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Art, Sex, and Institutions: Defining, Collecting, and Displaying *Shunga*

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Abstract

In Edo-Japan (c.1603 - 1868) *shunga*, sexually explicit prints, paintings and illustrated books, were widely produced and disseminated. However, from the 1850s onwards, *shunga* was suppressed by the government and it has largely been omitted from art history, excluded from exhibitions and censored in publications. Although changes have taken place, cultural institutions continue to be cautious about what they collect and exhibit, with *shunga* largely remaining a prohibited subject in Japan. Since the 1970s there has been a gradual increase in the acceptance of *shunga* outside Japan, as evidenced in the growing number of exhibitions and publications. The initial impetus behind this thesis was: Why and how did *shunga* become increasingly acceptable in Europe and North America in the twentieth century, whilst conversely becoming unacceptable in post-Edo Japan?

I discuss how and why attitudes to *shunga* in the UK and Japan have changed from the Edo period to the present day, and consider how definitions can affect this. My research examines how *shunga* has been dealt with in relation to private and institutional collecting and exhibitions. In order to gauge modern responses, the 2013 *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition at the British Museum is used as an in-depth study - utilising mixed methods and an interdisciplinary approach to analyse curatorial and legal decisions, as well as visitor feedback. To-date there are no official or standardised guidelines for the acquisition, cataloguing, or display of sexually explicit artefacts. It is intended that institutions will benefit from my analysis of the changing perceptions of *shunga* and of previous *shunga* collections and exhibitions when dealing with *shunga* or other sexually explicit items in the future.

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Preface

My fascination with Japanese art has been longstanding, so when I first became aware of *shunga*, sexually-explicit artworks produced in the Edo period (c.1603-1868), as an undergraduate, it was interesting to me but no more so than any other aspect of Japanese art. It was not until 2008, whilst writing my Masters' thesis, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) that *shunga* caught my interest as a subject for further research. During a discussion of *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro*¹, an out-of-print exhibition catalogue and key monograph on the artist Utamaro, the subject of my thesis, my supervisor John Carpenter mentioned that the Japanese version of it was significantly cheaper. The catalogue accompanied an extensive exhibition that was shown in the UK at the British Museum in 1995 and subsequently in Japan at Chiba City Museum of Art, and was edited by Tim Clark and Asano Shugō, the museums' curators respectively. Reflecting the cross-cultural nature of this collaboration, the catalogue is bilingual, with *all* of the essays and catalogue entries in both English and Japanese. So why was there a need for a Japanese version? Carpenter explained that Utamaro's *shunga* works had been removed from the catalogue sold in Japan. It later transpired that not only had *shunga* been removed from the Japanese catalogue, but also from the exhibition in Chiba. This prompted further curiosity and a wealth of questions, and these questions became the basis of this thesis.

Fortuitously for me, in 2009 a Leverhulme-funded research project on *shunga* was undertaken collaboratively by the British Museum and SOAS, University of London in the UK, and the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) and the Arts Research Centre (ARC), Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto in Japan. As part of the project a series of symposia brought Japanese art historians together with curators and other academics working in related subjects in order to share existing knowledge and advance the small but expanding field of *shunga* scholarship. It became clear that the removal of *shunga* from the 1995 Utamaro exhibition and catalogue in Japan was not an isolated incident but that *shunga* was, and remains, a contentious subject in

¹ Shūgō Asano and Timothy Clark, *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro* (London: British Museum Press, 1995).

Japan. It has often been omitted from art history, collections of *shunga* offered to institutions have been refused, and exhibitions and publications featuring *shunga* have been censored.

One of the intended outcomes of the research project was an exhibition of *shunga* in the UK and in Japan. Realising that these exhibitions offered a unique opportunity to observe current institutional policies and public responses to *shunga* I resolved to use the exhibitions as a focused study within my PhD. Rarely does this kind of exciting opportunity occur, and it has made it possible for me to compare the results with previous attitudes to *shunga*.

This is how my thesis came to be.

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This thesis has been made possible with help from a great number of people, to all of whom I sincerely offer my thanks. To those who have not been mentioned here by name, I am no less grateful and I ask forgiveness.

Many museum staff freely shared their time and knowledge with me and answered my never-ending list of questions. They have greatly enriched this thesis. Thank you to current and former staff at the British Museum, especially Tim Clark, Stuart Frost, David Francis, Lawrence Smith, Ryoko Matsuba, Tony Doubleday, Laura Purseglove, Paul Goodhead, Jon Ould, Paul Roberts, and Francesca Hillier. I would also like to thank the 205 anonymous visitors to the British Museum's *shunga* exhibition for taking the time to share their views with me, and Shelley O'Connor for her help conducting the questionnaires. Thank you to Rupert Faulkner and Gregory Irvine at the V&A, and archival staff at Blythe House. Thank you to Drew Gerstle and Akiko Yano at SOAS, and Craig Hartley at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Thank you to Ishigami Aki at Ritsumeikan University, Hayakawa Monta at Nichibunken, Asano Shugo at Yamato Bunkakan, and Tanabe Masako at Chiba City Museum, who, in addition to sharing information with me, kindly overlooked the many mistakes I undoubtedly made in Japanese. Thank you to the private collector 'Mr Jones' and to a curator in Russia, both of whom generously shared information with me but prefer to remain anonymous.

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Thank you to the Service family, whose continuing kindness and hospitality allowed me to study in London and to carry out much of the research for this thesis. Thank you to my friends, parents, and family for putting up with me being largely absent for several years and for letting me spend most of my time with books instead of people. My thanks especially to Alex for his support and belief in me.

Abbreviations

ACE - Arts Council England

ARC - Arts Research Centre, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto

BAME - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

BL - British Library, London

BM - British Museum, London

BnF - Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

Chiba - Chiba-shi Bijutsukan (Chiba City Museum of Art)

DCMS - Department of Culture, Media and Sport

EID - Department of Engravings, Illustrations, and Drawings, V&A

GSM - Gender and Sexual Minorities

HAM - Helsinki Art Museum

HMA - Honolulu Museum of Art

ICOM - International Council of Museums

JA - Department of Japanese Antiquities, British Museum

KI - The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Indiana

LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art

MA - Museums Association

MEXT - Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology,
also known as Monbushō

MFA - Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

MGS - Museums Galleries Scotland

NACF - National Arts Collections Fund

Nichibunken - Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyū Sentā (The International Research
Centre for Japanese Studies), Kyoto

OA - Department of Oriental Antiquities, BM

SKM - South Kensington Museum, a previous name for the V&A

SMC - Scottish Museums Council

SOAS - School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

TNM - Tokyo National Museum

V&A - Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Introduction

During the Edo period in Japan (c.1603 - 1868) the production and dissemination of *shunga*, sexually explicit prints, paintings and illustrated books, was acceptable in a way in which it was not in Europe. Sex was an acceptable part of Edo period life and therefore it is not surprising that it was a common and popular theme in art. However, largely due to foreign influences, from the Meiji period (1868-1912) onwards, depictions of sex became a sensitive subject and gradually disappeared from art.

Although access to sexual material became more commonplace in the late twentieth century, cultural institutions remain cautious about what they collect and exhibit. As noted in the preface, *shunga* is a contentious subject: it has often been omitted from art history, collections of *shunga* offered to institutions have been refused, and exhibitions and publications featuring *shunga* have been censored. The removal of *shunga* from the 1995 Utamaro exhibition and catalogue when it travelled from the BM to Chiba is but one example of this. I comparatively examine the treatment and reception of *shunga* in the UK and in Japan diachronically to show how sex in art and the concordant concepts are culturally and historically situated. I discuss the differences in attitudes to *shunga* between Japan and the UK, why these differences occurred and how they have changed.

Overview

This short introductory chapter starts with the main questions which drove my research, and then sets out my aims. Chapter 1 explores terms used in relation to sexually explicit art, and the impact they can have, then offers definitions of how they are used in this thesis. In addition, various ways that *shunga* has been defined both within and outside of Edo-period Japan are discussed. Chapter 2 looks at private collectors and their collecting habits. To situate *shunga* collecting in a meaningful context, the collecting of erotic art and *ukiyo-e* are outlined first with reference to specific collectors. Several prominent private *shunga* collectors are then discussed in more detail. Many private collectors have

gifted their *shunga* collections to public institutions, and Chapter 3 examines the institutional collecting of *shunga* noting the impact of legal issues and social mores in the shift from passive to active collecting. In particular, the history of *shunga* collecting at prominent institutions, such as the V&A and the BM, is traced. As institutional collecting of *shunga* developed, displays of *shunga* also increased. Chapter 4 outlines and analyses the history of *shunga* displays and exhibitions from the 1970s onwards. Chapter 5 is an in-depth study of the 2013 *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition at the British Museum, based on first-hand research including visitor questionnaires and observations, and staff interviews. Chapter 6 brings together and explores issues raised in previous chapters, including the role of institutions, notions of public and private, the power of language, the handling of sensitive topics, and the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities (GSM)².

Aims

The initial impetus behind this thesis was to address the question, Why and how did *shunga* become increasingly acceptable in Europe and North America in the twentieth century, whilst conversely becoming unacceptable in post-Edo Japan? With an increasing academic and general interest in *shunga*, furthered by the *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition, it seems timely to explore issues surrounding *shunga* and grapple with a range of questions which unfolded from the original, bigger question. It is useful to heed the advice of a Japanese proverb, *onko chishin* (温故知新, literally ‘warm the old and know the new’), which roughly translates as ‘study the old to understand the new’ or, more poetically, ‘we can understand the present only by knowing the past’³. In keeping with this, the aims of this thesis are to promote discussion about and suggest some answers to the following questions:

² Although the term LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) may be familiar, more inclusive and updated terms such as LGBT+, LGBTQ, or LGBTQIA are becoming common. However, there is some disagreement over what the additional letters should stand for, leading to the cumbersome acronym LGBTQIAAP (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, and Pansexual). Therefore, the term GSM is preferred as whilst it is less specific it is clear and inclusive.

³ Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire : Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 206.

1. What is *shunga*? How is it understood by museums, history of art, collectors, and by the populace?
2. How is *shunga* defined? Why is categorising *shunga* important?
3. Do the English translations of *shunga* (usually 'erotic art' or 'pornographic art') accurately convey what *shunga* is and was within its own time?
4. Why was *shunga* created? How was it understood and used by Edoites? What were the functions of *shunga* and the artists' intentions? How do these compare with modern views of *shunga*?
5. How has the way that 'obscene' items have been dealt with by museums changed over the years?
6. What difficulties have there been for museums relating to collecting *shunga*? How does institutional collecting relate to private collecting practices?
7. What challenges are faced by institutions that wish to display art such as *shunga*? How can these be negotiated?
8. How do people today respond to *shunga*?

The main objectives of previous *shunga* scholarship have been to share knowledge of *shunga*, to interpret images, to translate accompanying text, and to situate *shunga* within the context of Edo-period culture and society, particularly within the *ukiyo-e* school and individual artists' oeuvres. Building upon this essential existing research, my objectives are to investigate how *shunga* has been perceived and dealt with by museums, academics and the wider public, especially in relation to collecting and exhibiting, and to examine how and why ways of thinking about *shunga* and other sex-related artworks have changed from the Edo period to the present day.

Some of the areas of *shunga* that I intended to discuss are now not covered in this thesis because since I began my research interest in *shunga* has greatly increased. Where I had identified gaps or interesting topics for discussion so too did historians and scholars of Japanese art, many of whom have now published on these previously unrepresented areas. Additionally, as I carried out my research I discovered two things. First, I had been overly ambitious in the range of issues that I aimed to write about. Constraints of time and space have not permitted me to discuss all of the aspects that I had hoped to, and several topics which I have included in this thesis are not dealt with in as much depth as I

intended. On the plus side this gives me plenty of scope for future research projects. Second, even as I began to answer some of the questions listed above, my research uncovered more questions and areas of interest about *shunga* that I wanted to follow up on. In short, this thesis is not exhaustive. Furthermore, as I was writing it some of the information was already changing, and some issues I was exploring have now been addressed in new research.

Nevertheless, I still aim to present a constructive contribution to current discourses on *shunga* and provide a new perspective by utilising an interdisciplinary approach. My research incorporates aspects of history of art, especially the history of collecting and collections, museum studies, visitor studies, feminism, aesthetics, and qualitative research - particularly grounded theory - where appropriate.

Shunga has not yet been looked at from a practical perspective⁴ as existing scholarship has focused on establishing knowledge about *shunga* and examining the contents of *shunga*, both of which are fundamental areas of research. These knowledge-based and theoretical concerns have established *shunga* as a field of academic scholarship and provide a solid base for further theoretical and practical questioning. Given the suppression of *shunga* in Japan and the lack of equivalent explicit art in Europe, academics and curators were uncertain of how modern audiences would respond to *shunga*. To address this gap, in conjunction with the BM Interpretation department, I utilised museum and visitor studies to gather feedback on the *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition in order to gauge people's responses.

A report by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on understanding and improving museums in the twenty-first century, noted that in general, museums⁵ 'have tended to operate as individual institutions in relation

⁴ This is an example of a key premise of my thesis, under which much of the research and writing was carried out, but which can now no longer said to be true. See Chapter 5 section 5 for instances of practical engagement with *shunga* from Museum Studies perspectives. However, it is impractical to update and rewrite this thesis to reflect all of the changes and advances in *shunga* scholarship which have occurred (and are still occurring) over the course of this thesis.

⁵ Where 'museums' is used to stand for museums, galleries, science centres, and heritage institutions. This thesis also uses the term 'museum' to encompass these as well as other cultural and knowledge institutions such as libraries, archives and universities.

to the creation, acquisition and management of collections’⁶. Indeed, to-date there is no national policy or standardised guidelines for the acquisition, cataloguing and display of sexually explicit items for museums. Categories can have an impact on how institutions and the public respond to artefacts. Drawing on theoretical debates in aesthetics and feminism, but bearing in mind legal and practical issues, I will offer a definition of *shunga*, and in the process other works labelled ‘erotic’, ‘pornographic’ or ‘obscene’. It is intended that these definitions can be utilised by museums and galleries to create consistency across institutions and facilitate dialogue. Furthermore, I hope that institutions can benefit from the suggestions, which result from my analysis of previous examples of *shunga* collections and exhibitions, for future handling of potentially problematic artworks, for example when considering whether to purchase or exhibit sexually-explicit items.

Literature summary

Scholarship on *shunga* will be discussed throughout this thesis and integrated into chapters alongside relevant themes and topics, rather than in one all-encompassing ‘review’. Nevertheless, I shall give a short and selective summary of the published literature here in order to give a sense of chronological developments.

Despite its illicit status, from the late 1920s Shibui Kiyoshi published on *shunga*⁷, and from the 1970s onwards so did other Japanese scholars such as Hayashi Yoshikazu⁸ and Kazuhiko Fukuda⁹. However, the artworks reproduced in these books were usually cropped or censored (masked with boxes or paint over the genitals), producing a challenging situation for *shunga* scholarship. This kind of physical censorship is conspicuous and often draws more attention to the areas it was intended to conceal. For example, several of Fukuda’s publications contain many unpaginated reproductions of *shunga* with silver paint over the genitals,

⁶ Museums and Cultural Property Division, “Understanding the Future : Museums and 21st Century Life : The Value of Museums” (London, 2005), 15.

⁷ Kiyoshi Shibui, *Genroku Kohanga Shūei* ([Tōkyō]: Kohanga Kenkyū Gakkai, 1926); Kiyoshi Shibui, *Ukiyoe Naishi = Ukiyo-E Naisi* (Tōkyō: Daihōkaku Shobō, 1932).

⁸ Yoshikazu Hayashi, *Kiyonaga to Shunchō: Enpon Kenkyū* (Tōkyō: Yūko Shobō, 1976).

⁹ Kazuhiko Fukuda, *Ukiyoe No Higiga* (Tōkyō: Haga Shoten, 1978); Kazuhiko Fukuda, *Hikan Nikuhitsu Ukiyoe* (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1973).

which often serves to emphasise the shape of the phallus rather than obscure it¹⁰.

Uncensored reproductions of shunga began to be published in Japan in the late 1980s, with Henry Smith crediting Fukuda as ‘the key person responsible for the gradual dissolution of the pubic hair ban’¹¹. Censorship laws notably relaxed in Japan after the *hea ronsō* (hair controversy) of 1991, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.3.1, but as Joshua Mostow notes ‘reproduction of *shunga* took over the field in the 1990s, reducing analysis or explanation to almost nil’¹².

However, *Teihon Ukiyoe Shunga Meihin Shūsei*, a 27 volume series on *shunga* co-authored by Hayashi and Richard Lane and published from 1995 onwards¹³, breaks this trend. Access to uncensored colour reproductions may be one reason why the series sold well but it was undoubtedly also because it was a significant development in terms of scholarship on *shunga*. Each of the first 24 volumes focused on a single *shunga* book, album or series and provided interpretations as well as transcriptions of the accompanying text in modern Japanese.

In Europe and the USA there had been infrequent publications prior to this which acted as introductions to *shunga*, such as those by Charles Grosbois in 1964¹⁴, Tom and Mary Anne Evans in 1975¹⁵ and Marco Fagioli in 1989¹⁶. However, it was not until *Imaging/Reading Eros* in 1995¹⁷ and Timon Screech’s innovative *Sex and*

¹⁰ See Fukuda, *Ukiyoe No Higiga*; Fukuda, *Hikan Nikuhitsu Ukiyoe*.

¹¹ Henry Smith, “Overcoming the Modern History of Edo ‘Shunga,’” in *Imaging Reading Eros : Proceedings for the Conference, Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850, Indiana University, Bloomington, August 17-20, 1995*, ed. Sumie Jones (Bloomington: East Asian Studies Center Indiana University, 1996), 33.

¹² Joshua S. Mostow, “Introduction,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu : University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 5.

¹³ Yoshikazu Hayashi and Richard Lane, *Teihon Ukiyoe Shunga Meihin Shūsei* (Tōkyō: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1995).

¹⁴ Charles Grosbois, *Shunga, Images of Spring : Essay on Erotic Elements in Japanese Art*. (Geneva : Nagel, 1964).

¹⁵ Tom Evans and Mary Anne Evans, *Shunga : The Art of Love in Japan* (New York: Paddington Press, 1975).

¹⁶ Marco Fagioli, *Shunga, Images Du Printemps : L’erotisme Dans L’estampe Japonaise : A l’occasion d’Europalia 89 Japon = Shunga, Lentebeelden : Erotiek in de Japanse Prentkunst : Ter Gelegenheid van Europalia 89* (Ixelles: Le Musée d’Ixelles, 1989).

¹⁷ Sumie Jones, ed., *Imaging Reading Eros : Proceedings for the Conference, Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850, Indiana University, Bloomington, August 17-20, 1995* (Bloomington: East Asian Studies Center Indiana University, 1996).

the Floating World in 1999¹⁸, that *shunga* became a subject for academic study in the English-speaking world.

Sex and the Floating World is more in-depth and scholarly than most books on *shunga* up to that point, but it is written in an accessible and clear manner. Another departure from convention is the emphasis on text, with images used to support points rather than the reproduction of images being the main reason for the book. Others may have hinted or implied, but Screech was the first to openly acknowledge and critically engage with the sexual functions of *shunga*. Yet as Mostow acknowledges ‘As a polemical focus, this argument is long overdue, but it also risks being reductive: clearly there was more happening in *shunga* than simple arousal’¹⁹.

Interestingly, *Sex and the Floating World* had actually been published in Japanese the previous year with a more suggestive title - *Shunga: katate de yomu Edo no e* (*Shunga: Edo Images Read with One Hand*). A revised edition of the English version, for which Screech wrote a new chapter entitled ‘Re-engaging with Edo Erotica’, was published in 2009. This extra chapter is utilised to present developments in *shunga* scholarship in the intervening period, as well as to remark on reviews of the original edition of the book. To an extent, the importance of *Sex and the Floating World* can be demonstrated by the amount of citations, reviews, and other scholarly attention it received, and continues to receive. At 13 and 16 pages respectively Allen Hockley and Paul Berry’s reviews²⁰ of Screech’s 1999 publication are lengthier and more engaged than an average book review published in a journal. In an unusual turn of events, Screech transformed the one-way flow of reviews into a dialogue by publishing a short response to Berry’s review in *Archives of Asian Art*²¹, the same journal that had published the review two years earlier.

¹⁸ Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820*, 2nd, revis (London: Reaktion, 2009).

¹⁹ Mostow, “Introduction,” 7.

²⁰ Allen Hockley, “*Shunga*: Function, Context, Methodology,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 55, no. 2 (2000): 257-69; Paul Berry, “Rethinking ‘*Shunga*’: The Interpretation of Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period,” *Archives of Asian Art* 54 (2004): 7-22.

²¹ Timon Screech, “A Response to Paul Berry’s Review of the Book, ‘Sex in the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820’ (University of Hawai’i Press, 1999),” *Archives of Asian Art* 56 (2006): 107.

The title of *Poem of the Pillow and Other Stories*, published in 2010²², suggests that the reader can learn about some of the stories that *shunga* illustrated or parodied, but there are no explanations of narratives or characters to be found in this image-heavy book. Indeed, apart from a 3-page general overview, the only other text in this hefty 463-page book are brief, half-page inserts with cursory information about the artists. Although the text makes reference to some of the prints or paintings which follow, it does not offer interpretation or engage with the works. It seems that the only purpose of this book was to reproduce *shunga* images. Whilst being able to browse through large, full-colour images has its own pleasure and merit - reproductions of unexpurgated images helped advance *shunga* scholarship during the publication boom in the 1990s - but after two decades of *shunga* scholarship Calza's book is disappointing in its lack of analysis.

In contrast, Rosina Buckland's *Shunga: Erotic Art of Japan*²³, which was also published in 2010, manages not only to serve several functions simultaneously but to do them well: it is an accessible introduction to *shunga*; it provides an overview of *shunga* scholarship by summarising what is known about *shunga* to date; it gives translations for some previously unpublished works; it gives a glimpse of the British Museum's *shunga* collection; and it tested the waters for the *shunga* exhibition and catalogue planned for 2013 at the BM.

Books which are introductions or overviews of *shunga* have generated a breadth of knowledge and created a space for dialogue about *shunga* in terms of art. Translations and interpretations have taken this forward and produced a depth of knowledge, which helped to shape *shunga* as an area of academic study. Later publications have built on the research of these essential foundations to produce a different type of knowledge by concentrating, not on an artist, but on a specific theme or issue. However, they achieve this narrowing of focus by, paradoxically, widening out their perspective and drawing on examples from not only across the range of *shunga* but also from other aspects of Japanese art and culture.

²² Gian Carlo Calza, *Poem of the Pillow and Other Stories by Utamaro, Hokusai, Kuniyoshi and Other Artists of the Floating World* (London: Phaidon Press, 2010).

²³ Rosina Buckland, *Shunga : Erotic Art in Japan* (London: British Museum Press, 2010).

Recently in Japan, there have been several small, affordable introductory *shunga* books, which include plenty of images and avoid lengthy essays in favour of breaking up the text into shorter sections to appeal to a different audience. One example is Hayakawa's *Shunga no Mikata: 10 no Point*²⁴. This may be a sign of the growing acceptability of *shunga* in Japanese society or it may be scholars redoubling their efforts to make that shift come about by targeting the wider public. It is likely a combination of both. The fact that these books can be found alongside other art books (not segregated into categories or put on a top shelf) in general bookshops, even small to medium sized bookshops in shopping malls and on high streets, indicates a relaxation of censorship and a growing tolerance of, if not yet full awareness and acceptance of, *shunga*.

During the course of this thesis, the field of *shunga* studies has rapidly grown and many of the gaps in the literature are now being addressed. In particular, the 536-page scholarly exhibition catalogue, *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*²⁵, which features contributions from 35 scholars, engages with many previously overlooked issues, some of which will be examined in Chapter 6.4. At the end of Chapter 5 additional examples of recent publications which advance *shunga* scholarship will be given.

²⁴ Monta Hayakawa, *Shunga No Mikata: 10 No Point (10 Viewpoints of Shunga)* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2008).

²⁵ Clark et al., *Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*.

1. Defining *shunga*

1.1 Definitions and Why They Matter

Sexually explicit art is a polemical subject and even finding the right terms to discuss it is difficult. Many people dismiss the idea that art that is sexually explicit can be art, but if it is not art then it must be something else, and usually this 'other' is named pornography. However, what makes something pornography is not easily agreed on. I will discuss some of the ways pornography might be defined in relation to art. This discussion will also necessitate covering 'obscenity' and 'erotic' as those terms are interconnected. Some may question the usefulness of attempting to define obscenity, pornography, the erotic, and their relationships to art, but definitions and categorisations are important because, in this case, they have an impact, not just academically, but on everyday life. Will an institution - museum, gallery, archive, library, or university - collect or display something that is classed as pornography? Will their attitude, or a viewer's attitude, to the item be different if the work is labelled pornography, erotic, obscene, or art? Will people even view works which have been categorised as pornography?

By using such terms, which have connotations of value, it is almost as if the viewer or institution need not engage with the item themselves because it has already been prejudged for them. In this sense, calling items pornography, and claiming that pornography and art are mutually exclusive, can prejudice people against items before they have had the chance to view them for themselves and make up their own minds. Therefore, the use of these terms can affect what can be exhibited and where, what is censored, how it is marketed, if it will receive funding, how it is perceived, if it will be sold, publicly collected or shunned, and whether it is seen to break any laws or likely to cause offense.

This section aims to follow Alyce Mahon's advice on dealing with sex-related art: 'If we are to assess sexually explicit art critically - rather than merely react to it - then we must look to its social, historical and political contexts, its artistic

intent, and its popular and critical reception'²⁶. In section 1.1.1 I will briefly examine obscenity by making reference to legal definitions and what is commonly understood by the term. In section 1.1.2 theories of intention, reception, function, purpose, and aesthetic experience, will be looked at and used to compare art and pornography to suggest an answer to the question 'what is art?' Judgements and moral objections inform views of pornography as opposed to the erotic and will be considered in section 1.1.3. Social and historical contexts, as well as the context of private/public space, will be used in section 1.1.4 to respond to the question 'what is pornography?' Cultural context is important since 'pornography' is a Euro-American concept rooted in Christian ideas of original sin and nineteenth-century morals. Section 1.1.5 deals with form and how it relates to class ideas. Following on from form, section 1.1.6 deals with content - especially explicitness - as a way of comparing pornography and erotic art. Finally, section 1.1.7 proposes that pornography is not a tangible thing but an argument or viewpoint, and puts forward a suggestion for an alternative to the terms 'pornography' or 'erotic art'.

1.1.1 What is Obscene?

Many people use 'pornography' and 'obscenity' almost interchangeably, but even though some pornography may be obscene not all pornography is necessarily so. Obscenity is a wider term and can encompass violence, war, excess, and other repugnant activities particularly those relating to bodily functions; it does not refer only to pornography. The Williams committee claimed that 'obscenity' was a meaningless term due to its vagueness²⁷. Indeed, although the resultant report is on obscenity and film censorship, the majority of it focuses on pornography.

The 1857 Obscene Publications Act did not define the term 'obscene'. The Hicklin case in 1868 gave rise to obscenity being defined as the 'tendency to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences'²⁸.

²⁶ Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

²⁷ Bernard Williams, "Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship: Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, November 1979" (London: H.M.S.O., 1979).

²⁸ quoted in *ibid.*, 9.

The ‘deprave and corrupt’ test was commonly used for prosecutions from then on, eventually becoming part of the revised 1959 Obscene Publications Act.

In what noticeable way then can a viewer be depraved or corrupted? The House of Lords unsuccessfully attempted to clarify this in 1972, they ‘emphasised that the words “deprave and corrupt” refer to the effect on the mind, including the emotions, and that it is not necessary that any physical or overt sexual activity should result’²⁹. This definition of ‘obscene’ would include not only pornography but also the ‘erotic’ (often regarded as a separate category from pornography because it is thought to affect the mind but not the body). Furthermore, an ‘effect on the mind, including emotions’ is very similar to common definitions of what art, or the aesthetic experience (discussed in section 1.1.2), should produce in its viewers. Therefore, the ‘effect on the mind’ definition would also include art and literature, as well as labelling all pornography and anything erotic as obscene, and becomes so broad as to be meaningless. Similarly, Williams concluded that the words ‘deprave and corrupt’ were not useful because they are too vague and difficult to prove.

It is also not clear why something which affects a viewer should be seen as negative. Williams called the ‘deprave and corrupt’ test ‘a causal notion of obscenity, based on the idea that the rationale of suppressing obscenity is the harm that it causes’³⁰. But harm, and exactly how it is caused, is often difficult to identify in the case of pornography or sexually explicit art.

An alternative judgement of obscenity is if ‘it offends against current standards of what is acceptable’³¹. However, not everyone will be offended by the same representation or even to the same degree. ‘Indecent’ seems a more suitable term for this definition as it is considered ‘milder’ than ‘obscene’, and perhaps this is why the Customs Act, the Post Office Act and the Acts relating to public displays use ‘indecent or obscene’ as their test. ‘Indecent’ suggests that an image is unsuitable *only* for a specific time, place, or audience, but not that it is necessarily offensive. For example, a picture may be acceptable to an adult and

²⁹ Ibid., 10.

³⁰ Ibid., 96.

³¹ Ibid., 11.

in a private place, but would be considered indecent for children or for displaying in a public park.

Some contend that sexual representations, because they make public a private act, are inherently offensive. 'A further reason for considering even the pornographic content of a genuine work of art offensive, is that it can be, and is perhaps legitimately experienced as, foisted or forced on a viewer or reader who neither wants nor expects it'³². Works, which might be considered obscene, may be protected by the public good defence in the 1959 Obscene Publications Act on account of their literary, artistic or scientific merits, this is similar to the Miller test used in the USA. However, some of the respondents to the Williams committee feel that regardless of any other merits they may possess obscene works should be prohibited, whilst others say that 'what was of genuine artistic or literary merit could never be capable of depraving or corrupting'³³.

1.1.2 What is Art?

Rather than attempting to provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions to define art in a strict sense (an almost insurmountable task)³⁴, some common features and theories of art will be discussed. Common features of art such as beauty, artistic skill, expression, the ability to transmit ideas or convey the artist's experience, imitation or representation of life, will be considered overlapping reference points within a cluster concept, but not as necessary conditions.

³² Sorrell in Oswald Hanfling, *Philosophical Aesthetics : An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 341.

³³ Williams, "Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship" 15.

³⁴ For a philosophical consideration of definitions of art and pornography, see Simon Fokt "Pornographic Art - a Case from Definitions," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 3 (2012): 287-300.



Figure 1 Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, oil on canvas, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

A prominent theory of art, the institutional theory, in which the status of art is conferred upon an object by the artworld (critics, institutions, artists), is worth mentioning although there is not space to fully explore it. Kelly Dennis remarks on Mark Twain's belief that Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Figure 1)

was little more than pornography, concluding ironically that, "in truth, it is too strong for any place but a public Art Gallery." As Twain recognized, the context of the public display of art significantly influences its reception, in this case transforming into art what might otherwise be considered pornography.³⁵

Although it is now in a public art gallery it was originally a private commission. Does this mean its status has changed from being pornography to art? Surely it was art to begin with and is still art now. It may have had the same effects as pornography in its time, but it would be anachronistic to say it was 'pornography' then and it is unlikely to be considered pornographic by today's standards. Dennis acknowledges this change:

This is not merely to suggest that the definition of pornography is relative, and that one era's porn is another era's art. It is to draw attention to the institutional and discursive function of the museum as a public site for viewing, and to ask: What happens when

³⁵ Kelly Dennis, *Art Porn : A History of Seeing and Touching* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), 21.

contemporary pornography and private vice are placed on its very public walls? Do they also become art?³⁶

Questions of how private and public space affects the functions, or at least the perceptions of artworks, will be addressed in Chapter 6.2.

Another relevant theory is that the artist's intention for an object to be art is what makes it art. Intention seems to be particularly privileged in the art/pornography debate and shall be discussed, as will the function or purpose of art/pornography and the notion of aesthetic experience.

Intention plays a key role in definitions of pornography. Stephen Marcus claims that there is nothing wrong with a work intending to arouse its viewers/readers because great artworks/literature should evoke strong emotions and 'it lies within the orbit of literature's functions - for works of literature to excite us sexually'³⁷. But he maintains, as shall be seen in section 1.1.5, that art and pornography are mutually exclusive. It is often argued, in line with Marcus, that pornography cannot be art because it only has one intention - to sexually arouse. However, pornography can have more than one intention, such as artistic, educational, humorous, political or social commentary, and arousal need not be the only one. Furthermore, how can viewers discern the artists' intention unless it is stated explicitly? Michael Rea's definition is useful here; for him something is pornography if the content is sexual so that it arouses the viewer and this 'is either the effect intended by both producer and consumer or a very likely effect in the absence of direct intentions'³⁸.

Christy Mag Uidhir also believes that art and pornography are 'intention-dependent', he even thinks both can have arousal as their purpose, but that art evokes feelings, including arousal, in a prescribed way and pornography is not specific in that as long as the end result is arousal then it does not matter why or how it is achieved³⁹. While his attempt at a neutral definition is

³⁶ Ibid., 160.

³⁷ Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians : A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Corgi, 1969), 280.

³⁸ Michael Rea, "What Is Pornography?," *Noûs* 35, no. 1 (2001): 133.

³⁹ Christy Mag Uidhir "Why Pornography Can't Be Art," *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 1 (2009): 193-203.

commendable, his idea of ‘manner specificity’ and ‘inspecificity’ as the reason for art and pornography being mutually exclusive is not convincing. He also argues that the terms ‘artistic pornography’ and ‘pornographic art’ are used descriptively and do not mean an object is both pornography and art⁴⁰.

Hans Maes’ discussion of the common oppositions used to argue that art and pornography are mutually exclusive is insightful⁴¹. He questions the dichotomies of subjectivity vs. objectification; beauty vs. smut; contemplation vs. arousal; complex vs. one-dimensional; original vs. formulaic; and imagination vs. fantasy to show that they are artificial constructs and not self-evident as most philosophers and art historians claim. He deconstructs these mutually exclusive categories, and demonstrates that the differences between art and pornography are not clear-cut but blurred and over-lapping. He also provides counter-examples of pornography to disprove the claims that only art can have X or display Y.

The most useable definition of pornography encountered so far, as it refrains from value judgements and does not exclude the possibility of pornography being art, comes from Bernard Williams:

a pornographic representation is one that combines two features: it has a certain function or intention, to arouse its audience sexually, and also a certain content, explicit representations of sexual material (organs, postures, activity, etc.). A work has to have both this function and this content to be piece of pornography.⁴²

It is said that pornography ‘is immune to constraints of plausibility, truth to life, or insight’⁴³. Yet, it could also be argued that landscape or religious paintings are not constrained by plausibility, truth to life, or insight (which does not prevent them from being called ‘art’), and whilst this may be true in some cases, it is not necessarily so. Even if this is so, this does not stop viewers from appreciating other aspects of pornography, landscapes or religious art. Maes notes, ‘Both

⁴⁰ Ibid., 201.

⁴¹ Hans Maes, “Drawing the Line: Art Versus Pornography,” *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 6 (2011): 385-97.

⁴² Williams, “Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship”, 103.

⁴³ Maes, “Drawing the Line: Art Versus Pornography,” 387.

artists and pornographers deal in fictional worlds, but the imaginative creations of artists offer us a way of perceiving and understanding the reality we actually live in'⁴⁴. As Lynn Hunt has outlined, pornography originally evolved from using sex as a way to critique religion and politics⁴⁵. Therefore, there is no reason why pornography cannot also be seen as offering the viewer a perception of their own reality.

Sexually explicit art can tell the viewer a lot about a culture and its time period, it can display ideas on gender and class relationships, religion, or social and moral values. Furthermore, as Edward Lucie-Smith explains 'erotic art and literature have much to tell us about our own nature as human beings, much to tell us about the actual context in which we live, and much to please the aesthetic sense'⁴⁶.

Many of those who believe art and pornography are mutually exclusive, like Jerrold Levinson or Marcus, claim that this is due to the aesthetic experience produced by contemplating art. They argue that arousal interferes with contemplation and therefore aesthetic experience is not possible with pornography. Levinson's theory, for example, posits that their aims are incompatible: 'One induces you, in the name of sexual arousal, to ignore the representation, while the other induces you, in the name of aesthetic delight, to contemplate and dwell on the representation'⁴⁷. In order to cover cultural and temporal differences Levinson usually favours an inclusive definition of art: 'art is anything that was intended as art'⁴⁸. Yet, it seems as though Levinson has narrowed his usual broad definition of art to be about attention to form and value judgements to deliberately exclude the possibility that some pornography can also be art by creating a necessary condition. However, even Levinson

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lynn Hunt "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800," in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone, 1993), 9-46.

⁴⁶ Edward Lucie-Smith, *Ars Erotica: An Arousing History of Erotic Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 19.

⁴⁷ Hans Maes, "Art and Pornography," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43, no. 3 (2009): 110.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

himself has difficulty reconciling the status of work by Gustav Klimt (Figure 2) and Egon Schiele within his own theory⁴⁹.



Figure 2 Gustav Klimt, *Danae*, 1907, oil on canvas, Galerie Würthle, Vienna

Kenneth Clark also used the opposition of contemplation and arousal as a way to exclude pornography from art:

To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation, and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is my objection to painting with a communist programme, and it would also apply to pornography.⁵⁰

Levinson and Clark's assumptions narrow the definition of art too much as they would exclude not only propaganda or pornography but also other forms of art such as religious art.

1.1.3 Pornography vs. Erotic

The question 'what is art?' is often conflated with 'what is good art?'. As Hanfling points out, 'It is sometimes held that the word 'art' has an honorific

⁴⁹ Jerrold Levinson, "Erotic Art and Pornographic Pictures," *Philosophy and Literature* 29, no. 1 (2005): 234, 238.

⁵⁰ Clark in Frank Longford, *Pornography - the Longford Report* (London: Coronet, 1972), 100.

connotation, that to describe something as art is to praise it'⁵¹. This is perhaps why so many try to separate art and pornography; they do not wish to confer 'praise' on pornography.

Similarly, Yaffe notes that 'pornography' and 'erotic' can be not only descriptive but also evaluative; 'Sexual materials elicit evaluative judgements from individuals and these are determined according to the extent to which they elicit positive and negative affective responses'⁵². These negative connotations of the term pornography lead to confusion, because of the assumption 'that if something does no identifiable harm, then any objection to it must be (merely) a matter of taste'⁵³. It is almost always deemed 'bad taste' and so 'pornography' becomes a value judgment.

The word 'erotic' comes from the Greek *eros* (romantic love) whereas 'pornography' stems from *porne* (prostitute) and *graphos* (describing or writing). This etymology links pornography with obscenity, because of the moral connotations with prostitution, and the erotic with emotions and love. However, erotic art being linked to emotions is also due to idealisation and romanticisation. As Peter Webb, for example, claims 'Erotic art is art on a sexual theme related specifically to emotions rather than merely actions, and sexual depictions which are justifiable on aesthetic grounds'⁵⁴. Again, it seems to come back to being a matter of taste or judgment. Webb's word choice - justifiable - is interesting, but even those writers who do believe that some pornography can be art still use terms like 'respectability' and 'accreditation'. By splitting the positive and negative aspects of sex into erotic and pornography (love vs. sex, emotion vs. action, aesthetic value vs. morally harmful) and by using culturally/socially loaded words writers perpetuate the stereotype that art is good and high and has merit and that all pornography is bad and low and obscene.

⁵¹ Hanfling, *Philosophical Aesthetics : An Introduction*, 21.

⁵² Yaffe in Williams, "Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship," 235.

⁵³ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁴ Peter Webb, *The Erotic Arts*, 2nd ed. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983), 2.

The idea of pornography being ‘bad’ or harmful also features in moral objections.⁵⁵ Pornographic interest is often taken to mean objectification and dehumanisation and being ‘uninterested in the first-person perspective of the subject represented’⁵⁶. Similarly, Roger Scruton claims sex is obscene only when seen from out-with the ‘perspective of those engaged in it’⁵⁷. However, Matthew Kieran argues that an interest in the subject is necessary for arousal⁵⁸. This is presumably why in erotic art and pornography the viewer is usually presented with a situation and characterisation not just genitalia without context.

Another moral issue, asserted by feminists in particular, is that by objectifying women pornography degrades and demeans them. The most prominent of the anti-pornography feminists were Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who in 1984 in their anti-pornography legislation for Minneapolis, defined pornography as being sexually explicit *and* including some form of violence, subordination, objectification, or humiliation of women (usually, but they acknowledge it can also be men or children)⁵⁹. MacKinnon and Dworkin, as well as Steinem, and Mahon, argue that pornography is about male power over women whereas the erotic, whilst still sexually explicit, is about equality, both heterosexual and homosexual⁶⁰.

As observed earlier, some authors seem to distance themselves and their topic from the negative connotations of pornography by dividing the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ aspects of sex and ascribing them to the terms ‘erotic art’ and ‘pornography’ respectively, possibly because they have a vested interest. For instance, ‘This book [on erotic art] is about celebration, which, as we shall see, is diametrically in opposition to any form of exploitation’⁶¹. It is easy to understand why Webb wants to distance his book from certain types (or the vast majority) of

⁵⁵ The moral and feminist issues relating to pornography are too extensive to adequately cover here without changing the entire focus of this thesis; however, because of their importance they shall be briefly discussed.

⁵⁶ Matthew Kieran, “Pornographic Art,” *Philosophy and Literature* 25, no. 1 (2001): 42.

⁵⁷ Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 139.

⁵⁸ Kieran, “Pornographic Art,” 43.

⁵⁹ Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea. Dworkin, *In Harm’s Way : The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (London : Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁶⁰ Ibid.; Mahon, *Eroticism and Art*, 15; Gloria Steinem, “Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference,” in *Take Back the Night : Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York : Morrow, 1980). See also Rea, “What Is Pornography?,” 129-130.

⁶¹ Webb, *The Erotic Arts*, xxvii.

pornography, which tends to degrade or dehumanise woman. However, not all pornographic art or literature conforms to the standard negative stereotypes of pornography.

As Webb himself notes, ‘The vast majority of sexually explicit works of art are produced as part of an overall desire to express the totality of human experience; very few artists have made sex their only motivation’⁶². If this constructive or aesthetic use of sexual imagery is stripped away and all that is left is dehumanisation, objectification, exploitation, indecency, and invasion of privacy for the sake of making money rather than conveying meaning, information, opinions, emotions, or, in other words, saying something about people or the world we live in, then it is understandable that Webb would want to call that ‘pornography’ and not ‘art’.

For centuries, pornography has been set up in opposition to art, so it has become a convenient shorthand for writers to express their dislike of something that does not fit with *their* concept of art by referring to it as ‘pornography’, which is already laden with negative connotations and strongly associated with obscenity and immorality. Pornography, in this sense, is not an object or a thing but just a name given to an argument as shall be discussed further in section 1.1.7.

1.1.4 Pornography in Context

Hunt points out that ‘pornography has always been defined in part by the efforts undertaken to regulate it’⁶³. The 1986 Meese Commission report noted that

the control of written and printed works in Europe from medieval times through the seventeenth century was undertaken primarily in the name of religion and politics, rather than in the name of decency, and it showed that modern obscenity laws only took shape in the early nineteenth century.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., 5.

⁶³ Hunt, “Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800,” 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.

Therefore, out of those old-fashioned ideas the standard argument that pornography is bad/wrong/dangerous/immoral because it might encourage sexual thoughts/desires/acts developed. Society, in particular religion, has attempted to control pornography because it fears that people may act on these pornography-induced sexual thoughts, which might in turn lead to sex outside marriage, extra-marital sex, masturbation or sex for pleasure instead of procreation. Anti-porn campaigners have also claimed that other undesirable ‘consequences’ of pornography include divorce, sexual assault, child abuse, and homosexuality⁶⁵. There have been many studies of pornography and its effects but they have been unable to prove that pornography, on its own, causes harm or that there is any basis for these claims.

To return to the idea of context affecting the definition of art:

An ‘aesthetic object’, [Danto] wrote, ‘is not some eternally fixed Platonic entity, a joy forever beyond time, space and history...The aesthetic qualities of a work are a function of their own historical identity’. Presented at a given moment in history, and in a particular cultural context, an object is a work of art, with suitable aesthetic qualities; presented at another time and in another context, it is nothing of the sort.⁶⁶

Rea asks, ‘How could it be pornographic at one time but not at another? The answer is simple: at one time but not at the other it was reasonable to believe that most of the target audience would treat it as pornography’⁶⁷. The idea that context changes how the audience treats an object such as Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* was raised in 1.1.2. Dennis elaborates on this notion:

The enforced distance of the viewer from the work in public thus contributed to its status as art; in a private space, by contrast, the viewer’s proximity to the image potentially identified the image and his relation to it as pleasurable, and therefore inappropriate - as indeed pornographic.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ for more on these claims see the Meese report in Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds., *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (London: Virago, 1992); Williams, “Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship”; Longford, *Pornography - the Longford Report*.

⁶⁶ Hanfling, *Philosophical Aesthetics: An Introduction*, 36.

⁶⁷ Rea, “What Is Pornography?,” 141.

⁶⁸ Dennis, *Art Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching*, 21.

Williams elucidates the difference between private and public context: a person may not object to pornography in private, but the same sexual representations, which were not considered offensive may now offend if displayed in public⁶⁹. For others this sense of offence is compounded because it is ‘forced on the attention of those who have not even volunteered to be voyeurs. They are thus forced or importuned to see things which they do not think should be seen’⁷⁰. This immediacy of vision is in contrast with pornographic writing which needs to be deliberately engaged with and is therefore easier to avoid.

1.1.5 Class Issues

Attitudes about the difference between literature and pornography are similar to those about art and pornography. Marcus asserts that it is form rather than intention that disqualifies pornography from being literature: although pornography bears a superficial formal resemblance in that it is written and printed in the same way a novel would be, ‘Most works of literature have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Most works of pornography do not’⁷¹. Similarly, in art, painting as a form is treated differently than other media. Even though formally, art and sexually explicit works can be composed in the same manner and feature similar content and styles, the inherent creativity assumed in the painted form raises it above reproductive art forms like prints or photographs, which are not unique and more likely to be deemed pornographic.

Previously, art and literature were restricted to the ‘social elite’. Paintings of ‘the erotic’ or female nudes were once private commissions although today many hang on the walls of public galleries. Previously, pornographic or erotic items were kept in so-called secret museums, which were uncatalogued locked cabinets within museums that ‘regulated the consumption of the obscene so as to exclude the lower classes and women’⁷² because they were not considered educated enough to respond appropriately to the content. Secret museums will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 section 2.

⁶⁹ Williams, “Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship,” 123.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁷¹ Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 281.

⁷² Lynn Hunt, “Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity”, 12.

The power of the erotic was originally used for social criticism. Hunt explains that even when it became a business it was still class-restricted: ‘After the 1820s, pornography for sexual arousal was bought by male aristocrats, professionals and clerks but not by the working classes’⁷³. So not only was art originally restricted to the elite but so too was pornography. However, Kerstin Mey argues that new notions of pornography and obscenity formed alongside ‘the establishment of means of mass reproduction of texts and images, and therefore their increased promulgation and accessibility in the public arena (and the perceived need for their regulation)’⁷⁴.

1.1.6 The Power of Sexual Content

Mahon summarises philosophical views on the erotic, including those of Plato and Kant: ‘sexuality, sexual desire, and the body are all proposed as a threat to rational, civilized society. Eroticism, because it is linked to the emotions (from sexual arousal to fear and anger), has the power to agitate the mind, the soul, and to disrupt order’⁷⁵. However, what is considered erotic can include a wide range, from suggestive works which have no explicitness or even nudity, Georgia O’Keeffe’s flowers (Figure 3) for example, to works which are sexually explicit, such as Schiele’s images of masturbation (Figure 4).

⁷³ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁴ Kerstin Mey, “Art and Obscenity” (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), 2.

⁷⁵ Mahon, *Eroticism and Art*, 12.

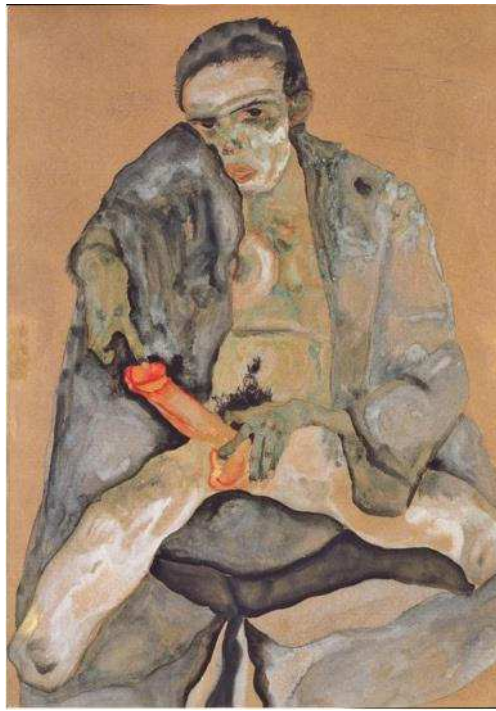


Figure 3 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Canna*, 1922, oil on canvas, Arizona State University Art Museum

Figure 4 Egon Schiele, *Eros (self-portrait)*, 1911, chalk, gouache, and watercolour, private collection (reproduced in Steiner⁷⁶)

But these works, both termed erotic by some, may be placed at opposite ends of the scale by others. There is an imagined sliding scale which tends to coincide with value judgements - with 'milder' images considered erotic and harmless at one end and more explicit images, in terms of sexual organs and activity, considered pornography and depraved at the other. Due to previous religious and social attitudes, same-sex pornography and erotic art tends to be placed higher on the scale than its heterosexual equivalents.

Where people wish to place the cut-off point for art in terms of explicitness varies. Webb and Levinson argue that intention is the dividing line between erotic and pornographic rather than content or explicitness⁷⁷. Although, they argue that explicitness should not be what separates 'erotic' and 'pornography', reservations remain over the explicitness implied by the terms. Most viewers will assume an item labelled as erotic will be less sexually explicit than if it were

⁷⁶ Reinhard A. Steiner, *Egon Schiele, 1890-1918: The Midnight Soul of the Artist* (Köln: Taschen, 2000), 14.

⁷⁷ Webb, *The Erotic Arts*, 2; Hans Maes and Jerrold Levinson, "Art and Pornography: Philosophical Essays" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 235.

called pornographic and it will be hard to change the meanings encompassed by a term like 'erotic' in the minds of the public.

Therefore, a book or an exhibition described as containing erotic art may be reasonably expected to contain nudes, suggestive poses, or even implied sex. However, if that exhibition or book displays graphic, sexually explicit images then people, because they were not expecting it, may feel the offence that Williams described which comes from it being 'forced' upon them and, in reaction to this shock, call it pornographic. Perhaps if the sexual explicitness was expected then there would not be this unthinking reaction to re-label (and in a sense downgrade) art as pornography (reinforcing ideas that being classed as 'pornography' is a negative value judgment and that art and pornography are mutually exclusive).

Nevertheless, it seems that to say a book or exhibition contains pornographic art would be to do it a disservice, as many people will dismiss it out of hand because of the connotations of 'pornography' and they will expect it to be offensive or indecent. They may feel social pressure to agree with the 'prejudgement' of something as 'pornography' (in the negative sense described previously) and therefore that they must claim to be offended because it is expected of them and to show that they are 'reasonable people'.

Another possible interpretation of 'erotic', which contrasts with the philosophical viewpoint earlier, is offered by Williams:

the erotic is what expresses sexual excitement, rather than causes it - in the same way as a painting or a piece of music may express sadness without necessarily making its audience sad. ...In this sense an erotic work will suggest or bring to mind feelings of sexual attraction or excitement. It may cause some such feelings as well, and put the audience actually into that state, but if so that is a further effect.⁷⁸

1.1.7 What is Pornography?

Art can include pornographic elements without being pornography. Levinson uses the term 'pornographic art' for art relating to or incorporating pornography

⁷⁸ Williams, "Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship," 104.

(such as Figure 5 by Chris Ofili) but is not pornography itself because it is not intended to sexually arouse and it is doubtful it would be used in such a way by viewers.



Figure 5 Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, 1996, paper collage, oil paint, glitter, polyester resin and elephant dung on linen, private collection

In 2010, Tim Clark proposed that '*shunga*' would be more helpfully translated as 'sex art' to avoid the connotations of 'pornography' and 'erotic'⁷⁹. In line with Clark, the term 'sex art' could usefully be used and extended to encompass works that are currently termed 'erotic art' or 'pornographic art'. Sex art could include works like Ofili's as well as other works considered erotic or pornographic because it denotes the subject matter regardless of intention or use or reception or level of explicitness and offers no moral or value judgement. Like the terms religious art, landscape art, or portraiture, it tells the viewer only the genre (or main subject) but not the form or style or attitude towards the subject.

