

UKIYO-E IN NEW ZEALAND

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I

The accumulation of art works, literature, and diverse cultural artefacts has occupied private and institutional interests since the beginning of the European colonisation of New Zealand. The collection of objects from international sources has been sustained alongside the development of the country's own cultural archives. In many instances, either through the offices of institutional frameworks like the British National Art-Collections Fund or through personal association, collections have focused on European and especially British objects. From the earliest days, however, New Zealand collecting interests appear also to have been much more catholic in nature, embracing works from the most diverse sources. One recurrent focus has been the collection of works of fine and decorative arts from Japan. In particular, there seems to have been a preference for the distinctive *ukiyo-e* — 'floating world pictures' — of Edo-period Japan (1603–1868). This field has occupied collectors intermittently from the earliest days to the present. One result of their interest has been the deposition of significant bodies of works into public collections in various parts of the country. This paper examines the history of these collections and their dispersal, the motives and contexts

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that seem to have underpinned their accumulation, and the implications these collections have for cultural and academic interests today.

The earliest collection of *ukiyo-e* seems to have been developed by Sir George Grey (1812–98) during the nineteenth century. Grey’s collection of diverse bibliographic materials—especially those with an interest in legislative history, natural science, and education—occupied him throughout his professional career. The legacy is the formation of two significant library collections: the earlier one in Capetown; the later one in Auckland. The New Zealand collection contains a small collection of *ukiyo-e*—thirty-seven items in total. Each of these items is in fact a small collection in itself—a bound album of polychrome woodblock prints or woodblock print illustrated literary works—so as a collection of individual illustrative works, the total number of pictorial compositions is much greater.

Grey’s *ukiyo-e* albums had been obtained not directly from Japan, but from the United States of America. Approximately thirty had been sent from San Francisco by one Robert J. Creighton in 1881. Others were added from a merchant, a Mr. Hunt:

In the same year (1881) Robert J. Creighton, future biographer of Grey’s namesake Sir George Grey, Bt., sent from San Francisco a parcel of some thirty Japanese books and an article about the Boers, which was ‘dashed off for the information of our American readers, who know next to nothing of South Africa.’ The Japanese books, many of which are concertina-shaped and brightly hand-coloured, cover topics such as occupations in Japan and old allegorical fables. The provenance of these scarce nineteenth-century productions was documented by Grey: “I forwarded, per Mr Atkinson, New Zealand mail agent, a parcel of Japanese books to your address, at Mr Walworth’s request. I hope you receive them in due course. Mr Walworth has returned to England.” Mr Walworth had spent a few days at Kawau. Some Japanese books were also given to me by Mr Hunt, a merchant of Japan.’ (Kerr 245)

As Donald Kerr has noted, the *ukiyo-e* works constitute something of a curiosity in the Grey collection. They are nevertheless an interesting group, whose diversity reflects the range of occupations of the *ukiyo-e* artists themselves, and in total they reveal much of the distinctive character of the *ukiyo-e* project. Grey’s own catalogue list (Fig. 1) for the works identifies them thus:

1. Collection of beautiful women
2. Guide to painting by Hokusai a famous artist
3. Guide to painting by Sada-hide—Part 2

4. Guide to Painting by Sada-hide—Part 1 also Part 3
5. Biographical story of Kanshidjo who introduced Chinese characters into Japan
6. Novel for people of a low class.
7. a story of a bad woman.
8. Japanese novel of low life.
9. Stories of two couples of men, one good, the other bad.
10. Story of a female thief.
11. Story of a famous thief.
12. Story of an actor.
13. Productions of Japan Vol-1
14. Productions of Japan Vol-2
15. Collections of Hokusai's pictures.
16. Picture of Kiho
17. *no entry*
18. Translation of Sai.ye.ki. an account of a monkey who went as a protector for a monk who had been sent to India, by an ancient Chinese dynasty to collect Buddah [sic] books.
19. a guide to painting
20. a story to teach children to love their country and to be kind to parents.
21. Pictorial history for children.
22. Story of a Eunuch.
23. A story of a sparrow.
24. Different playthings for children.
25. A story of a Cat.
26. A story of a Rat. And ten other small books.—
37. in all +

The surgeon of the Japanese man of war penciled their titles in them—
+

There are two Nos. 4²

Grey's collection was comprehensive enough to illustrate a number of the defining characteristics of *ukiyo-e*. These works can be identified almost exclusively with a single time period—that of the government of Japan by the Tokugawa shoguns (1603–1867)—and place—Edo (today's Tokyo), the birthplace of the 'floating world' demi-monde of brothels, kabuki, fashions, and literary entertainments of a newly developed urban, and urbane, social environment. *Ukiyo-e* can be defined also by its preoccupation with the representation of genre subjects, scenes from the everyday lives of the people

² The transliteration and punctuation here are consistent with those of Grey's handwritten catalogue entries.

of the city and its rural environs. These subjects are illustrated in volumes 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of Grey's catalogue. The scenes they contain are infused with the sensibilities of life on the streets: urbane, earthy, gritty and immediate, unaffected representations of the manners and mores of their human subjects. These works include associated subjects from everyday life—catalogue numbers 13 and 14, for example, are more correctly titled *Boon of the Mountains* and *Boon of the Sea*—proud representations of local produce from the brush of Hiroshige III.

These volumes also reflect *ukiyo-e*'s preoccupation with printed matter, especially with the medium of the woodblock print which was developed to a state of perfection during this period. The various volumes include a range of published formats, including compositions combining images and text; albums of collected pictures, like the 'Collection of beautiful women' listed as catalogue entry number 1; illustrated novels or *kibyoshi*; and *gafu*, or books of instruction for the amateur artist (entries 2, 3, 4, and 15). The textual examples include volumes conveying themes from the literary, historical, and mythological heritage of Japan. One example is that listed at entry number 18: 'Sai ye ki'. This title (Cantonese Sau yau gei; pinyin Xīyóujì; Wade-Giles Hsiyu-chi) is one of the enduring classics of Chinese literature, *Journey to the West*. It is a fictional account of the Buddhist monk Xuánzàng (Tripitaka) and his disciples Sūn Wùkōng, Zhū Bājiè, and Shā Wùjīng in their pilgrimage to India to obtain Buddhist sutras during the T'ang dynasty. During the twentieth century it has been popularised for international audiences in translation and in film, television, *manga* and *anime* versions in variations of the title *Monkey*: the tale of Monkey, Sandy, Piggy, and Tripitaka, the boy monk who brought the Buddhist scriptures from the west to the east (India to China).

