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book review of

Painting Edo: Selections from the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art by Rachel Saunders and Yukio Lippit and *Catalogue of the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art* edited by Rachel Saunders

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Rachel Saunders and Yukio Lippit,
Painting Edo: Selections from the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art.
Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums (Distributed by Yale University Press), 2020.
164 pp.; 215 color and b&w illustrations.
\$35 (hardcover)
ISBN: 9780300250893

Rachel Saunders, ed.,
Catalogue of the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art.
Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums (Distributed by Yale University Press), 2020.
264 pp.; 486 color illustrations.
\$65 (hardcover)
ISBN: 9780300250909

Among the innumerable losses that resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic was the widespread, long-term shutdown of museums, and the loss of public access to the Harvard Art Museum's stunning exhibition *Painting Edo: Japanese Art from the Feinberg Collection*. Open for just a few short weeks before the March 2020 global shutdown and a subsequent year and a half of museum closure, the exhibition was accessible through a series of virtual events but will remain available through the two accompanying publications: *Painting Edo: Selections from the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art* and *Catalogue of the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art*. This review covers both books, but will primarily focus on *Painting Edo*.

Painting Edo was the largest exhibition ever shown at the Harvard Art Museums, commemorating the promised gift of the Feinberg collection to the institution. Comprised of over three hundred pieces, the collection is remarkable in quality and comprehensive in scope, with representative works from nearly every stylistic lineage of the Edo period (1615–1868). Edo painting is a frequent subject for exhibitions in the United States, but often with a specific topic or theme. In recent years the National Museum of Asian Art focused on Hokusai (2019–21), the National Gallery of Art and LACMA included Edo paintings in the show *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art* (2019), and the Art Institute of Chicago featured paintings of the Yoshiwara, or pleasure district, in *Painting the Floating World: Ukiyoe Masterpieces from the Weston Collection* (2018). A comprehensive look at Edo painting, though, is

relatively rare in the United States, as most museum collections lack the breadth and depth necessary to compile such a show. Herein is what makes these twin publications of such value, they provide both a detailed and extensive scope of Edo painting that is of interest to students, scholars, and collectors.

The catalogue of the collection includes 265 entries covering the objects. Each is accompanied by a photograph and a detailed text, as well as transcriptions of poems, signatures, and seals. The catalogue thus presents a helpful research resource, but as there is no index it is lacking in accessibility. For example, if one were interested in learning about the varied Buddhist icons in the collection the only way to find them is to page through the catalogue. Entries in the catalogue are organized in alphabetical order by the artist's name, but with no subject index in either book there are limitations how these volumes can be used. Technical critiques aside, the *Catalogue of the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art* presents excellent scholarship by a distinguished group of both established and emerging researchers in the field.

Of greater general interest is the *Painting Edo* text. With essays by Yukio Lippit, the Jeffrey T. Chambers and Andrea Okamura Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, and Rachel Saunders, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Curator of Asian Art at the Harvard Art Museums, this book presents both an overview of Edo painting and an in-depth study of one painting cycle in the Feinberg collection. Lippit's text, "Edo Painting: Ten Chapters," provides a relatively concise summary of much of the context, styles, lineages, and movements within Edo painting. Saunders' essay, "Birds, Flowers, and Botany in Sakai Hōitsu's Pure Land Garden" provides an intricate analysis of one painting program, meaning that this book gives both a broad view and a deep investigation of Edo period painting.

That a comprehensive essay on Edo painting can be written from the Feinberg collection is telling of the scope and quality of the works within. Lippit's essay states that it does not intend to be a "totalizing history of Edo painting" (16) but rather aims to provide a framework for the works, nonetheless the essay reads as a straightforward introduction to the topic. Divided into ten sections, the essay starts with "True Views" which addresses landscape paintings. Lippit adeptly discusses the complex international influences on Edo pictorialism, wasting no time before he addresses simplified ideas of Edo isolation policies as a,

mischaracterization based on Western bias; Japan was simply selective in its recognition of formal diplomatic ties, which were held only with the Joseon and Ryūkyū kingdoms, and in its trade relations, which officially were limited to the Dutch East India Company but unofficially included China and other entities (14).

The discussion of the aesthetic complexity of Edo painting gives way to a summary of the *ryūha*, or lineages, in the second section. This proves to be a helpful introduction to the concept of Japanese painting houses, focusing on the Kano school, but also arguing for a revision of earlier understandings of the mid to late Edo Kano painters as less innovative than their predecessors.

