

Press Event: March 26, 2012

## Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800)

[Click here to listen \(42:47 min, 20.5 mb\)](#)



Left to right: Fuminari Tanaka, Director, Cultural and Business Projects Bureau, Nikkei Inc.; T. Allan McArtor, Chairman, Airbus Americas, Inc.; His Excellency Ichiro Fujisaki, Ambassador of Japan; Kazuhisa Sato, Treasurer, The Imperial Household Agency; Earl A. Powell III, Director, National Gallery of Art; Reverend Raitei Arima, Superintendent Priest, Rinzai-shu, Shōkokuji-ha, Shōkokuji Monastery; Yoshimi Inaba, President and COO, Toyota Motor North America, Inc.; and Yukio Lippit, Guest Curator, National Gallery of Art; Professor of Japanese Art, Harvard University

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### General Information

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Biography

## Itō Jakuchū (1716-1800)

The circumstances of Jakuchū's birth enabled him to retire early from his family business and devote himself almost entirely to painting. He was born in 1716 as the eldest son of the Masuya wholesaler that lent out space to grocers in Kyoto's Nishiki-Takakura District, a neighborhood that still functions as a foodstuffs market today. He served as the fourth-generation head of the Masuya for seventeen years, from his father's death in 1738 until 1755, when he retired and was succeeded by his younger brother Sōgon (1719–1792). Jakuchū's headship of the family business gave him both wealth and social status; long after retirement he maintained his standing as an elder of his neighborhood association (*chō*), and he fraternized with leading members of the mercantile and ecclesiastical community. From the accounts that have survived, however, the wholesaler enterprise was presumably cause for considerable stress, as Jakuchū was responsible for a great number of small transactions and the livelihood of thousands. The memory of this clamorous professional life may have led to a later fictitious anecdote, recorded by the scholar Hiraga Shōsai in 1793: while head of the Masuya, Jakuchū grew so disenchanted that he secluded himself in a mountain retreat in Tanba for some two years, resulting in turmoil for the three thousand grocers under his charge.

Vocational pressures may also have led Jakuchū sometime during his mid-to-late thirties to seek out the spiritual mentorship of the Zen monk Daiten. Daiten's was the decisive relationship in Jakuchū's artistic formation, providing the painter with not only religious guidance but also insights into literary tradition, entree to networks of prominent cultural enthusiasts, and access to the art treasures of Shōkokuji and other institutions. And Daiten was the one who most likely conferred upon the artist the Daoist sobriquet Jakuchū, which means “like a void,” and convinced him to make the abbot's monastery the home of *Colorful Realm of Living Beings* and his own burial ground. The Ōbaku-sect monk Baisa'ō (Old Tea Seller)

represented another important source of emulation from this period. Espousing a humble, unattached life that eschewed monastic affiliation, Baisa'ō actually sold tea from a portable stand he set up next to various Kyoto landmarks. His embodiment of an unpretentious, spartan mode of existence made a deep impression upon Jakuchū. Likewise modeling himself as a layman or unaffiliated Buddhist, he painted portraits of Baisa'ō, had a number of works inscribed by the monk, and in a similar vein styled himself as the Old Man of One Rice Bushel (Beito'ō), indicating that he painted only for sustenance. Like the elder monk, Jakuchū aspired to the status of ultimate spiritual amateur.

The basic chronology of the thirty scrolls of *Colorful Realm* (c. 1757–1766) can be established on the basis of the seven dated works in the series; the state of its seals and signatures; the testimony of Daiten; Jakuchū's dedication inscription; and entries from the official chronicle of Shōkokuji, where the work was eventually donated. This sequence embodies progression from traditional bird-and-flower imagery that mostly recycles earlier Jakuchū subjects to more fanciful, oneiric imagery that is arguably motivated by a commemorative agenda. This evolution coincides with the artist's most productive period, one that also witnessed the painting of fifty large panels in 1759 for the Ōjoin at a subtemple of Shōkokuji, his most monumental and accomplished work in monochrome ink, and a similarly large-scale cycle of mural decor, this time in polychrome, for Kotohira Shrine on Shikoku Island in 1764.