Some of these volumes, again consistently with the project of *ukiyo-e*, celebrate the earthy or risqué. Entry 7, 'Story of a Bad Woman', is in fact an illustrated edition of Ihara Saikaku's *ukiyo-zōshi* ('floating world novel') *Kōshoku ichidai onna*, *Life of an Amorous Woman*. Despite the judgmental implications of Grey's transliteration of the title, Saikaku's text is not really salacious. His story, and so many others he wrote during the Edo period, is really more of a cautionary tale. Late in the novel he describes its main protagonist:

The heroine, now deserted by her youth, lives in lonely squalor. One night she has a hideous vision of all the children to whom she should have given birth, 'each wearing a hat in the form of a lotus leaf and each one stained with blood from the waist down'. On the right we see her neighbours, three elderly, bedizened harlots; they are having a drink of salted, hot water to fortify themselves after the night's exertions. (Ihara 196–97)

As with Grey's collection, the context of early interests in the southern regions seems to have been within the broader collection of a wide range of bibliographic, archival materials, cultural artefacts, and curiosities. Two early Dunedin figures appear to have collected ukiyo-e. In the case of Willi Fels (1858–1946), the ukiyo-e works formed a tiny, insignificant interest within the broad spectrum of an immense collection that included Māori and Pacific artefacts; European glass and ceramics; items representing the history of the subcontinent, Persia, Tibet, Japan, and South East Asia; and Greek, Roman, Papal, and English coins. Eventually, Fels was to bequeath over 80,000 pieces to the Otago Museum, and many more were dispersed within his family. At least three of the ukiyo-e works from his collection (one each by Hiroshige, Kunisada, and Masayoshi) came to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery through Charles Brasch (1900–73) in 1973. The works are recorded as having been left to him by Fels, his grandfather, in 1946.

Brasch's own collection was also collated within the broader context of collecting printed materials. In his case, besides those acquired, like the Fels ukiyo-e, through family connections, the context was that of substantial collections of New Zealand drawings, paintings, and prints; Piranesi engravings; books and other printed media. Brasch's collection was dispersed, in some instances as personal gifts, more substantially as an archival bequest to the University of Otago, and in the bequest in 1973 of ten works to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Dunedin's other great literary and archival benefactor, Dr Thomas Morland Hocken (1836–1910), appears also to have accumulated *ukiyo-e*, but we are unable today to gauge precisely the scale or scope of the works he acquired. This part of his collection no longer exists, and there is no formal written record of its earlier existence. Hocken's *ukiyo-e* are known only through anecdotal evidence. It would seem that during the organisation of Hocken's bequest to the University of Otago, Dr Skinner (1886–1978) came across the collection of *ukiyo-e*—a group of *shunga* or 'spring pictures', highly explicit scenes of sexual activities. Skinner was concerned at the legal implications of retaining them in a public collection: the works were offensive, and the archive was accessible to the public. Skinner proposed selling them in Sydney. Professor Benham (1860–1950) suggested that this would be legally problematic: presumably, the sale of works would contravene the conditions of the bequest. Skinner burned the collection.³ The implication of Dr Skinner's decision would seem to be that the *shunga* were considered to be pornographic and socially unacceptable, and presumably

³ This account was confirmed by Professor Parsonson, latterly of the History Department, University of Otago, in an interview with DB in June 2003. Professor Parsonson received the account from Dr Skinner. However prurient their actions may seem today, they were quite consistent with other instances, including, for example, the destruction of Richard Burton's erotica collections by his wife Isabella.

retaining them might have been potentially injurious to the public good. This judgement may seem incomprehensible in New Zealand today, or even culturally insensitive, but it is important to remember that Japanese audiences would, by and large, have shared Skinner's evaluation. *Shunga* were considered at best vulgar, more usually as obscene, and banned by the government throughout the period of their manufacture in Tokugawa Japan. Even today uncensored *shunga* are thought to be obscene in Japan and are rarely seen outside of academic texts or some museum displays.

Like those of Grey and Hocken, other collections of *ukiyo-e* formed in Dunedin, or by collectors connected to Dunedin, were assembled within the context of much broader interests. The collecting interests of the Theomin family were, like those of Willi Fels, of catholic, international scope. Their acquisitions, which now form a significant part of those on public exhibition at their stately home of Olveston, included fine examples of Japanese armory, porcelain, and decorative arts. They seemed, however, to include only one example of *ukiyo-e*: Watanabe Seitei's *Seitei kachō gafu*, *Seitei's Drawing Book of Flowers and Birds* (1890), now in the Special Collections, University of Otago.

Members of the locally connected De Beer family—Dora, Mary, and Esmond (Esmond 1895–1990)—gifted a significant body of fifty works to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1982. Their gift included important works by Hokusai, Hiroshige, Harunobu, Utamaro, and artists of the Utagawa School (Toyokuni, Kunisada, etc.). In their case the collecting context was that of the privileged connoisseur, and the works formed part of a richly varied collection of European prints and paintings, together with a fine collection of rare books and incunabula, much of which is now housed in the Special Collections, University of Otago.

Ironically perhaps, the aftermath of World War II provided a new impetus for the collection of *ukiyo-e* in New Zealand. The collections assembled by Fred Staub, Frank Shurrock, and Keith Mossheim in 1948 formed the core of a major sale of *ukiyo-e* in Christchurch in the same year. Frank Shurrock (1887–1977) had trained before the war years at the Chester School of Art and the Royal College of Art at a time when the European fashion for Japonisme was still strong. From 1923 he was Master of Sculpture at the Canterbury College School of Art, from which he retired in 1948. Fred Staub was a student and subsequently a practicing associate of Shurrock. Keith Mossheim was an Officer in Charge of the Education Corps, in J-Force. Mossheim's language knowledge and proximity to a source of *ukiyo-e*—then still very cheap commodities in Japan—and Shurrock and Staub's passion and expertise combined in the assembly of a large number of works in Christchurch. A significant proportion of the collection was exhibited in the rooms of the YMCA. The works apparently held some appeal in Christchurch academic circles, and the entire exhibition sold in

three to four days. The remaining works provided the core of collections assembled by both Shurrock and Staub, now housed as the F. Shurrock/F. Staub loan collection at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Eighty-four works are held on loan there, with further works retained by family members. These collections are especially rich in nineteenth-century woodblock prints by Hokusai, Hiroshige, and a broad range of Utagawa School artists (Staub).

Like Keith Mossheim, Ronald Stevens Munro (d. 1992) served with J-force and assembled a significant collection of prints, together with other decorative arts objects. Munro had been a teacher, and his curriculum had included the teaching of art. Again Munro's purchases seem to have centred on nineteenth-century works. They included thirty-six of Hokusai's Fuji views, thirty-four of Hiroshige's views of Edo (Fig. 2), others by Hiroshige II, forty genre scenes by Shōsei Ikkei, an Utamaro, and a variety of later Utagawa school works by Kunisada, Chikanobu, and Kunichika. The collections were gifted to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1993 by his son, Andrew Munro.

