

Sharaku
Interpreted
by Japan's
Contemporary Artists

写楽
200年の時空を超えて
再見



70 - Yasumasa Morimura «Self-portrait "Sharaku" 4 - after Sadanoshin»

46 — Kazumasa Nagai
The 200th anniversary of SHARAKU
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

47 — Keisuke Nagatomo
Untitled
1995 offset 103×72.8

48 — Masayoshi Nakajo
To Mr. Sharaku
1995 offset 103×72.8

49 — Makoto Nakamura
Sharaku's Mouths
1995 offset 103×72.8

50 — Yukimasa Okumura
ULTIMA MACCHINA
1995 offset 103×72.8

51 — Koichi Sato
Sharaku
1995 offset 103×72.8

52 — Keiji Sugita
An Astonishing Shiga Daishichi
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

53 — Ikko Tanaka
A Sharaku Head in 9 Circles
1995 offset 103×72.8

54 — Yuzo Yamashita
The Mask behind the Mask
1995 offset 103×72.8

55 — Shunyo Yamauchi
Untitled
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

56 — Tadanori Yokoo
SHARAKU
1995 offset 103×72.8

Section III ♦ Homage to Sharaku

57 — Yukio Fujimoto
SHARAKU BOX (Mizuemon)
1996 wood, music box movement 40×26×20

58 — Yukio Fujimoto
SHARAKU BOX (Mikinoshin)
1996 wood, music box movement 40×26×20

59 — Yukio Fujimoto
SHARAKU BOX (Bunzo)
1996 wood, music box movement 40×26×20

60 — Takashi Fukai
Memory — Sharaku
1996 wood, paper, pigment 220×43×37

61 — Miran Fukuda
Otani Oniji III as the Servant Edohei
1996 acrylic on cotton on panel 162×108

62 — Miran Fukuda
Sanokawa Ichimatsu III as Onayo
1996 acrylic on cotton on panel 162×108

63 — Masahiro Kiyomizu
Image of Mr. S — A
1996 ceramic 103×45×45

64 — Masahiro Kiyomizu
Image of Mr. S — B
1996 ceramic 38×109×45

65 — Naofumi Maruyama
Yuji
1996 acrylic on cotton 145.5×112

66 — Naofumi Maruyama
Sachi
1996 acrylic on cotton 145.5×112

67 — Yasumasa Morimura
Self-portrait "Sharaku" 1 — after Yadorigi
1996 woodblock, zinc relief print, digital print
39.3×27

68 — Yasumasa Morimura
Self-portrait "Sharaku" 2 — after Servant Edohei
1996 woodblock, zinc relief print, digital print
38.9×25.9

69 — Yasumasa Morimura
Self-portrait "Sharaku" 3 — after Bodara and Gon
1996 woodblock, zinc relief print, digital print
39×25.3

70 — Yasumasa Morimura
Self-portrait "Sharaku" 4 — after Sadanoshin
1996 woodblock, zinc relief print, digital print
39.3×25.6

71 — Takashi Murakami
And then, and then and then and then and then 3—A
1996 acrylic on canvas 100×100

72 — Takashi Murakami
And then, and then and then and then and then 3—B
1996 acrylic on canvas 100×100

73 — Saburo Ota
200 Years after SHARAKU, from 1 June 1994 to 28
February 1995
1996 cancelled stamps, 20 sheets each: 35.2×24.5

74 — Kenjiro Okazaki
It is because my nose picks up all kinds of food smells,
or, well, it must be that grated *daikon* I eat every day.
My nose feels all creepy. OK, today I'll just eat simple
things, so I order some *soba* noodles. But then I want
what the person next to me is eating. Ohhh, I ate some-
thing I shouldn't have ... Just as I finish up a bowlful, I
get all sleepy.
1996 acrylic, pigment on cotton 117×91×5.5

