

Keys to the collection— Faces

Chokosai Eisho

“...if you who want to make color prints you couldn't dream of anything more beautiful...”

—Mary Cassatt, 1890

Chokosai Eisho was active from in the period from 1780 to 1800 as an 'ukiyo-e' painter and print designer. He was a pupil of Chôbunsai Eishi (1756–1829), who hailed from a *samurai* family. As an eldest son he was destined to assume responsibility as head of his family, but he preferred to become an artist and renounced his birthright.

Eisho's designs are considered less idyllic and more robust and life-like than those of his teacher Eishi. He produced numerous 'bijin-ga' series and several 'kibyoshi'. His work also shows the influence of Kitagawa Utamaro, (1753-1806) who is considered the greatest 'ukiyo-e' artist, particularly in his portraits ('okubi-e'). He was most famous for depictions of beautiful women, especially geisha and courtesans in their daily life.

Both Chokosai Eisho and his teacher Chobunsai Eisha worked in the late period of the pre-eminent artist Kitagawa Utamaro, which can justifiably be called the golden age of 'bijin-ga'.

In the mid-nineteenth century, this style influenced the European Impressionists, particularly in relation to the use of partial views and an emphasis on light and shade. The reference to Japanese influence among these artists often refers to the styles of the golden age of 'bijin-ga'.



Beautiful courtesan with flower fan—

An 'okubi-e' (close up portrait) within the 'ukiyo-e' tradition of depicting beautiful women.

'Bijin-ga' (beautiful person picture) is a generic term for pictures of beautiful women in Japanese art, especially in woodblock prints of the 'ukiyo-e' genre. The term can also be used for modern media, provided that the image conforms to a classic representation of a woman, usually shown wearing Kimono.

The image of *Beautiful courtesan with flower fan* shows a woman with a high-ranking courtesan hairstyle divided into four sections: forelock, side locks, back hair and topknot which was then tied to make a puff at the back. The hairstyles were complex and decorated with kanzashi (hair ornaments) kogai (sticks) and kushi (combs).

What do these words mean:

Ukiyo-e—

Japanese art form which depicts subjects from everyday life. 'Ukiyo-e' translates as 'pictures of the floating world', comprised from three Buddhist terms; 'uki' (float), 'yo' (world), 'e' (picture).

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Gallery**

Victorian Curriculum level 7 to VCE
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Chokosai Eisho
*Beautiful courtesan with
flower fan* 1790s
hand coloured woodblock with
mica
Collection: Geelong Gallery

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Chokosai Eisho

born 1726;
died 1801

Beautiful courtesan with flower fan 1790s
hand coloured woodblock with mica
40.5 x 27.1 cm
Collection: Geelong Gallery
Gift of Sir Thomas Maltby, 1964

Question

Many western artists such as Manet, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Renoir, Monet, were influenced by Japanese art. Why?

Give examples to support your responses.

Research

Examine and consider the formal and design elements that made 'ukiyo-e' pictures of life in Edo Japan both popular and distinct. Compare this work with an impressionist artist whose work you believed was influenced by the 'ukiyo-e' style.

Activity

Create a series of three self portraits: The first piece create a thick continuous line drawing from a photograph of yourself, you may like to fill areas with colour or decorative designs; The second piece based on your understanding of what you have learnt—consider the elements, principles and materials to create in the 'ukiyo-e' style of painting in the third piece, trace or replicate the outline of the same self portrait to create a stylize portrait that reflects how an impressionist artist style was inspired by 'ukiyo-e'.