Other substantial collections of *ukiyo-e* have been assembled elsewhere in New Zealand. In Canterbury, for example, a number of individual and family interests seem to have coincided with those of Shurrock, Staub, and Mossheim. The McArthur family collection was so substantial that its dispersal at auction took two entire days in the mid-1980s. Other family collections include the Kinsey collections, those of Mr and Mrs A. A. G. Reed, and the G. H. Christie collection. Many of the Christie collection works still bear the pencilled register of earlier sales through Sotheby's during the 1920s and 1930s, and collection stamps of important early European collectors like Hanns Crzellitzer. The most substantial of these collections seems to have been that of Justice Sir Erima Northcroft (n.d.), a patron of the Canterbury Museum. Northcroft's interests were extensive, embracing both Chinese and Japanese arts. His Japanese collection included large numbers of *ukiyo-e*, with important examples of fine *kakemono* by Hokusai, Chikanobu, and others, and large numbers of woodblock prints by a diverse range of artists. Northcroft's personal collection formed the core of the important exhibition of Chinese and Japanese art objects displayed at the Durham Street Art Gallery in Christchurch between the 21st of April and the 17th of May 1952 (Northcroft).

In Auckland an extensive collection was assembled by a Captain George Humphreys-Davies (n.d.). The works were exhibited there between the 20th of September and the 10th of October 1934, and are now housed in the collections of the Auckland City Art Gallery. Like Northcroft in Christchurch, Humphreys-Davies developed his interest in and collection of Chinese and Japanese art in conjunction with a corresponding active interest in the development of museum collections. He was a Member of the

Museums Association, London, and an Associate of the Musée Cernuschi, Paris. By 1937, when he edited the catalogue for the travelling exhibition *Chinese Art including many Examples from Famous Collections, Exhibited in New Zealand, 1937*, he had been appointed honorary curator of the Oriental collections at the War Memorial Museum, Auckland (Humphreys-Davies).⁴

II

What motivated the formation of these collections? There seem to have been various rationales for the collection of *ukiyo-e* in New Zealand. Most of them seem remote from those of the original Japanese collectors during the Edo period itself. *Ukiyo-e* had been barely considered as art works in their original contexts. Woodblock prints in particular were ephemera, cheap throwaway multiples occupied with the promotion of fashion or the popular theatre as much as they were concerned with aesthetic interests. They were collected, assembled into albums or boxed sets of serially published works, but they certainly held little of the cachet of the more traditionally oriented projects of Kanō or Tosa school painters, or the fine arts of calligraphy and ink painting.

From the first contact with Western visitors, however, *ukiyo-e*, especially woodblock prints, seemed to hold a special interest, and were collected by many, as curiosities perhaps, but more obviously as pictorial documentation or records of their visits. For the earliest travellers, during Japan's apparent two hundred and fifty years of seclusion, *meisho-ki* landscape/genre pictures of well-known places by artists like Hokusai and Hiroshige played a key role in constructing western conceptions of the Japanese urban and rural environments. Hiroshige's *Suruga-chō* (Fig. 2) is one print from a much larger series of over one hundred views of popular recreational, religious, and business areas in and around Edo—now Tokyo—the thriving new capital of Japan. His high viewpoint allows the inclusion of the regional landmark, the ubiquitous Mt Fuji, and a view right down one of Edo's principal trading streets.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan entered a period of more vigorous interaction with the West in a range of spheres: diplomatic, trading, scientific and technological, and academic. The American academic Ernest Francisca Fenollosa (1853–1908) was initially brought to Tokyo to

⁴ A suggestion of the roles of Humphreys-Davies and his wife in the curation of this exhibition is contained in two letters from Mr. George Eumortolopoulos in London: the first, dated 21.VII.36, invites Mrs. Humphreys-Davies to tea to see what he proposed lending for the exhibition; the second, dated 10.III.37, thanks Captain Humphreys-Davies for sending a copy of the exhibition catalogue and reviews ('2 Notes').

teach philosophy. Very quickly, however, he was appointed as an adviser to the government on cultural properties. His responsibility to his hosts was manifest in the publication of his own view of Japanese art history, his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912). His retrieval of art treasures within Japan was, however, accompanied by a corresponding degree of self-interest. Fenollosa became a voracious collector and exporter of Japanese art works, and his aesthetic and academic interests were eventually to contribute significantly to the development of a vigorous market for these treasures in the United States of America.

Here in New Zealand, Sir George Grey's early collection seemed to have more to do with the former motive, that of constructing something of a conceptual picture of an otherwise mysterious domain. Though these works were apparently an accidental or chance acquisition, otherwise quite incidental to the whole of Grey's collections, they offered some evidence of the cultural character of an otherwise little-known land and as such were able to satisfy a broader curiosity about the world at large. On a personal level, this curiosity was one dimension of Grey's polymathic capacity manifest in the most catholic of collecting agendas. Equally though, his collections reveal one important facet of the colonial processes in which he was so intimately involved. The development of archives was closely linked to the role of knowledge in establishing power relations in the new world. The collecting activities were instrumental in establishing world views that rationalised and justified colonisation, and lead to the development of libraries, schools, and universities as institutions of control. Grey's library legacies in Capetown and New Zealand paralleled similar examples developed by other figures elsewhere—most notably on the subcontinent. Coincidentally though, Grey's collection displays something of an understanding of the functional rationales of *ukiyo-e* as communicative devices, components in the broader publishing context of printed broadsheet, book, or album.

Similar motives seem to have underpinned the collections of Fels and Hocken, though the focus of Hocken's attention on the *shunga* is more difficult to explain. Certainly, he collected other Japanese documents. The Hocken collections catalogue contains entries for seventeen titles, comprising thirty-six volumes, on specifically Japanese themes. Subjects range from Buddhism and archaeology to fire walking and singing, though most are records of diplomatic engagements or transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan or the Japan Society, or dictionary references for Japanese language translation (Trimble, *Catalogue* 313–15). The majority of these works were European publications however. The *shunga* were more unusual, and might have been an opportunist acquisition, perhaps during one of Hocken's two visits to Japan during his world tour between 1901 and 1904. It seems doubtful that his interest in these objects was particularly salacious;

despite Dr Skinner's misgivings, the images, stylistic character, and context of these works seem too distantly removed from Hocken's own world to function in this manner. Like Grey's, Hocken's collections embrace omnivorous, widely varying collecting interests, generated through a consciousness of occupying a place in an adolescent nation:

The purpose of the Hocken Collection being historical, the scope of it is very wide: for every variety of every political, social, theological, economical, or intellectual movement of the country contributes to its history. The meaning of the word history is given as a knowledge of facts and events: but most of the historical books we read are mere story-books: to get at true history we must have access to the documents. This being what Dr Hocken endeavoured to give us in regard to the history of New Zealand. And as the history of New Zealand has important off-shoots in the histories of Australia and Polynesia, the Collection contains many books and papers regarding those regions. Japan is represented by many volumes, because of its certain future activities in the Pacific. (Trimble, *Dr. Hocken* 3)

For these men, knowledge was collected in order to make sense of a society in a state of flux, not simply for personal reasons, but because they saw the fundamental value of the archives they developed for the community itself. The validity of this rationale is borne out in the way both men disposed of their collections. They gave them to the public, for the public good, to establish foundations for the legislative, academic, and intellectual growth of the nation as a whole. As Trimble acknowledges, for Hocken Japan's presence in the Pacific region had important implications for constructing a world view from New Zealand.