The third section, “Contemporaneity,” links the pictorialism of Edo genre painting to both “Scenes in and around the Capital” (*rakuchū rakugai zu*) and *nanban*, or “southern barbarian” screens. Lippit traces Edo genre paintings to the earlier *yamato-e* tradition which developed at court. Again, he debunks previously held notions of the *nanban* as being based on real-life observation of the Portuguese, instead connecting the paintings to Kano imagery of Chinese merchant ships. Contemporaneity easily flows into the fourth section, “Floating Worlds.” Referring to an old Buddhist term, the floating world was the urban environment of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters and the beautiful women housed within. In this section Lippit discusses the depiction of the interior and exterior spaces of the urban environment, the textiles represented in the paintings, *bijin*, or beautiful women, and even the de-idealization of beauty (39), but fails to mention the horrific and oppressive living and working conditions of the courtesans represented in these paintings, or the patriarchal social structures that allowed the Yoshiwara to develop as it did. In the aftermath of recent attempts to align the field of art history with the social justice and gender equality movements, it seems irresponsible to not mention the troublesome reality that existed behind these exquisite paintings.^[1]

The fifth section focuses on Rinpa, or the “School of Kōrin,” a style that is closely associated with contemporary vernacular ideas of Japanese art history, and which has also received recent attention in the US museum world.^[2] Here, Lippit provides an engaging analysis of the legacy of Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716) and a detailed discussion of the techniques found in Rinpa painting. This section briefly introduces Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828), who will be taken up by Rachel Saunders later in the book, and Hōitsu’s student Suzuki Kiitsu (1796–1858), building on the concepts of lineage that were introduced earlier in the essay. Section six, “Cultivated Pictorialism” analyzes *nanga* (*bunjinga*), or literati painting, which along with Rinpa had an outsized impact on Edo art. Lippit provides a basic history of the development of *nanga* in China and its domestication in Japan. He addresses the gap between the Chinese frameworks and Japanese circumstances: Japan did not have a true literati class, leading to Japanese *nanga* as, “more of an artisanal pictorial style than as a manifestation of a cultivated individual . . . accordingly some *nanga* might in fact be understood as ‘illiterati painting’” (52). This section also argues for a flourishing of creativity in *nanga* resulting from the use of printed painting manuals. As practitioners were learning to paint from printed materials, artists had to fill in gaps in their knowledge. Finally, Lippit acknowledges the mastery of Tokuyama Gyokuran (1728–84), a woman literati painter who was previously discussed primarily as the wife of famed painter Ikeno Taiga (1723–76), helping to cement her position in the canon.

Section seven, “Strangeness” examines the *kijin*, or eccentrics. Reviewing the oeuvres and brief biographies of artists such as Taiga (1723–76), Soga Shōhaku (1730–81), and Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800), this section examines the qualities of “extraordinary talent, elegant reclusion, and the strange or supernatural” (60) that characterized these artists. Next, “Expansion of Pictorial Culture” shows how the complexity of Edo isolation policies combined with economic growth contributed to painting as being more accessible. This section also elaborates on earlier discussions of Edo pictorialism to elucidate the works of Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–95) and Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–99). Among these paintings is Ōkyo’s *Fish and Turtles* (ca. 1772–81), an innovative screen painting, and the only known object of its kind, which utilizes a double layer of painted silk to provide the illusion of an aquatic environment

(74–76). It is with exquisite paintings such as this that the reader understands the distinctive quality of the Feinberg collection.

The essay jumps into the nineteenth century in section nine, “Professional Amateurism,” with an elaboration on how *nanga* developed as it matured and interacted with the Maruyama-Shijō school, impacting training and changing aesthetics. The final section, “The End of Edo,” provides a conclusion to the narrative of this essay. Again as he has done throughout, Lippit works to add complexity to the narrative of Japanese art history, focusing on the subtle changes that occurred in painting practice, such as the inclusion of a canon of past heroes (92) and the impact of the emerging field of *zuan* (design; 94). He also incorporates recent research by Yurika Wakamatsu to suggest that the woman literati painter Okuraha Seiko (1837–1913) may have had a gender-neutral identity, hinting at the complex laws and norms surrounding gender in the Meiji period (1868–1912). This final section is cleverly written, as Lippit concludes his discussion of Edo with a transition to Meiji, but does so by showing the continuity of artistic ideas, avoiding clichéd tropes of aesthetic decline or a total break in culture with the rapid changes of Meiji.

