of geishas and women performers that may connect more directly in cultural context to those of “Le Café-Concert,” the *ryakuga-shiki* displayed here depict a more frank everyday experience of life for men and women.

While more study is needed to understand fully who the women Keisai depicted were, it is clear they are from different social stations based upon their dress. It can also be assumed that since the *ryakuga-shiki* were created during his time appointed to a feudal lord, that at least some of the women may be of a much higher class than is typically observed. These differences influence how these women appear, and give deeper nuance to their relationships and the roles they play, however in more general terms, there is a common theme in how they appear. Keisai's women are not on a stage, as Lautrec's and Ibels' are, but in more private settings. Their lounging positions and relaxed conversation with other women and men are not the typical activities that would be occurring in intensely public settings. This level of a more ‘private’ viewing experience of the women than the male figures in the *ryakuga-shiki* also hints at differences in the views of gendered space. Keisai's women in ‘private’ are the passive aspect of the interactions presented, the men taking on the active roles.

The differences in the subject matter depicted in Keisai's prints versus that in Lautrec and Ibels work also may relate to the time and duration that each would be studied in their own

contexts. Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* would have been more intimately viewed for longer periods of time. Artists hoping to learn might pick up a volume and devote significant amounts of time to studying and understanding form as he depicted it or the aesthetic concepts presented. For casual viewers as well, though perhaps not studying the prints in the same way, the ability to view such a large volume of work by Keisai at once and handle each page would have created a deeper intimacy. In contrast, Lautrec and Ibels prints were largely seen in passing on the streets. Even ones that would have been shown in gallery settings, and those that were advertisements of a more artistic kind such as those from "Le Café-Concert" would not have been engaged with to the same degree as Keisai's. While a collector may view one print or a few done by an artist such as Lautrec or Ibels, and study and appreciate it immensely, the level of intimacy that can be gained from that single print is not the same as the physicality of interacting with a volume. While perhaps not intentionally correlated by the artist, in this way, the subject matter also reflects such a context of viewing – private and casual moments viewed in a more personal and tactile experience.

A History of Collecting Japanese Prints & The *Ryakuga-Shiki*

Another distinction between Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* and the French artists' work becomes clear when viewing them in the same space: their archival condition. Many of Keisai's prints are quite damaged: several are edged with tape or adhesive remnants, accented by torn or folded corners, water stained, and some even have tears or loss of material (fig. 19, fig. 20). In contrast, each print by Lautrec is in near pristine condition, and the Ibels prints are intact with minimal fading, bearing nowhere near the amount of damage sustained by the *ryakuga-shiki*. Such

discrepancies in appearance can be traced back through the collection history of these prints, and they speak to the fluid nature of “value” across geographical and cultural contexts.

Within Japan, Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki* were valued as both educational materials and aesthetic objects as well, typically purchased in their original print book form.⁴¹ While the entire collection history of the particular set of *ryakuga-shiki* in this exhibition remains largely unknown, the typical fate of many Japanese woodblock prints that were exported to Europe can provide a potential partial explanation for their current appearance.⁴² Not only were these prints and those like them appreciated and appropriated by French artists, but they have been seen by collectors in popular culture in vastly different ways.

Infatuated as the French were with Japanese culture coming into their market during the nineteenth-century, prints did not always begin their journey to Europe as objects to be collected. Many Japanese prints were in fact valued more for their use as fodder for packing rather than as art objects.⁴³ Once their potential value was discovered by importers, the prints that made it to Europe were then sold to budding collectors. Those that were within books such as Keisai’s

⁴¹ Smith, “World Without Walls,” 12.

