Major Exhibition of 20th-Century Japanese Woodblock Prints
Exploring Japanese Modernization

Exhibition Spotlights Seven Seminal Artists of Shin Hanga Movement, Features 109 Prints from Renowned Wells Collection

SEPTEMBER 26, 2015, TO MARCH 13, 2016

MINNEAPOLIS, JULY 30, 2015

This fall, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), home to one of the most comprehensive collections of shin hanga woodblock prints in the world, will present a special exhibition tracing the development and evolution of the shin hanga movement. “Seven Masters: 20th-Century Japanese Woodblock Prints from the Wells Collection” will probe visual artists’ responses to the nation’s rapid modernization at the turn of the 20th century, and spotlight the work of seven instrumental artists: Hashiguchi Goyō, Yamamura Kōka (Toyonari), Natori Shunsen, Itō Shinsui, Kawase Hasui, Yamakawa Shūhō, and Torii Kotondo. Featuring 112 works depicting a range of subject matter—including pictures of beautiful women, landscapes, and portraits of Kabuki actors—“Seven Masters” will be on view from September 26, 2015, through March 13, 2016.

“During the early 20th century, when all art forms were undergoing unprecedented changes, a small group of artists created beautiful and enticing prints that captured Japan’s dynamic, modern life,” said Andreas Marks, the MIA’s Mary Griggs Burke Curator of Japanese and Korean Art. “Shin hanga employed the highest production values of traditional Japanese printmaking within a very new social context and market. This exhibition explores seven artists’ unique approaches to the modernization
of Japanese culture and, by showcasing the diversity of this critical art form, seeks to offer insight into the world of this phenomenon.”

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Japan vied for recognition and equality among Western nations, and instituted a series of fundamental political, economic, and social reforms. As a newly industrial, capitalist state, the nation quickly adopted Western technology, mannerisms, and values—which inevitably manifested in cultural taste and artistic expression. This rapid drive toward Western sensibilities and the rise of the foreign market contributed equally to a growing nostalgia for distinctly Japanese culture and a fascination with the vitality of modern life. After the turn of the century, the entrepreneurial publisher Watanabe Shōzaburō began to capitalize on this dichotomy by selling new prints that evoked the traditional ukiyo-e woodblock style as souvenirs to Western tourists. In 1915, Watanabe expanded his portfolio after visiting an exhibition of the Austrian painter Friedrich (Fritz) Capelari, from whom he commissioned additional designs to realize his vision of a new type of print—one that would feature the emerging, modern Japan while maintaining the technical precision of traditional printmaking. His decision to commission Capelari gave birth to the shin hanga movement.

While initially employing foreign painters to provide shin hanga print designs, Watanabe soon hired Japanese artists to meet the demand among enthusiasts in the United States and Europe. The artists presented in “Seven Masters” each played a significant role in the development of shin hanga and its aesthetic ideals, and together reflect the diversity of the art form.
Notable works in the exhibition include:

**Friedrich (Fritz) Capelari’s Umbrellas** (1915), likely the first of 12 images the artist designed in collaboration with Watanabe Shōzaburō, marking the birth of the *shin hanga* movement. The series comprises romantic landscapes and pictures of beautiful women that were marketed to Western foreigners visiting Japan.

**Hashiguchi Goyō’s Woman Applying Powder** (1918), a depiction of the artist’s model Nakatani Tsuru applying makeup to her shoulders with the help of a small mirror. Embellished with mica in the background and on the hand mirror, this print is a prime example of the blind-printing technique used to create the tie-dying effect of her robe. Nakatani Tsuru is believed to have been the model for a number of erotic drawings by Goyō, some of which feature her with a male companion, thought to be the artist himself.

**Yamamura Kōka’s The Actor Morita Kan’ya XIII as Jean Valjean** (1921), based on the actor Morita Kan’ya XIII’s lead role in the play *Les Misérables*, performed at Tokyo’s Yūraku Theater in December of 1920. The first Japanese adaptation of Victor Hugo’s 1862 French novel *Les Misérables* dates from 1910, and recounts the life of ex-convict Jean Valjean as he assumes a new identity in order to pursue an honest life.

**Itō Shinsui’s Applying Powder** (1922), part of the artist’s large-scale series of beautiful women, *Twelve Forms of New Beauties*. The series was intended to be issued in editions of 200, with a new print each month for one year; however, the tremendous devastation caused by the Great Kantō Earthquake in September of 1923 postponed the release of the final print by several months.

