



Large  
Print

# Kyōsai:

**The Israel Goldman  
Collection**

The Gabrielle  
Jungels-Winkler Galleries

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# **Kyōsai: The Israel Goldman Collection**

The Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

19 March – 19 June 2022

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# Introduction to the exhibition

The Japanese painter Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889) was one of the most innovative artists of his day. He lived during a turbulent time, experiencing the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate (the hereditary military government) and the new imperial regime's reforms to modernise and Westernise the country. Kyōsai's drive to capture the world with his brush earned him the nickname "demon of painting" – which he lived by.

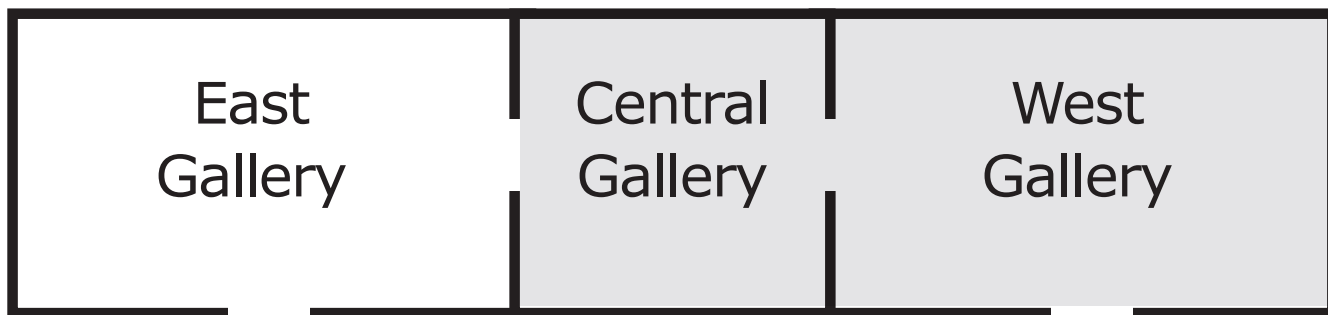
In childhood, Kyōsai studied with Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861), a master of 'ukiyo-e', the popular art form depicting what was topical and fashionable. He then trained in a Kano studio, the Tokugawa government's official painter school. Kano painters mainly served the samurai, whose decline released the artist from the traditional class system that had structured the art world in Japan.

Kyōsai's art is characterised by an eclectic and versatile style and a strong sense of contemporaneity and humour. He amalgamated his training in classical Japanese and Chinese subjects and formal painting techniques with topical, comic and satirical pictures from the world of 'ukiyo-e'. He was also an ardent practitioner of sketching from life.

Kyōsai was celebrated for his impromptu painting performances. Europeans who saw him paint in Tokyo marvelled at the speed and conviction of his delivery. When he died, many obituaries were published in Japan and internationally, including at least 30 in British newspapers.

The Israel Goldman Collection, London, is the world's richest collection of the artist's work, comprising nearly a thousand objects and growing.

All the works in this exhibition are on loan from the Israel Goldman Collection, London and, unless otherwise stated, are by Kawanabe Kyōsai.



You are in the East Gallery



 Seating



# **Introduction to the East Gallery**

## **From Tradition to Innovation**

Kyōsai, as a highly trained painter, was proficient in traditional methods and subjects. He broke with convention by blurring the established boundary between “serious” and comic pictures.

Traditionally, complex painting techniques were reserved for literary classics, historical and legendary figures, auspicious themes and religious images. Comic pictures were typically produced in a lighter, more fluid style.

Kyōsai often saw humour in “serious” subjects and introduced comic and everyday content in highly finished, detailed paintings.

The selection in this room demonstrates Kyōsai’s range and skill across diverse genres. Subjects include animals, monsters, ghosts, protective deities and Buddhist icons.

Some paintings display powerful Kano-style ink techniques, others depict humorous creatures – recalling works by his first teacher, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and referencing medieval picture scrolls.

He can be seen exploring Western techniques such as perspective, shading and the study of anatomy, which attests to his insatiable curiosity and desire to push beyond tradition.

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

# **Crow on a Branch at Night**

1871/89

Ink on paper

# **Crow on a Branch**

1871/89

Ink on paper

# **Two Crows with 'Crow Gourd'**

c. 1884/89

Ink and light colour on silk

For Kyōsai, crows symbolised his success as a painter.

