



## From the Permanent Exhibition Area

## From the Aesthetics of Edo Corner

# “*Iki*,” the Edo Aesthetic, Seen in *Bijin-ga* Prints from the Tenmei to Kansei (1781-1800)



**Tachibana**, from the *Contemporary Beauties of the Pleasure Quarters* series  
Torii Kiyonaga, ca. 1782–84

Among commoners living in Edo aesthetic consciousness of *iki* became established in the late eighteenth century, during the Tenmei and Kansei eras (1781-1800). In the ukiyo-e world, masters as Torii Kiyonaga, Kitagawa Utamaro, and Tōshūsai Sharaku were working with great creative energy. The Edo community was also experiencing the Great Tenmei Famine and sharply rising prices in that period, and the proactive commercial policies advocated by Tanuma Okitsugu were coming to an end. Matsudaira Sadanobu’s Kansei Reforms were beginning, casting a gloomy shadow over the free and lively Edo spirit. Here we explore the Edo *iki* nurtured in those social circumstances by examining two ukiyo-e works.

## Pleasure Quarters Pride

The women depicted in *Tachibana*, from the *Contemporary Beauties of the Pleasure Quarters* series, are geisha based in the Tachibana district (present-day Higashi Nihonbashi). The painting depicts them dressing up before they make their entrance. The woman standing in the middle is

looking at her colleague who is still applying rouge to her lips. When their preparations are complete, the geisha will stroll to the dinner party at which they are to perform. Their kimono are the then-popular style with designs confined to their skirts. They walk with bare feet in wooden clogs to flaunt these *iki* patterns. Torii Kiyonaga depicts their Edo-ideal slender, supple bodies in a manner now labeled “Edo Venus.” This ukiyo-e captures the pride and resilience of the geisha getting ready to perform.

## Knowing the Sweets and bitters of Love

Resting her chin on her hand, she stares into the distance, her eyes half closed. *Reflective Love*, from the series *Anthology of Poems: The Love Section*, is an *okubi-e* portrait. The expression on the face and gesture with the hand capture this beauty’s emotions in a manner that makes this portrait of a beauty one of Kitagawa Utamaro’s masterpieces. The clean, unadorned lines elegantly and effortlessly depict the feelings expressed in her face. Her shaved eyebrows tell us that she is a married woman, and her hair done up in a *torobin shinoji mage* chignon indicates that she is the wife of a commoner. She is wearing a *kosode* kimono with a small, *komon*, decorative pattern. The background color is a faintly reddish grey. Her under kimono has a yellow and black check pattern that, combined with the purple tie-dyed undergarment, enlivens the color of the hand and face. In her we see a woman of a certain age and recalling the subtleties of love.



**Reflective Love**, from the series *Anthology of Poems: The Love Section*  
Kitagawa Utamaro, ca. 1793

## Sophisticated Lives

These two prints of beauties portray women whose lives personify *iki*, women who understand the subtleties of the worlds they inhabit. In late eighteenth-century Edo, the term *tsū* (sophisticated, knowledgeable) was used to describe this idealized type of behavior.

“Showy but not gaudy, being *iki* indifferently, witty but not overly”: the sense of style these beauties express was described in *Kumoi-sōshi* (The Book of *Kumoi*) in 1781.

The themes showcased in the “World of Ukiyo-e” section of the Aesthetics of Edo corner of our permanent exhibition area change from month to month. From Tuesday, October 20 to Monday, November 23, the featured artist will be Torii Kiyonaga, and the works on display will include *Tachibana*, from the *Contemporary Beauties of the Pleasure Quarters* series. (Curator Nishimura Naoko)

# Historic Styles in the Meiji Era

**Tokyo Metropolitan Edo-Tokyo Museum**  
**Director**  
**Fujimori Terunobu**

The permanent exhibition area at the Edo-Tokyo Museum includes, along with historic artifacts, models based on careful research. The Tokyo Zone has a corner entitled “Tokyo in the Age of ‘Civilization and Enlightenment.’” The scale models there, equipped with sound and movement, of “Ginza Bricktown,” “Rokumeikan,” and “Nikorai-dō” are particularly popular. Prior to the opening of the museum, its director, Fujimori Terunobu, spent many years constructing these models while he was still on the faculty of the University of Tokyo. Here he explains why these models, now part of the museum’s permanent exhibits, are so fascinating.

For a time after the end of World War II, Western-style buildings from the Meiji era were considered old-fashioned and largely ignored. Reassessment of their value began around 1968, the centennial celebration of the start of the Meiji Era. Now many people admire their arches and domes, red brick and stone materials, and tasteful styles. There is, however, one barrier to deeper understanding of these Western-style buildings.

That barrier is style. This church is in the Gothic style, this bank is Neo-Classical, this station is Victorian: each of these Western buildings was built in a specific style.

Each of these styles was defined during a particular era of European history, from the ancient Greeks on. Some were reborn or revived during the fifteenth century, the Renaissance, as novel “Neo” forms of classical styles. The Meiji era, when Japanese architects were adopting European models, was also the final era when those historic styles were being used. It was as if, seized with an overwhelming passion, those architects had turned over a toy box full with historic toys, to play with whatever spilled out.

