

JOAN B MIRVISS LTD

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LYRICAL IMAGES: POETRY AND JAPAN'S VISUAL ARTS at JOAN B MIRVISS LTD

November 14 – December 20, 2008

*An Exhibition of 19th- and 20th-century Prints and Paintings Highlighting the
Interplay between Text and Image*

NEW YORK: Joan B Mirviss LTD is pleased to present a selection of more than thirty-five Japanese prints and paintings from the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries that explore the rich artistic legacy that developed between Japan's literary and visual arts. Organized around cherished poetic themes and lyrical motifs, the exhibition will include superb examples of calligraphy, color woodblock prints, gold-leaf screens, and painted hanging scrolls. **LYRICAL IMAGES: POETRY AND JAPAN'S VISUAL ARTS** will open to the public on November 14 and will remain on view through December 20, 2008 at Joan B Mirviss LTD, located at 39 East 78th Street at Madison Avenue.

Individual poems, or verses that were included in lyrical prose, were an integral part of Japan's literary tradition. From the romantic *Tale of Genji* to the narrative *Tale of the Heike*, poetry and the act of composing poems were key elements in the plots of many of Japan's epic novels, many of which originated during the flowering of imperial court culture during the Heian period (794-1185). Complex iconography with layered allusions and metaphors arose from these poetic episodes that addressed subjects such as love, beauty, nature, and spirituality, and provided painters and printmakers with a significant source of inspiration. For example, images of Murasaki Shikibu (c. 973-1014), the renowned author of the *Tale of Genji*, came to represent the epitome of refined aristocratic culture, brilliant prose, and ideal beauty. One highlight from the exhibition is an exquisite painting on silk by Watanabe Seitei (1851-1918), whose portrait of the revered poetess seated on a balcony under a full moon captures the emotional appeal of her celebrated writing.



JAPANESE ART By Appointment

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In addition to literal representations, **LYRICAL IMAGES** will include fine examples by masters of the color woodblock medium that reinterpret these classical themes in both beautiful and, at times, humorous ways. One striking print by Suzuki Harunobu (1724-1770) depicts a playful parody on the established lyrical theme of "eight views" (*hakkei*), which paired set poems with the natural beauty of famous locales.

In this work, Harunobu substituted the traditional landscape view with an interior scene of a pleasure house in Edo featuring a courtesan and her patron. Another highlight is a kabuki portrait by Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825) in which the popular actor Ichikawa Danjūro VII is shown holding an umbrella in the rain under the title of "Rain-prayer Komachi" (*Amagoi Komachi*). This title reflects one of the seven guises of the celebrated poetess Ono no Komachi (ca. 825-900) that came to form the lyrical convention of "Seven Komachi" (*Nanakomachi*).

Poetry and literature also held an important role in the religions of Japan and their strong connections with nature and spirituality. Calligraphy and ink painting served both as forms of meditation as well as powerful tools to proselytize. Two Zen Buddhist ink paintings by the artists Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768) and Otagaki Rengetsu (1791-1875) are highlights conveying the visual and textual relationships between word and image. Both artists have created dramatic expressions in ink by combining traditional Buddhist subjects with their own poetry and calligraphy. As a complement to the two-dimensional works, a selection of contemporary Japanese ceramics will be included that reflect the timelessness of these lyrical compositions.

EXHIBITION

November 14 – December 20, 2008

Tuesday – Friday 12 – 5 pm

Saturday 1 – 4 pm

and by appointment

About JOAN B MIRVISS LTD

Joan B. Mirviss has been a renowned expert in Japanese art, specializing in prints, paintings, screens and contemporary ceramics for more than thirty years. As a distinguished, widely published, and highly respected specialist in her field, Mirviss has advised and built collections for many museums, major private collectors, and corporations. Laura J. Mueller, gallery director and curator of this exhibition, is also a published scholar of Japanese woodblock prints. She has lectured in both the United States and Japan, and curated museum and gallery exhibitions.

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