⁴² The prints in this collection at UWM do not have a listed donor and no records exist in the UWM Collection about ownership prior to their arrival. So far my research has not revealed any documents that can be tied to these particular individual prints. Their existence as separate prints as opposed to bound volumes makes tracking them particularly difficult. While a majority of the *ryakuga-shiki* prints in this exhibition are similar in theme and color, suggesting they may belong to one volume, at this point, I have been unable to prove beyond a doubt that they were indeed previously connected. In addition, there are several other *ryakuga-shiki* prints in the UWM collection that do not appear stylistically or thematically connected to the rest. This suggests, as does their existence as individual pages separated from a volume, that perhaps at more than one point in their collection history, these prints were gathered from multiple different sources or volumes. With so many factors, complete positive identification of them at various points in history is difficult.

⁴³ Josef Kreiner, for example, mentions the instance where Felix Bracquemond “discovered” Hokusai prints used as wrapping paper in a box packed with Chinese porcelain at his printer, August Delatre’s shop. See Kreiner, *Japanese Collections in European Museums* vol. 1, page 15.

ryakuga-shiki were typically far more profitable as individual prints. Intact volumes of *ryakuga-shiki* by Keisai survive today in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; however, this is not the norm.⁴⁴ Far more exist today as single prints like the ones on display here: cut—not always evenly—from the pages of a book.⁴⁵

Compared with the much more pristine condition of the Lautrec and Ibels prints in this exhibition, it is clear that over the years of their existence, Keisai's prints have been treated and valued quite differently. Lautrec's "Le Café-Concert" series and even the other advertisements, were collected as art objects almost immediately upon their creation.⁴⁶ In fact, according to Iskin,

Quickly appropriated by collectors, the illustrated lithographic color poster became a hybrid print. Although initially it functioned as ephemeral advertising on the streets, collectors assembled, preserved, cataloged, exhibited, and stored the poster in their portfolios for posterity. They thus played a crucial role in transforming the poster into an artwork in an expanding field of graphic arts.⁴⁷

This would not have been the case decades earlier in the nineteenth-century, but Jules Chéret, the "inventor of the artistic poster," had laid a foundation in the 1890s for the treatment of such advertisements as art objects in addition to their commercial value.⁴⁸ Thus, at the time they were

⁴⁴The Museum of Fine Arts Boston volume, "Keisai Ryakuga en", collection record and images can be found at this link: <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/keisai-ryakuga-495180> in addition to the *Ryakuga-* <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/keisai-ryakuga-495180>.

⁴⁵ This, of course, was not the fate of all Japanese woodblock prints. Many *ukiyo-e* prints (especially those by well-known artists such as Hokusai) are relatively well-preserved and in good condition still today. Even several other *ukiyo-e* prints by Keisai such his landscapes and prints from the series *Imayō odori ezukushi*, or 'Collection of Pictures of Current Dances' are in much better conditions than the ones here displayed.

⁴⁶ Iskin, *The Poster*, 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

working, Lautrec and Ibels' posters were at once considered *l'affiche artistique*, or artistic posters, as well as commercial ones.⁴⁹

As stated previously, Keisai's *ryakuga-shiki* were initially valued for more than just their function. Japanese audiences collected the bound books and cared for them just as the French poster collectors did. However, they were still objects that were meant to be used, not just looked at. Because of this, they would have been handled far more frequently and regularly, gaining far more wear and tear than what would be expected for a traditional *ukiyo-e* or nineteenth-century French print. In addition, by the time they began their journey to Europe, the bound volumes of *ryakuga-shiki* were already almost one hundred years old. Age, combined with this potential handling over that time, in contrast to the prints is one major factor in the difference in their condition.

That French prints functioned as both art objects and advertisements for various businesses, shows, and dancers, did not diminish them in the eyes of many collectors at the time. Posters produced for advertising in Paris in *fin-de-siècle* Paris were understood by critics and writers as needing to be artistic in order to appeal to viewers in a commercial sense.⁵⁰ I would argue, however, the same would not have been said of Keisai's prints like the *ryakuga-shiki*. Certainly, Kesai's *ryakuga-shiki* were meant to be aesthetically compelling, though in a different sense. As an artistic teaching manual, it would not have been successful, nor gained the popularity it did, if his style was not artistically appealing in addition to serving a practical function. In reality, although the prints of Keisai, Lautrec, and Ibels all had dual purposes as art object and functional object, it is likely that the French public, including art critics would not

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

have equated the two. I would propose that the different valuing of Keisai's prints has far more to do with underlying prejudice and French imperialistic notions than their original purposes.