Half a century ago, when historians of my generation were beginning to study the history of architecture, we believed that the history of modern architecture in Japan could be understood without reference to those chaotic styles originating from European. As our research progressed, however, we came to understand that it was a mistake to ignore historic styles. We needed to know why, out of so many possibilities, did an architect choose the one on which he based his design? The



Replica of the Rokumeikan as it was in November, 1885



Replica of the Nikorai-dō as it was in the 1890s



The Bustle of People in Front of the Chuo Shimbunsha Building on Ginza Brick Street  
 Ogata Gekko, late Meiji

choice was surely not made without concepts or preferences. Whichever style was selected, there had to have been a reason for it.

Let’s examine three examples of Western-style buildings from early Meiji, starting with the style adopted for Ginza Bricktown, whose construction was completed in 1877.

This style is called English Neo-Classic and during this era spread widely throughout regions colonized by Britain. These buildings were designed by Irish architect Thomas Waters, whose intention was to replicate Great Britain’s imperial colonial style. But why? Waters was, by training a mining engineer. In Europe, that status would be lower than that of an architect. In Japan, however, he presumably wanted to enjoy working as an architect, with its higher status.

Next, let’s look at the Rokumeikan, a building designed to entertain foreign guests. The roof style is French. The porch appears to be based on the colonial veranda; its columns suggest coconut palms. The interior decoration was Islamic. In Britain of that era, the exotic combination of coconut palms and Islamic motifs would have evoked India.

Josiah Conder, the architect who designed the Rokumeikan, had a geographical view of architectural styles. He thought that a style evoking India would be appropriate to fill the gap between Japan and the West.

The original proposal for the Nikorai-dō (St. Nicholas Cathedral) sent from Moscow envisioned a properly Russian Orthodox style. Conder, who was commissioned to produce the final design for the cathedral, kept the orthodox floor plan but eliminated the onion-shaped dome characteristic of Russian Orthodox churches. He replaced it with an English-style roof. His own aesthetic sensibility must not have allowed the onion-shaped dome.

In all of these examples, form and style reflect both the architects’ sensibilities and contemporary trends.

## Visitor Information

Please visit our website for the latest information.

### Hours

9:30 - 17:30

Saturdays 9:30 - 19:30

(Last admission 30 minutes before closing.)

### Closed

Mondays (When Monday is a national holiday, the next business day)

Year-End and New Year Holiday

### Admission for Permanent Exhibition

	Individual	Group (20 and over)
Adults	¥ 600	¥ 480
Students*	¥ 480	¥ 380
Ages 65 and over	¥ 300	¥ 240
Junior high** and high school students	¥ 300	¥ 240

\* Includes university and vocational college students

\*\*Free admission for junior high school students resident or studying in Tokyo

### Free Admission to Permanent Exhibition

- Pre-school and elementary school children
- Junior high school students who are residents of Tokyo
- Those in personal possession of disability certificates Mental disability, psychiatric disability protection and atomic bomb survivor chart holders upon showing of the document (documentary proof of age also required) and their two custodians

### Silver Day

Admission is free for ages 65 and over on the 3rd Wednesday of each month (documentary proof of age required)

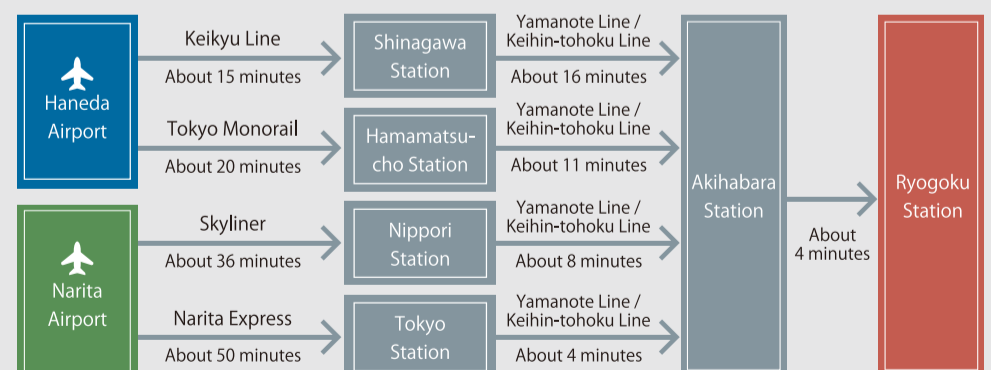
### Family Day

The admission for two adult custodians (Tokyo residents) who bring children aged below 18 on the 3rd Saturday and the next day (Sunday) will be reduced by half for entrance to permanent exhibition

A separate admission fee applies to special exhibitions.

## Getting Here

### From Airports



\* All times from Narita Airport are from “Narita Airport Terminal 2+3 (Airport Terminal 2) Station”.

### by Train by Subway

- 3-minute walk from West Exit of Ryogoku Station, JR Sobu Line
- 1-minute walk from A3 or A4 Exit of Ryogoku Station (Edo-Tokyo Hakubutsukan-mae), Toei Subway O-Edo Line