75 — Kenjiro Okazaki
When you yawn, you cannot control even your own face.
Stop that silent, ragged rubbing of your face, it will leave
marks! Try a nap, you're sure to snore. The vibrations
picked up through your fingertips during the day seep
into your subconscious, the back of your throat gets all
rough, and they start to come back out.
1996 acrylic, pigment on linen 117×91×5.5

76 — Tsuyoshi Ozawa
The Sharaku Project
1996 two wooden bases, postcards
base=35×180×180

77 — Akira Yagi
Disappearance
1996 porcelain 10×31.5×54.5

78 — Akira Yagi
Capturing Time Deep in Nested Boxes
1996 porcelain largest box: 6×13.4 (diameter)

79 — Akira Yagi
"Staring"
1996 porcelain, set of three vases
larger: 20×12×14.6/ middle: 13×14×16.6/ smaller: 8
×13.2×16

Extra

80 — Toshusai Sharaku
Daidozan Performing the Ring Entering Ceremony
November 1794 polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-*
e) triptych
Reproduced by the Adachi Institute of Woodcut Prints
each: 38×25

81 — Takashi Murakami + Yukimasa Okumura
Speak in C Major Cool ... How about it, DOB?
1996 offset 103×72.8

NOTE

Data for each object is presented in the order of: number, artist,
title, date, technique or medium, dimensions (height by width, or
height by width by depth, in centimeters).

Lisf of Exhibits

Section I ♦ Reproductions of Sharaku

All the works in this section are recent reproductions created by the Adachi Institute of Woodcut Prints. The original woodblock "nishiki-e" prints were made in May 1794.

1—Toshusai Sharaku

Sawamura Sojuro III as Ogishi Kurando
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

2—Toshusai Sharaku

Segawa Tomisaburo II as Yadorigi, Wife of Ogishi Kurando
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

3—Toshusai Sharaku

Sakata Hangoro III as Fujikawa Mizuemon
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

4—Toshusai Sharaku

Bando Mitsugoro II as Ishii Genzo
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

5—Toshusai Sharaku

Ichikawa Yaozo III as Tanabe Bunzo
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

6—Toshusai Sharaku

Segawa Kikunojo III as Oshizu, Wife of Tanabe Bunzo
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

7—Toshusai Sharaku

Sanokawa Ichimatsu III as Onayo, the Gion Prostitute
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

8—Toshusai Sharaku

Arashi Ryuzo as Ishibe Kinkichi, the Moneylender
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

9—Toshusai Sharaku

Otani Tokuji as the Servant Sodesuke
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

10—Toshusai Sharaku

Segawa Tomisaburo II as Yadorigi, Wife of Ogishi Kurando, and Nakamura Manyo as the Servant Wakakusa
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

11—Toshusai Sharaku

Sanokawa Ichimatsu III as Onayo, the Gion Prostitute, and Ichikawa Tomiemon as Kanisaka Toma
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

12—Toshusai Sharaku

Ichikawa Komazo III as Shiga Daishichi
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

13—Toshusai Sharaku

Onoe Matsusuke as Matsushita Mikinoshin
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

14—Toshusai Sharaku

Matsumoto Koshiro IV as Gorobei, the Fishmonger from Sanya
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

15—Toshusai Sharaku

Nakayama Tomisaburo as Miyagino
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

16—Toshusai Sharaku

Matsumoto Yonesaburo as Shosho of Kewaizaka, actually Shinobu
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

17—Toshusai Sharaku

Nakajima Wadaemon as Bodara Chozaemon, and Nakamura Konozo as Gon of the Kanagawa-ya
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

18—Toshusai Sharaku

Morita Kanya VIII as Uguisu no Jirosaku, the Palanquin-bearer
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

19—Toshusai Sharaku

Ichikawa Omezo as the Servant Ippei
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

20—Toshusai Sharaku

Otani Oniji III as the Servant Edohei
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

21—Toshusai Sharaku

Iwai Hanshiro IV as the Wet Nurse Shigenoi
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