In Japan, his fame was established when the painting 'Winter Crow on a Withered Branch' won the top prize for painting in the Domestic Industrial Exposition in 1881. As his crow images became popular both in Japan and the West, Kyōsai made a seal that said "flying over all lands", suggesting that his crows were indeed flying out across the world and spreading his reputation.

## **Crow on a Plum Branch with Rising Sun**

c. 1884/89

Ink and light colour on silk

## **Night Procession of One Hundred Demons**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

The subject of 'possessed objects' – tools and utensils that would turn into monsters if neglected for one hundred years – is based on medieval folklore. In these screens, one of Kyōsai's most important works, monsters run in pandemonium in the dark of a misty night, but scatter in panic when confronted by the rising sun.

## **Frog Acrobats**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

## **White Monkey Hanging from a Vine before a Waterfall; Monkey in a Tree by a River, Holding Loquats**

1888

Ink and light colour on silk

# **Tiger Looking at Its Reflection in Moonlight**

1871/89

Ink and gold on silk

# **Eagle Chasing the Wind God Down a Waterfall**

1886

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Egret over Lotus Pond in the Rain**

1871/89

Ink on paper

# **Shōki Riding an Elephant, Accompanied by Demon Attendants**

Mid-1870s

Ink and red colour on paper

# **Shōki and Two Demons**

1882

Ink, colour and gold on paper

Shōki is the Japanese name for the Chinese Daoist deity Zhong Kui, a vanquisher of demons and sickness caused by evil beings. He is said to have appeared in a dream of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (reg. 712–756) when he was bedridden. He saved the emperor from the demons tormenting him; when the emperor awoke, the illness was gone.

# **Shōki Grasping a Demon**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Hell Courtesan (Jigoku-dayū) and Ikkyū**

1871/89

Ink, colour and gold on silk

# **Hell Courtesan (‘Jigoku-dayū’), Dancing Ikkyū and Skeletons**

1871/89

Ink, colour and gold on silk



The Zen monk Ikkyū (1394–1481) visits a courtesan called Jigoku ('Hell'). She chose her name to describe her hellish existence, a result of sins committed in a previous life, and wears a robe with images of hell in penance.

Suspicious, Jigoku leaves the monk with the female entertainers of her house of pleasure so she can observe him secretly. As she peeps at them, she sees the dancers' silhouettes turn into skeletons, a manifestation of the ephemeral nature of life.

## **A Beauty in Front of King Enma's Mirror**

1871/89 (1887?)

Ink, colour and gold on silk

Enma, King of Hell, is astonished to see that his mirror, which should project the sins of the deceased woman before him, shows only her actual, beautiful reflection.

His mouth is agape with surprise, depriving him of his usual authoritative appearance. Kyōsai broke with convention and combined comic content with complex technique normally reserved for serious subjects.

## **Preparatory Drawing for Ghost**

c. 1868/70

Ink on paper

## **Ghost**

c. 1868/70

Ink, light colour and gold on silk

Kyōsai probably based this painting on sketches he had made of his deceased wife, Tose, in 1860. The dramatic foreshortening of the standing lantern introduces a sense of realism inspired by European prints and paintings.

The woven pattern on the scroll's original silk mounting features diagonal lines that resemble rain, adding to the chilling atmosphere.

## **Dragon and Tiger**

c. late 1860s/70

Ink, light colour and gold on silk

## **Wave and Rising Sun**

c. 1883/89

Ink and light colour on paper

## **Mountains in Rain**

1884

Ink and 'gofun' on silk

# **Daruma**

1885

Ink and light colour on paper

The monk Daruma (Bodhidharma) is said to have brought Zen Buddhism from India to China in the late fifth or early sixth century. It is believed that he attained enlightenment after sitting in meditation for nine years. Kyōsai became a Buddhist disciple around 1883 and often depicted Daruma.

# **Daruma**

1888

Ink on paper

# **Kannon Riding on the Head of a Dragon**

1886

Ink, light colour and gold on silk

# Woman Praying Before a Crow

Date unknown

Ink and colour on silk

A woman with a water basin performs a ritual known as 'Kikkōden' during the Star Festival (the seventh day of the seventh lunar month), asking for improvement in her artistry and skill at needlework.

