

BIRDS AND FLOWERS

花鳥画

Since antiquity birds perched on branches amidst blossoming flowers have inspired poets and artists. According to the diaries of Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241) he was ordered by the Emperor to compose one bird poem and one flower poem for each of the twelve months, resulting in *Poems and Flowers and Birds of the Twelve Months* (1214). The association of birds and flowers with particular months remained popular until the Edo period (1615–1868). Poems based on them appeared on paintings, ceramics and clothing and inspired popular card games.



Ohara Koson's (1877–1945) woodblock prints of exotic and domestic birds and flowers (*kacho-ga*) imbued the traditions of Japanese art with a sense of modernity. *Crow on the snow covered willow in Winter* became an emblem of a new Japan. The solemn mood of the image is best expressed by the *haiku* of Matsuo Basho (1644–1694):

A crow is perched	<i>Kara eda ni</i>	枯れ枝に
Upon a leafless withered bough –	<i>Karasu no tomari keri</i>	鴉のとまりけり
The Autumn dusk.	<i>Aki no kure</i>	秋の暮



The events of the late 1850s precipitated the decline of the feudal Tokugawa shogunate in Edo and the rise of modern Tokyo. Japan's emergence on the world stage came at a time when global communication and transport ensured Japan's participation in the world exhibitions of the 1870s. Capitalising on the Japan 'craze' of the late nineteenth century, in Europe, America and Australia, the Japanese Government focused on presenting technically refined decorative arts instead of feats of engineering. Government sponsorship and imperial patronage created an ideal environment for craftspeople to refine the skills and motifs passed down from the Edo period. The works of art they produced for the Western market were of a 'technical excellence not seen before or since'.⁹ During the Meiji era (1868–1912) artists imbued bird and flower motifs with a new sense of technical expertise and modern style. Imagery that had first appeared on lacquerware and porcelain reappeared on magnificent bronze vessels, wireless enamel and cloisonné.



During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the introduction of Western technology such as photography and lithography, meant that the era of the *ukiyo-e* print and the 'floating world' of Edo came to an end. Responding to the demand from the West for an idealised vision of Japan, the publisher Watanabe Shozaburo (1885–1962) initiated the 'new print' movement (*shin hanga*), which featured a return to collaborative print creation. This directly contrasted the 'creative prints' movement (*sosaku hanga*), which stressed the role of the artist motivated by a desire for self expression.



Like artists before him Yoshida Hiroshi (1876–1950) portrayed the famous scene of the drum bridge at Kameido Tenjin Shrine in Tokyo. The depiction of seasonal wisteria is a reminder of the past but portrayed in a way to suggest the influence of photography. The duality of existing in a modern world, yet yearning for the past, is best expressed in a poem by Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902):

I see the wisteria that moves like waves and longings rise for Nara and Kyoto, the ancient courtly days	<i>fuji nami no hana o shi mireba Nara no mikado Kyo no mikado no mukashi koishi mo</i>	藤なみの花をし見れば奈良のみかど京のみかどの昔こひしも
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above: Ohara Koson, Japan 1877–1945, *Crow on the snow covered willow in Winter*, c.1926, colour woodcut on paper, 37.4 x 16.7 cm (image); Gift of Brian and Barbara Crisp in memory of their son Andrew 2005

below: Yoshida Hiroshi, Japan, 1876–1950, *Kameido Bridge*, 1927, colour woodcut on paper, 37.5 x 24.5 cm (image); Gift of R.W. Boswell 1961

EVER BLOSSOMING LIFE

増殖する生命

Today we live in a world where the natural environment is largely pushed to the periphery. Our engagement with it becoming largely 'virtual'. As the pace of life increases, the subtle changes in the natural environment, such as the blossoming flowers of Spring remind us that our lives are still guided by the cycles of nature. Like the aristocracy of ancient Japan, we cultivate a garden in our backyard and an idealised vision of nature in our minds.

Throughout the history of Japan the conception of nature has been re-envisioned by artists to evoke the ethos of their own era. *Ever Blossoming Life II – A whole year per hour, Gold*, 2016, was created by the self-proclaimed 'ultra-technologists', teamLab, founded in 2001 by Toshiyuki Inoko (born 1977) following his graduation from the Department of Mathematical Engineering and Information Physics at Tokyo University. The Tokyo-based collective is composed of specialists and professionals from various fields and includes artists, programmers, engineers, computer graphics animators, mathematicians, architects and web designers. Their self-professed aim is to 'achieve a balance between art, science, technology and creativity' expressing a sensibility unique to contemporary life.