It could be said that pornography is not a thing or content but a perception. Rather than calling an image 'pornography', Wilson argues there is a 'pornographic imagination'⁸⁰. Similarly, Scruton claims obscenity is a way of

⁷⁹ Timothy Clark, "Exhibiting Shunga at the British Museum in 2013: Key Messages" (Shunga in its Social and Cultural Context workshop, SOAS, 2010). He recently revisited and elaborated on this proposal in Timothy Clark, "Sexhibition: Reflections on Shunga in London, Looking Forward to Shunga in Tokyo," 文化資源学 (*Bunka Shigengaku*) (特集 春画と日本社会 *Special Issue Shunga and Japanese Society*), no. 13 (2015): 127-36..

⁸⁰ Wilson in Segal and McIntosh, *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, 26.

seeing⁸¹. What a viewer finds obscene or erotic or pornographic is subjective and based largely on their cultural and social background. As Lucie-Smith said, ‘If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, eroticism is in his or her mind. It is not merely what we look at or read but how we perceive it which governs our reactions’⁸². It should be noted that what Lucie-Smith calls erotic art seems to include what most others consider pornography (explicitness, arousal, incitement to action, used for masturbation).

Theodore Gracyk argues for the recognition of the term ‘pornographic attitude’, and claims that Dworkin and MacKinnon’s definition of pornography ‘fails because it overly simplifies pornography as a certain content’⁸³ and, in doing so, ignores the attitude expressed towards that content. Although Gracyk agrees that most pornography does objectify and demean woman as Dworkin and MacKinnon claim, he clarifies that not *all* pornography has the ‘pornographic attitude’:

pornography is being singled out because it provides a highly visible symptom of the mistreatment of women...But sexually explicit materials are just one forum for degrading women in images. A degrading attitude can and does occur in representations which are not sexually explicit (e.g., in advertisements and some popular novels). The pornographic attitude can be found in any number of representations or images that express contempt for women as sexually autonomous, equal persons.⁸⁴

Like Gracyk, Mahlet Zimeta asserts that pornography is not an object or representation, but the name given to an argument⁸⁵. Her theory is that pornography is being used as a collective term for a variety of negative issues which occur across many different aspects of society and that pornography is a symptom of society’s problems. She points out that dehumanisation, objectification, exploitation, indecency, and invasion of privacy can all be found in ‘acknowledged’ and celebrated works of art and literature, so these attributes cannot be why pornography is problematic. Neither is it the sexual

⁸¹ Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 138.

⁸² Lucie-Smith, *Ars Erotica*, 6.

⁸³ Theodore Gracyk, “Pornography as Representation: Aesthetic Considerations,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21, no. 4 (1987): 104.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁵ Mahlet Zimeta, “Why Pornography Is Not the Problem” (Pornography and Objectification Workshop paper 30.05.11: University of Edinburgh, 2011).

content that people object to but how pornography deals with it. In line with Zimeta's observation of pornography as a thick term (including a positive or negative judgement), with 'pornography' being negative and 'erotic' being the corresponding positive thick term, Clark's use of 'sex art' would be a thin term as it is descriptive but value neutral.

1.1.8 Conclusion

After carefully considering different viewpoints on the uses and definitions of the terms 'pornography', 'erotic' and 'obscene' and how they relate to art, for the sake of clarity the following uses are proposed. Firstly, the use of the term sex art as a genre. Secondly, within sex art, 'erotic' will be used in the expressive way described by Williams at the end of section 1.1.6. Not all sex art will be erotic but the erotic is a subgenre of sex art. Thirdly, within sex art, 'pornography' will be used for works which meet Williams' criteria of containing sexually explicit representations and having the function or intention of arousing. Again not all sex art will be pornography, but pornographic art, in this sense, is a sub-category of sex art. To differentiate this use of 'pornography' from the arguments in section 1.1.7, 'pornographic attitude' will be used for works which objectify or degrade, negative aspects which are present in, and symptomatic of problems in, society as a whole and although commonly found in pornography are not specific to pornography.

The use of 'pornography' will now be value neutral, including the 'good' and 'bad' aspects of sex and sexual representations. 'Bad' pornographic art may objectify and degrade women and therefore will display the pornographic attitude but not all pornography will necessarily do so. Finally, 'obscene' will be reserved for sexually explicit or graphically violent representations which cause offense and lack the features or functions of art (intention, function, aesthetic experience, offering a perception of or commentary on the world or human nature, etc.). For these reasons 'obscene' works are not part of sex art as a genre and will be excluded from the category of art altogether. 'Pornography' and 'erotic' will no longer be split by explicitness or value judgements. Both will be used as value neutral terms which can and do include positive and negative aspects of sex. Using these definitions, it is possible that an artwork which falls

under the genre of sex art could be pornographic and erotic and art all at the same time.

One further point worth noting is made by Maes, who identifies Kitagawa Utamaro (Figure 7) and Robert Mapplethorpe as artists who have created work that is both art and pornography, proving that they are not mutually exclusive categories: ‘Better than any abstract argument, these works show that the notion ‘pornographic art’ is not an oxymoron but designates a legitimate artistic category’⁸⁶. In addition to Maes’ examples, works by Pablo Picasso (Figure 6), Schiele (Figure 4), and Klimt (Figure 2) support the argument against mutual exclusivity.

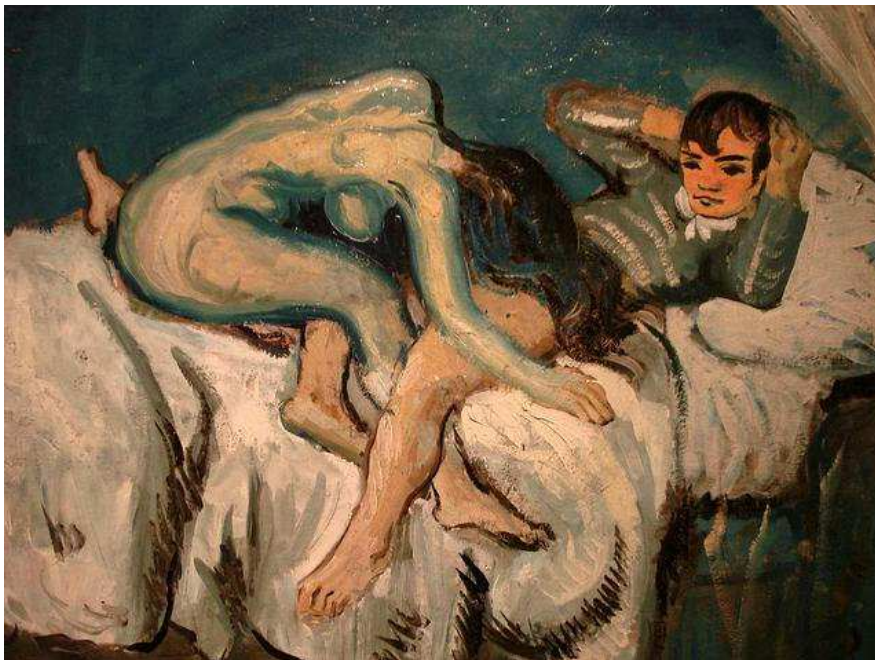


Figure 6 Pablo Picasso, *Erotic Scene (La Douceur)*, 1903, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

1.2 What was shunga? (1603-1868)

Shunga are sexually explicit woodblock prints, paintings and illustrated books, created in Japan during the Edo period (1603-1868). There are many ways to describe or define *shunga*, but two key aspects are that they were created in Edo-period Japan and they feature explicit sexual content. Where the borders of these aspects are drawn is explored in section 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.

⁸⁶ Maes, “Art and Pornography,” 395.



Figure 7 Kitagawa Utamaro, print 9 from *Negai no itoguchi* (*Threads Leading to Desire*), 1799, colour woodblock print, British Museum, London

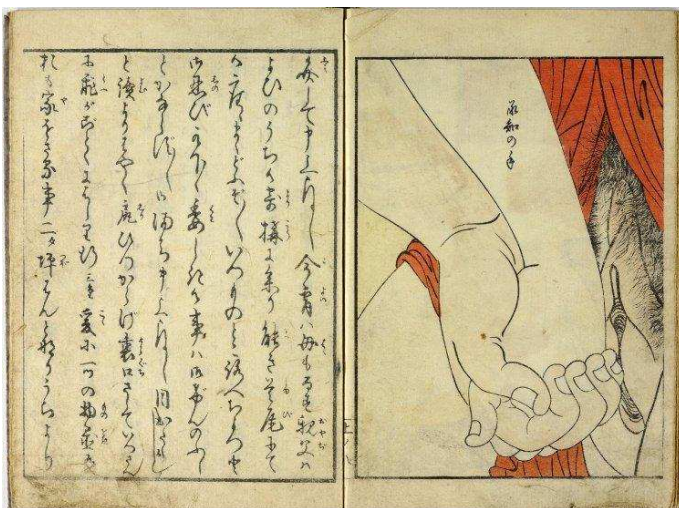


Figure 8 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Shochi no te* (*Consenting hands*) from *Ehon warai jogo* (*Picture Book: The Laughing Drinker*) volume 1, c.1803, colour woodblock-printed book, British Museum

Although *shunga* are predominantly woodblock prints (Figure 7), illustrated books (Figure 8) and scroll paintings (Figure 9), it does not tend to be limited by medium and there are also explicit *netsuke* (carved toggles) (Figure 10) and ceramics (Figure 11). Photographs, which attempt to replicate the content of *shunga*, do not begin to appear until after the Edo period and are not considered to be *shunga* (although others may disagree).



Figure 9 Katsukawa Shun'ei (attrib.), scene 6 from an untitled handscroll, c.1800, ink, colour and mica on paper, British Museum



Figure 10 (left) Ryugyoku, *netsuke*, pre-1865, ivory, British Museum

Figure 11 (right) Sake cup, c.1800-50, enamelled porcelain, British Museum

It should be noted that *shunga* is a collective term used to refer to a wide-range of artworks relating to sex and it was never a coherent movement, as artists were working across different cities, schools and centuries. *Shunga* is not determined by stylistic limitations, although it was most commonly produced by *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world) artists including Suzuki Harunobu (1725-1770), Kitagawa Utamaro (1753?-1806) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). There are extant examples by artists of other leading schools of the day including Kano (Figure 12) and Tosa (Figure 13). It is therefore beneficial to think of *shunga* as a genre, like landscape or portraiture, rather than as a homogeneous category. Why *shunga* was closely linked with *ukiyo-e* is discussed in section 1.2.3, which outlines who produced *shunga* and why.



Figure 12 unidentified Kano school artist, scenes from a handscroll, early 17th century, ink, colour, gold and silver pigment, and gold and silver leaf on paper, British Museum



Figure 13 unidentified Tosa school artist, scene from a handscroll, early 17th century, ink, colours, gold and silver on paper, British Museum

Shunga includes a wide range of works that have been gathered together due to their sexual content, but this act of grouping together can obscure the multiplicity of functions and uses that *shunga* had. How *shunga* was used, and by whom, is addressed in section 1.2.4 whilst section 1.2.5 examines the different roles that *shunga* played in Edo Japan. The term *shunga* is now used internationally for the sake of clarity and simplicity, but there were a variety of words used in the Edo period to refer to sexually explicit art. The nuances of the different uses of *shunga* that are suggested by these alternative names are discussed in section 1.2.5. The contradictory and ambiguous acceptability of *shunga*, principally related to religion and politics, is considered in section 1.2.6.

1.2.1 Time and place

One aspect of defining *shunga* is the limitation of where and when it was made. *Shunga* were created in Edo-period Japan (c.1603-1868), primarily in the capital city of Edo (modern-day Tokyo) but also to a lesser extent in Kamigata (the Osaka and Kyoto area). The date-range for what is considered *shunga* broadly matches the span of the Edo-period. This is partly because during the Edo period Japan's closed-door policy, which forbade foreigners from entering and the Japanese from leaving Japan, with the exception of very limited trade with the Chinese and Dutch at the artificial island of Dejima off Nagasaki, largely isolated it from outside influences. However, prior to the 1630s trade and ideas flowed freely between China and Japan. Not only were Japanese artists aware of Chinese sex art (*chunhua*) and sex manuals, but at times they also drew inspiration from them and incorporated elements into *shunga*⁸⁷.



Figure 14 unidentified artist, scene from *Chigo no sōshi* (*Book of Acolytes*), 19th century copy of 14th century scroll, handscroll, ink and colour on paper, British Museum

In addition, explicit depictions were not unique to the Edo period: images depicting sex, masturbation, and phallic competitions have been recorded in Japan from the Heian period (794-1185) onwards. Precursors to *shunga*, such as the narrative scrolls *Koshibagaki-zoshi* (*Tale of the Brushwood Fence*) and *Chigo*

⁸⁷ For discussions of Japanese engagement with Chinese sex art see Aki Ishigami and Alfred Haft (trans.), "Chinese Chunhua and Japanese Shunga," in *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, ed. Timothy Clark et al. (London: The British Museum Press, 2013), 92-103; Hiromitsu Kobayashi, "In Search of the Cutting Edge: Did Ukiyo-E Artists Borrow from the Erotic Illustrations of the Chinese Fengliu Juechang Tu?," *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 40, no. 3 (2009): 62-67.

no sōshi (*Book of Acolytes*) (Figure 14), were repeatedly copied over the years and undoubtedly were a source of inspiration for *shunga*. Whilst there is some sense of continuity of sex in art, and the continuance of aspects like humour and exaggerated genitals, it should not be misinterpreted as a linear progression of sex throughout Japanese history constituting a single entity. Earlier scrolls had a slightly different audience, tone and use from *shunga*, and there was a greater emphasis on humour than eroticism. This can be seen in scrolls which focus on phallic contests (Figure 15) and fart battles rather than on sex. As Screech explains,

Shunga were the result of the coming together of a specific set of conditions. Most basically, of the economic and libidinous structures of the cities of Edo and Osaka from the turn of the seventeenth century. The surge of printing, the spread of basic levels of education, and a highly artificial demography were core elements. By the mid-nineteenth century, the situation had evaporated into something else, and although pornography continued to be produced, the conditions had mutated sufficiently to require us to draw a line and to consider a new age to have been entered.⁸⁸

Often the date range for *shunga* is extended up to around 1900 as production did not immediately cease at the end of the Edo period⁸⁹. Sexually explicit works were still produced during the Meiji era (1868-1912) by artists such as Kawanabe Kyosai (1831-1889) and Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892) who worked across the two eras. Sexually explicit art produced in the Meiji period has been discussed as *shunga* by Buckland, Smith, and Uhlenbeck⁹⁰. Nevertheless, in addition to the reasons enumerated above by Screech, it could be argued that differences in style, tone, intention, and a decrease in the volume and acceptability of images might be used to counter the widely accepted inclusion of sexually explicit work by Meiji-era artists like Terasaki Kōgyō (1866-1919) as *shunga*.

⁸⁸ *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820*, 43.

⁸⁹ Some go further and include works produced in the twentieth and twenty-first century within the category of *shunga*, for example see Roni Neuer, *Shunga: The Erotic Art of Japan 1600-1979* (New York: The Ronin Gallery, 1979); Shawn Eichman and Stephen Salel, *Shunga: Stages of Desire* (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2014).

⁹⁰ Rosina Buckland, 'Erotic Art of the Meiji Era (1868-1912)' in Clark et al., *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 454-463; Rosina Buckland, "Shunga in the Meiji Era: The End of a Tradition?," *Japan Review* 26, no. Special Issue - Shunga: Sex and Humour in Japanese Art and Literature (2013): 259-76; Smith, "Overcoming the Modern History of Edo 'Shunga'"; Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 216-219.



Figure 15 Utagawa Hiroshige III, detail from *Kōken tei no monko Yuge no Dōkyō kensei no zu*, 1865, handscroll, ink and colour on paper, copy of Toba Sōjō, *Yobutsu kurabe* (*The Phallic Competition*), 11-12th century, handscroll, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

1.2.2 Sexual content

The most obvious way to define *shunga* is by its content: *shunga* depict sex. *Shunga* were usually produced as a set of twelve prints or with twelve unconnected scenes in a scroll painting, rather than in the narrative format that seems to have been favoured in pre-Edo sexually explicit scrolls. Although one or two *abuna-e* (literally translated as ‘danger pictures’) are often included in a *shunga* set or *shunpon* (*shunga* book), it could be said that *abuna-e* are not *shunga* as they are only mildly risqué and do not explicitly show sexual acts or organs (Figure 16).



Figure 16 Suzuki Harunobu, *Tenugui-kake kihan (Returning Sail at the Towel Rack)* from *Fūryū zashiki hakkei (Eight Fashionable Views of Interiors)*, c.1768, colour woodblock print, British Museum

Figure 17 Suzuki Harunobu, *Woman bathing*, 1770, colour woodblock print, Rijksmuseum

The nude as a genre did not exist in Edo Japan and due to the tradition of mixed communal bathing nudity was seen as a natural state and was not considered erotic in and of itself⁹¹. Apart from the attractiveness conferred on the nape of a woman's neck '*shunga* dismiss the erotic possibility of skin'⁹². Even in *shunga*, couples' bodies are often partially concealed by kimono rather than completely exposed, usually with the genitals visible for emphasis, and exaggerated to symbolise the strength of passion involved. By using kimono to frame the bodies of the participants and in particular their exaggerated genitals, artists focused viewers' attention on the act of sex.

On the other hand, there are a few examples of nudes seemingly intended to be perceived erotically despite not featuring sex. For example, Figure 17 shows a naked woman stepping into the bath. For any viewer who is uncertain, the frog's unabashed gaze at the woman's genitals indicates where the, presumably male, viewer should be looking and makes the titillating intent of Harunobu's picture clear. Although this mild eroticism in nudes and *abuna-e* may overlap with some of the features of *shunga*, and thus may blur the boundaries, they fall outside the genre of *shunga*, as they do not depict sex.



⁹¹ The debate about 'natural' and 'erotic' in relation to the terms 'nudity' and 'naked' and how they relate to *shunga* will be touched on in 1.3 with the intention to examine it in detail in the near future.

⁹² Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 109.

However, this blurring of boundaries fits Screech's argument for a lack of division between *shunga* and other *ukiyo-e* works: 'In a way, one might even say, *shunga* does not really exist, but is an element in a representational continuum from clothed beauties to copulation'⁹³. As Screech explains, 'Pictures could serve as advertisements for those whose services were to be bought'⁹⁴. For this reason, he includes non-explicit pictures, such as *bijinga* (pictures of beautiful women) (Figure 18), *yakusha-e* (actor prints) (Figure 19) and images of courtesans, in his discussions of Edo sex. Screech's inclusive approach mimics Edo attitudes in which sex was not isolated from other aspects of life and *shunga* were not produced separately from other genres of art.



Figure 18 (left) Kitagawa Utamaro, *Three Beauties*, mid-1790s, colour woodblock print, Victoria and Albert Museum

Figure 19 (right) Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Shirai Gonpachi from Date otoko kisho kurabe (Comparison of the Spirit of Able Men)*, c.1850, colour woodblock print, British Museum

Although he does concede that, 'The presence or absence of depicted organs naturally makes a difference'⁹⁵. Indeed, the graphic depiction of exaggerated genitalia is a key distinguishing feature of *shunga*, which emphasises sex as the subject and helps to convey the strength of the emotions and sensations behind it more clearly to the viewer. Genitals were often shown the same size as the

⁹³ Ibid., 314-315.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 314-315.

lovers' heads. This equality of size and of pictorial focus on faces as well as genitals seems to indicate that the psychical and emotional aspects of sex were as important as the physical ones.

In *shunga*, identification seems to be encouraged and subjectivity is emphasised, with the emotional experience of the participants conveyed through the focus on their faces and gestures of pleasure, and through the portrayal of people as individualised human beings rather than as gods or allegories like in European sex art. *Shunga* often gives viewers context in a way that other sex art does not through the use of text. As Berry advises, 'reading the texts accompanying *shunga* is critical to their interpretation'⁹⁶. Text can reveal information about the participants to viewers, such as their relationship to each other, or it can directly give a voice to the lovers to articulate their subjectivity and express their pleasure. Although text in *shunga* can give context, it is also frequently 'dirty talk' and witty remarks. In this way, the text and image work together to convey the eroticism and humour that characterise *shunga*.

Another characteristic of *shunga*, one that is frequently commented on, is the apparent equality between men and woman and the focus on their mutual pleasure. In *shunga*, women are shown as equal and their enjoyment is depicted as being as important as men's. Signs of female pleasure include curled toes, closed eyes, head thrown back, dishevelled hair, and the emission of sexual fluids. The text can also reveal cries of pleasure, as well as showing the level of intimacy and engagement between the couple. This focus on the emotional aspects of a physical act allows viewers to connect with the participants and establishes a balance of people being depicted as both physical and psychological at the same time, avoiding the reduction solely to the physical as in most European female nudes.

However, *shunga*, like all artworks, are not documents, and it is unlikely that the focus on equality and mutual pleasure reflected gender relations in the Edo period. Though it should be remembered that power inequality and hierarchies permeated Japanese culture in all aspects of daily life including work and family

⁹⁶ Berry, "Rethinking 'Shunga'," 17.

relationships, not just sexual ones. But, if mutual pleasure is an illusion, it is one that is necessary for *shunga* to function as art and as pornography.

Despite the focus on mutual enjoyment, there were depictions of non-consensual sex in *shunga*. A common misconception is that, prior to contact with foreign countries in the 1850s, there were no depictions of rape or violence in *shunga*. Whilst it is true that there was a focus on consensual participation and mutual enjoyment, as described above, there were depictions of sexual aggression throughout the Edo period. Such depictions did increase in frequency at the end of the Edo period, but many of these are by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892), an artist known for his bloody and violent images. It should be remembered that scenes of coercion were relatively rare and to attribute violent imagery only to European influence would be erroneous.

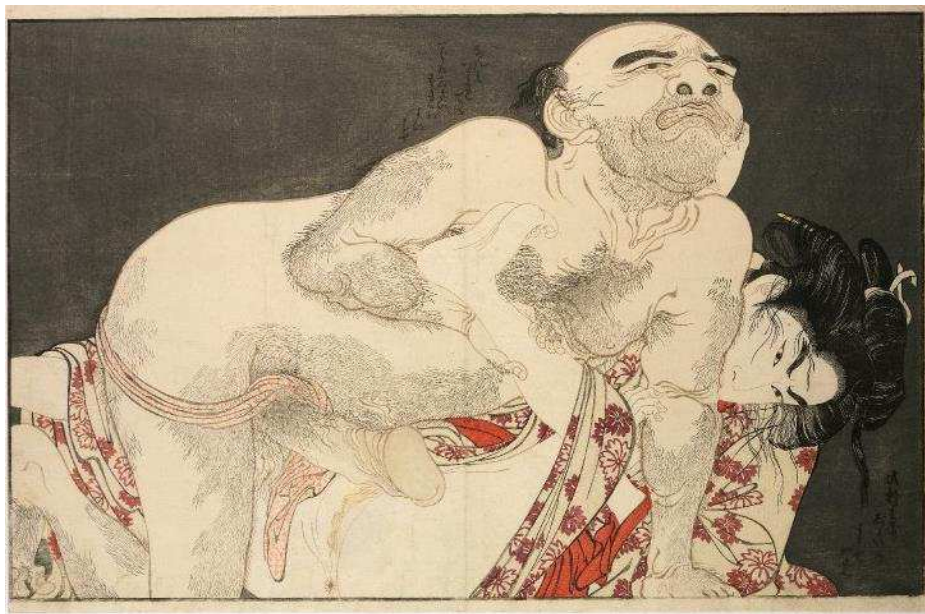


Figure 20 Kitagawa Utamaro, print 9 from *Utamakura (Poem of the Pillow)*, 1788, colour woodblock print, British Museum

In scenes of coercion, such as in Figure 20, men are usually depicted as ugly and hirsute as if the repulsiveness of their intentions manifests itself visibly, as though artists were judging men who forced themselves on women. Hayakawa Monta notes how through the character of Mane'emon (Figure 21) Harunobu expresses disgust at a calligraphy teacher forcing himself on his young pupil, by ridiculing his large, ugly nose, and voicing a preference for harmony in male-

female sexual relations⁹⁷. It may be the case that artists were drawing on Chinese notions of social harmony and balance between yin and yang, which represent female and male aspects respectively.



Figure 21 Suzuki Harunobu, print 2 from *Fūryū enshoku Mane'emon* (*The Amorous Adventures of Mane'emon*), 1765-70, colour woodblock printed book, British Museum

It is sometimes mistakenly assumed that *shunga* mainly depict courtesans and their clients. Courtesans, indentured sex-workers who lived and worked in legalised brothels in the so-called pleasure quarters, Yoshiwara in Edo, Shimabara in Kyoto and Shinmachi in Osaka, were a subject of endless fascination in *ukiyo-e*, so it may be surprising that they are not the major subject in *shunga*. When courtesans do appear in *shunga* they tend to be depicted with their secret or true love rather than a client. Instead of focusing on paid sex, *shunga* portrays all kinds of people, including domestic scenes with husbands and wives, insatiable widowers, adulterers, young or old lovers, *chonin* (townspeople), ladies-in-waiting, and even foreigners. Edoites loved novelty and, in order to satisfy them, artists rose to the challenge and offered a variety of combinations of participants, locations, situations and sexual positions.

Male-female relationships were referred to as *nyoshoku*, or sometimes *joshoku*, which translates as ‘female love’ or ‘lust for women’ and indicates the dominance of the male viewpoint in Edo society. Some men preferred male-

⁹⁷ Hayakawa Monta, *The Shunga of Suzuki Harunobu : Mitate-E and Sexuality in Edo* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2001), 22-24.

female relationships and others male-male but in the Edo period these were not considered mutually exclusive and there was a fluidity of sexuality that allowed for participation in both. As can be seen in Figure 22, in which an older man, a samurai as indicated by his two swords, penetrates a male youth whilst embracing a young woman.



Figure 22 Sugimura Jihei, scene 6 from an untitled *shunga* series, mid-1680s, woodblock print, private collection (reproduced in Clark et al. *Shunga*, 128–129.)

Nanshoku (male love) was used to refer to male-male relationships, but there was no term for female-female relationships. Depictions of female-female sex are rare, particularly in contrast to the sizable quantity of extant male-male *shunga*⁹⁸. Figure 23 is an example of *nanshoku shunga*; it depicts a young *onnagata* (actor who specialised in female roles) having sex with a client. It could be argued that *nanshoku* was given equal status with *nyoshoku* as male-male scenes were included with male-female ones in *shunga* sets, scrolls, and illustrated books, and there were no artistic distinctions in the way male-male and male-female couples were depicted.

⁹⁸ For more information on male-male sexuality in Edo Japan see *Cartographies of Desire : Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*. and Gary Leupp, *Male Colors : The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1997), and for more on male-male couples in art see Ellis Tinois, "The Representation of Male-Male Sex in Japanese Erotic Books," in *Japanese Erotic Fantasies : Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period*, ed. Chris Uhlenbeck (Amsterdam: Hotei Pub., 2005), 31-34.



Figure 23 Suzuki Harunobu, print 5 from *Furyu enshoku Mane'emon* (Elegant Amorous Mane'emon), 1770, colour woodblock print, British Museum.

1.2.3 Who created shunga and why?

As previously mentioned, there are examples that show *shunga* were created by artists of various schools and styles (Figure 12 & Figure 13), but the vast majority of extant *shunga* are *ukiyo-e*, which was the predominant school in the Edo period. Almost all of the leading artists of their day, including Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-1694), Nishikawa Sukenobu (1671-1750), Suzuki Harunobu, Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815), Kitagawa Utamaro, Katsushika Hokusai, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), produced *shunga* as well as the *bijinga*, *yakusha-e*, still-lives, landscapes, theatrical and Yoshiwara scenes that they are known for. It is estimated that *shunga* roughly accounted for between a fifth and a quarter of some *ukiyo-e* artists' output. There was little differentiation between the creation and distribution of *shunga* and other genres of art: it was drawn by the same artists, cut by the same carvers, commissioned by the same publishers and sold by the same sellers to the same audience.

Why did artists create *shunga*? What were their intentions? On the one hand, it can be assumed that artists wanted to make art: to create something that would show off their talent, distinguish them from their peers and that would engage, entertain and offer enjoyment to viewers. On the other hand, artists and publishers also wanted to make money and they realised that sex sells. If *shunga*

had not been a popular, and therefore profitable, subject it would not have continued to be produced. Chris Uhlenbeck also highlights art and money as the key incentives for creating *shunga*:

Shunga are about sex - naturally. But they are equally about fun, humour and double entendre. They are also about money, being just another cog in the Japanese publishing machine. And they are about artistic merit, about artists who needed to earn a *sen* or two, and about some being better at it than others.⁹⁹

The sensuality and humour of *shunga* make it an ideal fit with the ideas of play and recreation in *ukiyo-e*. In *ukiyo*, the floating world, notions of living in the moment meant that leisure and play were important and this tended to focus around the theatre district and pleasure quarters. *Asobi* (play) is an important concept in Japanese culture. Play could give a sense of freedom and respite to those struggling under the strict constraints of the Tokugawa regime, which will be discussed later. Much of *ukiyo-e* culture related to play(fulness), ambiguity, layers of meaning, referencing other times, events, people, places, and *shunga*, as another aspect of play, also engaged in this cultural-intertextuality with their multiple layers of meaning.

All of the artists who produced *shunga* are male. There were few female artists in the Edo period¹⁰⁰. It is therefore unsurprising that there are no known female *shunga* artists. The possibility has been raised that Hokusai's daughter Katsushika Ōi (active c.1818-after 1854), who as an artist may have produced or contributed to *shunga* in her father's workshop¹⁰¹, but as of yet there is no conclusive evidence to either support or disprove this tantalising theory.

1.2.4 Who used *shunga* and how?

Shunga not only depicts a range of people of different classes, ages, genders, and sexualities, but it also appears to have been used by a similarly wide

⁹⁹ Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies : Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ This phenomenon is not specific to Japan but the norm across the globe. For information on Edo-period female artists see Fister *Japanese Women Artists 1600-1900* (Lawrence, Kansas: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1988)..

¹⁰¹ Tadashi Kobayashi and Julie Nelson Davis, "The Floating World in Light and Shadow: Ukiyo-E Paintings by Hokusai's Daughter Oi," in *Hokusai and His Age*, ed. John T Carpenter (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005), 93-103.

audience¹⁰². Surprisingly, given the sexual nature of their business, the only people who are not mentioned as using *shunga*, although they are sometimes depicted in it, are courtesans¹⁰³.



Figure 24 Utagawa Toyokuni, scene from *Ōyogari no koe* volume 1, 1822, colour woodblock printed book, International Research Centre for Japanese Studies

Since *shunga* were produced by male artists and it is commonly accepted that they were used as pornography, it is usually assumed that they were for a male audience. However, there are textual and visual accounts of women using *shunga* (Figure 24). Although, it should be remembered that art is not evidence, but rather it presents a starting point for discussion and its content should be questioned, the repeated depictions in art and literature of women viewing and using *shunga*, either alone or with a partner, would indicate that they contain a grain of truth or are at least plausible. Women would have at least been aware of *shunga* and had probably handled it, given that they ran the household and dealt with all the deliveries including receiving books from the *kashihonya* (itinerant lending library).

¹⁰² For more on audiences see Hayakawa Monta, 'Who Were the Audiences for Shunga?' in Clark et al., *Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 34-47.

¹⁰³ Seigle argues that courtesans did not use *shunga* and offers some possible reasons in Uhlenbeck *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 35-55.

In *Sex and The Floating World* Screech openly acknowledged that, as well as being art and a source of humour, *shunga*'s main purpose was as pornography or erotica. He also raised the possibility of female viewers:

More than is often accepted for Europe, too, Edo pornography seems to have been useable by women, although whether this resulted in the creation of specifically female-oriented imagery, or whether women and girls consumed pictures destined to perpetuate male fantasies is a moot point.¹⁰⁴

On the contrary, it is an issue that merits further discussion. Drew Gerstle's recent works on Edo parodies contribute to this discussion. He suggests that certain *shunga* books may have been aimed at a female audience, as they parodied educational textbooks for women¹⁰⁵. He discusses in detail the example of *Onna dairaku takara-beki* (*Great Pleasures for Women and their Treasure Boxes*) c. 1755, by Tsukioka Settei (1726-86), which is a parody of the educational textbook *Onna daigaku takara-bako* (*Treasure Chest of Great Learning for Women*) from 1716.

It is generally accepted that *shunga* were viewed either alone or with a partner. However, even though Screech accepts depictions showing individuals masturbating using *shunga* (Figure 25) as representative of how they were used, he dismisses depictions showing couples using *shunga* together (Figure 26) as being a 'myth'¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁴ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 93.

¹⁰⁵ C Andrew Gerstle, *Great Pleasures for Women and Their Treasure Boxes & Love Letters and a River of Erect Precepts for Women : Two Erotic Parodies of 18th-Century Japanese Conduct Books = Onna Dairaku Takara-Beki, C.* (Hollywood Calif.: Highmoonoon, 2009).

¹⁰⁶ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 39.



Figure 25 Tsukioka Settei, scene from *Bidō nichiya johō ki* (*The Way of Love, Women's Treasures for Day and Night*), 1764-71, monochrome woodblock-printed book (reproduced in Screech¹⁰⁷)



Figure 26 unidentified artist, *Couple Looking at a Shunga Book* from *Raikō and the Earth Spider*, 19th century, colour woodblock print, Rijksmuseum

Despite this, Screech does not make it clear why *shunga* use by couples (for arousal, seduction or even mutual masturbation) should be any less plausible than use for solitary masturbation. He does concede that

¹⁰⁷ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 305.

People might have used *shunga* together, but once real sex was initiated pictures would seem to become rapidly superfluous, with painted genitals losing appeal when live ones were at hand.¹⁰⁸

Yet this does not disprove (or prove) that couples used *shunga*, it only suggests that *shunga*'s function for couples may have been short-lived. Uhlenbeck offers another reason why *shunga* may have been used by couples:

The importance of humour, wit and double entendre seems to suggest that some *shunga* were meant as something quite the opposite of 'solitary-use pornography'. They were made to share, sometimes with a lover, when sex provided the appropriate context.¹⁰⁹

It does seem likely that people would have wanted to share *shunga* with a partner, whether for sexual reasons or to jointly appreciate its artistic or humorous elements. But as Hockley cautions, 'The possibility of multiple viewing behaviors will resist any over-arching perspective we might attempt to bring to the study of *shunga*'¹¹⁰.

1.2.5 What roles did *shunga* play?

Although for simplicity *shunga* is the most commonly used term nowadays, both within Japan and internationally, in the Edo period there were a variety of terms used¹¹¹. Many of these terms reflect the variety of roles that *shunga* could fulfil. There are a multitude of uses of *shunga* which can, and do, vary over time and from viewer to viewer, due to factors such as gender, status, sexuality, experience or mood. As well as being art, *shunga* could also be used as pornography, for humour, education, economic purposes, and for protection.

Shunga literally translates as 'spring pictures' and the term comes from *chunhua* or *chungong hua* (Spring Palace pictures), the name given to Chinese sexually explicit art. But it can also be seen as a euphemism which implies links to nature and fertility, as spring is the time of year for new life and new growth, when many animals procreate and the earth is lush and green. In this way, the term

¹⁰⁸ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 21.

¹¹⁰ Hockley, "Shunga: Function, Context, Methodology," 266.

¹¹¹ See Smith, "Overcoming the Modern History of Edo 'Shunga.'"

‘spring pictures’ helps to situate sex as a natural part of a wider cycle of life. This naturalisation of sex is visible in *shunga*: ‘Depictions of animals mating in the spaces of human coupling rendered desire ‘natural’ and extenuated those cravings society sought to police’¹¹².

Pornography

Shunga is often translated, and in effect defined, in English as ‘erotic’ or ‘pornographic’ art, which indicates *shunga*’s main functions as art and as pornography. However, until Screech the latter was not openly acknowledged, but merely implied.

The primary purpose of these pictures was for masturbation. Most erotica is for this, and, *prima facie*, there is no reason why *shunga* should be any different. This is not to deny that other uses were possible, but they would have been secondary.¹¹³

He goes on to say ‘pornographic images in Japan were admitted to be intended for auto-eroticism, albeit denials hovered in the air’¹¹⁴. Screech uses the fact that another term for *shunga* was *warai-e* (laughing pictures) as evidence of how the pictures were used, as *warai* could also be a euphemism for masturbation. Edo was referred to as the city of bachelors due to the imbalance in the population between men and women. This was accentuated by *sankin-kōtai* (alternate attendance), the system under which samurai had to spend alternate years living in their hometown and being in attendance to the shōgun in Edo. Whilst living in Edo, they had to leave their wives and families at home. The need for the pornographic aspect of *shunga* becomes apparent in light of this. Although prostitution was accepted in Edo society, in reality, visiting a high-class courtesan in the so-called Pleasure Quarters was unaffordable for most. The alternatives were cheap, unlicensed prostitutes, a visit to whom came with increased health risks, or using ‘compensatory’ images. However, as this section on roles will show, *shunga* was not merely a substitution activity.

¹¹² Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 163.

¹¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 36.

As well as *shunga* being used for solitary masturbation, it could also be used by couples as a source of arousal, to revive flagging appetites, or as a means of seduction as discussed in section 1.2.4. *Makura-e* (pillow book) is an alternative name for *shunga* which indicates its use in the bedroom.

Art

Shunga were made by the popular artists of their day and were just as aesthetically pleasing as any other piece of artwork, so there is no reason to assume that they could not be viewed, appreciated, and treated as art. *Shunga* could be a feast for the eyes (Figure 27). Some luxury works featured gold leaf, rich pigments, or exquisitely detailed carving. Artists played around with compositions and sometimes included artwork on screens within the image in other styles to show off their talents. They depicted inventive positions, lavishly decorated kimono, and beautiful people. They could express a whole gamut of moods and emotions including pleasure, passion, amusement, anger, and tenderness.



Figure 27 Hosoda Eishi, *Haru (Spring)* from *Shiki kyōen zu (Contest of Passion in the Four Seasons)*, late 1790s-early 1800s, hanging scroll, ink, colour and gold on silk, private collection

Art is said to function in several ways, including as a mirror which reflects reality, as an escape or distraction from reality, or as an influence on reality. In the case of *shunga* the former is unlikely, but as long as viewers remain aware of

the illusions surrounding *shunga*, information about Edo sex and society can be discerned. For example, does the illusion of sex being always available - still a popular fantasy today - not reveal something about the reality behind those desires; probably that sex was not so freely available, or at least not for the majority of people. As Screech notes 'art compensates for absences much more often than it illustrates realities'¹¹⁵.

Whatever illusions artists employed there must have been enough truth within them for viewers to recognise and with which they might identify, otherwise *shunga* would not have been as popular as they were. Edo artists carefully balanced elements of illusion and fantasy with reality in order to give viewers a satisfying print - whether that satisfaction comes from the aesthetics, the humour or through arousal, in this particular instance, does not matter. If the realities of sex in Edo Japan had been depicted - pre-arranged marriages, children sold into prostitution, gender inequality, variable attitudes to sexuality - these images might be too unappealing for viewers to connect with. They would have been too alienating for contemporary Edoites who were looking to *ukiyo-e* and *shunga* to escape the harsh realities of their lives (such as famine, fires, and numerous restrictions).

Shunga could provide a window into another world, one that the viewer may otherwise never be able to see or experience. Voyeurism (as in Harunobu's popular *Mane'emon* series, for example in Figure 23), scopophilia (pleasure in looking), and fetishisation are often incorporated into *shunga*. Sexual desires that perhaps could not be satisfied in actuality (for whatever reason) could be represented in *shunga* as it provided a safe space to explore these issues and satisfy desires mentally.

Intellectual stimulation is another aspect of *shunga* as art beyond the obvious aesthetic element. Although *shunga* prints and illustrated books were relatively cheap, they should not be dismissed as 'low art'; many *shunga* works require a literate, knowledgeable viewer in order to be able to function as art or humour. Intertextuality, word play, puns, symbolism, and witty references commonly

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 299.

featured in *ukiyo-e*, and *shunga* was no exception. Uhlenbeck comments on the mental pleasure available from *shunga* as art:

The different narrative levels can be read separately, but the interrelationships between them can result in a complex work of art. This overlay of visual and textual meaning has led Hayakawa to conclude that *shunga* were not purely pornographic tools designed for male excitement. In addition to the role *shunga* play in sexual arousal, he stresses that part of the enjoyment of *shunga* is the interpretation of the interrelationships between narrative levels.¹¹⁶

Humour

Warai-e (pictures for laughing) was another name for *shunga*. As explained above, 'laughing' was also a euphemism for masturbation, but it is possible that the actual meaning of *warai* was intended, to draw viewers' attention to the humorous nature of *shunga*. *Shunga* is well-known for its parodies and for *mitate*, unusual juxtaposition which results in a subtler form of humour. Many popular plays and novels had *shunga* parody versions, including *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) (Figure 28). Parodies offer viewers the pleasures of recognition and of being in on the joke.



¹¹⁶ Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 20.

Figure 28 unidentified Utagawa school artist, scene from *Inaka Genji (Country Genji)*, 1860-1879, colour woodblock-printed book, British Museum

Gerstle and Preston have argued that *shunga* could have been used to make social and political commentary as a way of getting around censorship edicts which forbade governmental criticism and the depiction of current events¹¹⁷.

Education

Shunga were included in a bride's trousseau, ostensibly to educate the young newlywed but, as Screech states,

no amount of looking at *shunga* will instruct a girl on how sex is pleurably or safely performed. ...Manuals relating to contraception and sexual hygiene were written in the Edo period, but they are entirely different from the genre known as *shunga*.¹¹⁸

Indeed, if a young woman was relying on what she saw in *shunga* rather than a medical manual to prepare her for her wedding night then she was in for a big surprise, or perhaps a little one given *shunga*'s tendency for exaggeration. Illing also casts doubt on the educational function of *shunga*:

The Japanese house with walls literally paper-thin, was no place for secretive behaviour, even had social custom demanded it, and children would scarcely have had to be taught the 'facts of life'.¹¹⁹

The sentiment that *shunga* should not be taken seriously as a guide is also present in *senryū*, Edo-period comic poems, as in this oft-quoted example: 'The stupid couple Try doing it as in *shunga* And sprain their hands'¹²⁰.

¹¹⁷ C Andrew Gerstle, "Shunga and Parody," in *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, ed. Timothy Clark et al. (London: The British Museum Press, 2013), 318-31; Jennifer Preston, "Shunga and Censorship in the Edo Period (1600-1868)," in *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, ed. Timothy Clark et al. (London: The British Museum Press, 2013), 246-58.

¹¹⁸ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 37.

¹¹⁹ Richard Illing, *Japanese Erotic Art and the Life of the Courtesan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 5 unpaginated.

¹²⁰ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 41.

Economic

There are three ways that *shunga* can fulfil an economic function: as a form of advertising, as a product to make money for artists and publishers and fill customers' demand for that product, and as a way to stimulate spending in related areas such as other *ukiyo-e* or in the Yoshiwara. As in modern-day advertising, the implication of sex was used to sell products such as alcohol, make-up or toothpaste¹²¹, whilst more explicit *shunga* advertised sex toys, lubricant and 'long-life' medicine. *Shunga* within *shunga* were another kind of advertising, with the implication that if viewers buy *shunga* then they too might be able to experience what is depicted.

Fran Lloyd notes that 'sex and consumerism were part of Japan's urban culture...and were utilized by the ruling powers as a means both of controlling the potential political unrest of the male populace and of furthering economic prosperity.'¹²² In these ways *shunga*, and other *ukiyo-e*, were part of what David Pollack coined an 'economy of desire'¹²³. Similarly, Screech uses the phrase 'libidinous economy'¹²⁴ because a wide range of *ukiyo-e* could be seen as adverts: depictions of teahouse waitresses, courtesans, actors and geisha could be said to advertise those whose services could be bought.

Protection

Higa (hidden pictures) is another name for *shunga*, and it was claimed to be for protection against fire or injury in battle. *Higa* were said to be kept in storehouses to ward off fire, although since the examples of this are found within *shunga* itself it seems more like an advertising ploy for *shunga* than a genuinely held belief¹²⁵. However, rather than questioning the efficacy of using *shunga* for protection, it might be more informative to consider *higa* in terms of folk customs and traditions.

¹²¹ Pollack, "Marketing Desire," 57.

¹²² Fran Lloyd, "Critical Reflections," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. Fran Lloyd (London : Reaktion Books, 2002), 13.

¹²³ Pollack, "Marketing Desire," 47, 58.

¹²⁴ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 9.

¹²⁵ See Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 36-37.

In the military, men were away from their family and from women so there was little opportunity for sex, apart from *nanshoku*. It is therefore not difficult to see why shunga would be carried in a soldier's helmet. However, the belief that *shunga* could protect against injury on the battlefield seems to have been common even in the Meiji era as apparently a significant number of shunga were carried by soldiers in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and Ishigami describes how shunga were illegally offered for sale to the families of soldiers around this time¹²⁶.

Religion

One role that is notably absent is a religious one. Despite the cults of phallic worship and the numerous phallic and yonic votives found in Japanese temples, it may be surprising that *shunga* does not seem to have been used for the purposes of religion or fertility.

1.2.6 Why was shunga acceptable in the Edo period?

Shunga did not face the same moral judgements and strict censorship that erotic or pornographic art did, and to some extent still does, in Europe, America, and post-Edo Japan. This difference was mainly due to religion and politics. Three other factors may have contributed to the acceptability of *shunga* albeit to a lesser extent. One was an awareness of scrolls featuring sex and bawdy humour from the Heian period, which was considered a high point of Japanese culture, and onwards. Two was a long tradition of phallic worship, rooted in Shintō beliefs, which may have paved the way for the acceptability of depictions of sexual organs and situations in scrolls. Three was that *shunga* drew on elements of Chinese sexually explicit art and Chinese culture in general was held in high esteem.

¹²⁶ Aki Ishigami and Rosina Buckland (trans.), "The Reception of Shunga in the Modern Era: From Meiji to the Pre-WWII Years," *Japan Review* 26, no. Special Issue - Shunga: Sex and Humour in Japanese Art and Literature (2013): 44-45.

Religion

In Europe, because of the predominance of Christianity, sex and the naked body are associated with sin, shame, guilt and embarrassment. Shintō (the way of the gods) is the animistic belief system indigenous to Japan, which features sex at the heart of its creation myth. The Japanese islands and several Shintō gods are believed to be the products of sexual union of the deities Izanagi and Izanami. Buddhism, which co-exists alongside Shintō beliefs, advises against sexual misconduct, but treats sex between two people who love each other as moral, whether they are married or not. In contrast to Christianity, in Shintō and Buddhism sex is not sinful. Instead, sex was treated as a part of life in Edo Japan, as an aspect of human experience and not something to be hidden. Consequently, it was an acceptable, and popular, subject in art.

This lack of religious judgement of sex and sexual practices, in addition to the tradition of communal bathing, meant that nudity was not shameful. However, the nude as a genre did not exist in Edo art. Although people are occasionally depicted naked in *shunga*, artists tended to depict their figures clothed, or even when undressed, shown against or at least partially covered by kimono. Without an inherent sense of eroticism in nudity, and perhaps because Japanese artists did not use shading and contours to give a sense of three-dimensionality, like in European art, nudes were little more than areas of flat, pale colour and consequently lacked appeal as a genre. The eroticism seems to occur not from the baring of skin but from this partial concealment, as well as the vibrant colour combinations and lavish patterns displayed by partially clothed figures being more visually engaging and tantalising for viewers.

Clothing could also act as a framing device to emphasise faces and genitals, and as a succinct way of indicating the character of the people depicted. Tanaka reveals an additional role that textiles play: ‘In contrast to culturally refined clothed bodies, naked bodies are raw and unsophisticated. It is important to note that sexual intercourse in *shunga* was not meant to be “natural”. Rather,

sex was dramatized, narrativized and civilized'¹²⁷. From this perspective, clothing helps *shunga* to depict an idealised version of sex. The scarcity of nudes is therefore not necessarily a reflection of religious or moral judgements but of aesthetic and cultural preferences. In addition, there was not the same need for the nude as there was in Europe, where sexually explicit art was not permissible. Instead, these sexual desires were sublimated into the nude, where they were 'justified' and 'sanitised' through references to classical and biblical tales. It was not until the Meiji period (1868-1912), when Victorian morals and Christian notions of shame and sin were introduced, that attitudes towards sex and the human body in art changed in Japan.

Politics and censorship

Prior to the battle of Sekigahara in 1600 Japan was rife with civil disruption as rival clans fought for power. In 1603 Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) became the *shōgun* (military leader) of a newly unified and peaceful Japan. Ieyasu usurped the power from the Emperor and made Edo (modern-day Tokyo) his new capital leaving the Emperor as a figurehead in the ancient, courtly capital of Kyoto. In 1639, to protect the recently established social order from the spread of Christianity and the threat of outside attack, Japan entered a period of isolation that would last until 1853, when Japan was forced to end its closed-door policy and recommence contact with the outside world. During that time, the Tokugawa clan remained in power and kept the people of Edo Japan under strict rule, including controlling social interactions, travel, jobs, and enforcing class and gender restrictions. On the other hand, due to its isolation, Edo Japan was largely unaffected by the moral attitudes and censorship which were prevalent in contemporary Europe, America, China and Korea.

The Tokugawa *bakufu* (military government) 'recognised the power of the print medium as a form of mass communication, and it issued many regulations to control the publishing industry, including its erotic output'¹²⁸. There were three main justifications for this censorship: moral, social, and political stability.

¹²⁷ Yuko Tanaka, "Erotic Textiles," in *Imaging Reading Eros : Proceedings for the Conference, Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850, Indiana University, Bloomington, August 17-20, 1995*, ed. Sumie Jones (Indiana: East Asian Studies Center Indiana University, 1996), 67.

¹²⁸ Buckland, *Shunga : Erotic Art in Japan*, 30.

Shunga was made nominally illegal along with other luxury goods in 1722 as part of the larger Kyoho reforms, which stated that ‘because they are bad for public morals, amorous books (*kōshokubon*) must gradually cease to be printed’¹²⁹. Yet, the production and dissemination of *shunga* and *shunpon* (*shunga* books) was largely tolerated as an ‘open secret’ by the government. Similar edicts reissued in 1790s and the 1830s, resulted in temporary dips in production, but *shunga* continued to be made and sold, sometimes in a more discrete manner in deference to the edicts. This indicates an initial unfavourable shift in attitudes towards the acceptability of *shunga*, but that the censorship edicts were not always enforced.

In the early part of the Edo period, prior to the Kyoho reforms, well-known artists such as Morunobu, Harunobu and Isoda Koryūsai (1735-90) signed their *shunga* works. There was a system of self-regulation for the authorization of prints and books, which, after the Kansei reforms in the 1790s, had to feature the artist’s signature, and publisher’s and censor’s seals. Given the ambiguity of *shunga*’s legal status, later *shunga* were unsigned although they often featured pseudonyms with textual or visual clues from which the knowing buyer could identify the artist. Nevertheless, *shunga* were produced by almost every major *ukiyo-e* artist and were widely circulated. The extent to which publishing laws were enforced varied over time and as Gerstle has pointed out, *kashihonya* (itinerant lending libraries) were not prosecuted for distributing *shunga*¹³⁰.

Artists and publishers were more likely to be prosecuted for political or social commentary than for sexually explicit works. Art was censored to ensure political control; not only was outright criticism of the government banned, as it was claimed it would be damaging to society, but no current or historical political figures could be depicted in art. In 1804, Utamaro was arrested not for his extensive *shunga* output but for his un-heroic depiction of the sixteenth-century *shōgun* Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536/37-1598) (Figure 29). Prohibitions in publishing did not single out *shunga* for moral judgement, instead in art

¹²⁹ Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 17.

¹³⁰ Gerstle, *Great Pleasures for Women*, 2.

‘Impropriety was a greater offence than sexual explicitness, as it contained an implicit threat to the social order’¹³¹.



Figure 29 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Mashiba Hisayoshi* (Toyotomi Hideyoshi), c.1603-04, colour woodblock print, British Museum

Sumptuary laws were often repeated prohibiting luxury items such as large, lavishly coloured albums. ‘Semi-secret purchases were the only ones that could still be extravagant, as limits were placed on the number of colours and sizes of book that publishers could openly issue’¹³². However, a large quantity of *shunga* were in book format, *shunpon*, which was less expensive than a painting or set of luxury prints. Even those who could not afford to buy their own could borrow *shunga* books from the *kashihonya* for a small fee. However, Buckland notes that censorship in Edo was class related as it was this affordability and availability that caused the censorship laws to be enacted:

The legal restrictions regarding erotica dealt exclusively with published material, and there was no attempt made to control painted works. These were available only to the elite, and therefore posed no threat to the fabric of society.¹³³

¹³¹ Buckland, *Shunga : Erotic Art in Japan*, 30.

¹³² Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 52.

¹³³ Buckland, *Shunga : Erotic Art in Japan*, 33.

