



Universität
Zürich ^{UZH}

Zurich Lectures in
East Asian Art History

Thursday, April 11, 2024
18:15–20:00

University of Zurich
Rämistrasse 59
Room RAA-G-15

Embodied Poems and
Samurai Love: Poems
for Screen-Paintings
(Byōbu-e) and
Imaginary Portraits
(Kasen-e)

Prof. Joshua S. Mostow
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Abstract

Premodern Japanese visual culture had a surprising number of genres that involved the embodiment of *waka* in human form. *Byōbu-uta*, or “screen poems,” were a very important genre in the development of what is known as the *Kokinshū*-style in the late 8th century and beyond. Here, poets would assume the persona or personae of human figures depicted on a folding screen and compose poems from their perspective. Some have argued that the practice of *byōbu-uta* contributed to the development of *kyokō* 虚構, or “fictionality,” and the literary court romance (*monogatari*), which we will explore in relation to illustrated scrolls (*monogatari-e*). At the other end of the spectrum is the genre of *kasen-e* 歌仙絵, or imaginary portraits of exemplary poets. Again, groupings of notable poets start with the Kana Preface of the *Kokinshū* and the Six Poetic Immortals (*Rokkasen*). The Thirty-Six Poetic Immortals (*Sanjūrokkasen*) were selected by Fujiwara no Kintō around 1007-1009 and the poets were depicted in the *Satake-bon Sanjūrokkasen emaki* attributed to Fujiwara no Nobuzane (1177?-1266?). In the Edo period, this led to depictions of the *One Hundred Poets* of Fujiwara no Teika’s *Hyakunin isshu*. Here, however, the inclusion of depictions of the poets encouraged all the poems to be understood as in the voice of the poet him- or herself, despite the fact that a number of the included verses were on set topics, such as the “waiting woman” (*matsu onna*) where the male poet would compose in a feminine persona. In other words, unlike *byōbu-e*, *kasen-e* discouraged the idea of fictional personae. This presentation will explore the results of such understanding in printed illustrated editions of the original *One Hundred Poets* as well as the *Warrior One Hundred Poets* in the Edo period.

Joshua Mostow is Professor of Asian Studies at The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, where he teaches pre-modern Japanese literature and visual culture. His research focuses on the inter-relations between text and image; Japanese women’s writing in the court tradition; the ideological construction of the Heian period in the modern era; and Japanese “national erotics” (that is, the use of sexuality in cultural self-definition). His books include: *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, with Norman Bryson and Maribeth Graybill (Hawai’i, 2003); *The Hundred Poets Compared: A Print Series by Kuniyoshi, Hiroshige, and Kunisada*, with Henk J. Herwig (Hotei, 2007); *The Ise Stories: Ise monogatari, with Royall Tyler* (Hawai’i, 2010); and his sole-authored *Courtly Visions: The Ise Stories and the Politics of Cultural Appropriation* (Brill Japanese Visual Culture 12, 2014). *Hyakunin’shu: Reading the Hundred Poets in Late Edo Japan* will be published by University of Hawai’i in May 2024.