This happy correspondence of philanthropy and scholarship may have informed the burgeoning international passions for Japanese art that followed the Meiji Restoration. This was the period when the great American collections were formed; collections that survive today in Boston and other centres. Fenollosa's early interests seem to have served those of his Japanese hosts, but these commitments soon seemed to blur with those of self-interest and commercial gain as he began to contribute to the formation of the great auction sales catalogues for the disposal of Japanese art treasures back in America.

The complexity of these interests can be seen in the passion for *ukiyo-e* of a figure like the architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959). On the face of things, Wright was simply an avid collector, but, as Julia Meech notes,

Wright interacted with Asian art on many levels: as a successful dealer; as a modernist inspired by Japanese graphic design; as a

teacher lecturing apprentices at ‘print parties’ and staging print exhibitions in the mid-west; and as the typically compulsive collector, unable to restrain himself, always obsessively acquisitive. (16)

Wright’s trading was later to degenerate, however, to embrace the sale of works of dubious origin and even outright fakes, singular profiteering, and poor judgements of authenticity: ‘Taken as a whole, this is an amazing saga of greed, rivalry, double-cross, devious dealings, arson, murder, infidelity and acquisition fever’ (Meech 16).

Like Wright’s collection in America, that of the Theomin family in Dunedin was nurtured in conjunction with the development of international entrepreneurial engagements in China and Japan. The armoury collection, the porcelain, and other artefacts form tangible records of Theomin’s own travels; some were purchased during those journeys; others, accumulated through diplomatic exchange or gift. Oddly, given the family’s obvious interest in things Japanese, their collection seems to have contained few examples of *ukiyo-e*. Those they did own had little to do with their commercial interests. Dorothy Theomin’s copy of Watanabe Seitei’s *gafu* (drawing book) of birds, plants, and insects does not really fit within this context at all: it was a school prize.

The collection of Japanese prints in Europe, particularly in Paris, has often been linked to the birth of modernist painting there. In some ways the encounter of the New Zealand art world with *ukiyo-e* during the early to middle twentieth century was not dissimilar to that of Parisian artists in the 1870s. Woodblock printing, and printmaking in general, had absorbed the developing schools of art in Britain, and the La Trobe scheme teachers had imported much of this interest to New Zealand with them. The Japanese prints demonstrated an apparent focus on decorative interaction of line, colour, and pattern rather than on representation, and combined this formal preoccupation with a corresponding respect for exquisitely fine craftsmanship. They were, for a generation of teachers and students imbued with the formalist frameworks established by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, the manifestation of an art form defined by the qualities and conditions of its medium. Hence, for the young Fred Staub, it wasn’t ‘names’ or any sense of the history of *ukiyo-e* that informed his collecting, so much as its simple appeal to the eye—albeit an appeal informed philosophically through his associations with Bernard Leech and Frank Shurrock (Staub).

Significantly, this encounter was with style and craft, rather than with meaning or socio-cultural function. The appreciation of *ukiyo-e* during this period was developed in almost complete ignorance of the historical and cultural contexts that had informed the original development of the form, or of the complex and subtly interwoven networks of meaning that underpinned their iconographic functions. It is significant that Staub, Shurrock, and Ronald Munro were all teachers, and *ukiyo-e* could be embraced into the

pedagogic constructs of their art programmes in New Zealand schools of art and secondary schools. Alternatively though, for those who had visited Japan, as Staub, Mossheim, and Munro had, these prints reflected the world they found there, as remnants of past art traditions that still survived at that time in the *ie* art training workshops of the day. These visitors seem to have collected examples from every sphere of the *ukiyo-e* repertoire: actor and *kabuki* prints, courtesans and scenes of the Yoshiwara brothel districts, genre pictures, and landscape compositions. For most visitors though, landscapes were the most popular subjects. It is really no accident that Hiroshige and Hokusai (in their original editions or as reprints or copies of these) featured so frequently on the traveller's shopping list. Compositions like Hiroshige's view over Edo offered reasonably faithful illustrations of a Japanese scene still visible, if rapidly changing, in post-war occupied Japan. In this sense these prints functioned precisely as *meisho-ki* (pictures of famous places) had for their original Japanese audiences, as souvenir representations, 'post-card' records of their travels. In this way their collections seem quite consistent with patterns established by earlier European visitors to Japan, travellers like von Seibold or Kaempfer, for whom these same subjects had established a medium through which they could communicate their own experiences to audiences on the other side of the world.

For collectors like Charles Brasch and the de Beer family, collecting *ukiyo-e* was really just one dimension of a broader programme of connoisseurship, the realisation of their own scholarship and taste in the literary and artistic domains through the accumulation of the refined and esoteric. In this sense these figures were continuing in the scholar/collector tradition established by Fenollosa, in which learning and refinement informed the distinctive taste of the cognoscenti. *Ukiyo-e* were among the more elegantly attractive artefacts from the East; owning these works suggested being party to delicate mysteries of exotic climes, and so formed an esoteric mark of their own exceptionality.

Public interest in these collections of Japanese art works (and of Chinese works as well) was evident when they circulated in major exhibitions from the 1930s to the 1950s. While interest was sustained through this period, the motives for that attention changed dramatically from the prewar period to the World War II aftermath. During the mid-1930s, for example, the admiration for these cultural worlds was clearly stated in the introductory notes to one of those exhibitions:

Why should we study Chinese art?

First, because it manifests a great civilization—one which has lasted continuously for over 3,000 years and has ruled the lives of countless

millions, probably more than a fifth of mankind. The very immensity of this influence constitutes a claim to attention.

Secondly, this civilization and the art which typifies it are not so aloof and remote as some of us believe. The notion that until recent centuries China has remained a secluded land, cut off from outside communication, is a fallacy. Evidence to the contrary is accumulating, and it shows clearly that from the earliest times China did not develop her culture alone and unaided, while we in the West have to acknowledge indebtedness to China. Remember that China and Europe are not geographically separated, although they lie at the extremes of a vast continent. No barrier obstructed the passage of peoples and ideas, to and fro, across the Northern Steppe, which stretches from the Carpathians almost to the Pacific. We do not yet know when the movements started; but, within historical memory, before the beginnings of our era, trade in jade, silk and horses, and the enterprise of missionary Buddhists quickened intercourse between East and West. During the last 2,000 years contacts have become increasingly numerous. In short, China's civilization and ours are related, though distantly, and for that reason alone we must regard her art as something that concerns us.

