

## *Edo Avant Garde*

### Formats and Techniques: How did Edo Period Japanese Live with Art?

#### Module 4

#### CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

#### MIDDLE SCHOOL LESSON

In this lesson, students will explore the ways in which **Edo** period (江戸, 1615-1868 CE, pronounced: “eh-DOUGH”) painters developed materials to create *avant garde* artwork that decorated living spaces. Students will also discover some of the challenges in preserving and conserving these traditional works.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How were the paints, inks, paper, and silk used in the production of Edo paintings made?
- What science is involved in the preparation, preservation, and conservation of art?
- How were various formats of Edo art used in architecture?

#### ACTIVITIES:

1. Popular painting formats in the **Tokugawa** (徳川, pronounced: “toe-KU-GAH-wah”)/Edo period included *byōbu* (folding screens, 屏風, pronounced: “BEYOH-boo”), *fusuma* (vertical panels that separate spaces but can slide and act as doors, 襖, pronounced: “fuh-SUE-mah”), and *kakemono* (hanging scrolls, 掛物, pronounced: “kah-KEH-moh-no”). You can explore other formats of East Asian painting through the following resource from the Metropolitan Museum of Art:

[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pfor/hd\\_pfor.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pfor/hd_pfor.htm)

- A variety of plant and mineral-based pigments, along with metals such as gold and silver, were used in the creation of these works. Please refer to the Introductory Essay in Module 4 for more details on painting formats, materials, and techniques.



Photos courtesy of Angie Stokes

- Being *avant garde* meant that the artists creating these works were using new or unusual materials and techniques. Examine some of the characteristics that made these artists and their works “*avant garde*.”
  - Artists sometimes employed the techniques of *tarashikomi* (a painting technique of dropping color or ink onto wet paint and allowing the dropped color to bleed outward and move on its own, 溜込, pronounced: “ta-RAH-SHE-koh-me”).
  - Some artists preferred to use a *mokkotsu* (没骨, pronounced: “moh-COAT-sue”) technique where objects were created without the use of an outline. Explore this technique and many other materials: <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/rOri/rinpa.htm>

- Finely beaten gold or silver were often used as metallic leaf for the background and were applied to the silk or paper base using *nikawa* (膠, pronounced: “knee-KAAHWAAH”), a type of animal-derived glue. Metals could also be ground into a fine dust and applied as a finishing touch as well.
- These techniques helped to create unique effects that were considered *avant garde*. View film segment 35:08-35:51 to see the effects of candlelight on viewing such works at night.
  - How might a candlelight viewing of **Maruyama Ōkyo**’s (円山応挙, 1733-1795 CE, pronounced: “ma-RUH-YAH-MA | OH-kyoh”) *Rooster* differ from a candlelight viewing of **Sakai Hōitsu**’s (酒井抱一, 1761-1828 CE, pronounced: “SAH-kai | HOH-eet-sue”) *The Ivy Way through Mt. Utsu* (宇津, pronounced: “UUT-sue”), based on the number of screens and the use of gold?



Maruyama Ōkyo  
Detail of *Rooster*  
Private Collection



Sakai Hōitsu  
Detail of *The Ivy Way through Mt. Utsu* (early 1800s)  
Harvard Art Museums

