

PLAINS ART MUSEUM

Japanese woodblock prints featuring women in the Edo Period on display at Plains Art Museum

Press Release

For Immediate Release (June 2025)

Fargo, ND – Plains Art Museum is pleased to announce the opening of *Floating Beauty: Women in the Art of Ukiyo-e*. The exhibition will be on view from June 7 to September 28, 2025, in The Museum's Jane L. Stern Gallery.

Floating Beauty examines historical perspectives on women and their depiction in art in Edo Period Japan (1603 – 1867). Made up entirely of woodblock prints created in the *ukiyo-e* style, this exhibition highlights female characters in literature, kabuki theatre, and poetry; the courtesans and geisha of the Yoshiwara district; and wives and mothers from different social classes performing the duties of their station, in order to gain some insight into the lives of women in pre-modern Japan. Through a Washitsu display, and the Usuki Family objects, you will learn about historical Japan and gain insight into the lives of women during this period.



In the tradition of *ukiyo-e*, women are most commonly represented in the *bijinga* ("pictures of beautiful women") genre. Featured in these prints are beautifully depicted courtesans with elaborate hairstyles, heavy make-up, and highly decorative clothing. These beauties were considered the 'ideal woman,' and aside from their physical radiance, they were passive, attentive, and well trained in the entertainment of their male companions.

Looking beyond the *bijinga*, this exhibition shows that women in Edo society were hard working and industrious individuals. Society scorned idleness in women of all ages, and even high-ranking females were required to perform a litany of tasks. Women were expected to be subservient but not weak; weakness would not run a demanding household or manage business affairs. For those outside of a traditional household role such as the courtesans and geisha of the Yoshiwara, life was even more harsh. Similarly, female literary characters were well-defined and robust, but often did not fare well, eventually falling victim to the devices of men.

Over fifty woodblock prints will be featured in the exhibition, including works by *ukiyo-e* masters Suzuki Harunobu, Kitagawa Utamaro, Katsushika Hokusai (*The Great Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa*), Utagawa Kunisada, Kikugawa Eizan, and Utagawa Hiroshige. The entire exhibition is taken from the permanent collection of the [Reading Public Museum](https://www.readingpublicmuseum.org/) in Reading, Pennsylvania, who organized the exhibition.

Plains Art Museum is your nonprofit art museum and education center, supported by over 800 community members. The Museum is located at 704 First Avenue North in downtown Fargo. For more information, visit plainsart.org.

above: Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, 1760 – 1849), *The Great Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa*, 1830 – 1831, ink on paper, 10 x 14 1/2 in., Museum Purchase, Reading Public Museum, Reading, Pennsylvania.

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