For New Zealanders, Chinese art may be said to offer a special interest, because of certain similarities with Maori ornament. Here is a promising field for research, which might reveal fresh clues to the great enigmas of both Maori and Chinese origins.

My last reason why Chinese art should be studied is the one most likely to appeal to the majority. It is the admirable and vital quality of the art itself. No estimate of so vast a theme can be attempted profitably in a brief foreword. Nor can specific allusion be made to the numerous and diverse objects which, with public spirit and enthusiasm, Captain G. A. Humphreys-Davies has brought together in order to provide a representative exhibition. The objects will speak for themselves, and may they serve not only as an aesthetic delight, but also as means for understanding a great and ancient race. (Professor W. Perceval Yetts, qtd. in Humphreys-Davies v)

By the 1950s, however, admiration had given way to expediency or necessity:

Since our grandfathers came to our small country we have for the most part been detached from the great events of the wider world. Recently

and dramatically it has become far otherwise. No longer may we be unconcerned. At this moment the world is passing through an unhappy period of international constraint and distrust. We in New Zealand, because of our proximity to this turbulence as it affects Asia, are forced to apply ourselves to a study of the Orient. That study engages the attention of those especially concerned with the political, the economic and the military consequences of our nearness to Eastern Asia. Should we allow that study to be thus confined?

If we are to live in friendship with those countries which modern conditions of travel and communications have made our neighbours then we should assume the duties of neighbours and seek to learn what we may of their peoples. We should study their ways of thought, their fears and their hopes, their need of help from us and our need of help from them. We are a young community. They are infinitely old. With the confidence, perhaps the overconfidence, of our youthful outlook we may see much in them we think should be improved. At the same time there should be found much of benefit to ourselves. Already we know something, although little, of the accumulated wisdom of these philosophic peoples. Much of this is still to be learned. As they have their stored treasures of the mind so have they also beauties as of the creative arts. Some of this, too, is known to us but again there is much more to know.

Those who are responsible for this exhibition of oriental art offer to help us widen our knowledge of these people beyond matters of trade and politics. This handbook and the works to which it refers is an invitation to us to seek to join our oriental neighbours in thought by the study of their things of beauty, the products of their past and of their present. Thus may we be placed upon the path leading to understanding from which alone can grow trust and friendship. (Northcroft 3)

III

As the early collections of *ukiyo-e* were formed, their impact was narrow, confined to the relatively small groups who had immediate access to them. These would have included the politically privileged circles of Grey's world and the socially privileged milieu of the Theomins. Indeed, in some instances the exotic, esoteric character of the collections themselves confirmed that elite status. In each case though, the artefacts they accumulated became a part of the broader cognitive framework that informed their world views. As

collections like those of Willi Fels moved into the public domain, they became a part of the rich fabric that could inform broader understandings of the world. This transfer was slow, however, where works remained in family hands through subsequent generations before being gifted, bequeathed, or sold to institutional interests.

During the twentieth century, where collections were assembled by artists and members of art-related circles, their impact was a little more immediate. Collections of *ukiyo-e* formed by artists and teachers during the 1930s and the post-war years did contribute to developments in art practice and education. The La Trobe scheme teachers and other twentieth-century European artist visitors had expanded the scope of visual art repertoires beyond their earlier focus on drawing, design, and painting. Now they embraced sculptural modelling, printmaking, and decorative crafts in ways that reflected the increasingly catholic (though still largely utilitarian) curriculum of British schools of art and design.

The circulation of *ukiyo-e* had significant consequences for the New Zealand arts environment. In the broader sense, the finely crafted and attractively decorative *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints confirmed European trends by providing tangible evidence of the potential for the elevation of utilitarian crafts to fine arts status. In a more practical sense, *ukiyo-e* suggested alternative technical pathways for printmakers. The procedures employed by artists like E. Mervyn Taylor (1906–64) had been informed by European convention. The raised surface of the finely cut woodblock was rolled with a single colour, usually black, of oil-based ink and transferred to paper to create monochromatic impressions. Japanese examples now offered artists a polychrome option. They employed a multi-block process in which a single colour was printed from each block in a layered succession of different colour impressions. A final black-printed key block provided the contours and linear details. They also employed softer transparent water-based pigment layers which could be manipulated to produce a broader range of visual effects than the European processes. The result was the development of greater delicacy, subtlety, and complexity of colour relations in their pictorial compositions.

This multi-block polychrome method was adopted by the Dunedin artist/teacher Robert Donn (n.d.; in New Zealand from 1921) to print the small English village scene reproduced in Fig. 3.⁵ In this classroom demonstration piece, which has survived in several semi-printed states, Donn has used at least eight separate colour blocks, together with a range of sophisticated Japanese printing techniques. Like the later master craftsmen of *ukiyo-e*, he has overlaid some blocks to produce complex hues, used coarse

⁵ Robert Donn was Senior Lecturer in Art at the Dunedin Training College from 1922 to 1932.

brush effects to create an atmospheric sky, and employed the *bokashi* gradation of pigment, as in the roof, to create a softly curved surface.

The versatility afforded by these technical effects appealed to artist-designers like Eileen Mayo (1906–94, Fig. 4), for whom the Japanese-type polychrome woodblock became a mainstream medium. Its attractive pictorial possibilities appealed also to artist specialists in other media. Earlier, in a particularly pointed display of his personal commitment to *ukiyo-e*, the sculptor Frank Shurrock had employed the polychrome Japanese-style woodblock print process in his 1914 self-portrait in the rather affected pose and costume of a *kabuki* actor (Stocker plate i).

For Mayo, as for many other artists whose oeuvre encompassed both the personal project and employment in the world of ‘commercial art’ or graphic design, *ukiyo-e* offered an attractive source of design devices sympathetic to both the craft and the commercial print processes of their day. The combinations of planes of flat colour and patterned surface, rhythmic, linear contour, and shallow space compositions were immediate and decorative. They dominated poster and illustrative design during the 1930s and war years and retained their popularity even to the 1960s. In Mayo’s earlier work, multi-block printing methods offered ample scope for an experimentally inventive investigation of the print process. Through it she was able to explore the pictorial potentials of transparent pigment overlay and textural modulation of the printing block surface she had drawn from the examples of the virtuoso craftsmen of the later nineteenth-century *ukiyo-e*. Her compositions were suffused with the delicate rhythmic modulations earlier Japanese artists like Suzuki Harunobu or Kitagawa Utamaro had employed in the contours of flowing kimono or the movement of flowing branches or streams. What was particularly interesting with Mayo was the way she extended the visual character of the layered block modes into other media like silkscreen, linocut, and even gouache. In the silkscreen print *Black Swans*, she has used the screen-printing technique to reproduce the effects of layered transparent pigment—most notably in the overlay of translucent grey-green pigment over the lower body of the foreground swan. The gently rhythmic movement and shallow spatial field are consistent with block-printed models, and the finely textured surfaces of the black feathers even reproduce the precise incisions of the Japanese block-carver’s knife.

