



Scene from "Imoseyama onna teikin (An Example of Noble Womanhood, or The Teachings for Women)"

Date

1852

Primary Maker

Toyokuni III

Medium

Polychrome woodblock print on two sheets of paper

Description

Utagawa Kunisada was one of the most successful Japanese woodblock print designers and book illustrators of his time. He became a student of Utagawa Toyokuni I in 1801 and, upon the latter's death in 1825, unseated the master's presumptive heir, Toyoshige, or Toyokuni II, as the new leader of the studio (artists frequently adopted their teachers' names and signed different names to their works over their careers). Kunisada's primary subject was Kabuki actors; prints of that nature were typically created for specific productions of a play, to be enjoyed as souvenirs. This woodblock print is an example of ukiyo-e—literally, "pictures of the floating world," in reference to the hedonistic and sometimes risqué subjects favored by its practitioners and aficionados. It depicts a scene from the play *Imoseyama onna teikin* (An Example of Noble Womanhood, or The Teachings for Women), originally written for Bunraku (puppet) theater and first performed in 1771, after which it was adapted for Kabuki theater. The plot is based on the Taika coup d'état of 645 CE, in which the prince who would later become Emperor Tenji and his minister, Fujiwara no Kamatari, triumphed over the scheming Soga no Iruka. Fujiwara no Kamatari's red-faced servant (played by the actor Ichikawa Danjū VIII; all the actors are identified by name on the print), disguised as a fisherman, is seen at the left, and Soga no Iruka, at the right. Inset are images of a female character (who would, however, have been played by a male actor) and her lover, Motome, a young samurai (also played by Ichikawa Danjū VIII). The sumptuous patterns seen throughout the print are even more impressive when one realizes that each color was printed from a separate block, requiring extremely precise registration of the blocks onto the paper support—here, two *ban*, or large, sheets were joined to form a diptych. The kanji (Chinese characters) in the seals at the lower right name the artist and the imperial censors, as all prints created between 1790 and 1876 for public consumption had to be approved by the latter; from such seals, the dates of prints can be determined with varying accuracy. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, *INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS*, 2017) This print depicts a scene from the Kabuki play, "Imoseyama Onna Teikin." Riyashi Fukashichi (Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjū VIII), at left, arrives disguised as a fisherman and offers Soga no Iruka (Arashi Rikan III) sake which hangs from his sword. The characters of Tachibana hime (Iwai Kumesaburo III) and her lover Motome (Ichikawa Danjū VIII) are shown above at left and right. Oban diptych format.

Dimensions

Sheet (each): 13 15/16 × 9 13/16 in. (35.4 × 24.9 cm) Overall: 13 15/16 × 19 11/16 in. (35.4 × 50 cm)