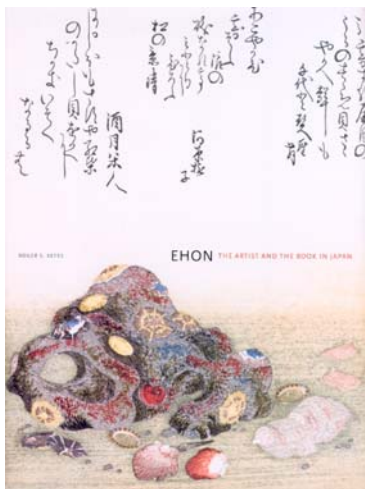


Ehon: The Artist and the Book in Japan / Roger S. Keyes.—Seattle, WA: The University of Washington Press with New York Public Library, December 2006.—320 p.: ill.—ISBN 0-295-98624-7 (cl., alk. paper): \$50.00.



Ehon represents the culmination of a five-year mission, conceived by Robert Rainwater, retired New York Public Library curator, and realized by Roger Keyes, visiting scholar in East Asian Studies at Brown University. Drawn entirely from NYPL's Spencer Collection, 1,500 *ehon* or Japanese picture books were identified, researched, catalogued, and digitized. For the collection catalog Keyes selected seventy titles to describe in-depth with complete bibliographical information, along with a brief essay offering biographical details, historical background, and cultural significance. These entries are enhanced with 250 chiefly colored illustrations and an introductory essay on the physical aspects of books, such as papers, inks, calligraphy, and bindings. *Ehon* also includes an abbreviated title index to all 1,500 volumes and helpful bibliography. The accompanying website offers more than 1,000 images presenting 1,200 years of Japanese book art (<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org>).

While a recent exhibition of the collection was divided into three thematic sections representing a traditional Asian division of the cosmos—Heaven, Earth, and Humanity—the published catalog is organized in a traditional, Western chronology. Those readers who experienced the unexpected pleasure of seeing old masters Kitagawa Utamaro and Taiso Yoshitoshi side by side with contemporaries Daidō Moriyama and Kawada Kikuji, will forgive the decision when they realize how ultimately successful the published catalog is as a reference source.

Ehon provides an introduction to both visual and literary Japanese artists, and how their work found its way to the public. For instance, when the young Katsushika Hokusai organized an all-night drawing party, he had no idea that the resulting 364 *manga* or free-style drawings would find their way into print and become one of the most influential Japanese books of his generation. His hallucinogenic three-eyed goblins and serpent-necked ghosts became so popular that *Hokusai's Manga: Sharing the Spirit Frees the Hands* was extended into ten different volumes between 1814 and 1819. Their influence continues into the twenty-first century with Japanese comic artists who usurp the name *manga* with a nod to Hokusai's legacy. This is only one of the many charming narratives that fill *Ehon* and make it one of the few reference sources that entice us to read it cover to cover before placing it close by for future consultation.

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