22—Toshusai Sharaku

Ichikawa Monnosuke II as Date no Yosaku
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

23—Toshusai Sharaku

Bando Hikosaburo III as Sagisaka Sanai
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

24—Toshusai Sharaku

Tanimura Torazo as Washizuka Yaheiji
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

25—Toshusai Sharaku

Ichikawa Ebizo as Takemura Sadanoshin
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

26—Toshusai Sharaku

Osagawa Tsuneyo II
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

27—Toshusai Sharaku

Iwai Kiyotaro as Fujinami, Wife of Sagisaka Sanai, and Bando Zenji as Ozasa, Wife of Washizuka Kanda-ya
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

28—Toshusai Sharaku

Sawamura Yodogoro II as Kawatsura Hogen, and Bando Zenji as Oninosadobo
polychrome woodblock print 38×25

Section II ♦ Sharaku in Graphic Art

29—Masuteru Aoba

Dream/Sharaku
1995 offset 103×72.8

30—Katsumi Asaba

Eyes Floating in Darkness
1995 offset 103×72.8

31—Kiyoshi Awazu

"SHARAKU elements" Festival
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

32—Susumu Endo

Untitled
1995 offset 103×72.8

33—Shigeo Fukuda

SHARAKU
1995 silkscreen, pair of posters each: 103×72.8

34—Yoshio Hayakawa

Sharaku's Face Veiled
1995 offset 103×72.8

35—Kotaro Hirano

Sharaku
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

36—Masaaki Hiromura

Untitled
1995 offset 103×72.8

37—Yusaku Kamekura

Sharaku's Eyes
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

38—Takahisa Kamijo

Untitled
1995 offset 103×72.8

39—Shuzo Kato

Sharaku
1995 offset 103×72.8

40—Mitsuo Katsui

The Iris Hairpin of Love
1995 offset 103×72.8

41—Kuni Kizawa

Sanokawa Ichimatsu III as Onayo
1995 offset 103×72.8

42—Ryohei Kojima

Imagine Sharaku
1995 silkscreen 103×72.8

43—Tsuyokatsu Kudo

Sharaku who?
1995 offset 103×72.8

44—Shin Matsunaga

"I AM HERE."—The eyes of Sharaku
1995 offset 103×72.8

45—Koji Mizutani

Contemporary Sharaku
1995 offset 103×72.8

Toshusai Sharaku

Dates unknown

An *ukiyo-e* artist of the Edo period. Some identify Saito Jurobei, a *noh* actor who lived in Hacchobori, Edo and a retainer of the Awa clan, as Sharaku, but no decisive proof supports this theory. In approximately ten months from May 1794 to February 1795, Sharaku produced over 140 works. The majority of these prints were portraits of actors in their *kabuki* or *kyogen* roles, and others include images of *sumo* wrestlers and warriors. Twenty-eight large portraits featuring close-up images of the heads of *kabuki* actors printed in lavish color and mica were the most highly esteemed of his works. These works were created early in this ten month period. While earlier artists had depicted head-only, or bust portraits, such as the Katsukawa school actor prints or Utamaro's images of women, Sharaku boldly captured each actor's features and the characteristics of his role through a blend of keen observation and impressively realistic expression. Over the short period of his career Sharaku switched from one style to the next, moving from full-length portraits of actors seen in narrow format, to works with clearly depicted background images and series. And yet it cannot be denied that the dynamic depiction which characterized Sharaku's debut works gradually diminished, was subdued in his subsequent production. Contemporaneous literature, such as the *Ukiyo-e Ruiko*, makes only the following reference to this artist: "Sharaku — Although he did portraits of *kabuki* actors, he depicted them so realistically that some resulted in undesirable images, which were not appreciated by the public for very long. Hence his popularity ended in a year or two." Sharaku was then rarely noticed in later literature. But with his 1910 publication