Instead of the magpie normally associated with the festival, there is a crow.

Perhaps the woman represents Kyōsai himself with his signature bird, praying for improvement of his art.

# Introduction to the Central Gallery

## Laughing at Modernity

Kyōsai had a keen interest in society, and captured contemporary events in his pictures with humour and piquancy.

His satirical prints from the 1860s, the period leading up to the collapse of the shogunate regime, reflect widespread anxiety about the political turmoil, economic instability and foreign presence. He channelled the febrile atmosphere into dynamic images of frog battles, monster parties and wildly dancing 'tengu' (mischievous, semi-human creatures).

Under the new Meiji government, the sudden influx of Western-style culture greatly shocked many Japanese, after over 260 years of relative isolation.

Kyōsai's comic pictures express both the excitement of the new era, with modern technologies such as the telegraph and trains, and a certain scepticism towards those who blindly followed the new trends.

The government's policy of hiring European and American specialists to teach at new institutions in Japan brought the painter a personal benefit. The British architect Josiah Conder (1852–1920) became his pupil around 1881, and remained a student, patron and friend until Kyōsai's death in 1889.



You are in the Central Gallery





**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

# **Cat on a Catfish Boat**

Early 1870s

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Frog School**

Early 1870s

Ink and light colour on paper

Frogs were Kyōsai's favourite subject – he often used them to illustrate the lives of ordinary people. In 1872, a national educational system was established in Japan, and the first public elementary school opened the following year in Tokyo. Modern Western teaching methods were introduced. Typical of these were wallcharts featuring a large diagram, map or images. Here, frog students seated on a lotus root respond vigorously to a teacher who points to a lotus-leaf wallchart.

# **Frogs on a Lotus Rickshaw with a Telegraph Pole**

1870s

Ink and colour on paper

# **Elephant and Raccoon Dog**

c. late 1860s/70

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Frog Postman and a Lotus Telegraph Pole**

Early 1870s

Ink and light colour on paper fan

# **Skeleton Shamisen Player in Top Hat with Dancing Monster**

1871/78

Ink and light colour on paper

Kyōsai pokes fun at the craze for all things new and Western. People might put on different appearances but beneath the surface the truth – the transience of life – remains the same. Here the skeleton sports a top hat and Western clothes, but a samurai sword sticks out behind him.

# **Foreigners and Samurai**

1863

Colour woodblock print

# **Famous from India: Elephants at Play**

1863

Colour woodblock print

# **Fashionable Picture of the Great Frog Battle**

1864

Colour woodblock-print triptych

The image appears to depict the battle at the Hamaguri Gate of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, one of many military conflicts that led to the end of the shogun regime in 1867. Kyōsai escaped any serious consequences of the Tokugawa government's censorship by using animal proxies and a pseudonym.

# **Newly Published Collection of Shadow Pictures**

1867

Colour woodblock print

## **Shadow Picture of the Forms of the Hundred Night Demons**

1867

Colour woodblock print

## **Comic Version of One Hundred Tales**

1868

Colour woodblock-print triptych

This triptych was published after the shogun's capital Edo was conquered by the new government and its allies.

The shogun's supporters were suffering heavy losses in the north of Japan. However, the monsters, who represent the new government's allies, are shown to be fretting about their powerful opponents.

Prints like this continued to be published in Edo, reflecting residents' hope that power would return to the shogun.

## **School for Spooks**

1874

Colour woodblock print

## **Enlightenment of Acala**

1874

Colour woodblock print

Even the 'immovable' deity Fudō Myōō (Acala) is following new trends. The holy flames with which he destroys worldly desires and passions are instead being used to cook beef stew and warm saké.

Consumption of meat, beef in particular, was a flagship policy in the government's promotion of Westernisation. 'News Magazine', which the deity reads here, was one of the modern media used to propagate these new policies.

# **Battle of the Frogs**

1877

Colour woodblock-print triptych

During the 1870s, residual conflicts continued between the former samurai class and the Meiji government. Kyōsai depicted the last and most significant, the Satsuma Rebellion (January to September 1877), once again as a frog battle.

Saigō Takamori (1828–1877), who led the rebellion, is top right, riding a large brown toad.