Significantly though, Shurrock, Mayo, and Donn had all acquired their knowledge of Japanese methods and idioms earlier, within the European context of their own training. For Donn and Mayo in particular, Japanese elements were assimilated with those from a number of other sources, including art deco, art nouveau, and late-modernist commercial design idioms. For New Zealand artists, the acquisition was to be at second hand, as the European artists came to the country to teach or work professionally as

artists. The direct impact of Japanese art had by then become moderated by or confused with other stylistic idioms.

The longer term legacy of the adoption of Japanese printing procedures was eventually realised in the works of some members of the generation of specialist print artists that developed during the 1960s and 1970s for whom the colour relief print became a key medium. Besides its popularity as a medium for the professional artist or designer, the multi-block polychrome print, based very much on the Japanese model, was to become standard fare for students studying in the schools of art in the main centres. In the years following the Second World War, nurtured very much by the driving forces of Gordon Tovey (1901–74) and Clarence Beeby (1902–98), visual arts education boomed in New Zealand. The syllabus educators developed, while carefully non-prescriptive in its nature, was broad in its range, and included printmaking, textiles, and three-dimensional arts and crafts. The teacher training environments they developed—especially the visual arts third-year specialist course at the Dunedin Teachers College—nurtured the development of a generation of artists and artist-teachers like Marilynn Webb, for whom the polychrome relief print was to become a central focus. In the subsequent transposition of these skills to primary and secondary school classrooms, colour printmaking became an enduring component in young peoples' art experiences. Its presence, alongside the other arts and crafts in the curriculum of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, did much to shape the way the New Zealand public conceived a broadly based domain for the visual arts that survives today.

The early collections of Japanese art in New Zealand have a tangible presence today in public collections throughout the country. In Auckland, for example, a significant collection totalling 256 pieces was deposited in the Auckland City Art Gallery; the collection included some twentieth-century and some three-dimensional works. A significant proportion of these was purchased by the Mackelvie Trust following the exhibition of works in Auckland from the 20th of September to the 10th of October 1934, arranged by Capt. G. A. Humphreys-Davies. The collection is diverse, but is especially rich in Utagawa school artists, especially Toyokuni, Kuniyoshi, Yoshitora, and Hiroshige. The Grey volumes are held in the Special Collections, Auckland City Library. Though they have yet to be fully catalogued, an initial survey verifies that almost all of the works are ukiyo-e, mostly from the late-Edo or early-Meiji periods. A smaller number are Chinese in origin.

The Canterbury Museum has received approximately 1,000 works. Though loosely arranged in groups according to artist or type, these works are yet to be formally catalogued. Almost all are *ukiyo-e kakemono* paintings ('hanging thing'—scroll paintings), *sumi-e* (ink paintings), and woodblock prints. Like the Auckland holdings the group is diverse, but is especially rich

in Utagawa actor prints by Kuniyoshi, Toyokuni I, and Kunisada (Toyokuni III). It also includes prints by Eizan and Eishi; paintings by Chikanobu, Hokusai, and Eishi; and substantial collections of landscape prints by Andō Hiroshige and his successors. These collections include significant numbers of ‘later’ impressions, especially by Utamaro and Harunobu. Of a group of 269 works exhibited in 1952, approximately one-third are identified as re-cut reprints (Northcroft 33–35).

Interestingly, a number of prints from the Christchurch Kinsey collection are now held in Wellington, at the Alexander Turnbull Library. They were part of a more extensive collection formed by Sir Joseph Kinsey (1852–1936). Four collections of Japanese *ukiyo-e* and related art works were bequeathed to the Library following his death in 1936. These include one set of eight bound volumes of woodblock prints containing some works by Hokusai and Shosai. A second group includes a set of fifteen woodblock print illustrations of scenes of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. A third group contains seven colour woodblock prints, including one Hiroshige and seventy-two photolithographic reproductions of prints. The fourth group comprises eleven French photolithographic reproductions printed in 1890. In addition the Library holds eight volumes on Japanese interest subjects, including compilations of verse, books about prints, and albums of paper samples. Some one hundred Japanese works from Kinsey’s collections were later deposited in the Canterbury Museum collections and thirty other non-Japanese graphic works in the Christchurch City Art Gallery (then the Robert McDougall Art Gallery), following the death of his daughter, Mary Moore Kinsey, in 1954.

A small group of Asian works—one Chinese painting and fourteen woodblock prints by Toyokuni and Hiroshige—is held in the collections of Te Papa Tongarewa. Catalogue records for these works contain no information about the collections from which they may have originated.

In Dunedin, a significant collection of 281 *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and twenty-three related decorative art pieces was deposited in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Other works—of porcelain, textiles, and clothing, and arms and armour—are included in the collections of the Otago Museum and the Olveston stately home.

Even within the contexts of the institutions that now house them, these collections still convey much about the preoccupations, agendas, and tastes of their original owners. Grey’s illustrated volumes still reflect his own bibliophile inclinations as well as those of their new home. Interestingly though, these works are still curiosities within the Auckland City Library. Grey had collected them as eccentric examples of near-contemporary publishing practice in Japan; now the works are survivors of the past, isolated in a single file box from the rest of the Library’s Special Collections. The Shurrock, Staub, and Munro collections in Dunedin still reflect the

professional interest of the artists and teachers who collected them. Their appeal to these artists was the same as that for an earlier generation of French painters. As Shurrock himself noted, Monet, Manet, Degas, and Whistler had ‘admired them for their design and artistry’ (Shurrock, qtd. in Northcroft 30). The technical and aesthetic attractions were the same for these New Zealand collectors, and the aesthetic, and now historical, interests survive in their new context.

The collections now in the Auckland City Art Gallery and Canterbury Museums are more varied in nature. In Christchurch especially, they represent the diverse combination of differing interests or contributors. The claims of some of these early collectors suggest dual agendas, in enriching their knowledge of the world and in improving their own aesthetic sensibilities. In the case of the former, Sir Erima Northcroft had claimed,

Already we know something, although little, of the accumulated wisdom of these philosophic peoples. Much of this is still to be learned. As they have their stored treasures of the mind, so have they also beauties of the creative arts. Some of this, too, is known to us but again there is more to know. (Northcroft 3)

In the latter instance, G. C. C. Sandston claimed, in his introductory note to the catalogue of the same exhibition, ‘The ultimate object of the exhibition is to stimulate interest in standards of taste’ (Sandston, qtd. in Northcroft 4). These ambitious objectives for self-improvement may have been sincerely held and energetically pursued, but their realisation seems, in retrospect, inconsistent. The current state of the collections in the Canterbury Museum represents the best, and the worst, of *ukiyo-e* or Edo taste. They contain some fine examples of *ukiyo-e*—excellent *kakemono* by Hokusai and Chikanobu, for example—and they include work of the coarsest craftsmanship, especially poorly cut and printed landscape compositions by later followers of Andō Hiroshige. They include some works in fine condition and others in poor form, faded, badly rubbed, and soiled. Most interestingly, they also contain a significant number of works classified as ‘late prints’ or ‘reprints’. These are works published years after the deaths of their original artists. In some instances they were printed off original blocks, often with reduced colour ranges. In others they are twentieth-century reproductions printed by hand, but off re-cut blocks. In a number they carry the identifying seal of the post-war UNESCO project that sought to preserve these compositions for later generations. That their original collectors were aware of their status, and understood them still to represent *ukiyo-e* in a legitimate manner, is suggested by their acknowledged inclusion in the 1952 Christchurch exhibition of Chinese and Japanese arts (Northcroft 33–35).

