

# RA

## Press Release

Royal Academy of Arts

# Kyōsai

## The Israel Goldman Collection

**Kyōsai: The Israel Goldman Collection**  
**The Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries**  
**19 March – 19 June 2022**

*Supported by*



Kathryn Uhde



Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889) was the most exciting and popular Japanese painter of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A child prodigy and draughtsman of the highest ability, his art is humorous, provocative, energetic, and outrageous. The exhibition focuses largely on the art of *sekiga*, ‘spontaneous paintings’, produced at ‘calligraphy and painting parties’ (*shogakaï*) which were often fuelled by prodigious amounts of saké. Overlooked for decades, many of these works reveal a comical twist which plays on conventions or reflects the artist’s take on society. Alongside these spontaneous works, highly detailed studio paintings reveal the wide subject range Kyōsai referenced as well as his revolutionary style which challenged the rigid artistic conventions of the day. The historical context of his work is explored, revealing the great political, social, and cultural changes taking place across Japan which he captured in his art. The exhibition includes around 80 works, many of which have never been exhibited or published, and these are drawn from the unparalleled collection of Israel Goldman. This is the first monographic exhibition of Kyōsai’s work in the UK since 1993.

Kyōsai was initially a pupil of the *ukiyo-e* artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861) before receiving academic training at the celebrated Kano school. He had a keen engagement with the world around him and an inexhaustible curiosity; he did not hesitate to incorporate new elements into his traditional studies. More recently he has been an important source for modern manga, tattoo artists and contemporary painters. As one of the most famous artists of his day, written records regarding Kyōsai are also abundant. There are contemporary accounts of his interactions with the first generation of Western artists, writers and diplomats to visit Japan after the country opened its ports to the West in 1854. They include the British architect, Josiah Conder, and the founder of the musée Guimet, French industrialist Émile Guimet. Kyōsai also published a self-illustrated, semi-autobiography, *Kyōsai gadan*, in 1887.

The exhibition explores three themes. The first section, *From Tradition to Innovation*, highlights Kyōsai’s representative works which demonstrate the variety of genres and styles in which he painted. These works, which include finely finished examples in full colour, reveal Kyōsai’s firm foundation as a trained academic painter and provide a distinct contrast to the

spontaneous paintings. Thanks to his extensive mastery of the traditional practices, these works are painted with considerable freedom and invention. A highlight here is one of the most important works in the exhibition, a unique pair of 3-metre folding screens, *Night procession of one hundred demons*, 1871 – 1889.

The second section *Laughing at Modernity* introduces Kyōsai within the historical setting of mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Prints and paintings depict the introduction of Western culture to Japan, encounters with Europeans and Americans, domestic political events and civil wars. In these pieces, contemporary topics are treated with humour, with human figures or ‘humanised’ animals often created in order to overcome strict political censorship.

The final section, *The Artist meets his Public*, focuses on spontaneous paintings and collaborative works. Collaboration often occurred at gatherings and it was a vital part of art making in 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Some of the spontaneously painted compositions are ‘drunken paintings’, which reveal the essence of Kyōsai’s virtuosity as a painter with their wilder and freer brush strokes. Kyōsai also painted comical *shunga* (sexually explicit images), often impromptu in front of an audience. Additional, related works are exhibited in the genre of ‘paintings within paintings,’ one of Kyōsai’s recurring themes.

### **Organisation**

The exhibition is organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London. It is curated by Dr Sadamura Koto, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Fellow, Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures and Visiting Researcher in the Asia Department at the British Museum, and Israel Goldman, in conjunction with Dr Adrian Locke, Chief Curator, Royal Academy of Arts.

### **Accompanying Publications**

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication written by Dr Sadamura Koto as well as a book on Kyōsai’s animal images, *Kyōsai’s Animal Circus*.

### **Dates and Opening Hours**

Open to public:           Saturday 19 March – Sunday 19 June 2022  
                                    10am – 6pm Tuesday to Sunday (last admission 5.30pm)

### **Admission**

From £15; concessions available; under 16s go free ([T&Cs apply](#)); Friends of the RA go free.

### **Tickets**

Advance booking is essential for everyone, including Friends of the RA. Tickets can be booked in advance online ([royalacademy.org.uk](http://royalacademy.org.uk)) or over the phone (0207 300 8090).

### **Images**

Publicity images for *Kyōsai: The Israel Goldman Collection* can be downloaded via this [link](#). By downloading the images, you acknowledge and accept the terms and conditions. These images can only be reproduced to illustrate a review or criticism of a work or report as defined by section 30 (i) and (ii) of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

## Events

### **Weekend art history course: Modern traditions – A Japanese art history**

Saturday 7 & Sunday 8 May 2022, 10am-5pm, £420, Wolfson British Academy Room, Burlington Gardens

### **Online discussion: From Kyōsai to manga – The art of visual storytelling**

Tuesday 10 May 2022, 6.30-7.45pm, £8 (£5 concession)

### **Weekend art making course: Sumi-e – The art of Japanese ink painting**

Saturday 14 & Sunday 15 May 2022, 10.30am-5.30pm, £480, The Clore Learning Centre, Burlington Gardens

## **Safety measures**

The health and safety of visitors and staff is paramount. Safety measures for visitors can be found on the RA website: [royalacademy.org.uk/visiting-and-safety-during-coronavirus](https://royalacademy.org.uk/visiting-and-safety-during-coronavirus).

## **Social Media**

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:

Facebook /royalacademy

Instagram @royalacademyarts

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#RAKyosai

## **About the Royal Academy of Arts**

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy is an independent charity. It does not receive revenue funding from the government so is reliant upon the support of its visitors, donors, sponsors, patrons and loyal Friends.

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**Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD**

**For further press information, please contact Annabel Potter on 020 7300 5615 or [annabel.potter@royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:annabel.potter@royalacademy.org.uk)**

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