

THE SCHOOL OF YOKOHAMA

JAPANESE HAND-PAINTED PHOTOGRAPHY
IN THE 19th CENTURY



ORGANIZED BY

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IN COLLABORATION WITH

MUSEC

Museo delle Culture, Lugano

Switzerland



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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION IN BRIEF

DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1800s, AN EXTRAORDINARY ARTISTIC PHENOMENON TOOK PLACE IN JAPAN.

The mastery of traditional Japanese painting embraced the opportunities inherent in emerging Western photographic techniques. And the outcome was astonishing and poetically beautiful. Delicate color applied to even the tiniest areas of the photographed surface resulted in works of art so sublime and subtle that it is difficult to distinguish today between the painting and the photography. This artistic movement is known as the School of Yokohama, and it represents one of the peaks, if not the climax of 19th century photography.

During this century, Japan was a society very much in transformation, both culturally and visibly. Thousands of artists, foreigners and Japanese, experimented with this delicate technique recording this profound transformation through a unified and recognizable language, suffused with originality and aesthetic and stylistic principles.

This exhibition of +70 exquisite hand-painted photographs and albums draws on an extensive and superb collection of the MUSEC (Museum of Cultures) of Lugano, Switzerland and is organized in collaboration with Contemporanea Progetti of Florence, Italy.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM AND THE CESCHIN PILONE/FAGIOLI COLLECTION

MUSEC OPENED IN 1989, DUE TO THE GIFT OF SWISS-ITALIAN ARTIST AND COLLECTOR, SERGE BRIGNONI, WHO DONATED HIS EXTENSIVE ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTION TO THE CITY OF LUGANO.

The museum's suggestive location in Villa Malpensata, a beautiful villa built in the mid 1700s along the lakefront of Lugano, evokes the nature of this museum, conceived as an institution where cultures meet and dialogue together. Along with the Brignoni collection, the museum hosts an impressive number of other collections, among which the Ceshin Pilone/Fagioli Collection represents the largest and unique collection of its kind on Japanese photography. Thanks to the variety of media, techniques and subjects presented, the Collection is an essential element in the study of Japanese iconography of the Meiji period (1868-1912).

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a beautifully-illustrated, 300-page reference book that traces the origins and evolution of 19 th-century Japanese photography. Written by Francesco Paolo Campione, Director of the Lugano Museo delle Culture, the book presents the characteristics and explores the meanings and values of an artistic language that has no equal in modern history. The last chapters are dedicated to the astonishing work of all the great masters of the Yokohama School. The book, published by Skira, is hardback with dust jacket and has a format of 27x23 cm.



THE SOUVENIRS OF TRAVELERS AND GLOBETROTTERS

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SCHOOL OF YOKOHAMA WERE THE EXPENSIVE SOUVENIRS THAT WEALTHY WESTERNERS BROUGHT BACK HOME FROM JAPAN, OFTEN COLLECTED IN PRECIOUS ALBUMS WITH COVERS LACQUERED AND DECORATED IN EBONY, IVORY, HORN, MOTHER-OF-PEARL AND WITH THE TYPICALLY JAPANESE MAKI-E TECHNIQUE INVOLVED USING GOLD AND SILVER POWDERS TO CREATE DESIGNS ON LACQUER.

Thanks also to the success and diffusion of modern printing techniques, photographs originally conceived to grace the souvenir albums of globetrotters, were then used also to illustrate publications, travel guides and to depict the customs and daily life scenes of a world that appeared to the West as the quintessence of a timeless East: a land of geisha and samurai, of pagodas and mysterious costumes, in some ways barbaric, but for many others polite and elegant.

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Transplanting Rice
Adolfo Farsari (attrib.), 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Miko Japanese Shrine Maidens
Kusakabe Kimbei (attrib.), 1880 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Samurai
Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz, 1870 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Album Cover
Anonymous, 1890 ca.
Wood, Black Lacquer, Gold Decorations



Album Cover
Anonymous, 1880-1890
Wood, Red Lacquer, Gold Decorations

ARTISTIC TECHNIQUE

THE MASTERPIECES OF THE SCHOOL OF YOKOHAMA WOULD HAVE NEVER EXISTED WITHOUT THE INVENTION OF THE ALBUMIN PRINT, A TECHNIQUE THAT WAS IMPORTED FROM EUROPE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY BY WESTERN PHOTOGRAPHERS.