The nineteenth-century was a time of continued colonizing efforts by the West over countries and regions in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. These efforts were fueled largely by Western ideas of superiority that crossed all areas of culture, including the arts. As Japanese prints were flooding the French market, some artists and collectors found much to appreciate, whether artistically, or simply for their nature as something "exotic," a term fraught with its own imperialistic and problematic connotations. That said, in France and Europe in general, Japanese prints were not always viewed as *art* in the same way that Western prints were—to some, they were not something to be preserved or appreciated, but something to be looked at or down upon, criticized by collectors and artists.⁵¹

For French audiences who did appreciate, collect, imitate, or appropriate the style of Japanese prints, the dichotomy of valuing them while also retaining a notion of cultural superiority certainly comes to play.⁵² As Blai Guarné, a prominent anthropologist and writer on colonialism, has stated, "In the colonial system, the universal dignity of the colonizer was only seen in relation to the natural inferiority of the Other in the civilising process."⁵³ While Japan

⁵¹ For a fairly recent essay on Japanese culture's reception and understanding of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1974) as well as context in how Japan understood popular opinion of its culture in the West in the late 1800s and early 1900s, see: Daisuke Nishihara, "Said, Orientalism, and Japan," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 25, *Edward Said and Critical Decolonization* (2005): 241-253.

⁵² Elizabeth Mix has recently argued in "Appropriation and the Art of the Copy", "Implicitly... the ability to appropriate was one of the benefits afforded specifically to a ruling class." She paraphrases this idea from a section of Thorstein Veblen's book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994). This applies not only to the larger idea of orientalism as Veblen discusses specifically, but also follows with *japonisme* in similar but different ways. For a discussion on this see Guarné.

⁵³ Blai Guarné, "On Monkeys and Japanese: Mimicry and Anastrophe in Orientalist Representation," *Digithum "Orientalism"* [online dossier] no. 10 (2008): 28.

was certainly ‘Other’ in the French world, as Guarné goes on, “The case of Japan is particularly revealing. Not having been formally colonized, Japan would integrate itself with the strength of an equal into the European-Atlantic order, which drove its opening-up during the second half of the 19th century.”⁵⁴ As a result, Japan as an extreme ‘other,’ though not one directly subjugated, represented a kind of paradox in the minds of those in the west. It possessed the ability to be seen as alternatively “both the sublime and the grotesque.”⁵⁵ Since they were not entirely politically dominant over Japan, the French could at once admire the beauty of Japanese artwork, holding it to a high level of aesthetic appreciation, while still relegating it to the othering category of ‘exotic’ and separate from the Western ideal.

However, there is a tension and uncertainty that exists within such an ideological contradiction. As Thorstein Veblen, prominent nineteenth-century economist and sociologist, asserted, French audiences would have seen themselves, at least in part, as akin to a ruling class over Asian countries like Japan.⁵⁶ Since this was not in fact the case, imitation and appropriation in fact, served as useful tools to assert a kind of dominance over Japan. Veblen’s 1899 book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, often quoted by scholars such as Mix and Guarné in discussions of appropriation, states that the root of appropriation and emulation was the desire for “ownership.”⁵⁷ Such a notion helps to explain the role of appropriation and *japonisme* in the French imperial context.