Many novels warned about the dangers of excessive sex, which could lead to financial ruin and a lack of attention to responsibilities, but as long as it did not affect the stability of family or societal relationships, the government was tolerant of sex. This tolerance can be seen in the sanctioning of the pleasure quarters (legal areas of prostitution).

In reality the works would be produced and circulated anyway so it was better for both sides to appear to be conforming to and enforcing the rules. It was yet another game and, as long as everyone appeared to be playing by the rules, social order could be maintained. But tension existed between surface and reality. In Japan to appear to be polite, to conform, to fit in with society is important, but this does not necessarily correspond to the reality. As long as people are seen to be conforming and adhering to the rules that tension or gap is acceptable. For example, the first page in a *shunpon* or set of *shunga* was often a non-explicit image or an *abuna-e* (Figure 16), with censors turning a blind-eye to the rest of the sheets. This maintained the illusion of social order.

However, not everyone in Edo Japan was as tolerant of sex as it would appear. Screech describes Sadanobu, a late eighteenth-century high-ranking, government official's concerns that allowing the playful and erotic sides of Edoites to be represented in art would unfavourably affect opinions of him and the *bakufu*:

Sadanobu was disturbed. If future ages looked back at the time of his rule through the lens of such (mis)representations, he would be a laughing stock in history. ...The horror of later generations looking at such works [*ukiyo-e*] - or even *shunga* - and thinking that was how Edoites really lived!¹³⁴

This is a useful reminder to be wary of treating art as fact. Despite appearing to have certain freedoms, Edoites lived in a hierarchical society and were expected to conform to rules and social pressures, from the *bakufu* and each other, in almost all aspects of life including sex, art, religion, jobs, travel, marriage, and expenditure. *Ukiyo-e* and *shunga* offered an escape from these restrictions and did not reflect the opinions of those who disagreed with their subject matter.

¹³⁴ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 82.

1.2.7 Conclusion - Why was shunga important in Edo Japan?

As can be seen *shunga* could fulfil many roles depending on how people wanted to engage with it. Life in the Edo period was one full of pressures from the *bakufu* and Confucianism, which dictated how people should behave, who they could interact with, what jobs they could do, how they could spend their money, and *shunga* as a source of humour was a way to release some tension and stress through laughter. There were many hardships such as fires and famines and as art, *shunga* could provide an escape or distraction from the problems of life. Marriages were frequently arranged for political, economic or business reasons rather than chosen for love, and concubines and affairs were not uncommon. As pornography, *shunga* could be an outlet for sexual frustrations or for stimulation whether it was used alone or with a partner.

1.3 A Note on Nudes and Nakedness

Like many topics raised in this thesis, the concepts of ‘the nude’ and ‘nakedness’ and how those relate to eroticism and sex is an entire avenue of enquiry in itself. Regrettably, it is one which there is not space to explore, and to do so would risk shifting the focus of my thesis. Yet, I felt it necessary to note because the nude is an issue which remains on the periphery of many of the areas I address in this thesis. For example, as shall be seen in Chapter 3.3, from the Meiji era onwards, nudity or naked was often conflated with sex and obscenity. Similarly, Satō Dōshin observes that ‘art historical research in Japan tends to treat the issue of the nude as one relating to art and sex’¹³⁵ which he explains is related to the ‘religious and humanistic baggage’¹³⁶ of the European genre of the nude. He considers the nude in terms of the corporeality of the body in contrast to an expression of universal beauty¹³⁷.

However, the debate about ‘natural’ and ‘erotic’ in relation to the terms ‘nudity’ and ‘naked’, how those terms have been contradictorily defined in art

¹³⁵ Dōshin Satō, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State : The Politics of Beauty* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 264.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 264-267.

history (notably by Kenneth Clark in 1956¹³⁸ and John Berger in 1972¹³⁹), issues of gender and sexuality relating to the nude¹⁴⁰, and the changing relationship between *shunga*, the nude, and concepts of the body will be the topic of future research.

¹³⁸ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude : A Study of Ideal Art* (London: J. Murray, 1956).

¹³⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corp. ;Penguin Books, 1972).

¹⁴⁰ For examples see Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude : Sexuality, Morality, and Art* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press & St. Martin's Press, 1996); Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities : The Female Nude in Art* (New York : Routledge, 2001).

2. Collecting shunga: private

All these pieces [of erotic art] come from a world which no longer exists; they are the work of expert hands which created them with love and care, and each tells its own story. *They express a poetry that enriches human existence and brings the past to life*; this is the material that constitutes the collector's ideal world.¹⁴¹

In Europe during the nineteenth, and for much of the twentieth, century sexually explicit art was considered obscene, and that it was only from the 1850s onwards that Japanese art became available in any significant quantity. Bearing this in mind, this chapter will discuss aspects of private collecting of *shunga* and question who were the collectors, why did they collect, and why were they specifically interested in *shunga*. This questioning of collectors, their lives, motivations, methods, and collecting practices is important because it illustrates some of the differing attitudes towards *shunga* over time and across continents. Furthermore, since much of the *shunga* that is held in public collections today came from private individuals it is fruitful to explore private *shunga* collecting before going on to examine institutional collecting, which I will do in Chapter 3.

Private collectors of *shunga* can generally be split into two main types: collectors who have a wider interest in Japanese art and culture and those who have an interest in erotic art or phallicism, with most collectors falling into the former. To better understand *shunga* collecting it must be situated in relation to these two areas. Since the reception and collection of Japanese art in Europe and America has been written about extensively, it will only be briefly mentioned, but the collection of erotic art will be discussed in more detail. Following this, to reflect attitudes to *shunga* and how these have varied, examples of private *shunga* collectors from America, Europe, and Japan will be discussed, including information drawn from an interview with a contemporary UK-based *shunga* collector.

It was initially hoped that, as well as giving insight into individual collectors, patterns of *shunga* collecting would begin to emerge, but it is now clear that the

¹⁴¹ Ferdinand M Bertholet, *Gardens of Pleasure : Eroticism and Art in China, Works from the Bertholet Collection* (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 52 emphasis added.

time that would have been needed to carry out such research would have been prohibitive. A comprehensive survey of *shunga* collectors and trends in their collecting is outside the scope of this thesis. Apart from the recent book *Erotic Japonisme: The Influence of Japanese Sexual Imagery on Western Art*¹⁴², which details *shunga* collected by artists, more general patterns are not yet apparent as there is much research on private collectors of *shunga* yet to be carried out. Nevertheless, it is still useful to gather together what information is already known about *shunga* collectors, so that it can be assessed in terms of the history of collecting and collections as well as from the more familiar perspectives of *ukiyo-e* studies or Japanese art history. Furthermore, the collectors, the works within their collections, and the circumstances of their acquisitions can be more easily compared when this information is in one place rather than, as it exists now, as numerous disparate and discrete articles and catalogue entries.

2.1 Erotic art

Firstly, the existing research on erotic collecting will be discussed. Secondly, motivations for collecting in general will be outlined and then questioned to see to what extent they can be applied to erotic collecting. Thirdly, some examples of collectors of erotic art and the scope of their collections will be given. A more detailed analysis of the contents of their collections will be a future research project.

2.1.1 Histories of Erotic Art

Although sex art has been created and collected for many centuries it is not a widely researched subject, especially in comparison to the amount of in-depth research and analysis published on written erotica. However, this partially depends on the definition of ‘erotic art’, because, as discussed in Chapter 1, many people include depictions of nudes within the category of erotic art and there has been much written on the nude by art historians¹⁴³. For the purposes of this chapter, ‘erotic art’ refers more specifically to art depicting or implying

¹⁴² Ricard Bru, *Erotic Japonisme. The Impact of Shunga on Western Artists*. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013).

¹⁴³ Clark, *The Nude : A Study of Ideal Art*; Berger, *Ways of Seeing*; Smith, *The Victorian Nude : Sexuality, Morality, and Art*; McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities : The Female Nude in Art*.

sexual acts or situations than to nudes, but does not exclude nudes, *abuna-e*, bathing scenes and other such works. Whilst the term ‘sex art’ is preferred, ‘erotic’ is also used in this section as it is the term commonly used in existing literature and debates. Phallicism is included here because many collectors of erotica, whether visual art or literature, also displayed an interest in phallic artefacts.

There has, of course, been research on sex art within specific cultural and geographic areas, notably Greek and Roman art¹⁴⁴, as well as more general surveys, which draw on examples from across the globe and throughout history. From the Kronhausens’ survey in 1971¹⁴⁵ to Lucie-Smith’s more light-hearted history of erotic art in 1997¹⁴⁶, which takes a somewhat tongue-in-cheek tone. Webb’s *The Erotic Arts*¹⁴⁷ (originally published in 1975) is a more substantial and structured exploration of sex art in various cultures over the centuries, whereas Philip Rawson focuses on Asian, or as he refers to it ‘Oriental’, art to gain insight through cultural comparisons¹⁴⁸. Recent publications offer a more considered discussion on the nature of art and eroticism rather than trying to survey it as a whole¹⁴⁹.

2.1.2 Collecting Erotic Art

Collecting in general is a topic which has been frequently addressed by Susan Pearce, who has written or edited numerous publications on a wide range of issues including historical and contemporary collecting, private and institutional collecting, and she has examined possible reasons for collecting¹⁵⁰. She has

¹⁴⁴ Caroline Vout, *Sex on Show : Seeing the Erotic in Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Catherine Johns, *Sex or Symbol : Erotic Images of Greece and Rome* (London: British Museum, 1982).

¹⁴⁵ Phyllis. Kronhausen and Eberhard. Kronhausen, *Erotic Art : A Survey of Erotic Fact and Fancy in the Fine Arts* (London: W.H. Allen, 1971).

¹⁴⁶ Lucie-Smith, *Ars Erotica: An Arousing History of Erotic Art*.

¹⁴⁷ Webb, *The Erotic Arts*.

¹⁴⁸ Philip Rawson, *Erotic Art of the East : The Sexual Theme in Oriental Painting and Sculpture* ([New York]: Minerva, 1973); Philip Rawson, *Oriental Erotic Art* (New York: Gallery Books, 1981).

¹⁴⁹ Mahon, *Eroticism and Art*; Dennis, *Art Porn : A History of Seeing and Touching*; Mey, “Art and Obscenity.”

¹⁵⁰ Susan M. Pearce, “Collecting Reconsidered,” in *Museum Languages : Objects and Texts*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (Leicester : Leicester University Press, 1991), 137-53; Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections : A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992); Susan M. Pearce, ed., *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London and New York:

inspired or been involved with most of the significant literature on collecting, and her work has informed much my research. For the purposes of this thesis, Eva Rovers' article 'The art collector - between philanthropy and self-glorification' was helpful in detailing the shifts in private collecting and for complicating the notion of collecting by acknowledging that there can be multiple, and - as the title implies - even conflicting, reasons behind private collecting¹⁵¹. There are a variety of reasons for collecting, including but not limited to, knowledge, pleasure, investment, to establish or display social status/wealth, and to create or express a sense of identity. However, unless a private collector kept a journal or has been interviewed then it can be difficult to ascertain what the collector's motives were.

In what ways does erotic art collecting fit, or not fit, with traditional collecting models? By relating the background, interests and collecting habits of private collectors of sex art in this section, it is hoped that the resultant information will begin to suggest some answers to that question. Earlier known collectors of erotic art can be situated in two broad groups: those who were outside normal societal expectations (artists, writers, wealthy eccentrics) and those whose position in society conferred enough respectability to counteract the negative associations of erotica (doctors, scientists, scholars). This pattern becomes less evident over time as European and North American societies began to engage more openly with sex and sexuality. It could be said there is a third group of private collectors of erotic art: those who are anonymous. Perhaps they chose to remain unknown because they did not fit into one of the groups above, who could justify their interest in sex, and so risked being stigmatised by society. Other reasons for private collectors desiring anonymity will be discussed below in relation to Japanese art collectors.

2.1.3 Collectors of Erotic Art

Routledge, 1994); Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting : An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London : Routledge, 1995); Susan Pearce et al., *The Collector's Voice : Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting. Vol. 3, Imperial Voices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁵¹ Eva Rovers, "Introduction: The Art Collector - Between Philanthropy and Self-Glorification," *Journal of the History of Collections* 21, no. 2 (2009): 157-61.

Dr. George Witt

The Englishman George Witt (1804-1869) is summarised in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography as a ‘physician and collector of phallic antiquities’¹⁵².

Despite his interest in obscenities, as they were considered then, for the majority of his own lifetime Witt appeared to be the stereotypical, respectable Victorian gentleman¹⁵³. He initially collected antiquities, natural history and anatomical specimens, but in 1849, before emigrating to Australia, Witt sold his collection to Bedford Literary Scientific Institute, which later formed part of the Bedford Museum. Interestingly, when he returned to England in 1854 his collecting interests had shifted to focus on phallic objects, or as it was more euphemistically described, ‘the cult of Priapus, the god of fertility’¹⁵⁴.

Witt collected phallic objects and art from a variety of cultures, including *shunga*, and many three-dimensional objects such as amulets, votives, tintinabula (Figure 30), figures and lamps. As shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, the donation of Witt’s collection of 434 items, which he described as ‘Symbols of the Early Worship of Mankind’, in 1865 to the British Museum was one of the reasons for the creation of the BM Secretum, a restricted collection of phallic, erotic and explicit objects.



Figure 30 tintinabulum, bronze, Witt Collection, British Museum

¹⁵² David Gaimster, “Witt, George (1804-1869),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

¹⁵³ He worked as a doctor at various hospitals in England and briefly for the East India Company at Calcutta before gaining his MD in 1830 from Leiden University. In 1832, Witt married Elizabeth Hedley and became the director of Bedford Infirmary. In 1834, Witt became a fellow of the Royal Society and was elected Mayor of Bedford for a year.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Although three of his nine scrapbooks contain *shunga*, I would not call Witt ‘a *shunga* collector’. He was interested in sex art and phallic objects from all cultures and time periods. Ostensibly, Witt collected phallic objects as a means of learning more about the cultures that created them, which he grouped together as pre-Christian and fertility-worshipping¹⁵⁵. However, not only did Witt remove them from their original contexts, he seems to have made no attempt to understand them in context and how they were originally used, for example as a talisman, symbol of fertility, object for aesthetic appreciation, source of humour, display of the skills of the maker, and so on. For instance, he does not seem to have been interested in other examples of Japanese art or aspects of Japanese culture, but collected *shunga*, along with a handful of *netsuke* and porcelain, because they depict sex and phallic imagery.

Witt’s interest in *shunga* was more from the viewpoint of material culture or anthropology, than from an artistic one. The quality of *shunga* works that Witt collected varies widely from poor impressions from worn blocks with cheap, gaudy inks, to black and white pages removed from *shunpon*, to prints subtly enhanced with *karazuri* (blind embossing) and mica pigments. Of particular interest are the rare, playful prints (referred to as *shikake-e*, ‘trick print’ or ‘toy print’) which have flaps that fold out or lift up and sometimes moving parts (Figure 31); the interactive and ephemeral nature of these works means that few survive intact.



Figure 31 unidentified artist, colour woodblock print, Witt Collection, British Museum. An example of *shikake-e* with a lift up flap and moving parts: the man has articulated limbs and, when the tab on the left is pulled, his penis inserts into a cut made along the woman’s vagina.

¹⁵⁵ However, as noted in 1.2.5, *shunga* were not used for fertility.

A newspaper article poses one of the questions which commonly occurs when discussing erotic collecting: ‘What, then, drove Witt to collect and hoard items he could never display in polite society?’¹⁵⁶. As previously discussed, it is difficult to ascertain an individual’s motivations for collecting, but whilst it is true that Witt could not display his collection openly, Gaimster explains that he was part of an informal international network of phallic and erotic collectors, who shared information and illustrations of their objects with each other. ‘Like him they were all gentlemen of education and means who would have considered themselves capable of responding in a detached, scholarly way to the subject matter’¹⁵⁷. The gentlemen-scholar persona, interested in the archaeological merit of antiquities, was one way that collections like Witt’s were justifiable. Furthermore, as a doctor Witt was given a level of respectability and he had good reason to look at objects depicting anatomy and the human body. To demonstrate his scholarship, Witt wrote a pamphlet to accompany his collection, entitled ‘Catalogue of a Collection Illustrative of Phallic Worship’, which he privately published in 1866.

Edward Perry Warren

Edward Perry Warren (1860-1928) was an American author and art collector, but lived primarily in England for most of his life. More substantial biographical information and insight into his collecting is available because unlike other collectors, Warren is best known as a collector¹⁵⁸. Several of his writings were published under a pseudonym, most likely because their subject matter was frowned upon. Writing as Arthur Lyon Raile, Warren idealised and promoted a rather pederastic version of homosexuality in three volumes of *The Defence of Uranian Love* (1928-30). At Lewes House, Sussex, Warren formed a community of

¹⁵⁶ Laura Thomas, “Restricted to Men of ‘Taste and Education,’” *The Times Higher Education*, May 26, 2000.

¹⁵⁷ Gaimster, “Witt, George (1804-1869).”

¹⁵⁸ He graduated from Harvard University in 1883 before attending Oxford, where he gained a BA in Classics in 1888. Warren was from a wealthy Boston family and his mother collected Old Master paintings, including a couple of nudes which she donated to MFA as ‘Mrs. Samuel Dennis Warren’. Kaylor highlights Susan Cornelia Warren’s interest in acquiring an additional, more explicitly, erotic painting, Titian’s *The Rape of Europa* (c.1560-62), but she lost out to another Boston collector, Isabella Stewart Gardner Michael Matthew Kaylor, *The Collected Works & Commissioned Biography of Edward Perry Warren*, 2013, 754.

male art enthusiasts¹⁵⁹ who lived with him from 1890 until the early 1900s, including archaeologist John Marshall (1862-1928), with whom Warren had a close and probably intimate relationship¹⁶⁰.

Lewes House was a hub for the collection of art and antiquities, in particular the Greek and Roman erotic art for which Warren is remembered¹⁶¹. Kaylor archly comments on Warren's predilections, 'he also collected young men whose erotic sensibilities, scholarly pursuits, and aesthetic tastes were particularly Grecian'¹⁶². The house acted as a private museum for the Lewes House Brotherhood, as they were dubbed, and it was furnished and decorated with antique furniture, textiles and art that they had collected, under Warren's guidance. Parts of Warren's collection are now in the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston (he also collected on their behalf for a period), the Ashmolean, Oxford, and the Courtauld Institute, London, as well as other private and public collections across America and Europe.

Despite his passion for sexually explicit art there were no *shunga* in Warren's collection, but one item of particular interest is the first-century silver Roman cup (Figure 32) which now bears his name in the British Museum, the history of which provides a concrete example of the shifting acceptability of erotic art¹⁶³. Sox assumes that Warren likely acquired the cup between 1892 and 1902, when he did the bulk of his collecting, but Kaylor gives a date of 1911. Kaylor states that Warren paid £2,000 (equivalent to £971,000 today) for the *scyphus* (drinking vessel), which had been found in Bittir, near Jerusalem¹⁶⁴.

¹⁵⁹ Including, at various points, Matthew Stewart Prichard (1865-1936), John Rowland Fothergill (1876-1957), Harold Woodbury Parsons (1883-1967) and Richard Fisher.

¹⁶⁰ Marshall moved out of Lewes House in 1907 when he married Warren's cousin, Mary Bliss (apparently in retaliation for Warren's affections towards Harold Asa Thomas) but after her death in 1925, he returned to Warren.

¹⁶¹ In his biography of Warren, Sox remarks that his enthusiasm for collecting was so renowned that 'Alexander Murray of the British Museum complained that there was "nothing to be got nowadays" as the Lewes House collectors were "always on the spot first"' David Sox, "Warren, Edward Perry (1860-1928)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2005.

¹⁶² Kaylor, *The Collected Works & Commissioned Biography of Edward Perry Warren*, xlv.

¹⁶³ For more on the Warren Cup see Stuart Frost, "The Warren Cup: Secret Museums, Sexuality, and Society," in *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (London: Routledge, 2010), 138-50; Dyfri Williams, *The Warren Cup* (London: The British Museum Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁴ Kaylor, *The Collected Works & Commissioned Biography of Edward Perry Warren*, liv.



Figure 32 Warren cup, 1st century, silver, British Museum

Regardless of its age and craftsmanship, not to mention its artistic, cultural, and monetary value, it languished for many years after his death as the depictions of sex between older men and youths around the cup proved too challenging for institutions at the time. After auctioning off the other property and possessions inherited from Warren, Harold Asa Thomas (1883-1953), his former secretary and boyfriend, attempted to sell the cup to the Metropolitan Museum, New York¹⁶⁵. It was instead sold in the late 1950s to John Hewett, a British dealer, from whom the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, unsuccessfully tried to acquire it in the early 1960s¹⁶⁶. In 1966 it was purchased by an American collector, Ariel Herrmann, who loaned it to the Antikenmuseum, Basel, in 1985 and then the Met, from 1991-1998¹⁶⁷. Finally, in 1999, a public institution rather than a private collector acquired the Warren cup. The BM's purchase and subsequent displays of the cup will be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

There is another pertinent example demonstrating the unease that often accompanies erotic art. In 1900, after seeing *La Foi (The Troth)* by the sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) in Paris and being unable to purchase it because it belonged to the French Government, Warren commissioned his own version of it for £1,000 (£524,000 today). Rodin was a friend of Warren's and a frequent

¹⁶⁵ Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 11 July 1998" (British Museum, Board of Trustees Meeting, 1998).

¹⁶⁶ Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 24 April 1999" (British Museum, Board of Trustees Meeting, 1999).

¹⁶⁷ Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 11 July 1998."

visitor to Lewes House. In 1906, Warren received his version of *Le Baiser* (*The Kiss*) (Figure 33), which had one specific difference noted in the contract: ‘L’organe génital de l’homme doit être complété [the genitals of the man must be completed]’¹⁶⁸. In 1914, Warren presented the sculpture to the local council, who put it on public display in the town hall for two years. However, Lewes Council records that in 1917, ‘the Borough Council, fearing that the subject of the statue might have an undesirable effect upon the local inhabitants, asked Warren to take it back’¹⁶⁹. They did not elaborate on what this ‘undesirable effect’ might be but apparently there had been complaints. In 1929, the year after Warren’s death, Thomas put *The Kiss* up for auction but initially it went unsold, likely due to its eroticism. It later had several private owners until it was acquired by the Tate Gallery in 1955 for the ‘token sum’ of £7,500.



Figure 33 Auguste Rodin, *Le Baiser* (*The Kiss*), 1901-1904, marble, Tate Gallery

Dr Alfred Kinsey

Dr Alfred Charles Kinsey (1894-1956) was an American entomologist and sexologist¹⁷⁰, whose collection of erotic and sexually explicit art, literature and other cultural materials formed the basis of the Institute for Sex Research at

¹⁶⁸ Kaylor, *Biography of Edward Perry Warren*, lix.

¹⁶⁹ Lewes District Council, “The Story of Lewes House,” accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.lewes.gov.uk/tourism/15716.asp>.

¹⁷⁰ Kinsey studied biology at Bowdoin College, Maine, and graduated in 1916. He pursued his interest in biology, in particular entomology and, in 1919, gained a Sc.D. from Harvard, Massachusetts, for his work on the taxonomy of gall wasps.

Indiana University, founded in 1947. It was renamed The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction in 1982.

Kinsey started collecting sex art, including *shunga*, around 1938 or 1939 as a way of gathering information on sexuality for a course on marriage that he was asked to teach. Like Witt and Warren, Kinsey built up a network of collectors of erotica as well as photographers and others with whom he exchanged information, but his collecting habits were more informed by his scientific background than an artistic one. Nevertheless, whilst Kinsey did employ taxonomy, ‘the science of collecting, classifying, organizing and naming’¹⁷¹, this did not preclude him from appreciating the works aesthetically. In a letter to the photographer George Platt Lynes, he wrote: ‘[we] have spent time analyzing the excellence of the lighting, the ingenious posing, the beauty of the whole. These things we do appreciate, as well as the opportunity to add to the scientific record’¹⁷².

Kinsey’s motivation for studying sexuality and sexual behaviour was likely furthered by his own experiences and sexual practices: from a young age Kinsey inserted objects into his urethra, he was bisexual, and he had an arrangement with his wife that they could have sex with other people¹⁷³. The increasing awareness and tolerance of a variety of sexual desires and behaviours in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is in part thanks to Kinsey’s work. This acceptance was not the case in the 1940s and 1950s when he carried out his research and, for years before that, he had struggled with his own sexuality. Another reason why was he was interested in sexually explicit art, and perhaps relating to his own conflicted feelings, was that for Kinsey ‘sexuality was an essentially creative force. He felt it touched all aspects of our lives and that many creative outlets...addressed the fundamental mystery of what it means to be a human being’¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷¹ Betsy Stirratt and Jeffrey A Wolin, “Collecting Desire,” in *Les Vérités Du Sexe : Archives Du Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex Gender and Reproduction, Bloomington, Indiana, USA*, ed. Pierre Borhan and Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro (Paris: Marval, 2003), 1.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷³ He married Clara Bracken McMillen in 1921 and they had four children.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

Art can have many functions, as Kinsey was aware, and he appreciated sex art in several ways. He used art as ethnographic/anthropologic data representing individuals' desires and fantasies, if not their actual behaviour, and as a way of gauging a culture's attitudes towards sex. He understood erotic art could be a means of expression not only for the creator but also for the viewer who could see elements of themselves that were not reflected or permitted elsewhere in their lives. On the one hand, Kinsey acknowledged the aesthetic aspects of sex art but on the other, he did not use them as criteria for collecting. Neither did he base decisions on other related aspects that are normally important to collectors such as authenticity, originality, artistic skill, rarity, or status of the creator. He stated,

The values do not depend on the authorship of the material, nor upon its intrinsic worth as art, but upon the fact that the material has wide public distribution. In fact, French postcards and cheap Japanese prints may be more significant in a scientific study than the world's finest art.¹⁷⁵

There are 72 *shunga* prints or books listed in the Kinsey Institute art collection¹⁷⁶ but note that all materials have not yet been catalogued so there may be more. Phallic *netsuke* are also present in the collection.

It could be argued that Kinsey should not be considered a private collector as his work at the Institute for Sex Research was for the University, however, Kinsey began collecting erotic art in 1938/39 and the Institute was not founded until 1947. In addition, many private collectors' collections later become part of public institutions, the only difference with Kinsey is that it is harder to draw a line between private and public or determine when the collection crosses from one to the other. Even though he later had a team of staff assisting him, the sexually related visual material collected was due to Kinsey's vision. The collection began with his ideals, for instance, unlike others, he avoided passing moral judgement on the content, and held the view that the work of famous artists should not necessarily be privileged over that of anonymous amateurs.

¹⁷⁵ Kinsey quoted in Marina Wallace, "The Fluidity of Acceptability: Seduced by Art and Pornography and the Kinsey Institute Collection," in *Pornographic Art and the Aesthetics of Pornography*, ed. Hans Maes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 282.

¹⁷⁶ Accessible via the Indiana University catalogue website - <http://iucat.iu.edu/>.

These attitudes continued under his successor, Paul Gebhard, who had worked with him for 10 years. It is significant that the Institute was later renamed after Kinsey in recognition of his achievements.

The Institute's collection now contains over 7,000 art objects and artefacts, as well as 8,000 films, 4,000 videos, 80,000 photographic prints and negatives, archive material, and 9,500 books from across six continents and 2,000 years of human history. Regardless of the vast breadth and quantity of objects and information, they should not be taken to be an objective or representative selection, as Gebhard explained:

Because the Institute received large donations of photographs from private donors with specific interests, the collection is somewhat biased in certain ways, and not always a true reflection of what was being produced at a particular time period.¹⁷⁷

The research produced, first by Kinsey and later by the Institute, was, and still is, for the benefit of the public by advancing knowledge of sex, sexuality, and gender worldwide¹⁷⁸, but his collecting habits did not fit into the normal patterns of institutional collecting. Institutional self-censorship, which will be covered in the next chapter, is notably absent. Perhaps this was because he started collecting to satisfy his own interests and scientific curiosities. Part of the reason for this lack of institutional censorship is that Kinsey received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation rather than relying on governmental financial support and thus was free from many of the constraints that other public institutions faced, especially relating to sexually explicit material.

On the issue of not accepting government funding, Wallace elaborates,

He knew that conditions of acceptability would change with time. It was not worth risking having his collection destroyed or closed down by some new moralizing regent.¹⁷⁹

Whilst Kinsey may have been free from some governmental pressures, it was illegal then to possess, distribute, import or send obscene materials in the USA.

¹⁷⁷ Stirratt and Wolin, "Collecting Desire," 10.

¹⁷⁸ See <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/about/missionstatement.html> for a detailed list of aims.

¹⁷⁹ Wallace, "The Fluidity of Acceptability," 278.

Where these laws might have hindered other collectors, Kinsey turned them to his advantage and greatly expanded the collection in the late 1940s and early 1950s by ‘contacting police departments as well as postal and customs officials to obtain confiscated materials’¹⁸⁰. In order to justify his research, Kinsey and those who have written about him are careful to emphasise the scientific nature of his inquiry (‘prestigious’, ‘serious academic inquiry’, ‘scientific legitimacy’) and how he drew on methods from his scientific background and applied them to culture and behaviour. The results from studying over 18,000 interviews and countless books, videos and artworks were published in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 1948, and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 1953, often referred to collectively as the Kinsey Reports. These reports were revolutionary and Kinsey’s theories, for example that heterosexuality and homosexuality are not fixed but fluid and exist on a sliding scale rather than as binary oppositions, became commonly known not just within a scientific context but also internationally to the wider public.

Ferdinand Bertholet

Ferdinand M. Bertholet (born 1952) is a Dutch collector of Chinese sexually explicit art and art dealer. Even though Bertholet is not a *shunga* collector, he offers unrivalled insight into contemporary erotic art collecting in his book on his collection, including a section detailing exactly how and why he collects Chinese erotic paintings¹⁸¹. Furthermore, there are undoubtedly aspects of Bertholet’s collecting journey, whether experiences or motivations, which find parallels in the lives of *shunga* collectors, but whose accounts are unrecorded.

His interest in Chinese erotic art was piqued in the early 1970s when he found a book on the subject by Beurdeley and his ‘passion was born’ several years later when, by chance, he discovered paintings of ‘unprecedented beauty’ from a Chinese erotic album inside a chest of drawers in an antique shop in Hong

¹⁸⁰ Stirratt and Wolin, “Collecting Desire,” 3.

¹⁸¹ Bertholet, *Gardens of Pleasure*, 49-57. Bertholet also details his fascination for Chinese art from a young age and his desire to be an artist, which he pursued at the Royal Academy of Fine Art in Amsterdam.

Kong¹⁸². Bertholet expounds several reasons for his passion in addition to quality, aesthetics and the ‘allure of the erotic’:

They also contain many elements one does not find in traditional art. A bamboo painting, for instance, does not improve our understanding of daily life in China. Neither does a portrait of an exquisite lady because, for the most part, it presents an idealized depiction of a beauty that never existed. Erotic pictures, on the other hand, tell a story and inform us as to the fashions of the time, the clothes and hairstyles, as well as the social position of each figure. And there one can also see how rooms were normally decorated and furnished, the inner courtyard gardens, and the old objects they might have collected.¹⁸³

The informative attributes of Chinese erotic art described by Bertholet are present in *shunga* as well, although these insights must be treated with a little caution, precisely because of the risk of idealization that Bertholet notes with portraiture.

As his knowledge of Chinese art and culture increased over time, so too did his reasons for collecting sex art. Outlining the censorship and destruction of erotica that occurred in China from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, Bertholet declares,

As I became aware of the extent of these losses, my obsession with unearthing this type of art only increased. If at first collecting had been guided by artistic expression, henceforth my main aim became to safeguard the remnants of an almost lost heritage.¹⁸⁴

He returns to the notion of preservation in his conclusion, where he refers to himself as a ‘temporary custodian of this art’ and shares his desire that his collection should be kept together in a museum. Bertholet explains,

That would be to the benefit of all, in particular to the Chinese, who might then be able to reacquaint themselves with a culture of which they have been dispossessed.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ibid., 50. Even dealing in East Asian artefacts in Europe, which he had stumbled into as a means to fund his travels in Asia, it still took Bertholet six months of saving to be able to afford the paintings.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 57.

This fits with Rovers' notion of a noble or selfless collector¹⁸⁶.

2.2 Japanese Art

There is not as much research published about collecting Japanese art, particularly *ukiyo-e*, in the UK as there is in America most notably by Julia Meech¹⁸⁷. Nor has there been as much research as on Chinese art collecting in the UK, for example the University of Glasgow's Chinese Art into Research Provenance (CARP) project¹⁸⁸. Much of the research on collecting and provenance of *ukiyo-e* in Europe is related to Japonisme, although this includes not only artists and dealers but also the critics, writers and thinkers who were part of the artists' cultural milieu. Similarly, research on private collectors of *shunga* tends to focus on artists¹⁸⁹, presumably because it is able to build on the research already conducted in the more established field of Japonisme. Another reason for this is that private collectors often remain anonymous, whereas the majority of artists are public figures and information about them is more freely available.

Collections donated to institutions by private individuals usually do not record much information about the collector, so unless they are known in another field it is often difficult to obtain information. Furthermore, collections are often bequeathed (in other words, when the collector has died) or are donated by a family member (again, after the collector has died) and so the collector cannot be sought to provide insight into their life, their collection or collecting habits. A desire for anonymity, or conversely to be named, can be related to an individual's motivations for collecting.

¹⁸⁶ Rovers, "Between Philanthropy and Self-Glorification."

¹⁸⁷ Julia Meech, "Early Collectors of Japanese Prints and The Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 1982; Julia Meech, *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art of Japan : The Architect's Other Passion* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000); Julia Meech, "Edwin Grabhorn: Printer and Print Collector," *Impressions*, no. 25 (2003): 54-69; Julia Meech, "The Early Years of Japanese Print Collecting in North America," *Impressions*, no. 25 (2003): 14-53.

¹⁸⁸ <http://carp.arts.gla.ac.uk/>

¹⁸⁹ Monta Hayakawa et al., *Secret Images : Picasso and the Japanese Erotic Print* (London ; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2010); Bru, *Erotic Japonism*; Colette Colligan, "The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley : Sexuality and Exoticism in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture" (Houndmills, Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Linda Gertner Zatlín, "Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal" (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Collectors may wish to remain anonymous for a variety of reasons, including security, privacy, to avoid competition from other collectors, or to avoid loan requests from museums and galleries. Even when collectors choose not to be anonymous, an awareness of these individuals often only happens when their collections are publicly exhibited. Research on the collector themselves tends to be done retrospectively and more often than not it is because their collections have become public - donated or bequeathed to a public institution - and even then usually only when the collection is exhibited. Perhaps because of the relative scarcity of information on private collectors, even within these exhibition catalogues of named collectors the focus is mainly on the contents of the collection without questioning how or why the collections were formed.

These catalogues tend to interpret works individually or thematically rather than situating them within that collection specifically as a whole or examining what this can reveal about the collector. Whereas in other fields of art history some collectors are examined as skilled individuals, more like curators or connoisseurs rather than mere purchasers. Following similar methods and aims as in the *Journal of the History of Collections*, there is scope to study specific collectors, their collecting process, and the resultant collections as part of their social, cultural, and historic context, and what they can reveal about these wider areas, which I will begin to do in the section below on *shunga* collectors.

2.2.1 Artists as collectors

There has been much written about Japanese artists engaging with European art and even more so on European, particularly French, artists reacting to Japanese art¹⁹⁰. Therefore, I will not cover these already well-researched areas other than to briefly summarise aspects pertinent to *shunga*. Most people are likely aware that *ukiyo-e* was available in large quantities in Europe and America due to the Japanese disregard for it as art at the time. It has been well established which late-nineteenth century artists owned *ukiyo-e* and that they bought it through prominent dealers such as Hayashi Tadamasa and Bing. Ricard Bru establishes

¹⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the literature available previously, see Toshio Watanabe, "High Victorian Japonisme" (Bern : P. Lang, 1991).

which of these artists owned *shunga* as part of their collection, including Picasso and a range of familiar European artists, mostly British or French¹⁹¹. Artists, outside of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist circles of art who are known to have owned *shunga* include Beardsley¹⁹², John Singer Sergeant, Gerald Kelly, Klimt, Rodin, and members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Before focusing on specific *ukiyo-e* private collectors, I wish to mention a less well-known example of a couple who were both artists and who collected works of Japanese art as well as more generally erotic, but not necessarily explicit, art. Like many others discussed in this chapter, they are better known for their profession or other areas of collecting. I would not term them as Japanese or erotic collectors but collectors with an interest in, and an acceptance of, Japanese art and the erotic as a subject. They are mentioned here because they demonstrate the general and widespread interest in Japanese art in Europe at the time as well as being examples of artists as collectors. Furthermore, it offers a little insight into the collection history of sex art at the BM.

Charles Hazelwood Shannon (1863-1937) and his partner Charles de Sousy Ricketts (1866-1931) were British artists and collectors. They bequeathed over 300 Japanese prints to the BM but also displayed an interest in a wider range of cultures and subjects in art, including the human body, perhaps due to being a painter/printmaker and designer (respectively). Shannon often drew nude or erotic subjects, as can be seen in the majority of the 250 or so prints of his own work that he donated to the BM. Their (sometimes intertwined) collections of prints, paintings and books were bequeathed to the BM, and include *shunga*, *abuna-e*, nudes and other mildly explicit artworks. Shannon and Ricketts' collection of around 190 Greek and Roman antiquities were bequeathed to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Christina Rozeik, of the Fitzwilliam, notes that Ricketts would sometimes carry out repairs on items in their collection himself,

¹⁹¹ Hayakawa et al., *Secret Images : Picasso and the Japanese Erotic Print*; Bru, *Erotic Japonism. The Impact of Shunga on Western Artists*.

¹⁹² Colligan, "The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley"; Zatlin, "Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal."

including restoring the genitals of a male figure on a Greek *kylix* (drinking cup)¹⁹³.

2.2.2 Ukiyo-e collectors

It should be noted that there is a difference between *shunga* collectors, such as Richard Lane who deliberately collected *shunga*, and collectors who happen to have some *shunga* in their vast collection, for example Henri Vever or Robert Ravicz. Nonetheless, it is still relevant to examine how such collectors treated *shunga*, how it fit their tastes, and how their collections compare with those of other *ukiyo-e* collectors who did not acquire *shunga*. This is certainly one avenue of future research which can help expand the burgeoning field of *shunga* scholarship.

Jack Hillier

Jack Ronald Hillier (1912-1995) was an English scholar and collector who was celebrated for his many publications on Japanese art, especially *ukiyo-e* and *ehon*. Hillier's ambition was to be an artist but, despite attending evening classes at the Central School of Art, Holborn, in the early 1930s and publishing books of his own drawings in 1951 and engravings in 1991, art remained a 'hobby' for him¹⁹⁴. It was in pursuing his passion for art, in particular wood engraving, that Hillier encountered Japanese art. He was so impressed by the technical as well as artistic qualities of a portfolio of Japanese prints he acquired at a book market in 1947 that he began to study not only Japanese art but also taught himself to read Japanese¹⁹⁵. An article he published on Japanese art, in 1951, led to a commission from Phaidon Press for a series of books on

¹⁹³ "‘A Maddening Temptation’: The Ricketts and Shannon Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities," *Journal of the History of Collections* 24, no. 3 (2012): 375.

¹⁹⁴ Unlike most other scholars, Hillier did not attend university but was self-taught. He left school at 15 and went to work at the British General Insurance company. In 1938, he married Mary Louise Palmer, a specialist on dolls and automata, and they had two children. Apart from a period of service in the RAF during World War II, Hillier worked in insurance until his retirement in 1967.

¹⁹⁵ Matthi Forrer, *Essays on Japanese Art Presented to Jack Hillier*, ed. Matthi Forrer (London: R.G. Sawers Pub., 1982), 9.

ukiyo-e. The first of which, *Japanese Masters of the Colour Print*¹⁹⁶, is still considered one of the best introductions to the subject¹⁹⁷.

Hillier continued to increase his knowledge of Japanese art and developed an eye for collecting, as he was able to study thousands of objects whilst working as a freelance cataloguer for Sotheby's for 25 years. It was often from auctions at Sotheby's during the 1950s and 1960s that he acquired much of his *ehon* collection. This was partly because the artistic value of Japanese illustrated books was not yet recognised, and partly due to a decline in interest in Japanese art and culture in general in the decades following the Second World War. Unfortunately for Hillier, the success of his own works on Japanese art and *ehon* led to an increase in appreciation and consequently an increase in prices and competition in the 1970s.

However, Hillier was not only a collector himself but guided, or was largely responsible for, the collections of others. He encouraged friends and fellow Japanese art collectors Robert Ravicz and Gerhard Pulverer to acquire woodblock illustrated books for their collections. He was more actively involved in advising others on the formation of their Japanese art collections, most notably in the mid-1940s when he was commissioned to collect *ukiyo-e* for Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968). Yoshiko Ushioda, former curator of the Japanese collection, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, notes that Chester Beatty's interest 'in oriental art had first been kindled as a young man in New York by his encounter with Chinese snuff bottles at an oriental art dealer's shop called Yamanaka Shokai'¹⁹⁸. He had a wide range of interests but mainly collected works on paper such as Islamic manuscripts, Nara-*ehon*, and Egyptian papyri. His *ukiyo-e* and *surimono* collection is renowned for its quality, thanks in part to Hillier's skilled eye and to Chester Beatty's desire for quality over artistic status: 'Hillier recalls that Sir Chester Beatty would often refuse an excellent or extremely rare print because he considered it to be unhealthy, grubby or

¹⁹⁶ Jack Hillier, *Japanese Masters of the Colour Print a Great Heritage of Oriental Art* ([London]: Phaidon, 1954).

¹⁹⁷ Yu Ying Brown, "Jack Hillier: A Gentleman Scholar of Japanese Art," *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 27, no. 4 (1996): 64; Oliver Impey, "Obituary: Jack Hillier," *The Independent*, January 11, 1995.

¹⁹⁸ "Sir Chester Beatty and His Japanese Collection," *Japan Forum* 2, no. 2 (1990): 236.

dirty’¹⁹⁹. His Japanese art, along with Chester Beatty’s other collections, was bequeathed to the Irish public as part of the Chester Beatty Library.

Hillier’s own collection, which was also noted for the quality and condition of the works, became public as well. He sold 67 Maruyama-Shijo and Nanga school works to the Ashmolean, Oxford in 1973, and over 1,100 *ehon*²⁰⁰ plus around 100 *surimono* to the BM in 1979, on ‘more than generous terms’²⁰¹. In addition, he donated 34 objects, mainly Japanese paintings and prints, to the BM between 1952 and 1992.



Figure 34 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Ehon kiku no tsuyu* (Picture Book: Dew on the Chrysanthemum) volume 1, 1786, woodblock-printed book, British Museum. Front cover and double-page image from a volume from Hillier’s collection.

Although Hillier had some *shunpon* in his book collection, for example Figure 34, he was not a *shunga* collector per se. Yet, as a collector and scholar of Japanese art, Hillier played an important role in *shunga* scholarship and collecting due to his insistence on *shunga* being an integral part of Japanese art and culture. As is evidenced by his refusal to omit or censor the *shunga* pictured in his books. Significantly, this prevented *The Art of the Japanese Book*²⁰² from being co-published in Japan by Kodansha as planned, and even from being imported into Japan. Hillier clarified the reason for his refusal in a letter to the Japanese

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 240.

²⁰⁰ This is likely the number of volumes rather than titles as Smith gives the figure of 560 *ehon* (Smith, “The New Japanese Galleries in the British Museum,” 83.)

²⁰¹ Impey, “Obituary: Jack Hillier.”

²⁰² *The Art of the Japanese Book* (London; New York: Published for Sotheby’s Publications by Philip Wilson Publishers ;; Distributed in the U.S. by Harper & Row, 1987).

Embassy, London: ‘to omit *shunga* would be tantamount to falsifying the portrayal of a people that produced such great graphic art’²⁰³.

The notion of art as being representative of a nation is significant; especially since part of the reason *shunga* was prohibited in post-Edo Japan was as an attempt by the government to control the image other countries had of the Japanese people. The links between art, identity, and nation are raised in Chapter 5, by visitors to the British Museum *Shunga* exhibition, but as there is not space to explore this topic in detail it is intended as a future area of research.

Despite Hillier’s inclusion of *shunga* in his publications, his outstanding contribution to scholarship and the resultant increase in the appreciation of Japanese art in general was recognised by the Japanese government. In 1992, Hillier was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun with Gold Rays and Rosette. It was well deserved, for even in his eighties Hillier continued to share his knowledge and passion for Japanese art and illustrated books with others cataloguing *ehon* in the British Library as a volunteer.

Robert Ravicz

Robert Simon Ravicz (1921-1993) was an American anthropologist and an *ehon* collector²⁰⁴. In 1968, he began collecting Japanese woodblock-printed books. Unlike with most collectors, Ravicz’s reasons for collecting *ehon* specifically do not have to be guessed at as his wife Marilyn elucidates them in a foreword to the catalogue of an exhibition of his collection at Hiraki *Ukiyo-e* Museum.

Firstly, the elegance and unparalleled skill and sensitivity of woodblock medium, as expressed by Japanese artists...Secondly, the book format offered a private, personal and more intensely interactive potential. ...Thirdly, because the book remains closed more often than not, the color and condition of many *ehon* are more often than not, in spite of wear gained through their handling, better

²⁰³ Brown, “Jack Hillier: A Gentleman Scholar of Japanese Art,” 65.

²⁰⁴ He gained degrees at the University of Texas and Harvard. In 1958, Ravicz married fellow anthropologist and art-lover Dr. Marilyn Ekdahl and they raised three children together. He began working at California State University, Northridge, in 1963 and taught on Mesoamerica and the Indian subcontinent.

maintained. ...the grace of Japanese calligraphic forms offered an additional source of delight.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, like Witt and Warren or Goncourt and Bing with their networks of like-minded erotic and Japanese art enthusiasts, respectively, Ravicz was able to share his enjoyment of, and trade information about, *ehon* with an international circle of scholars, dealers, and friends.

Ravicz's collection of over 800 titles included a small number of *shunpon*, which is not surprising given that he received advice on collecting from Hillier. Some less-explicit scenes from *ehon* by Moronobu and Kunisada, as well as the more potent image of a woman with two octopuses from Hokusai's *Kinoe no komatsu* (see Figure 62), are reproduced in *The Japanese Picture Book: A Selection from the Ravicz Collection*²⁰⁶. Remarkably, Ravicz's *shunpon* is now in the collection of a Japanese public institution. The acquisition of Ravicz's collection by Chiba shall be discussed in Chapter 3.3.

Gerhard Pulverer

Dr. Gerhard Pulverer (born 1930) is an Austrian medical researcher and *ehon* collector²⁰⁷. From the 1970s onwards, Pulverer and his wife Rosemarie, guided by Hillier's suggestions, with additional advice from BM curator Tim Clark, and scholars Roger Keyes and Matthi Forrer, collected *ehon*, including *shunpon*. The Freer Gallery of Art website dedicated to Pulverer's collection, entitled 'The World of the Japanese Illustrated Book', states:

Most of the Pulverer material was acquired from European collections, many of which were formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pulverer was able to acquire the very best examples of illustrated books available on the market in the last quarter of the twentieth century.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Hiraki Ukiyoe Bijutsukan, *Ravittsu Korekushon Nihon No Ehon = Japanese Picture Books from Ravicz Collection* (Yokohama-shi: Hiraki Ukiyoe Bijutsukan, 1994), 4.

²⁰⁶ Jack Hillier, *The Japanese Picture Book : A Selection from the Ravicz Collection* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1991).

²⁰⁷ He studied medicine in Vienna and gained his M.D. in 1954. In 1958, Pulverer began working at the University of Cologne, where he was director of the Institute of Hygiene until he retired in 1999.

²⁰⁸ The Freer Gallery of Art, "Acknowledgments," accessed May 13, 2015, <http://pulverer.si.edu/resources/acknowledgements>.

The resultant collection of 938 titles (2,184 volumes) was bought by the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, in 2007, as Pulverer wanted his collection to be ‘conserved, researched, and exhibited’ by a museum. Works from Pulverer’s collection had already been frequently exhibited, for example at *Lentelust*, an exhibition of *shunga* held in 2005 in Rotterdam²⁰⁹, as well as at an exhibition dedicated to *shunpon* from Pulverer’s collection in Heidelberg in 1995²¹⁰. These exhibitions will be considered in Chapter 4.

2.3 Shunga Collectors: From Private to Public

To give a context and basis of comparison for *shunga* collecting I will begin by discussing the *shunga* collecting habits of two Americans, William Sturgis Bigelow, a nineteenth-century collector and physician, and Richard Lane, an *ukiyo-e* scholar who collected in the latter half of the twentieth century. Then I will briefly situate the *shunga* collecting of two Europeans, a nineteenth-century Italian engraver *Edoardo Chiossone* and a contemporary UK *shunga* collector, who shall be referred to in this thesis as Mr. Jones²¹¹. Finally, I will consider two Japanese *shunga* collectors, Shibui Kiyoshi, an East Asian art scholar, and Uragami Mitsuru, an Asian art dealer and contemporary collector; this will round out a brief, and admittedly selective, overview of private *shunga* collectors.

One of the reasons for selecting these particular collectors is that, with the exception of the contemporary collectors (Uragami and Jones), their collections, whether through purchase or donation, have ended up in public institutions. As noted, this increases the public awareness of the collector and the amount of information available on them, as do their positions as scholar or artist. It also means that their collections are publically accessible for study. The contemporary collectors have been chosen because, as the sense of *shunga* being unmentionable has lessened, they are able to be more open about their collections than previous generations. Now for example sex art collectors such as Bertholet and Uragami give media interviews. In addition, these collectors are

²⁰⁹ See Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*.

²¹⁰ Dorit Marhenke, *Shunga : Erotic Art in Japan : Erotische Holzschnitte Des 17. Bis 19. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 1995).

²¹¹ Mr. Jones, because it is a common UK name, has been assigned to preserve the collector’s anonymity.

currently active, have collections of notable quality, and they have in recent years loaned *shunga* works to public and commercial exhibitions.

2.3.1 William Sturgis Bigelow

William Sturgis Bigelow (1850-1926) was an American physician and art collector²¹². Bigelow had acquired Asian art in both America and Europe, but the bulk of his considerable collection was formed during the seven years he lived in Japan. After hearing lectures on Japan by Edward Morse, Bigelow joined him and Ernest Fenollosa on a trip to Japan in 1882. Whilst in Japan, Bigelow not only collected Japanese art but studied it too. He also studied Japanese culture, language, and religion, which led him to become Buddhist in 1885. He amassed an important collection of Buddhist art, including works dating from the Heian (794 - 1185) and Kamakura (1185 - 1333) periods.



Figure 35 Torii Kiyonobu, scene from *Erotic Contest of Flowers*, c.1704-11, handscroll, ink, colours, gold and silver on silk, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This intimate and tender scene is one of 11 in a painted handscroll from Bigelow's collection.

²¹² Bigelow's father and grandfather both had high-profile medical careers so it is unsurprising that he followed them into medicine. In 1874, Bigelow graduated from Harvard University and then spent five years in Europe continuing his study of medicine. Notably, he studied in Paris with the bacteriologist Louis Pasteur. Swinton notes that he also 'found time to buy objects from S. Bing, the dealer in Japanese art'. Elizabeth de Sabato Swinton, "Bigelow, Boston, and Buddhism," *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 35, no. 1 (2004): 58.

In 1890, when Bigelow returned to America, he gave his collection on ‘permanent loan’ to the MFA, Boston. Bigelow’s collection extended far beyond Buddhist art; it also featured almost 50,000 woodblock prints, nearly 4,000 paintings, ‘plus hundreds of paintings, swords, swordguards and Noh costumes’²¹³. Bigelow made a short trip to Japan in 1902. In 1909, Okakura Kakuzō, an advisor to the MFA, wrote from Japan to advise them of a special shipment he was sending on Bigelow’s behalf. The shipment contained work ‘of Amorous Subjects’, including 180 multi-volume *shunpon* titles and nearly 100 *shunga* paintings (see Figure 35 and Figure 39), and Bigelow had arranged special clearance for it in Washington D.C.²¹⁴.

Bigelow formally donated his entire collection to the MFA in 1911, which, as *The Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* records, the Museum Committee ‘voted to accept’ and commented that in Bigelow’s gift ‘amounting numerically to more than twenty-six thousand pieces, almost every branch of Chinese and Japanese art is represented’²¹⁵. It would seem that even hundreds of sexually explicit artworks were not enough to deter the museum from accepting Bigelow’s collection. The MFA’s attitude towards *shunga* will be detailed in Chapter 3.

2.3.2 Richard Lane

Richard Lane (1926-2002) was an American East Asian scholar, collector and dealer who lived in Japan for almost 50 years. Lane moved permanently to Japan in 1957, where he married Dr. Chiyeko Okawa in 1960. Between 1957 and 1971, Lane assisted the Honolulu Museum of Art with cataloguing their Japanese prints.