Whatever their status, authenticity, or condition, these collections stand today as a substantial record of instances of historical cultural intercourse between New Zealand and Japan, whether at a remove, as with Grey's acquisitions, or through first-hand contacts, as with Dunedin's Theomin and Munro collections. They stand as a record of the taste, intellectual, and cultural preoccupations (and pretensions) of our forebears, and of the patterns of collecting these generated. As such the history of these collections poses a significant challenge to deficit theories of cultural history in New Zealand—theories that assert that cultural interests have been parochial, inward looking, or isolationist—in ways that insulated New Zealand from international interests and exchanges and encouraged a 'delayed development' syndrome evident in achievements in our literature and visual arts. Each of these collections provides tangible evidence to the contrary: they demonstrate a persistent interest in, knowledge of, and response to contemporary events, trends, and interests in other parts of the world. Though the understandings of these works may well have been compromised, conditioned by limitations of contextual knowledge or expectation, the views they demonstrate of the worlds of theatre and brothel culture and especially of the Edo and surrounding rural landscapes were consistent with popular ideas of how Japan looked or was, at least as it was understood through contemporary reportage, travelogue, or photographic evidence. Also, with the exception of works by the later and minor Utagawa artists that proliferated at the time, these collections reflect an acute awareness of the development of an *ukiyo-e* aesthetic within Japan, and a knowledge of the principal artist contributors to that development.

The deposition of all of these works into public collections has generated a new wave of academic and public interest in *ukiyo-e* during the past decade. This revival has encouraged, in Dunedin at least, the presentation of a series of exhibitions of Japanese art at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Exhibitions of *ukiyo-e* from international collections like *Le Rayonnement de l'estampe Japonaise* from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, British Columbia (Till), have been followed by the exhibition of works from the Shurrock/Staub collections, collated by Peter Entwistle; the exhibition *Face of Iki* curated by David Bell; and most recently the exceptionally popular and broadly scoped *Miyabi* exhibition, developed from the combined resources of Dunedin and Otaru collections and curated under the professional leadership of staff of the Otaru Museum in Hokkaido. Indeed, the collections of Japanese art and decorative crafts in a number of Dunedin institutions have formed one of the key focus points in the development of the city's thriving sister-city relationship with the city of Otaru, and cultural and artistic domains have formed an essential component in the construction of those relationships. These popular shows have been

complemented by parallel exhibitions in dealer galleries, like the *Floating World to Shin Hanga: Japanese Woodblock Prints from the 19th to the 20th Centuries* at the Marshall Sieffert Gallery; by the *West Meets East* display assembled by Donald Kerr in the Special Collections, University of Otago; by the decorative arts and textiles in the Otago Museum, *Kimono—a Japanese Story*; and by the permanent displays at Olveston, the former home of the Theomin family.

Today the collections provide a valuable resource for academic research and teaching. The huge holdings of the Canterbury Museum have formed the focus for major interdepartmental and postgraduate projects in cataloguing, critical evaluation, and curation under the leadership of Dr Richard Bullen of the University of Canterbury. The Dunedin collections have provided the foundation resources for a small number of art-writing investigations, including the recently published *Hokusai's Project* (Bell). In both Christchurch and Dunedin, the collections provide a valuable reference resource for the first New Zealand university courses on *ukiyo-e* and Japanese art.

The history of collecting *ukiyo-e* in New Zealand forms an interesting story in itself. The varying motives and agendas of its different collectors, and the eventual destinations of each of these collections, reflect a range of preoccupations. The ebbs and flows of popularity of Japanese arts illustrate the changing shape of intellectual engagement and taste in New Zealand since the nineteenth century. Drawn together, however, the entirety of these collections reflects the diversity and complexity of the *ukiyo-e* programme itself. It describes the historical development of *ukiyo-e*, from its early monochromatic character, through the crystallisation of *ukiyo-e* style in the project of Suzuki Harunobu, its heyday during the time of Utamaro, through the later decline of the Utagawa School, and the final flowering of naturalistic illustration in the projects of Hiroshige and Hokusai, to its end following the Meiji revival. It reflects the breadth of the field, embracing painting of *kakemono* scrolls and *sumi-e*, *ukiyo-zōshi* novels, *gafu* books of instruction, woodblock prints, and decorative arts. It demonstrates the broad range of subject categories that occupied its artists: *meisho-ki* landscape and genre combinations, *kachō-e* pictures of flowers and birds, *kabuki-e* theatre pictures, and *bijin-ga* images of beautiful women.

Together, the combined holdings of the Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin institutions constitute a unique resource for the appreciation and study of the development of *ukiyo-e*. Dunedin's developing exhibition programme and the research projects developing at Canterbury University illustrate a revival of interest in Japanese arts, now informed by increasingly pro-active academic resources. The objects of the curiosity and somewhat esoteric interests of those early collectors have now become embraced into the mainstream of art historical and critical engagement, and the works they

accumulated will now form a foundation for the appreciation of Japanese arts by an entirely new generation.

