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Actor Segawa Kikunojō V as Okaru

Uemura Yohei

Not on display

Title/Description: Actor Segawa Kikunojō V as Okaru

Artist/Maker: Uemura Yohei (Publisher)

Born: 1826 circa - 1826

Object Type: Graphics

Materials: Ink, Paper

Measurements: Support and image h. 353 x w. 250 mm

Inscription: Censor's seal

Accession Number: 41456

Historic Period: Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

Production Place: Asia, Japan

School/Style: Utagawa School

Woodblock print from an incomplete diptych by Utagawa Kuniyasu (1794-1832) published by Uemura Yohei. The print depicts actor Segawa Kikunojō V as Okaru from the kabuki play, 'Copybook of the Treasury of Loyal Retainers' (*Kanadehon Chūshingura* 忠臣蔵). The text at the top of the print provides the actor's name and theatrical role: actor Segawa Kikunojō as Okaru. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was staged at the Kawarazaki Theatre in Edo in the 8th lunar month of 1826. The date of this performance may provide an approximate date of the print's publication.

The plot of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* is based on a real-life incident that occurred in 1703, when 47 retainers of Lord Asano Naganori of Akō domain avenged themselves on their dead master's enemy, Kōzuke no Suke. After settling their vendetta, the retainers were arrested and ordered to commit ritual suicide. Playwrights, inspired by the scandal, quickly adapted the tale for the *jōruri* puppet theatres and kabuki theatres. Names of the key characters were altered to circumvent official censorship.

Utagawa Kuniyasu has captured Kikunojō cast in the *onnagata* role of Okaru, peering out from a palanquin. This scene occurs in Act 6 of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* when Okaru bids farewell to her husband Hayano Kanpei. Okaru has found a way to help Kanpei, who has been secretly trying to raise funds for the vendetta. Without knowing how the money will be spent, Okaru agrees to be sold

to a brothel. Although the diptych is incomplete, the other panel probably shows a guilt-ridden Kanpei. This is the couple's final parting, as later in this Act Kanpei commits suicide.

Segawa Kikunojō V (1802-1832) received his acting title in 1815, and in the same year became the leading female role specialist (J. *tate onnagata*) at the Kawarazaki Theatre. [1] Kikunojō also performed male roles, and achieved recognition as a versatile actor (J. *kaneru yakusha*).

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston has a similar design to the Sainsbury Centre Collection's print. This diptych is a double portrait of Segawa Kikunojō V and has been dated the 8th lunar month of 1826. Boston Museum of Fine Arts' related design reveals that Kikunojō was cast as both Okaru and Hayano Kanpei, in what would have been a lightning-fast costume change. [2] It was a theatrical conceit to have one actor perform both parts of a married couple, or a pair of ill-fated lovers.

In the collection at the National Theatre, Japan (*Kokuritsu Gekijō*), there is another *Kanadehon Chūshingura* print, designed by Utagawa Kuniyasu and published by Uemura Yohei, which depicts Segawa Kikunojō V in a palanquin. The National Theatre, Japan has dated this kabuki production to the 8th lunar month of 1826. [3] These two examples suggest a date for the design in the Sainsbury Centre Collection.

Vanessa Tothill, May 2020

[1] Samuel L. Leiter, *New Kabuki Encyclopedia: A Revised Adaptation of 'Kabuki Jiten'* (Westport, Connecticut; London, Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 562.

[2] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, object number: 11.40657a-b.

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/471640/actor-segawa-kikunojo-v-as-both-okaru-r-and-hayano-kanpei?ctx=340741c8-3f3d-4a8e-b904-952835044e5e&idx=0> [accessed 6 May 2020]

[3] National Theatre, Japan (*Kokuritsu Gekijō*), object number: NA030240.

https://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/dglib/collections/view_detail_nishikie?did=362&kw=%25E6%25AD%258C%25E5%25B7%259D%25E5%259B%25BD%25E5%25AE%2589&division=search&class=nishikie [accessed 19 May 2020]

Further Reading

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