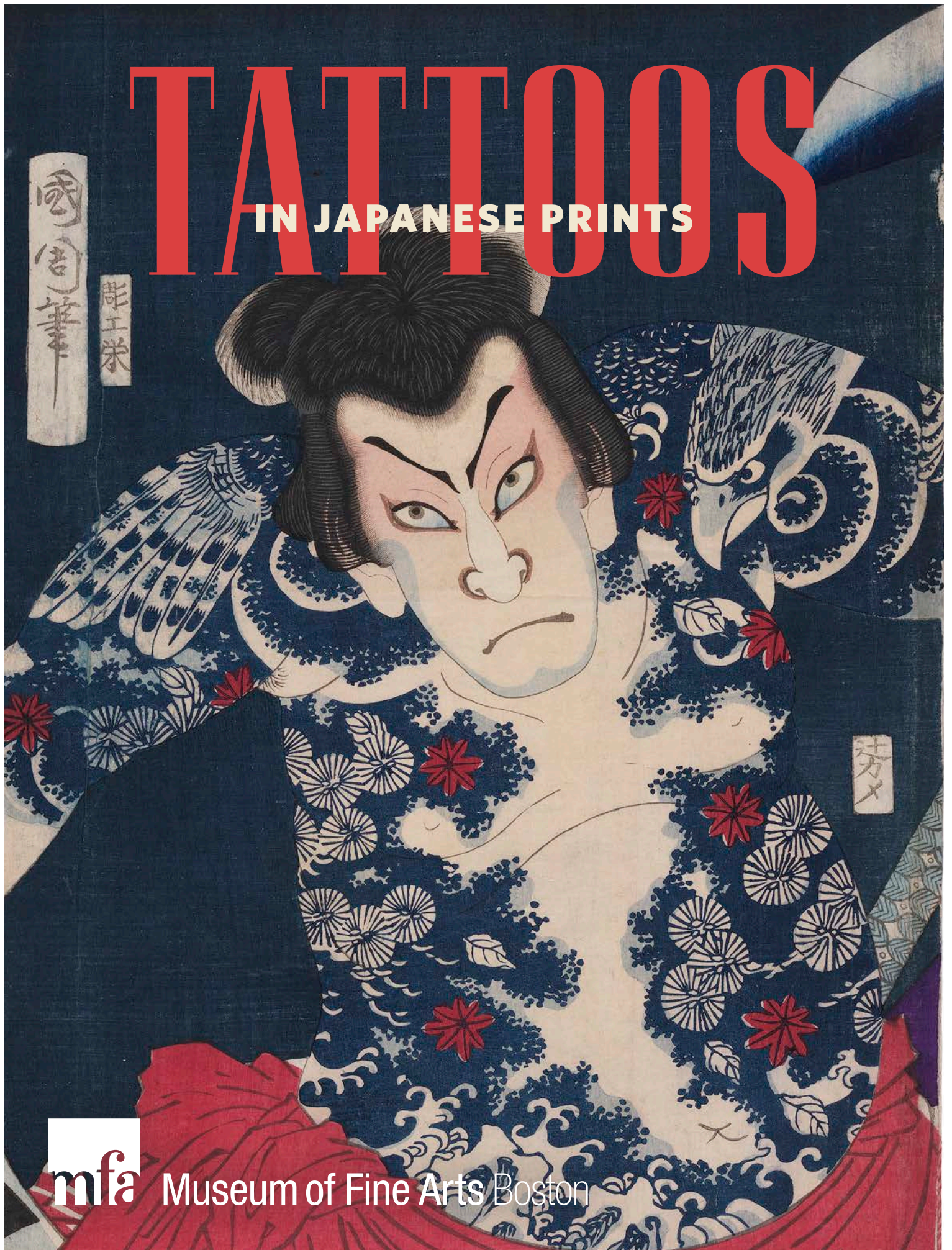


# TATTOOS

IN JAPANESE PRINTS



Museum of Fine Arts Boston



11.41710 a–c Toyohara Kunichika, Actors Ichimura Kakitsu IV as Asahina Tōbei (R), Nakamura Shikan IV as Washi no Chōkichi (C), and Sawamura Tosshō II as

*Yume no Ichibei* (L), 1868. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 36.3 x 71.8 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints

**Curator** Sarah Thompson  
Curator for Japanese Prints  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

**Number of objects** Approximately 100

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# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



54.1519 Kitagawa Utamaro I, *Onitsutaya Azamino and Gontarō, a Man of the World*, from the series *True Feelings Compared: The Founts of Love*, about 1798–99. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 38.7 x 25 cm. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Langenbach in memory of Charles Hovey Pepper.