It was undoubtedly his extensive training in Japanese language, literature and culture²¹⁶, and his apparent curiosity and thirst for knowledge, which made Lane

²¹³ David Pickman, “Museum of Fine Arts , Boston : The First One Hundred Years,” *Curator* 12, no. 4 (1969): 240.

²¹⁴ Rogers in Nobuo Tsuji, ed., *Bosuton Bijutsukan Nikuhitsu Ukiyoe. Bekkan Shunga Meihinsen* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 7.

²¹⁵ Boston Museum of Fine Arts, “The Bigelow Gift,” *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 9, no. 53 (1911): 50, 48.

²¹⁶ Lane joined the military in 1944 and, after specialising in Japanese language, worked as a Marine Corps interpreter. After the war, he spent a year in Japan as a translator. Lane gained a B.A. from the University of Hawai’i in 1948, followed by an M.A. in Comparative Literature

one of the most prominent *ukiyo-e* scholars. Over the course of his career, Lane published over 300 articles and books in Japanese and English (as well as some translations in French and German), many of which were of great importance to the development of Japanese art history, such as *Images from the Floating World*²¹⁷. As Meech points out, Lane's interest in humorous and bawdy Japanese literature, in particular the works of Ihara Saikaku, on whom he wrote his thesis, easily expanded to other comparable areas of Japanese culture²¹⁸ and the playfulness, humour and sexual nature of *ukiyo-e* and *shunga* are a logical choice. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, he was one of the first scholars to openly, and consistently, discuss *shunga* in and treat it as part of *ukiyo-e* and of artists' oeuvres.

Lane also acted as an East Asian art dealer and sold works to esteemed institutions such as the V&A and BM. However, as a dealer he had a reputation as being inconsistent in his buying practices. Despite being known as a scholar and a dealer, Lane kept his activities as a collector quiet. Stephen Little, curator at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, claims that this was one of the reasons Lane was able to acquire such a substantial collection. Another reason he gives is that 'Lane consistently bought in areas that were not yet fashionable...thus staying ahead of the pack'²¹⁹. This explains how Lane acquired such a substantial *shunga* collection, as a wider awareness of *shunga* as a viable subject for collection, exhibition and research did not come about until the mid-1990s. Lane had a reputation as a 'loner' and a 'rigorously independent thinker'²²⁰. Furthermore, his linguistic abilities and his in-depth knowledge of culture surely facilitated his ability to see beyond current trends to the appeal and merits of as yet underappreciated works.

the next year from Columbia University. In the early 1950s he carried out graduate study at Tokyo University, then completed a PhD in East Asian Language and Culture from Columbia in 1958.

²¹⁷ Richard Lane, *Images from the Floating World: The Japanese Print: Including an Illustrated Dictionary of Ukiyo-E* (New York: Putnam, 1978).

²¹⁸ Julia Meech, "Richard Lane (1926-2002), Scholar and Collector," *Impressions*, no. 26 (2004): 111.

²¹⁹ Stephen Little, "The Richard Lane Collection," *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 36, no. 2 (2005): 94.

²²⁰ Meech, "Richard Lane (1926-2002), Scholar and Collector," 111.

The year after his death, Lane's art collection, along with the rest of the contents of his house, was sold by the Japanese authorities in Kyoto to the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawai'i. Despite not leaving a will, which is why his collection ended up in the possession of the Japanese government, old correspondence revealed that Lane had intended to give his research library of over 5,500 books to the Honolulu Academy of Arts, and this desire was subsequently honoured. The Honolulu Academy of Arts was renamed the Honolulu Museum of Art in 2012 and hereafter shall be referred to as HMA regardless of the date.

The Lane Collection comprised almost 20,000 items of Japanese, Chinese and Korean art²²¹, with a focus on Japanese, especially Edo-period, art. In order to finance conservation and cataloguing and keep the focus of the collection on Japanese art, some of Lane's Chinese art, including Ming and Ching Dynasty scrolls, were apparently sold in 2005. In addition to a large number of *ukiyo-e*, there are paintings by Kanō, Maruyama-Shijō, and Nanga school artists, as well as Meiji-era books and artwork, Buddhist paintings, and *shunga*.

Although they account for only a fraction of his extensive collection, the 833 *shunga* works, many of which are rarities and masterpieces of high quality, which Lane assembled make him one of the foremost collectors of *shunga*. However, Lane's *shunga* collection may have been even larger. As Meech reported in a memorial piece on Lane²²², in the 1980s Lane's home had been broken into and a number of artworks were stolen including the four volumes of Kunisada's *shunga* set *The Four Seasons*. In this particular instance, the works were returned to Lane by the dealer Robert Sawers, who, on discovering that they were stolen, bought back the set from the BM to whom he had sold it²²³. How many works were missing in total is not known due to Lane's tendency to buy up vast quantities of art at auction and hoard it in uncatalogued stacks, heaps and piles that literally filled most of the rooms in his Kyoto home. Moreover, Meech suggests the likelihood of subsequent thefts, particularly after

²²¹ Honolulu Academy of Arts, "Delving into the Richard Lane Collection," *Calendar News*, *Honolulu Academy of Arts* (Honolulu, 2008), 6.

²²² Meech, "Richard Lane (1926-2002), Scholar and Collector."

²²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

Lane's death, as she notes that his safes were found opened and practically empty²²⁴.

It is estimated that it will take at least a decade to finish cataloguing Lane's art collection²²⁵, despite the significant progress already made by HMA, with assistance from an international team of Asian art specialists, between 2003 when it was in storage in Kyoto and shipment to Honolulu in 2009. The massive amounts of time, effort, and knowledge necessary to catalogue such an expansive collection are likely to have been part of the reason why the Japanese authorities sold it for the nominal price of 3 million yen (approximately \$26,000 at the time). An accurate valuation of the collection will not be possible until the cataloguing is complete. Furthermore, it was known that Lane had acquired a number of forgeries²²⁶. Nevertheless, Little, who as director of HMA from 2003 to 2010 oversaw the acquisition of the Lane collection, said, 'Even a preliminary survey, however, reveals that as a collector Lane had a gifted eye and was unafraid to take risks, many of which proved brilliant'²²⁷. Regardless of Lane's reputation as a dealer, his formidable knowledge has ensured that his collection contains many high quality works.

So far there have been two exhibitions at HMA displaying some of these highlights: *Richard Lane and the Floating World*, October 2008-February 2009, and *Masterpieces from the Richard Lane Collection*, March-June 2010. Additionally, between 2012-2014 HMA ran a series of three exhibitions focusing on *shunga*, the first two of which each feature about 50 works from Lane's *shunga* collection. These and other *shunga* exhibitions will be discussed in Chapter 4. *Shunga: Stages of Desire*²²⁸ was written to complement the *shunga* exhibition series whilst showing more of HMA's collection than could be displayed. Of the 270 works in the book approximately 90 percent are from the Lane Collection.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Shawn Eichman and Stephen Salel, "Why so Much Shunga at the Honolulu Museum of Art?," *Impressions* 36 (2015): 142.

²²⁶ I am grateful to Stephen Salel for the reminder that 'authenticity' is a complex term, which should be seen as a spectrum in relation to Asian art, and that forgeries can have historical value, Stephen Salel, "Honolulu Museum of Art and the Richard Lane Collection" (Personal communication, 2016).

²²⁷ Little, "The Richard Lane Collection," 94.

²²⁸ Eichman and Salel, *Shunga: Stages of Desire*.

In keeping with other private collectors, information about Richard Lane as a collector came to light after his death and because his collection has been the focus of these public exhibitions. Despite the increase in scholarship on Lane himself there is still scope for further study, for example Little notes that ‘The Lane Collection is, among other things, fascinating as a time capsule of the art market in Japan from 1957 to 2002’²²⁹. If the contents of his collection are taken into consideration, alongside the works Lane bought and sold as a dealer, it could be the basis of a fascinating and informative research project, not only on *ukiyo-e* markets in general but also more specifically on the availability and circulation of *shunga* over the five decades or so of Lane’s activities. Unfortunately, Lane did not record the provenance for most of his collection, making this kind of further research challenging.

2.3.3 Edoardo Chiossone

Edoardo Chiossone (1833-1898) was an Italian artist from Genoa who lived in Japan from 1875 until his death in 1898. From 1847 he studied at the Accademia Ligustica (Ligurian Academy of Fine Arts), specialising in engraving, graduating in 1855. He began working for the Italian National Bank in 1867 and trained in Frankfurt and London on making paper bank notes. Chiossone was invited to Japan in 1874 to work for the government Printing Bureau (*Insatsu Kyoku*) creating stamps and money. He learned Japanese printmaking techniques and, in return, taught European techniques, including how to watermark paper. ‘In 1879 he went on a trip around Japan with Tokuno Ryohsuke to record ancient art works and monuments; 510 photographs were taken and Chiossone made 200 drawings’²³⁰. In 1888, he produced the official state portrait of the Emperor, which Lia Beretta calls ‘his highest recognition’²³¹ despite the fact that he received The Order of the Rising Sun (4th class) in 1880 and then the Order of the

²²⁹ Little, “The Richard Lane Collection,” 94.

²³⁰ Lia Beretta, “Edoardo Chiossone,” *The Asiatic Society of Japan Bulletin*, 1994, <http://www.asjapan.org/web.php/lectures/1994/10>.

²³¹ Ibid.

Sacred Treasure (3rd class) in 1891²³². Although Chiossone retired in 1891, he remained in Japan and continued to work.

During his 23 years in Japan, Chiossone acquired approximately 20,000 objects²³³ including *nihonga*, Buddhist sculptures, lacquerware, porcelain, musical instruments, clothing, *ukiyo-e* and *shunga*. Frabetti claims that Chiossone was able to amass such a large collection due to ‘his social position which allowed him access to the eminent figures of Japanese politics, economics and culture’²³⁴. However, his collecting was not indiscriminate. Hillier notes the quality of prints in Chiossone’s collection and praises his ‘critical eye’, which he attributes to Chiossone’s training as an engraver, and his ‘discerning and eclectic taste for the changing idioms of Japanese art’²³⁵. The collection is interesting not only for its variety but because it was deliberately collected by one man, with the intention of it being a museum collection, and it was ‘never broken up or divided’²³⁶. In accordance with Chiossone’s will, his art collection was sent to the Ligurian Academy of Fine Arts, where he had studied. The collection, organised by Okakura Kakuzō, opened in 1905 and was displayed at the Ligurian Academy until 1940. Shortly after World War II a building was specifically designed to house Chiossone’s collection but it was not finished until 1970. The Museo d’Arte Orientale Edoardo Chiossone (The Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art) opened the following year.

²³² Donatella Failla, *Masterpieces of Japanese Art from the Edo Period to Modernisation*, ed. Mia Clark (Milano: Silvana editoriale, 2001), 200.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 201.

²³⁴ Museo d’arte orientale E. Chiossone, *Un Italiano in Giappone : Dipinti, Stampe, Pergamene Dal XVII Al XIX Secolo Dal Museo D’arte Orientale Edoardo Chiossone Di Genova = An Italian in Japan : Paintings, Prints and Scrolls from the 17th to the 19th Century* (Milano: Electa, 1991), 27-29.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²³⁶ Frabetti in *ibid.*, 29.



Figure 36 Katsukawa Shunshō, *Ehon haikai yobuko-dori* (*Haikai Book of the Cuckoo or Worshipping a Woman's Pussy at Night*), 1788, colour woodblock-printed book, British Museum. Note that this impression is from the British Museum's copy rather than the Chiossone Museum's.

It is unclear if any *shunga* have been exhibited in the Chiossone Museum, but a small number of *shunga* were collected by Chiossone. Although Hillier's observation that 'we have benefitted greatly from Chiossone's open mind'²³⁷ relates to his acquisition of nineteenth-century prints, it is equally applicable to *shunga*. *Shunga* were included in *Ukiyo-e Prints and Paintings from the Early Masters to Shunshō*²³⁸, which was the first catalogue of the Japanese fine arts (prints, illustrated books, and paintings) in the Chiossone Museum collection. The total amount of *shunga* in the collection is not given, but several *shunpon* by Sukenobu, Settei, and Shunshō are described with accompanying images. Although the copy of Shunshō's *Ehon haikai yobuko-dori* (Figure 36) was rebound out of sequence, it is rare and 'rich in *karazuri*'²³⁹ [literally 'empty printing', embossing]. Chiossone not only had a copy of Settei's well-known *Onna dairaku takara-bako* but two other books by Settei which are also *shunga* parodies of etiquette manuals for young ladies. Additionally, a selection of over 40 sheets taken from albums or sets by Harunobu and Koryūsai are reproduced, including scenes from *Fūryū zashiki hakkei* (Figure 16) and the ever-popular *Fūryū enshoku Maneemon* (see Figure 21, 23, 37 and 38).

²³⁷ Hillier in *Ibid.*, 18.

²³⁸ Luigi Bernabò Brea and Eiko Kondo, *Ukiyo-E Prints and Paintings from the Early Masters to Shunshō: Edoardo Chiossone Civic Museum of Oriental Art, Genoa* (Genoa: SAGEP, 1980).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

2.3.4 Mr. Jones

Mr Jones, a contemporary UK-based collector, gave valuable insights into the collecting of *shunga* as well as the ups and downs of private collecting more generally. In order to preserve his anonymity, I will only share a brief and selective summary of this. Jones started his collection with the purchase of a single volume from a three-volume *shunpon* illustrated by Eisen (1836) that he chanced upon in a print shop whilst in Kyoto in 1977. He was intrigued by the contents and amused by other people's reactions as most were reticent to even look at the book. Jones recalls how 'at that time in Japan *shunga* reproduced in modern publications were invariably censored with little purple clouds'. On the other hand, it was possible to see uncensored images of *shunga* in publications in the UK in the 1970s, in particular Jones cites the catalogue from a V&A *ukiyo-e* exhibition²⁴⁰, and various commercially published books by Lane and Hillier.

Throughout the 1980s Jones collected Japanese prints and the occasional book. Then in 1988 he inherited 45 Edo-period books, which redirected his collecting from prints to books. However, his next acquisition of a *shunpon* was not until 1991. Jones now has 142 *shunpon* and approximately 130 *shunga* in his collection. On the topic of multi-volume titles and sets of prints, Jones wryly comments 'you learn very quickly, especially with the eighteenth century material, that you don't get too picky about completeness'²⁴¹. Jones notes how his collection, which covers a range of areas of Japanese art, developed more organically and serendipitously than the term '*shunga* collector' implies: 'I never consciously was collecting *shunga*, per se...[and] I never exclusively collected *shunpon*. For example, I've got 66 titles by Hokusai, and I never consciously collected Hokusai but it happened'²⁴².

He goes on to explain 'With Japanese books, consciously, purposely collecting is very difficult, virtually impossible.' Although collectors can pass on a 'wishlist' to dealers, Jones remarks that 'it's entirely serendipity what you're going to

²⁴⁰ Robin A. Crighton, *The Floating World: Japanese Popular Prints, 1700-1900* (London: HMSO, 1973).

²⁴¹ Jones, "Interview on Collecting *Shunga*" (Personal communication, 2014)..

²⁴² Ibid.

find’²⁴³. As well as purchasing works from well-known Japanese art dealers in London and Leiden such as Chris Uhelenbeck and Israel Goldman, Jones also mentions visiting second-hand book shops in Japan. The varied means of acquisition, and his acceptance of serendipity, are reflected in two facets to Jones’ collection: what he calls his ‘museum collection’, high-quality works in good condition, and his ‘study collection’, works which are incomplete or in poor condition but are nevertheless useful for research. Jones’ *shunga* collection does indeed contain museum-worthy works, some of which have been loaned to a number of high-profile institutions for exhibitions over the years.

2.3.5 Shibui Kiyoshi

Shibui Kiyoshi (渋井清) (1899-1992) was a Japanese scholar and a collector of Asian art. Shibui wrote on Japanese art extensively in the 1960s, but what is remarkable is the fact that he published books on Japanese ‘erotica’, in other words *shunga*, in the late 1920s and early 1930s²⁴⁴. He also published works on Chinese sexually explicit art. After his death, Shibui’s art collection was feared to have been lost or destroyed, but in 2008 it resurfaced and was purchased by the Muban Foundation in London. His collection included rare Chinese sex art as well as examples of *shunga*. Since then, several articles have been published detailing Shibui’s collection and examining its significance from various angles²⁴⁵.

2.3.6 Uragami Mitsuru

Uragami Mitsuru (浦上満) (born 1951) is a Japanese art dealer and collector, and has an active presence in the Japanese artworld, as Director of Tokyo Art Club, Trustee of Tokyo Art Dealers’ Association, and executive director of the International *Ukiyo-e* Society. Most descriptions of Uragami, including the profile on his company website, imply that his interest in art stems from his father, Uragami Toshiro (浦上敏朗), who was also a collector of *ukiyo-e* and ceramics. After graduating from university, Uragami pursued his interests by working for

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Shibui, *Genroku Kohanga Shūei*; Shibui, *Ukiyoe Naishi = Ukiyo-E Naisi*.

²⁴⁵ Of particular interest are James Cahill, “The Shibui Printed Books in Chinese and Japanese Erotic Pictorial Art,” *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 40, no. 3 (2009); Sebastian Izzard, “Shibui Kiyoshi: Pioneer in the Study of Ukiyo-E,” *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 40, no. 3 (2009): 55-61.

the antique art dealer Mayuyama & Co. He spent five years there developing his skills and knowledge before going on to establish his own company, Uragami Sokyū-do Co., in 1979, which deals in, and organises exhibitions of, Asian art.

There are around 1,000 prints and albums in Uragami's *shunga* collection²⁴⁶. Uragami says, 'My collection of *shunga* began in 1997 with the sale of the collection of the Paris jeweller, Henri Vever, at Sotheby's in London'²⁴⁷. This statement raises some interesting questions; such as why was Uragami drawn specifically to *shunga* in Vever's vast collection? The catalogues of Vever's collection, cover four auctions (1973, 1975, 1977, 1997) and 1,434 lots in total, were written by Hillier for Sotheby's²⁴⁸, which gives some sense of the size and importance of Vever's collection. Yet, even this was not the full extent of it, as Hillier notes in the introduction that Vever (1854-1942) had already sold 'an unspecified number of prints to Kojiro Matsukata' in the 1920s and that 'he made many important bequests to the French national collections, including many Japanese prints'²⁴⁹. Matsukata (松方 幸次郎) (1865-1950) was a Japanese businessman and eminent collector of European art. Interestingly, Matsukata's collection of almost 8,000 *ukiyo-e* prints, including those he had bought from Vever, became the core of Tokyo National Museum's *ukiyo-e* holdings.

In the Vever Collection catalogues *shunga* are included but tend to be represented by either cropped details or the *abuna-e* from an album or book. However, the *shunga* are not grouped together but shown amidst individual artist's other works. Why then did this small number of *shunga* in Vever's illustrious collection²⁵⁰, which were not shown fully or grouped together, pique Uragami's interest? Unfortunately, Uragami does not elaborate on that point,

²⁴⁶ Zoe Li, "INTERVIEW: Uragami Mitsuru on Japanese Erotic Art, Shunga," *BLOUIN ARTINFO*, 2013, <http://hk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/930857/interview-uragami-mitsuru-on-japanese-erotic-art-shunga>.

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Sotheby's Hong Kong, "Press Release - Beyond the Paper Screen: An Exhibition of Japanese Erotic Prints from The Uragami Collection," 2013.

²⁴⁸ Jack Hillier, "Catalogue of Highly Important Japanese Prints, Illustrated Books and Drawings, from the Henri Vever Collection. Part 1." (London : Sotheby & Co, 1973); Jack Hillier, "Catalogue of Highly Important Japanese Prints, Illustrated Books, Drawings and Fan Paintings from the Henri Vever Collection. Part 2." (London : Sotheby & Co, 1975); Jack Hillier, "Highly Important Japanese Prints from the Henri Vever Collection. Final Part." (London : Sotheby's, 1997).

²⁴⁹ Hillier, "Catalogue Henri Vever Collection. Part 1.," vi.

²⁵⁰ 17 out of the 197 lots in the 1997 sale were prints, *ehon* or albums featuring *shunga* and/or *abuna-e*.

but comments in interviews reveal that he appreciates *shunga* for its artistic qualities and technique, which create ‘exceptional depictions, but make it feel natural and exciting’²⁵¹. Moreover, Uragami offers an insight into one of the appeals of collecting - to be able to engage and bond with others over art: ‘It’s my pleasure to share with dealers, good friends, collectors. *Shunga* originally is not the same as porn where men look at it alone. *Shunga* is something you enjoy with others. It is full of humor and wit’²⁵².

To this end, he explains that exhibitions of *shunga* are important, as they are an opportunity to share his collection with art lovers. As he points out, exhibitions not only allow people to appreciate the ‘high quality of *shunga* as art’ but also to examine ‘the relationship between sex and society’²⁵³. *Beyond the Paper Screen: An Exhibition of Japanese Erotic Prints from The Uragami Collection*, which was held in 2013 at Sotheby’s in Hong Kong and featured over 60 *shunga* works from Uragami’s collection, will be discussed further in Chapter 4. In addition to this exhibition and loaning works from his collection to Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Uragami, along with Asaki Masakatsu, is part of *Shunga* in Japan LLP, which was a sponsor of the BM’s 2013 *shunga* exhibition.

²⁵¹ Zoe Li, “The Pleasures of Shunga, Japan’s Revered Genre of Erotic Prints,” *BLOUIN ARTINFO*, 2013, <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/932090/the-pleasures-of-shunga-japans-revered-genre-of-erotic-prints#>.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Sotheby’s Hong Kong, “Press Release - Beyond the Paper Screen: An Exhibition of Japanese Erotic Prints from The Uragami Collection.”

3. Collecting shunga: institutional

Since Japanese art began to become available in significant quantities in the 1860s, when Japan was coerced into relations with Europe and America, it has been possible for institutions to collect *shunga*. Yet, as has been discussed, *shunga* collecting could be problematic for a number of reasons. Institutions, since they served the public, faced even more difficulties than private collectors, but despite this some museums and libraries did acquire *shunga*. For the best part of a century, institutional acquisition of *shunga* and other erotic works was largely due to collections being donated or bequeathed from private collectors. However, the move towards sexual liberation from the 1960s onwards brought about a gradual shift in museums from passive to active collecting of *shunga*. This chapter will trace this shift in *shunga* collecting and look at how institutions balanced the religious and social disapprobation of ‘obscenity’ with their aims of representing societies and cultures from around the world. The importance of institutional collecting practices was noted in a DMCS report:

Collections are at the heart of all that museums do, but they need to remain dynamic resources. They should, and in many cases do, reflect the vitality, the uniqueness and the diversity of contemporary communities and their lives.²⁵⁴

The question of what is, or should be, the role of museums underpins this chapter. This issue is raised now as it will be beneficial to bear it in mind throughout this and subsequent chapters, until it is debated in Chapter 6.

To establish a wider context for institutional *shunga* collecting, I will begin by outlining the collection of Japanese art and *shunga* at a few North American and European institutions which have notable *shunga* collections, namely the MFA, the HMA, and the BnF. Next, I will focus on museums in the UK. Legal issues, the notion of institutional censorship, and so-called secret museums will be explored, before looking in detail at how the BM and V&A collected *shunga*. Finally, I will discuss the issues of legality and censorship in Japan, and consider how *shunga* has been collected at Nichibunken, ARC at Ritsumeikan University, and Chiba City Museum of Art. The institutions featured were specifically chosen

²⁵⁴ Museums and Cultural Property Division, “The Value of Museums,” 7.

for several reasons: they are prominent (if not national) institutions; they have significant *shunga* collections; information about their collection and collecting habits is relatively accessible; and many of them acquired *shunga* from one of the major private collectors of *shunga* discussed in the previous chapter²⁵⁵.

3.1 Institutional *shunga* collections worldwide

3.1.1 The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) was established in Boston in 1870 by a group of private individuals, who raised the necessary funds by public subscription. Inspired by the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A), they hoped to mimic them by creating a collection that would be educational, especially for artists and designers. When the Museum opened in 1876 it had around 5,600 objects; since then the collections have greatly increased and the MFA now holds an estimated 500,000 objects²⁵⁶. This figure and the fact it receives over a million visitors each year supports the MFA's claim of being one of the most comprehensive museums in the world. Japanese art has a prominent place amidst the MFA's varied collections, which range from ancient to contemporary and include works from the Americas, Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania. Additionally, a sister museum, the Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts (N/BMFA), was opened in Japan in 1999. The MFA claims to have the largest and finest collection of Japanese art outside of Japan²⁵⁷, with over 100,000 Japanese objects²⁵⁸, including over 55,000 woodblock prints and 700 *ukiyo-e* paintings²⁵⁹.

Some well-known figures who, either through curation or donation, were responsible for shaping the Japanese collection at the MFA will be introduced to ascertain how *shunga* became part of the collection. Remarkably, the MFA declares that it was the first museum in America not only to collect Japanese art

²⁵⁵ There are, of course, other institutions with notable *shunga* collections (such as Rijksmuseum) which could have been included, but due to limitations of space this was not practical, and institutions which met more of the criteria listed above were prioritised.

²⁵⁶ Amelia Kantrovitz, "'Hokusai' Features Legendary Artist, Best Known for Iconic 'Great Wave,'" n.d., <http://www.mfa.org/news/hokusai>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Sebastian Smee, "MFA Exhibit Tours Japan, Will Not Be Seen in Boston," *The Boston Globe*, March 24, 2013.

²⁵⁹ Timothy Clark et al., *The Dawn of the Floating World, 1650-1765: Early Ukiyo-e Treasures from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2001), 34.

but also to have a curator specialising in it²⁶⁰. That specialist was the influential art historian Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908), who was Curator of Oriental Art between 1890 and 1896. He was actively involved in promoting and preserving Japanese style painting (*Nihonga*) within Japan along with the scholar Okakura Kakuzō (1862-1913). As part of their endeavour, in 1887, Fenollosa and Okakura helped to found the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō), which is now part of Tokyo University of the Arts (Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku, or Geidai). Okakura later followed Fenollosa as Curator of Oriental Art at the MFA (1904-1913). Despite being known for his passion for *Nihonga*, Fenollosa also published a history of *ukiyo-e*²⁶¹ and catalogued the Morse Collection.

Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925) was an American zoologist and lecturer at Harvard, who became Keeper of Pottery at the MFA in 1890. Over the course of several extended visits to Japan he amassed a collection of over 5,000 pieces of Japanese ceramics and pottery that he later donated to the Museum, along with the works given to him by former prime minister and art collector Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922) in 1882 for his services to Japan. Morse's contributions to Japan were formally recognised by the Japanese government in 1922, when he was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasures (2nd class).

The Spaulding brothers, William Stuart (1865-1937) and John Taylor (1870-1948), were well known collectors of European, Japanese and American art²⁶². In 1921, the Spauldings donated their collection of over 6,000 Japanese prints to the MFA on the condition that, in order to preserve the light-sensitive pigments used in *ukiyo-e*, they would never be displayed²⁶³. There are several examples of *abunae* or censored *shunga* in the Spauldings' Collection, but it is unclear if it also contains uncensored *shunga*. It is revealing (pun intended) to compare an altered version of a Harunobu print from the Spauldings' Collection (Figure 37) to an unaltered version from the Bigelow Collection (Figure 38). The Spauldings

²⁶⁰ Karen Frasca, "Art of Japan Collection and History of Cultural Exchange," accessed May 21, 2015, <http://www.mfa.org/news/Japan>.

²⁶¹ Ernest Fenollosa, *The Masters of Ukiyo : A Complete Historical Description of Japanese Painting and Color Prints of the Genre School : As Shown in Exhibition at the Fine Arts Building, ... New York, January, 1896* (New York: Ketcham, 1896).

²⁶² For more on the Spauldings and their collections see Frederic Alan Sharf, *Art of Collecting : The Spaulding Brothers and Their Legacy* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2007).

²⁶³ Museum of Fine Arts Boston, "Collection Tour: The Spaulding Collection," accessed June 26, 2015, <http://www.mfa.org/node/9540>.

purchased the print in 1913 in Japan from the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who not only collected *ukiyo-e* but also acted as a dealer²⁶⁴. Given the illicit status of *shunga* in Taishō-era Japan (1912-26), it seems likely that the print would have been censored by the Japanese source rather than by Wright or the Spauldings.



Figure 37 and Figure 38 Suzuki Harunobu, print 20 from *Fūryū enshoku Mane'emon* (*The Amorous Adventures of Mane'emon*), c.1765-70, colour woodblock print, both Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. On the left is the Spauldings' censored version, with Bigelow's uncensored version on the right.

Despite Fenollosa, Okakura, Morse, and the Spauldings' importance in terms of Japanese art history and collecting, Bigelow was arguably the most significant collector for the MFA, not only for the sheer volume, but also for the quality, of Japanese art donated. He was a Trustee of the museum and, as mentioned in Chapter 2, donated 50,000 woodblock prints and almost 4,000 Japanese paintings, including more than 100 *shunga* paintings (including Figure 35 and Figure 39) and 180 *shunpon* titles. Although the MFA accepted the *shunga* works donated by Bigelow, and despite their high quality and artistic pedigree, they were not deemed suitable for display and kept segregated in locked cabinets. Malcolm Rogers, Director of the MFA, describes how *shunga* were classified as 'reserve works' and 'obscene pictures' and that cataloguing was 'kept to a discreet minimum'²⁶⁵. In addition, some *shunga* works were annotated with the word 'smut' in pencil. Whilst *shunga* may have been deemed smut and locked away, that they were accepted at all and not subjected to physical censorship indicates that on some level the MFA, as an institution, acknowledged their artistic and cultural value.

²⁶⁴ For details about Wright's interest in Japanese art see Meech, *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art of Japan: The Architect's Other Passion*.

²⁶⁵ Rogers in Tsuji, *Bosuton Bijutsukan Nikuhitsu Ukiyoe. Bekkan Shunga Meihinsen*, 7.

Ann Nishimura Morse, curator of Japanese Art at the MFA, traces the developments in institutional censorship at the MFA and cites several examples which occurred in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century²⁶⁶. Prior to the museum's opening in 1876 fig leaves had been attached to Classical statues by Dr. Henry J. Bigelow, the renowned surgeon and father of William Sturgis. In 1908 when further male nude sculptures were gifted to the museum by Warren they were hidden away in storage. Ancient Greek vases were 'censored with strategic applications of black paint'²⁶⁷. In 1929 Kojirō Tomita, a curator at the MFA, had conservators fill in the pudendum of a first-century sculpture of an Indian fertility goddess. Morse then outlines how changes in attitudes to sex and sexuality in the 1960s led to these acts of censorship being reversed²⁶⁸.

Nevertheless, it was not until 2001, when a recently acquired album of explicit eighteenth-century Chinese art was exhibited, that sex art was publically appreciated and engaged with by the MFA. The exhibition, *Secret Spring*, included scenes from a handscroll by Eishi (Figure 39), which had been donated by Bigelow in 1911, and this was the first time that *shunga* was displayed at the MFA. The Eishi scroll, *Kisa no tsuna (The Elephant's Leash)*, was displayed again, as were a small selection of other *shunga* works, in the 2007 exhibition *Drama and Desire*²⁶⁹.

²⁶⁶ Morse in Ibid., 12-13.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁶⁹ The *shunga* works were reproduced uncensored in the catalogue, Anne Nishimura Morse and Shūgō Asano, *Drama and Desire : Japanese Paintings from the Floating World, 1690-1850*, 1st ed. ([Boston]: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2007).



Figure 39 Chōbunsai Eishi, scene from *Kisa no tsuna* (*The Elephant's Leash*), c. 1804–18, ink, colour, gold, and mica on silk, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Another high quality painting from Bigelow's collection.

3.1.2 Honolulu Museum of Arts, Honolulu

The Honolulu Museum of Arts (HMA) was originally founded, as Honolulu Academy of Arts, by Anna Rice Cooke (1853-1934) in 1927. She married Charles Montague Cooke and, in the 1880s, they began to collect art for their home. The collection increased to number in the thousands, and so in 1922 Cooke obtained a charter to create a museum, which she aimed to make 'specifically relevant to Hawaii's ethnically diverse community'²⁷⁰. The collection has continued to expand and today contains over 59,000 works²⁷¹, focusing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American, European and Asian art, particularly prints, drawings, and paintings. Given Hawai'i's geographical location, it is unsurprising that the HMA possesses a substantial amount of Japanese art, the third largest collection in America after the MFA and the Art Institute of Chicago²⁷². Of particular note is the collection of over 12,900 woodblock prints, ranging from

²⁷⁰ Honolulu Museum of Art, "History," n.d., <http://honolulumuseum.org/11592-history>.

²⁷¹ The numbers given in this section reflect HMA's collection at present but, like all institutions, are subject to change due to the ongoing process of acquisition and deaccessioning. Current figures are courtesy of Salel, "Honolulu Museum of Art and the Richard Lane Collection."

²⁷² Honolulu Museum of Art, "The World's Loveliest Art: James A. Michener and Japanese Woodblock Prints," 2007, http://honolulumuseum.org/art/exhibitions/11627-worlds_loveliest_art_james_michener_and_japanese_woodblock_prints/.

seventeenth-century Buddhist works to twentieth-century contemporary prints. Around two thirds, or 8,562 prints (with a volume of *ehon*, or illustrated book, in this case being counted as a print), are already available to view on the HMA website, with the intention that the rest will be added in the ‘near future’²⁷³. The full extent of the HMA’s holdings of Japanese paintings are unclear but currently 663 can be viewed online, with approximately 100 more being added each year²⁷⁴. Images of *shunga* and *shunpon* are included amidst the other paintings and woodblock-printed works accessible on the website.

What may be surprising is that the majority of the HMA’s Japanese print and painting collection is mainly due to two private collectors, James Michener and Richard Lane, rather than curators or keepers. James Albert Michener (1907-1997) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning American author, philanthropist and art collector, who published over 40 books, both novels and non-fiction. Michener’s third wife, Mari Yoriko Sabusawa, whom he married in 1955, was an American of Japanese heritage, although his interest in Japanese art dates from before this as he had researched Japanese culture for his writing. Over the years, from the late-1950s until 1991, Michener donated Japanese prints from his collection to the HMA. In total the James A. and Mari Michener Collection contains over 6,000 prints. Michener published a selection of *ukiyo-e* prints from his collection, many of which he later donated to the HMA, with notes on each by Lane²⁷⁵. Between 1957 and 1971, Lane liaised with the HMA as a Research Associate for *Ukiyo-e* and assisted with the cataloguing of Michener’s prints. This institutional association is part of the reason why Lane’s collection ended up at the HMA. The main details of the acquisition of the Lane Collection by the HMA were related in the previous chapter and will not be repeated here, but the contents of the collection will be explored in a little more detail.

The Lane Collection comprises almost 20,000 items of Japanese, Chinese and Korean art, but it is hard to accurately break down this figure. Although it is not yet fully catalogued, it is estimated to include 11,000 woodblock-printed books,

²⁷³ Honolulu Museum of Art, “Collections at the Honolulu Museum of Art,” accessed May 24, 2015, <http://art.honolulumuseum.org/>.

²⁷⁴ Salel, “Honolulu Museum of Art and the Richard Lane Collection.”

²⁷⁵ James Michener, *Japanese Prints: From the Early Masters to the Modern* (Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1959).

over 3,000 paintings and hundreds of single-sheet prints²⁷⁶. What is known, thanks to the research undertaken for exhibitions, is that to-date there are 833 *shunga* works, mainly printed books, in the Lane Collection. Prior to this acquisition, the HMA had 34 works of *shunga* in their collection, more than most institutions with Japanese art holdings (excluding exceptions such as the MFA, the BM, and Nichibunken). It seems likely that these 34 *shunga* came from Michener given that he was their main donor of *ukiyo-e*, and active acquisition of *shunga* by museum curators was rare prior to the 1980s. Furthermore, Michener was aware of *shunga* and included a chapter entitled *The Other Books* (with *Shunga* as the subtitle on the bottom of each page), in *The Floating World*²⁷⁷ despite not being permitted to include any accompanying images. He laments this restriction in *Japanese Prints*, which features works from his own collection:

This collection contains two additional Sugimura prints of high quality, the black line being especially good, but they are too erotic in content to be reproduced. I regret this, for they demonstrate what artistic effects can be achieved by this singing line.²⁷⁸



Figure 40 Sugimura Jihei, *Couple Embracing*, c.1685, monochrome woodblock print, Honolulu Museum of Arts

²⁷⁶ Articles on Lane each cite different figures for the works in the collection - see Meech, "Richard Lane (1926-2002), Scholar and Collector"; Little, "The Richard Lane Collection"; Honolulu Academy of Arts, "Delving into the Richard Lane Collection"; Eichman and Salel, "Why so Much Shunga at the Honolulu Museum of Art?". This may be because the numbers have been more accurately counted as work on cataloguing the collection progresses and because authors do not always clarify if they are referring specifically to Japanese objects or including Korean and Chinese objects in the totals.

²⁷⁷ James Michener, *The Floating World* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954).

²⁷⁸ Michener, *Japanese Prints: From the Early Masters to the Modern*, 28.

This *sumizuri-e* ('black ink printed picture') by Sugimura Jihei (Figure 40), donated by Michener in 1991, may be one of the ones he referred to which was not allowed to be printed in 1959. Perhaps the reason he waited until 1991 to donate this, and other *shunga*, was specifically because they were *shunga* and institutional caution towards sex art prevailed. On the other hand, it is also possible that he kept these particular works for longer because of his fondness for them; Michener admitted that he held *sumizuri-e* in 'special affection'²⁷⁹. Whilst, this may be the case, the content undoubtedly played a part. In 1957 and 1972, for example, Michener donated several non-explicit prints (no visible genitals or sexual acts occurring) which, like those he did include in his publications, are likely to have been the frontispiece of, or a milder scene from, a *shunga* set or album. Whereas the explicit prints, whether *sumizuri-e*, hand-coloured, or *nishiki-e*, and regardless of artist, all seem to have been donated by Michener in 1991.

3.1.3 Bibliothèque national de France, Paris

The Bibliothèque national de France (BnF) is unlike many of the other institutions discussed in this thesis in that it is a library rather than a museum. Nevertheless, as shall become apparent, there are parallels between overall attitudes to sexually-related material and the way *shunga* was collected by the BnF and the BM, for instance, particularly before the Department of Books and Manuscripts was separated in 1973 to form the British Library (BL).

The BnF traces its origins back to the Royal Collection of Charles V (1338-1380), but Priebe claims that it was not until the collection had been re-established in 1544 that it became 'a true state library'²⁸⁰. The library has undergone several changes of name and location, but perhaps the most significant was during the French Revolution. In 1792 the Bibliothèque du Roi was renamed the Bibliothèque Nationale²⁸¹. In 1988, President at the time François Mitterrand announced a new building to make the national library larger and more modern,

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁸⁰ Paul M Priebe, "From Bibliothèque Du Roi to Bibliothèque Nationale: The Creation of a State Library, 1789-1793," *The Journal of Library History* (1974-1987) 17, no. 4 (1982): 389.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 394.

which was completed in 1996. Regardless of its location, for centuries it has been the legal repository for publications in France (it was considered the largest repository in the world at the end of the nineteenth century) and today holds 14 million books and printed documents²⁸².

Christophe Marquet details the BnF's *shunga* collection in the exhibition catalogue for *L'Enfer* and offers an overview on the BnF website²⁸³. The collection consists of nearly 200 loose prints (from albums or series) and 50 titles in 112 volumes. The BnF's *shunga* came from three private collectors and 'ils comportent quelques-uns des plus anciens exemples de ce genre et certains titres sont d'une très grande rareté'²⁸⁴. The first was in 1907 when Robert Lebaudy donated the collection of Emmanuel Tronquois (1855-1918), an early scholar of Japanese art. The second was bequeathed by the collector Georges Marteau (1858-1916) in 1916. The third was in 1933 from the illustrator Georges Barbier (1882-1932), which consisted of 153 items in three portfolios²⁸⁵. These *shunga* collections were not entered in the catalogue but instead put in '*L'Enfer*', or the library's 'hell'. '*L'Enfer*' was a separate, restricted section created by the BnF in the 1830s to house works which were said to be 'contraires aux bonnes mœurs'²⁸⁶. Items from this collection, including *shunpon*, were exhibited in 2007 in *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque*, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2 Institutional collecting in UK

Although access to sexual material has become more commonplace in the twenty-first century, particularly on the internet, sex continues to be a sensitive subject and cultural institutions remain cautious about what they collect and exhibit. Not all censorship is official or overt; one aspect of institutional censorship is an unspoken decision to uphold the implicit taboo by not showing

²⁸² Bibliothèque nationale de France, "Welcome to the BnF," 2015, http://www.bnf.fr/en/tools/a.welcome_to_the_bnf.html.

²⁸³ Christophe Marquet, "Gravures et Livres Illustrés Érotiques Japonais de l'Enfer Du Département Des Estampes et de La Photographie," in *L'enfer de La Bibliothèque, Eros Au Secret*, ed. Marie-Françoise Quignard and Raymond-Josue Seckel (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2007), 277-325; Christophe Marquet, "Les Estampes Érotiques," accessed January 16, 2016, <http://expositions.bnf.fr/japonaises/arret/05-2.htm>.

²⁸⁴ Marquet, "Gravures et Livres Illustrés Érotiques Japonais," 302.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 305.

²⁸⁶ Bibliothèque nationale de France, "L'Enfer de La Bibliothèque Dossier de Presse," 2007, 2.

sex art; yet this exclusion of sex from cultural institutions ignores, and even denies, an important aspect of human experience. In keeping with this notion of sex art as forbidden, *shunga* has largely been omitted from art history, excluded from exhibitions, and censored in publications.

It is important to note that to-date there is no national policy or standardised set of guidelines for the acquisition, cataloguing, and display of sexually explicit items for museums or other institutions²⁸⁷. As discussed in Chapter 1, definitions, categorisation, and presentation can have an impact on how institutions and the public respond to sex-related artefacts. The ambiguity of legal definitions relating to obscenity and pornography can be problematic for institutions, especially if *shunga* is referred to by these terms. It could be argued that the lack of clarity surrounding the legality and censorship of ‘obscene’ or ‘pornographic’ artworks put the burden on institutions to self-censor for fear of falling foul of the law or engendering a public outcry, both of which only become apparent *after* such works have been acquired or displayed. In this way, institutional censorship can be seen as a preventative measure rather than an indication of the level of acceptability or engagement with sexually explicit items.

3.2.1 Legal issues

The laws which may be applied to *shunga* and other sexually explicit works are perhaps more pertinent to exhibitions (see Chapter 4), however these laws affect collecting: institutions do not normally collect items that they cannot exhibit²⁸⁸. In addition, laws may reflect the social attitudes to sex and sexuality of the time and can shed light on the rationale behind institutional decisions or policies. All of the legal issues that may affect *shunga* collecting and exhibiting will be presented here to avoid repetition, even though their significance may not become apparent until Chapter 4.

²⁸⁷ There are guidelines for dealing with other sensitive issues including human remains, ivory, and stolen art, in particular works taken during the Nazi era.

²⁸⁸ There are circumstances under which institutions may acquire items not intended for exhibition: for example, for teaching purposes, as an investment, or as a rare example despite being in poor condition.

Since the mid- to late-twentieth century, *shunga* are usually deemed erotic or pornographic, but in the nineteenth century would have been labelled 'obscene'. Legal censorship of such items began with the 1857 Obscene Publications Act²⁸⁹. It had previously been unofficially regulated by class, as art would only have been available to the upper classes, those who could afford, or had access to, paintings, costly prints and other visual materials. As Hunt has observed, regulation, and therefore definitions, only became necessary once art could be mass-produced as cheap prints, thus making them accessible to the lower classes²⁹⁰. Although prior to the obscenity laws in the nineteenth century the concept of pornography did not exist, that is not to say that art could not and was not used for the same purposes as modern-day pornography, namely arousal or masturbation.

Somewhat perplexingly, the 1857 Act left the term 'obscene', and what this might entail, undefined. It was not until the case of *Regina v. Hicklin* in 1868 that an attempt was made to define obscenity. Despite the Act initially being proposed by Lord Chief Justice Campbell in order to restrict the sale of pornography, such as the pornographic novels, etchings, prints, and catalogues of prostitutes²⁹¹ which were available for sale on Holywell Street, London by the notorious publisher William Dugdale and others, the term 'obscenity' encompasses more than sex. In the Hicklin case the 'obscenity' in question was a pamphlet²⁹² sold by Henry Scott, a member of the Protestant Electoral Union. The pamphlet was written to criticise the Catholic Church and included detailed descriptions of 'filthy' questions apparently being put to young women during confession. Initially the magistrate Benjamin Hicklin seized the pamphlets after complaints of their obscenity and under the Act they would have been destroyed. Scott appealed on the grounds that his intention was not to spread obscenity or immorality but to highlight wrongdoing by the Catholic Church. Hicklin granted the appeal, however this was then overturned by Chief Justice Cockburn. In his verdict against Scott, Cockburn described obscenity as a

²⁸⁹ The Act applied to England, Wales and Ireland, but not Scotland, where 'obscenity' was already considered to be sufficiently covered by Common Law.

²⁹⁰ Hunt, "Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity."

²⁹¹ This is one of the earliest uses of the word 'pornography' in English, coming from the Greek *porne* meaning prostitute or whore and *graphos*, writing or drawing.

²⁹² The pamphlet was entitled *The Confessional Unmasked; shewing the depravity of the Romish priesthood, the iniquity of the Confessional, and the questions put to females in confession*.

‘tendency to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences’ and he disregarded whether the intentions of the maker or publisher of the work were to deprave or corrupt. In the nineteenth century women, children and the lower classes were treated as those who might be easily depraved or corrupted.

Despite its vagueness, the ‘deprave and corrupt’ test continued to be used in prosecutions and was eventually incorporated into the revised 1959 Obscene Publications Act. The Act was extended to cover items which could not only be read or seen but also heard. The Act had a new addition: Section 4 or the ‘public good defence’ as it is commonly referred to, under which works that might be considered obscene could be exempted ‘in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern’. This is in opposition to Justice Cockburn’s ruling that a work was obscene regardless of context, overall content of the work, intent or other possible merits. Section 4 stipulated that a work should be taken as a whole rather than judged only on a specific part or parts, as Cockburn and other judges had previously been able to do. Cases brought under the Act tend to be written works rather than art, the most well-known being D.H. Lawrence’s 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in *Regina v. Penguin Books* 1960, which was exempted as a work of literature under Section 4 and because of the changes in social attitudes.

Whilst the 1960s are known for their increasingly relaxed attitudes towards sex, attitudes to same-sex relationships took longer to change. In 1957, the Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution recommended that ‘homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private be no longer a criminal offence’²⁹³. It took a decade before this recommendation was enacted in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and consensual sexual acts between men over the age of 21 were decriminalised²⁹⁴. The report is more commonly referred to as the Wolfenden report, after Sir John Wolfenden (1906-85) who chaired the committee. He later became Director of the BM (1969-74). Even after the 1967

²⁹³ John Wolfenden and Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, “Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution” (London : HMSO, 1957), 115.

²⁹⁴ HM Government, *Sexual Offences Act 1967*, 1967. This only applied in England and Wales; in Scotland and Northern Ireland homosexual acts were not decriminalised until 1980 and 1982 respectively.

Act, it would take several more decades for institutions to reflect the fact that homosexuality was no longer outlawed. Due to lingering notions of illegality and immorality, works depicting or describing homosexual acts still tend to be more likely to be deemed obscene (rather than erotic), or more obscene, than the heterosexual equivalent.

By the early 1970s, attitudes towards erotic art and obscenity in general had changed. The changes can be seen in the discussion that unfolds through a series of correspondence between the author Peter Webb, his publishers, Secker & Warburg, the British Museum secretary, Mr Bridgewater, and the governmental Treasury Solicitor, Mr Hosker. Webb wrote to the BM seeking permission to reproduce images of a selection of objects from the Museum's collection in his book, which he planned to title 'Celebration of love - studies in the erotic arts'²⁹⁵. In a letter to the BM, dated January 1972, the Managing Director of Secker and Warburg vouches for Webb as 'a bona fide teacher, scholar and writer and that he has a contract with us to write a serious book on the Erotic Arts'²⁹⁶. Whether this was a pre-emptive measure or in response to a query from the BM is unclear. Regardless, that such assurances were necessary indicates the kind of judgements made about those who viewed sexually related material.

The BM sought legal advice from the Treasury Solicitor. After viewing the proposed images and excerpts from Webb's manuscript, in December 1972 Hosker gave his recommendations, but cautioned that 'it is not possible to say definitely whether a particular picture is obscene'²⁹⁷. Instead, Hosker explained which laws may apply and offered a precedent. He briefly mentions section 11 of the Post Office Act 1953, which relates to 'indecent' images, but the main concern was the Obscene Publications Act 1959. Hosker grouped Webb's photographs into three categories: group 'A' had only a small risk of prosecution in his opinion, 'B' a greater risk, and 'C' the highest likelihood²⁹⁸. If charges were brought, a defence could be made under Section 4 'If the work can be seen

²⁹⁵ Presumably Webb wrote in early January 1972 or December of the previous year, but not all correspondence regarding this matter is in the BM archives.

²⁹⁶ T. G. Rosenthal, "Letter from Secker and Warburg to BM, Dated 5th Jan 1972" (British Museum Central Archive, 1972).

²⁹⁷ Hosker, "Letter to BM, Dated 29 December 1972" (British Museum Central Archive, 1972).

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

to have an intellectual and cultured approach and it is advertised as such'²⁹⁹. This was the approach taken by Secker and Warburg in their letter supporting Webb.

In 1972, Lucie-Smith had published a book entitled *Eroticism in Western Art* and no legal issues had arisen³⁰⁰. Using this as a precedent, and finding similarity between Lucie-Smith's illustrations and group 'A', Hosker thought it unlikely that Webb would face prosecution³⁰¹. However, if charges were brought it would not only be the author who was liable but also his publishers and the BM Trustees. On this basis, in January 1973 a small committee of the Trustees³⁰² and the Director, Wolfenden, examined the images to assess the risk. After careful consideration they granted permission for all but two of the images as the committee felt the rest of the photographs posed little risk of prosecution³⁰³. The two excluded images were by Eric Gill, and the committee stated that they 'differed from the rest in that they had little, if any, aesthetic quality, and they could not be said to contribute in any significant way to the content of the book'³⁰⁴. Webb's book was published in 1975 as *The Erotic Arts* and no charges were brought against it.

Like Section 4, which recognised that works can have other merits, the 1981 Indecent Displays (Control) Act may have helped institutions to break away from notions of sex art being taboo and their self-imposed censorship, in which they assumed the role of protector of those who may be depraved or corrupted. The Act excluded cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, theatres, and cinemas and other situations which are for a paying adult audience only. Payment of a fee and the age of visitors are both important factors that museums take into account, as will become apparent in the next two chapters. Another Act which may apply to museums is the 2009 Coroners and Justice Act.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Edward Lucie-Smith, *Eroticism in Western Art*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972). In fact, a second, revised edition was published in 1991 with the title amended to *Sexuality in Western Art*.

³⁰¹ Hosker, "Letter to BM, Dated 29 December 1972."

³⁰² The committee members were Lord Crawford, Lord Annan, and Professor Gower, for more information see Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 20 January 1973" (British Museum, Board of Trustees Meeting, 1973), 1382..

³⁰³ Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 24 February 1973" (British Museum, Board of Trustees Meeting, 1973), 1394.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

In particular, subsection 62(6) was designed to tackle child pornography and made it an offence to be in possession of a ‘prohibited image of a child’. Although this Act was not intended to apply to art it may inadvertently include some *shunga*, as it refers not just to photographs but to any sort of depiction and the definition of a ‘prohibited image’ includes one in which a child is not involved in any sexual act but is present whilst adults are.

3.2.2 Institutional policies

The laws outlined above were not necessarily intended to apply to museums or art, which may partially explain the opacity of the guidelines, nevertheless they may be applicable in certain situations. Where then might an institution look for guidance on whether a sexually explicit artwork is obscene, indecent or prohibited? Several professional organisations offer support and guidance to institutions on a range of issues, and it may be anticipated that they would have something to say about the acquisition, cataloguing, access, and display of material like *shunga*.

Perhaps the first group to consult is the Museums Association (MA) as it is the oldest in the world and the largest in the UK, with over 6,000 individual members, 600 institutional members and 250 corporate members³⁰⁵. It is a non-governmental organisation and its policies and guidelines include a code of ethics, which as Vanessa Trevelyan, convener of the ethics committee explains, aims to

*identify potential pitfalls; to offer guidance in difficult situations; to provide consistency in dealing with issues so we don't all make it up as we go along; and to maintain the confidence of benefactors, originators and society as a whole. But above all, I believe it is to help museum professionals resolve the operational and management problems that they face day in, day out.*³⁰⁶

Shunga could be considered a potential pitfall, and both institutions and the public would benefit from consistency with regards to sexually explicit artefacts.