The completion of *Colorful Realm* marked another transition in the life of the artist. In the ninth month of 1765, the artist donated *Colorful Realm* (then comprising twenty-four paintings) to Shōkokuji, along with the *Śākyamuni Triptych*. The timing of the donation may or may not have been catalyzed by the death of his younger brother Sōjaku ten days earlier. At the end of that year the artist declared his intention of donating one of his Kyoto residences to his neighborhood association in exchange for its annual provision of funds to Shōkokuji to commemorate Jakuchū in perpetuity. By the end of 1766 the artist had established his tombstone at the Shō'ō-an subtemple at Shōkokuji, inscribed with a lengthy epitaph on Jakuchū's life authored by Daiten. By this time the remaining six scrolls of *Colorful Realm* may possibly have been completed, though the first confirmed display of the entire set was for the thirty-third death anniversary of the artist's father in 1770.

Excerpted from Yukio Lippit, *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū* (Washington, DC, 2012), 138-142.

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## Biography

Yukio Lippit

Guest Curator

*Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings  
by Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800)*



Yukio Lippit is Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, where he has taught since 2003. He specializes in Japanese painting. He is the co-author with Gregory Levine of *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan*, the catalogue to an exhibition celebrating the centennial of the Japan Society of New York in 2007. His monograph on the official painting system of early modern Japan, *Painting of the Realm: The Kano House of Painters in Seventeenth-Century Japan*, is forthcoming from University of Washington Press, and he is currently writing a book on Zen Buddhism and Sino-Japanese ink painting. Lippit has taught in Heidelberg and Tokyo and was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) and the J. Paul Getty Research Institute. He is the guest curator of *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800)*, on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from March 30 through April 29, 2012.

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## Recent Chronology of Exhibitions Including Scrolls from Jakuchū's *Colorful Realm of Living Beings*

Tokyo National Museum

October 6, 2009–November 29, 2009

### **"Treasures of the Imperial Collection—Splendor of Japanese Art"**

All 30 scrolls **without** the *Śākyamuni Triptych* from Shōkokuji

[www.tnm.jp/modules/r\\_free\\_page/index.php?id=645&lang=en](http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=645&lang=en)

Jōtenkaku Museum, Shōkokuji Monastery, Kyoto

May 13, 2007–June 3, 2007

### **"Jakuchū"**

All 30 scrolls **with** *Śākyamuni Triptych* from Shōkokuji

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

December 14, 1997–March 8, 1998

### **"Twelve Centuries of Japanese Art from the Imperial Collections"**

9 scrolls from *Colorful Realm*, **without** *Śākyamuni Triptych* from Shōkokuji

Asia Society, New York

October 5, 1989–December 6, 1989

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

December 21, 1989–February 2, 1990

### **"The Paintings of Jakuchū"**

10 scrolls from *Colorful Realm*, **with** *Śākyamuni Triptych* from Shōkokuji

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Related exhibition, did not include *Colorful Realm* scrolls:

Tokyo National Museum

July 5, 2006–August 27, 2006

## **"The Price Collection: Jakuchū and the Age of Imagination"**

6,500 visitors daily; total attendance 320,000

According to *The Art Newspaper* (March 2007), this exhibition had the highest per-day average of visitors of any exhibition in the world for 2006, which reflects the popularity of Jakuchū.

[www.tnm.jp/modules/r\\_free\\_page/index.php?id=382](http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=382)

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Backgrounder

## *Japan Spring* Exhibitions from the Edo Period and Fact Sheet: The City of Edo and the Edo Period (1615- 1868)

Washington, DC, is the first city outside of Japan to host three major exhibitions of masterworks by distinguished Edo-period artists. Each exhibition features not simply a retrospective of a distinctive and important painter and designer of the 18th and 19th centuries, but also specific thematic ensembles of works—perhaps the best efforts—created by Kazunobu, Hokusai, or Jakuchū over periods as long as a decade. Most of these works have never before been seen outside of Japan.

### ***Masters of Mercy: Buddha's Amazing Disciples***

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, March 10–July 8

From 1854 until his death in 1863, Japanese artist Kano Kazunobu (born 1816) labored to produce one hundred paintings depicting the miraculous interventions and superhuman activities of the five hundred disciples of the Buddha. The project was commissioned by Zōjōji, an elite Pure Land Buddhist temple in Edo. Now widely regarded as one of the most impressive feats of Buddhist iconography created during the Edo period, this remarkable ensemble was largely overlooked through much of the 20th century.