Large-scale decorative tattoos became one of the most eye-catching art forms of Japanese popular culture during the late Edo period (1615–1868). They first began to appear in cities such as Edo (modern Tokyo) and Osaka in the early 19th century. Previously, tattoos were small and used to mark criminals or give proof of deep devotion to a lover or patron deity.

These decorative tattoos were closely related to woodblock prints. Many of the early tattoo artists were trained as blockcutters, craftsmen who transformed designs drawn on paper into carved wooden blocks for mass-producing prints. In the late 1820s, the artist Kuniyoshi designed a series of prints showing Chinese martial arts heroes with spectacular tattoos that were—and still are—often copied by real-life tattoo artists.

During the Meiji era (1868–1912), the government's desire to modernize Japanese life led to an official prohibition of tattooing in Japan that lasted until the mid-20th century. The ban temporarily pushed the practice underground, and the strong associations that it created between tattooing and organized crime linger even today.

The exhibition explores the social background, iconography, and visual splendor of Japanese tattoos through the printed media that helped to carry them from the streets of Edo-period Japan to 21st-century tattoo shops all over the world.

**Final object checklist pending approval.**

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



64.811 Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Zhu Gui, the Dry-land Crocodile*, from the series *One Hundred and Eight Heroes of the Popular Shuihuzhuan*, 1843–47. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 36.3 x 25.3 cm. Bequest of Maxim Karolik.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



64.809 Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Du Xing, the Devil-faced*, from the series *One Hundred and Eight Heroes of the Popular Shuihuzhuan*, 1843–47. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 36.3 x 25.3 cm. Bequest of Maxim Karolik.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



11.29736, 11.42437, 11.42436 Utagawa Kunisada I, *Plum: Actors Arashi Kichisaburō III as Tōken Gonbei, Comparable to Yang Zhi (R); Ichikawa Kodanji IV as Danshichi Kurobei, Comparable to Ruan Xiaoer (C); and Iwai Kumesaburō III*

*as Yakko no Koman, Comparable to Little Sanniang (L), from the series A Modern Shuihuzhuan, 1859. Woodblock print (nishiki-e); ink and color on paper. 36.5 x 74.3 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.*

## Tattoos in Japanese Prints



11.16144 Toyohara Kunichika, Actor Ōtani Tomoemon V as Danshichi, from an untitled series of actor portraits, 1869. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 37.5 x 25 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



11.34915 Toyohara Kunichika, *Actor Onoe Kikugorō V as Oniazami Seikichi, No. 6*, from the series *Flowers of Tokyo: Kunichika's Caricatures*, 1872. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 35.5 x 23.5 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



11.41572 a–c Toyohara Kunichika, *Actors Kawarazaki Gonjūrō as Takaramusubi no Gon (R), Ichimura Uzaemon XIII as Tachibana Hishizō (C), and Nakamura Shikan IV as Sanba Jafuku (L), in Unity of Three Happinesses: Favorite Actors Before a*

*White Waterfall*, 1863. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 35 x 73.6 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



11.35892 Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Konjin Chōgorō*, from the series *Sagas of Beauty and Bravery*, 1866. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 24.4 x 17.9 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

# Tattoos in Japanese Prints



11.15822-4 Utagawa Kunisada I, *A Roof-Raising Ceremony on an Auspicious Day*: Actors Sawamura Tanosuke III, Nakamura Shikan IV (R), Kwarazaki Gonjūrō I, Ichikawa Kodanji IV (C), Ichikawa Ichizō III, and Onoe Baikō 4.5 (later Jitsukawa

*Enjaku I*) (L), 1860. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. 37.4 x 75.8 cm. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection.

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Final object checklist pending approval.

## Traveling Exhibitions

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