**Yamakawa Shūhō’s Approaching Snow** (1927), a close-up of a young woman’s face and a personification of winter. Evoking the gloom of the season with snow-laden clouds and nandina branches with red berries, a motif that decorates the woman’s blue kimono, Shūhō depicts the woman glancing to the side while lifting her sleeve-covered hand to her face, as if for protection from the chilly air.

**Torii Kotondo’s Applying Powder** (1929), the first of 21 beauty prints that Kotondo designed between 1929 and 1934. The image depicts a woman smoothing powder onto her neck, her undergarment slipping off one shoulder and her hair arranged in a loose chignon—a modern beauty. While Kotondo’s paintings depict women from various eras of Japanese history, his woodblock prints picture only women of his own time.

**Kawase Hasui’s Spring Dusk at the Tōshō Shrine in Ueno** (1948), a depiction of the Tōshō Shrine located in Tokyo’s Ueno Park, which is dedicated to the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu. The shrine provides an ideal view of the five-storied pagoda of the Kan’ei Temple, represented here, where six of the 15 shoguns lay to rest.

“Frederick B. Wells III amassed a superb collection of *shin hanga* prints, and his generous donation of his collection has dramatically enhanced the MIA’s holdings of this seminal period,” said Kaywin Feldman, Duncan and Nivin MacMillan Director and President of the MIA. “We are delighted to make his prized prints accessible to our local, national, and international audiences for the first time, and express our sincere gratitude to Ellen Wells, his wife and a longtime and ardent patron of the MIA, whose support has been vital to the realization of this project.”

“Seven Masters: 20th-Century Japanese Woodblock Prints from the Wells Collection” is accompanied by a 288-page catalogue by Andreas Marks, Mary Griggs Burke Curator of Japanese and Korean Art and director of the Clark Center for Japanese Art at the MIA, with essays by Chiaki Ajioka, independent scholar and curator of modern Japanese art and
board member of the Australia-Japan Foundation; Ishida Yasuhiro, independent ukiyo-e scholar and a lecturer at Kyushu University, Fukuoka; Yuiko Kimura-Tilford, former research associate in the Department of Asian Art at the MIA; Amy Reigle Newland, independent scholar of Japanese woodblock prints; Charles Walbridge, photographer in the Department of Visual Resources at the MIA; Matthew Welch, chief curator and deputy director of the MIA; and Yano Haruyo, curator at the Minami-Alps City Shunsen Museum of Art.

**Frederick B. Wells III and the MIA**

Frederick B. Wells III was a scion of one of the great grain families of the Midwest, retiring from the Peavey Company in 1976. It was after retirement that Wells began to pursue his dream of opening a gallery of Asian art, enrolling as a full-time student at the University of Minnesota, where he received a Master of Arts with a concentration in East Asian history in 1980. His gallery, Asian Fine Arts, opened on Second Avenue in downtown Minneapolis in 1981, and primarily focused on ceramics, Japanese woodblock prints, decorative hanging scrolls, folding screens, and Korean furniture. Fascinated by the beauty of shin hanga printmaking early on, Wells determined that this would be his personal area of collecting, separate from the inventory he maintained for the gallery, and between 1981 and 1989 he carefully sought out images in pristine condition that struck a responsive chord.

In addition to his gallery pursuits, Wells was a longtime supporter and trustee of the MIA, intimately familiar with the museum’s printed works and growing holdings of Asian art. Alongside his wife, Ellen Wells, he initially supported the Department of Textiles, making occasional gifts of Asian art objects. In the late 1990s, the couple supported the museum’s newly established gallery of Korean art by donating a number of works to the collection. In 2002, they generously donated their own collection of nearly 270 Japanese prints, the core of which was an exceptional group of shin hanga, which instantly transformed the MIA into a leading center of shin hanga in the United States, and extended the museum’s representation of the grand Japanese woodblock print tradition into the twentieth century.

**PRESS CONTACTS**

**MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS**

Anne-Marie Wagener
(612) 870-3280; awagener@artsmia.org

Tammy Pleshek
(612) 870-3171; tpleshek@artsmia.org

**ABOUT THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS**

Home to more than 89,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—the MIA links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration. The 2014 fiscal year marked the highest attendance—752,444 visitors—in the nearly 100-year history of the MIA.

General admission to the MIA is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum hours: Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3000 or visit arts mia.org.