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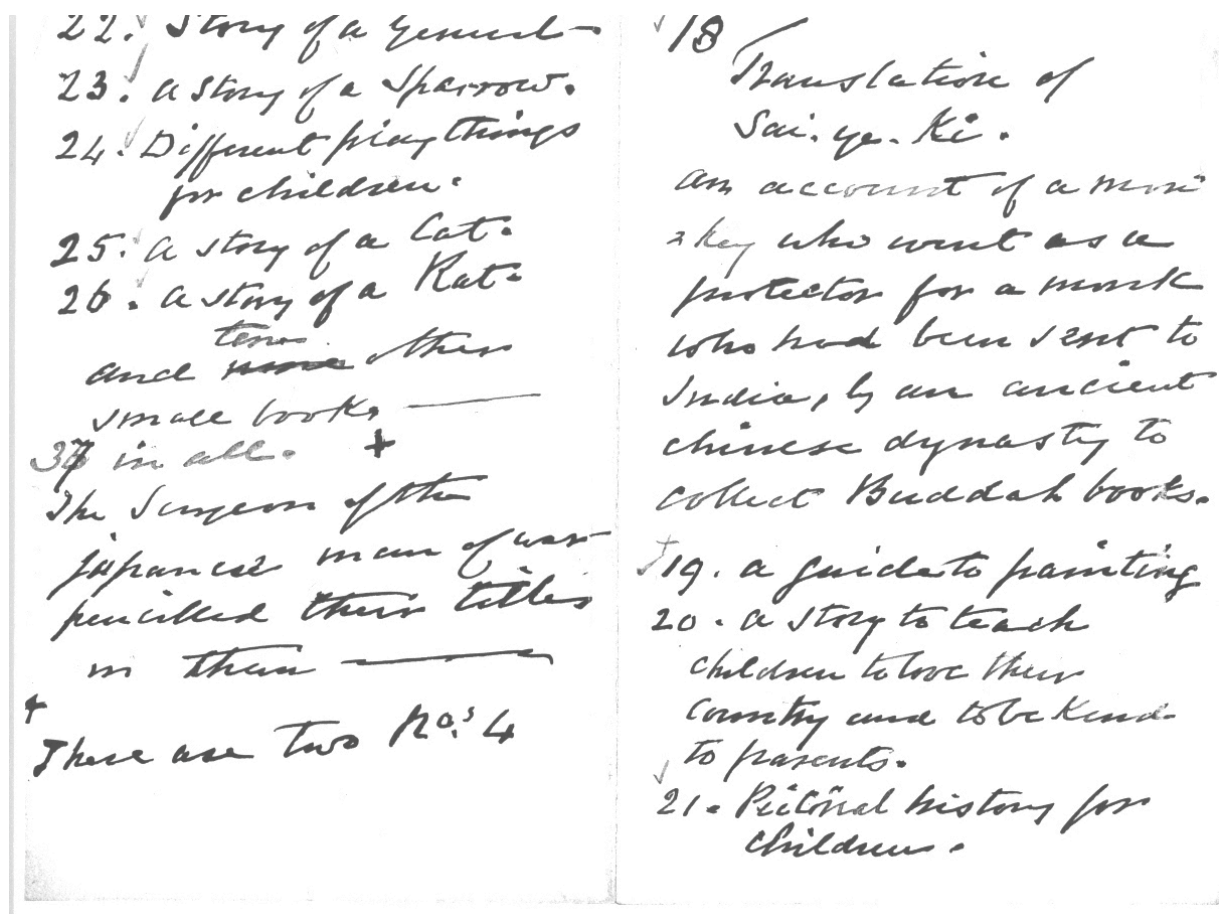


Fig. 1. Section of Sir George Grey's catalogue record of Japanese block-printed books, Special Collections, Auckland City Library.



Fig. 2. Andō Hiroshige, *Suruga-chō*, from the series *One Hundred Views of Edo* (*Meisho Edo hyakkei*), September 1956, woodblock print, 38 x 25 cm, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

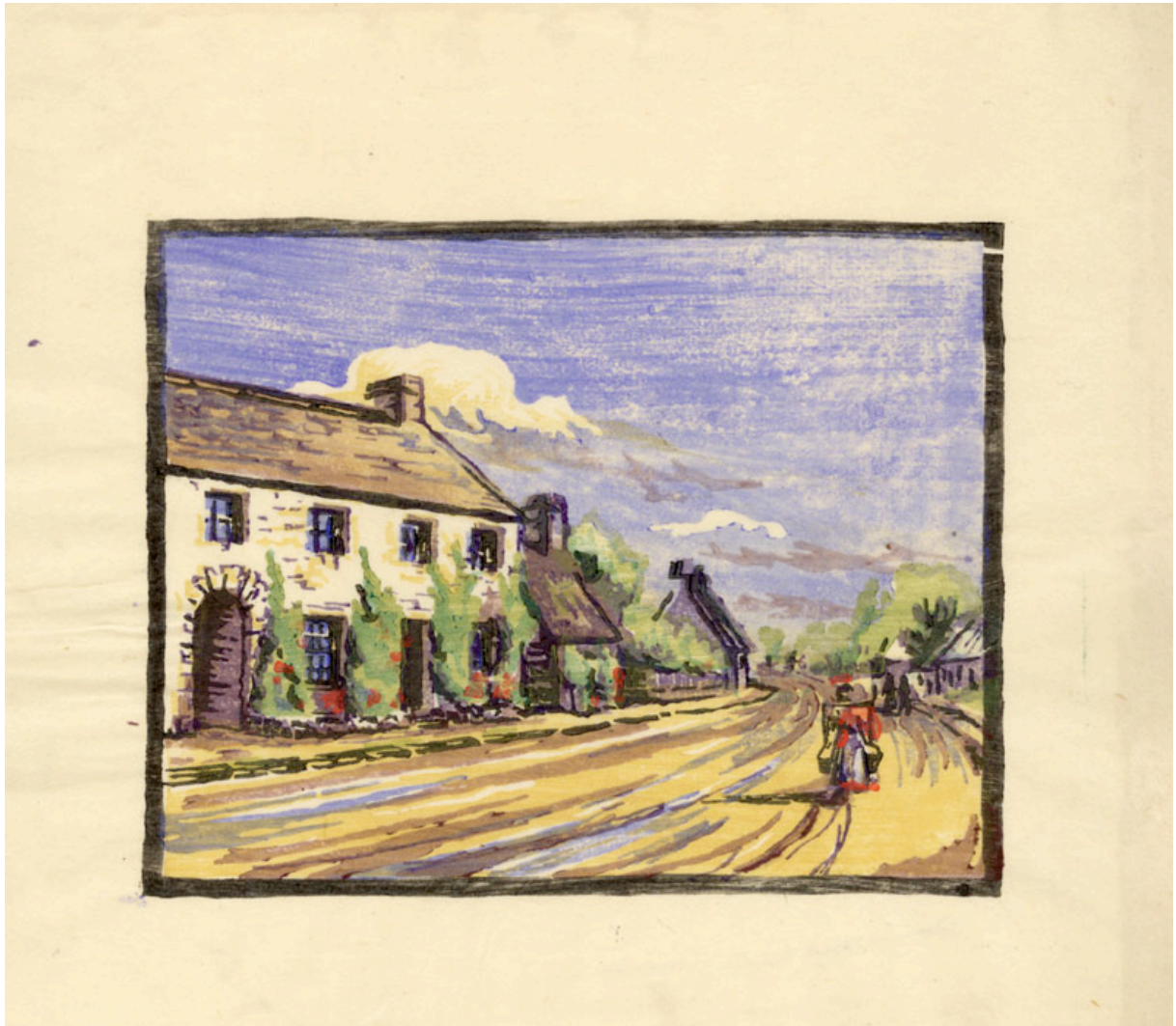


Fig. 3. Robert Donn, *English Village Scene*, ca. 1920s, woodblock print, 11.4 x 14.5 cm, private collection.



Fig. 4. Eileen Mayo, *Black Swans*, 1983, silkscreen print, 29.5 x 41 cm, private collection.