Ever Blossoming Life, defined as 'endless', compresses a year of blossoming flowers into sixty minutes. A myriad of colourful flowers grow, blossom, wither and fade away in a profusion of scattered petals, against an effusive gold background. *Ever Blossoming Life* is the most recent example of the collective's practice, which infuses Edo period screen painting with cutting-edge technology. The result is work of art which, like nature, endlessly creates itself anew, presenting each viewer with a unique if fleeting moment.

- 1 Matthew Felt, 'A review of Uta Mokkan: a history of early Japanese poetry through inscription', *Dissertation Reviews*, 11 November 2015, <<http://dissertationreviews.org/archives/12599>>.
- 2 'Ancient wooden tablet including nearly entire poem uncovered in Kyoto', *The Mainichi*, 27 November 2015, <<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151127/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>>.
- 3 Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the culture of the four seasons: nature, literature, and the arts*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, pp. 25–6.
- 4 Laurel Rasplica Rodd (trans.), *Kokinshu: a collection of poems of ancient and modern Japan*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1984, p. 35.
- 5 Shirane, p. 90.
- 6 Shirane, p. 90.
- 7 James Bennett & Amy Reigle Newland (eds), *Golden journey: Japanese art from Australian collections*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2009, pp. 108, 112–13.
- 8 Bennett & Newland, pp. 108, 112–13.
- 9 Earle, Joe, *Splendors of Imperial Japan: Arts of the Meiji Period from the Khalil Collection*, Khalil Family Trust, Britain, 2002, p. 8.

Curated by Russell Kely
Associate Curator of Asian Art

detail: teamLab, Japan, formed 2001, *Ever Blossoming Life II – A whole year per hour: Gold*, 2016, Tokyo, four-channel digital work, endless, edition 4/6 + 2 A/Ps; Gift of the Neilson Foundation through the Art Gallery of South Australia, Foundation, 2015. Image courtesy the artists and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney



Adelaide Festival Centre, Art Gallery of South Australia and Samstag Museum present teamLab in Adelaide



A trans-historical view of the natural world where tradition meets technology

EVER BLOSSOMING

below: attributed to Ando Jubei Workshop, active late 19th–early 20th century, Japan, *Vase, with pigeons and dolphins*, c.1880, Nagoya, cloisonné enamel, shokudo rim, gilt interior over copper, 62.5 x 30.5 cm; Bequest of Mr and Mrs William Milne 1914

above: Urushibara Yoshihiro, Japan, 1888–1953, *Hellebores*, c.1920, woodcut on paper, 30.1 x 21.3 cm; David Murray Bequest Fund 1939

BETWEEN POETRY AND PAINTING

和歌と絵の間

For hundreds of years Japanese artists have cultivated an appreciation of blossoming flowers. An idealised vision of nature, with consciously selected flora and fauna symbolically linked to the seasons, was first expressed in poetry. Japanese poems known as *waka* were composed by members of the court and were essential to the development of Japanese culture particularly the indigenous painting style known as *yamato-e*.

Waka celebrating the beauty of seasonal flowers appear in the eighth century on wooden tablets (*uta mokkan*), the roof tiles of pagodas, and pottery discovered at palaces and temples in Nara and Kyoto.¹ The *Naniwa* poem, set in Osaka, was considered the 'father of poetry' as it was a model for writing among the elite.²

at Naniwa Bay	<i>Naniwa-zu ni</i>	難波津に
they bloom, these flowers	<i>Sakuya kono hana</i>	咲くやこの花
emerging from Winter now	<i>Fuyu-gomori</i>	冬ごもり
it is Spring they bloom, these flowers.	<i>Ima o haru-be to</i>	いまを春へと
	<i>Sakuya kono hana</i>	咲くやこの花

The earliest anthologies of court poetry, such as the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* (*Man'yōshū*), c.759, and *Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times* (*Kokin Wakashū*), c.905, include a wide diversity of flora categorised by the seasons, with a special focus on flowering plants and evergreens. These poems describe an idealised vision of nature through clusters of animals and plants set in areas renowned for their natural beauty. The emphasis in *waka* poetry was not on describing the physical characteristics of the natural world, but on expressing specific emotions or ideas.³ In his preface to the *Kokin Wakashū*, the famous poet, Ki no Tsurayuki (872–945), states that: *The seeds of Japanese poetry lie in the human heart and grow into leaves of ten thousand words ... hearing the warbler sing among the blossoms and the frog in his fresh waters – is there any living being not given to song?*⁴ The palace-style residences 'created a direct sense of continuity between the interior and landscaped garden', with the verandas becoming a site of much court culture and interaction.⁵ Architectural elements such as sliding doors and screens were painted with idealised visions of the birds and flowers of the four seasons (*shiki-e*), the twelve months (*tsukinami-e*) and famous places (*meisho-e*). Aristocratic women, who rarely left their residences, often composed poems about the birds and flowers painted on their screens and partitions rather than from real life. These poems were then often attached to the work itself.⁶