### ***Hokusai: 36 Views of Mount Fuji***

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, March 24–June 17

From about 1830 to 1832 Hokusai created his masterpiece, the series *36 Views of Mount Fuji*. These works belong both to the very old tradition of famous Japanese landscape pictures and to the new genre of souvenir prints. As a result of the upsurge in travel during the Edo period, many of these prints were purchased by tourists

attracted goods and workers from throughout Japan. Diverse opportunities for employment—as servants, shopkeepers, entertainers, hired laborers, or apprentices in nascent industries such as publishing—lured migrants from near and far. During the 18th century, the largest wooden city in the world experienced a series of disastrous fires. Between 1703 and 1721, Edo's two largest theaters burned to the ground eight times and more than one-third of the city went up in flames in 1772.

The city of Kyoto was Japan's ancient capital, serving as the seat of the imperium from the late eighth century until the end of the Edo period in 1868. Whereas Edo served as the new locus of political power with the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, Kyoto maintained its vibrant role as a repository of traditional cultural knowledge and artistic practices throughout the premodern period. Against this backdrop, innovative artists from Kyoto's mercantile community—such as Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716) and Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800)—emerged during the Edo period.

It is estimated that more than 25 percent of the total land area in Japan belonged to temples and shrines during the 18th century.

Artists in the Edo period worked in many media. A famous artist such as Ogata Kōrin was as likely to paint on a ceramic bowl or a woman's kimono as to design a lacquer box or paint on paper or silk.

Strict sumptuary laws in Edo Japan were designed to limit the conspicuous display of wealth by the merchant class. For example, merchants were not allowed to have household articles with gold lacquer decorations, use gold and silver leaf in their structures, build three-story houses, have elaborate weddings, or wear long swords or large short swords

In Edo Japan, rice was such an important commodity that it was used for samurai stipends and formed the basis of the economy. As living standards increased, a greater percentage of the population could use rice as the primary source of food. As such, the farmer and rice cultivation became symbols in Japanese art for economic prosperity, peace, and stability as well as for the simple rural life.

The art of the Edo period speaks to viewers in the West in a direct and powerful way, not only for its inherent qualities but also because so much of its aesthetic concurs with what we consider modern. Late 19th- and early 20th-century Japanese art,

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Toyota and its employees and associates in the United States and across the globe, are pleased to support the National Gallery of Art and to celebrate the close and enduring friendship between the United States and Japan.

Toyota is proud to join the National Gallery of Art and the National Cherry Blossom Festival in celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan's gift of 3,000 cherry blossom trees to the nation's capital.

Toyota will mark this centennial celebration by supporting the exhibition of one of Japan's great artistic national treasures, Itō Jakuchū's *Colorful Realm of Living Beings*. A part of the Imperial Household's collection, Itō Jakuchū's works will be shown outside of Japan in their entirety for the first time.

Itō Jakuchū's 18<sup>th</sup>-century works display scenes of birds and flowers with ink, color and gold on hanging scrolls of silk. Jakuchū's works are emblematic of the careful precision that is at the core of Japanese craftsmanship - a quality valued by the Japanese people and by those of us at Toyota.

And like the Cherry Blossom trees, Toyota's roots run deep throughout the United States. Along with our dealers and suppliers, Toyota employs more than 200,000 people in the US, operates 10 manufacturing plants and has invested over \$18 billion - we value the importance of our friendship with the United States.

This exhibition coincides with the National Cherry Blossom Festival, an annual celebration of the cooperation and friendship between Japan and the United States. The cherry blossom gift has been at the heart of this festival in Washington, D.C., attracting tens of thousands each spring. Toyota will also participate in the planting of new cherry blossom trees in public spaces to ensure the trees continue to mark the dawn of spring in the U.S. capital for years to come.

This spring also marks the anniversary of the 2011 tsunami that devastated Japan and its people. As we remember the tragedy of a year ago, we marvel at the resiliency of the Japanese people and remember the overwhelming generosity from the world, but in particular from the United States.

Toyota and the National Gallery of Art also share a very unique characteristic; we were both founded 75 years ago, making this partnership all the more special.

Our hope is that the *Colorful Realm of Living Beings* exhibition adds to the already spectacular annual celebration, and we invite all festival goers to share in the appreciation of this stunning example of Japanese artistry.

## Dynamic Cultural Activities are our policy

Since its establishment in 1876, NIKKEI Inc. has continuously evolved as a media organization with a focus on business and economic news, and a reputation for fair and impartial journalism, both in Japan and abroad. The five newspapers we publish form the cornerstone of our operations. We are also active in a diverse range of areas, from digital media to book and magazine publishing to broadcasting. We are continuously expanding into new arenas, including education and index-related businesses such as the Nikkei Index at the stock exchange. In all areas, we strive to contribute to the peaceful and democratic development of the Japanese economy by providing objective reporting to our readers.

