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Shunga + Bijin-ga: Exploring Japanese Art



Synopsis

This book presents the Japanese art of Shunga and Bijin-ga from the mid 1700s to the mid 1950s. Shunga is Japanese for 'spring pictures' but means 'erotic art'. The translation of Bijin-ga is 'pictures of beautiful people' meaning women, commonly referred to as 'beauties'. There is a link between them, as both are sexual in nature, with many pictures being of courtesans, or women as subjects of desire. But there is a lot more to it than that! This is not an academic book but more a personal journey of discovery by an accidental collector of Japanese woodblock prints. Bob Bentley informs, entertains and hopefully inspires like-minded fellow travelers embarking on similar explorations. The illustrations show a fascinating culture which thrived in the period when Japan was isolated from the rest of the world up to a time when the style and beauty of its art eventually exploded into the Western imagination. Bob has acquired a number of rare and original prints, as well as the more affordable, including re-prints, some almost as wonderful. The book is based purely on his collection - with delicate prints reproduced in high quality - imperfections and all. Many are exquisite works of art. This is a demonstration of the art that many people can acquire - at one level or another. Although there may be several hand made prints available of the same image, no two are identical. In buying prudently, you will see how it is possible to enjoy originals of the greatest artists, alongside beautifully crafted reprints. Here is a real passion, expressed in clear language, demystifying a culture that has provided the world with some of the most glorious art that has ever been seen.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'This territory is a minefield, a jungle, but nonetheless wonderful to explore. Some people collect for

financial reasons, trading at the top end, where a very rare print might go for over \$5000. An old reprint hand made in exactly the same way and similarly aged can be extraordinarily inexpensive - often less than \$150 - suitable to adorn any living room, or bedroom!" This original print by Utamaro is from a famous series of twelve named 'Prelude to Desire' (1799) and the text on the print tells us she is a widow and he a married man. There is some mention of her 'pussy' but she wants him to 'get started quickly', wondering what attracts him as he has a fashionable wife at home - although she herself is wearing the latest style of striped robe. Prints like this tell us a lot about the sexual attitudes in Japanese society at the time. The goings-on in the 'pleasure quarters' are well illustrated in the small shunga publications which were the porn mags of their day. The first is a cover picture, deliberately innocuous to get past the censors, who generally only looked at the opening pages. These two prints (Utagawa School c.1860) are supreme in their detail for such small images. You can see where the Austrian artist, Gustav Klimt got his ideas.

Bob Bentley is a BAFTA award winning film director who, after directing a film about the famous print by Hokusai, 'The Great Wave', developed a love of Japanese woodblock prints that led to an extensive collection of Shunga and Bijin-ga art. He teaches film at a London University and enjoys collecting and also painting his own works. His previous book is "The Pleasure of Rope" which shows how Japanese rope bondage is practised in the modern day.

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