# **Famous Mirror: The Spirit of Japan, Newly Published**

1874

Colour woodblock-print triptych

The text in the image states: “A picture of demons and heretics running away, fearing the miraculous power of the famous mirror”. Among them is Mr Punch, with a large nose, bulging eyes and samurai hairstyle and attire, a character adapted by the British cartoonist Charles Wirgman (1832–1891), Japan correspondent for the ‘Illustrated London News’.

# **Preparatory drawing of Kumasaka Chōhan and Ushiwakamaru**

Date unknown

Ink and red colour on paper



Preparatory drawings, either for prints or paintings, were made at the actual size of the finished work. The artist first used vermilion lines for rough drafts, before switching to black as his ideas coalesced. Corrections were made by pasting on an additional thin layer of paper, showing the lines beneath. The artist would have made another, neater version of the drawing.

# **Preparatory Drawing of Two Young Women Playing with Cats**

c. 1878

Ink and red colour on paper

# **Western Man and Japanese Woman before Mt Fuji**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Peoples of the World**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Tachibana Kirō (Chotei Sanjin)**

## **Five Holy Men**

1871/87

Ink and light colour on paper

The Confucian scholar Tachibana Kirō's verse reads: 'While I [a Japanese deity] protect myself, Christ seizes the moment to dance, Shakyamuni and Laozi tune in, and Confucius beats the drum in attack. The world is one great theatre.' It could be interpreted as a protest at a time when Confucianism was being challenged: Christianity appeared to exploit every opportunity to proselytise and Buddhism was actively campaigning.

# **Western Man Arm- Wrestling with Asahina, King Enma Playing Go with the Wind God, and Other Deities**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Museum of Education at the First Domestic Industrial Exhibition in Ueno**

1877

Ink and light colour on silk

# **Party at a Hotel in Suez**

c. 1880

Ink and colour on silk

# **Animal Circus**

1871/89

Ink and colour on paper

# Cats Pulling a Catfish Float, with Gourd and Woman

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

Processions of floats featuring large decorative figures were the principal attraction of summer festivals in Edo/Tokyo. The 'gourd catfish' motif means that something is difficult to pin down, like trying to hold down a slippery catfish with a smooth round gourd.

In Kyōsai's period, catfish also signified government officials for their customary moustaches, while cats represented geisha or courtesans whose string instruments used catskin for the sound box.

# Showcase

## **Kyōsai's Picture Diary**

1882–83

Ink and light colour on paper

Kyōsai started keeping a picture diary before 1870 and continued until his death in 1889. His diaries provide a vivid record of his life, chronicling, among other things, lessons with his pupils, visitors to his house, outings, commissions, artworks seen or purchased, food eaten, and money and gifts received. On this page, the bearded Conder, who felt uncomfortable kneeling in Japanese style, lies on the floor to watch Kyōsai work.

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Uryū Masayasu**

## **Kyōsai's Account of Painting (Kyōsai gadan)**

1887

Colour woodblock-printed book

This four-volume book includes Kyōsai's semi-autobiography transcribed by Uryū Masayasu and illustrated by the artist himself. It features an account of his arrest in 1870, for allegedly painting images insulting to high-ranking persons while being heavily drunk at a 'shogakai' held at a restaurant.

Here, behind the pillar on the right-hand page, Kyōsai is held down and bound by policemen while attendees flee in panic.

The other scenes on display depict Kyōsai painting a dragon for the ceiling of an ancient shrine, and as a child, sketching a severed head he fished from a stream.

# Introduction to the West Gallery

## The Artist Meets His Public

In nineteenth-century Japan, artists often produced works impromptu in front of an audience.

The creative process was appreciated as a performance. At commercially organised calligraphy and painting parties called 'shogakai', attendees would pay for admission, and once inside, could ask the artists to create works for them at no extra charge.