³⁰⁵ Museums Association, “About,” accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/about>.

³⁰⁶ Museums Association, “Code of Ethics for Museums: Ethical Principles for All Who Work for or Govern Museums in the UK” (London: Museums Association, 2008), 3, emphasis added.

However, the 24-page code, which draws on ‘25 years of ethical development in the UK and overseas museum sectors’³⁰⁷, does not address the acquisition or display of such potentially sensitive items. On the other hand, the MA does raise the issue of sensitive topics as part of its series of ethical debates on its website: questioning religious imagery and censorship³⁰⁸, and the marketing of exhibitions with a sensitive theme, such as the Museum of London’s 2006 *Queer is Here*, in relation to age, culture and beliefs³⁰⁹. If members are unsure, the MA can be contacted for free advice on ethical matters. When asked directly, Charlotte Holmes, Museum Development Officer and contact for ethical enquiries at the MA, responded ‘We do not have specific guidance on sexually explicit material’ but she suggested, ‘museums should consider if/how public trust and benefit can best be upheld’³¹⁰. Holmes also pointed out that there may be legal issues to consider.

Interestingly, as part of a review of their code of ethics, the first full review in 12 years, the MA undertook online consultation between June 2014 and February 2015, which received over 100 responses. Further consultations on the code of ethics were held at a series of workshops at museums in Glasgow, Belfast, Leeds and Cardiff between May and June 2015³¹¹. Part of the reason for reviewing the ethics code was to widen its focus, so perhaps issues relating to sex and sexuality may be included in the revised version, which is due at the 2015 AGM in November³¹².

Another potential source of guidance is Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS), which was known as the Scottish Museums Council (SMC) prior to 2008. It is the National Development Body for museums, and works with over 400 museums and galleries in Scotland. One of the ways it supports these institutions is by

³⁰⁷ Museums Association, “Code of Ethics for Museums”, 3.

³⁰⁸ Museums Association, “Ethical Debate: Censorship,” accessed June 8, 2014, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/13496>.

³⁰⁹ Jo Fells, “Ethical Debate: Marketing,” accessed June 8, 2014, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/14087>.

³¹⁰ Charlotte Holmes, “Guidance on Dealing with Sexually Explicit Items” (Personal communication, 2014).

³¹¹ Patrick Steel, “Ethics Consultation Roadshow Begins in Glasgow,” 2015, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/news/08042015-ethics-consultation-roadshow-begins-in-glasgow>.

³¹² Patrick Steel, “Sector Responds to MA’s Code of Ethics Consultation,” 2015, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/news/17022015-museums-association-code-of-ethics-responses>.

‘Signposting to information, advice and resources and sharing best practice’³¹³. However, apart from the guidelines on the care of human remains, there is no information on how to handle sensitive issues and there was no response to an inquiry about guidelines for dealing with sexually explicit objects. Similarly, the Arts Council England (ACE), which since 2011 has taken responsibility for some of the duties from the now-disbanded Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), including supporting museums, has no listing for ethics in its website Advice and Guidance section; instead, ACE directs users to the MA Code of Ethics. The Association of Independent Museums (AIM), which is part funded by ACE (who in turn are funded by the government), offers advice and information as Success Guides and Focus Papers, which can be freely accessed from its website, but again these do not contain any guidelines on the handling of sensitive items. When asked about sexually explicit works, Tamalie Newbery, Executive Director of the AIM, said that the issue had not come up and suggested checking the MA’s code of ethics³¹⁴.

The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), does address the issue of sensitive objects in its Arts and Culture policy *Maintaining world-leading national museums and galleries, and supporting the museum sector*. As well as aiming to maintain and improve museums and galleries, they claim they are also

helping to ensure potentially sensitive objects are handled appropriately by: providing advice to national museums and galleries, including on how they can prevent illicit trade in cultural objects, and how they can handle human remains in their collections handling claims from people, or their heirs, who lost property during the Nazi era, which is now held in UK national collections.³¹⁵

Whilst these are important legal and ethical issues for museums, these policies do not comprehensively address the term ‘potentially sensitive objects’: with sexually explicit and religious items being prominent omissions. Although the DCMS were contacted to see if they wished to clarify this, their response was

³¹³ Museums Galleries Scotland, “About Us,” accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.museumsgalleryscotland.org.uk/about-us/>.

³¹⁴ Tamalie Newbery, “Guidance on Dealing with Sexually Explicit Items” (Personal communication, 2014).

³¹⁵ DCMS, “Maintaining World-Leading National Museums and Alleries and Supporting the Museum Sector,” 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/maintaining-world-leading-national-museums-and-galleries-and-supporting-the-museum-sector>, emphasis added.

that they do not ‘provide information for research projects’ and they suggested contacting the ACE instead³¹⁶. Since the ACE in turn recommends the MA’s code of ethics, it would seem that most institutions rely on the Museums Association, which is a professional organisation, not a governmental or national one.

In addition to guidelines from professional organisations, each institution has its own policies. For example, the BM’s acquisition policy³¹⁷ elucidates the purpose of acquisitions:

1.1 The British Museum is a universal museum holding an encyclopaedic collection of material from across the world and all periods of human culture and history. For the benefit of its audience now and in the future, the Trustees are committed to sustaining and improving the Museum’s collection.

1.2 Acquisitions are made in order to:

- (i) maintain and improve the Museum’s cultural and historical record of the world’s cultures and civilizations, including new, recently discovered, unexplored or poorly understood fields of human history and experience;
- (ii) generate public interest in the past and present;
- (iii) create new audiences and inform, entertain and inspire the existing audience in new ways; and
- (iv) generate public understanding of differing cultural perspectives.³¹⁸

It goes on to lay out the principles for acquisitions, which cover legal issues, documentation and funding, and lists other policies with which the BM is compliant. These include codes of practice and professional ethics from the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the MA, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as governmental acts and regulations, which, like the DCMS policy, relate to human remains and illegally obtained property.

There is nothing in the BM’s acquisition policy that would exclude sexually explicit objects. Rather, *shunga* fits the criteria under 1.2 (i-iv) as it is a

³¹⁶ DCMS, “Guidance on Dealing with Sexually Explicit Items” (Personal communication, 2015).

³¹⁷ It is unclear when this policy was introduced, but the most recent version of it was approved by the Trustees of the British Museum 4th July 2013 and will be reviewed in 2018.

³¹⁸ Trustees of the British Museum, “British Museum Policy: Acquisitions of Objects for the Collection,” 2013, 1.

relatively unexplored and poorly understood area, from another culture and historical period, and its acquisition would help to generate understanding of not only different cultural perspectives but also a better understanding of the oft-overlooked areas of experience of sex and sexuality within all cultures.

However, this acquisition policy reflects modern attitudes to collecting and the role of the museum, but such openness and inclusion has not always been the case.

3.2.3 Institutional censorship³¹⁹

In addition to official legal censorship and professional guidelines, it is interesting to reflect on unofficial institutional and social censorship, although this was more significant in the nineteenth and earlier half of the twentieth century. Section 9.10 of the MA's code of ethics advises institutions to 'Strive for editorial integrity and remain alert to the pressure that can be exerted by particular interest groups, including lenders and funders'³²⁰. If institutions follow this advice, then they can avoid submitting to the social and institutional censorship that has excluded or suppressed sexually explicit art in the past.

Although there may be no specific reference in a collecting policy that would prevent the acquisition of *shunga*, there are many stages in the process at which the approval of curators, trustees, and funders is required, and at any of these stages unofficial censorship may, intentionally or unintentionally, occur. For example, potentially sensitive subjects are mentioned, but not defined, in the BM's acquisitions procedure guidelines, which requires documents to be submitted to the acquisitions committee for purchases over £25,000, items funded from a source other than departmental funds, or contentious objects requiring further discussion³²¹. It is understandable that contentious acquisitions

³¹⁹ Information from this section in particular as well as other parts of this thesis were presented as 'Sex, Art, and Museums: On the Changing Institutional Censorship of *Shunga*' at the Association of Art Historians conference, held at Royal College of Art, London, April 2014. The conference paper was then rewritten as a book chapter, which is due for publication in 2016, Louise Boyd, "Sex, Art, and Museums: On the Changing Institutional Censorship of *Shunga*," in *Art and Censorship: Silencing the Artwork*, ed. Roisin Kennedy and Riann Coulter (I.B. Taurus, forthcoming).

³²⁰ Museums Association, "Code of Ethics for Museums", 20.

³²¹ Trustees of the British Museum, "Acquisitions Procedure for Curators 2012 Onwards," 2012, 25.

should be carefully considered and there may be valid reasons for declining certain items.

By institutional censorship, I do not mean decisions made as part of the regular curatorial selection process based on issues such as quality, condition, provenance, or cost, nor those which are made to ensure complicity with legal requirements. Rather, institutional censorship is the decision to exclude objects like *shunga* solely because of their sexual content. This decision may be made, for instance, due to social pressure, personal preference, or religious belief, but regardless of the reason, there seems to have been an unspoken agreement that cultural institutions would not engage with such items. An invisible line of acceptability had been drawn and institutions assumed responsibility for maintaining that line.

It could be argued that the vagueness of the obscenity law shifted the responsibility to institutions, which in the nineteenth century decided that women, children and the uneducated had to be protected from the ‘obscene’. This gendered and class-based censorship was consistent with social attitudes towards and the treatment of women and minors at the time. David Gaimster, Director of the Hunterian Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow since 2010, explains how it was thought that viewing ‘pornography’ might ‘provoke an imbalance in the relationships between men and women and hence a breakdown in the social order’³²². Furthermore, men of lower classes were not trusted to be able to ‘respond appropriately’ to obscene items. For these reasons, institutions restricted access to those who were deemed suitable, educated men who could respond in ‘a detached, scholarly way to the subject matter’. This paternalistic and elitist way of thinking drove institutional censorship of erotic items, and in some cases led to secret museums.

Secret museums

Secret museums were separate rooms, locked cabinets, or private cases within museums or libraries with restricted access, which contained items, usually

³²² David Gaimster, “Sex & Sensibility at the British Museum,” *History Today* 50, no. 9 (2000): unpaginated.

uncatalogued, that were deemed to be ‘obscene’. In 1795, the first secret museum was formed in Naples to house the sex art and phallic artefacts uncovered in Pompeii. This secret museum, the reserved cabinet, required a special permit and ‘only those people of mature years and sound morals would be admitted’³²³. That people interested in viewing newly uncovered antiquities had to undergo personal judgement reinforces the aura of negativity and ‘wrongness’ which was created around sexually explicit items.

As described above, from the 1830s onwards the BnF placed works which were considered ‘contrary to good morals’, including *shunga*, into a separate locked section referred to as *L’enfer (Hell)*. Access to the material required the submission of a written request to the library authorities and those who gained access were hidden from their fellow library users by a screen when viewing the material³²⁴.

Despite these examples, as Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation at the BM, points out,

Formal Secret Museums were never common since only large institutions needed them. Elsewhere the smaller quantities of difficult or troublesome artefacts could be kept in the keeper’s office or left languishing in stores.³²⁵

There is little documentation of this unofficial institutional censorship; it became invisible. Accordingly, it is the unmentioned locked cabinets which have come to encapsulate the danger of restrictions for modern scholars due to the accompanying loss of cultural understanding and information.

It was in this informal manner during the period 1830-50s that some antiquities in the BM began to be segregated, irrespective of cultural context, due to their ‘obscene nature’. For example, in 1830 the BM acquired fragments of Marcantonio Raimondi’s *I Modi (The Positions)*, a series of engravings (Figure

³²³ Ibid. unpaginated.

³²⁴ Marie-Françoise Quignard and Raymond-Josue Seckel, *L’enfer de La Bibliothèque, Eros Au Secret* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2007).

³²⁵ Stuart Frost, “Secret Museums: Hidden Histories of Sex and Sexuality,” *Museums & Social Issues: A Journal of Reflective Discourse* 3, no. 1 (2008): 31.

41), after drawings by Giulio Romano, showing sexual positions. The version published in 1527 was accompanied by sonnets of explicit dialogue by Pietro Aretino. Even though they had already been subject to physical censorship (the explicit parts had been cut out), the engravings were kept in a separate folio in the Keeper's office as they were considered 'too vulgar by the Museum for cataloguing with the general collection'³²⁶.



Figure 41 Marcantonio Raimondi, fragments of *I Modi (The Positions)*, 1510-20, engravings, British Museum. Although the genitals have been cropped out, the pose of several of the figures indicates that a sexual act is occurring.

Acts of physical censorship could be carried out by collectors, dealers, staff in institutions or even visitors to museums, whose sensibilities had been offended. In addition to the risk of being chopped up and locked away, items featuring nudity or sex were also subject to the addition of fig leaves, draped material, or blocks of colour being painted on to obscure the genitals. In some cases, artworks were vandalised: with genitals scratched off vases or paintings, and male statues castrated. In others, loin clothes and sculpted fig leaves were used to cover three-dimensional genitalia. For example, in 1857 the V&A received a

³²⁶ Gaimster, "Sex & Sensibility at the British Museum" unpaginated.

replica of Michelangelo's *David* as a gift for Queen Victoria. In the same year, a detachable fig leaf was specially made (probably by the London-based D. Brucciani & Co), to be hooked onto the statue. According to the V&A website 'This fig-leaf was hung on the David on the occasion of visits by royal ladies'³²⁷. Apparently, it was Queen Victoria herself who, shocked by David's nudity, ordered that he should be covered up³²⁸. However, this is only anecdotal. On the contrary, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert are known to have exchanged nude paintings and sculptures as gifts to each other.



Figure 42 unidentified French artist (previously attributed to Gericault), *Study of a Male Nude*, 1810-1820, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Note that a faint line is still visible, indicating where the painting had previously been severed.

One bemusing occurrence of physical censorship of 'erotic' art was to a painting donated to the MFA by Warren's mother, Susan (or Mrs Samuel Warren, as she preferred to be identified). In 1891, she donated a painting entitled *Study of a Male Nude* (Figure 42) by an unidentified French artist, which had been cut in half just above the genitals by a previous owner. Interestingly, despite the

³²⁷ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Fig Leaf for David," accessed July 1, 2015, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85428/fig-leaf-for-david-cast-d-brucciani-co/>.

³²⁸ Malcolm Baker, Brenda Richardson, and Anthony Burton, *A Grand Design : The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson (London : V&A Publications, 1997), 132.

subject being a male nude, and eroticism arguably being in the eye of the beholder, it is hard to ascertain what was considered so erotic or obscene about the painting, in comparison to other nudes of the same time, to warrant such censorship. Was the male nude, even when flaccid, considered more ‘erotic’ or ‘obscene’ than the female nude, which was a common subject in art? Regardless of the previous collector’s rationale for censoring it in the late-1870/early-1880s, in 1935 the painting and the male figure were restored to their full erotic potential and can now be viewed online³²⁹. Luckily for modern scholars, museum staff, visitors, and art historians, many sexually explicit or erotic works have survived uncensored and in relatively good condition *because* they were hidden away in cupboards or secret museums.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in 1865 Dr George Witt donated his collection of phallic antiquities, which he titled *Symbols of the Early Worship of Mankind*, drawn from cultures around the globe to the BM. In his history of the British Museum, former Director David Wilson notes that the Witt collection was accepted by the Trustees ‘without apparent discussion’³³⁰. Indeed, an examination of the minutes and documents relating to the donation uncovers no disagreement or hesitancy relating to the sexual nature of the content. Perhaps this is because as Gaimster, who was Assistant Keeper in Medieval & Later Antiquities (1986-2001) where the remains of the Secretum were kept, points out, ‘the artefacts were of sufficient archaeological merit to justify acquisition’³³¹. Nevertheless, former curator, Lawrence Smith, commends the Trustees as having vision for accepting Witt’s collection ‘at the height of the Victorian period’ even though ‘they probably knew it wouldn’t be looked at properly for a long time’³³².

The BM’s Secretum was officially formed that same year, 1865. It combined the 434 objects in Witt’s collection with approximately 700 items that had previously been unofficially segregated and locked away in the keeper’s office. The formation of the Secretum can be said to be partially in response to Witt’s

³²⁹ Museum of Fine Arts Boston, “Artwork: Study of a Male Nude,” accessed May 18, 2015, <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/study-of-a-male-nude-31020>.

³³⁰ David M Wilson, *The British Museum : A History* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 166.

³³¹ Gaimster, “Sex & Sensibility at the British Museum” unpaginated.

³³² Lawrence Smith, “Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum” (Personal communication, 2014).

donation, but it is also likely to be in response to the Obscene Publications Act 1857, the intentions of which are echoed in Witt's desire to restrict access to the collection:

Naturally, provision was made for the protection of the morally suggestible. Witt insisted the collection be allotted a room where it could be viewed - for scholarly purposes - by men of an appropriate education and class.³³³

In March 1938, some 'phallic and kindred objects'³³⁴ from the Witt collection were transferred from the Secretum to their relevant cultural departments, including *netsuke* and votive wooden phalluses to Oriental Antiquities. The transfer was carried out by Sir Thomas Downing Kendrick (1895-1979), who became Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities in 1938, the department then responsible for the Secretum. What prompted this redistribution is unclear³³⁵, but a report Kendrick wrote for a Standing Committee meeting, July 1939, implies it was due to practical, curatorial reasons: 'with the Director's approval he had distributed among the Departments concerned, the antiquities not appropriate to his Department'³³⁶. 'Not appropriate' may be interpreted as referring to the phallic and sexual nature of items in Witt's collection. However, it seems more likely that Kendrick thought it inappropriate that Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Oriental artefacts were under the care of the British and Medieval Antiquities Department rather than, for instance, staff specialising in classical antiquities or Japanese art. This supposition seems to be borne out by an earlier report, dated May 1939, written by Kendrick (again in the third person), 'Only the western European antiquities in this collection now remain in Mr. Kendrick's charge'³³⁷. Since Kendrick did not try to relocate the items in the Witt collection that were relevant to his Department, presumably it was not their subject matter he objected to.

³³³ Thomas, "Restricted to Men of 'Taste and Education.'"

³³⁴ Thomas Downing Kendrick, "Report 6th May 1939" (British Museum Central Archive, 1939).

³³⁵ Perhaps it was instigated by Kendrick taking stock of the Department when he became Keeper.

³³⁶ Thomas Downing Kendrick, "Standing Committee Report 8th July 1939" (British Museum, Standing Committee Meeting, 1939), 7.

³³⁷ Kendrick, "Report 6th May 1939."

Despite these transfers, the Secretum, and notions of social and institutional censorship, remained largely intact. In 1948, researchers wishing to view items in the Secretum was required to submit a formal application to the Museum's Director (or Principal Librarian as the position was then titled) Sir Henry Ellis. But 1953 was the last year that items were deposited in the Secretum. There is no record of the Trustees discussing this issue, but from then on, any new sex art acquired went directly to the relevant department. It could be argued that the addition of Section 4, the 'public good defence', to the Obscene Publications Act in 1959 gave museums more flexibility and removed some of the impetus for institutional censorship. Indeed, in the 1960s most items from the Secretum were dispersed to relevant departments, put back in to their proper contexts. Another factor for this cultural change must have been the significant changes in social attitudes to sex in the 1960s, seen for example in the partial decriminalization of homosexual acts in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. Whether museums should reflect, or conversely lead, this kind of social change will be questioned as one facet of the issue of the role(s) of institutions in Chapters 6.1.

As discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to the status of art, institutions have authority and how an institution defines an item affects how visitors understand it. One of the basic ways in which museums categorise objects is by culture, not just by place of origin but as a product of a specific period and people within that place. This means an object is seen within a specific context and this contextualisation increases the chances of understanding how that object was viewed and functioned in its own time and place. It can also give insight into that particular culture. Offering insight and understanding of different cultures and historical periods is a fundamental aspect of museums. By segregating works based on the depiction of sexual acts or organs and by removing them from public knowledge, secret museums prevented any insight or understanding of such objects and their respective cultures being achieved.

Gaimster described the secret museum as a curatorial concept³³⁸. On the contrary, it was not a deliberate curatorial decision but a situation imposed upon museums (both staff and visitors) through a combination of legal, social

³³⁸ Gaimster, "Sex & Sensibility at the British Museum."

and religious expectations and pressures. Curators work to tell the stories of an object and its culture and era, but secret museums and informal institutional censorship did the opposite. By stripping items of their cultural and historical contexts, secret museums were responsible for the loss of several stories or layers of potential meaning from sexually explicit artefacts.

Secret museums denied the varied reasons for creating or collecting sex-related artefacts. In the Secretum talismanic Roman tintinabulum were kept alongside eighteenth-century Dutch condoms and Edo-period *shunga*. Whether official or a restricted cabinet in the Keeper's office, secret museums went against a basic principle of museums by grouping objects together regardless of their cultural and historical contexts. Preziosi and Farago claim that 'Any museological collection is, by definition, only made possible by dismembering another context and reassembling a new museological whole'³³⁹. Whilst collecting may remove items from their original context, in museums the contextual information is retained and shared. In contrast, secret museums not only removed but actively hindered the preservation or reconstruction of contextual knowledge.

3.2.4 Institutional collections of shunga in UK

In addition to the reasons given in the introduction to this chapter for choosing specific institutions as examples, there is a further motivation for focusing on the BM, and in such detail:

Until well into the twentieth century there were few professional archaeologists and even fewer art historians. Their specialities only gradually evolved as taught subjects in the universities; consequently, until the explosion of interest in them after the Second World War and the expansion of the number of universities, the 'experts at the British Museum' were the real professionals to whom many automatically turned for information.³⁴⁰

Even now, many institutions, art historians, and scholars still look to the British Museum, not only for information, but as an exemplar.

³³⁹ Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, "What Are Museums For?," in *Grasping the World : The Idea of the Museum*, ed. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2004), 5.

³⁴⁰ Wilson, *The British Museum : A History*, 10.

British Museum, London

The British Museum was established in 1753 based on Sir Hans Sloane's (1660-1753) collection of over 71,000 items and opened to the public in 1759. It was the first national public museum in the world, and had free admission for 'all studious and curious persons'³⁴¹. Despite parts of the collection being separated off to form new institutions (notably the Natural History Museum, 1880, and the British Library, 1973) the remaining BM collection now consists of over 8 million objects ranging from pre-historic to twentieth century and encompasses all cultures of the world.

There are over 22,000 Japanese items in the BM collection, including 4,500 paintings, 10,500 prints and 1,500 *ehon*³⁴². Japanese art and objects have been part of the BM since the beginning as Sloane had acquired Japanese materials collected by the German physician Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716)³⁴³. However, it was not until 1862 that there were further deliberate additions to the BM's Japanese holdings³⁴⁴ from items exhibited in the International Exhibition in London of that year, in which Franks had been involved. Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826-97) began working at the BM in 1851, and was Keeper of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography from 1866 to 1896. He displayed an interest in Oriental art, collected Japanese ceramics, *netsuke*, and *tsuba* (Japanese sword guards)³⁴⁵ and was responsible for the acquisition of the important Gowland Collection of early Japanese archaeological items³⁴⁶. Although it was fashionable to collect Japanese artefacts in the late nineteenth century, Smith lauds Franks as being more discriminating than the typical Japonisme enthusiast due to his detachment and eye for

³⁴¹ The British Museum, "History of the British Museum," accessed May 25, 2015, http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/the_museums_story/general_history.aspx.

³⁴² Lawrence Smith, "The New Japanese Galleries in the British Museum: A New Home for Rediscovered Collections," *Japan Forum* 2, no. 1 (1990): 80.

³⁴³ The British Museum, "History of the Collection: Asia," accessed May 24, 2015, http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/departments/asia/history_of_the_collection.aspx.

³⁴⁴ Lawrence Smith in A.W. Franks : *Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (London : Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1997), 263.

³⁴⁵ For more on Franks and his collecting see Caygill and Cherry, A.W. Franks : *Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*.

³⁴⁶ Wilson, *The British Museum : A History*, 171.

quality³⁴⁷. Smith also credits Franks with persuading the Trustees to acquire William Anderson's collection³⁴⁸ of over 3,000 Japanese (and some Chinese) paintings in 1881³⁴⁹.

In 1912, Oriental Prints and Drawings was created as a sub-Department of Prints and Drawings, where the poet and art historian Laurence Binyon (1869-1943) had been Assistant Keeper since 1893. Binyon worked at the BM for 40 years, was the first staff member to visit the Far East, including Japan³⁵⁰, and greatly expanded the Japanese prints and paintings collection. In 1916 he wrote a catalogue of the BM's Japanese prints. Writing on the 1842 edict 'against luxury and loose morals', which banned prints of actors and courtesans, Binyon notes 'Erotic prints were also forbidden'³⁵¹. Whilst Binyon was aware of *shunga* no erotic prints from the BM's collection are listed in the text or plates. In *Japanese Colour Prints* there is a small comment on 'erotic pictures' but the tone is surprisingly non-judgmental for the time: 'The fact that Utamaro designed a number of erotic pictures has no significance in relation to his morals, for every Ukiyoe artist from Moronobu onwards produced these'³⁵². Binyon's son-in-law, Basil Gray (1904-1989) started at the BM in 1928 and later took over responsibilities for *ukiyo-e* prints and Japanese paintings when he became the first Keeper of Oriental Antiquities (OA), 1946-1969. The Department of Oriental Antiquities & Ethnography was created in 1933³⁵³ and was further refined in 1946 when the two elements were divided into separate departments.

³⁴⁷ Smith in Caygill and Cherry, *A.W. Franks : Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, 262.

³⁴⁸ For which Anderson later wrote the catalogue - William Anderson, "Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of a Collection of Japanese and Chinese Paintings in the British Museum" (London : Longmans, 1886).

³⁴⁹ Smith in Caygill and Cherry, *A.W. Franks : Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, 269.

³⁵⁰ Wilson notes that Binyon was scheduled to visit Japan and China in 1914 but this did not take place until 1928 due to the First World War, Wilson, *The British Museum : A History*, 370 fn.170.

³⁵¹ Laurence Binyon, "A Catalogue of the Japanese & Chinese Woodcuts Preserved in the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum" (London : British Museum, 1916), xxvi.

³⁵² Laurence Binyon and John Joseph O'Brien Sexton, *Japanese Colour Prints*, ed. Basil Gray, 2nd ed. (Faber, 1960), 123, originally published 1923.

³⁵³ There had briefly been a Department of Oriental Antiquities created in 1860, but, in 1866, it was subsumed into British & Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography. In 1921, BMAE was divided into British & Mediaeval Antiquities and Ceramics & Ethnography, the latter of which became Oriental Antiquities & Ethnography in 1933. See Wilson, *The British Museum : A History* for more on these and other departmental changes.

After the Second World War, feelings of unease lingered towards Japan and, by extension, Japanese art and culture. For this reason, it was not until the late 1950s/early 1960s, in particular due to Hillier's publications and Gray's 'persistence'³⁵⁴, that Japanese art began to become popular and an appropriate area for study and acquisition once more. The first Japanese specialist, David Waterhouse (b.1936) was appointed in OA as an Assistant Keeper (class II) in 1960. Previously, staff members across different departments were responsible for Japanese ceramics, paintings and prints, archaeology and so on separately. Furthermore, staff in OA were expected to cover a vast area encompassing India, Asia, and 'the Middle East'. For example, Binyon also specialised in Persian and Indian miniatures and Gray was a connoisseur of Chinese, Islamic, and Indian art. In 1964, Waterhouse curated an exhibition on Harunobu, notable as the first Japanese special exhibition since *The Work of Hokusai*, curated by Gray, in 1948.

Lawrence Smith (b. 1941) worked at the BM from 1962 until he retired in 1997. He began in the Department of Manuscripts but moved to Oriental Antiquities in 1965, where he became Keeper in 1977. In 1987, a new department of Japanese Antiquities (JA) was created, splitting off from OA when fundraising for a new gallery specifically for Japanese art and antiquities began³⁵⁵. Smith was the first Keeper of JA (later Senior Keeper) in 1987, with Jessica Rawson becoming Keeper of OA³⁵⁶. Having worked at the BM for 35 years, Smith experienced first-hand the changes in attitudes towards Japanese art, visible in the refining of the departments, and in how sexually explicit works were dealt with. In a personal interview, Smith gave insight into the negative attitudes towards sexually related material that existed in the Manuscripts Department in the early 1960s, and which had likely been the norm across the BM for decades:

a surprisingly high proportion of them [staff in Manuscripts Department] were religious, Christian, very high church or Catholic...and they were very excitable about sexual matters...They'd recently received and had to index the Marie Stopes papers. Marie Stopes was a pioneer of women's liberation, sexually speaking,

³⁵⁴ Smith, "The New Japanese Galleries in the British Museum," 79.

³⁵⁵ The Japanese Galleries opened in 1990 and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

³⁵⁶ This is noteworthy as it was the first time a woman was appointed Keeper at the BM, Wilson, *The British Museum : A History*, 299.

particularly contraception. ...some of them were very upset about her in the Manuscripts Department, they would refer to her as 'that woman'. ...what they really tried to blame her for was implying that women could get any pleasure from sex.³⁵⁷

Smith's example encapsulates the underlying attitudes of the time and these views were paralleled in curatorial practice in the Department of Printed Books, which had its own equivalent of the Secretum, the Private Case³⁵⁸. Anything of a sexual nature was automatically put in the Private Case, which was not dispersed until the late 1980s. Smith notes that the older generation of staff 'thought anyone who wanted to see them was a pervert'³⁵⁹. It is clear that from the beginning of his career Smith was aware of issues of judgement and censorship relating to works of a sexual nature.

In 1965, when Smith transferred to the Department of Oriental Antiquities, '*shunga* of high artistic quality' had been segregated from other *ukiyo-e* into two locked drawers³⁶⁰. As in the Manuscripts department, although there was never anything formalised in writing, it was expected that staff would continue to segregate such works and to restrict access to them. Researchers or anyone else wishing to view *shunga* had to obtain special permission by submitting a letter to the Keeper citing reasons for the request. An article in *New Society* magazine in 1964 describes the experience of a journalist and two friends, a painter and a novelist, who after hearing rumours applied to see *shunga*:

We concocted a letter which, while not revealing our true motive (which was simply to see the damn things), contrived to hint at our high artistic and scholarly motivation.³⁶¹

Their reasons were accepted and MacInnes describes how they were taken to a distant basement room to view the works, 'a high chill vault that would sterilize any sensual impulse'³⁶². This is unusual as the BM has a study room for

³⁵⁷ Smith, "Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum."

³⁵⁸ For an account of the Private Case see Peter Fryer, *Private Case, Public Scandal: Secrets of the British Museum Revealed* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966)..

³⁵⁹ Smith, "Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum."

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Most of the Oriental paintings (except screens or other works which were too large) were also kept in locked drawers in the same corridor.

³⁶¹ Colin MacInnes, "Out of the Way: Straight Sex at the BM," *New Society*, November 1964, 26, original emphasis.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

researchers to view items from the collection. Smith confirms that *shunga* were treated atypically, 'At that time they were never shown in the general students' room, if you showed them to someone you had to go somewhere else'³⁶³. This distinction reinforced the notion that sexually explicit art was something to be hidden away. Gray, who had been Keeper of OA until 1969, and his successor Douglas Barrett (1917-1992), both of whom were described by Smith as being broad-minded for their generation, left the task of deciding who was permitted to view *shunga* to Smith's judgement. Although it was left to Smith's discretion, he thought it prudent to inform the Keeper if he was going to show *shunga* to anyone. Reminiscent of attitudes to Private Case visitors, Barrett referred to those who came to view *shunga* as 'dirty dicks', albeit in a slightly tongue-in-cheek manner³⁶⁴.

Smith explained that the only criterion for putting works into the separate drawers was 'any depiction of genitalia'³⁶⁵. This included masterpieces such as Kiyonaga's *Sode no Maki*, Utamaro's *Utamakura* (Figure 54), and a seventeenth-century painted handscroll. Unfortunately, none of the *shunga* works had been officially acquisitioned so there was no record of when they entered the collection or from whom they were purchased or received. Smith points out that, due to a lack of records, the security and conservation of *shunga* could be problematic. Firstly, they could have been stolen and nobody would be aware. Secondly, their condition had not been properly monitored; 'the *Uta no makura* was in really poor condition and *Sode no maki* was all screwed up'³⁶⁶.

Smith concedes the possibility that some of the *shunga* prints were actively purchased by previous Keepers. However, he suggests it is more likely that explicit works were put aside by Binyon, whom he praised as 'a great connoisseur of *ukiyo-e* prints', or even possibly some of his predecessors, because the works were 'all clearly picked for their quality as works of art'³⁶⁷. For this reason, Smith rules out the possibility that they came from Witt, as he tended to collect three-dimensional objects and for documentary purposes. On

³⁶³ Smith, "Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum."

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

the other hand, it is plausible that some may have come from accessions of large art collections such as Morrison's. In total 2, 649 objects (the majority of which are Japanese) are registered as coming from the British author and collector Arthur Morrison (1863-1945), including prints bought by the Museum in 1906, the collection of Japanese and Chinese painting bought from Morrison and donated by William Gwynne-Evans in 1913, and others bequeathed in 1946 after his death.

As a younger generation of scholars and art historians rose to higher positions, replacing more conservative members of staff, a shift in attitudes towards erotic materials began. Smith recalls that prints donated by Kelly (including Figure 8, Figure 43, Figure 61 and Figure 73) were the first *shunga* in the BM to be officially accessioned and numbered³⁶⁸. In 1972, Lady Kelly, wife of artist and former president of the Royal Academy (RA) Sir Gerald Festus Kelly (1879-1972), donated 'six *Ehon* (block-printed books), two made-up albums, and 11 separate sheets'³⁶⁹ belonging to him to the BM. The *shunga* prints had originally been collected by the American artist John Singer Sargent (1856-1925). They were then passed on to the artists Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942) and John Wheatley (1892-1955) in turn, before being left to Kelly. When Kelly died, his wife was less than pleased by the 'dirty pictures' in his collection and was relieved that the BM took them off her hands³⁷⁰. The works were in very good condition and of such high quality that Smith felt he had to register them and, in doing so, he ensured they could not be lost or stolen without trace and that they would be monitored for conservation. This is significant as it was the first time in the BM that a curator created records for *shunga* and treated it as they would any other *ukiyo-e* or work of Japanese art.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 22 July 1972" (British Museum, Board of Trustees Meeting, 1972), 1306.

³⁷⁰ Smith, "Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum."



Figure 43 Isoda Koryūsai, untitled, 1772-1774, colour woodblock print, British Museum. This is one of the works donated by Kelly, it depicts a *kamuro* (child attendant) spying on a courtesan having sex with either a client or, more likely, her secret lover.

In 1974 the pre-existing *shunga* in the collection (over 95 items³⁷¹) were registered, as were with any other un-numbered items, due to a Museum-wide audit instigated by the government. For most of the *shunga* registered in 1974 there is no provenance information. However, a late seventeenth-century handscroll by Hishikawa Morohira is tantalisingly noted as being from the collection of Fukui, but no further details are given. Fukui Rikichiro (福井利吉郎) (1886-1972) was a Japanese professor of art history, specialising in Japanese and Chinese painting, notably Buddhist art and the Rinpa School, at Tohoku Imperial University from 1924 until he retired in 1946³⁷².

³⁷¹ Objects which had no accession number and could not be traced to an entry in the register were assigned new 'temporary' numbers. For Oriental Antiquities these begin with OA+.

³⁷² Tohoku University, "History of the Department of Eastern and Japanese Art History," 2008, http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/art/tounichibi%28Eng%29/e_f_ayumi.html.

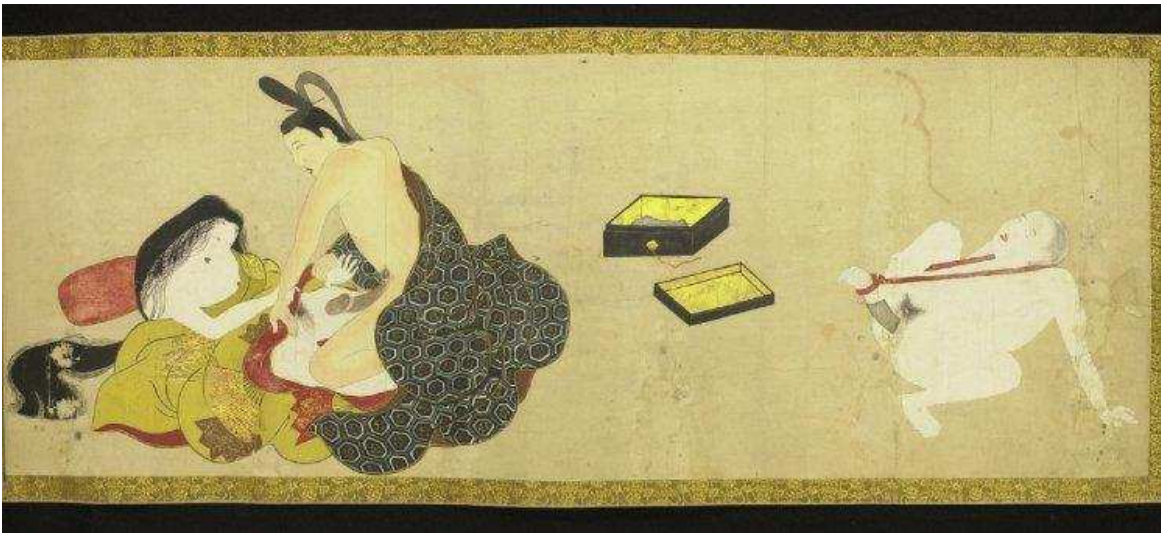


Figure 44 unidentified *Ukiyo-e* School artist, untitled *shunga* painting, 1651-1700, handscroll, ink, colours, and gold on paper, British Museum. The opening section of the scroll, which has ten scenes, shows a nun masturbating and a nobleman with a female partner.

For Smith, the acquisition of a seventeenth-century *shunga* scroll (Figure 44) from Lane in March 1980 was a ‘watershed’ for the BM in the institutional acceptability of erotic art. By his recollection, this was the first deliberate purchase of *shunga* by the BM. Due to the price, it had to be authorised by the Board of Trustees. Smith credits the director David Wilson, as being ‘forward looking’ in supporting the purchase of a work which, although important art historically, could not be exhibited in the foreseeable future³⁷³. Minutes from the Board of Trustees meeting note that the purchase was sanctioned and include an excerpt from Smith’s report, which gives several reasons in addition to artistic quality why the purchase would be beneficial for the Museum:

The Museum possessed a fine collection of Japanese erotic prints...By contrast the Museum had very few paintings...Erotic paintings had one great advantage in the field of Ukiyoe in that they tended to remain hidden away and not to be copied or duplicated. They thus formed a valuable body of dependable work by which to judge the standards of the paintings of the period.³⁷⁴

That Smith, Wilson, and the Trustees considered the scroll in terms of how it would help enhance and complement the Museum’s existing *ukiyo-e* and *shunga*

³⁷³ Smith, “Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum.”

³⁷⁴ Smith in Trustees of the British Museum, “Minutes from Saturday 22 March 1980” (British Museum, Board of Trustees Meeting, 1980), 2945.

collection, rather than its explicit content, demonstrates that *shunga* were now being taken seriously as art.

Actually, although this was an important turning point in institutional collecting of sex art at the BM, there had been a few purchases of *shunga* slightly prior to this, as well as another handscroll, attributed to Katsukawa Shun'ei, purchased in March 1980, from the dealer Robert G Sawers. In 1979, a number of *shunpon* volumes were included in the purchase of Jack Hillier's illustrated book collection, but they only accounted for a small fraction of the 525 *ehon*. More significantly, in 1978, a scroll (Figure 45), likely a fragment of a larger work, by Utagawa Toyoharu (1735-1814), founder of the Utagawa School, was bought from Milne Henderson Fine Art. Museum records show that the purchase had to be approved by Wilson, the Director, but this was due to its price bracket rather than its explicit content. Unlike the *shunga* scroll purchased in 1980, the Toyoharu painting was not expensive enough to necessitate the involvement of the Trustees.



Figure 45 Utagawa Toyoharu, untitled *shunga* painting, c.1789-1801, ink and colour on silk scroll, British Museum. The fragment of a scroll, which is burnt at the edges, depicts the rape of two maids by three workmen.

The scroll was later included in the book *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, where its unpalatable subject matter is openly addressed by Clark: 'No matter how impressed we are by Toyoharu's sure grasp of the human form and the freshness of his colouring, there is no avoiding that this is a scene of rape,

and violent rape at that'³⁷⁵. Although Clark emphasises that such scenes of coercion are rare, he does not downplay or shy away from the subject; instead, he describes and interprets the scene in the same manner as other *ukiyo-e* paintings in the book.

In 1989, 103 *shunga* prints and illustrated books were accessioned and, following the convention from the 1974 audit, given OA+ numbers. These works are probably from the remnants of the Secretum, or possibly a forgotten locked drawer. Like the 1974 group, they had no records despite being in the BM collection for some time. A further seven *shunga* works were accessioned in the same manner in 1990. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s *shunga* continued to be sporadically purchased, with acquisitions of *shunga* increasing to an average of one a year between 2003 and the 2013 exhibition. Smith notes that in 1990 there were about 500 *shunga* items in the BM collection³⁷⁶. In 2003, Japanese Antiquities and what remained of OA merged and was renamed the Asia Department. There are currently four permanent Japanese specialists in the Asia Department plus one visiting researcher. Clark, who began in JA in 1987, is Head of the Japanese Section, which contains 30,000 objects.

A further significant sign of progress in the collection history of sex art at the BM is the purchase of the Warren Cup (Figure 32) in 1999. It would previously have been unthinkable for any public institution to spend £1.8 million acquiring an item showing male-male sexual intercourse, despite it being a masterpiece of exceptional quality and an important example of ancient Roman art³⁷⁷. As noted in Chapter 2, attempts to sell the Cup in the 1950s and 1960s to museums (the Met and the Fitzwilliam) were unsuccessful. However, Dyfri Williams (b.1952), who was Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities from 1993 until 2007, in a Purchase Recommendation Report to the BM Trustees gave a persuasive rationale, in addition to the rarity and artistic merit of the Cup:

³⁷⁵ Timothy Clark, *Ukiyo-E Paintings in the British Museum* (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1992), 108-109.

³⁷⁶ Smith, "The New Japanese Galleries in the British Museum: A New Home for Rediscovered Collections," 84.

³⁷⁷ For more information see Dyfri Williams, *The Warren Cup* (London: The British Museum Press, 2006).

The open nature of the homoerotic scenes has for many years condemned the piece to an obscure notoriety. Now, however, at a time when society is itself becoming less prejudiced and when scholarship is also showing a greater willingness to put aside later cultural perspectives and to allow the ancient Romans their own sexuality, the Warren cup can find its rightful place in the study and appreciation of early Roman silver. That place should be in the British Museum.³⁷⁸

The Cup as a vehicle for discussing sexuality, both Roman and modern, will be considered in Chapter 4.

That such progress has been made is not only due to curators but also the directors and Trustees who supported the purchase and display of sex-related objects over the years. The dispersal of the Private Case and the Secretum, and the lessening of access restrictions to items formerly in those secret museums are also indicative of the increasingly tolerant attitude of directors and Trustees. Since Neil MacGregor (b.1946) took over as Director from Robert Anderson in 2002, the BM's image and reputation as an institution have greatly improved.

V&A, London

The V&A began as the Museum of Manufactures, London, established in 1852, which became the South Kensington Museum in 1857. The Museum, irrespective of its name, was founded to continue Henry Cole's intention to advance design that began with the Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace in 1851, the profits of which helped fund the building of the Museum. In 1899 it was renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in recognition of Prince Albert's involvement in the Great Exhibition, and a foundation stone was laid for the new building by Queen Victoria. The aims of the V&A were, and continue to be, to promote the practice of art and design and 'to make works of art available to all, to educate working people and to inspire British designers and manufacturers'³⁷⁹. For this reason, the collections span a wide range of media including metalwork, ceramics, furniture, textiles, and sculpture as well as

³⁷⁸ Williams quoted in Trustees of the British Museum, "Minutes from 11 July 1998."

³⁷⁹ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "A Brief History of the Museum," accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/a-brief-history-of-the-museum/>.

paintings and prints. As of 2015, the V&A has 1,197,637 museum objects and works of art³⁸⁰ from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and America, covering over 2,000 years right up to the twenty-first century.

From the beginning, even before the craze for Japonisme swept Europe, the V&A collected Japanese objects, initially from International Exhibitions and in later decades from dealers such as Bing, Liberty's, and Christopher Dresser³⁸¹. In the 1860s, the V&A received Japanese porcelain, lacquerware, metalwork, and other items which had been gifted to Queen Victoria³⁸². There are currently more than 48,500 Japanese items in the collection³⁸³, with over 25,000 of those being *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints³⁸⁴, books, and paintings. Interestingly, almost half of the *ukiyo-e* came from a single purchase: in 1886 the V&A bought around 12,000 prints and several hundred woodblock printed books from the London dealer S. M. Franck & Co., who, until 1943, imported a wide range of Near and Far Eastern art objects³⁸⁵. Another significant portion came in 1916, when 6,000 prints from the collection of the banker William Cleverly Alexander (1840-1916) were donated by his daughters, the Misses Alexander³⁸⁶.

³⁸⁰ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Size of the V&A Collections," 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/size-of-the-v-and-a-collections/>.

³⁸¹ Gregory Irvine, "Collecting Japanese Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Arts of Asia* 39, no. 4 (2009): 76.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁸³ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "V&A Collections Development Policy," 2015.

³⁸⁴ Rupert Faulkner and B. W. Robinson, *Masterpieces of Japanese Prints : The European Collections : Ukiyo-E from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Richard Lane and Muneshige Narazaki (London : Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991), 24.

³⁸⁵ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "S. M. Franck & Co. Ltd.," accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/s.-m.-franck-and-co.-ltd.>

³⁸⁶ Irvine, "Collecting Japanese Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum," 79.



Figure 46 unidentified artist, untitled, c.1830-1900, ink, gold and colours on silk, Victoria and Albert Museum. Each layer of the couple's kimono is intricately patterned and the screen behind, with landscape paintings and calligraphy, is adorned with gold making this a sumptuous scene and demonstrating the artist's eye for detail.

Initially, the department of the V&A responsible for Japanese prints was the National Art Library, where Lt. Col. Edward Fairbrother Strange (1862-1929) worked from 1889 to 1900. Strange was the first curator with knowledge of, and a strong interest in, Japanese material culture. Although he moved to be Keeper of Engravings, Illustrations and Drawings (EID) (1900-1914) and then of Woodwork and Furniture (1914-1925), Strange continued to expand, and write about, the V&A's *ukiyo-e* and lacquerware collections throughout his career. Strange published on Japanese prints as early as 1897 (with several updated versions throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century), but there is no mention of *shunga*, not even in the section covering common *ukiyo-e* subjects³⁸⁷. Furthermore, *shunga* did not enter the V&A's collection until 1922, with the acquisition of seven albums³⁸⁸ of explicit paintings from F L Lowe via the Art Fund (Figure 46 and Figure 47).

³⁸⁷ Edward Fairbrother Strange, *Japanese Illustration: A History of the Arts of Wood-Cutting and Colour Printing in Japan* (London: G. Bell, 1897).

³⁸⁸ Each album has between 5 and 16 images, with most having the usual 12 scenes.

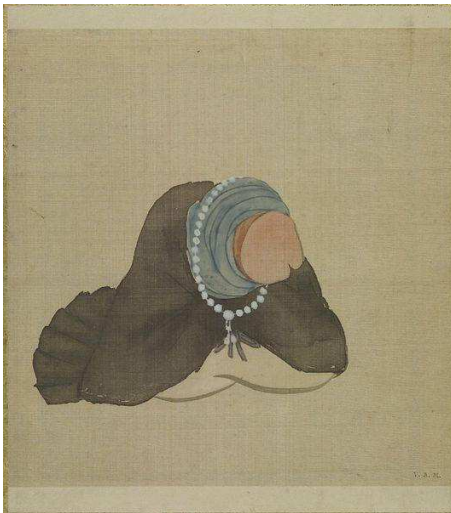


Figure 47 unidentified artist, untitled, ink and colours on paper(?), Victoria and Albert Museum. In contrast to the aesthetic feast of Figure 46 above, the images in this album have a humorous focus, and this penis dressed as a priest would have been particularly difficult to describe in 1922.

A note from 1922 from Martin Hardie (1875-1952), Keeper of EID, to the Director, Cecil Harcourt-Smith (1859-1944), shows that he treated the painted albums (referred to as drawings) as art:

though the nature subject matter of the drawings makes it impossible for them to be made available for general use, their fine quality of draughtsmanship and design, and the fact they came through the N. A. C. F., should cause us to accept them for our collections.³⁸⁹

Hardie may have been guided by the National Art Collections Fund's (NACF) acceptance of *shunga* as art, but it is noteworthy that, even in an internal letter, he has not used any of the negative or judgemental terms (erotic, pornographic, obscene) which are usually applied to *shunga* in the early twentieth century³⁹⁰. Rather than employing negative or euphemistic terms to describe the contents of the albums, Hardie avoids this dilemma altogether. In a letter to the NACF, he suggests 'in your annual report and in our own Catalogue the gift should be described merely as "Seven albums of Japanese drawings"'³⁹¹. Indeed, in various V&A documents that is how they are recorded, with one list

³⁸⁹ Martin Hardie, "Letter Drafts from Martin Hardie Dated 4th May 1922" (V&A Nominal File MA/1/N102, 1922).

³⁹⁰ However, in the margins someone has stamped 'noted for precedents', with a hand-written note underneath, 'Indexed under obscene objects'.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

even having the additional caution ‘These should be referred to in the briefest terms’³⁹².

As this was the V&A’s first acquisition of *shunga*, Hardie looked to the BM and seems to have used the Secretum as a guide:

It was agreed that, owing to the nature of the subjects, the drawings must be kept under lock & key, and shown only to the serious student of Japanese art and sociology, on special application to the officer in charge of the Dept. (I understand that the B. M. has similar Japanese drawings received there under the same conditions.)³⁹³

In 1931, the Museum was offered another group of *shunga* prints from a private collector, Mr R. R. Bowles. Once again, ‘*shunga*’, ‘erotic’, ‘obscene’ or other related terms are not used to describe the prints. There is no mention of the sexually explicit content of the prints, but it can be inferred from a letter written by an unnamed EID staff member (probably Hardie who was still Keeper) to Bowles:

With reference to the volume of prints which you were good enough to bring this morning, I have discussed with my Director the proposed gift of this for inclusion in our collections. We already have several similar volumes, which are kept locked up in our safe, with a notice that they are to be issued only to serious students of Japanese Ethnography and Art at the discretion of the Keeper of the Department and with his personal authority. These volumes are not entered in our public catalogue. We should be glad to accept this volume which is now so generously offered if it may be kept by us under precisely the same conditions as the similar works which we have already.³⁹⁴

Since, like other institutions, the V&A had no official policy about sex art, this archival document, along with those from the Lowe acquisition, give unprecedented insight into the V&A’s curatorial practices in the 1920s and 1930s. The Director who approved the Bowles acquisition was the art historian Sir Eric Maclagan (1879-1951). Maclagan is best known for his scholarship on

³⁹² The Victoria & Albert Museum, “List of 1922 Accessions” (V&A Nominal File MA/1/N102, 1922).

³⁹³ Hardie, “Letter Drafts from Martin Hardie Dated 4th May 1922.”

³⁹⁴ The Victoria & Albert Museum, “Letter Dated 26 Feb 1931” (V&A Nominal File MA/1/B2095, 1931).

Italian sculpture and the Bayeux Tapestry. He also wrote a short catalogue of Rodin's sculpture (1914), which includes images of several nudes as well as the more suggestive Cupid and Psyche, who are naked and holding each other in an intimate embrace³⁹⁵. It is possible that Maclagan was more accepting of *shunga* than others of his generation because he was already familiar with nude/erotic sculpture.

Albert James Koop (1877-1945), who began working at the V&A in 1900, was a colleague of Strange and shared his enthusiasm for Japanese art. Although he helped to update Strange's books on *ukiyo-e*, Koop was more interested in metalwork than prints, becoming Keeper of Metalwork in 1935. Therefore, it was not until Basil William Robinson (1912-2005), who started at the V&A in 1939, that the Japanese print collection developed further. His books on Japanese swords in 1955 and 1961 and on Kuniyoshi³⁹⁶ are highly regarded and they have become key texts in those fields. Like Binyon, Robinson was also a specialist in Persian miniatures. From 1966 to 1972, he was Keeper of Metalwork, which seems to have housed a sizeable number of Middle Eastern and Asian three-dimensional objects. Faulkner notes that until the 1970s the Word and Image Department 'looked after our East Asian material'³⁹⁷. Japanese prints, books, and paintings were transferred to the Far Eastern Section of the Oriental Department, created in 1972 by Director John Pope-Hennessy, of which Robinson was Keeper Emeritus.