Flowers play a crucial role in *The tale of Genji*, written by the lady-in-waiting, Murasaki Shikibu (c.973–c.1014). The chapter titles and nicknames of characters suggest seasonal flowers which are often subtle allusions to the events of the narrative. The earliest surviving text of *The tale of Genji* appears on twelfth-century hand scrolls that portray the interior settings, complete with architectural elements bearing paintings of the natural world in *yamato-e* style. *Scenes from the three chapters of The tale of Genji*, provides an image of the lavish interior furnishings, as well as the twelve-layer robe (*junihito-e*) worn by women, the colour of each layer symbolic of seasonal flowers.



detail: Japan, *Scenes from the three chapters of The tale of Genji* [Genji monogatari], 17th century, single six-panel screen, colour and gold on paper, 91.0 x 232.0 cm; Gift of the Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia 1999

EVERLASTING SEASONS

永遠なる四季

Folding screens depicting birds, trees and flowers in seasonal landscapes on lavish cut gold belong to a painting genre known as 'birds and flowers of the four seasons' (*shiki-kacho zu*). Paintings of the four seasons (*shiki-e*) became popular from the ninth and tenth centuries along with *waka* poetry but reached their fullest expression in the Momoyama period (1573–1615) with the rise of the military elite and regional lords. Read from left to right they celebrate the cyclical progression of the seasons symbolised by specific flora and fauna which are meant to evoke certain emotions. Autumn in particular was pervaded by a sense of melancholy and was often symbolised by Autumn grasses and the cries of migrating geese.



detail left screen: attributed to Hasegawa school (active 16th–18th centuries), *Autumn landscape with wild geese*, c.1650, Kyoto, pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour and gold on paper, each 102.5 x 259.0 cm; South Australian Government Grant assisted by the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1986

Yamanoue no Okura's (660?–733?) poem describing the seven grasses of Autumn (*aki no nanakusa*) was possibly inspired by gardens of the Heian aristocracy, a great source of poetic reflection.

Flowering blossoms	<i>Aki no No ni</i>	秋の野に
in Autumn fields	<i>Sakitaru Hana wo</i>	咲きたる花を
when I count them on my fingers	<i>Oyubiori</i>	指折り
they number seven	<i>Kakikazureba</i>	かき数ふれば
	<i>Nanakusa-no Hana</i>	七種の花
The flowers of the bush	<i>Hagi no Hana Obana</i>	萩の花 尾花
clover (<i>hagi</i>), eulalia (<i>obana</i>),	<i>Kuzuhana Nadeshiko-</i>	葛花 瞿麦の花
arrowroot (<i>kuzu</i>), pink	<i>no Hana Ominaeshi</i>	姫部志
(<i>nadeshiko</i>), patrinia (<i>ominaeshi</i>),	<i>Mata Fujihakama</i>	また藤袴
also mistflower (<i>fujibakama</i>)	<i>Asagao-no Hana</i>	朝貌の花
and morning glory (<i>asagao</i>).		

For over three hundred years the Kano school of painters, based in Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo), catered to the military elite and created a definitive style of painting and a common visual language, which still resonates today. The combination of Chinese themes, bold brush and ink strokes, lush pigments and cut gold of *yamato-e* were initially conceived to decorate castle interiors and convey a sense of grandeur and opulence. The Kano school remains the longest running and most influential school of painting in Japan and unique in the history of art.

Birds, tree and flowers is signed by the artist Kano Sanraku (1559–1635), who was a fifth-generation Kano school artist and the founder of the Kyoto branch. This single-panel screen was once part of a pair that illustrated all four seasons and depicts the birds and flowers associated with late Winter and early Spring. On the left, the first buds of Spring appear on



Kano Sanraku, Japan, 1559–1635, *Birds, tree and flowers*, 1624–35, Kyoto, Japan, six-panel screen, ink, colour and gold on paper, 173.0 x 370.0 cm; Gift of Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2015

the branches of the ancient willow tree which extends over a bamboo fence. At its base appear flowering camellia and young bamboo shoots, symbols of renewal and regeneration. Amidst the expanse of cut gold leaf, a white heron takes flight, while another rests on the willow tree, a reminder that in Japanese poetry and art herons are often associated with late Winter: The extravagance of the cut gold is contrasted by the dark-blue stream, with a small mandarin duck and a rock, indicative of Chinese philosophical traditions such as Daoism which had a profound impact on Japanese art and culture.

