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THE PRINTER'S EYE: UKIYO-E FROM THE GRABHORN COLLECTION

Japanese prints from the exceptional Grabhorn
Collection displayed for first time in U.S. museum
exhibition

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 21, 2015— San Francisco art collector Edwin Grabhorn (1889–1968) brought a unique perspective to his search for fine Japanese woodblock prints. Serving as co-founder of Grabhorn Press, a printing firm based in the city, he was acutely attuned to the technical side of printmaking. On Feb. 20, 2015 the public will get a rare chance to appreciate Grabhorn's skill as a collector when the Asian Art Museum unveils *The Printer's Eye: Ukiyo-e from the Grabhorn Collection*, an original exhibition showcasing 88 superb prints acquired by the museum in 2005. The exhibition coincides with the museum's presentation of *Seduction: Japan's Floating World*, a special exhibition featuring paintings, textiles, prints and other material related to the popular entertainment districts of Edo-period (1615–1868) Japan. Together the exhibitions offer museum visitors a close examination of how the “floating world”— a pleasure-seeking way of life—was portrayed by artists of the period.

Ukiyo-e, or “pictures of the floating world,” is the term for woodblock prints and paintings that depict the fashionable, escapist activities available in Edo (present-day Tokyo) and other urban centers of the time. A popular art form, ukiyo-e prints were intended for a mass audience. In the 18th century ukiyo-e soared to heights of sophistication and elegance, part of a revolution in creative expression whose impact was felt throughout Japan and eventually the West. *The Printer's Eye* considers ukiyo-e prints from three perspectives: the rapid development of printmaking techniques, the role of prints in promoting urban celebrities, and the relationship between prints and other trends in daily life, literature and fashion.

Honoring Grabhorn's sensitivity to carving and coloring effects, *The Printer's Eye* traces the technical evolution of printmaking in Japan from its inception in monochromatic prints, to hand-colored ukiyo-e, and culminating in the complex multi-colored designs

Hunting for fireflies, 1767–1768, by Suzuki Harunobu (Japanese, 1725?–1770). Woodblock print; ink and colors on paper. *Courtesy of Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, Gift of the Grabhorn Ukiyo-e Collection, 2005.100.29.* Image © Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

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often termed “brocade pictures” (*nishiki-e*). Particularly notable are rare early works by Kaigetsudo Dohan and Okumura Masanobu, as well as exquisite full-color prints by Suzuki Harunobu, Kitagawa Utamaro and others. Having been studiously protected from light by the Grabhorns, many works from the collection preserve their original vibrant colors. Others represent the only surviving impressions of particular designs. An original carved woodblock, a set of carving tools and other printing materials are included alongside the prints to illustrate the technical means used during the prime of Edo-period printmaking.

Additionally, the exhibition unpacks the often arcane subject matter of ukiyo-e and introduces its leading characters: celebrities of the pleasure quarter and stage performers. Many prints feature well-known Kabuki actors, including popular female impersonators, costumed for their roles on the stage. Equally prominent are courtesans, depicted as idealized beings whose gorgeous clothing and surroundings mask the harsh realities of life in Edo-period brothels. Captured in dramatic poses, close-up views or private moments, ukiyo-e portraits placed viewers in the company of stars, transporting them to exciting dramas and erotic encounters.

The final section of the exhibition explores popular styles of the Edo period through prints inspired by seasonal activities, literary themes and ever-changing fashions. What their subjects wore, how their hair was styled and the items included in their settings communicated intriguing subtexts to urban residents, many of whom found these details familiar and meaningful. *The Printer's Eye* unlocks the secrets of these complex images, revealing the wit and charm appreciated by Edo-period viewers.

“We are thankful to the family of Edwin Grabhorn’s widow, Irma Grabhorn, for donating the works in this exhibition. The ukiyo-e are unparalleled in quality and preservation,” said museum director Jay Xu. “*The Printer's Eye* demonstrates the technical refinement in ukiyo-e and serves an excellent basis for introducing the early history of Japanese prints.”

The Printer's Eye runs from Feb. 20 through May 10, 2015 in the museum’s Lee Gallery. The exhibition begins with 56 prints on view, and on March 31, 32 of the works will be replaced with a fresh selection from the collection. Visitors are encouraged to visit twice to view all 88 prints, which are highlights of the 136-print Grabhorn ukiyo-e collection.

Organized by the Asian Art Museum, *The Printer's Eye: Ukiyo-e from the Grabhorn Collection* is curated by Dr. Laura Allen, curator of Japanese art, and Dr. Yuki Morishima, assistant curator of Japanese art. The Asian Art Museum will serve as the only venue.

Presentation is made possible with the generous support of The Bernard Osher Foundation and The Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Fund for Excellence in Exhibitions and Presentations.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition will be accompanied by a substantive, richly illustrated catalogue, published by the Asian Art Museum; available in softcover, \$35; 200 pages. Available at the Asian Art Museum store and online at <http://store.asianart.org>. Contact the store at 415.581.3600 or shop@asianart.org.

ABOUT THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is one of San Francisco's premier arts institutions and home to a world-renowned collection of more than 18,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history. Through rich art experiences, centered on historic and contemporary artworks, the Asian Art Museum unlocks the past for visitors, bringing it to life while serving as a catalyst for new art, new creativity and new thinking.

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Hours: The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 5 PM. From Feb. 26 to Oct. 8, hours are extended on Thursdays until 9 PM. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

General Admission: FREE for museum members, \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors (65+), college students with ID, and youths (13–17). FREE for children under 12 and SFUSD students with ID. General admission on Thursdays after 5 PM is \$5 for all visitors (except those under 12, SFUSD students, and museum members, who are always admitted FREE). General admission is FREE to all on Target First Free Sundays (the first Sunday of every month). A surcharge may apply for admission to special exhibitions.

Access: The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access: 415.581.3598; TDD: 415.861.2035.

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