There is little available information on Far Eastern staff member Robin A. Crichton, other than he worked at the V&A in the early 1970s³⁹⁸. Crichton, under Robinson and with assistance from Hillier, organised a large-scale *ukiyo-e* exhibition in 1973. *The Floating World* exhibition will be discussed in Chapter 4, but is worth mentioning here for two reasons. Firstly, it is the most recent special exhibition of Japanese prints by the V&A, although this is not deliberate

³⁹⁵ Eric Robert Dalrymple Maclagan, "Catalogue of Sculpture by Auguste Rodin" (London : H.M.S.O., 1914).

³⁹⁶ B. W. (Basil William) Robinson, *Kuniyoshi* (London: H.M.S.O., 1961); B. W. (Basil William) Robinson, "Kuniyoshi : The Warrior-Prints / B.W. Robinson." (Oxford : Phaidon Press, 1982).

³⁹⁷ Rupert Faulkner, "V&A Shunga Exhibition History" (Personal communication, 2014).

³⁹⁸ Snippets of information suggest that by 1975 Crichton had left the V&A and was working at the Fitzwilliam, Cambridge. At some point he was curator of the Korean collection, and possibly Keeper of Applied Art. It seems that by 1997 he was Assistant Director and by 2004 he had retired.

but rather due to a lack of opportunity³⁹⁹. Joe Earle (b.1952) worked in the Far Eastern Department from 1974 until 1987, and was Keeper from 1983. Earle is largely responsible for the creation of the permanent, dedicated display space, the Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art and Design, which opened in 1986. This gallery displays Japanese items from across the breadth of the Museum's collection, which at times includes a small number of prints. Secondly, and more significantly, a selection of *shunga* was included in the 1973 exhibition. This was the first time *shunga* had been publically displayed in the UK and was a huge step forward, in terms of moving away from the previous institutional censorship.

Although Robinson continued to work on *ukiyo-e* until he retired in 1976, 'No further acquisitions [of Japanese prints] have been made since 1969'⁴⁰⁰. Why this is the case is curious, but the V&A had already amassed an extensive *ukiyo-e* collection by then so perhaps the Museum felt that Edo-period art was sufficiently represented. A further possible reason is that contemporary Japanese crafts became the focus of an active collecting program, in the late 1980s⁴⁰¹, with historical items, such as *ukiyo-e*, fitting better with the BM's collection policy. At times the V&A and the BM have been able to reach informal agreements and work with one another to avoid direct competition for objects⁴⁰² and to ensure a broad range of items are collected across the national institutions. As the V&A website states:

The V&A's particular strengths lie in the decorative arts and design history, complementing the archaeological focus and numismatic strengths of the British Museum, and the British Library's focus on manuscripts and the printed book. There is considerable consultation with other institutions in London and throughout the UK, as we continue to build our collections with a national framework in mind.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Faulkner and Robinson, *Masterpieces of Japanese Prints: The European Collections: Ukiyo-E from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 24.

⁴⁰¹ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Japan," accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/j/japan/>.

⁴⁰² For example see Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, 9-10.

⁴⁰³ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Asian Department," accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/asian-department/>.

Some overlap between the two institutions was inevitable, and this is acknowledged even by those who repeat the long-standing claim that the V&A collected ‘art (for the education of artists and craftsmen)’ and the BM collected ‘archaeology or history (for the satisfaction of collectors and antiquaries)’⁴⁰⁴. Theoretically, and in intention, this may have been the case but in reality the collecting practices of both institutions was more nuanced and the lines less distinct.



Figure 48 Katsukawa Shunchō, untitled, 1785, colour woodblock print, Victoria and Albert Museum. One of the prints deemed ‘of a pornographic nature’ from the collection of Horn.

One potential drawback of *ukiyo-e* acquisitions ceasing in 1969 is that *shunga* did not tend to be actively purchased until the 1980s onwards. Luckily, the V&A were ahead of the times when it came to acquiring sex art and by 1969 had collected 196 *shunga* images⁴⁰⁵ through both active and passive acquisitions. In 1954, the V&A acquired 97 *shunga* works (including Figure 48) from the collector Marmaduke Langdale Horn (1889-1953). Between 1923 and 1946 Horn had already donated various items including silverware, sculpture, and drawings. He also bequeathed other Japanese prints, which the Museum received in 1953 after his death. Nevertheless, there was some confusion over the legal rights to the *shunga* prints. Horn’s will listed Japanese prints amongst the art that was to go

⁴⁰⁴ Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident : The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London : V&A Publications, 1999), 100.

⁴⁰⁵ Here an image is counted as a page from an album, book or a print, because many series, books and albums have been separated out into individual images and each image has been assigned an acquisition number by the V&A.

to the V&A, but he had left a letter stating that ‘a number of Japanese coloured prints’ were to be given to the British Museum. Horn’s executors wrote to the V&A to clarify the matter and offered their unsolicited opinion that ‘these prints are of a pornographic nature and would be in no way suitable for public display’⁴⁰⁶. The Director’s response to this statement, in an internal memo, was a spirited questioning of the term ‘pornographic’:

Well, if they’re the great pornographic prints (soidisant [so-called]) of Utamaro, Harunobu etc. they are among the most exquisite of all engravings. It depends what the “correct” solicitors mean by pornographic. *Nothing is less pornographic or less corruptive than a plain nude, nothing more pornographic than a nude suggestively disguised.* I suppose I must in my Episcopal self see them.⁴⁰⁷

The immediacy of Ashton’s reaction is apparent as he scrawled this response directly on the back of the solicitors’ letter. Before becoming Director, Sir Leigh Ashton (1897-1983) had worked in various departments including Architecture and Sculpture, Textiles, and Ceramics and he co-wrote books with Basil Gray on art from China, 1935, and India and Pakistan, 1950. It is tempting to speculate that Ashton was familiar with *shunga* due to his association with Gray. Furthermore, China and India both have traditions of sex art so it is also plausible that Ashton may have seen examples of these. Alternatively, he may have seen the *shunga* already in the V&A’s collection. Whatever the reasons, Ashton’s praise of *shunga* is a positive and progressive view for the 1950s. Ashton and Robinson accepted the prints after viewing them and they went to the EID Department.

Despite Ashton’s opinions about *shunga*, in terms of institutional collecting, similar issues arose as in 1931. In an internal memo, Miss E.A. Audsley, in EID, seeks the opinion of Terence Hodgkinson (Assistant to the Director) about the registration of Horn’s prints: ‘They went immediately under lock and key and I was just asked to allocate 97 numbers for them. The difficulty is that if they are

⁴⁰⁶ Collyer Bristow & Co., “M. L. Horn Deceased, Dated 10th Dec 1953” (V&A Nominal File MA/1/H2799, 1953).

⁴⁰⁷ Leigh Ashton, “Handwritten Internal Memo, Dated 14th December 1953” (V&A Nominal File MA/1/H2799, 1953), emphasis added.

numbered something must go down in the register about them'⁴⁰⁸. From this statement, it seems that little has changed since the safe was set up in the EID Keeper's office in 1922. The prints were entered in the day book and registered, but unlike the previous lot of *ukiyo-e* from Horn, which were individually listed with their artist, a title or description, date and format, there was only a single, brief entry on the form: 'Japanese prints (97) in portfolio Erotic subjects'. Even in 1962, caution was still being exercised as a memo notes that Graham Reynolds, Keeper of EID (1959-1974)⁴⁰⁹, believed the erotic prints 'should not be included in the printed Accessions list or put into the Catalogue of Japanese Prints'⁴¹⁰. Nevertheless, Robinson must have studied the Horn *shunga* by then as he created a list of the prints by artist, although he did not include descriptions as he had for other accessioned *ukiyo-e*. The fact that the word 'erotic' is used to describe the prints is also a step forward, as previously staff were careful to avoid recording the subject of *shunga* in any documentation.

By 1968, Reynolds' attitude toward *shunga* seems to have changed, perhaps due to the increasingly liberal shift in society in the 1960s, as he purchased six *shunga* prints from Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. This was the first, and sadly last, deliberate acquisition of *shunga* by the V&A. Perhaps Reynolds was swayed by the fact that these prints are by renowned *ukiyo-e* artists Utamaro, Harunobu (two), Koryūsai, Kiyonaga (Figure 49), and Shunchō.

⁴⁰⁸ Miss Audsley, "Internal Memo Dated 11th February 1954" (V&A Nominal File MA/1/H2799, 1954).

⁴⁰⁹ In 1961 EID became Department of Paintings and Department of Prints & Drawings (P&D), with Reynolds remaining Keeper.

⁴¹⁰ Y.B., "Memo Dated 11 Sept 1962" (V&A Nominal File MA/1/H2799, 1962).



Figure 49 Torii Kiyonaga, scene from *Shikidō jūniban* (*Twelve Scenes of the Art of Eros*), 1784, colour woodblock print, Victoria and Albert Museum

For the first time in the V&A, *shunga* prints are, like other *ukiyo-e*, listed individually by artist on the documentation, although there is no reference to their sexual content⁴¹¹. In addition, a memo from Reynolds instructs that the prints should be put in the safe in Ward-Jacksons' office⁴¹². Peter Ward-Jackson (1915-2015), who began at the V&A in 1948, was Deputy Keeper in Prints & Drawings (P&D) from 1963 until he retired in 1976. It is unclear why the safe would be in the Deputy Keeper's office rather than the Keeper's. Regardless of its precise location, the safe was still in operation several decades later, as Rupert Faulkner (b.1955) recalls, 'when I started working at the V&A in 1984, all the erotic East Asian material we had was kept in a large safe in the Keeper's office separately from all our other graphic material'⁴¹³. Faulkner, now a Senior Curator in the Asian Department, began in the Far Eastern Department.

The Asian Department was formed in 2001 and consists of the Indian, East Asian, South-East Asian, and Middle Eastern collections⁴¹⁴. At present there are five staff members in the Asian Department who specialise in Japanese fields, with Japanese prints as well as ceramics and contemporary crafts being Faulkner's

⁴¹¹ Graham Reynolds, "V&A Purchase Slip Dated 16th May 1968" (V&A Nominal File MA/1/K185, 1968).

⁴¹² Graham Reynolds, "Memo on Purchase from Kegan Paul Dated 15th May 1968" (V&A Nominal File MA/1/K185, 1968).

⁴¹³ Faulkner, "V&A Shunga Exhibition History."

⁴¹⁴ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Asian Department."

areas of interest. He is unsure when the collection of prints in the safe was dispersed⁴¹⁵. Perhaps it fell out of use when the departments merged. Alternatively, the safe may have stopped being used earlier, in the late 1990s when *shunga* research increased and awareness of it grew. It may not be possible to ascertain an end date, because the safe was an informal practice rather than an official secret museum and little has been recorded about it.

3.3 Institutional collecting in Japan

Whilst museums may be, in the words of Preziosi and Farago, a ‘European invention’⁴¹⁶ they were quickly adopted in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century. This is not surprising given that Japan had its own history of collecting (privately and in temples) and exhibiting (*misemono*, for instance). For further information on these issues, articles by Peter Kornicki and Angus Lockyer provide a history of pre-museum collecting and displays, as well as the integration of the European conceptions of ‘art’ (*bijutsu*) and ‘museum’ (*hakubutsukan*), in Japan⁴¹⁷. Additionally, a recent article by Patricia Huang discusses the impact of the South Kensington Museum on the formation of museums and their collecting practices in Meiji-era Japan, in particular on TNM. She touches upon related issues of interest such as the link between museum collections and the formation of national identity, and the educational role of museums⁴¹⁸. An insight into cross-cultural perspectives on museums and collecting is offered by Christina Kreps, who draws on an array of examples including practices from China, India, Oceania, and indigenous peoples in North America⁴¹⁹.

⁴¹⁵ Faulkner, “V&A Shunga Exhibition History.”

⁴¹⁶ Preziosi and Farago, “What Are Museums For?,” 5.

⁴¹⁷ Peter Kornicki, “Public Display and Changing Values: Early Meiji Exhibitions and Their Precursors,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 49, no. 2 (1994): 167-96; Angus Lockyer, “National Museums and Other Cultures in Modern Japan,” in *Museums and Difference*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 97-123.

⁴¹⁸ Patricia Huang, “Early Museological Development within the Japanese Empire,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 28, no. 1 (2016): 125-35.

⁴¹⁹ Christina Kreps, “Non-Western Models of Museums and Curation in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon. Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 457-72.

3.3.1 Legal issues

Due to the major political and social upheaval there were many ordinances relating to censorship issued in the Meiji era. However, these measures can be seen as a continuity of censorship; as Pflugfelder observes

much of the “civilized” legislation usually ascribed to the Westernizing zeal of the late 1860s and early 1870s rested solidly on Edo-period precedent, including prohibitions against public nudity and seminudity, the sale of erotic images (*shunga*) and phallic objects, and public urination.⁴²⁰

In *Censorship in Imperial Japan*, Richard Mitchell not only enumerates the official censorship laws and ordinances which were in effect between 1868 and 1945, but also covers ‘informal practices such as techniques of administrative guidance, “voluntary” restraint or self-censorship, the use of *fuseji* (literally, ‘conceal a letter’) as a censorship tool, and the growth of “illegal” government censorial methods’⁴²¹. Like Pflugfelder, Mitchell emphasizes a continuity of censorship between pre-modern and modern Japan:

Imperial Japan’s censorship system is best understood by first looking at the censorship precedent set during the Tokugawa era (1603-1867), [sic] since the imperial response was conditioned by earlier regulations and social attitudes.⁴²²

As noted in Chapter 1, during the Edo period censorship laws were not consistently applied but rather sporadically enforced, usually following the re-issue of an earlier edict. Mitchell comments on the arrest of the famous Edo-period writer Santō Kyōden after censorship edicts issued in 1790: ‘Authorities punished Santō in order to startle the literary world into following the reform program’⁴²³. It could be said that the Ehon Taikōki incident⁴²⁴ when Utamaro was arrested in 1804 for depicting Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Figure 29) was similarly

⁴²⁰ Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire : Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*, 147.

⁴²¹ Richard H. Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), ix.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴²⁴ For details see Julie Nelson Davis, “The Trouble with Hideyoshi: Censoring Ukiyo-E and the Ehon Taikōki Incident of 1804,” *Japan Forum* 19, no. 3 (September 28, 2007): 281-315.

calculated to send a message to artists by making an example of Utamaro. Mitchell argues that ‘The fact that Edo officials repeatedly issued the same censorship regulations suggests that their efficacy was low’⁴²⁵, which would indicate why they felt the need to make examples of such well-established figures as Kyōden and Utamaro.

In the Meiji era, as in the Edo period, censorship was primarily concerned with suppressing governmental criticism and maintaining ‘social order’, as the Ehon Taikōki incident and the following example demonstrate:

As early as 1870, the artist Kawanabe Kyōsai was jailed for drawing a caricature of the Meiji oligarch Sanjō Sanetomi engaged in sexual relations with a male foreigner, although in this case the charge was not public obscenity but the even graver offense of insulting a government official.⁴²⁶

Mitchell notes that ‘a consensus was emerging among Meiji political leaders on the need to redefine national goals and to establish a new national self-identity, and to disseminate these views to the people’⁴²⁷. Censorship was one of the ways that this deliberate, self-conscious manipulation of national identity was achieved, using the ‘legal system, various institutions and group pressures to regulate society’⁴²⁸. How Japan and the Japanese people *might* be perceived by Europeans and Americans, regardless of to what extent these perceptions existed, was a key factor in the suppression of *shunga*. As Toshio Watanabe observes, ‘One of the origins of the censor’s aversion to nude images was the interpretation by Western visitors of the prevalence of actual nudity in Japan as uncivilised’⁴²⁹.

In February 1869, the Shinbunshi Inkō Jōrei (Press Publication Ordinance), which changed the way newspapers were censored, was issued by the Meiji government: ‘they dropped prior inspection in favor of editorial responsibility

⁴²⁵ Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan*, 12.

⁴²⁶ Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, 20.

⁴²⁷ Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan*, 14.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴²⁹ Toshio Watanabe, “Why Censor a Nude Painting? Kuroda Seiki and the Nude Painting Controversy,” in *Censure, Autocensure et Tabous Actes Du Quatrième Colloque D’études Japonaises de l’Université de Strasbourg*, ed. Sakae Murakami Giroux, Christiane Seiguy, and Sandra Schaal (Arles: P. Picquier, 2010), 198.

for the contents of each issue. At the heart of these regulations, then, was the idea of imposing self-censorship on each editor and giving punishment after the fact'⁴³⁰. This describes attitudes which are still prevalent in contemporary Japan and the notion of self-censorship is easily transposed to curators and other institutional staff at museums and galleries.

In the same year the Shuppan Jōrei (Publication Ordinance) also changed the inspection system for books from pre- to post-publication. Books still had to include the name and address of the author, publisher, and book dealer. Limits on the contents of publications were also in place - in addition to prohibitions on sensitive political information and slander, books must not 'make statements which led readers into lascivious practices'⁴³¹. Although what might be considered provocative or lascivious does not seem to have been explained.

In 1872 the Shuppan Jōrei was revised to include a wider range of works under Article 13: 'Newspapers, drawings, portraits, and popular fiction shall conform to the above regulations'⁴³². This regulation of art in publications has clear significance for *shunga* and *shunpon*, which had been described as 'lascivious' by foreigners as early as the seventeenth century and then again during the Meiji era. The Meiji government were very sensitive to foreigners' opinions of Japan and wanted to be considered an equal to those 'civilised' nations. This desire is reflected in the phrase '*bunmei kaika*' (civilisation and enlightenment) which became common from around 1873 onwards.

The Shuppan Jōrei was revised in 1875:

Article 4 recognized, for the first time, the Home Minister's power to prohibit the publication or sale of any book that the Minister deemed harmful to public peace or injurious to morals, and to seize the printing materials (Article 4). Obscene or immoral books were for the first time, explicitly prohibited (Article 6).⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan*, 25.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 27.

⁴³² Ibid., 30-31.

⁴³³ Ibid., 50.

Article 4 is significant because previous censorship had not extended to controlling the circulation of published materials in such a manner.

Furthermore, this was extended to apply to books that were published prior to the 1875 Shuppan Jōrei, and, as a result, ‘police were ordered to go into bookstores to reinspect and recensor old books’⁴³⁴. Used book shops were one of the few places that *shunga* could be acquired in the Meiji era. Ishigami details how the enactment of the publication ordinance affected the sale and circulation of *shunga* and *shunpon* in the Meiji era with close reference to newspaper reports⁴³⁵.

The 1887 Shuppan Jōrei and Shinbun Jōrei further detailed the prohibition of the publication of obscene literature and pictures. Around this time, the concept of obscenity included images of nudity, particularly when these items could be bought or seen in shops. In 1889 the Ministry of Internal Affairs prohibited nude images (more specifically female nudes, which Watanabe notes had become popular in the 1880s), ‘not because of their pornographic nature but because they corrupted public morals’⁴³⁶. The notion that nudity was able to corrupt and that the public, or more accurately the lower classes, needed to be protected is similar to the concept of obscenity in Britain in the late-nineteenth century as encapsulated in the Hicklin test.

Watanabe develops his case that it was the public aspect of nude images, rather than the nudity per se, that was problematic by outlining the differences in responses to Kuroda Seiki’s nude paintings in the 1890s. Kuroda (1866-1924) was a leading *yōga* (Western-style) artist who learned to paint in a realistic style in Paris in the late 1880s where female nudes were a common subject. Between 1893 and 1900 Kuroda displayed several oil paintings of female nudes at exhibitions in Tokyo and Kyoto, receiving praise and prizes from the artworld but criticism and controversy when the exhibitions were open to the public⁴³⁷. For example, in 1895 the authorities tried to remove *Chōshō* (*Morning Toilette*),

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁴³⁵ Ishigami and Buckland (trans.), “The Reception of Shunga in the Modern Era.”

⁴³⁶ Watanabe, “Why Censor a Nude Painting? Kuroda Seiki and the Nude Painting Controversy,” 195.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 190-192.

which depicted a full-length female nude, from an exhibition in Kyoto⁴³⁸. In 1901 the censure escalated with the ‘*Koshimaki Jiken*’ (Knickers or Undergarment Incident) at an exhibition in Tokyo, in which the police censored Kuroda’s *Ritai Fujinzō* (*A Female Nude Figure*) by draping a cloth over the lower half of the painting (and the woman).

After this, at public exhibitions nude paintings ‘were confined to a special room by police order to which only art specialists were allowed access’⁴³⁹. This kind of restriction has parallels to secret museums in Europe, and is a censorship tactic that was still in use in Japan in the 2000s⁴⁴⁰.

The main law which has affected, and still affects, the collection and display of *shunga* is Article 175 of the Keihō (Penal Code), which was written in 1907. Article 175 (Distribution of Obscene Objects), updated to reflect the value of the yen in 2009, states:

A person who distributes, sells or displays in public an obscene document, drawing or other objects shall be punished by imprisonment with work for not more than 2 years, a fine of not more than 2,500,000 yen or a petty fine. The same shall apply to a person who possesses the same for the purpose of sale.⁴⁴¹

As with the Obscene Publications Act in the UK, the Japanese Penal Code does not define the term ‘obscene’ (*waisetsu*). To complicate matters further, in Article 176 ‘*waisetsu*’ is translated as ‘indecent’ indicating that it is not a straightforward term with one clear meaning. It was not until 1953, in the verdict of the court case against Oyama Hisajirō and Itō Sei, the publisher and translator of the Japanese version of DH Lawrence’s novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*⁴⁴², that a definition of obscenity was given:

⁴³⁸ Sato, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State : The Politics of Beauty*, 264.

⁴³⁹ Watanabe, “Why Censor a Nude Painting? Kuroda Seiki and the Nude Painting Controversy,” 192.

⁴⁴⁰ For example, at the Happiness exhibition in 2003 (see Chapter 4.3.2).

⁴⁴¹ Ministry of Justice Japan, “刑法 Penal Code,” *Japanese Law Translation Database System*, 2009, <http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=1960&vm=04&re=02&new=1>.

⁴⁴² Oyama was convicted at the 1951 Tokyo District Court trial and this was upheld at his appeal in the Tokyo High Court the following year. Although Itō had been acquitted at the first trial he was convicted at the appeal. Both convictions were upheld at the final appeal in 1957 at the National Supreme Court. The verdict of obscenity is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it set a legal precedent in Japan which had lasting implications. Secondly, it contrasts

to be obscene the literature in question must be such that it is harmful to the normal feeling of shame, it excites and stimulates sexual desire, and runs counter to good moral concepts regarding sex.⁴⁴³

Although this definition appears to be specifying three criteria for obscenity, it does not actually clarify matters due to the use of unquantifiable terms such as ‘normal’ and ‘good moral concepts’. Good morals are also a criterion used in Article 21 of the Kanzei teiritsu hō (Customs Tariff Law) which lists prohibited imports, including ‘Books, pictures, sculptures and similar things, which would harm public morals and order’⁴⁴⁴. A further issue is that basing obscenity on the subjective and shifting notions of shame and morality does not help those who wish to purchase, create, or distribute items to judge whether or not those items would be in breach of Article 175. However, the Chatterley trial set an important and lasting precedent.

Many have argued, including Oyama and Itō’s defence, that Article 175 is outdated and that it is an act of censorship (検閲 *ken’etsu*) which contravenes Article 21 of the Japanese Constitution. The Constitution was written in 1946, and enacted the following year, with Article 21 partly being in response to the Japanese government’s use of censorship and propaganda during World War II. Article 21 states:

Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression are guaranteed. No censorship shall be maintained, nor shall the secrecy of any means of communication be violated.⁴⁴⁵

However, in court cases, such as the *Chatterley* obscenity trials, Article 12 of the Constitution has been invoked in order to counter arguments which are

with the verdicts of not obscene returned at the trials against publications of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* in the USA and England in 1959 and 1960 respectively.

⁴⁴³ Supreme Court of Japan, “Judgment upon Case of Translation and Publication of LADY CHATTERLEY’S LOVER and Article 175 of the PENAL CODE” (1953 (A) 1713, 1953).

⁴⁴⁴ Udo Helms, “Obscenity and Homosexual Depiction in Japan.,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 39, no. 3-4 (2000): 147.

⁴⁴⁵ Ministry of Justice Japan, “日本国憲法 The Constitution of Japan,” *Japanese Law Translation Database System*, 2009, http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail_main?id=174.

based on Article 21, and to justify the censorship enacted by the application of Article 175, on the grounds of ‘public welfare’⁴⁴⁶. Article 12 states:

The freedoms and rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be maintained by the constant endeavor of the people, who shall refrain from any abuse of these freedoms and rights and shall always be responsible for utilizing them for the public welfare.⁴⁴⁷

Notions of public welfare were remarkably similar to the paternalistic and class-based notions of protecting the vulnerable in the UK:

Although the Chatterley prosecution overtly pointed to women and youth readers, it seems prosecutors were also invoking the dangerous specter of a readership that included the “masses.”⁴⁴⁸

In 1972 the Supreme Court moved away from the previous criteria of shame and public morals when it redefined ‘*waisetsu*’ (obscenity) in the case against Nagai Kafū’s short story ‘Yojohan fusuma no shitabari’ (What I found in the sliding doors of the four-and-a-half-mat room), which was originally written in 1924 was reissued⁴⁴⁹. Anne Allison summarises the aspects on which obscenity was henceforth to be judged according to the Japanese legal system:

(1) the relative boldness, detail, and general style of a work’s depiction of sexual behavior, (2) the proportion of the work taken up with the sexual description, (3) the place assumed by sex within the intellectual content of the work as a whole, (4) the degree to which artistry and thought content mitigate the sexual excitement induced by the writing, and (5) the relationship of the sexual portrayals to the structure and plot of the story.⁴⁵⁰

An important development is the contextualisation of parts within the whole work, and the consideration of artistic value, intention, and

⁴⁴⁶ Supreme Court of Japan, “Judgment upon Case of LADY CHATTERLEY’S LOVER”; Kirsten Cather, *The Art of Censorship in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), 9-66.

⁴⁴⁷ Ministry of Justice Japan, “日本国憲法 The Constitution of Japan.”

⁴⁴⁸ Cather, *The Art of Censorship in Postwar Japan*, 32.

⁴⁴⁹ For details see Ibid., 167-192; Kirsten Cather, “The Posthumous Censorship Trial of Nagai Kafu,” *Japan Forum* 19, no. 3 (2007): 411-28.

⁴⁵⁰ Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires : Mothers, Comics and Censorship in Japan*, 2nd ed. (California and London: University of California Press, 2000), 176.

reception which were disregarded in earlier obscenity cases in Japan. Despite these changes in criteria, which were now similar to those in the UK and USA, the 1973-80 Yojohan trials resulted in the same verdict of obscenity as in the 1948-50 trials against it, as Cather explains:

by defining obscenity as something that was conjured in the minds of readers rather than an objective attribute of the text, the judges could affirm both the artistry of Kafū's authorial intent and the potential obscenity of contemporary reader reception.⁴⁵¹

Also during the Occupation Period (1945-1952) an obscenity charge was brought against the magazine *Sekai gahō*, which was banned for reproducing Titian and Tintoretto paintings (presumably featuring nudes) on its frontispiece⁴⁵².

Whilst in other chapters I have set aside issues of obscenity relating to photography, as they are outside the scope of this thesis, examples are included here because in Japan the enactment of obscenity laws, which impact on *shunga*, is intertwined with photography. In 1991 the photographer Shinoyama Kishin published two books which ignited the *hea nūdo* (hair nude) debate over depictions of pubic hair. The first was entitled *Water Fruit* and featured the actress Higuchi Kanako, the second was called *Santa Fe* and was of the teen idol Miyazawa Rie. Both books included artistic nudes of the women, with pubic hair visible in a small number of images. That the pubic hair was not censored, as was standard in Japan, caused controversy initially⁴⁵³ but led to an increase in publication of uncensored photographs and artworks in the wake of Shinoyama's 'hair nudes' as artists no longer feared prosecution for obscenity for merely showing pubic hair. The 'hair nude' boom peaked in 1994 with over 300 'hair nude' photo books published in Japan⁴⁵⁴ and by 1996 the *hea nūdo* had become 'commonplace' in publications⁴⁵⁵.

⁴⁵¹ Cather, *The Art of Censorship in Postwar Japan*, 190.

⁴⁵² Kensuke Tamai, "Censorship," *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (Kōdansha, 1983), 254.

⁴⁵³ Neither book was charged with obscenity but *Water Fruit* received a verbal warning from the police.

⁴⁵⁴ Philbert Ono, "PhotoHistory 1990-1994," 2009, http://photoguide.jp/txt/PhotoHistory_1990-1994.

⁴⁵⁵ Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 175.

Mostow highlights the importance of Shinoyama's 'victory against visual censorship' for *shunga* scholarship:

Now every *shunga* that had ever been published could be republished in un-expurgated form. ...By the late 1990s the *ukiyo-e* section of any major Japanese bookstore was 80 percent filled with *shunga*.⁴⁵⁶

Despite this, exhibitions and catalogues of *shunga* and other sex art were not given the same freedom in Japan. One prominent instance is the charges against a book of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's work which show that, whilst pubic hair is permissible in publications, depictions of genitalia are still problematic. In 1994 an eponymously-titled photobook of Mapplethorpe's work was published in Japan. In 1999 the publisher Asai Takashi was carrying a copy when he returned to Narita airport after a trip abroad⁴⁵⁷. Customs inspected the book and decided that since 20 of the 260 black and white photographs depicted male nudes (with visible genitalia) then the whole book was obscene. Therefore, it was confiscated under Article 21 of the Customs Tariff Law and Asai was warned by police over the sale of the book under Article 175 of the Penal Code.

Asai took the matter to the Tokyo District Court, arguing that he had sold the book since 1994 without incident, plus since it was previously published in English it was available to buy over the internet and that the National Diet Library holds a copy⁴⁵⁸. In 2002 the Court returned a ground-breaking verdict that even if something is obscene it does not necessarily harm public morals. However, Customs officials appealed and in 2003 the Tokyo High Court overturned the ruling and reverted to the standard definition of obscenity. Asai observed that 'art museums and galleries are influential in determining the general public's tolerance of obscenity... I would like to see an end to a situation in which one has to exercise self-censorship because artistic works contain images of genitalia'⁴⁵⁹. To this end, he appealed and in 2008 the Supreme Court overruled the High Court and Justice Nasu Kohei declared that *Mapplethorpe*

⁴⁵⁶ Mostow, "Introduction," 5.

⁴⁵⁷ For details see Supreme Court of Japan, "Judgment Concerning the Enforcement of Import Control under Article 21, para.1, Item 4 of the Customs Tariff Act..." (2003 (Gyo-Tsu) 157, 2008).

⁴⁵⁸ Tai Kawabata, "Is Obscenity in the Eye of the Public?," *The Japan Times*, 2003.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

‘compiles work from the artistic point of view, and is not obscene as a whole’⁴⁶⁰. The verdict took into account the artistic intent of the work and stated that ‘art and obscenity are concepts of different levels and they are not incompatible with each other’⁴⁶¹.

3.3.2 Institutional policies

Similar to the situation in the UK described previously, there is a lack of guidance for institutions dealing with sexually explicit art such as *shunga*. Whilst there may be no explicit policies forbidding the acquisition of sex art, interviews with Japanese curators made it clear that museum staff are expected to conform to expectations and the invisible line of institutional censorship. That people understand what is implied rather than explicitly said is a common feature of the Japanese language and culture, and is not specific to discussing (or not discussing as the case may be) *shunga*.

Whereas *shunga* first made its way into UK institutions through passive acquisitions, in a symposium paper Gerstle remarked that, even in recent decades, donations of *shunga* collections had been refused by Japanese institutions⁴⁶². However, it is not only in Japan that museums remain cautious about *shunga*. For example, in the 1970s a Russian cultural institution, which possesses several thousand Japanese prints, was offered a collection of 1000 *shunga* prints but the director refused because they knew that they would not be able to display or allow access to the works⁴⁶³.

In the discussion on institutional policies and unofficial censorship in the UK, I noted that there was little documentation relating to sexually explicit art and its exclusion from institutions. There are even less traces in the case of Japanese institutions as museum staff were implicitly expected to adhere to the unofficial institutional censorship of *shunga*. As with acquisition policies at UK institutions,

⁴⁶⁰ The New York Times, “Supreme Court in Japan Upholds Mapplethorpe,” *The New York Times*, 2008.

⁴⁶¹ Supreme Court of Japan, “Judgment Concerning the Enforcement of Import Control under Article 21, para.1, Item 4 of the Customs Tariff Act...”

⁴⁶² C Andrew Gerstle, “Shunga Workshop Programme Opening Remarks” (Shunga in its Social and Cultural Context workshop, SOAS, 2010).

⁴⁶³ Russian Curator, “Correspondence on Shunga Collecting in Russia” (Personal communication, 2015).

there is nothing that explicitly prohibits the purchase of *shunga* in Japanese institutional policies. However, as has been demonstrated, in Japan legal issues remain unclear, particularly in regards to depicting genitals, and there is a greater risk of prosecution regardless of the artistic intentions and qualities of a work. For these reasons, institutional collecting and display of *shunga* is still largely avoided in Japan.

3.3.3 Institutional collections of *shunga* in Japan

Despite the lingering sense of illicitness surrounding *shunga* in Japan, several high-profile public institutions (including the ARC, Ritsumeikan, which is not discussed here) have developed collections of *shunga*. Further research into the history of these institutional collections in Japan is necessary, but for now a brief mention of Nichibunken and Chiba's collections of *shunga* will have to suffice.

Nichibunken, Kyoto

Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyū Sentā (The International Research Centre for Japanese Studies), or Nichibunken as it is better known, is a government-funded, inter-university research institute, which was established in 1987 by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (MEXT). As Komatsu Kazuhiko, the current Director General, states the purpose of Nichibunken is 'to promote and support the study of Japanese culture and history through international collaboration'⁴⁶⁴. He expands on this:

Nichibunken collects and preserves valuable materials necessary for the study of Japan, mainly publications from other countries that introduce Japanese culture and present original research. Our library resources are highly esteemed, and scholars and graduate students both from Japan and other countries consult Nichibunken's databases and make extensive use of the library collection.⁴⁶⁵

As one of the four National Institutes for the Humanities in Japan, it has a prestigious reputation, both nationally and internationally, and is known for

⁴⁶⁴ Kazuhiko Komatsu, "Greetings from the Director," 2015, <http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/en/about/index.html>.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

producing high-quality research. Nichibunken publishes two peer-reviewed journals, *Japan Review* and *Nihon Kenkyū*, in English and Japanese respectively. In addition to sharing information in these traditional print formats, Nichibunken is also responsible for generating research and digitally preserving information through the creation of databases of Japanese art, literature, maps, photographs, and *shunpon*. Given Nichibunken's reputation and government funding, it may be surprising that it has a significant collection of *shunpon*. This is partially due to the work of Hayakawa, who began as an Assistant Professor at Nichibunken in 1987, the year it was established. Like institutions in North America and Europe, the *shunga* collection began through passive acquisition. Hayakawa describes how many elderly Japanese women donated their *shunga*, often received as part of a trousseau, to Nichibunken⁴⁶⁶.

The database lists 232 *enpon* in Nichibunken's own collection, but this is the number of titles rather than volumes, with many of the titles having two or three volumes. Hayakawa has diligently studied the contents of Nichibunken's *shunga* collection, and published numerous books and articles based on his research, most notably the 10 volume series, *Kinsei enpon shiryō shūsei* (*Collected Erotic Texts of the Early Modern Period*) produced by Hayakawa between 2002 and 2010. Each volume is dedicated to reproducing and interpreting a *shunpon* title from Nichibunken's collection, with transcriptions and English translations of the texts, reminiscent of Hayashi and Lane's *Teihon Ukiyo-e Shunga Meihin Shusei* series. The Nichibunken series includes four volumes of *shunpon* by Moronobu and Harunobu's *Imayō tsuma kagami* (with translations by Patricia Fister and Kuriyama Shigehisa), as well as two by Settei (written in conjunction with Gerstle). The books were distributed to museums and universities known for their research on Japanese Studies and culture to facilitate international scholarship. In addition to printed copies, Hayakawa also produced pdf versions of the books in the series, which are freely available from Nichibunken's website⁴⁶⁷.

⁴⁶⁶ Monta Hayakawa, “春画や日本の美術館についてのインタビュー (Interview on Shunga and Japanese Museums)” (Personal communication, 2013).

⁴⁶⁷ Nichibunken, “Hayakawa Monta Homepage,” accessed January 5, 2014, <http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/~montah/>.

Chiba-shi Bijutsukan

The Chiba-shi Bijutsukan (Chiba City Museum of Art) collection holds Japanese art ranging from the Edo period to contemporary works, and according to its website has one of the leading collections of *ukiyo-e* prints in Japan. Although Chiba opened in 1995, around the time *shunga* began to be published uncensored, it was not free from the caution and prejudice towards *shunga* that established institutions had to contend with. As noted at the outset of this thesis, *shunga* were omitted from not only the opening exhibition, *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro*, but also the ‘Japanese version’ of the accompanying bilingual catalogue (Figure 50). Asano Shūgō, then senior curator at Chiba, and Tanabe Masako, current senior curator at Chiba, who was then an assistant, explained how the omission was due to institutional censorship rather than a curatorial choice as the Board of Education would not allow the *shunga* to be displayed⁴⁶⁸.



Figure 50 *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro* exhibition catalogue (1995), with the ‘Japanese version’ on the right. Note that the texts in both are bilingual and the omission of *shunga* from the version sold in Japan is the only difference.

Asano, now director of the Museum Yamato Bunkakan, Nara, was responsible for purchasing a small number of *shunga* prints for the Chiba collection. However, it was only possible to acquire the explicit Moronobu works because they were part of a larger acquisition of Ravicz’s collection, who stipulated that it must be kept

⁴⁶⁸ Shūgō Asano, “春画や歌麿展についてのインタビュー (Interview on Shunga and the Utamaro Exhibition)” (Personal communication, 2012); Masako Tanabe, “春画展や収集についてのインタビュー (Interview on Shunga Exhibitions and Collecting)” (Personal communication, 2013).

intact⁴⁶⁹. When Chiba held a large Moronobu exhibition in 2000 no *shunga* were displayed. This is despite having examples of Moronobu's *shunga* in their collection and the fact that *shunga* accounted for a significant part of Moronobu's oeuvre. The catalogue shows that a couple of non-explicit Moronobu works such as Figure 51, which were likely taken from a *shunga* album or set, were included⁴⁷⁰.



Figure 51 Hishikawa Moronobu, *Tsuitate no kage* (*Shadows of the screen*), c.1673-81, monochrome woodblock print with hand colouring, Chibashi bijutsukan. This is likely a frontispiece to or scene from a *shunga* album.

Chiba also has a few examples of *shunga* by Utamaro in its collection but Tanabe explained that these could not be displayed (even if they were not *shunga*) due to their poor condition⁴⁷¹. There are only around a dozen or so examples of *shunga* in Chiba's collection, but the fact that a public museum in Japan has *any* *shunga* is noteworthy. The acquisition of *shunga* by institutions in Japan is a step towards the acceptance of *shunga* and its reintegration into Japanese art history. Although there is much research still to be carried out on *shunga* collecting worldwide, patterns are beginning to emerge as collections change

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Chiba-shi Bijutsukan, *Hishikawa Moronobu Ten : Chiba-Shi Bijutsukan Kaikan Goshūnen Kinen* (Chiba-shi: Chiba-shi Bijutsukan, 2000).

⁴⁷¹ Tanabe, “春画展や収集についてのインタビュー (Interview on Shunga Exhibitions and Collecting).”

from being private to public, and as public institutions change their collecting of *shunga* from passive to active.

4. Displaying shunga⁴⁷²

The museum as an institution has, as Susan M. Pearce explains, ‘the ability to display, to demonstrate, to show the nature of the world and of man within it by arranging collected material in particular patterns which reflect, confirm and project the contemporary world view’⁴⁷³. The notion that through the display of objects an understanding, not only of the objects and the culture which created them can be achieved, but also insight given into the ‘contemporary world view’ specific to the time and place of the display is significant and can itself be utilised as another way of tracing changing attitudes to *shunga*. An additional aspect of institutional displays is the ability to go beyond merely reflecting or confirming views, to questioning and influencing those views. Whether institutions should reflect or challenge the social and cultural norms will be addressed in a section on the roles of institutions in Chapter 6.

The history of exhibitions is a relatively new field of study, but Stephanie Moser summarises its importance: ‘As active agents in the production of knowledge, museum displays are increasingly being recognized as documents of significance to the history of scholarly disciplines and the evolution of ideas’⁴⁷⁴. This chapter surveys displays and exhibitions that have featured *shunga*⁴⁷⁵ with the intention of determining to what extent those displays reflect contemporaneous attitudes to sex in art and sexuality in general. Where pertinent, Moser’s suggested categories for analysing museum displays⁴⁷⁶, listed here in Table 1, will be utilised.

⁴⁷² At the end of June 2015, after this Chapter had already been written, Ishigami published an article surveying *shunga* exhibitions, Aki Ishigami, “2000 年代以降の春画展示 (Shunga Exhibitions in Japan, the United States and Europe, 2000-),” 文化資源学 (*Bunka Shigengaku*) (特集 春画と日本社会 *Special Issue Shunga and Japanese Society*), no. 13 (2015): 115-25.. Given that that is also the scope of this Chapter, there is inevitably much (unintentional) overlap. However, this demonstrates that there was a need for research into *shunga* exhibitions. Furthermore, as Ishigami was directly involved with some of the exhibitions discussed our perspectives on these events will be different.

⁴⁷³ Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, 5.

⁴⁷⁴ Stephanie Moser, “The Devil Is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge,” *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2010): 22

⁴⁷⁵ This is not an exhaustive list of *shunga* displays and exhibitions, but it is as comprehensive as possible based on information available in English and Japanese, and taking into consideration spatial limitations of the thesis.

⁴⁷⁶ Moser, “The Devil Is in the Detail”.

Architecture, Location, Setting		Space
Design, Colour, Light	Subject, Message, Text	Layout
Display Types	Exhibition Style	Audience and Reception

Table 1 Moser's categories for analysis

Until relatively recently sexually explicit art⁴⁷⁷ has either been censored or noticeably lacking in exhibitions and displays⁴⁷⁸. To an extent this is still the case, although since 2013 there has been a marked increase in the inclusion of *shunga* and other sex art in exhibitions. Despite the number of sex-related artefacts that have undoubtedly been destroyed or remain in private collections, the lack of exhibitions relating to sex or sexuality in cultural institutions cannot be said to be because of a lack of material. This is verified by the wealth of objects in secret museums, safes, and locked drawers, as introduced in Chapter 3. Issues such as religious and moral judgement, social mores, institutional censorship, and the opacity of legal acts, which have been outlined in preceding chapters, explain why *shunga* was, and on occasion continues to be, excluded and omitted⁴⁷⁹. This chapter will describe events in which *shunga* have been displayed, whether as the specific focus of an exhibition or as part of a wider show, and analyse their impact. The success of these exhibitions, in terms of visitor engagement, numbers, and satisfaction, indicates that the earlier dearth of such exhibitions was not due to a lack of public interest in sex art.

Firstly, displays of *shunga* outside the UK and Japan, mainly in North America and Central Europe, will be summarised. These will be grouped chronologically and to roughly coincide with advancements in the acceptability of *shunga*. Secondly, examples of *shunga* being displayed in the UK will be given. Again,

⁴⁷⁷ This does not include photography. Although photography is art, when it depicts actual people in a sexual situation there are several additional factors that need to be addressed and such discussions are outside the scope of this thesis but see Marina Wallace, Martin Kemp, and Joanne Bernstein, *Seduced: Art & Sex from Antiquity to Now* (London ;;New York: Merrell in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 2007), 15-16..

⁴⁷⁸ Whilst items in an exhibition are said to be 'on display', there are slight differences between 'an exhibition' and 'a display'. A display tends to be more informal, often with little or no budget, and on a smaller scale than an exhibition. Its purpose is to highlight and rotate items from the institution's own collection, usually in an existing space utilising the existing layout and available cases. Exhibitions may be free or have an entry charge but displays are always free. Displays may be promoted within the institution, but they do not usually receive media coverage, external publicity or have an accompanying catalogue. Exhibitions are only temporary but displays may be short- or long-term.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Exclude' implies censorship or a deliberate decision, whereas 'omit' connotes an oversight or lack without such a clear intention.

these displays will generally be organised by date, but, following on from the previous chapter, largely focusing on the institutional attitudes of the V&A and the BM. Thirdly, the display of *shunga* in Japan, or as will become apparent lack of displays, will be examined. This chapter will conclude by drawing some comparisons between exhibitions and by outlining the various narrative functions that *shunga* have fulfilled within those exhibitions.

The number of exhibitions studied in this chapter may give the impression that there have been countless *shunga* exhibitions, whereas in reality, many of these are instances of only a small number of *shunga* being shown. Many of the displays and exhibitions in this chapter are not widely known and were only uncovered through persistent research. Furthermore, of those exhibitions which do focus on *shunga* only a small number have had an impact beyond the lifespan of the exhibition and beyond the geographical location of the venue.

Whilst exhibition catalogues can provide a record of which works were displayed and what aspects were emphasised, this is not always the case. A catalogue may be aimed at casual visitors, enthusiasts, or scholars, and as a result, the tone and depth of information may be different from that used in the exhibition itself. In addition, seeing the actual artworks and encountering them in a public space, possibly with companions and, therefore, with the possibility of discussion and varying opinions, is a very different experience from looking at facsimiles in a catalogue, which is more likely to be a solitary activity done in private.

Ideally, analysis of an exhibition would be carried out on the basis of visiting the exhibition. However, where this has not been possible, for exhibitions which were historically or geographically distant, the analysis has been made using a range of available materials, including catalogues. To achieve a fuller understanding, sources such as archival documents – internal memos, exhibition plans, photographs, inter-institution correspondence, minutes from meetings, promotional material, interpretation panels, exhibition labels, exhibition guides, press releases, reviews and other media responses were drawn on. Moreover, where possible, I carried out interviews with museum staff who worked on displays of *shunga*.

4.1 Displaying shunga around the world

4.1.1 Early shunga exhibitions, 1975-1995

Records indicate that the first exhibitions of *shunga* took place in the 1970s. There may have been earlier informal displays, which have not been recorded, but this is unlikely and not supported by existing information on institutional collecting and exhibitions. Whilst these early exhibitions may not have been large-scale nor had a notable impact beyond those who visited, they are important because they were the first exhibitions to focus on *shunga*. As such, they pushed, and helped to determine, the boundaries of the institutional and social acceptability of sexually explicit art.

In 1975 (15 November - 24 December), the exhibition *Shunga: Meisterwerke der erotischen Kunst Japans* took place in Nuremberg at the Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft (also known as the Kunstverein Nürnberg). Of note is that the image reproductions are uncensored in the slim accompanying catalogue, which also gives general information about each artist and a brief description of the works⁴⁸⁰. However, this seems to have had little impact as it is not widely referenced even within the field of *shunga* scholarship.

The exhibition *Shunga: The Erotic Art of Japan 1600-1979* held at the Ronin Gallery, New York in Spring-Summer 1979 had more of a profile. The exhibition was reviewed in an issue of the New York Magazine. Despite the disparaging title 'Alien Porn', the review actually engages with the artistic qualities and some of the uses of *shunga*, 'as titillation for the affluent merchants of Edo, the lusty metropolis which is now Tokyo'⁴⁸¹. Even if the reviewer, John Ashbery, oversimplified matters by resorting to the East/West dichotomy in relation to attitudes to sex, he does not rely solely on the term 'erotic', which seems to have been used ubiquitously in the 1970s. Instead, after noting the beauty and exquisiteness of *shunga*, he acknowledges the lack of a satisfactory term when he states 'much, though not all, of the show is explicitly pornographic (for want

⁴⁸⁰ Franz Winzinger, *Shunga : Meisterwerke Der Erotischen Kunst Japans : [Ausstellung] Galerie Im Pilatushaus 15.11. Bis 24.12.1975* (Nürnberg: Die Gesellschaft, 1975).

⁴⁸¹ John Ashbery, "Alien Porn," *New York Magazine* (New York, June 1979), 61.

of a better word)’⁴⁸². The catalogue largely consists of images, but the brief two-page introduction addresses both the artistic and sexual aspects of *shunga* in a rather direct and balanced manner for the time⁴⁸³. Interestingly, the catalogue extends the period for what is considered *shunga*, not only by including paintings from the Meiji period but also several prints which were created in 1979, the year the exhibition was held.

A decade later *Shunga, Japanese erotic prints*, curated by Marco Fagioli, was held at Le Musée d’Ixelles, Brussels as part of the international festival Europalia Japan. This is often cited, within *shunga* scholarship, as the first *shunga* exhibition (or perhaps the first worthy of scholarly attention), demonstrating its lasting impact and relatively high profile. Fagioli credits ‘experts contemporains comme Hayashi Yoshikazu, Tom et Mary Anne Evans et Richard Lane’ for assisting with the critical rehabilitation or re-assessment of erotic *ukiyo-e* prints⁴⁸⁴. He uses the terms ‘érotique’ and ‘pornographique’ to describe *shunga* in the catalogue, which features many prints borrowed from the BnF. It also drew on European private collections, including works belonging to Pulverer and the Paris-based collector Hugutte Beres.

Moving forward to 1995, when awareness of *shunga* within art history was increasing, there was another exhibition in Germany. A selection of *shunga* from Pulverer’s collection was shown at the the Kunsthalle Darmstadt, which the catalogue notes included not only prints but also woodblock printed books and paintings⁴⁸⁵. As mentioned in Chapter 2, *shunga* from Pulverer’s collection can now be viewed on a dedicated website entitled ‘The World of the Japanese Illustrated Book’, courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art. This exhibition differs from most other exhibitions as it was drawn from a single (private) collection.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ The introduction states that it is ‘the first major exhibition of *shunga* to be shown in New York’, which intriguingly implies that there might have been a previous exhibition of *shunga* in another state or else they would have broadened their claim to ‘the first in America’.

Neuer, *Shunga : The Erotic Art of Japan 1600-1979*.

⁴⁸⁴ Fagioli, *Shunga, Images Du Printemps*, 11-12.

⁴⁸⁵ Marhenke, *Shunga : Erotic Art in Japan : Erotische Holzschnitte Des 17. Bis 19. Jahrhunderts*, 5.

4.1.2 Key shunga exhibitions, 1995-2014

It is acknowledged that the mid-1990s was a turning point for *shunga*. This was partially because publications no longer had to censor images of *shunga*, so more people were able to view a greater number of works. Partly as a result of this and partly through individual concerted efforts *shunga* scholarship advanced greatly from the late 1990s onwards. The following exhibitions have been classed as ‘key exhibitions’ because they have furthered knowledge about *shunga* both in terms of focused academic research and provided a wider dissemination of more general information. They displayed an extensive selection of high-quality works chosen from distinguished public and private collections. Additionally, these exhibitions have gained a reputation which exceeds their geographic location and has lasted long after the exhibitions have finished. A positive international reputation has been achieved by involving Japanese art experts and curators, due to the quality of the catalogue, or through a comprehensive exhibition website. The catalogues have proved important because of 1) the research presented, 2) the continued opportunity to view works which are not usually displayed or are from private collections, and 3) they made the information accessible to a wider audience.

Sexuality and Edo Culture

In 1995 a group of scholars and art historians collaborated on a *shunga* project⁴⁸⁶, an important part of which was the *Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850*, conference at Indiana University. The proceedings, edited by Sumie Jones⁴⁸⁷, were published as *Imaging/Reading Eros*⁴⁸⁸. Whilst the scholarship provided focused research on a variety of fascinating *shunga*-centred topics (including humour, history, prostitution, advertising, textiles, ‘otherness’, gender and sexuality), the circulation seems to have been limited to universities and institutions. This is not surprising since those participating in the conference were probably also the target audience.

⁴⁸⁶ Funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) and NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities).

⁴⁸⁷ Now Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature and of East Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Indiana.

⁴⁸⁸ Jones, *Imaging Reading Eros : Proceedings for the Conference, Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850, Indiana University, Bloomington, August 17-20, 1995*.

Another element of the project, which catered to a more general audience, was two small displays of *shunga*, guest curated by Asano and Clark. One was at the Indiana University Art Museum, which showed *ukiyo-e* and milder works, and the other was held concurrently at the Kinsey Institute, where more explicit materials were displayed⁴⁸⁹. It is because of the scholarship produced by the project and the number of specialists involved that *Sexuality and Edo Culture* has been included in this category, as the displays were not as comprehensive as other key exhibitions, particularly regarding their size, scale, and impact.

Forbidden Images

The *Kielletyt kuvat: vanhaa eroottista taidetta Japanista* (*Forbidden Images, Erotic art from Japan's Edo period*) exhibition was held at the Tennispalatsi of the Helsingin kaupungin taidemuseo (Helsinki City Art Museum) from 20 November 2002 until 26 January 2003. For reasons of conservation, and possibly also as a way of displaying a larger selection (around 270 works in total), there was a rotation of works between 19 and 21 December⁴⁹⁰. *Forbidden Images*, curated by two prominent *shunga* scholars, Hayakawa Monta and Shirakura Yoshihiko, featured works on loan from Japanese private and public collections as well as the University of Art and Design Helsinki.

