

Oriental excellence featured in art show

Japanese courtesans daintily go about their daily routine, lounging, talking, preening and playing.

Intrigues long played out and forgotten are plotted again as an elegant privileged way of life continues via artists' prints first cut out more than four centuries ago.

Prints and woodcuts from the 16-20th centuries were the subject of an exhibit and sale, recently at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus, Farmington Hills.

Sponsored by Marson Ltd., of Baltimore, Maryland, the exhibit combined prints from Japan, Taiwan, China, India and Persia.

In each of the countries the influence of Western culture changed the shape and form of the artists' focus.

Woodcuts from Japanese artists con-

centrated on clean crisp lines which carried out a pattern. Courtesans of the 18th century were depicted by the printmaker Utamaro.

THEIR DELICATELY patterned robes and stylized poses speak for a life of leisure and ritual. Colors such as pale peach shades are clearly confined within the lines of the print.

But the precision of the printmakers slowly faded as Western influences became stronger, according to Charles Wiebe, Marson's representative.

Subtle pastels gave way to brighter blues, purples and reds imported from the West. Instead of adding to the elegant art, the colors bled on the prints and gave them a garish look.

"The style deteriorated in the later part of the 19th century and the early 20th century. Today, modern Japanese artists are doing the same things that Western artists are doing," Wiebe said.

Subject matter changed with Western influence, also. Traditional landscape subjects such as flowers and glimpses into parts of a scene gave way to representations of an area in its entirety.

Changes in the political climate of the country affected its art as well, Wiebe said.

In mainland China, artists are concerned with subjects that depict the proper political perspective.

"MOST OF THE prints that are being made today in China are propaganda pieces," Wiebe said. Intricate paper cuttings depicting animals or persons are some of the non-propaganda work coming out of China.

Silk screen prints depicting traditional subjects, such as travelers finding their way through the mountains, still are available but most have been taken out of the country before the Communist takeover.

Although the face of eastern art has changed, traditional prints still draw an audience. Their artists are sometimes just as mysterious as the life-style the prints depict.

Pictures of actors and upper class men join those of the courtesans in the traditional printmakers' repertoire.

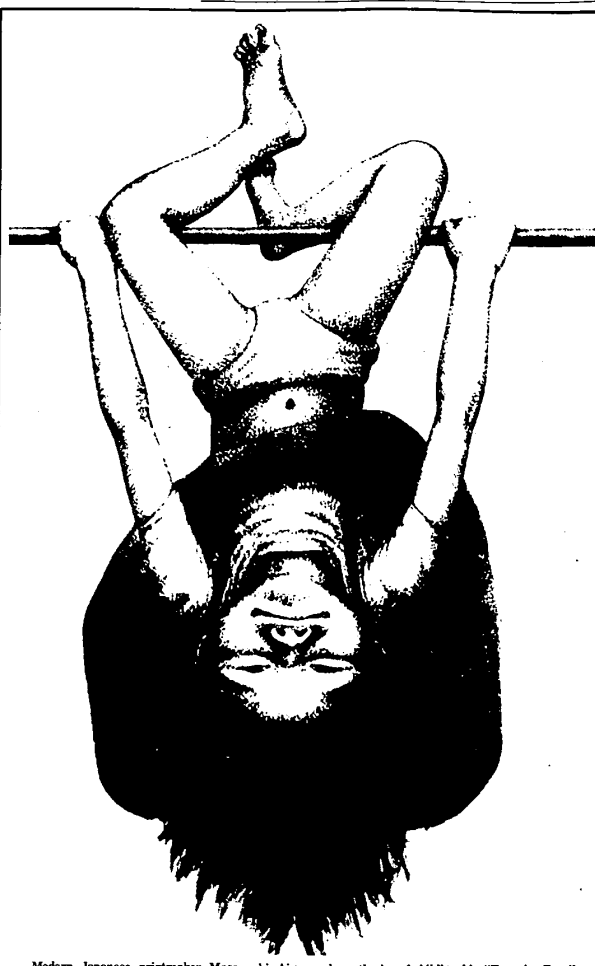
One of the first artists to depict actors from the common man's theatre, kabuki, Sharaku marked his works with a sparing use of lines. Instead of showing his expertise at creating repetitions of patterns, he concentrated on the psychology of the individual performer, according to Wiebe.

Sharaku is an mysterious figure to art historians interested in eastern art. Although 40 of his prints are known, all were completed within one year.

"AFTER THAT YEAR, he drops out of sight. We don't know what happened to him," explained Wiebe.

Yet, Sharaku is one of the most influential of the 19th century print-makers.

His concentration on depicting members of the theatre troupes was copied by later printmakers.



Modern Japanese printmaker Masayoshi Aigasa shows the joy of childhood in "Exercise Bar."



Toyokuni depicted this Japanese courtesan in the 18th century. Today, this work, one of the original series of woodcuts, is worth about \$1,200.

Albee classic worth seeing

By BARBARA MICHALS

Special writer

Who's afraid of Edward Albee? Not the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford, which has tackled the absurdist dramatist's little-known "Seascape" and turned it into an evening of highly effective theater.

Albee, perhaps best known for his provocative "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" always offers an intellectual challenge to both actors and audience.