of Sharaku, the German scholar Julius Kurth created a "Sharaku boom" in the west which eventually resulted in a reevaluation of the artist in Japan. Sharaku was then firmly established as an outstanding *ukiyo-e* artist both in and out of Japan. Conversely, the puzzle regarding Sharaku's identity has only further deepened, as if his face were somehow veiled. Sharaku — suddenly appeared, then just as suddenly, vanished a mere ten months later. Sharaku, whose expressive style went through dramatic shifts over a short period, all resulting in the production of 140 works. The theory of "Sharaku's other identity" thrives in Japan, furthering the concept that Sharaku was some famous artist who simply took the name Sharaku for a limited period of activity. Artists such as Maruyama Okyo, Utamaro and Hokusai have all been proposed for this role, but none of these theories has survived. Such speculations have merely fanned the flames of the "Sharaku legend." Works are scattered throughout the world, including those in The British Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Comparatively few Sharaku works remain in Japan, and 27 actor bust-portraits in The Tokyo National Museum have been designated as Important Cultural Properties. All of Sharaku's works were published by the publisher Tsutaya Juzaburo.

Sharaku Interpreted by Japan's Contemporary Artists

Masanobu Ito

"He was a dreamer who dared to be an Oedipus, to approach the Sphinx of passion that stares out of human faces. Mysterious power lurks in the grotesque wrinkles and demonic grimaces of his 'Noh masks'; there was nothing that was petty or hollow, but rather something important and allegorical."

— translated from the Julius Kurt's *Sharaku*

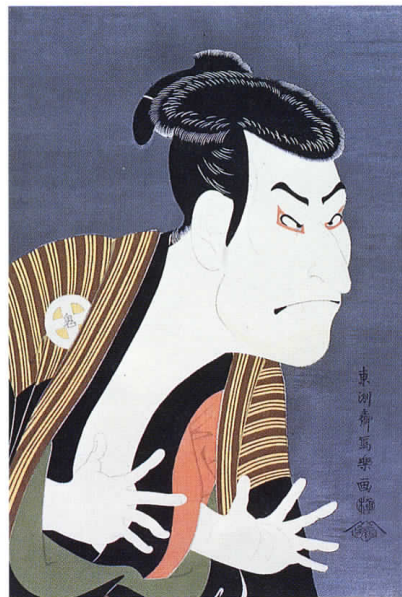
Toshusai Sharaku was obviously a genius *ukiyo-e* artist born in Edo. The definitive basis for this evaluation lies in the twenty-eight bust portraits created by Sharaku in his earliest period. While these works are polychrome prints, they actually employ a relatively small number of different colors, and their compositions, made up solely of the four elements of face, hands in some pose, chest, and a black mica background, are actually quite simple. But once seen, these bust portraits are engraved on the memory, they have some indescribable, uncanny power.

Is that power some form of the real that surpasses realism? Sharaku cannot be said to have set out to depict a likeness of the faces of these actors. Rather, they are drawn in an impressionistic fashion, as if the inner character of the person appearing in that scene is overlapped with the actor's own individual features, those supposedly hidden by his thick makeup. Let us consider the print, *Matsumoto Koshiro IV as Gorobei, the Fishmonger from Sanya*. This man who acts the role of a fishmonger who aids two sisters in their revenge against their father's murder is depicted as an extremely frank, chivalrous person. And the actor of this role himself, Matsumoto Koshiro IV, is said to have been quite a combative, pugnacious character. On the other hand, Onoe Matsusuke, the actor who played the murder victim in this play, Matsushita Mikinoshin, had a wispy, near-vanishing insubstantiality that seems to somehow foreshadow the dire misfortune that will later befall him.