Forbidden Images is an important exhibition as it was the first major exhibition dedicated to *shunga* in Europe, and, at the time, was the largest and most comprehensive to date. In addition to the impressive size and scope of the exhibition, it received international critical acclaim and had record visitor numbers over what is usually a quiet period for the Museum. Part of the reason for the international acclaim may be due to information being accessible to a larger audience as there were two versions of the catalogue in a total of four languages: a tri-lingual version *Kielletyt kuvat: Förbjudna bilder: Forbidden*

⁴⁸⁹ Timothy Clark, "Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition" (Personal communication, 2013).

⁴⁹⁰ Helsinki City Art Museum, "Forbidden Images, Erotic Art from Japan's Edo Period," 2002, http://www.hel.fi/hki/Taimu/en/art+museum+tennis+palace/past+exhibitions/2002/kielletyt_kuvat_-_vanhaa_eroottista_taidetta_japanista.

images (in Finnish, Swedish, and English respectively)⁴⁹¹ and a Japanese version *Shunga: Himetaru warai no sekai*⁴⁹².

Desire of Spring

Lentelust: Erotische fantasiën in Edo Japan (Desire of Spring: Erotic Fantasies in Edo Japan) ran from 22 January to 17 April 2005 at the Kunsthall, Rotterdam. It claimed to be the ‘very first chronological overview of Japanese erotic art’⁴⁹³, which is surprising as Fagioli in the 1989 exhibition in Brussels, as an example, followed a general chronological progression of the development of *ukiyo-e* and *shunga* through key works by famous artists and technical advances⁴⁹⁴. *Lentelust*, like each new *shunga* exhibition, also claimed to be the ‘largest-ever’⁴⁹⁵. *Desire of Spring* was certainly extensive, with guest curator Chris Uhlenbeck selecting over 200 works from museums and private collections worldwide to be exhibited. Uhlenbeck, owner of Japanese art specialists Hotei Publishing (now part of Brill), along with Margarita Winkel wrote and edited the catalogue, which features essays on *shunpon*, male-male sex, courtesans, and literature⁴⁹⁶.

Honolulu Museum of Art exhibitions

Between 2012 and 2015, Honolulu Museum of Art (HMA) ran a series of exhibitions on *shunga* co-curated by curator Shawn Eichman and Stephen Salel. The first was *Arts of the Bedchamber* (23 November 2012 - 17 March 2013), which featured over 90 works, predominantly from the Michener and Lane Collections and focused on the progress of *shunga* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The second was *Tongue in Cheek: Erotic Art in 19th-Century Japan* (14 November 2013 - 9 March 2014), which as the title suggests looked at humorous aspects of *shunga* and its development in the nineteenth century. The third, *Modern Love: 20th-Century Japanese Erotic Art*, continued

⁴⁹¹ Monta Hayakawa, *Kielletyt Kuvat : Vanhaa Eroottista Taidetta Japanista = Förbjudna Bilder : Gamml Erotisk Konst Från Japan = Forbidden Images : Erotic Art from Japan's Edo Period* (Helsinki: Helsingin kaupungin taidemuseo, 2002).

⁴⁹² Yoshihiko Shirakura and Monta Hayakawa, *Shunga : Himetaru Warai No Sekai : Herushinki Shiritsu Bijutsukan Ukiyoe Shungaten*. (Tokyo: Yōsensha, 2003).

⁴⁹³ Kunsthall, “Desire of Spring: Erotic Fantasies in Edo Japan,” 2005, <http://www.kunsthall.nl/en-22-315-Desire-of-Spring-.html>.

⁴⁹⁴ Fagioli, *Shunga, Images Du Printemps*.

⁴⁹⁵ Kunsthall, “Desire of Spring: Erotic Fantasies in Edo Japan.”

⁴⁹⁶ Uhlenbeck, *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*.

the chronological exploration by looking at later examples of *shunga* and comparing them to sexually explicit imagery created subsequently in Japan. It ran from 20 November 2014 - 15 March 2015 and a catalogue encompassing works and themes from all three HMA *shunga* exhibitions, *Stages of Desire*, was published to coincide with the final exhibition⁴⁹⁷.

4.1.3 Shunga within exhibitions, 2004-2015

The exhibitions mentioned here are not exclusively on *shunga*, but instead have included a selection of *shunga* to represent one aspect within a wider theme. These exhibitions reached a significant amount of people as they were held in prominent venues in major cities and, with the exception of the Kinsey Institute display, have accompanying catalogues that are generally available.

L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque

L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque, Eros au Secret (Hell in the Library, Eros in the Closet), curated by Marie-Françoise Quignard and Raymond-Josué Seckel, was held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris (4 December 2007 - 2 March 2008)⁴⁹⁸. The press release provocatively described *L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque* as the first time the BnF exhibits its dark side and lifts the curtain on Hell⁴⁹⁹. The exhibition featured over 350 items selected from *L'Enfer*, including a number of *shunga* prints and *shunpon* from the collections of Tronquois, Marteau, and Barbier, and explored the history of the secret museum.

This exhibition was not the first time that *shunga* had been exhibited in Paris. The *ukiyo-e* exhibition *Images du Monde Flottant: Peintures et estampes Japonaises XVIIe - XVIIIe siècles*, which was held at the Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 27 September 2004 - 3 January 2005, also included a selection of *shunga*.

⁴⁹⁷ Eichman and Salel, *Shunga : Stages of Desire*.

⁴⁹⁸ Quignard and Seckel, *L'enfer de La Bibliothèque, Eros Au Secret*.

⁴⁹⁹ Bibliothèque national de France, "L ' Enfer de La Bibliothèque Dossier de Presse," 2.

Although it did not feature *shunpon*, the *Banned Books* exhibition at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (24 June - 30 October 2011), like the *L'Enfer* exhibition, addressed the issues of institutional censorship, obscenity, and public morals by showing a selection of books, illustrated books and other printed matter that had been segregated within their collection.

Eros in Asia

A small exhibition entitled *Eros in Asia: Erotic Art from Iran to Japan* was held at the Kinsey Institute, around February 2009, showed art from across the Asian continent. In addition to art from Iran and Japan it featured works from China, India, Turkey, Mongolia, and Burma 'each of which has its unique artistic traditions and genres for the visual representation of sexuality'⁵⁰⁰. Admission to the exhibition was free, which is in contrast to most exhibitions of sex art, but there was an age advisory⁵⁰¹. Whilst not having a catalogue, the artworks which were displayed are available to view with the interpretive text as a slide show on the Kinsey Institute Gallery website⁵⁰².

Secret images

Secret images: Picasso and the Japanese erotic print at the Museo Picasso, 5 November 2009 - 14 February 2010, was curated by Ricard Bru. Eminent *shunga* scholar Hayakawa was involved in the exhibition and catalogue⁵⁰³. Prior to the exhibition it was not well known that Picasso owned *shunga*, and the artist had at various points in his career denied being inspired by *ukiyo-e* in general.

4.1.4 Shunga exhibitions, 2002-2013

The exhibitions in this section were smaller in scale and impact than the key *shunga* exhibitions discussed above. Although the potential for new information on specific collections, the collectors, and discussions generated by these exhibitions is valuable, their impact might best be termed as regional as they

⁵⁰⁰ The Kinsey Institute, "Eros in Asia: Erotic Art from Iran to Japan," *Kinsey Today*, 2009, <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/newsletter/win2009/erosasia.html>.

⁵⁰¹ 'Visitors should be 18 years of age or older, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian'.

⁵⁰² Kinsey Institute Gallery, "Eros in Asia: Erotic Art from Iran to Japan," accessed July 7, 2015, <http://www.kinseyinstitutegallery.com/>.

⁵⁰³ Hayakawa et al., *Secret Images : Picasso and the Japanese Erotic Print*.

brought *shunga* to the attention of a more localised audience. Where there were accompanying catalogues they were intended to provide readers with a basic introduction to *shunga* rather than advancing *shunga* research.

Shunga, Arte ed eros in Giappone nel periodo Edo

The exhibition *Shunga, Arte ed eros in Giappone nel periodo Edo*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy (21 October 2009 - 31 January 2010) was not the first time that *shunga* had been displayed at that venue. In 2004, the large-scale *ukiyo-e* exhibition *Il mondo fluttuante (The floating world)* (7 February - 30 May 2004), curated by Gian Carlo Calza, featured a small number of *shunga* in the section on kabuki and the pleasure districts⁵⁰⁴, but the *shunga* were shielded by screens⁵⁰⁵. In contrast, *shunga* were the focus of the 2009 exhibition and accordingly were openly displayed on the walls and in table cases, as can be seen in Figure 52.



Figure 52 View of works on display at *Shunga, Arte ed eros in Giappone nel periodo Edo*, Palazzo Reale, Milan (photo copyright: Non solo kawaii)

The exhibition, which erroneously claimed to be ‘the largest exhibition ever devoted to the genre of *shunga*’, featured 100 prints, 30 albums and *ehon*, and 10 kimono from the Museum of Cultures, Lugano, and from Swiss and Italian private collectors⁵⁰⁶. Originally, the exhibition was conceived in five sections,

⁵⁰⁴ Roderick Conway Morris, “Pleasure in the Floating World,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2004.

⁵⁰⁵ Non solo kawaii, “Shunga, Arte Ed Eros in Giappone Nel Periodo Edo,” 2009, <http://www.nonsolokawaii.com/shunga-arte-ed-eros-giappone/>.

⁵⁰⁶ Antonio Mazzotta Foundation, “Mostra Shunga,” 2009, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100125231920/http://www.mostrashunga.it/>.

four of which progressed through the works of important *shunga* artists chronologically from the early seventeenth century to 1900⁵⁰⁷. The curators, Marco Fagioli, who had previously curated the 1989 *shunga* exhibition in Brussels, and Günther Giovannoni, utilised the standard art-historical turning points of Harunobu, Utamaro, and then Hokusai and Kuniyoshi as the division points⁵⁰⁸. The fifth, and somewhat smaller, section compared *shunga* with ‘erotic and pornographic manga’⁵⁰⁹. However, this section was censored and subsequently moved to Yamato Video, Milan⁵¹⁰. There is a clear distinction between the elegant, marble-floored rooms of the Palazzo and the mundane space of a commercial video shop. The *shunga* are designated as art and lent an air of authority by being shown in the official venue, whereas the anime and manga were deemed ‘not art’ by their removal from this space. On the other hand, they may still be considered art but inappropriate for a certain audience.

It appears as though there was no age restriction on entrance; there was a tagline ‘We recommend viewing for mature audiences’ but this seems to relate to the film showings and display of anime and manga at Yamato Video rather than the exhibition itself⁵¹¹. Furthermore, the press release and the official website⁵¹², set up specifically for the *shunga* exhibition, list the admission charges and state a reduced price of €4 for ‘schools and groups’⁵¹³ implying that there was no age restriction. Perhaps the section on anime and manga had to be relocated because there was no age restriction on the exhibition but there are on some explicit anime and manga.

The exhibition was subsequently shown at the Museo delle Culture, Lugano, Switzerland (23 October 2010 - February 27 2011) as part of the *Nippon*:

⁵⁰⁷ Palazzo Reale, “Shunga, Arte Ed Eros Nel Giappone Del Periodo Edo” (Press release, 2009).

⁵⁰⁸ Marco Fagioli and Günther Giovannoni, *Shunga : Arte Ed Eros Nel Giappone Del Periodo Edo* (Milano: Mazzotta, 2009).

⁵⁰⁹ Non solo kawaii, “Shunga, Arte Ed Eros in Giappone Nel Periodo Edo.”

⁵¹⁰ Although it is not clear exactly why or when, it was closed at the Palazzo Reale by 30 October and reopened at Yamato Video on 14 November. For more see *ibid.*; “Shunga E Manga Part 1,” 2009, <http://www.nonsolokawaii.com/shunga-e-manga-part-1/>; “Shunga E Manga Part 2,” 2009, <http://www.nonsolokawaii.com/shunga-e-manga-part-2/>.

⁵¹¹ Antonio Mazzotta Foundation, “Mostra Shunga.”

⁵¹² The official exhibition website no longer exists, but the Internet Archive offers a snapshot of the main page from 25 January 2010, *Ibid.*.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*; Palazzo Reale, “Shunga, Arte Ed Eros Nel Giappone Del Periodo Edo.”

Between Myth and Reality festival which took place throughout the city⁵¹⁴. Although reduced in size to 62 objects, they were grouped in the same four chronological divisions as in Milan⁵¹⁵. Even though the website includes a reduced entrance fee for schools, it had a similar cautionary note, which is auto-translated by the web-browser as 'Note: We recommend a visit to an adult audience'⁵¹⁶. Confusingly, the Museum's own English version of the website translates the tagline in much stronger terms: 'Warning: this exhibition is for ADULT audiences only'⁵¹⁷. However, there was no clarification on what constituted an 'adult' or 'mature' visitor.

The Art of Love

The Art of Love: Ofer Shagan's Shunga Collection at the Tikotin Museum of Japanese Art, Haifa, Israel (June 6 - October 10 2009) was curated by Ilana Singer. Two things differentiate this exhibition from the other regional exhibitions. Firstly, it was all drawn from a single private collection,⁵¹⁸ whereas most *shunga* exhibitions have drawn on private and public collections internationally in order to show the highest quality artworks. Secondly, it showed the broadening appeal of *shunga*, as it took place outside Europe and America, where all of the previous *shunga* exhibitions have been held.

Shunga - Erotika v japonski umetnosti

Shunga - Erotika v japonski umetnosti (*Shunga - Erotic [sic] in Japanese Art*) was held at Lendava Castle, Slovenia from 15 April to 3 July 2011. The exhibition

⁵¹⁴ As well as the accompanying catalogue from Milan, there was a multimedia website created for the *Nippon* festival, which gave information on the themes of the exhibition and offered a selection of highlights, available as webpages, pdf downloads, audio clips, and videos. Città di Lugano, "Nippon, Between Myth and Reality: Arts and Culture from the Land of the Rising Sun," 2010, <http://www.nipponlugano.ch/en/index.html>.

⁵¹⁵ Museo delle Culture, "Shunga. Arte Ed Eros Nel Giappone Del Periodo Edo," 2010, <http://www.lugano.ch/museoculture/welcome.cfm?id=DF8694E141AE8035C125765B004ECC43>

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Museo delle Culture, "Shunga. Art and Eros in Japan's Edo Period.," 2010, <http://www.lugano.ch/museoculture/welcome.cfm?id=DF8694E141AE8035C125765B004ECC43&language=en>.

⁵¹⁸ Shagan has published an 'encyclopaedia' of *shunga*, in both Japanese and English. Whilst these give some cursory and general information, they cannot claim to offer encyclopaedic knowledge of *shunga*; instead, their main purpose seems to be highlighting works from Shagan's collection. Ofer Shagan, *Nippon Shunga Hyakka* (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2011); Ofer Shagan, *Japanese Erotic Art : The Hidden World of Shunga* (New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2013).

appears to have been curated by Andràs Morgós, a professor at Tokyo University of the Arts, who wrote the text for the catalogue⁵¹⁹.

Beyond the Paper Screen

Beyond the Paper Screen - An Exhibition of Japanese Erotic Prints from the Uragami Collection was a short exhibition (it ran for only two weeks, 18-31 July 2013), nevertheless, it was an important development in terms of displaying *shunga* in Asia. *Beyond the Paper Screen* was held at Sotheby's Hong Kong Gallery, where more than 60 *shunga* prints and albums owned by the private collector Uragami were displayed⁵²⁰.

Sotheby's Hong Kong continued to push the boundaries by exhibiting Chinese sexually explicit art in 2014. *Gardens of Pleasure: Sex in Ancient China* exhibition (16 April to 3 May 2014) featured over 100 items from Bertholet's collection⁵²¹. Due to stricter enforcement of censorship, neither Chinese nor Japanese sex art can be exhibited in mainland China, where 'the portrayal of sex is still very sensitive' according to Sotheby's Asia chief executive officer, Kevin Ching⁵²².

Erotic Art of Japan: Everybody's Doing It

Since the exhibition in 1979 at the Ronin Gallery, New York has again played host to a *shunga* exhibition. In March 2014, in the wake of the BM *shunga* exhibition, the knowingly titled *Erotic Art of Japan: Everybody's Doing It*, which as the website explains is 'a triple-entendre'⁵²³, displayed 50 works at the Scholten Japanese Art gallery and over 100 on their website. Unlike most of the exhibitions discussed which have been held at institutions, Scholten Japanese Art is a private art gallery and this was a sales exhibition. Lest this seem too

⁵¹⁹ Andràs Morgós, *Shunga - Erotika v Japonski Umetnosti* (Slovenia: Galerija-Muzej Lendava / Galéria-Múzeum Lendva, 2011).

⁵²⁰ Sotheby's, "Beyond The Paper Screen: An Exhibition of Japanese Erotic Prints from the Uragami Collection," 2013, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2013/pvt-selling-exhibition-i-hk0441.html>.

⁵²¹ Samantha Payne, "Ancient Chinese Erotic Art Exhibition Unveiled for First Time in Hong Kong," *International Business Times*, May 12, 2014.

⁵²² The Japan Times, "Erotic Art Offers Glimpse of China's Lost Sexual Philosophy," *The Japan Times*, April 18, 2014.

⁵²³ Scholten Japanese Art, "Erotic Art of Japan: Everybody's Doing It," 2014, <http://www.scholten-japanese-art.com/shunga.htm>.

opportunistic, the website states that ‘Mr. Scholten began purchasing Japanese erotic prints and books in the 1990s’⁵²⁴. Furthermore, this was not the first time that Scholten had exhibited *shunga* - *Sex in the City: Japanese Erotic Prints* ran 3 November 2001 - 15 February 2002 to coincide with the publication of Klompmakers’ *Japanese erotic prints: shunga by Harunobu and Koryusai*⁵²⁵.

4.2 Displaying shunga in the UK

4.2.1 V&A

Nude statues

In 1903, the then South Kensington Museum, received a letter of complaint from a Mr. Dobson:

I write to raise a protest against the exhibition of nude male statuary which you have on view in one of the Galleries of the S Kens Museums. It’s quite impossible for me (& I have no doubt for others) to take my daughter or children there on account of this. One can hardly designate these statues as “art”! ; if it is, it’s a very objectionable form of art.⁵²⁶

The letter prompted some internal discussion, with Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke (1846-1911), (Director V&A, 1896-1905), searching for records of any similar complaints particularly from the previous 20 years since the tin fig leaves had been removed⁵²⁷. This would mean that the Museum had stopped using fig leaves around 1880, which was only 20 years or so after the fig leaf was specially made for the copy of Michelangelo’s David. Mr. F.G. Ogilvie (Principal Asst. Secretary, Board of Education) responded to Clarke that he had heard only ‘a single objection’ to a nude antique male figure. Despite the public ‘hostility’ that Sir Philip Owen (Director V&A, 1874-1893) anticipated after the removal of the fig leaves not materialising, Ogilvie was still partially in favour of covering genitals on objects on display in a public museum:

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Inge Klompmakers, *Japanese Erotic Prints : Shunga by Harunobu & Koryūshai* (Leiden: Hotei Pub., 2001).

⁵²⁶ C. W. Dobson, “Letter of Complaint 28 April 1903” (V&A Nominal File MA/1/D1262, 1903).

⁵²⁷ Caspar Purdon Clarke and F. G. Ogilvie, “Internal Memo 18 May 1903” (V&A Nominal File MA/1/D1262, 1903).

Public opinion has changed very much on this matter during the last 30 years, but I am of the opinion that it would still be desirable in cases where the nude figure is treated in a very realistic manner, as in the huge figure called John the Baptist by Rodin.⁵²⁸

The reluctance of some staff members to display the human body in its natural state, and the objections over nudity raised by a few members of the public, indicate how difficult it must have been for artworks that were erotic or explicit to be considered ‘art’ at the time. However, attitudes were changing and opinions such as these were in the minority; Clarke emphasises this and cites the BM as an authoritative example against the need for fig leaves:

The antique casts Gallery has been very much used by private lady teachers for the instruction of young girl students and none of them have ever complained even indirectly. To be sure of the British Museum practice I wrote to Mr. [illegible] who informs me that they “don’t use fig leaves and that the students male & female find no difficulty in making careful drawings of Mars, Venus or Pan”.⁵²⁹

However, the examples that Clarke gives are students, who were most likely of a younger generation than the V&A staff and ‘average’ visitor and were more likely to be open to change. Additionally, since they were studying art they would have encountered nude figures previously and would therefore be less likely to be shocked, especially compared to an unaware visitor encountering this kind of art for the first time.

The Floating World

The first public display of *shunga* in the UK was as part of an exhibition on *ukiyo-e*. In 1973 *The Floating World: Japanese Popular Prints 1700-1900* exhibition opened at the V&A and ran from 19 September until 25 November. Minutes state that the exhibition had ‘enjoyed a considerable success’ as it had a total attendance of 37,000 and more than 3,000 copies of the catalogue were sold⁵³⁰. As mentioned, it was curated by Crighton, with assistance from the independent

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ The Victoria & Albert Museum, “Minutes of the 175th Meeting of the Advisory Council, 13 December 1973,” 1973, 4.

Japanese art expert Jack Hillier. In a letter dated 9 September 1971, Robinson, who is not yet ‘officially involved’, asks if Hillier would assist during the planning of the exhibition in an ‘advisory capacity’ as ‘I am anxious that [Crichton’s] first exhibition should be a success’⁵³¹. In his response, dated 13 September, Hillier says he is happy to do anything to help and makes a suggestion:

I do not wish to seem to be putting an oar in at this stage, but I wonder if the proposed show involves illustrated books to any extent, alongside the broadsheets? The V&A collection of books is unusually good, and has a number of outstanding things that could possibly fill out certain areas not too well represented by the separate prints.⁵³²

As Hillier was known as a collector of *ehon*, which at that point were still underappreciated, it is unsurprising that he enquires about their inclusion. Crichton seems to have taken Hillier’s advice as there were 50 illustrated books in addition to about 300 prints and paintings in the exhibition. Although it is not mentioned in any of the correspondence, it is possible that Hillier was also responsible for suggesting the inclusion of another under-appreciated aspect of *ukiyo-e*: *shunga*. The decision to include *shunga* in both the exhibition and the catalogue was not taken lightly, as the correspondence reveals.

The Deputy Director of Publications at the V&A, H. W. Leader, consulted the Treasury Solicitor’s Department and HMSO regarding the inclusion of *shunga* in the exhibition and catalogue. Allan Baher, the Assistant Treasury Solicitor, in reply to Leader gives information on the Obscene Publications Act, the ‘deprave and corrupt’ test and the public good clause, but cautions, ‘it is easy to state the law but nearly impossible to forecast what will or will not be regarded as obscene’⁵³³. Nevertheless, he explains what a jury would assess:

the strength of the literary, sociological or ethical merit they consider the exhibition to possess. The same considerations would apply to a book and I think that if either the book or the exhibition is obscene, the other is also and conversely the book following as it does from the exhibition will not be obscene if the exhibition is not obscene.⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ B. W. Robinson, “Letter from Robinson to Hillier 9 Sept 1971” (V&A Nominal File MA/28/224, 1971).

⁵³² Jack Hillier, “Letter from Hillier to Robinson 13 Sept 1971” (V&A Nominal File MA/28/224, 1971).

⁵³³ Allan Baher, “Letter Dated 11 July 1973” (V&A Archive Nominal File MA/28/224, 1973).

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

Since explicit images accounted for less than five percent of the works in the exhibition and catalogue, Baher accordingly advises that as a whole the risk of depraving and corrupting is low. However, he warns that the *shunga* prints on their own - if taken out of the wider context of Japanese art - would be deemed obscene⁵³⁵. Perhaps this is why *shunga* were not made a separate category in the exhibition layout. Baher also emphasises the importance of context, especially in terms of public and private space, 'there may be a different tendency to deprave and corrupt where a print is seen on a wall by schoolchildren from the case where a book is purchased by a child to take home'⁵³⁶.

A letter from an unidentified V&A staff member to Leader addresses the issues of context and public good raised by Baher:

The exhibition is designed firstly to show a cross-section of the Japanese Prints collection, and to indicate the range of subject matter and styles through which life in 18th and 19th century Edo was reflected. ...The prints at issue (which number only five or six out of a total of three hundred) have been chosen for their artistic qualities, and, in the case of Utamaro, are unsurpassed in this regard by anything else in the Museum's collection. Any exhibition which claimed to give a comprehensive view of Ukiyo-e Prints and yet omitted all the erotica would be invalid from an historical standpoint.⁵³⁷

In addition to these points, the V&A also looked for a precedent for displaying and publishing erotic art. In an internal memo, Dempsey put forward an exhibition and accompanying catalogue on Tantra at the Hayward as a possible precedent since 'Both exhibitions deal with oriental cultures in which the erotic plays an important part.' He then notes that 'they had not a single complaint about this aspect of the Tantra show'⁵³⁸. However, Easeman in his response disagrees,

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Letter Dated 17 July 1973" (V&A Archive Nominal File MA/28/224, 1973).

⁵³⁸ Andrew Dempsey, "Memo Dated 23 January 1973" (V&A Archive Nominal File MA/28/224, 1973).

I am in fact concerned about the Japanese Prints which seem to me to go rather beyond anything included in the Tantra exhibition and could well give offence to some people. In a sense, the Tantra drawings and paintings are symbolic and have religious associations. As I understand it, the situation is not the same with the Japanese Prints where the subject is dealt with somewhat more vividly.⁵³⁹

Easeman takes a more nuanced approach and looks beyond the sexual element to the intention/function of the works, which, whether deliberately or unconsciously, echoes the criteria for a possible defence under Section 4.

Perhaps it was in response to Easeman's concerns that it was decided to have an admission charge, 'one effect of which will be to deter the casual visitor, and the catalogue price of £1.30 will be beyond the range even of lubricious children'⁵⁴⁰. For adults admission was 30p (or free on Thursdays 6-8pm), for students, schoolchildren and OAPs it was 15p, and for school parties it was 10p per head. Note that there is no age limit or advisory. On the contrary, a memo from the PR department to Crichton encloses a leaflet, with the admissions charges and other exhibition information, and a note that these were to be mailed out to schools⁵⁴¹.

The exhibition was divided by subject matter into five areas: I) kabuki and theatre; II) beautiful women; III) landscapes and views; IV) birds and flowers (and other animals); and, the final broader group, V) heroes and heroines, battles and warriors, myths and legends, poetry and fiction. It is pleasing, and rather ahead of his time, that Crichton did not segregate or group *shunga* in a separate section but presented it as a part of *ukiyo-e*⁵⁴². Most of the *shunga* displayed were in section II, beautiful women, with a couple of *abuna-e* in category V. There were 12 *shunga* prints and paintings, two *abuna-e*, and two *shunpon* shown amidst the *bijinga* of section II. These included several works from Utamaro's *Utamakura* series (Figure 54), often regarded as the pinnacle of *shunga*, as well as explicit prints by other leading artists including Harunobu, Koryūsai, and Shuncho, many of which were bequeathed by Horn. There is no

⁵³⁹ Easeman, "Memo Dated 25 January 1973" (V&A Archive Nominal File MA/28/224, 1973).

⁵⁴⁰ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Letter Dated 17 July 1973."

⁵⁴¹ The Victoria & Albert Museum, "Memo Dated 13 June 1973" (V&A Archive Nominal File MA/29/161, 1973).

⁵⁴² Alternatively, this may have been as a precaution to minimise the risk of prosecution by 'decontextualising' *shunga* from other subjects in *ukiyo-e*.

record of the exhibition labels or other interpretation, but it is reasonable to assume that the text in the catalogue essays and captions can be used as a guide to the approach and tone taken. Not all *shunga* were illustrated in the catalogue (those which are are unexpurgated) but neither are most of the illustrated books, whether explicit or not.

Welsh Arts Council

Shunga was included in another exhibition in Britain in the 1970s, but this time the subject was not Japanese art but marriage and sex. Between 1969 and 1976 the Welsh Arts Council (WAC) ran a series of exhibitions, *Art and Society*, on sensitive but weighty subjects: *War*, 1969; *Work*, 1970; *Worship*, 1971; and *Marriage*, 1976. This series, curated by Ken Baynes, has gained a reputation for the impact it had and all four exhibitions were collected into one catalogue titled *Art in Society*⁵⁴³. From a journal article Baynes published on the series, it is clear that *Marriage* was intended to have been titled *Sex* and to have opened in 1973⁵⁴⁴. Some of the items featured in *Marriage* were borrowed from the V&A and the BM. In a more recent article, Huw Jones describes how the exhibition, which had been planned since 1971, was beset by various setbacks due to the subject⁵⁴⁵. The controversy surrounding the exhibition led to discussions on television, radio and in parliament. Baynes had to justify and defend his choice of topic for the exhibition.

Encounters

The only other time the V&A has shown *shunga* is in the 2004 exhibition *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800*. Yet Faulkner points out that this is due to ‘lack of opportunity’ rather than a deliberate decision⁵⁴⁶. *Encounters* ran from 23 September until 5 December 2004. One *shunga* print which showing a personal cross-cultural encounter between a Dutchman and a

⁵⁴³ Ken Baynes, “Art in Society” (London : Lund Humphries, 1975).

⁵⁴⁴ Ken Baynes, “The Art and Society Project of the Welsh Arts Council,” *Leonardo* 6, no. 2 (1973): 97-102.

⁵⁴⁵ Huw David Jones, “Redefining Art and Culture: The Welsh Arts Council’s ‘Art and Society’ Exhibition Series 1969-76,” *Visual Culture in Britain* 15, no. 01 (2014): 28-49.

⁵⁴⁶ Faulkner, “V&A Shunga Exhibition History.”

courtesan (Figure 53) was included. There was an advisory sign which informed visitors that a sexually explicit work was on display.



Figure 53 Chokosai Eisho, *Dutchman and Maruyama Courtesan* from *Fumi no kiyogaki*, colour woodblock print, c.1790-1800, Victoria and Albert Museum. This print, bequeathed by Horn, was also displayed in the *Floating World* exhibition in 1973.

4.2.2 Seduced

The *Seduced: Art and Sex from Antiquity to Now* exhibition, held at the Barbican, London from 12 October 2007 until 27 January 2008, was co-curated by Marina Wallace, Martin Kemp, and Joanne Bernstein. The purpose of the exhibition was clearly stated in the catalogue:

Seduced aims to be both celebratory and discursive: it encourages pleasure at the same time as encouraging debate. It celebrates sexual experience as a defining condition of humanity while simultaneously asking important questions about the changing social acceptability of visual representation of the sexual act.⁵⁴⁷

That statement also encapsulates the intentions of this thesis, albeit with a more specific focus in terms of cultures and time span than *Seduced*, which included artworks from India, China, ancient Greece and Rome, and twentieth-

⁵⁴⁷ Wallace, Kemp, and Bernstein, *Seduced: Art & Sex from Antiquity to Now*, 6.

century America. There were some *shunga* on display, including works loaned by the BM, however these were shown in a separate area. Kemp explains this was intended to create a smaller space with a sense of privacy to view smaller, more intimate items, like *shunga*, in a rough approximation of the way they would have been viewed⁵⁴⁸.

Entrance to the exhibition was limited to over 18s only; a fact which one reviewer critiques:

if the Barbican had not banned under-18s - highlighting the hypocritical discrepancy between the age of consent [16 in the UK] and the age at which you are deemed mature enough to view sexual imagery - this exhibition might usefully be exploited as a pedagogical tool to encourage sexual openness and discussion among young adults.⁵⁴⁹

Thatcher's point is reasonable as public institutions have the potential to affect society and inform people's opinions. As shall be discussed shortly, this notion of sexual imagery as a tool for discussion and pedagogy was to be successfully undertaken seven years later by the Wellcome Collection. However, the age restriction at the Barbican was due to the rating classifications of the film pieces shown, rather than because of institutional censorship or hypocrisy by the curators; in fact, Kemp stated that he wanted no age restriction⁵⁵⁰.

Fortunately, rather than relying on reasoned assumptions and suppositions, in the case of *Seduced*, further insight is available. The curators have openly described some of the additional processes and deliberations that occurred due to the sexual nature of the exhibition. For instance, *Seduced* evolved from a project which began in 2002 as 'Intimate Relations', but it failed to get off the ground because of lack of sponsorship⁵⁵¹. In 2013 Wallace elaborated on some of

⁵⁴⁸ Martin Kemp, "Art and Pornography: The Beholder's Share" (London: Aesthetics, Art, and Pornography at the Institute of Philosophy, 2011).

⁵⁴⁹ Jennifer Thatcher, "Seduced: Art and Sex from Antiquity to Now," *Art Monthly* 312 (2007): 25-26.

⁵⁵⁰ Kemp, "Art and Pornography: The Beholder's Share."

⁵⁵¹ Wallace, Kemp, and Bernstein, *Seduced: Art & Sex from Antiquity to Now*.

the issues relating to *Seduced*⁵⁵², whilst Kemp reflected on his experience of curating *Seduced*, at the Institute of Philosophy conference *Aesthetics, Art, and Pornography* in 2011. In his exploration of the differences between art and pornography, two areas were of particular importance for Kemp: intention, which he defined as a broad span of motives and not only the conscious intention of the maker, and context of viewing, having control over how people see and understand images. He acknowledged that by showing sexually explicit images in a museum they become legitimised as ‘art’ regardless of their original intention and reception, for example, brothel items⁵⁵³. Perhaps it was this awareness of the power that institutions have over how people understand works that led Kemp and his co-curators to pose questions throughout the exhibition and catalogue, rather than attempt to give definitive answers. Similarly, on the issue of whether an item is art and/or porn, Kemp advocates the use of fuzzy categories rather than a list of necessary criteria⁵⁵⁴.

The well-known art critic Waldemar Januszczak reviewed *Seduced*. In a reversal of the usual distinctions made between art and pornography, ancient and modern, paintings and photographs, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, Januszczak claims that the older prints and paintings, particularly the Western works, ‘[don’t] have the space, either, or the time, to become good art’ because of social restrictions. Instead, he praises the modern, photographic works:

The invention of photography was a boon because it did away with the need for bad and hasty squiggling. ...Artistically, the show only really springs to tumescent life upstairs, where the most recent examples of sex’s relationship with art are preserved.⁵⁵⁵

Januszczak’s response contradicts most visitors’ reactions; as Kemp pointed out, because of historical distance, visitors tend to be more accepting of antique works than modern ones⁵⁵⁶. On the other hand, there have been numerous exhibitions of photographic works of a sexual nature by Robert Mapplethorpe or

⁵⁵² Wallace, “The Fluidity of Acceptability: Seduced by Art and Pornography and the Kinsey Institute Collection.”

⁵⁵³ Kemp, “Art and Pornography: The Beholder’s Share.”

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Waldemar Januszczak, “Seduced at the Barbican,” 2007, <http://www.waldemar.tv/2007/10/seduced-at-the-barbican/>.

⁵⁵⁶ Kemp, “Art and Pornography: The Beholder’s Share.”

Nan Golding, for example, and it is only on occasion that these have caused upset over the past decade or two.

As a means of pre-empting potential accusations of obscenity, the Barbican conferred with lawyers, the police, and London city councillors and showed them the exhibition before it opened. Another preparatory measure was that the curators of *Seduced* underwent media training for dealing with the tabloids⁵⁵⁷.

4.2.3 The British Museum

Mitsubishi Galleries Displays

The BM's dedicated Japanese exhibition space, The Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries (Rooms 92-94, Level 5), opened in 1990. Prior to that date, Room 91, which used to be called the Konica Gallery, was used for special/temporary Oriental exhibitions. The Japanese Galleries were specially built in a converted space above the Prints and Drawings Gallery (Rooms 90, 91 and 91a, Level 4). On occasion *shunga* has been shown in the Japanese Galleries, for instance in *Japan Time*, a themed display in 2000. *Shunga* has also featured in the general *Japan from Pre-history to the Present* displays in the Mitsubishi Galleries, in October 2007-February 2008 and in 2010. Although the display layout and theme are permanent, some items are rotated every three or four months due to conservation reasons, to display more of the collection, and to keep the display interesting for repeat visitors. The BM has generally opted not to have an age restriction. Instead, in a relaxation of institutional censorship the curators allowed visitors to make an informed choice; notices were displayed advising visitors that sexually explicit works were on display. Furthermore, an age restriction is difficult to enforce on displays as, unlike exhibitions, they can have more than one entrance or exit, and being free, there are no dedicated staff at the entrance to check tickets.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

A Dream of Fair Women

The first time that *shunga* was exhibited at the British Museum was in 1978 as part of the exhibition *A Dream of Fair Women: Japanese Paintings and Prints of the Ukiyoe School*. The exhibition, curated by Lawrence Smith, ran from 8 June to 24 September in Room 91. Rather than making an event of it or drawing unnecessary attention by seeking permission, Smith decided to include a few mild *shunga* prints, with the personal caveat that if there were any complaints he would remove them⁵⁵⁸. Only three works in the exhibition were *shunga*. These were the three least-explicit scenes from *Utamakura* but they were also chosen for their aesthetic qualities to display Utamaro's skill, as can be seen in Figure 54. This method of gradually reintroducing *shunga* as a part of *ukiyo-e* is an effective way to normalise *shunga*, rather than make it the focus of attention and thus invite offence, and has been the approach taken by subsequent BM curators.



Figure 54 Kitagawa Utamaro, scene 10 from *Utamakura (Poem of the Pillow)*, 1788, colour woodblock print, British Museum.

⁵⁵⁸ Smith, "Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum."

Commendably, Smith did not shy away from discussing *Utamakura* and included a few paragraphs on ‘erotica’ in his explanation of themes in the slim exhibition catalogue. He gives a brief background on *shunga* production and censorship before heralding *The Poem of the Pillow* as a ‘masterpiece’⁵⁵⁹. Despite being few in number, these works drew the attention of the *Sunday Times* magazine, which featured the exhibition on the cover with the title ‘The Erotic Art of Utamaro’ and included a seven-page article. The article was written by Smith, and he introduced *ukiyo-e*, Edo life and detailed Utamaro’s *Twelve Hours of the Green Houses*, which is a non-explicit series depicting a day in the life of courtesans⁵⁶⁰.

The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro

The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro was a large scale retrospective, the most comprehensive to date, which featured over 500 prints, paintings and illustrated books. It was co-curated by Clark and Asano, of the Chibashi Bijutsukan (Chiba City Museum of Art) where it was subsequently displayed. The Chiba version of *Utamaro* will be discussed in section 4.3.1. *Utamaro* was held at the British Museum from 31 August to 22 October 1995, had a modest admission charge of £3, and filled not only the entire Mitsubishi Galleries (Rooms 92-94), which displayed books and prints, but also Room 91 (which is connected to Room 93 by a flight of stairs), which showcased paintings. The exhibition was conceived in two halves and on 25 and 26 September there was an almost complete change of works.

Shunpon was boldly displayed together in two cases down the centre of the Mitsubishi Galleries, in both halves of the exhibition. In total, seven different book and series titles, most with several volumes or sheets, were displayed including *Ehon kiku no tsuyu* (Figure 34), *Ehon toko no ume*, *Ehon warai jogo* (Figure 8Figure 61) and *Ehon hana fubuki*. Having an allocated space for *shunga* allowed the BM to display all twelve scenes from *Utamakura* together (including Figure 20Figure 54), along with the sheets from a private collector’s versions of *Ehon komachi-biki* and *Negai no itoguchi* (Figure 7), which had been separated

⁵⁵⁹ *A Dream of Fair Women : Japanese Paintings and Prints of the Ukiyoe School* (London: British Museum, 1978), 4.

⁵⁶⁰ Lawrence Smith, “A Dream of Fair Women: The Erotic Art of Utamaro,” *The Sunday Times Magazine*, June 1978.

out. Often, when displayed or published, a *shunga* image is shown out of the context of the rest of the series, album, or book of which it is a part, which can give the misleading impression of *shunga* being single-sheet prints. That the BM was able to show an entire series or contents of a volume of *ehon* provided visitors with the opportunity to understand images in relation to their original context as Edo viewers would have. The obvious shift from private to public viewing will be put to one side for the moment and addressed in Chapter 6.

Further context for all of Utamaro's works was available in the two-volume catalogue by Asano and Clark⁵⁶¹, which has become the standard text on Utamaro and is highly regarded by art historians and art lovers alike. However, the scholarly focus and high cost of the catalogue, even more so since it is out of print, may have been prohibitive for more casual visitors. This is perhaps why a more comprehensive than usual exhibition guide leaflet was available. The guide, when unfolded, covered two sides of A3 and gave information about Utamaro and the stages of his career, as well as sections on censorship, poetry, the Yoshiwara, ordinary women, and erotica. The leaflet also states 'Please note that this exhibition includes explicitly erotic imagery'.

The inclusion of *shunpon* in the exhibition was a significant sign of progress, both in terms of decreasing institutional censorship by the BM and in the increasing acceptability and awareness of *shunga*. More than this, to Clark the inclusion of *shunga* was essential,

Shunga is extremely important within the oeuvre of Utamaro as a whole, but more generally in his work eroticism, sensuality, we use the word 'passion' in the title of the exhibition, is fundamental to an understanding of what his art is all about.⁵⁶²

He further emphasises this point by noting how the lack of *shunga* affected the Chiba exhibition, 'It really takes a lot of the punch out of the exhibition as a whole'⁵⁶³.

⁵⁶¹ Asano and Clark, *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro*.

⁵⁶² "Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition."

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

Ukiyo-e I-V

Between 1998 and 2002, Clark curated a series of chronological exhibitions, *Ukiyo-e I - Ukiyo-e V*, to showcase the BM's Japanese print collection, which cannot be permanently displayed due to the light sensitivity of the pigments. Clark was involved in the Indiana University *shunga* project in 1996 and had included *shunga* in the 1995 *Utamaro* exhibition; consequently, it seems a natural progression that he would continue to include *shunga* in displays and exhibitions where they were relevant. In the case of *ukiyo-e*, *shunga* accounted for a significant portion, it is estimated about a fifth or a quarter, of many artists' output and is therefore undeniably relevant. Fortunately, many of the interpretation labels are extant and can be used to give an insight into the terms used and approach taken towards *shunga* at that point in time. This can be usefully compared with earlier and later institutional texts to form an overview of how the institutional censorship of explicit art has gradually decreased.

Ukiyo-e I: Early Period to 1765 ran from 20 January until 13 April 1998 in the Konica Gallery (now Room 91). Perhaps not wanting to overwhelm visitors or to challenge the status quo too much in the first exhibition of the series, only two of the 77 works are *shunga*, with one *abuna-e*. The two *shunga* prints are by Kiyonobu and are referred to in the text as 'erotica'. Erotica is mentioned not only in these two object labels, but also in some of the larger contextual case panels.

Ukiyo-e II: Harunobu, Chinese & Japanese Bird & Flowers ran from 1 December 1998 until 7 February 1999. As well as an increase in the number of *shunga* included, 16 prints and books out of a total of 95, this exhibition introduced the term '*shunga*' in addition to 'erotic' in the interpretation. On the whole, the object labels take a straightforward tone and use matter of fact words rather than euphemisms. For instance, 'Mane'emon comments that the man's testicles are as big as a pumpkin'. Although, this is a polite rephrasing rather than a direct translation, as characters in *shunga* tend to use informal and colloquial speech and Mane'emon in particular has a colourful vocabulary. The romanticising term 'lovemaking' occurs frequently, rather than a more direct reference to 'sex', but since the exhibition is aimed at a wide audience using

‘softer’ terms seems less likely to draw criticism. *Ukiyo-e II* features a representative range of *shunga* from the humorous and engaging scenes in the *Mane’emon* series, which includes a happily married couple, a male-male couple (Figure 23), and a husband cheating on his pregnant wife, to the refined elegance of the *shunpon Komachi-biki*, one of Utamaro’s acknowledged masterpieces, which refers to the famous ninth-century poet Ono no Komachi. The majority of the *shunga* prints were grouped in a central, free-standing case but since seven are by Harunobu and several more by Koryūsai, whose prints were previously attributed to Harunobu, this may be for stylistic reasons and not just because of the sexual content of the works.

Ukiyo-e III: Kiyonaga & the Multi-sheet Print followed directly on from *Ukiyo-e II* from 8 February until 18 April 1999. Amidst the 64 works, it featured four scenes from Kiyonaga’s *Sode no maki*, a Shuncho *shunga* print and an *abuna-e*. Again the terms ‘erotic’ and ‘*shunga*’ are used and the descriptive manner of the interpretation is no different from the rest of the exhibition labels.

Ukiyo-e IV: Utamaro, Sharaku & Eishi, which ran from 30 January until 8 April 2001, follows a similar pattern, with only two volumes of *shunpon* and a couple of *abuna-e* out of 70 works. However, given that Sharaku only produced kabuki prints (he is one of the few *ukiyo-e* artists not to produce *shunga*) and that many examples of Utamaro’s erotic output had already featured in earlier exhibitions, it is understandable that there were not greater numbers of *shunga* included. The *shunpon* displayed were two volumes of *Negai no itoguchi*, another of Utamaro’s explicit masterpieces.

There seems to have been no *shunga* included in *Ukiyo-e V*, which was held in spring 2002 and covered the period from 1800 to 1820.

The Asahi Shimbun Displays

The Mitsubishi Corporation are not the BM’s only Japanese sponsor; *Asahi Shimbun*, Japan’s leading daily newspaper, has had a long-standing relationship with the BM since the early 1980s. Not only is there an *Asahi Shimbun Gallery*, which displays Indian sculpture, but there is also an ongoing series of sponsored

temporary exhibitions in Room 3, *The Asahi Shimbun Displays*. Displays in Room 3 usually run for three months and are used as an opportunity to showcase an item from the Museum's collection, to raise an interesting issue, to test out ideas with visitors, to whet visitors' appetites, and so forth. Although supported by *Asahi Shimbun*, these displays are not limited to Japanese themes and have highlighted a wide range of objects and cultures from the BM collection. Nonetheless there have been several Room 3 displays focused on Japanese culture, including *Dressed to impress: netsuke and Japanese men's fashion* (19 June - 17 August 2014), *Ikebana: Living Flowers of Japan* (5 July - 19 August 2007), *Samurai to Manga: Japan across the centuries* (15 December 2005 - 8 February 2006), and *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*.

The *Women of the Pleasure Quarters: A Japanese Painted Screen* display, which was planned to coincide with, and complement, the 2013 *Shunga* exhibition, ran from 29 August to 3 November. The Tamaya screen was the centrepiece, with related objects such as coins and prints used to give context. Associated events such as a free talk by Clark gave visitors the opportunity to discover more about courtesans, prostitution and Edo-Japan. Visitor observations and surveys were carried out, which revealed that many of the visitors to the display were aware of or had also visited the *Shunga* exhibition⁵⁶⁴.

Warren Cup

Another Room 3 display of relevance focused on the sexually explicit nature of the Warren Cup (11 May - 2 June 2006). Rather than the institution dictating what should be censored, the BM continued their more progressive approach: a disclaimer explaining that sexually explicit works were on show was put up at the entrance to Room 3. This allowed viewers to decide for themselves. The Warren Cup has featured in several special exhibitions including *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010-2011) and *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict* (24 July - 26 August 2008), been loaned to York, Nottingham, Plymouth and the Isle of Wight, and is part of the permanent display in the BM's main galleries.

⁵⁶⁴ Laura Purseglove, "Interview on Room 3 Displays" (Personal communication, 2013).

The Warren Cup display, subtitled *Sex and society in Ancient Greece and Rome*, included a *shunga* preparatory drawing to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons of attitudes to male-male sex. The exhibition feedback report observed that visitors engaged with the themes and were keen to learn more about ‘the changing attitudes to sexuality across cultures and eras’⁵⁶⁵. Furthermore, the report revealed that

The majority of visitors were pleasantly surprised by the exhibition, and many thought the subject matter was entirely appropriate for the British Museum as it reflects modern society and the interests of visitors. If anything, visitors wanted to be more shocked and challenged by exhibitions!⁵⁶⁶

The BM seems to have taken note of visitor responses and since then has engaged with the challenging themes of sex and sexuality again, as shall be discussed in Chapter 6. Two recent examples of exhibitions which have included sexually explicit art, without age restriction or complaint, are *Life and Death: Pompeii and Herculaneum* (28 March - 29 September 2013), and *Defining Beauty: the body in ancient Greek art* (26 March - 5 July 2015).

4.2.4 Shunga in recent exhibitions, 2012-2015

Several recent exhibitions in the UK have included *shunga*, perhaps encouraged by the knowledge of the BM exhibition. Although *shunga* were shown at the *Hokusai Exposed* exhibition in London in 2013, they were low quality reproductions, which were not to scale, and they were not displayed as art. For these reasons it will not be discussed further.

Nobuyoshi Araki

From 2 May - 8 June 2013, a selection of *shunga* was shown at the Michael Hoppen Gallery, London, alongside the work of contemporary Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki. He acknowledged that *shunga* are a source of inspiration: ‘I’d like to take photos similar to *Shunga*, but I haven’t reached that level yet. There is bashfulness in *Shunga*. The genitals are visible, but the rest is

⁵⁶⁵ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, “Pleasure You Can Measure: Visitor Responses to the Warren Cup Exhibition” (London, 2006), 23.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

hidden by the kimono. In other words, they don't show everything. They are hiding a secret'⁵⁶⁷.

The Night of Longing: Love and Desire in Japanese Prints

In 2013, to coincide with and complement the BM exhibition, *The Night of Longing: Love and Desire in Japanese Prints* at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, exhibited *shunga* prints and books as one of the ways love was depicted in Japanese art. The exhibition, which ran from 1 November 2013 - 12 February 2014, was curated by Craig Hartley and largely utilised works from the Museum's own collection, with a few loans from private collectors. Thanks to this, the exhibition was free, but, following the BM's lead, an age advisory was displayed at the entrance to the gallery: 'Parental guidance advised for visitors under 16 years'.

The works shown in the exhibition are available to view on the Fitzwilliam's website, which also features an age advisory⁵⁶⁸. The online version of the exhibition allowed Hartley to add extra prints and more information than in the gallery space⁵⁶⁹. In particular, it permitted translations of dialogue and other text within the prints and books, which would take up far more space than a standard exhibition label, to be included. He noted that this was particularly significant for the works in the Pillow Pictures section, because the translations of the dialogue can 'change your preconception of what the mood and content of the print is' and that this was an important reason for including them⁵⁷⁰. The Pillow Pictures section featured more than a dozen *shunga* prints and books, as well as a few *abuna-e*. The dialogue for the *shunga* included on the website is based on translations by Laura Moretti, University of Cambridge. As with most *shunga* the dialogue can be very explicit, colloquial, and feature a lot of moaning or other onomatopoeic noises.

⁵⁶⁷ Michael Hoppen Gallery, "Nobuyoshi Araki," 2013, http://www.michaelhoppengallery.com/exhibition,current,3,0,0,2318,169,0,0,0,michael_hoppen_gallery.html.

⁵⁶⁸ The Fitzwilliam Museum, "The Night of Longing: Love and Desire in Japanese Prints" (The Fitzwilliam Museum, October 30, 2013), <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/nightoflonging/index.html>.

⁵⁶⁹ Craig Hartley, "Interview on Acquisition and Display of Shunga at the Fitzwilliam" (Personal communication, 2013).

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.



Figure 55 Yanagawa Shigenobu, Dutch Couple from *Yanagi no arashi (Willow Storm)*, late 1820s, colour woodblock print, Fitzwilliam Museum

Hartley felt that the dialogue in a print by Shigenobu (Figure 55) depicting a Dutch couple was even more explicit than other *shunga*, which made him hesitant to include a translation of it in the gallery. Although the Shigenobu print was intended to be part of the exhibition, the mock-European style ‘jarred’ with the surrounding *ukiyo-e* works and so it featured only in the online version, where the ‘raunchier’ text was less of an issue⁵⁷¹.

Beautifully Obscene

Beautifully Obscene: The History of the Erotic Print was an exhibition curated by History and Philosophy of Art students which ran 15 May - 12 June 2015 at the Studio 3 Gallery, University of Kent. The exhibition consisted of prints by a variety of artists from over 500 years, including Pietro Aquila (c. 1630-1692), William Hogarth (1697-1764), Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). The students were keen to incorporate examples of *shunga*, for their aesthetic appeal and to redress the balance of predominantly European works, but lacked the budget to acquire such prints. They contacted me and, with kind assistance from the Japanese Art History community, I was able to put them in touch with a private collector who was happy to loan them *shunga* for the exhibition. Initially the collector, Kirill Danelia, wished to remain anonymous

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

but just before the catalogue went to print changed his mind. Danelia generously loaned a total of 17 *shunga* prints and books, including works by Hokusai, Koryūsai, and Utamaro, to the *Beautifully Obscene* exhibition, five of which appear in the catalogue. The catalogue also features a short, general introduction to *shunga* which draws on various parts of this thesis⁵⁷².