"Seascape," his most recent work, had only a short run on Broadway a few years ago, possibly because the play needs the greater intimacy of a small theater. Given the guild's small, comfortable playhouse and its wealth of talent, "Seascape" thrives.

AS IN "VIRGINIA WOOLF," Albee here focuses on crises in the lives of two couples. But in "Seascape," improbable as it may sound, one couple is a pair of human-size talking lizards. Sarah and Leslie, the lizards, are fully-developed, viable characters, every bit as interesting as Nancy and Charlie, their human counterparts.

The drama takes place on an isolated rock-strewn seashore amidst towering sand dunes, the whole suggesting the sterility of modern life. Act I opens with the human couple sunning themselves on the rocks like lizards while Albee dissects the good and not-so-good years of their marriage.

Nancy is restless and wants to do something exciting with her life before it is over; Charlie would be content to live the rest of his life in semi-retirement. "We've earned a rest," he insists repeatedly.

"No, we shouldn't give up before we have to," Nancy retorts.

When the lizards appear, Charlie is terrified, but Nancy finds them beautiful and is eager to talk with them.

Act II provides some whimsical comedy as the two species approach each other, first apprehensively, then exploringly. Eventually each couple becomes defensive of its respective lifestyles.

Nancy and Charlie teach the lizards about handshakes, eggless breeding, mammary glands and neatly-labeled

emotions. Though the lizards have never heard of "love" and cannot fathom keeping one's offspring around for 18 or 20 years, they are in some ways more monogamous, sensitive, and caring than the humans.

ULTIMATELY "SEASCAPE" is optimistic about the future of the human race. There'll be some changes made, but mankind will endure in some form or other.

Just as complex life forms previously evolved from simpler aquatic creatures, Sarah and Leslie have been driven from their comfortable underwater home by the evolutionary force.

The difference is that this time around the new forms of life are willing to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors.

All four actors deliver strong performances in the guild production. Louise Martin and Pietro DiGiorgio are thoroughly convincing as Nancy and Charlie, while Cathie Schroeder and Ron Samuel are equally believable as Sarah and Leslie.

Ms. Martin looks and sounds sweet and gentle, adding an interesting dimension to her nagging of Charlie. DiGiorgio, the bored husband in the first act, effectively runs through a broad spectrum of emotions in the second act.

The costumes and makeup for the lizards are exceptionally well done and greatly enhance the actors' credibility.

Ms. Schroeder does an outstanding job with body English, her darting eyes and quick head movements capturing both Sarah's sense of wonderment and her basic reptilian responses.

Samuel's portrayal emphasizes Leslie's masculinity as he bellows in anger at Charlie or humorously prides himself on the length of his tail.

Director Mary Ann Browne Vosgerchian keeps the play moving at a crisp pace so that even the verbose first act never sags.

Additional performances of "Seascape" are scheduled for Feb. 24-25 and March 24. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 7:30 p.m. on Sunday. The theater is at 15138 Beech Daly, South of Five Mile, Redford.

Staff photos
by Harry Mauthe

Softball managers meet set

The Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation will be having its initial managers meeting for slow pitch softball leagues on March 1.

Women's league managers will meet at 6:30 p.m., men's league will meet at 7:30 p.m.

This meeting will discuss league format, scheduling, registration days and deadlines, entry fees and other pertinent information.

For further information, call the department at 474-6115.

Novi plans crafts fair

The Novi Parks and Recreation Department is sponsoring its first Arts and Crafts Fair from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., March 4 at the new Novi High School cafeteria, Ten Mile and Taft. Admission is free. Entertainment will be provided by the Novi High School Jazz band and the Jaycee Auxiliary will sponsor a bake sale with proceeds going toward the March of Dimes.

Bands jam

The Farmington High School Stage Band is combining its talents with the Michigan Tech Jazz Ensemble at 8 p.m., March 1 in the Farmington High School Auditorium.

Earns BA

Yun-Lung Kao of Farmington Hills recently graduated from Ohio State University with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

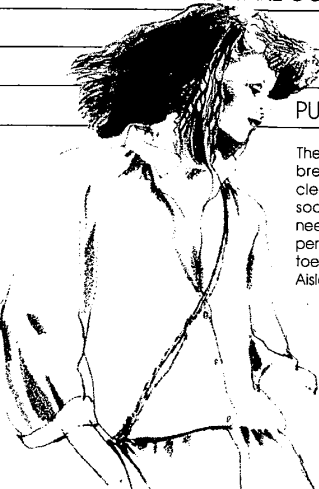
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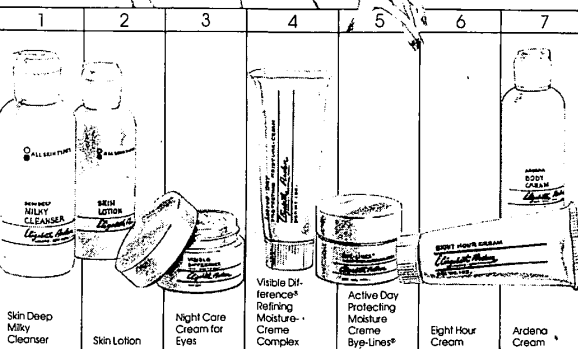
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