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# Mad Arrangement of Haika Poets in Calligraphy and Painting (Haika shoga kyōdai)

Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III)

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Mad Arrangement of Haika Poets in Calligraphy and Painting (Haika shoga kyōdai)

**Artist/Maker:** Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III) (Artist)

**Born:** 1847 circa - 1847

**Object Type:** Graphics

**Materials:** Ink, Paper

**Technique:** Woodcut

**Measurements:** Image h. 314 x w. 239, support h. 347 x w. 259

**Inscription:** Haiku poem attributed to Chiyome

**Accession Number:** 41463

**Historic Period:** Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

**School/Style:** Utagawa School

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Actor Nakamura Utaemon IV as Genkurō from the popular drama ‘Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees’ (*Yoshitsune senbon zakura* 千本桜). Genkurō is a shape-shifting fox spirit that appears to Shizuka Gozen disguised as Yoshitsune’s retainer Satō Tadanobu. Mysteriously, Genkurō is summoned whenever Shizuka Gozen’s beats a treasured drum. The audience later learns that the magical drum is stretched with the hide of the fox spirit’s father.

This production of *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* was performed in the 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month of 1847 at the Kawarazaki Theatre with actor Onoe Baikō IV as Shizuka Gozen. [1] The double censor seals of Mera Ta’ichirō and Murata Sahei confirm that this print was issued in the period 1846-1852, and is likely to have been approved by censors in 1847-1848. [2]

The series, Haiku Poets in Calligraphy and Painting (*Haika shoga kyōdai*) by Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865) was jointly published by Ebisuya Shōshichi and Kobayashi Taijirō. [3] This 36-sheet series was issued in a period when censorship of actor prints was beginning to relax. Tokugawa officials had banned actor prints in the summer of 1842, however by 1847 kabuki-related prints featuring the faces of star actors had returned.

In order to avoid official reprisals and fines, the artist and publisher were careful not to name the actor in the print. When the design was issued, Nakamura Utaemon would have been instantly recognisable to his fans, accustomed to reading the stylized facial features or 'likenesses' (J. *nigao*) of kabuki actors. A previous owner of the print has pasted a vertical strip of paper to the sheet with the actor's name handwritten in black ink: 'Nakamura Utaemon' (中村 歌右衛門). [4]

Utaemon IV is depicted in heroic, red *kumadori* makeup, a voluminous wig, and distinctive costume. He wears a red kimono decorated with white Buddhist wheels (J. *rinpō*), its sleeves tied back with a purple and yellow twisted cord. This is the costume traditionally worn when performing the part of Genkurō in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura*.

The title of the series is printed in the top right corner of the sheet. To the left of the composition within a rectangular frame imitative of a poetry slip (J. *tanzaku*), appears a haiku poem in cursive script. The printed poem is attributed to the female poet, Chiyome, also known as 'Chiyo of Kaga' (1703-1775).

It reads:

An early cry

Of triumph

Could it be the bush warbler?

Uguisu ya

haya hitokoe no

shitarigao

In pairing actor and poem, the artist and publisher are likening the exultant call of the bush warbler to the melodious speech of Nakamura Utaemon. The poem also carries the connotations of 'fast utterance' (J. *haya hitokoe*) and 'a proud and self-satisfied attitude' (J. *shitarigao*), which possibly describe the actor's spoken delivery and proud manner.

Vanessa Tothill, May 2020

[1] Tsubaki Tei Bunko, Osaka Prefecture University (object number: tub03-049).

[2] Andreas Marks, *Publishers of Japanese Woodblock Prints: A Compendium* (Leiden; Boston: Hotei

Publishing, 2011), pp. 478-79; 110.

[3] Andreas Marks, *Japanese Woodblock Prints: Artists, Publishers and Masterworks 1680-1900* (Tokyo; Rutland; Vermont; Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), p. 290.

[4] An identical print without modifications is in the collection at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (object number: 11.25113).

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/217781/actor-nakamura-utaemon-iv-from-the-series-combined-pictures?ctx=9c66db37-59b7-4789-97d2-43413c3d491f&idx=13> [accessed 28 May 2020]

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## Further Reading

Andreas Marks, *Publishers of Japanese Woodblock Prints: A Compendium* (Leiden; Boston: Hotei Publishing, 2011)

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