- Examine the following four minute video (not included in the film) featuring the hand-crafting of one of the three types of *washi* paper (和紙, pronounced: “WAH-she”) used to restore folding screens: <https://vimeo.com/295684590>
  - This film segment also features a look at the work of **Oka Iwatarō** (pronounced: “OH-kah | ee-WAH-TAH-row”), a master folding screen restorer. His studio in **Kyoto** (京都 pronounced: “KYOH-toe”) has painstakingly restored hundreds of screens, including many National Treasures. Without any restoration or proper cleaning, screens and handscrolls will typically only be able to survive in good condition for about a century.
    - Ask students to brainstorm a list of skills and knowledge that would be necessary for Oka Iwatarō and his team to do their job well.
    - Explore more about the conservation, care, and storage of screens with the following resource from the Smithsonian: [https://www.si.edu/MCI/downloads/REACT/folding\\_screens.pdf](https://www.si.edu/MCI/downloads/REACT/folding_screens.pdf)
    - Students can also explore a database of materials and techniques used in conservation of artwork through the Museum of Fine Arts Boston: [http://cameo.mfa.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://cameo.mfa.org/wiki/Main_Page) or teachers may wish to explore the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties: [https://www.tobunken.go.jp/index\\_e.html](https://www.tobunken.go.jp/index_e.html)
- Encourage students to be *avant garde* and experiment with various art media to explore the interaction of paints, inks, and metal through a hands-on project.
  - After viewing the film, have students explore the film’s website <http://www.edoavantgarde.com/list-of-artists-and-their-works> to select the subject matter (an animal, tree, flower, fish, bird, creature, etc.) for their project based on one of the works seen here. Students should also select the format for their work—will they be creating a scroll, screen, or another work of art?
  - To facilitate experimentation, you may want to set up stations where students explore the techniques described above before deciding on their final project plan. Metallic liquid watercolors provide an effective and affordable way to incorporate silver and gold elements. Spattering can be easily done by pulling a thumb across a toothbrush that has been dipped in paint. *Sumi* ink works well for *tarashikomi* effects. You may also be able to bring in a fish or another small animal for life-study drawing.
  - Provide students with a variety of media for recreating their chosen subject matter in a new and unique way. Students may recycle cardboard boxes to create miniature screens, use scrapbooking paper or wrapping paper to imitate silver or gold foil, apply watercolors and inks for painting, etc. Dowel rods work well for scroll hanging, and wallpaper can be used for mounting these works on a colorful, sturdy background. Students may also incorporate the use of technology to make their work—from projecting images for reproduction to creating an animated video of the animals coming to life and jumping from the paintings.
    - This project works well as a capstone at the end of the semester as it provides students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills.

2. Introduce students to one side of a two-sided *byōbu* with film segment 4:44 to 5:38. Compare the waves of the river seen in *Flowering Plants of Summer and Autumn* to the waves of the sea painted in *Boats on the Sea* seen in film segment 33:09 to 33:47 (note that both sides of the screen are shown in this clip, with the boat wrapping around from the front to the back screen.)



Sakai Hōitsu  
*Flowering Plants of Summer and Autumn* (1822)  
 Tokyo National Museum



Studio of Sōtatsu  
*Boats on the Sea* (1700s)  
 Minneapolis Institute of Arts

<https://www.masterpiece-of-japanese-culture.com/paintings/summer-and-autumn-flowers-sakai-hoitsu>  
[http://emuseum.nich.go.jp/detail?content\\_base\\_id=100321&content\\_part\\_id=002&langId=en&webView=](http://emuseum.nich.go.jp/detail?content_base_id=100321&content_part_id=002&langId=en&webView=)

- In both instances, the artists painted their waves with ink. Using a Venn diagram, compare these two representations of water.
- Both artists use shades of green pigments, but each uses this color quite differently. Discuss the ways in which these uses of green pigment differ.
  - Investigate the possible materials used to make these pigments by reading *Pigments in Later Japan: Studies Using Scientific Methods* from the Freer Gallery of Art: <https://asia.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Fitzhugh-Pigments-in-later-Japanese-Paintings.pdf>
- Screens like these are carefully assembled, transported, and positioned for display. Watch film segments 3:03-4:00 and 10:26-13:22 to see some examples of this in action.
  - Discuss with students the challenges of moving such large works of art. Why is it necessary to use gloves when moving these pieces?
  - Discuss with students how the context in which the artwork is viewed may change the viewer's experience. Consider the question posed by the narrator in the first segment, "What is the viewer's perspective supposed to be?"
  - Refer to the Introductory Essay for Module 4 for more information on how these works were originally displayed and viewed.
- Using the film's website resources, have students select a scene from one of the works to recreate on a fan: <http://www.edoavantgarde.com/list-of-artists-and-their-works> Narrate a demonstration of how to create four unique compositions using any one of the works, making sure to use terms such as shape, space, cropping, balance, etc. to help students to consider how they will select objects to include in their drawing and how to use the elements of art while applying the principles of design in their work.
  - After students have explored the website and chosen the work, they would like to feature on their fan design, have them divide a sheet of sketchbook paper into four rectangles and sketch a different composition of their object/scene in each box. Have students exchange their sketches with at least two other people for "cheers and checks" feedback, providing students with ideas of what is strong in each of their designs (cheers) and what areas might need to be improved (checks) before having students edit their works and select one of the four designs for the project.



