



Untitled [studies of Japan]

Date

c. 1877

Primary Maker

Unknown artist, Japanese

Medium

Album with lacquered board cover containing fifty albumen photographs with hand coloring

Description

After the arrival of the first camera in Japan in the 1840s, the field of photography began to thrive commercially. In the same period,

the shogunate eased travel restrictions, and Japan became an exotic destination for Europeans and Americans, inspiring a wave of “Japonism,” or fervor for all things Japanese. This album, which contains fifty hand-colored photographs, was most likely produced and sold as a souvenir for tourists, given the anachronism of its portrayal of Japan as rustic and feudal. Photographs in the album depict a variety of subjects, such as laborers in rice paddies, teahouses, geishas, a Buddhist temple, and pleasant scenery in Nikk and Kamakura. In fact, during the Meiji era of imperial rule, which began in 1868, a decade before the album was produced, modernizations such as gas lighting, railroads, and industrial production were introduced into the country. Japanese tourist photography was known as Yokohama shashin on account of the number of celebrated photographers working in the port city of Yokohama (shashin combines the ideograms for “reflect” and “truth”). The maker or makers of the images in this album are unknown. Typically, photography studios produced albums from a selection of images shot by multiple photographers in their employ, who were rarely credited. Prior to the invention of color photography, watercolor was applied to black-and-white photographs to make them appear more realistic and more similar to color woodblock prints, as seen here. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) A volume of hand colored photographs of Japanese country life bound in laquered book boards. Cover is dark brown with flowered background and shows three open fans, two closed fans, and one partially open.

Dimensions

Overall (closed): 10 11/16 × 13 5/8 × 2 1/8 in. (27.1 × 34.6 × 5.4 cm) Image (each): 8 1/16 × 10 7/16 in. (20.5 × 26.5 cm)
Sheet (each): 8 1/16 × 10 7/16 in. (20.5 × 26.5 cm)