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TSUKIOKA KŌGYO and the beauty of the Nō theatre
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Tsukioka Kōgyo (1869-1927)

and the beauty of the Nō theatre

Inspired by the restrained beauty of the designs and the excellent 'surimono-like' printing quality, I bought my first two Kōgyo prints from the Dutch print dealer Chris Uhlenbeck in early 1983. The prints belonged to Kōgyo's extensive *Nogaku zue* ('Collection of Nō prints') series which depicts scenes from the Nō theater.

Later that same year, the opportunity arose to acquire a lot of ten prints from the same series at the Klefisch Auction House in Cologne. It was one of these prints which particularly induced me to buy this lot, and I still think that the print belongs to the best designs of the series (see fig. 1). Although I didn't realize it at that moment, it was the start of a gradual fascination for the largely under-estimated graphic work of Tsukioka Kōgyo.



1. Kōgyo.

The thundergod Kamo (illustrated on a votive panel),
from the series *Nōgaku zue* (1898)

From time to time, my interest was fired by events, such as the Nō theatre performance which I attended in Belgium in 1989 - the year in which Japan was the focus point in the *Europalia* festival. At first, I experienced these Nō performances as being somewhat dull, certainly compared to the action which I knew from Kabuki performances. The story-lines develop slowly in Nō theatre, although the costumes and chanting are reminiscent of the exotic splendor of the Kabuki theatre. Gradually, though, the 'silent beauty' of this ancient Japanese form of theatre became enchanting. I remember, for instance, the stunning performance which I witnessed in 2002 of the play *Abe no Seimei* (a new piece by the author Kiju Yoshida) which was staged in Alkmaar, the Netherlands by the two great contemporary Nō actors Rokuro Umewaka and Tadaki Okada - it was truly breathtaking! Or the outdoor performance by master Kano and his troupe in Aix-en-Provence which I attended last year. If you are susceptible to it, a Nō theatre performance can grab you and move you deeply.

Early in 2001, my friend Tom Rimer, who was at that time heading the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures of the University of Pittsburgh, mailed me that he had discovered a complete set of Kogyo's *Nogaku zue* series in the library of the university. Soon afterwards, we developed the idea of publishing a book on Kōgyō's oeuvre in which Tom would cover the fascinating stories connected with the Nō prints, and I would be responsible for all other data related to the prints.

I began investigating Kōgyō's output and soon found out that his Nō prints formed the majority of his work (he produced three large series on the subject, next to several smaller sets). However he also excelled in landscape prints, which come in a small size series, besides his work in the *shikishiban* format, which almost exclusively depicts *kachō* (flowers-and-birds) themes. It turned out that he had also created a considerable number of attractive paintings, again mainly related to the Nō theater.



2. The authors Tom Rimer (left) and Robert Schaap during their stay in Murs (Provence), 2002.

A German collector of Kōgyo prints, Claus-Peter Schulz, provided great assistance with this work and often surprised me with new Kōgyo material. After a discussion with Hotei Publishing (now part of Brill), the outlines were set for a monograph on Kōgyo, which would show all artistic aspects of the artist. In the summer of 2002, the authors met in the south of France and discussed which prints should be incorporated and which not (see fig. 2), and almost ten years after inception, publication is foreseen for next year. This book will be of interest to Japanese print lovers, who wish to learn about Kōgyo and Nō theater; and for those whose prime interest is in Nō theater itself, the book presents the creative solutions which Tsukioka Kōgyo employed to visualize the many Nō pieces (fig. 3).

I sincerely believe that the result will have been worth waiting for.



3. Kōgyo.
Nue (The fabulous bird),
from the series Nōgaku hyakuban (1925)

About the author

Robert Schaap was trained as an industrial designer and later received a British Council Scholarship Award to study graphic design at Hornsey College of Art in London. As a graphic designer he has focused on books relating to Japanese prints for some fifteen years, and over the last twenty-five years he has been collecting Japanese prints and paintings. He is a longtime editor (and designer) of the Society for Japanese Arts' journal *Andon* and has served as the Society's Secretary for almost thirty years.

Over the years, Robert Schaap has written numerous articles and reviews on various aspects of Japanese prints, and has (co)-organized several exhibitions on Japanese prints, such as *Beauty & Violence. Japanese Prints by Yoshitoshi 1839-1892; Heroes & Ghosts. Japanese Prints by Kuniyoshi 1797-1861* and *A Brush with Animals. Japanese paintings 1700-1950* and was the main author of their accompanying catalogues. He was co-author of *Crows, Cranes and Camellias. The Natural World of Ohara Koson 1877-1945*, which will be re-printed this year by Hotei Publishing.

Robert Schaap is the designer of numerous Hotei publications such as *Kawase Hasui. The Complete Woodblock Prints; The Hundred Poets Compared* and many more.



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