The second half of *Painting Edo* is devoted to Rachel Saunders’ essay “Birds, Flowers, and Botany in Sakai Hōitsu’s Pure Land Garden.” Taking the cycle of twelve paintings dating from ca. 1820–28 as a point of departure, Saunders’ presents a wealth of research on the artist, his training, living and working environment, visual milieu, and religious beliefs, incorporating the evolving field of Edo natural history and the intricate interplay of poetry and painting. Hōitsu is lesser known than some of his contemporaries, but has gained scholarly attention in the US in recent years.^[3] The essay starts by situating Hōitsu’s atelier within the city of Edo, and linking his surroundings to his bird-and-flower paintings. Continuing with a consideration of Hōitsu’s ties to the world of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters and how the poetry circles he engaged with there were visually connected to changes in the field of botanical study, Saunders gives readers insight into the complex world of Edo intellectual life through the varied symbols, signs, and word play found in paintings and prints of the era. She continues by discussing how Hōitsu, “set about painting himself into a new lineage by staging in Edo a performance of aesthetic kinship with Kyoto-born Ogata Kōrin” (114). Kōrin’s (1658–1716) famed 1709 pair of folding screens *Irises at Yatsushashi* had an influence on Hōitsu’s style and technique, which Saunders clearly explains for the reader. Hōitsu, in turn, staged a centennial memorial exhibition of Kōrin’s paintings in 1815 on the anniversary of the earlier artist’s death, publishing an accompanying “catalogue,” two events which helped to cement Kōrin in the art historical canon.

It is at this point that Saunders turns to Hōitsu’s bird-and-flower painting cycles, of which six complete groupings survive (120). The following two sections provide a detailed iconographical analysis of the paintings, including references to recent research and explanations of the rebuses and classical poetry references found within. She further details how Hōitsu’s cycles were different than the canonical bird-and-flower iconography that was established by Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241) in the thirteenth century. Saunders attributes the differences to Hōitsu’s interactions with the Western-influenced painting styles of the Akita Ranga school. From here she delves into the rich interplay of text and image found in Hōitsu’s later works, connecting these paintings to *haikai*, a form of linked verse seventeen-syllable poetry. Fascinatingly, she states that between the mid-seventeenth and mid-

nineteenth centuries “the number of season words multiplied six-fold, from around 600 to 3,500, introducing hundreds of new objects and phenomena, including plants, birds, and insects, to form a vast new reservoir of poetic topics” (133). Although no *haikai* are inscribed on Hōitsu’s later bird-and-flower paintings, and much of this linguistic word play is lost to us today, Saunders does a commendable job of resurrecting some of the meaning that was originally infused into these artworks.

Finally, she argues for the impact of printed natural history material on Hōitsu’s works, and provides a thorough discussion of the frog motif within his paintings as a means of summarizing many of her aforementioned arguments on poetry, global influences, and seasonality. The essay concludes by linking Hōitsu’s identity as a lay monk to his work as a painter and analyzing his aesthetic connections to Itō Jakuchū.

Hōitsu is best known as the first Edo Rinpa painter, but Saunders compellingly illuminates the multitude of concepts, beliefs, experiences, and inspiration from fellow artists that are found in his work. She presents a convincing analysis of the myriad cultural and aesthetic influences on the Pure Land Garden—this essay is densely packed with information—but while impeccably researched and exceedingly interesting, at times a more narrative flow or different organizational structure may have assisted the reader’s comprehension of this complex topic.

Both *Painting Edo: Selections from the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art* and *Catalogue of the Feinberg Collection of Japanese Art* are beautifully printed. For example, an illustration of Maruyama Ōkyo’s 1766 *Cranes and Pine* shows the intricate brushstrokes of the crane’s feathers and feet, the warp and weft of the silk visible in sharp detail (70–71).

The art of the Edo period is a popular topic, and *Painting Edo* builds upon a strong legacy of museum exhibitions on Edo painting held in the US. Together these two books provide a great resource for those interested in Edo painting. Lippit and Saunders’ essays skillfully introduce Edo painting while simultaneously complexifying it, and the catalogue presents detailed information and quality photographs documenting this fantastic collection.

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Notes

[1] Michelle Hartney, “The Other Audio Tour: The Truth Behind the Floating World,” <https://soundcloud.com/user-471450445/the-other-audio-tour-the-truth-behind-the-floating-world>.

[2] John T. Carpenter, *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012).

[3] Matthew McKelway, *Silver Wind: The Art of Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828)* (New York: Japan Society, 2012).