In a recent article, Art historian K. L. H. Wells also contributes to this understanding in a more general Western context. While she says Philippe Burty, the critic who coined the term

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁶ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.

japonisme, associated it as the study of “the art and genius of Japan,” this in fact ignores the West’s exoticizing of Japan, and how the “widespread interest in Japan was colored by, indeed predicated on, imperialist discourses that constructed Japan as economically, politically, militarily, and often artistically or culturally inferior.”⁵⁸ Although Wells speaks specifically in terms of *japonisme* in Britain, her discussion of the role of the copy versus original or ‘real’ object via George Ashdown Audsley’s *Keramic Art of Japan* and mimesis in *japonisme* and theatre bears weight in this discussion of the dual roles of Japan in the French view as well. As she points to through an examination of *The Mikado*, in particular, “Such instances of an imperial power mimicking those it dominates contribute to wider practices of acquisitive copying that can be understood collectively as imperial mimesis.”⁵⁹ *Japonisme* and French prints that display an appropriation of Japanese style are an expression of yet another kind of imperial mimesis. As is evidenced by views of *Keramic Art of Japan*, the Western imitation was far more important than the original Japanese art object itself.

In the end, therefore, traditional *ukiyo-e* prints, and most likely Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki* also, remained for most French collectors and artists nowhere near as valuable as their own versions and appropriations—even when they “appreciated” them.⁶⁰ Even the act of imitation and borrowing style, something that could be seen in a complementary light, has underpinnings of perceived cultural superiority. As Guarné states, “the representational resorts of imitation [are] deeply established in the imagination of colonial domination.”⁶¹ The differences between the

⁵⁸ K. L. H. Wells, “The ‘Merely Imitative Mood’: British Japonisme and Imperial Mimesis,” *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 27 (2017): 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁰ Wells, among other scholars, also backs this statement up with the assertion “... Western imitation was often construed as superior to the Japanese original...” from “The ‘Merely Imitative Mood’,” 29.

⁶¹ Guarné, 27.

original Japanese prints and French prints that then imitated and borrowed from them could be seen as the difference between “the reformer and the reformed, the officer and the subordinate, the original and the copy, as a means of making the latter an ‘authorized version of Otherness’”⁶² Value, and careful preservation along with it, may have been less vital for collectors of Japanese prints, as opposed to French prints of their contemporary time.

The sheer volume of Japanese prints that were circulating in Europe would have also made keeping them in ideal preservation conditions difficult. One collector, for example, had upwards of 17,000 Japanese prints recorded.⁶³ It is hard to imagine that such collections would have been conducive to careful preservation efforts and treatment of each and every print. The fate of those that remained in their original book form may have been more fortuitous in this way. If they were to remain in book form in the case of Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki* specifically, it is like that they would have been viewed potentially as simply like the pages of any regular book—left to be appreciated and preserved on a bookshelf as something to be used or looked at. Unbound, single pages could have sustained far more damage, being more exposed to the elements, prone to tears and bent edges. While we may never know exactly when these specific *ryakuga-shiki* were removed from their bound format, it is clear that time has not always been kind to them in their unbound form.

⁶² Ibid., 28.

⁶³ Iskin, 15.

Conclusion

This exhibition as a whole presents an image of a particular and unique kind of Japanese *ukiyo-e* print, telling a story previously unexamined in any thorough capacity. The *ryakuga-shiki* of Keisai were influential and popularly enjoyed not only in the context of Japan, but also as they began to circulate in the West, producing ever further-reaching effects on the evolution of printmaking styles. As this exhibition demonstrates, within France (and in the work of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Henri-Gabriel Ibels in particularly), the style of seventeenth and eighteenth-century *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints was appropriated and applied to their own designs. Through analysis of stylistic similarities as well as an understanding of the general availability of Japanese prints in France during the nineteenth-century, it is my assertion that there is a strong possibility that if not entirely familiar with Keisai and his *ryakuga-shiki*, Lautrec and particularly Ibels, must have encountered and been influenced by them in some manner.

