

*Ukiyo-e*, literally “pictures of the floating world,” is a genre of Japanese painting and woodblock printing that began in the mid-seventeenth century and remained prominent until the early twentieth century. Originally *ukiyo* was a Buddhist term that referred to the transient here and now, but during the Edo period (1603–1867) the word’s meaning grew to describe the entertainment quarters. By the middle of the seventeenth century *ukiyo-e* prints had begun to portray the daily life of commoners, especially those who lived in and around Edo (modern Tokyo).

*Ukiyo-e* depict many different things, but many of the prints are either *bijin-ga* (images of beautiful women) or *yakusha-e* (portraits of kabuki actors). These prints, which were mass-produced and could be bought relatively cheaply, reflect the interests and values of the common people who purchased them. Prints that depicted figures like sumo wrestlers and warriors, landscapes, and nature scenes were also popular. Prints of caricatures, fantastical scenes, and erotic content were common as well. Creating these prints required great skill, and each print was usually made by a team of people: one to create the painting, one to carve the boards, and one to apply the ink to the prints. *Ukiyo-e* prints have sharp, rich colors in order to catch the eyes of potential customers.

The Hagi Urugami Museum holds a collection of approximately 5,500 *ukiyo-e* prints, and each month around thirty of these are selected and displayed around a single theme. Included in the collection are prints from famous artists such as Hokusai, Utamaro, Sharaku, and Hiroshige. The collection spans the history of the artform and is a valuable resource for researchers and enthusiasts alike.