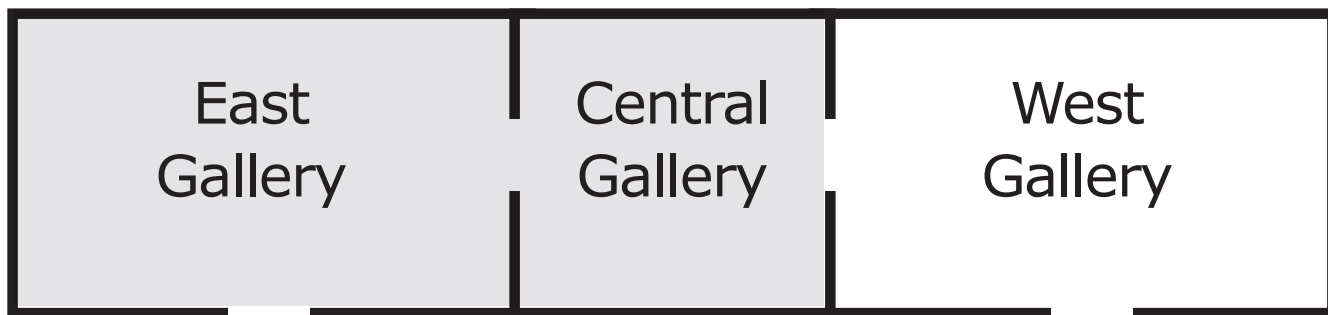
These gatherings were frequently a platform for collaboration. Multiple painters would complete a picture together or a calligrapher would inscribe a poem by the painter's work. Kyōsai often depicted a scene of art viewing, and the artworks within the image would be painted by other artists.



Collaboration has always been an important part of the creative process in Japan, among artist friends or between teacher and pupils, sharing and marking the occasion.

Event flyers, newspaper articles and anecdotes attest that Kyōsai was famous for his speedy, skilful and witty performances. The parties involved copious alcohol. Kyōsai loved saké and his brush became even more playful and expressive when intoxicated.

Josiah Conder wrote in his master's obituary: "Under the influence of BACCHUS some of his strangest fancies, freshest conceptions and boldest touches were inspired."



You are in the West Gallery



 Seating

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

# **Sparrows at a Calligraphy and Painting Party**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on silk

# **Demon Bowing to a Rolled-up Scroll Painting**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

Kyōsai often used the phonetic character 'no' (の) to mark his self-portraits: it is the first sound of the word 'nomu', meaning 'to drink'. Here the symbol appears to the side of one of the demon's horns, above his ear, an indication that the demon represents Kyōsai.

So, the 'demon of painting' (Kyōsai's nickname) is bowing to pay his respects to an important painted scroll.

# **Elephant**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Sukeroku Standing on the Lips of a Gigantic Sculpture of Shakyamuni**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Takemoto Sekitei**

## **Frog Acrobats**

1879

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai, Watanabe Seitei, Shibata Zeshin and 29 other artists**

## **Selected Fish and Vegetables**

1885

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai, Taki Katei, Okuhara Seiko and 52 other artists and calligraphers**

## **Calligraphy and Painting Party**

c. 1876/78

Ink and light colour on paper

This is one of the most extensive and complex collaborations seen within a single painting, and the work is preeminent in Kyōsai's oeuvre. It depicts a busy, boisterous shogakai. Besides the figures, Kyōsai painted miniature blank fans and scroll papers for other artists to fill in with their individual images and calligraphies. In the centre, close to the right edge, we find Kyōsai himself next to the bespectacled elderly painter.

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai, Ono Kozan and Fukushima Ryūho**

## **Shōki Viewing a Painting and a Calligraphy**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

## **Shōki Kicking a Demon High into the Air**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

A playful twist on the image of Shōki as a protector who wards off evil. Kyōsai made many pictures of Shōki as a self-important boss who pushes his demon servants around – the artist clearly sided with the underdogs. Kyōsai frequently inverted a conventional image in his comic pictures.

# **Cats Carrying Giant Tweezers to Torment a Catfish**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on silk

This image references the story of the medieval comic play 'The Fortified Beard', about a man who is overly proud of his large beard, becoming oblivious to everyday concerns and mistreating his wife. The wife, with other women from the neighbourhood, plucks out his beard with giant tweezers, overcoming the turret he has built around his beard in defence.

# **Cat with a Catfish Head**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper



# **Shōjō Drinking Saké from a Large Jar**

c. 1857/70

Ink and light colour on paper

Shōjō are mythical, red-haired saké-loving creatures. Kyōsai, identifying with their fondness for saké, featured them in many of his works. Unusually, this loose, drunken painting contains a poem that appears to have been inscribed by Kyōsai himself: “Will my body made of saké lees bud into painting? Today, once more, saké after saké; tomorrow again, saké after saké.”