The connections in style and subject matter drawn in this essay between artwork from such disparate cultures and time periods can tell us much about the societies within which each artist worked, and the reception of their work at the time of its creation. There is more depth to these connections beyond their aesthetic and surface similarities. The appreciation of French artists and of collectors in the nineteenth-century was not about the beauty of the *ukiyo-e* aesthetic and style alone. As Elizabeth Mix asserts, critics “tried to find, and occasionally ‘invented,’ stylistic similarities such as asymmetry, movement, and color as a way to promote Japanese art as similar to yet different from French art.”⁶⁴ This is often reflected in less recent

⁶⁴ Mix, “Appropriation and the Art of the Copy.” 1144.

scholarship on *japonisme* as well—focusing upon the beauty of such works is just one way to ignore or downplay the negative aspects of appropriation.⁶⁵

However, more and more scholars are approaching discussions of *japonisme* from different points of view. French “appreciation” of Japanese prints was not only about understanding and valuing them for the context, history, and aesthetic in most cases. Instead, it can be linked far more closely with culturally conditioned notions of superiority. The French artists were not “inventing a new style” or simply imitating Japanese techniques. They were appropriating a culture that was not their own. This is not to say that all nineteenth-century French artists, collectors, and appreciators of Japanese woodblock prints were consciously stealing from Japanese style in a malicious way. Many did appreciate the beauty of the artwork and aspire to a similar aesthetic, but to only acknowledge it as flattery and ignore the more sinister aspects of cultural and artistic appropriation is to not fully examine all sides of *japonisme* in French culture.

By studying the microcosm of this set of Keisai’s *ryakuga-shiki* in context with prints by Lautrec and Ibels, we can better understand another facet of the larger issue of *japonisme* in nineteenth-century France not yet fully explored. Adding to this conversation is essential to

⁶⁵ See: Guarné, “On Monkeys and Japanese,” Gregory Irvine, “From Namban to Meiji: The Availability and Reception of Japanese Art in The West.” In *Japonisme and The Rise of The Modern Art Movement*, ed., Gregory Irvine, 16-53 (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2013), Chae Ryung Kim, “East Meets West: Japonisme in the Discourse of Colonialism in the Development of Modern Art” (Masters Thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2012), Mix, “Japonisme and Cultural Appropriation,” Yasuko Suga, “Modernism, Nationalism and Gender: Crafting ‘Modern’ Japonisme.” *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 3 (2008): 259-275, Gabriel P Weisberg, “Rethinking Japonisme: The Popularization of a Taste,” in *The Orient Expressed: Japan’s Influence on Western Art, 1854-1918*, ed. by Gabriel P. Weisberg (Jackson: Mississippi Museum of Art; Seattle: in association with the University of Washington Press, 2011), 17-75, and Wells, “The ‘Merely Imitative Mood’: British Japonisme and Imperial Mimesis.” for just a few examples.

further scholarship of this time period and discussions of *japonisme* in French culture as well as bring attention to the value of Japanese prints in their own original context.

Viewing these prints together is about more than producing visual ties in line use and contouring. Through comparison of their use of narrative structure, the role performance plays in each print style, and the agency that subjects are given as they interact in private and public spaces, a deeper understanding of how each print worked within its own cultural context becomes clear. The *ryakuga-shiki* may have appealed to and inspired Lautrec and Ibels in style and subject matter, but each work remains an expression of the culture it was produced in. This exhibition and essay together provide an opportunity to understand both the value of this more obscure set of prints within their cultural context as well as acknowledge and problematize the impact they have had on a Western culture that was obsessed with them.

Glossary



Figure 1. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Yvette Guilbert*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 17 ¼ x 12 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086n). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



Figure 2. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Paula Brébion*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph in olive-green on wove paper, 17 1/8 x 12 5/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086o). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



Figure 3. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki (Figure with Instrument and patterned blanket)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.07)



Figure 4. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki (Four figures pulling a fifth)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.04)



Figure 5. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki (Woman laying with blanket)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.27)



Figure 6. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph, 10 5/16 x 8 1/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086r). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



Figure 7. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Jeanne Bloch*, from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 11 3/8 x 8 1/4 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086j). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



Figure 8. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Ouvrard*, from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove cream paper, 13 1/2 x 9 1/2 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086b). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



Figure 9. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Comment S'aime*, 1895, lithograph print, Private Collection.