- Have students enlarge their chosen design on a sheet of 11” x 18” paper, tracing a pre-cut fan stencil design. Students can either draw in the base of the fan or this could be something that the teacher places on the background to help with assembly of the final screen.
  - While students are working on their fans, create a screen for display using either a wall, a foldable art display, or sturdy pieces of cardboard or foam core cut and assembled in a two, four, or six panel format. For a special touch, gold wrapping paper can be used for the background and a decorative ribbon can be adhered around the edges. After students have drawn and colored or painted their designs on their fans, have them cut out the fan shape.
  - Before arranging the fans completing the screen, ask students to examine the following works by **Tawaraya Sōtatsu** (俵屋宗達, d. 1643, pronounced: “ta-WAH-RAH-yah | SOH-taht-sue”), one from the film and another from the Freer Gallery. Compare the composition of these two screens to one another—in what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different? Take a close look at each screen to see how they differ—the one featured in the film shows fans painted directly on the screen, while the other has fans that were pasted onto the screen (including one that might have actually been used as a fan!). Which screen is more exciting and catches the viewer’s eye? Why? How should these two pieces guide the class as they work collaboratively to display their fans as one cohesive screen?



Tawaraya Sōtatsu  
*Scattered Fans* (early 1600s)  
 Freer Gallery of Art

<https://asia.si.edu/exhibition/screen-with-scattered-fans/>



Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Tōshichirō  
*Painted Fans Mounted on a Screen* (early 1600s)

<https://asia.si.edu/exhibition/painted-fans-mounted-on-a-screen/>

3. Screens such as the ones just examined were an important part of not only palaces and temples, but they were also found in Japanese homes during the Edo period. Other artwork such as hanging scrolls with painting and calligraphy and ceramic vessels for *ikebana* (生け花, pronounced: “e-KAY-bahnah”) floral displays along with furnishings such as *tansu* chests (箆笥, pronounced: “THAN-suh”) for storage and *tatami* mats (畳, pronounced: “tah-TAH-me”) for floors also became widely used.



Kanō Sansetsu  
*Old Plum* (1646)  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/44858?amp%3Bft=old%20plum&amp%3Boffset=0&amp%3Bpos=1&amp%3Brpp=20&amp%3BsortBy=Relevance&searchField=All>

- Japanese houses of the Edo period were traditionally built of renewable resources like wood, bamboo and thatch, rather than stone and brick. In a country prone to earthquakes, fires, and a damp climate, these materials were less than ideal. However, changes in building techniques which utilized stone foundations combined with economic growth led to the construction of more durable homes and a greater investment in furnishings.
  - In one example, samurai homes built in the *shoin-zukuri* style (書院造, pronounced: “show-EEN-ZOO-ku-ree”) included *tokonoma* (alcoves, 床の間, pronounced: “toe-

- KOH-NO-mah”), an alcove for displaying art objects such as hanging scrolls which would be changed for various seasons or special visitors.
- By the late 16th century, many house floor plans for the wealthy showed separate spaces for living and for work. Innovations in construction allowed for more open spaces rather than a series of smaller rooms which encouraged the use of hanging curtains and screens as a means of privacy.
    - For more information on the construction and use of screens, please refer to the Introductory Essay for Module 4 or see the following Smithsonian resource: [http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson\\_plans/japan\\_images\\_people/intro\\_page5.html#:~:text=Construction%20of%20Japanese%20Screens,paper%20or%20occasionally%20on%20silk.](http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japan_images_people/intro_page5.html#:~:text=Construction%20of%20Japanese%20Screens,paper%20or%20occasionally%20on%20silk.)
  - Using the Minneapolis Institute of Arts’ online collection, explore two Edo period structures:
    - Audience Hall: <http://www.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/architecture/japanese-audience-hall.cfm>
      - If this were your home and you were to receive your art teacher as a guest, which hanging scroll from the film would you display in the *tokonoma* and why? <http://www.edoavantgarde.com/list-of-artists-and-their-works>
    - Tea House: <http://www.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/architecture/japanese-teahouse.cfm>
      - How did the craftsmen who made this environment use natural materials? Use the photograph to identify specific uses for the materials listed in the description.
  - Many of the features of an Edo period house have remained part of traditional Japanese construction. Explore the Japanese House, a 100-year-old house from Kyoto, Japan, reconstructed at the Boston’s Children’s Museum: <https://japanesehouse.bostonchildrensmuseum.org/virtual-tour>
    - What examples of Edo art do you see used in this home? What examples are different or missing? How does this house compare with your own home today? If you were to select one piece of art from the film to be included in your home, which piece would it be and why?
    - Of the projects you completed for this unit, which would you be more likely to display in your home? Where would you show this piece? Why?

### Source List:

Hanley, Susan B. *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*. University of California Press, 1997.

Artscape Japan. <https://artscape.jp/artscape/eng/ht/1612.html>. Accessed 18 December 2020.

The Art Story. <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/nihonga/history-and-concepts/> Accessed 18 December 2020.

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