The artists of the School of Yokohama printed images on albumin paper and, afterwards, they hand-painted the photographs. This artistic process saw an enormous success particularly in Japan due to the high degree of specialization that a large number of painters acquired in the past by painting on paper and silk, by making polychrome woodblock prints and thanks to their ability of applying the color on extraordinarily small surfaces.

Painters worked in the traditional way, resting on their knees or with their legs under a low table on which the photograph to color was laid. Many of the instruments used came from the painting and calligraphic tradition as well. The brushes, of high quality and variety, were realized through rabbit, deer, fox, squirrel and other animal hair, depending on their use. Their extraordinary thinness, and the sharpness achieved through the coloring process, achieved incredibly amazing results.

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Japanese Iris
Ogawa Kazumasa, 1895
Hand-painted Photograph



Lotus
Ogawa Kazumasa, 1895
Hand-painted Photograph



Carvings Inside Nikko Temple
Kusakabe Kimbei (attrib.), 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Ploughing Rice Ground
Kusakabe Kimbei, 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Tattooed
Anonymous, 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Figures
Kusakabe Kimbei, 1880-1890
Hand-painted Photograph

ARTISTIC TECHNIQUE

FORTUNE IN THE WESTERN WORLD

THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE AND SPREAD THE IMAGE OF JAPAN IN THE WESTERN WORLD WAS FULFILLED BY PHOTOGRAPHER FELICE BEATO WHO, IN 1868, STARTED SELLING AN ORGANIC SYSTEM OF PHOTOGRAPHS COLLECTED IN TWO CATALOGUES REPRESENTING JAPANESE PHOTOGRAPHIC VIEWS AND PORTRAITS.

Following the fire of Yokohama which destroyed his photographic studio, Beato developed a new photographic archive from scratch. Travelling throughout Japan, he collected a number of “Views of Japan” with representations of nature and famous Japanese places and a huge portfolio of portraits that he called “Native Types”, images highlighting the traits of the Japanese tradition that the Meiji modernization was relentlessly cancelling. Below each photograph informative texts described what was depicted.

These catalogues were an easy, intuitive formula, for any Western traveler in search of guides and itineraries for their future trip to Japan; a sort of organized quintessence of what travelers expected to find in this far and unknown country. Beato's formula gained an immediate success with the public and became not only the main common thread of this genre, but one of the best expressions of the images of Japan.





Tea Plantation
Kajima Seibei, 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Hair Dressing
Kusakabe Kimbei, 1880-1890
Hand-painted Photograph



Japanese Lady
Anonymous, 1875 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Kameido, Tokyo, (Wistaria Flower)
Tamamura Kihei (attrib.), 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph

THE AESTHETICS OF NOSTALGIA

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE YOKOHAMA SCHOOL ARE CHARACTERIZED BY THE PECULIAR FEELING OF NOSTALGIA THEY EXPRESSED.

They depict idyllic scenarios of a world that was disappearing under the Meiji modernization: a country made of cherry trees always in bloom, of women in kimonos, of samurai and Buddhist monks, of rice paper houses, of farmers working in the rice fields.

Flowers, landscapes, Mount Fuji, pagodas, everyday life scenes and portraits of men and women convey the sensation of a world suspended in an indefinite aura of ineffable perfection, of a marvelous, but fragile exotic universe, destined to disappear at the dawn of the twentieth century.





Peasant
Anonymous, 1880-1890
Hand-painted Photograph



Post Runner
Kusakabe Kimbei, 1880-1890
Hand-painted Photograph



Japanese Priest
Adolfo Farsari, 1885 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



Priests
Tamamura Kōzaburō (attrib.), 1880-1890
Hand-painted Photograph



Kashiwabara
Tamamura Kōzaburō, 1890 ca.
Hand-painted Photograph



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