

赤堀水右衛門

石井兵助



# Actors Arashi Kichisaburō III as Akabori Mizuemon and Kataoka Gadō II as Ishii Heisuke

Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III)

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Actors Arashi Kichisaburō III as Akabori Mizuemon and Kataoka Gadō II as Ishii Heisuke

**Artist/Maker:** Utagawa Kunisada (Utagawa Toyokuni III) (Artist)

**Born:** 1855 - 7/1855

**Object Type:** Graphics

**Materials:** Ink, Paper

**Technique:** Woodcut

**Measurements:** Support and image h. 360 x w. 248 mm

**Inscription:** Censor's seal

**Accession Number:** 41452

**Historic Period:** Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

**School/Style:** Utagawa School

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Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865) and publisher, Ebisuya Shōshichi issued this coloured, woodblock print to satisfy the public's insatiable demand for actor prints (J. *yakusha-e*). The kabuki theatre was an extremely popular form of entertainment and the market for actor-related goods was a profitable one.

The design depicts the actors Arashi Kichisaburō III as Akabori Mizuemon and Kataoka Gadō II as Ishii Heisuke from the kabuki play *Soga moyō Kameyama-zome*(□□□□□).

Arashi Kichisaburō III is performing the *katakiyaku* role of the villain, Akabori Mizuemon and wears a black kimono with crests, and a magnificent wig. [1]

The print depicts two enemies, posed in a frozen tableau (J. *mie*) before a backdrop of swirling

water. The dynamic pattern of the waves is replicated in the rhythmic surface design of Kataoka Gadō's purple kimono, unifying the composition.

The skilled artisan has used a number of techniques to produce this striking image. The dramatic blue of the print results from the introduction of a chemical-based aniline dye named Berlin Blue (J. *beroi*). The craftsman has used the effect of the grain of the woodblock (J. *mokume-zuri*) in combination with gradation printing (J. *bokashi-zuri*) to produce an animated ground colour that connects sky with river. Kichisaburō's black clothing and hair has been double-printed to produce a depth of colour, which possibly has then been burnished. Gadō's blue and white sleeve has an embossed texture that results from a technique known as 'blind printing' (J. *karazuri*).

The characters depicted here derive from the 'world' (J. *sekai*) of Kameyama revenge plays. These plays are based on an incident that occurred in 1701, when Akabori Mizunosuke murdered Ishii Uemon, a vassal of Lord Inaba. Uemon's sons registered their grievance with the magistrate and received permission to settle their vendetta. [2] On the stage, names and locations were changed to satisfy government censors. In kabuki productions, the 28-year vendetta reaches its climax not at the castle town of the Itakura family, but at the Date clan's Kameyama Castle, where the brothers Ishii Tomozō and Ishii Genzō avenge themselves on their father's enemy, Akabori Mizuemon. [3]

Kameyama plays reference an earlier tale of vengeance, known as the 'Tale of the Soga' (J. *Soga monogatari*). This story is also based on a historical event that occurred in 1193, and led to 18 years of plotting. Similarly, in the 'Tale of the Soga' two brothers avenge the death of their father.

The woodblock print in the Sainsbury Centre Collection presents a scene from the play, *Soga moyō Kameyama-zome*, which roughly translates as 'Soga Patterns Dyed at Mount Kame'. Within the title, the plots of Kameyama revenge plays (J. *Kameyama no adauchi mono*) and Soga plays (J. *Soga mono*) are presented in apposition.

Translating kabuki titles is a difficult task as the name of a play incorporates many puns. In the instance of this production, alternative Japanese characters are used in the title, so that the words 'butterfly' (J. *chō* 蝶) and 'plover' (J. *chidori* 雛) are transcribed as 'Soga patterns' (J. *Soga moyō*). This references the fabric patterns associated with the Soga Brothers, Soga Jūrō and Soga Gorō. Jūrō is usually depicted wearing a *kamishimo* decorated with plovers, whereas Gorō's formal attire is patterned with butterflies.

The date seal, used in combination with an 'aratame' inspection seal, reveals that the design was approved by government-appointed censors in the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month of a Hare Year. The Chinese zodiac Year of the Hare corresponds with 1855 in the Gregorian calendar. Kabuki playbills from this period confirm this date, and reveal that *Soga moyō Kameyama-zome* was performed at the Kawarazaki Theatre in Edo, from the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Ansei era (1855). [4]

It is worth comparing the scene in the playbill with the position of the actors in a print from the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. [5] The compositions in the Sainsbury Centre and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco feature the same actors and were issued in connection with the 1855 kabuki production of *Soga moyō Kameyama-zome*. Although the actors are not named in the prints,

they can be identified by their *nigao* or 'likenesses'. [6]

Vanessa Tothill, May 2020

[1] For a range of kabuki wigs see woodblock print 'Katsuratsuke Ichikawa Ichizō III' (1857) by Utagawa Kunitsuna, National Theatre Collection, Japan (Kokuritsu Gekijō), object number: NA007583003.

[https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/collections/view\\_detail\\_nishikie?division=collections&class=nishikie&type=title&istart=90&iselect=%25E3%2581%258B&trace=detail&did=1122227](https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/collections/view_detail_nishikie?division=collections&class=nishikie&type=title&istart=90&iselect=%25E3%2581%258B&trace=detail&did=1122227) [accessed 18 May 2020]

[2] Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 93-4.

[3] Samuel L. Leiter, *New Kabuki Encyclopedia: A Revised Adaption of 'Kabuki Jiten'* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 265.

[4] The production's title is confirmed by an illustrated kabuki playbill in the Art Research Center Collection, Ritsumeikan University, object number: arcBK03-0094-604\_04.

<https://www.dh-jac.net/db1/ban/results1024.php?f1=arcBK03-0094-604&f46=1&enter=portal&max=1&skip=3&enter=portal> [accessed 7 May 2020]

[5] Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, object number: 1963.30.5744ab.

<https://art.famsf.org/utagawa-kunisada/actors-akabori-mizuemon-and-ishii-heisuke-1963305744ab> [accessed 14 May 2020]

[6] The actors in this print were identified by Kurahashi Masae for Ritsumeikan University's Art Research Centre Ukiyo-e Database, in partnership with The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2006-2008). There is an identical print in the collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, object number: 11.402110.

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/471183/actors-arashi-kichisaburo-iii-as-akabori-mizuemon-and-kataok?ctx=1f7237de-59d8-454c-baad-7e42025e01dc&idx=4> [accessed 18 May 2020]

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## Further Reading

Leiter, Samuel L, *New Kabuki Encyclopedia: A Revised Adaption of 'Kabuki Jiten'* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1997)

Tilly, Charles, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

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## **Provenance**

This print formed part of Professor Frank Thistlethwaite's private print collection. Thistlethwaite was the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Anglia and instrumental in establishing the Sainsbury Centre. Acquired by SCVA as a bequest in 2003.

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