This expression of the inner world of the figures appearing in the work reveals the pioneering quality of Sharaku as an artist, someone who surpasses the journeyman print designer. In an age when actor prints were simply bromides that agreed with the tastes of the common people of the day, Sharaku was the avant garde who carried his age one step forward. The deformed

visages and exaggerated expressions seen in the bust portraits were backed up by a merciless gaze, one that could dynamically fix the reality of an instant. And yet, what is the meaning of this frozen gaze, seemingly staring off into space? Is it the first glimpse of the growing lack of clarity of the period, one that began to expose the cracks in the shogun-daimyo political system? Or is it the reflections of the darkness lurking in Sharaku's own heart?

The present exhibition, *Sharaku Interpreted by Japan's Contemporary Artists*, is neither an overview of works by Sharaku, nor an assembly of famous examples of *ukiyo-e*. Rather, this exhibition is a report of the personal reinterpretation of Sharaku by today's graphic designers and artists confronted with this artist two hundred years after his time. While the primary premise of this exhibition is to introduce and compare these various works by the participating artists faced with the common theme of Sharaku, at the same time, we also hope that this will provide an opportunity to illustrate the connections between *ukiyo-e* and the graphic design of Japan, the differences between the approaches used in graphic design and contemporary art, and the diversity of today's artistic expression that cannot be simply grouped under the single heading of "contemporary art."



20— Otani Oniji III as the Servant Edohei

And the person Sharaku is the true star in this exhibition. The theme “Sharaku” has stimulated the subtle ideas and rich imagination of the participating artists. They each constructed their own strategies for dealing with this topic, and through their sure expressions, have created an embodiment of their reinterpretations of Sharaku from their contemporary viewpoints. The results of their efforts have evoked something new from the fascinating quality and dynamism of this *ukiyo-e* artist. And we can interpret this collaboration between Sharaku and these participating artists, a collaboration that crosses temporal boundaries, as one experiment in the connection of the past and present of Japanese art.

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This exhibition is divided into three sections, “Reproductions of Sharaku,” “Sharaku in Graphic Art,” and “Homage to Sharaku.” The “Reproductions of Sharaku” section lines up recent reproductions of all twenty-eight bust portraits by Sharaku as created by the Adachi Institute of Woodcut Prints. Among the currently identified some 140 works by Sharaku, the most highly acclaimed are the single series of bust portraits that formed Sharaku’s debut work. This series was based on the Kabuki and Kyogen plays performed in May 1794 at the three Kabuki theaters in Edo. It is not hard to imagine how these “strange” bust portraits that deformed the faces of Kabuki actors were quickly embroiled in a huge sensation when they were first seen by the people of Edo who preferred the actor



2—Segawa Tomisaburo II as Yadorigi,
Wife of Ogishi Kurando



1—Sawamura Sojuro III as
Ogishi Kurando

portraits of the Katsukawa school artists or the beauty prints by Utamaro.

The prints created by the Adachi Institute are faithful reproductions of the original works which remain today in few numbers, only some 600 or so sheets are extant around the world. Compared to the original sheets which have now faded, these prints by the Adachi Institute appear in dazzlingly beautiful colors. As a result, these prints are important materials in our understanding of the color sensibilities of Sharaku’s works which were printed in few colors, and whose colors tended to be overshadowed by the unique poses and expressions of the figures portrayed.

* * *

The “Sharaku in Graphic Art” section displays a selection of the works, particularly the striking posters related to Sharaku’s bust portraits, exhibited in last year’s exhibition of works by 67 graphic designers, “The 200th Anniversary of Sharaku,” planned and supervised by Shigeo Fukuda and organized by the Mainichi Newspapers and others. The number of exhibits in this section, twenty eight, equals the number of bust portraits, and brings together posters by twenty-eight of the top graphic designers working in Japan’s world of graphic design.