Figure 10. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Les Bibis*, 1893, lithograph print, on loan from a Private Collection. This print is on view in this exhibition.



Figure 11. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled (figure with bird)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.03)



Figure 12. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Poster for "Elles"*, 1896, color lithograph, UWM Art Collection (1991.004.03). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert V. Krikorian.



Figure 13. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Au Cirque*, 1895, lithograph print, on loan from a Private Collection.



Figure 14. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *A Spectator*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph, UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086s). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



Figure 15. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled* (figure in patterned kimono), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/8 x 6 7/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.16)



Figure 16. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled*, (three figures around a table), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/6 x 6 5/18 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.24)



Figure 17. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled, (two figures face to face)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.01)



Figure 18. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled (line of figures, three on horses)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.08)



Figure 19. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled (figure reading)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.11)



Figure 20. Kitao Keisai Masayoshi, *Untitled (Figure posing, hand by her face)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.20)

Exhibition Checklist



1. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (two figures face to face), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.01)



2. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (man and woman with game), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.02)



3. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (figure with bird), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.03)



4. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (man and woman with game), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.02)



5. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (figure at a window), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.06)



6. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki* (figure with instrument and patterned blanket), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.07)



7. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled*, (line of figures, three on horses) First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.08)



8. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (two figures with screen), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 7 15/16 x 6 5/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.09)



9. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (figure sitting in profile), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.10)



10. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki (figure reading)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.11)



11. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled, (figure in red and grey kimono)* First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 5/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.12)



12. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki, (figure with round object)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 7 7/8 x 6 5/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.14)



13. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled (figure in patterned kimono)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/8 x 6 7/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.16)



14. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakugashiki (three figures in a room)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.19)



15. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled (Figure posing, hand by her face)*, First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.20)



16. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled Ryakuga-shiki*, (figure with face hidden), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.22)



17. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled* (two figures one facing away), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.23)



18. Kitao Masayoshi, *Untitled* (Figure leaning back with a fan), First edition from 1795, woodblock print, 8 1/16 x 6 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1972.128.27)



19. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph, 10 5/16 x 8 1/16 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086r). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



20. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Yvette Guilbert*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 17 1/4 x 12 3/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086n). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



21. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Paula Brébion*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph in olive-green on wove paper, 17 1/8 x 12 5/8 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086o). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



22. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *A Spectator*, from "Le Café-Concert", 1893, lithograph, UWM Art History Gallery (1974.001.086s). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



23. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *American Singer* from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 10 7/8 in x 7 3/4 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086u). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



24. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Title Poster for "Elles"*, 1896, color lithograph, UWM Art Collection (1991.004.03). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert V. Krikorian.



25. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Ouvrard*, from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove cream paper, 13 1/2 x 9 1/2 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086b). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



26. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Jeanne Bloch*, from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 11 3/8 x 8 1/4 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086j). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



27. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Anna Thibaud* from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 17 1/4 in x 12 1/2 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086d). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



28. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Kam-Hill* from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, 11 in x 8 1/2 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086i). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



29. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Emilienne d'Alençon Rehearsing at the Folies-Bergère*, from "Le Café-Concert," 1893, lithograph in black on wove cream paper, 13 1/4 x 10 in., UWM Art Collection (1974.001.086k). Bequest of Blanche and Henry Rosenberg.



30. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Les Bibis*, 1893, lithograph in black on wove paper, Private Collection.



31. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Ma Mie Jeannette*, 1893, lithograph in sanguine, Private Collection.



32. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Au Cirque*, ca. 1895, lithograph, hand-colored in gouache, Private Collection.



33. Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Les Petites Meres*, 1893, lithograph, Private Collection.

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