

Masami Teraoka



**WHEN PICTURES SPEAK:
THE WRITTEN WORD IN
JAPANESE ART
IN-FOCUS ROTATION THROUGH AUGUST 19,
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SF

248 Utah Street
SF, CA 94103
+ 415 399 1439

NY

313 W 14th Street 2F
New York, NY
By appointment only

WEB

www.cclarkgallery.com

Words and pictures are often combined in Japanese art, to celebrate poems and stories, express religious teachings, and comment on current events. Though not unique to Japan, the marriage of text and image has flourished there, finding relevance within each new generation of artists, writers, and patrons.

The paintings in *When Pictures Speak: The Written Word in Japanese Art* show the great historical and thematic range of this practice. The largest group of works, on the opposite wall, consists of pictures with texts from secular literature, especially Japanese poems (*waka*) in the style favored at the imperial court. Religious works are represented by ink paintings inscribed by Zen monks, narrative scrolls (*emaki*), and iconographic drawings (*zuzo*). The selections also include two examples of text and image in satire.

More than literal transcriptions of a story, pictures can amplify the meaning of a text with newly invented details or change the tone through stylistic means (for example, the choice of bold color versus sparse strokes of ink).

Similarly, inscriptions can complement the visual, adding not just stories or imagery, but also sensory elements like sound to the experience of looking. Calligraphic styles add their voices to the mix, as when dancing, rhythmic strokes are used for poems, or a more stately, formal style for an iconographic manual. As these examples show, words and pictures can be more eloquent together than apart.



Mistflowers, from *The Tale of Genji*, 1600-1700 (detail). Japan, Edo period (1615-1868). Album leaves, mounted on a handscroll; ink, colors, and gold on paper. Gift of the Walter and Phyllis Shorenstein Fund, B86D2.

The Tale of Genji, Japan's most famous novel, has been illustrated countless times since it was written around the year 1000. The two pages shown here come from a seventeenth-century album in which excerpts from the book's fifty-four chapters were paired with paintings.

The excerpt written on the right side in this example recounts an attempt by Prince Genji's son, Yugiri, to win the affections of an attractive young woman named Tamakazura. The scene is set during the mourning period following the death of Princess Omiya.

In the accompanying painting, Tamakazura pointedly turns away from Yugiri, rebuffing his unwanted advances.



One hand clapping, by Hakuin Ekaku (Japanese, 1685-1768). Hanging scroll; ink on paper. Gift from The Collection of George Gund III, 2016.53.

Zen Buddhists of the Rinzai school emphasize the use of koan, or paradoxical phrases, to try to free the mind from logical reasoning and thus promote enlightenment. An example is the famous koan devised by Hakuin Ekaku that asks students to accomplish a seemingly impossible task: to hear the sound of one hand clapping. On several occasions Hakuin painted the eccentric Chinese monk Budai, known as Hotei in Japanese, demonstrating the koan. In this version Hotei raises his right hand and gazes intently forward while balanced atop a bulging cloth sack.

An influential figure in the history of Zen Buddhism, Hakuin is admired for having revitalized the Rinzai school through teachings published during his lifetime. In the latter half of his life, Hakuin traveled far and wide and used lectures, sermons, paintings, and calligraphy to convey Zen insights to a broad cross section of the populace.



The bodhisattva Ashvaghosha (Memyo), from the scroll set Selections of Iconographic Drawings (Zuzosho), 1300-1300. Japan, Muromachi period (1392-1573). Handscroll segment mounted as a hanging scroll; ink and colors on paper. The Avery Brundage Collection, B64D1.

This sketch of the bodhisattva Ashvaghosha, known in Japanese as Memyo, comes from a set of handscrolls used by monks to study and transmit knowledge about the deities associated with Esoteric Buddhism. Memyo is known as a protector of sericulture, or the production of silk by raising silkworms. The painting shows the six-armed Memyo seated on a lotus pedestal atop a white horse. One hand holds a scale and others hold silk thread, a silk reel, and a sacred flame. Accompanying him are a groom and four female attendants labeled with names related to sericulture. At the left, a man dressed as a Chinese official approaches Memyo with his hands clasped in prayer.

Memyo appears to have originated as a Chinese folk deity that was later incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. The writing at the right side of the fragment is the last part of an accompanying text concerning Memyo.



Today's Special, 1982, by Masami Teraoka (Japanese, b. 1936). From the series 31 Flavors Invading Japan. Woodblock print; ink and colors on paper. Acquisition made possible by Richard Beleson and Kim Lam Beleson, 2004.22.

Contemporary artist Masami Teraoka often includes the written word in designs that pay sly homage to the tradition of Japanese actor and courtesan prints. In this image from the series "31 Flavors Invading Japan," a disheveled kimono-clad woman stretches her tongue to catch imminent drips from a two-scoop cone. The words at the top right give the titles "Ice cream and woman" and "A scene from today's life." To the right of the ice cream are the words "She's about to lick." The artist's signature appears at the lower left; inscriptions at the lower right identify the block carver and publisher.