Millet and birds, created in Yamaguchi Prefecture by a member of the Unkoku school, portrays the subtle shift from one season to another and is intended to evoke a sense of transience. Read from right to left, a flock of birds are snared in farmers' nets and perch in a grove of bamboo and ripening snake gourds. On the left the insect-eaten leaves and millet suggest the onset of Autumn and impending harshness of Winter. The depiction of millet implies a sense of solitude and a weariness of heart, as this coarse grain was mostly eaten by the rural poor.⁷

The Unkoku school, founded by Unkoku Togan (1547–1610), was based in western Japan and lasted almost ten generations. The followers of the school were primarily known for their brush and ink landscapes in the style of Sesshu Toyo (1420/26–1506), although many received training in Kano ateliers in Kyoto.



above: Unkoku School, Edo Period, 1615–1868, Japan, *Millet and birds*, c.1625, pair of six-panel screens, colour and gold on paper, 104.0 x 292.0 cm (each); Gift of Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2004

THE THREE FRIENDS OF WINTER

松竹梅

In East Asia the 'three friends of winter' (jp: *shochikubai*) pine, plum and bamboo are prized by scholars as symbols of perseverance and resilience. The term first appears in the *Record of the five-cloud plum cottage* written by the Chinese poet Lin Jingxi (1242–1310). Together they evoke the Confucian virtue of maintaining one's integrity even in the most adverse conditions. In Japan they are associated with new year celebrations and included in floral displays.

During the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, brush and ink paintings of mountains and blossoming flowers, accompanied by poems, were created by the literati of Japan, known as *bunjin* or *nanga*. *Bunjin* were an eclectic group of professional calligraphers, teachers and Confucian scholars who emulated the literati of China (ch: *wenren*). They cultivated 'the three perfections' (calligraphy, poetry and painting) and eschewed art created for sale, as it ultimately distracted from the journey into one's own heart and mind.



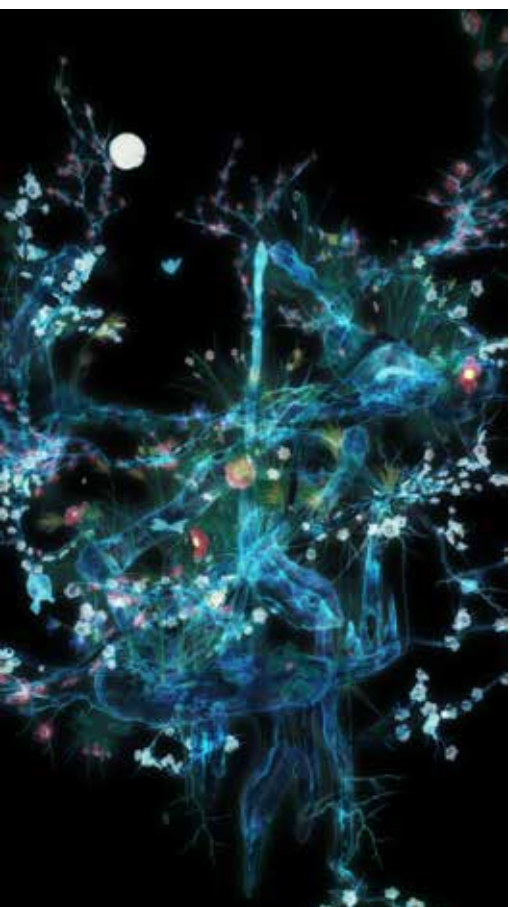
Ichikawa Beian, Japan, 1779–1858 and Kaburagi Untan, Japan, 1783–1852, *High in the snow-covered mountains*, c.1850, fan, ink on paper, 5.0 x 18.0 cm; Gift of Terry Smith and Jennifer Harris in appreciation of Professor Scott Johnson 2009

below: teamLab, Japan, formed 2001, *Cold life*, 2014, Tokyo, 4K ultra HD digital video, 7 mins 15 secs (loop), calligraphy: Sisyu; Courtesy teamLab and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

Adhering to the ancient Chinese credo, 'Painting is silent poetry', *bunjin* studied classical literature, history and philosophy in the hope that their erudition would be conveyed through their brush. As travel to China was forbidden during the Edo period (1615–1868), the 'southern school' (*nanga*) studied imported examples of brush and ink paintings by Chinese monks, as well as manuals, while others travelled constantly in Japan to observe nature.

