

IMPRESSIONS OF JAPAN

An expansive exhibition explores the art and evolution of Japanese printmaking over the past century.

BY BARBARA KLEIN

The walk may have been short, but the journey was long.

For the past two years, Akemi May, Carnegie Museum of Art's associate curator of works on paper, has been busy scouring the museum's collection database in search of Japanese prints. Her goal was to create a comprehensive exhibition that would span more than a century of changing techniques, subject matter, and philosophies.

As part of her discovery process, May would often leave the confines of her office and set out to explore the museum's in-house print storage room. The short trek from her desk became a rite of passage, an almost daily affirmation—each step asserting that her destination was drawing ever nearer.

Because, as May readily acknowledges, a computer screen is no substitute for the real thing, especially when dealing with woodblock prints. By their very definition, prints are produced in multiples, each iteration of a common design quietly asserting its individuality.

"It's easy to think that all prints are the same, but they're not," May says. "Every single impression has its own subtle variations—registration areas that are slightly off or places where the ink was applied differently.

"These are the details you can only detect when you look at it in person." ▶

Hashiguchi Goyō, *Woman in a Summer Kimono (Natsui no onna)*, 1920, Carnegie Museum of Art: Bequest of Dr. James B. Austin >