# **Crow on a Perch**

1871/89

Ink on paper

# **Crow on a Withered Branch**

1871/89

Ink on paper

# **Daruma**

1871/89

Ink on paper

# **Shōki, the Demon Queller**

c. 1883/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Vagina Daruma**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

Kyōsai parodies a parody. Many earlier artists had playfully reimagined Daruma as a courtesan in a red Buddhist robe, whose gruelling ten-year contract in the brothel district surpassed the nine years it took Daruma to reach enlightenment. Here, that courtesan is turned into a vagina monster.

## **Three Comic Shunga Paintings**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

### **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Kusakabe Meikaku**

### **Man Sending a Woman Flying with a Fart**

1886

Ink and light colour on paper

The Chinese poem by the calligrapher Kusakabe Meikaku (1838–1922) is related to the Nagasaki Incident of August 1886, in which seamen from the Qing Beiyang Fleet caused a commotion in a brothel in Nagasaki. Kyōsai's depiction of the man's fart attack on the naked woman correlates to the Qing sailors' outrage in the brothel.

# **Ofuku Looking at a Hanging Scroll of Matsutake Mushrooms**

c. 1883/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Yamaoka Tesshū**

## **Daruma Crawling between the Legs of a Courtesan**

c. 1884/89

Ink and light colour on satin

This image parodies the anecdote of Han Xin (d. 196 BC), the hero of early Han-period China, who is said to have crawled between the legs of the hooligan, as demanded, in order to avoid an unnecessary fight. Yamaoka Tesshū (1836–1888) inscribed a Zen teaching which indicates that once you reach enlightenment, you should take one more step even if this means falling, and lower yourself to go back to people.

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Ono Kozan**

## **Blind Connoisseurs and Go Players**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Kawanabe Kyōsai and Shibata Zeshin**

## **Blind Connoisseurs**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

The theme of blind men commenting on antiques came from China. It originated in an ancient Indian parable about blind men describing an elephant after each touching just a part of the animal. Kyōsai repeatedly worked on metaphorical images of the blind.

The subject can be read as an acerbic commentary on the critics and judges at official competitive exhibitions.

## **Tengu Viewing Art**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

The expression “being a ‘tengu’” (semi-human supernatural beings with long noses) is equivalent to “sticking your nose in the air” – being conceited. These connoisseurs are proud not only of their collection but also of their cultural sophistication.

## **Six Lucky Gods, with Benzaiten on a Hanging Scroll**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

# **Daikoku Painting a Scroll of Ebisu**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

## **Ink Battle**

1871/89

Ink and light colour on paper

The idea of an ink battle was perhaps inspired by a New Year's event at the family mansion of the shogun's retainer, Sōma, where they applied ink on the faces of guests to wish them a safe and healthy year. Here, the rival groups are depicted as medieval courtiers and warriors.

Kyōsai's contemporaries might have related the image to the battles of the 1860s between the Tokugawa shogunate's allies and the emperor's supporters.



# Showcase

## **Fart Battle**

1881

Ink and light colour on paper

This absurd subject existed as long ago as the twelfth century. It lampoons the human drive to compete. Political turmoil and military conflict inspired many images of fart battles in Kyōsai's time. He took delight in the theme and painted multiple versions. The artist lavishes us with diverse expressions of 'wind', as well as human figures in every conceivable kind of motion.

# Monks and Acolytes

1864

Ink and light colour on paper

Monks and acolytes had been subjects of 'shunga' (sexually explicit pictures) since at least the early fourteenth century. Kyōsai absorbed the theme and expanded it to create some of the most outrageous, orgiastic scenes in Meiji-era art. The scroll ends with a shocking scene of a high-ranking monk penetrating the Buddha from behind.

The target of the satire was probably Buddhist temples and monks who profited from the government's protection without following the Buddha's teachings.

# Your feedback, please

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We also offer one-to-one audio descriptive tours of the exhibitions with trained volunteer audio describers.

Wheelchair users can also benefit from our volunteers, who can assist with taking you around the galleries so you can enjoy our exhibitions at your leisure. With prior notice we can arrange these at a time that fits with your schedule. Please contact us for more information.

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## InTouch at the RA

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