A consideration of this group reveals that the majority of these works show the singling out of a section of an actor’s face depicted by Sharaku, such as the eyes, eyebrows, mouth, hair, hands or silhouette, and the replacement of that fragment somewhere on the poster. Even this use of a sole compositional element from the bust portraits confirms Sharaku’s vivid individuality. These posters are telling in their rendition of the various compositional elements of the bust portraits which are the source of the strength of Sharaku’s distinctive astringency. Sharaku is brought into each of the different types of poster in a completely natural, completely unforced manner; undoubtedly because these graphic designers each considered the bust portraits themselves as design elements. And we can posit that this would not have been the case if another *ukiyo-e* artist, such as Utamaro or Hiroshige, had been chosen for such a theme.

Historically speaking, there are a considerable number of points in common between today’s graphic design and the *ukiyo-e* of the Edo period. While there are formal and technical analogies between the two, we can also discern common elements in the manner in which they each participate in their respective society, and in the function they perform for that society.



49 – Makoto Nakamura «Sharaku's Mouths»



38 – Takahisa Kamijo «Untitled»

Needless to say, both media are based on the fundamental premise of reproducibility, and the fact that mass production meant that they could meet the diverse needs of the people of their day. *Ukiyo-e* brought art into the midst of daily life, and graphic design makes visual the interests of society and the feelings of the age. Both are rooted in the everyday lives of ordinary people, and in one sense, are a form of communication. In this manner alone they have a great influence over society, and indeed over the daily lives of people. And hence we can venture to say that, taken in this context, the reinterpretation of Sharaku by these graphic designers is a retracing of their own roots.

* * *

The works adorning the “Homage to Sharaku” section include works by eleven relatively young contemporary artists. While we group them under the single heading of contemporary artists, in fact their means of expression range from painting, sculpture, photography, ceramics, and prints to sound objects, and this very diversity can be seen as a microcosm of contemporary art. Indeed, it is very hard to indicate commonalities between them. We might daringly say that their point of intersection lies in the fact that each is an artist who has established their own expressive style, and each is capable of strategically responding to the subject.

Compared to the graphic designers who had some degree of contact with Sharaku, these eleven artists who have formed their own world of art works from contemporary means of expression each faced Sharaku from scratch. Sharaku was undoubtedly progressive in *ukiyo-e*, and yet for these artists, *ukiyo-e* is an entirely separate world, and they had rarely had an opportunity to squarely face Sharaku.

Almost all of the works arrayed here were new works created specifically for this exhibition. The request to these artists to create works was simple and singular; please create a new work that is your own interpretation of Sharaku, your homage to Sharaku. If we look at the works created from this request we can see that while some works make direct use of Sharaku images, others do not visually reveal a specific connection with Sharaku. But here the important element is not whether or not they actually use a Sharaku image, but rather, the concept of these artists confronted with Sharaku, that act, that method, that process. Even in the works in which a Sharaku image appears, the image is at once Sharaku, and not Sharaku, indeed it



71 – Takashi Murakami
«And then, and then and then and then 3-A»



75 – Kenjiro Okazaki
«When you yawn, you cannot control even your own face. Stop that silent, ragged rubbing of your face, it will leave marks! Try a nap, you're sure to snore. The vibrations picked up through your fingertips during the day seep into your subconscious, the back of your throat gets all rough, and they start to come back out.»



62 – Miran Fukuda «Sanokawa Ichimatsu III as Onayo»

can be taken as the opposite of Sharaku, and can fully shine with a tenacity that surpasses Sharaku.

These eleven artists did not, in general, flatter Sharaku, rather they called Sharaku into their own expressive precincts, and through the styles they had themselves established, revealed their own personal view of Sharaku.

Toshusai Sharaku disappeared suddenly after a mere ten month period in which he created some 140 works. Ignored for more than a hundred years, it was the German Julius Kurt who rediscovered this all but eclipsed *ukiyo-e* genius. This century's proper evaluation of Sharaku was brought from the west to Japan. And now we have the pleasure of anticipating how the personal reinterpretations of Sharaku by these twenty-eight contemporary Japanese graphic designers and eleven artists will be perceived by the world.

(Exhibition Division, The Japan Foundation)