

Press release

Frankfurt / Main, 29.08.2016

Yokohama 1868–1912: When Pictures Learned to Shine
8 October 2016 to 28 May 2017

Press preview: Wednesday, 5 October 2016, 11 am

Exhibition opening: Friday, 7 October 2016, 7 pm

Yokohama is, symbolically speaking, where Japanese modernism began and the country first opened up to the world. When the Europeans arrived around 1860, they brought an art form with them that was still in a fledgling stage at the time – photography. In Yokohama it experienced a meteoric ascent, and in that context increasingly supplanted the traditional pictorial technique of the *ukiyo-e* woodblock print.

From 8 October 2016 to 29 January 2017, the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt am Main will stage the exhibition *Yokohama 1868–1912: When Pictures Learned to Shine*, devoted to the capricious epilogue of the *ukiyo-e* and the concurrent rise of Japanese photography. With more than 250 woodblock prints and historical photographs, the show will offer surprising – and for the most part unfamiliar – insights into a country undergoing radical change and a unique chapter in Japanese art.

The present-day port city of Yokohama played a key role in the reopening of Japan: it was not far from the little fishing village that U.S. Admiral Perry's "Black Ships" dropped anchor in 1853. This demonstration of military power ushered in the end of the country's two-hundred-year isolation and forced the island empire to open up to international trade. Large foreigners' colonies sprouted up in the town as a result, and international trading companies established branch offices there. What is more, Yokohama became a popular stop for the first bourgeois tourists on their classical "Grand Tour" of the world.

A fascinating side effect of this development was the triumphal advance of photography, which met with overwhelming response in Japan. The first photo studios opened in Yokohama as far back as 1860 – initially on the initiative of European photographers, but Japanese exponents of the medium followed close on their heels.

Yokohama 1868–1912: When Pictures Learned to Shine will present works by European photography pioneers such as Felice Beato (1832–1909) or Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz (1839–1911). At the same time, it will introduce exceptional Japanese masters like Kusakabe Kinbei (1841–1932) and Ogawa Kazumasa (1860–1929), whose *œuvres* contrast strongly with those of the Europeans above all in composition and choice of motifs. Precisely these early Japanese photographs possess an almost magical intensity. Initially they catered superficially to the various clichés of a naively exotic image of Japan. Yet as native photographers began to develop their own styles, they increasingly disobeyed those models in stage-like situations that, however strongly stylized, are also masterfully arranged and illuminated.

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The extraordinarily vibrant early phase of Japanese photography went hand in hand with the slow demise of the *ukiyo-e* woodblock print, which at the time was already undergoing its sell-off to buyers abroad and hardly sparked any interest at all anymore in Japan. A special form of the *ukiyo-e* called Yokohama-e (“Yokohama pictures”) emerged in the Japanese harbour metropolis in those years, drawing its subjects from the international modernity that had meanwhile invaded everyday life in the country. These sheets are moving expressions of the boundless amazement with which the Japanese responded to the completely alien phenomenon of international trade and all the many innovations that came along with it. Finally, the propaganda prints produced during the Sino-Japanese War (1894/95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05) – and already anticipating the megalomania of the ultra-nationalist 1930s and '40s – formed a bizarre epilogue to the tradition of woodblock art.

With the aid of works from two prominent private German collections and the holdings of the Museum Angewandte Kunst, *Yokohama 1868–1912: When Pictures Learned to Shine* will shed light on one art form in decline and another on the rise. In juxtaposition, the woodblock prints and photographs will offer nuanced insights into Japan's rapid transformation from a tradition-steeped Asian culture to a modern industrial and colonial state.

At the same time, this exhibition at the Museum Angewandte Kunst is a cultural contribution to the Frankfurt-Yokohama twinning arrangement established five years ago.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue in German, English and Japanese.

Yokohama 1868–1912: When Pictures Learned to Shine is being realized with the kind support of the Metzler Bank, the Werner Reimers Foundation and Caparol Icons.

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8 October 2016 to 28 May 2017

Director

Matthias Wagner K

Curator

Dr. Stephan von der Schulenburg

Location

Museum Angewandte Kunst
Schaumainkai 17
60594 Frankfurt am Main

Information

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Opening hours

Tue, Thu–Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Wed 10 am – 8 pm

Admission

9 euros, reduced 4.50 euros

Sponsors

Metzler Bank
Werner Reimers Foundation
Caparol Icons

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