The communal cultivation of the three perfections during collaborative gatherings was essential. The two fans created by Ichikawa Beian and his extended family include poems and paintings evoking seasonal motifs. The fan features a poem about a scholar who fell asleep under a full moon in a snow-covered forest.⁸ The poem is accompanied by a painting of plum blossoms. Plum blossoms were especially treasured because they bloom in the coldest time of the year and burst through the Winter snow, revealing bright colours and promising the arrival of Spring.

In 2014 the artist collective teamLab worked with the calligrapher Sisyu to create *Cold Life*. The work is set at night in the light of the cold moon of Winter. A series of brush strokes creates the character for 'life' 生, which then evolves slowly into the venerable pine tree, appreciated for its needles which remain green throughout the year and its forbearance in the face of inhospitable conditions. From the pine a mélange of plum blossoms and insects burst into life a signal that Spring is imminent.



FAMOUS PLACES

名所

No natural feature in the landscape has inspired more devotion than Mount Fuji. Descriptions of Mount Fuji appear in the earliest imperial anthologies of poetry, when the smoke rising from the active caldera was an implicit reference to smouldering passion. In poetic imagination the vast plain of Musashi, once a wetland south-west of present day Tokyo, became intimately linked with the full moon of autumn, seasonal grasses and wildflowers, a motif eloquently expressed by Minamoto no Michikata (1189–1238):

On Musashi Plain	<i>Musashino wa</i>	武蔵野は
there are no mountains for the moon to hide behind	<i>tsuki no irubeki mine mo nashi</i>	月の入るべき嶺もなし
just white clouds hanging on the tips of the pampas grasses	<i>obana ga sue ni kakaru shirakumo</i>	尾花が末にかかる白雲



Japan, *The plain of Musashi, Mount Fuji and the moon*, c.1760, Kyoto, pair of six-panel screens, colour and gold on paper, 170.0 x 370.0 cm; Gift of Mitsubishi Motors Limited through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1981

During the Edo period (1615–1868), appreciation for Mount Fuji as both a sacred icon and tourist destination increased with the establishment of the shogunate in Edo. During the seventeenth century Mount Fuji and the plain of Musashi first appeared together on screens depicting 'famous places' (*meisho-e*).

Under the Tokugawa shogunate, urban environments in Edo, Kyoto and Osaka flourished and fostered a desire for art that portrayed the pleasures of this new environment – known as the floating world (*ukiyo*). By 1720 Edo was the largest city in the world, and had a highly literate population. The rise of popular urban culture in the Genroku period (1688–1704) coincided with the introduction of woodblock print techniques, and in the 1750s it became possible to produce multi-colour prints known as 'brocade prints' (*nishiki-e*). Publishers could



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japan, 1797–1858, *Dam on the Otonashi River at Oji, popularly known as The Great Waterfall*, no. 19, from the series, *One hundred famous views of Edo*, 1857, colour woodcut on paper, 34.0 x 22.5 cm (image); David Murray Bequest Fund 1942

now fulfil the voracious appetite of consumers for art with prints, which, unlike paintings, could be created rapidly, inexpensively and in large numbers. The most popular subjects of these prints, particularly in Edo, were birds and flowers (*kacho-ga*), landscapes (*fukei-ga*) and views of famous places (*meisho-e*) in the city – often featuring cherry trees.

Woodblock artists such as Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) created prints depicting landscape scenes in and around Edo, which had a profound effect on artists in Europe during the late nineteenth century. Hiroshige's *One hundred views of Edo* (*Meisho Edo Hyakkei*) remains his most enduring masterpiece, capturing the Edo landscape prior to the transformation associated with the Meiji Restoration. Divided into seasons, these 118 prints depict one of the most popular activities, that of viewing cherry blossoms. During the Heian period (794–1185) cherry blossoms were associated with Spring – but tinged with a sense of transience – while the pleasure seekers of the 'floating world' of Edo sought entertainment in every aspect of life, as described in this poem by Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801):

From the morning	<i>Uguisu no</i>	鶯の
when I first	<i>Koe kiki somuru</i>	聲ききぞむる
Hear the bush warbler sing	<i>Ashita yori</i>	あしたより
How passionately do I long	<i>Mataruru mono wa</i>	待たるものは
For the cherries blossoms	<i>Sakura nari keri</i>	櫻なりけり