Today we are expanding our sphere of influence by focusing on our core business – newspaper publishing – while simultaneously reinforcing our capabilities to meet the growing desire for knowledge about the fine arts. Based on our firm belief that the arts serve as an important contribution to society, NIKKEI is committed to supporting a broad range of cultural activities. Particularly active in our approach to overseas cultural exchanges, NIKKEI has been responsible for introducing monumental artists such as Turner, Kandinsky, and Rembrandt, to the Japanese public.

Over the past fifty years, NIKKEI has mounted several exhibitions with the purpose of introducing foreign art to Japan. Particularly notable exhibitions include 1993’s *Exposition du Bicentenaire du Musée du Louvre* and 1996’s *La Modernité– Collections du Musée d’Orsay*. Both attracted more than 1 million visitors. Additionally, as a part of the *Nikkei-Italia Project 2001*, NIKKEI organized *Italian Renaissance– An Age of Courty Cultures* with the Superintendents of Fine Art of Florence, Pistoia and Prato. This exhibition included 186 masterpieces of the great names of the Renaissance. Attracting more than 400,000 visitors in Tokyo, the exhibition traveled on to Rome after Tokyo. Additional notable exhibitions include 2008’s *Modigliani et le Primitivisme*, 2009’s *French paintings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Academism and Modernism* and 2010’s *The Post Impressionism: 115 Masterpieces from Musée d’Orsay*.

In 2005, NIKKEI mounted a spectacular exhibition of *Katsushika Hokusai*, one of the most important Ukiyo-e artists in the Edo period of Japan. More than 330,000 people saw the exhibition at the Tokyo National Art Museum in just 36 days. It then traveled to the Smithsonian Institution’s Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington D.C. In 2011, NIKKEI participated in hosting the exhibition HOKUSAI in Berlin to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Japan. NIKKEI has actively hosted various cultural conferences, such as the symposium “The Museum Summit”, which is held every two years. This event brings directors and curators from the world’s greatest museums together to discuss current affairs with Japanese counterparts.

NIKKEI is proud to continue our deep commitment to the arts and cultural exchange by sponsoring *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū (1716-1800)* at the National Gallery of Art. We are honored to be a part of displaying Jakuchū’s magnificent scrolls to the American public for the first time in history. We look forward to a long and lasting relationship with the National Gallery.



“Italy in Japan 2001”



Exhibition “HOKUSAI”



“The Post Impressionism:  
115 Masterpieces from  
Musée d’Orsay ”



The Museum Summit



Airbus and its 55,000 employees around the world are delighted to continue our rewarding partnership with the National Gallery of Art by supporting the exhibition *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū (1716-1800)*.

We are honored to be a part of bringing Jakuchū's magnificent scrolls to Washington, D.C., where they will be displayed in their entirety for the first time ever outside of Japan. Among Japan's most celebrated cultural treasures, these scrolls come to our nation's capital at an important moment: as we honor the centennial of Japan's gift of 3,000 cherry trees to the United States.

Like many of my Airbus colleagues, I greatly admire the Japanese tradition of finding beauty and functionality in the simplicity of nature. Jakuchū's scrolls provide a pictorial survey of flora and fauna, both mythical and actual, painted according to the highest standards of artistic and technical accomplishment in Japanese art. *Colorful Realm* depicts each of its 30 subjects in wondrously meticulous detail and, when viewed in its entirety, serves as one of the most dynamic and meditative expressions of the natural world in all of Japanese art.

Much as Jakuchū found inspiration in observing and imagining the natural world, Airbus believes the study and imitation of nature's best ideas – "biomimicry" – can help solve human challenges like making aircraft smarter and more efficient. In fact, ever since Leonardo da Vinci began sketching aircraft some 500 years ago, aeronautics engineers like me have looked to nature to inspire innovation. Protection of the diversity of life on Earth is a primary reason our company is committed to helping create the sustainable aviation industry of tomorrow.

What a unique opportunity we have to experience the world through the eyes and imagination of Itō Jakuchū, the brilliant Japanese artist of three centuries ago. We invite all visitors to the National Gallery to be inspired – and to enjoy!

Barry Eccleston  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Airbus Americas, Inc.