Unfortunately, the text was written and submitted before the *shunga* being loaned had been decided and therefore does not relate specifically to the works reproduced.

Institute of Sexology

The Institute of Sexology exhibition opened at the Wellcome Collection, London on 20 November 2014 and ran until 20 September 2015. As well as drawing items from its own collection, it also borrowed objects from the Kinsey Institute and the Science Museum, London. Throughout the run of the exhibition a comprehensive series of events took place. To further understanding of sexology - ‘the interdisciplinary study and classification of human sexuality’ - an exhibition guide booklet was freely available, in addition to the reasonably priced catalogue. Not all of the 200 plus objects on display were art or literature, some were documents and equipment relating to people who made scientific and social advances relating to sexuality such as Marie Stopes, Alfred Kinsey, and Sigmund Freud. Several examples of sexually explicit material culture were on display, including an album of paintings from China, a Greek flask depicting group sex, and a clamshell containing an erotic image from Japan, which was described as *shunga* in the interpretation label.

One important divergence from most other exhibitions discussed in this chapter is that *Sexology* was free. Previously exhibitions had an admission charge to deter those who may be casual, unsuitable, or uninformed visitors in an effort to minimise the risk of upset or prosecution. Due to the scientific and educational focus of *Sexology*, it is likely that the Wellcome Collection felt there was less risk of prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act and/or were more confident that the exhibition was demonstrably in the public interest, as defined

⁵⁷² Louise Boyd, “*Shunga*: Sexually Explicit Japanese Art,” in *Beautifully Obscene: The History of the Erotic Print*, ed. Allegra Baggio-Corradi et al. (Canterbury: Studio 3 Gallery, 2015), 22-28.

under Section 4. Sensibly, a cautionary tagline, drawing attention to the fact that sexually explicit images were on display, was still included in promotional material and at the entrance to the exhibition rooms.

4.3 Displaying *shunga* in Japan

Although this section is entitled ‘displaying *shunga*’ it will start with several examples of *shunga* being excluded from exhibitions. There are undoubtedly countless more instances that have gone unrecorded, as it is standard for exhibitions in Japan, even exhibitions of *ukiyo-e*, not to include *shunga*. I will then outline two examples which did include *shunga*.

4.3.1 Excluding *shunga*

Utamaro

A prominent example of *shunga* being excluded from an exhibition in Japan is the *Utamaro* exhibition at Chiba, 3 November-10 December 1995. It was noticeable because the same exhibition had been shown months prior at the BM, which allowed for direct comparison. Although with any travelling exhibition there will be slight differences in the works shown for conservation reasons or lenders’ preferences, the exclusion of *shunga* is more significant. The *shunga* works were not excluded for these common, practical reasons but solely because they depict genitalia and sex. As detailed in Chapter 3, *shunga* are an integral part of Utamaro’s oeuvre as they are ‘fundamental to an understanding of what his art is all about’⁵⁷³. The decision to exclude *shunga* from the exhibition and catalogue was not made by the curator Asano, but imposed upon him by the museum’s Board of Education, who claimed that as a public institution (whose visitors include children) it was not appropriate for Chiba to show *shunga*⁵⁷⁴. That curators and other museum staff were willing to engage with *shunga*, but those at higher levels of management vetoed it became a recurring pattern when a Japanese venue was sought for the 2013 *shunga* exhibition.

⁵⁷³ Clark, “Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition.”

⁵⁷⁴ Asano, “春画や歌麿展についてのインタビュー (Interview on Shunga and the Utamaro Exhibition).”

Karada no imēji

In general, the omission of *shunga* from exhibitions in Japan is less obvious. For instance, an exhibition entitled *Karada no imēji: seiyō to Nihon no jintai hyōgen: kinsei kara gendai e* (*The Image of Human Body in the Past and Present*) was held at the Shizuoka kenritsu bijutsukan (Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art) (19 October - 1 December, 1991). Although this exhibition pre-dated the relaxation in enforcement of laws about depicting pubic hair (and consequently nudity), a number of post-Edo period and European nudes were on display. The inclusion of *shunga* within an exhibition devoted to the image of the human body, and which featured *ukiyo-e*, would have been entirely apt, but no sexually explicit works were shown. On the one hand, Shizuoka *bijutsukan* had opened only five years earlier and its collection policy focused on landscapes⁵⁷⁵. On the other hand, from the catalogue essays it is clear that the curatorial team put a lot of consideration into ideas of the body and the nude, so it is disappointing that *shunga* were not a part of this. The exhibition was displayed chronologically across seven rooms to show changes of style, with Japanese and ‘Western’ works separated. However, the omission of *shunga* means that conclusions drawn about cultural comparisons and stylistic development based on *Karada no imēji* are likely to be incorrect as they are based on incomplete source material.

Interestingly, ten years later a similarly themed exhibition, entitled *Human Images*, was held at Kyoto National Museum, 23 October - 25 November 2001. Ishigami notes that some *shunga* were included in *Human Images*⁵⁷⁶.

Daiei Hakubutsukan Nikuhitsu Ukiyo-e Meihinten

In 1996, the BM encountered some resistance when they tried to loan a *shunga* handscroll attributed to Katsukawa Shun’ei to Chiba City Museum of Art for the travelling exhibition *Daiei Hakubutsukan Nikuhitsu Ukiyo-e Meihinten* (*Masterpieces of Ukiyo-e Painting from the British Museum*). Smith recalls:

⁵⁷⁵ Shizuoka Kenritsu Bijutsukan, “Karada No Imēji : Seiyō to Nihon No Jintai Hyōgen : Kinsei Kara Gendai E = The Image of Human Body in the Past and Present” (Shizuoka-shi: Shizuoka Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1991), 7.

⁵⁷⁶ Ishigami and Buckland (trans.), “The Reception of Shunga in the Modern Era: From Meiji to the Pre-WWII Years,” 38.

The painting was in two parts: the first part, obviously going from right to left, was very beautiful scenes of lovers but no genitalia showing, they were fully clothed, and that was the bit that was going to be shown, and then it went on to real *shunga* stuff. A customs official happened to go all the way through it and refused to allow it in. ...I thought this was an extraordinary situation; this was produced in Japan, it's now being reintroduced by the British Museum and they can't let it in.⁵⁷⁷

Smith's reaction was similar to my own response when I discovered that *shunga* had been excluded from the Chiba *Utamaro* exhibition and catalogue. Eventually the scroll was allowed through customs after Asahi Shimbun, one of the organisers of the exhibition, stepped in and vouched for the British Museum. Clark couriered the scroll to Japan and remembers how assurances had to be made that the explicit sections would not be shown, and possibly even that only the BM staff would handle it so that no Japanese person could see the *shunga* scenes⁵⁷⁸.

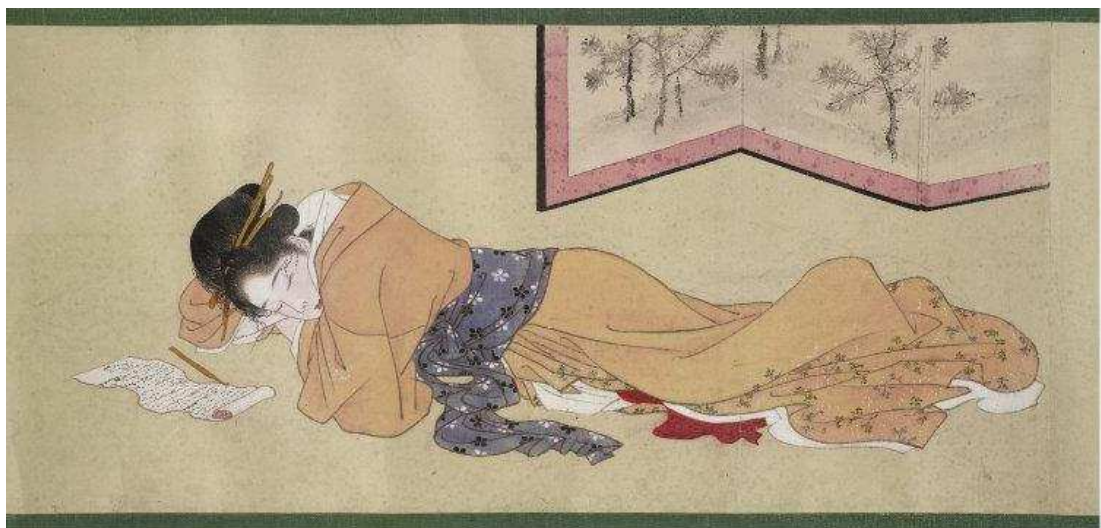


Figure 56 Katsukawa Shun'ei (attrib.), scene from an untitled handscroll, c.1800, ink, colour and mica on paper, the British Museum

The scroll was displayed, at Chiba and three other Japanese art museums, opened to an innocuous section showing a courtesan dreaming (Figure 56). Surprisingly, the catalogue entry for the scroll does mention *shunga*. Whilst it

⁵⁷⁷ Smith, "Interview on Shunga Collecting and Display in the British Museum."

⁵⁷⁸ Clark, "Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition."

does not elaborate on the term, the text explains that *shunga* scrolls normally have 12 scenes and that two are missing from this scroll⁵⁷⁹.

4.3.2 Happiness

A selection of *shunga* were shown in an exhibition entitled *Happiness* held at the Mori Museum, Tokyo, 18 October 2003 - 18 January 2004. *Shunga* were part of a themed section called Desire⁵⁸⁰. However, the *shunga* works were not openly displayed but put in a separate curtained off room for over 18s only.

4.3.3 Ritsumeikan University

To coincide with *shunga* workshops and symposia taking place at Ritsumeikan as part of the *shunga* research project, there were displays of *shunga* in 2009 and 2014. However, an informal source noted that these displays drew complaints from the local community.

4.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter and the previous one, examples have been given to show that institutions have gone to great efforts to minimise any potential offence whilst still engaging with *shunga*. They have given due consideration to how to avoid accidental viewing by unaware visitors and have provided information to aid visitors' understanding of *shunga*. There are many reasons for displaying *shunga*, but an obvious one, which admirably has been avoided by the majority of exhibitions discussed in this chapter, is to deliberately court controversy in an attempt to boost publicity and in turn visitor numbers. The institutions discussed above chose *shunga* for a number of reasons including aesthetic and artistic enjoyment; cultural or psychological insight; humour; to foster debate about censorship or sexual mores; to expand knowledge and understanding in relation to art, science, literature, and Edo-period culture; as a

⁵⁷⁹ Chiba-shi Bijutsukan, ed., *Daiei Hakubutsukan Nikuhitsu Ukiyoe Meihinten* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1996), 197.

⁵⁸⁰ David Elliott and Pier Luigi Tazzi, *Happiness : A Survival Guide for Art + Life = Hapinesu : Ato Ni Miru Koŕuku E No Kagi* (Tokyo; Kyoto: Mori Art Museum; Tankosha, 2003).

way of exploring sexuality, love, and romance; and to engage with a fundamental aspect of human experience in terms of the past and the present.

This chapter has described exhibitions and displays which have notably featured or primarily focused on *shunga* in order to demonstrate the rapid advancements that have been made in the acceptability of explicit art over a relatively short period of time. Some of these changes can be seen in the increasing number of *shunga* included in Japanese art exhibitions and in the language used to describe and interpret them. Most of the exhibitions discussed in this chapter, regardless of theme, have chosen to display *shunga* based on the artistic merits of the images. Most also had an admission charge and an advisory about the sexually explicit content. Having given examples of works exhibited and progress made by individual institutions, I will briefly compare and contrast some of these examples to show the different ways in which *shunga* has functioned as part of an exhibition narrative.

One of the key reasons for including *shunga* in an exhibition is to give it its due place within Japanese art, whether that is within Edo-period art in general, *ukiyo-e*, or a particular artists' oeuvre. It has been established that to exclude *shunga* is to ignore an integral part of Edo art and culture, and misrepresents artists, *ukiyo-e* and Edo society more generally. The V&A's *The Floating World* in 1973, and the BM's *Ukiyo-e* series and *Utamaro* exhibition in the 1990s have been instrumental in aiding the reintegration of *shunga* back into Japanese art histories, which is an ongoing process. This is in contrast to the continued exclusion of *shunga* noted at Japanese institutions.

Exhibitions which have focused specifically on *shunga*, particularly those in Helsinki, Rotterdam, and Hawai'i, have allowed for greater insight into the nuances and differences within *shunga*. As laid out in the introductory chapter, *shunga* was not a cohesive genre but an umbrella term. By gathering together large quantities of *shunga*, these institutions have allowed visitors to see the range and diversity of the works.

Displays which have come about as part of an academic project, such as with Indiana University in 1996 and Ritsumeikan University in 2009 and 2014, had the

clear intention to further knowledge and understanding of *shunga*. That the mid-1990s and early 2010s, when these events occurred, have been turning points for a more general increased acceptability and awareness of *shunga* is no coincidence. Through focused research, these projects drew together scholars from various Japan- and art-related fields, which resulted in the advancement of *shunga* studies.

Exhibitions which focused on erotic materials and issues of censorship, such as *L'Enfer* and *Seduced*, have utilised *shunga* in a different way. In *Seduced*, *shunga* was shown to help create a narrative of erotic art globally, as sex is treated as a basic human experience which exists across cultural and artistic differences. *L'Enfer* and, although it didn't include *shunga*, *Banned Books* featured sexually explicit art and literature to foreground the changes in censorship that have occurred, as for several decades, if not centuries, those works could not be displayed.

Rather than choosing *shunga* specifically for its aesthetic qualities, *the Institute of Sexology* exhibition at the Wellcome Collection used *shunga* to make scientific/anthropological/psychological points. It might be expected that *shunga* would be used in a similar manner in Kinsey Institute exhibitions, as Wellcome and Kinsey had similar motivations for collecting and prioritised the scientific or anthropological aspects over the artistic. However, of the KI exhibitions, *shunga* featured most prominently in *Eros in Asia*, where they seemed to have been chosen for artistic reasons rather than psychological or scientific insight. Although like *Seduced*, *Eros in Asia* gave the opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons.

Whilst the Warren Cup Room 3 display also used *shunga* cross-culturally, its main theme was exploring sexuality. This is another area where *shunga* are ideal for stimulating discussion: they depict more than the usual hetero-normative, cis-gendered male-female couple. *Shunga* give more scope for a wider range of viewers to connect as they commonly depict male-male couples, and allow for a fluidity of sexuality by depicting sexual scenes with two males and one female. There are also scenes with multiple participants. Depictions of female-female sex are rare, although there are extant examples.

I would argue that one or two *shunga* included in an exhibition like *Encounters*, which is not focused on either Japanese or erotic art, demonstrates that *shunga* have been successfully reintegrated as artworks. Furthermore, *shunga* have achieved a genuine level of acceptability, because the specific contents of the picture rather than the sexual nature of the works is the focus. In this exhibition, *shunga* forms part of a narrative about interactions between European and Asian cultures.

5. BM Shunga exhibition: an in-depth study

From the conception of this thesis it was intended that the exhibitions of *shunga*, planned for 2013 at the BM and at a partner venue in Japan, would be used as focused studies as they would provide a unique opportunity to examine current attitudes to *shunga*. However, there were difficulties in finding a venue in Japan. More than a dozen institutions declined the proposed *shunga* exhibition. Not all of them cited the subject matter as the reason but the implication was clear. There were a few venues that were interested but unfortunately at various stages of the exhibition planning each of these fell through. In a report on the project, Gerstle comments on these difficulties; ‘There are many individuals in Japan, it seems, especially in positions of authority, who do not wish to see *shunga* acknowledged as part of Japan’s cultural heritage’⁵⁸¹. It became apparent that there would not be a *shunga* exhibition in Japan to coincide with or follow on from the one in London, and so the BM’s *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition became my sole in-depth study. This chapter is an analysis of the visitor feedback and the exhibition itself.

I will begin with some background information on how the exhibition came about, firstly describing the international *shunga* research project it was part of and then looking at specific aspects of the exhibition planning. Before analysing the exhibition and the visitor feedback on it in detail, I will explain the methods used to gather the information for this study. To conclude this chapter, other responses to the exhibition will be outlined.

5.1 Shunga research project

Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art ran from 3 October 2013 - 5 January 2014 in Rooms 90 and 91 at the British Museum. The exhibition was co-curated by Timothy Clark, Head of the Japanese Section, British Museum, C. Andrew Gerstle, Professor of Japanese Studies, SOAS, Akiko Yano, research fellow, SOAS,

⁵⁸¹ C Andrew Gerstle, “Erotic Art International Research Project Report,” *Japan Research Centre Annual Review*, no. 61 (2011): 16.

and Aki Ishigami, post-doctoral fellow, Ritsumeikan University, and was accompanied by a scholarly catalogue edited by the curators⁵⁸².

Clark, Gerstle and Yano had already worked together on a successful project in 2005 on Osaka *kabuki*, which was funded by the AHRC. That project also culminated in an exhibition and catalogue⁵⁸³. *Kabuki Heroes on the Osaka Stage 1780 - 1830*, was held at the BM, 30 June - 8 August 2005, Osaka Rekishi Hakubutsukan (Osaka Museum of History), 1-25 Oct 2005 and Waseda Daigaku Tsubouchi-Hakushi Kinen Engeki Hakubutsukan (Waseda University Dr. Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum), Tokyo, 1-27 Dec 2005. A *shunga* print from the BM's own collection, which depicts a kabuki actor with a very prominent erection (Figure 57), featured in the exhibition and, surprisingly, it was included when the exhibition travelled to the Japanese venues.



Figure 57 unidentified Osaka school *ukiyo-e* artist, untitled *shunga* print, c.1780-1808, colour woodblock print, British Museum. This *shunga* print depicts the *kabuki* actor Ichikawa Danzo IV with an unidentified *onnagata*.

⁵⁸² Clark et al., *Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*.

⁵⁸³ C Andrew Gerstle, Timothy Clark, and Akiko Yano, *Kabuki Heroes on the Osaka Stage, 1780-1830* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

It was whilst researching Osaka *kabuki* prints for that project that Gerstle encountered a particular *shunpon* at Nichibunken which caught his attention⁵⁸⁴. Gerstle went on to research, and then publish a translation of, the *shunpon* in question, which was a parody of women's conduct books by Tsukioka Settei⁵⁸⁵. He became intrigued by *shunga* and how it had often been overlooked, which led Gerstle to propose it to Clark as the subject for their next collaborative project and exhibition.

The Leverhulme-funded, international *shunga* research project began in May 2009 and, in addition to Gerstle at SOAS and Clark at the BM, it involved Hayakawa at Nichibunken and Ryo Akama at the ARC, Ritsumeikan. In August 2010 Ryoko Matsuba, a specialist in Edo-period theatre and art, joined the project as a Research Fellow, with Ishigami also joining as a Research Fellow in April 2011⁵⁸⁶. As the first person to complete a PhD on *shunga* in Japan and one of the foremost researchers in the field, Ishigami was an advantageous addition to the project team⁵⁸⁷. Another collaborator was Yano, who as noted had worked with Gerstle and Clark as part of the Osaka *kabuki* project, and she translated Buckland's book on *shunga* for publication in Japan⁵⁸⁸. The Japanese title of the book, *Shunga Erotic Art in Japan Daiei Hakubutsukan Sōzō* (*Shunga: Erotic Art in Japan from the British Museum's collection*), makes it clearer that the book is giving an overview of and insight into the BM's collection. At that time Buckland was working at the British Museum and consequently her book complemented the *shunga* research project by introducing the BM's *shunga* collection and whetting both public and academic appetites.

The main aims of the project were to survey significant *shunga* collections, both private and institutional, around the world; to advance research into and awareness of *shunga*; and to disseminate this knowledge via exhibitions and a range of scholarly publications. Although the exhibition and accompanying

⁵⁸⁴ C Andrew Gerstle, "Interview on Shunga Project and Exhibition" (Personal communication, 2013).

⁵⁸⁵ Gerstle, *Great Pleasures for Women*.

⁵⁸⁶ Gerstle, "Erotic Art International Research Project Report."

⁵⁸⁷ Ishigami's doctoral thesis (Aki Ishigami, "Kinseiki Shunga, Enpon Kenkyū No Ichi Shiron" (Ritsumeikan Daigaku, 2008)) was the basis for her recent book on *shunga*, Aki Ishigami, *Nihon No Shunga, Ehon Kenkyū* (*A Study of Shunga and Ehon: Traditions of Eroticism in Japanese Art*) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2015).

⁵⁸⁸ Rosina Buckland and Akiko Yano, 春画 *Erotic Art in Japan* 大英博物館所蔵 (Heibonsha, 2010).

catalogue are the most obvious outcomes of the project, they were not the only ones. From the outset, workshops on *shunga* were held, in both Japan and the UK, which brought scholars together to share knowledge and generate discussion. Much of the research that began as presentations at these workshops went on to become parts of the catalogue or articles in the special issue of *Japan Review* published in 2013. Volume 26 of *Japan Review*, titled *Shunga: Sex and Humor in Japanese Art and Literature*, was edited by Gerstle and Clark and features articles which either complement or overlap with those in the catalogue⁵⁸⁹. A variety of *shunga*-related conferences, symposia, talks, and events aimed at a range of audiences preceded and accompanied the exhibition.

Yano described how the four curators began the project by carrying out a survey of, and research into, *shunga* collections in Europe, North America, and Japan:

whatever collections we heard about we went there and looked at it. ...It was a long process because first of all we didn't really know what exists in terms of *shunga*, because *shunga* is so hidden especially in Japan.⁵⁹⁰

Much of the information uncovered by this survey is available through the *shunpon* database, *Kinsei enpon sōgō dētabēsu* (*Comprehensive database of early modern enpon [shunpon]*)⁵⁹¹, which Ishigami was principally responsible for creating. Many of the private and institutional collections of *shunga* that were discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 (for example, Pulverer, Uragami, MFA, HMA, Nichibunken, and the BM) are featured in the database, as well as contemporary collections not covered here such as those of Michael Fornitz or Sebastian Izzard. The database provides a valuable resource on *shunpon* collections and is lasting outcome of the project.

⁵⁸⁹ For example, Buckland considers examples of Meiji-era sexually explicit art in both *Japan Review* and Clark et al., *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*.

⁵⁹⁰ Akiko Yano, "Interview on Shunga Project and Exhibition" (Personal communication, 2013).

⁵⁹¹ Aki Ishigami and Art Research Center Ritsumeikan University, "近世艶本総合データベース (A Comprehensive Database of Erotic Books in the Edo Period)," 2010, <http://www.dh-jac.net/db13/>.

5.2 Exhibition planning

I shall now move on to look at the exhibition, starting with the preparations for it. Yano explains:

more or less at the same time as conducting the survey, we started planning, thinking about how we should organise the exhibition, what kind of story, what kind of structure we should make for the exhibition.⁵⁹²

In addition to this kind of planning, which is necessary for any exhibition, the *shunga* project team undertook preparatory measures to specifically address potential concerns relating to the sexual aspects of *shunga*. There were three perspectives that the BM drew information from: institutional, legal, and visitors', of which I will now give examples.

As well as drawing on experience from previous displays of *shunga* and other explicit objects within the BM, the curators also held discussions with staff at other cultural and heritage institutions. For instance, following a model successfully used at the Natural History Museum, the BM produced a booklet with a selection of representative images for visitors to consult prior to entering the *shunga* exhibition. This was intended to be of particular use to parents or guardians to allow them to make an informed decision about whether or not to take under-16s into the exhibition. Due to the successful and high-profile exhibition of sexually explicit art in *Seduced* in 2007, the BM curatorial team looked to the Barbican for insight. Kemp, one of the curators of *Seduced*, shared his experiences and pointed out issues they encountered in terms of funding, for example.

Although looking at previous examples of exhibitions of sexually explicit art may be beneficial from a curatorial perspective, in a legal context they cannot be used as precedents. Tony Doubleday, Head of Legal Services at the BM, explained why:

⁵⁹² Yano, "Interview on Shunga Project and Exhibition."

in the end the test of whether something is obscene is for a jury. ...The jury system is unhelpful in that it leaves one uncertain as to whether or not something is an offence, but it's also useful because what it's doing is allowing the law to develop with cultural taste.⁵⁹³

The curators were advised by the BM's own legal team about the Obscene Publications Act and other related acts (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of these), but as Doubleday points out 'The law is not helpful for museums and galleries trying to present this kind of material...[because] unfortunately it's written in a way that catches all sorts of things which it was never intended to catch.'⁵⁹⁴ *Shunga* is the type of thing that these laws may inadvertently be applied to due to the wording used. For further clarification, he suggested that the curators consult the local police about the exhibition to 'make sure that they were comfortable that we were interpreting the law in an appropriate way'⁵⁹⁵. The police allayed the BM's concerns by confirming that they were not looking to apply obscenity laws to art in museum collections and exhibitions.

In February 2013 formative evaluation was carried out by TWResearch, on behalf of the BM, to test audience responses to the planned *shunga* exhibition. Based on the opinions expressed by the participants⁵⁹⁶, and in keeping with their responses to viewing some examples of *shunga*, the curators decided to change from the working title of *Shunga: Sex and Humour in Japanese Art* to *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*. The overall response was very positive and the curators were reassured that visitors accepted *shunga* as art and were comfortable viewing it in a public space.

To complement the formative evaluation and to assess the exhibition I carried out summative evaluation in conjunction with the BM's interpretation department in the form of exit questionnaires and unstructured visitor observations. See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire and Appendix B for the tables mentioned. Before analysing the visitor feedback, I will describe the questionnaire and the methods used to gather the data.

⁵⁹³ Tony Doubleday, "Interview on Legal Issues Relating to Shunga" (Personal communication, 2013).

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ TWResearch, "Shunga: Formative Evaluation Research," 2013, 29-32.

5.3 Feedback questionnaire

In order to evaluate the exhibition and visitor responses to it, I carried out visitor questionnaires 3 October - 4 November 2013, with additional questionnaires carried out 20 December, and online 27 November - 30 January. Further questionnaires were undertaken by Shelley O'Connor, an intern in the Interpretation Department, between 15 October and 21 November 2013.

The data from the exhibition evaluation had to be useful to various departments in the BM, the research project team, and to me. Therefore, the questionnaire used to collect visitor feedback was based on previous BM exhibition evaluations⁵⁹⁷ to ensure consistency and comparability, but took into consideration questions that staff in the Marketing Department, the Interpretation Department, and I felt would be relevant to our own particular but overlapping areas of interest. The final questionnaire (Appendix A) was compiled in consultation with David Francis, Interpretation Officer, after much deliberation to incorporate various concerns whilst ensuring that the questionnaire would remain coherent, intelligible, and of a reasonable length. It was comprised of 20 questions, including both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The questionnaire covered three main areas: information about visitors, what they thought about the exhibition, and what they thought about the content. After describing how the questionnaires were carried out, each of these areas will be discussed in turn.

5.3.1 Collection methods

The days of the week and the times of day that questionnaires were carried out were deliberately varied to widen the possibility of encountering different groups of people. For example, differences were apparent at weekends and on Friday evenings, when the Museum stays open until 8.30pm making it possible for people to visit after regular working hours. There was a notably younger demographic during these times.

⁵⁹⁷ for example Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, "Mysterious, Enigmatic, Spiritual: An Evaluation of The Power of Dogu: Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan" (London, 2009); Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, "Pleasure You Can Measure: Visitor Responses to the Warren Cup Exhibition."

The total number of responses was 205, with 68 of those answered online, 65 carried out by Shelley and 72 by me in-person. It was challenging to maintain consistency between in-person and online responses. For example, there were a higher number of unanswered questions by online respondents. Perhaps this is because people cannot ask for clarification if they do not understand a question, or because they had no strong opinion on a certain point, or even because of a sense of detachment due to lack of personal engagement. In addition, it was not possible to ascertain reasons for those who declined to participate online.

However, there are advantages to using online surveys: people are not reacting to the age, gender, ethnicity, or personality of the interviewer; they are anonymous; as they are not dealing with anyone face to face they can answer honestly without fear of embarrassment; they can offer criticism or negative points freely, which they might otherwise feel hesitant to do with a representative of the museum; people can fill in the survey anytime it suits them; they can take as long as they need to consider their answers; and they had longer to reflect on the exhibition than those who were interviewed as they exited.

Although there are drawbacks to combining data from two different collection methods, the extra work involved is easily justified by the fact that between the two methods the entire span of the exhibition was covered. For various reasons, in-person exit questionnaires could not be carried out during the final weeks of the exhibition, but it was always intended to have a mixture of online and in-person questionnaires to take advantage of the different benefits offered by these two methods. Unfortunately, complications with the survey website caused delays and the online survey option was not available until late November, rather than from the start of the exhibition as intended. Online responses cover from 27 November until the end of the exhibition, thus ensuring that visitor feedback is available from all stages of the exhibition.

It was decided that to facilitate a higher completion rate of questionnaires in the museum, and to achieve a deeper understanding of the data, either Shelley or I would ask the visitor the questions and record their answers. This also

ensured greater consistency. At least once a week I would check with Shelley if she had any questions or issues relating to carrying out the questionnaires and, if necessary, would clarify with examples of my own practice and prompts I used to promote certain types of information in response. For example, after a week or two of carrying out questionnaires, I noticed that question 14, What do you like best about the *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition?, drew different types of answers. Some visitors commented on an aspect of the exhibition such as the layout, others mentioned a theme of the exhibition such as the section on censorship, and others named a particular work or artist they liked. To strengthen the comparability of their answers I added, and advised Shelley to add, an additional verbal prompt to encourage visitors to specify both an aspect of the exhibition and a piece of work.

To try to avoid personal bias, every third person (or group) exiting the exhibition was approached and asked if they would like to take part. If they agreed, they were invited to take a seat and it was explained to them that they should not feel pressured to respond in any particular way, that negative as well as positive comments were welcomed and that there were no right or wrong answers. If they declined, they were asked if there was a particular reason. The most common responses for refusals were due to a lack of time and language barriers.

5.3.2 Language barrier or a cultural one?

I was particularly keen to find out what Japanese visitors thought about the *Shunga* exhibition, and in an attempt to remove the language barrier and make it easier for them to participate the questionnaire was translated into Japanese⁵⁹⁸. Despite this, Japanese visitors tended to decline. Although it should be noted that Shelley spoke no Japanese so only I could carry out the questionnaire in Japanese. In total six Japanese people completed the questionnaire, one with me, four with Shelley, and one online.

There are several possible reasons why Japanese visitors were reluctant to participate. Amusingly, I approached one Japanese woman and greeted her in

⁵⁹⁸ I initially translated the questionnaire but this was extensively revised by Dr. Ryoko Matsuba, Research Fellow at the BM and visiting scholar from Ritsumeikan University, who gave her time generously, and all credit must go to her. Any remaining errors are my own.

Japanese, as I had overheard her speaking with others in her group, but despite explaining about the questionnaire in Japanese her response was that she did not speak English! Japanese visitors usually claimed language differences or a lack of time as the reason, which may well be true but I believe other factors could also have contributed to their decision.

First of all, despite my best attempts language may still have been an issue as I greeted all potential participants in English unless I heard them speaking Japanese as I did not wish to make presumptions about ethnicity or country of origin. Secondly, *shunga* is not a common subject in Japan and Japanese visitors may have felt uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about it. Thirdly, Japanese people have a well-deserved reputation for being polite and this usually involves being over-generous with praise, perhaps their politeness prevented them from feeling that they could speak freely about the *Shunga* exhibition or the British Museum, especially if their opinions were not positive. Fourthly, in addition to being polite, Japanese people also have a reputation for being shy and reserved, particularly around non-Japanese and it is understandable that many visitors, not just Japanese ones, could have been uncomfortable or intimidated by a complete stranger approaching them. However, these potential reasons are speculative, appeal to stereotypical profiles, and cannot be verified.

5.4 Visitor feedback

Despite *Shunga* being a mid-range, low -budget exhibition held on the fourth floor rather than in one of the main spaces in the Great Court, it attracted 87,893 visitors over the course of 13 weeks. However, as Erskine-Loftus, a Museum Director in Qatar, cautioned:

One of the most oft-cited indicators of a museum's success is attendance, however knowing how many visitors attend does not indicate anything about the experiences they had.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁹ Pamela Erskine-Loftus, "What Are We Silently Saying? Non-Verbal Communication and Exhibitions," in *10 Must Reads: Interpretation* (Edinburgh and Cambridge, MA: MuseumsEct., 2014), 188.

It is precisely this reason why summative exhibition evaluation is important. In order to find out about the quality of visitors' experiences it is necessary to engage with visitors and allow them to express it for themselves.

Yet attendance figures are not without merit as they reflect visitors' interest in the topic of the exhibition; many respondents were drawn to *Shunga* after seeing posters, adverts or flyers. Additionally, good reviews in the media and word of mouth, both of which do indicate a positive experience, are often responsible for increasing visitor numbers, with many visitors having read reviews or heard about it through friends, family and colleagues. Therefore, it is significant that the visitor figures for *Shunga* were more than double the target or expected audience of 40,000, showing that *shunga*, and perhaps Japanese art in general, has a wider appeal than anticipated. It may also be seen as indicative of society's acceptance of and interest in sex and sexuality as subjects for discussion.

Dwell time is another figure frequently cited as an indication of audience enjoyment and engagement, yet, like visitor attendance on its own it does not give insight into visitors' experience. There is a correlation between entrance cost, room size and dwell time, with free exhibitions, often held in smaller spaces, having a significantly lower dwell time, whereas high-profile or 'blockbuster' exhibitions, which can cost around £15 for an adult ticket, were usually held in the Reading Room and had a longer dwell time. On average, visitors spent 77 minutes in the *Shunga* exhibition, with 70% staying at least an hour or more (Table 2). In comparison, visitors spent an average of 91 minutes in other special exhibitions. However, the exhibitions used for comparison were all blockbuster exhibitions held in the Reading Room with tickets usually double the price of *Shunga*'s. How visitors spent their time in *Shunga* and whether or not they enjoyed the exhibition will become apparent in their responses to the questionnaires, which shall now be discussed.

5.4.1 Visitor satisfaction

The vast majority of visitors, 94%, said they were satisfied with their overall exhibition experience (66% very satisfied, 28% quite satisfied). Only 1% (2

respondents) rated their overall experience as not very satisfactory, due to crowding, with no one saying that they were not at all satisfied (Table 3). Perhaps one of the reasons for visitors feeling satisfied with the exhibition was because 90% felt that it met their expectations⁶⁰⁰ (Table 4). Of the 9% who thought it did not, 3% said it was because it actually exceeded them. A further 3% said they had no expectations against which to measure it. The other 3% felt that the exhibition did not meet their expectations and cited repetitiveness as the reason why:

Exhibition was boring. The sex got in the way of appreciating the art.
Male, 65+, UK (LB007)

I thought it would be more varied. All the pictures were the same.
Male, 35-44, Germany (S002)⁶⁰¹

5.4.2 Visitor demographics

Gender

Of those who participated in the questionnaire, 57% were female and 42% male. One possible reason for a higher response rate from female visitors could be that they felt more comfortable because the interviewers were female⁶⁰². Furthermore, female respondents seemed less embarrassed and gave more detailed answers than male respondents did in general when answering the questionnaires. This trend was also noted in the formative evaluation report, and was partially attributed to women responding positively to the perceived gender equality and mutuality of pleasure in *shunga*⁶⁰³. As one participant expressed,

I feel that these images are more accessible to women. The person that's created that picture has really thought about the women in it.
Female, 20-30⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰⁰ A significant number of visitors who responded 'yes' offered an additional comment that it exceeded their expectations, but this was not recorded.

⁶⁰¹ Respondents are anonymous and are referred to here by letters representing the interviewers' initials, or TW for those completed online, and a sequential number.

⁶⁰² Although this would obviously not affect online responses.

⁶⁰³ TWResearch, "Shunga: Formative Evaluation Research," 25-28.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 10.

Age

Another factor which may have affected how comfortable people felt discussing the exhibition and the related sensitive issues of sex and sexuality, is age. Table 5 shows the breakdown of age ranges of respondents with the 25-34 category being the largest at 30%. This is in keeping with the general BM visitor figures with 25-34 year olds accounting for 27%, but almost double the average of 16% of visitors to special exhibitions, which may be partly due to that demographic being targeted by the marketing campaign.

Unsurprisingly, given the subject matter and age-related advisory, the under 20s figures are very low, accounting for only 2%, and all of those are in the 17-19 years old range, compared to an average of 10% from special exhibitions and 18% of general BM visitors. Overall visitor figures taken from weekly ticket sales show that children (under 16s) made up 0.4% (or 382) of the audience for *Shunga*, which is higher than expected, but should be treated with caution as toddlers in buggies and babes in arms were counted by museum staff⁶⁰⁵.

Ethnicity

A detailed breakdown of respondents' ethnicity can be seen in Table 6, with an overview of simplified groupings in Table 7, which shows that 82% of respondents to the questionnaire were white. This is only slightly lower than the average of 85% from special exhibitions. It is possible that Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) visitors may have been put off from answering the questionnaire, and are therefore underrepresented, due to language issues or even because of the ethnicity of the interviewers.

Repeat visitors

Table 8 shows the number of respondents who were first time visitors to the BM, at 13% this is notably lower than the 24% average of first time visitors to other BM special exhibitions. There is a higher percentage of visitors who have been to

⁶⁰⁵ Paul Roberts, "Interview on Shunga Exhibition Attendance" (Personal communication, 2013).

the BM in the past 12 months, 61% compared to 46% on average, suggesting that those attending *Shunga* are more frequent museum-goers.

Prior knowledge

To find out what kind of audiences attended *Shunga*, visitors were asked if they had any knowledge of Japanese art or culture prior to seeing the exhibition. As Table 9 shows, more than half said they had little or none, which is far higher than the 18% average from other special exhibitions. Of the 41% who identified themselves as having general knowledge, 25% of these had an interest in Japanese culture and 12% had visited or lived in Japan. 53% had prior knowledge of Japanese art or history, with only 13% of those specifically mentioning having previously seen or read about *shunga*. In comparison, around 68% of visitors to BM special exhibitions classify themselves as having a general, and 13% a specialist, knowledge of the exhibition subject on average. Given previous attitudes towards *shunga*, it is unsurprising that respondents with specialist knowledge were few, with only 5% identifying themselves as such. Whilst *Shunga* did attract those with an existing interest in Japanese art and culture, it also attracted a high amount of visitors who perhaps would not normally be interested in Japanese art or prints, which demonstrates the strength of sex as a topic of interest.

5.4.3 What visitors liked best

One of the qualitative questions visitors were asked ‘What do you like best about the *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition?’. As can be seen in Table 10, the responses fell broadly in to one of five categories, with respondents highlighting an aspect of curation, an aspect of *shunga*, a specific work, a section of the exhibition, or learning⁶⁰⁶. Each of these categories will be considered in more detail.

⁶⁰⁶ Some visitors gave more than one answer. For this reason, the total number of responses is greater than the number of respondents and does not add up to 100%.

An aspect of curation

Of the 205 respondents to the questionnaire, 119, or 58%, chose an aspect of curation as their favourite thing about the exhibition. This includes interpretation, contextualisation, selection, layout, approach, and the existence of the exhibition, as shown in Table 11.

Interpretation

Of the 119 respondents who liked a curatorial element, 34% highlighted the interpretation as being the best feature of *Shunga*. The interpretation texts were initially drafted by Clark before being circulated amongst, and redrafted by, the other co-curators. They were then fine-tuned by Clark in collaboration with the Interpretation Department, primarily David Francis, to ensure the tone, length, and phrasing of the texts were optimal for the non-expert audience that was anticipated. There were five different types of interpretative text used in the exhibition, which worked on different levels, from the general and introductory to the specific and detailed, which gave visitors a choice over their level of engagement. The five types of interpretation identified were section text panels, object labels, quotes, in-case panels, and de-code panels, each of which will be examined in turn.



Figure 58 View from *Masterpieces of Shunga* section showing panels three to six (photograph courtesy of the British Museum)

The first level of interpretation was the text panels on the six large, vertical triangular displays (visible in Figure 58), which were situated throughout the

exhibition, one for each section. The section panels functioned in two ways depending on the type of visitor. Firstly, they were useful for those who wanted to be able to quickly get a general overview without spending too much time reading or picking through details. Simultaneously, for those who wanted to go deeper and learn more, the panels served as an introduction, which whet their appetite for knowledge.

The first three panels gave an overview of the section and general information, whilst the panels for the final three sections focused on a particular aspect of *shunga* and posed questions to engage visitors. One respondent particularly liked these panels (referred to as ‘posters’):

The added information was helpful and well written, and the display posters such as ‘Was *Shunga* legal?’ were good at providing extra analysis and context. Male, 20-24, UK (TW053)

As well as asking ‘Was *Shunga* legal?’ in the section on censorship, the panels also raised the issues of ‘Who was *shunga* for? How was it used?’, which was addressed in the section on context, and ‘Why did *shunga* end? Why did it become taboo?’ was used as a springboard for discussion in *Shunga and the Modern World*. Francis explains that part of the interpretation strategy was to use these questions on the panels in order to build on the key messages of the exhibition:

Shunga is something people have a lot of questions about, so when you phrase something into a question it makes that contextual information that you give them more intriguing.⁶⁰⁷

Indeed, although the panel text indicated possible answers to the questions they posed, the use of questions encouraged visitors to form their own opinions on the topic and to seek out more information.

Additional information could be found in the second type of interpretation, the object labels, which were also referred to by respondents as descriptions,

⁶⁰⁷ David Francis, “Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting *Shunga*” (Personal communication, 2013).

narratives or commentary. As is typical in most exhibitions⁶⁰⁸, each item had its own label listing the artist, title, date, medium, and format, if known, followed by interpretive text which often provided a description or explanation of the scene shown. The object labels were more detailed than the panels and provided contextual details to aid viewers' understanding. For example, the object labels often explained details gleaned from both the image and the text that indicated the marital status, age or social class of the participants, and their relationship to each other. Revealing this information, which Edo viewers would have readily understood, helped to humanise the people depicted, which in turn allowed exhibition visitors to empathise and connect with them.

For instance, the object labels accompanying a selection of prints from Hokusai's album *Fukujusō* (*Adonis Flower*) shed light on the participants and the mood of each scene. Without the interpretation most viewers would be unaware that Figure 59 depicts an affair rather than a married couple: 'The woman's husband is away so she enjoys an unhurried night with her lover. Their bodies are wrapped together in powerful union.'



Figure 59 Katsushika Hokusai, print 8 from *Fukujusō* (*Adonis Flower*), c. 1822–3, colour woodblock print, British Museum

⁶⁰⁸ That object labels are standard when displaying artworks is evidenced by the debate provoked by Penelope Curtis's re-hang of Tate Britain's permanent collection without interpretive labels in 2013. See for example Jones "Tate Britain Scraps Explanatory Panels next to Works of Art," *The Guardian*, May 13, 2013.

By summarising the dialogue in another scene from the same album, Figure 60, the interpretation reveals that the woman is not embarrassed or demeaned by sex, but is an active participant: ‘The man suckles the breast of his pregnant wife, who wears a special sash. She asks him to hurry and gives precise instructions.’ This relates to a wider aspect of *shunga* that visitors repeatedly commented on - the mutuality of pleasure and a sense of greater equality between the genders.



Figure 60 Katsushika Hokusai, print 3 from *Fukujusō (Adonis Flower)*, c. 1822–3, colour woodblock print, British Museum

Another example of how interpretation can reveal is the information provided which allowed visitors to then apply it to other images and thus gave them the ability to ‘read’ *ukiyo-e* for themselves, as one visitor noted:

I liked that the text explained visual cues, e.g. how to recognise a courtesan, a kabuki actor, a married woman etc. Female, 45-54, Australia (LB021)

Respondents’ feedback indicates the success of the interpretative approaches used in the object labels:

The descriptions gave more understanding and pointed out details you wouldn't have otherwise noticed. Male, 35-44, Estonia (S023)

Descriptions make the pictures come to life. Male, 25-34, UK (S016)

And I enjoyed the labels! (This never happens). Female, 20-24, UK (TW041)

Object labels were around 85 words long on average and visitors appreciated the balance achieved by the curators, who included enough historical, cultural and artistic details that those with little or no previous knowledge of Japanese art or culture, as more than half of the respondents described themselves, could understand *shunga* without being overwhelmed with information.

[I liked] The short and clear explanations about each picture. Was good to understand what each picture was about without having to spend too long reading. Female, 25-34, UK (TW036)

These kinds of visitor comments indicate that Clark's intentions to keep the texts relatively short in order to help visitors pace themselves through what was a comprehensive exhibition were successful.

Visitors also seemed to appreciate the opportunity to expand their knowledge, as one respondent said the thing she enjoyed most about the exhibition was

That I was learning and not just seeing images. Female, 25-34, UK (LB042)

Encouraging visitors to learn about *shunga* and make connections for themselves was one element of the interpretation strategy. Not only were the key exhibition messages emphasised in the large text panels and referred to again in some of the object labels, the key themes were also set up in the introductory section using additional colour-coded headings on the object labels. Francis clarifies this:

The other thing was that at the very start of the exhibition some of the key themes: mutuality of pleasure, Japan having a different creation myth, humour within the *shunga*, the idea of art, is *shunga* fantasy, these are all laid out there in that first section. It's a different way of doing it, often that'd be spread out, maybe you might do that as thematic sections, [whereas] the strategy of this is to give people those themes at the start, like an introduction of a book and then you go out and apply them, but encounter them again with specific examples.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁹ Francis, "Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting Shunga."

Another thing that was slightly different from other exhibitions was the inclusion of Japanese text, which graphic designer Paul Goodhead elucidates on:

with almost all the Japanese exhibitions we'll include a Japanese heading for each object, for each section. And I think the assumption there is that most Japanese people are familiar with their own culture, they just want to know what we're talking about, so we do them this courtesy and it's not done for any other language, although we do sometimes have little leaflets, in Spanish for Columbian Gold for instance.⁶¹⁰

As well as translating the basic panel headings from English to Japanese and including the original Japanese titles in the object labels, another feature that visitors appreciated was the translation of the Japanese text, from either within the image itself or on the surrounding page of a book:

It was nice to have the poems translated. Female, 20-24, UK (TW041)

[I liked the] descriptive text about the scenes in the prints as they are often comical so nice to have the 'translation'. Female, 25-34, UK (TW035)

Francis notes that translated or summarised dialogue helped the exhibition to have multiple voices,

there's a kind of poetic museum voice making connections between people and then there's the voice of the dialogue that the characters themselves [say]. And then there's the quotes, the haikus on the wall.⁶¹¹

By including the text used in *shunga*, the interpretation featured not only the voices of the curators, which might be seen as academic, art historical, museum voices, but also Edo-period voices of the artist, writer, or people depicted who 'speak' from within *shunga*.

⁶¹⁰ Paul Goodhead and Jon Ould, "Interview on Exhibition and Design Relating to Shunga" (Personal communication, 2013).

⁶¹¹ Francis, "Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting Shunga."

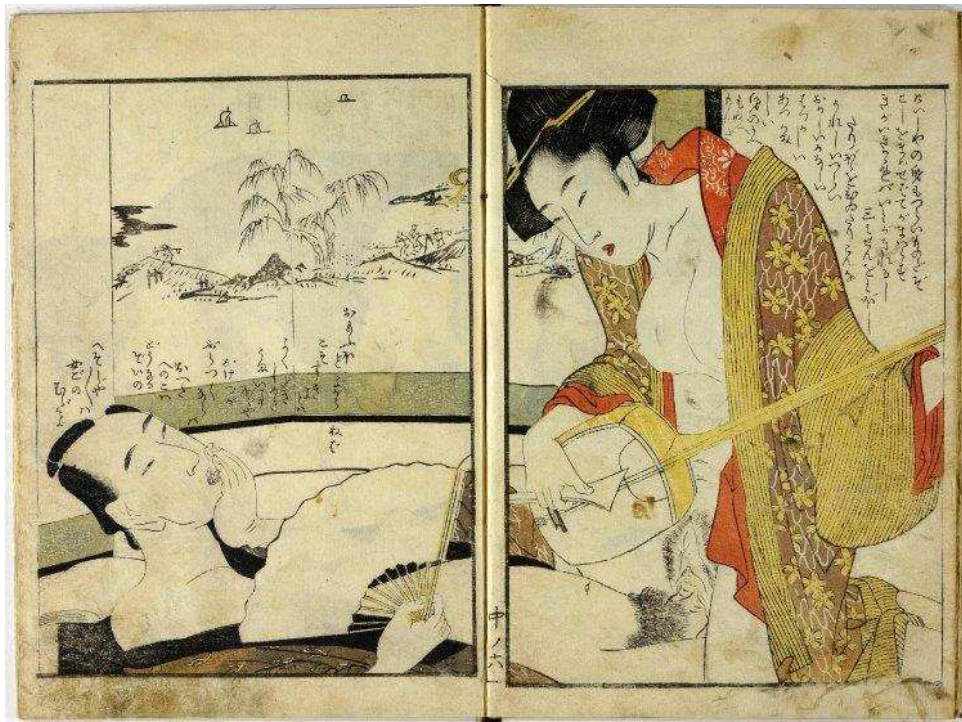


Figure 61 Kitagawa Utamaro, page from *Ehon warai jogo* (Picture Book: *The Laughing Drinker*) volume 2, c.1803, colour woodblock-printed book, British Museum

For example, a scene from Utamaro's *Ehon warai jogo* (Picture Book: *The Laughing Drinker*) (Figure 61) is shown in the introductory section and the interpretation includes a translation of the song the geisha is singing and the man's dialogue:

(Geisha, singing) A geisha's lot is not a happy one - / when she grinds her hips, she loses her fingering, / when she starts to come, the string snaps. / Fucking her shamisen and plucking her pussy, / isn't it a happy, painful, funny, sad, shameful, shameless old life...

(Man) When she doesn't cry out as much as she wants to, it's a sure sign she fancies you. What a sweet pussy, gripping so tight. When she wiggles her arse then what'll happen to the fella down there.

The text in *shunga*, whether dialogue or narrative, can alter the way that an image is perceived and understood, which will be taken up again in Chapter 6. A well-known example of this is a scene from Hokusai's book *Kinoe no komatsu* (Young Pine Saplings) featuring two octopuses (Figure 62), which had previously been interpreted as a scene of coercion, with the nineteenth-century writer Edmond de Goncourt going so far as to ponder if the woman was a corpse. Subsequent scholarship used the dialogue to reinterpret the scene, which revealed that the woman was enthusiastically enjoying herself. A translation of

this dialogue was included in the object label for this book (see Chapter 6.3), allowing the voice of the woman depicted to be ‘heard’.



Figure 62 Katsushika Hokusai, page from *Kinoe no komatsu* (*Young Pine Saplings*), 1814, woodblock-printed book, British Museum

A selection of quotes or poems, which were a third kind of interpretive text, were dotted throughout the exhibition space, either directly on the walls (Figure 63) or on the vertical triangular displays. For instance, in the section *Early Shunga (Before 1765)*, the curators and designers made clever use of what would otherwise have been a large expanse of blank wall space above some table cases housing handscrolls, by displaying the following quote, with the original Japanese text above it:

The old masters...depict the size of ‘the thing’ far too large...If it were depicted the actual size there would be nothing of interest. For that reason, don’t we say ‘art is fantasy’?

Tachibana no Narisue, *Things Written and Heard in Ancient and Modern Times*, 1254



Figure 63 View of wall text in the *Contexts for Shunga* section in Japanese and English, with the panel text leading visitors to the *Shunga and the Modern World* section to the left (photograph courtesy of the British Museum)

These kinds of text served several functions simultaneously: they provided visitors with more information, they filled an empty space, they were visually appealing, and the use of them throughout the exhibition was another way of tying the design together. Furthermore, by using spaces that would not necessarily be filled, like the back or side of a triangular display, the designers and curators avoided overwhelming visitors or crowding the objects with too much text. Although they are less obviously interpretive, the quotes have been chosen to supplement the themes and issues raised by the exhibition. Their positioning indicates that they are optional reading and not essential for understanding. Nevertheless, visitors welcomed the additional insight and context they provided. For example, in *Contexts for Shunga*, a quote illustrates where the use of the term *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world) originates (Figure 63):

Living from moment to moment; singing songs and drinking sake while gazing at the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves; merrily drifting along...your spirits unsinkable as a gourd riding a stream: that is life in the floating world.

Asai Ryōi, *Tales of the Floating World*, about 1665

This type of interpretation did not directly address the works on display but it added to the impression and subtly conveyed information to those who sought out these extra texts, as one visitor explains,

I liked the descriptions and the quotes as they gave you things you couldn't get from the picture alone. Male, 35-44, UK (LB029)

Visitors also liked the humour that was evoked, for instance by an oft-quoted *senryū*, comic poem, displayed in the section on censorship, which reinforces the notion of *shunga* as fantasy as introduced in the Tachibana no Narisue quote above:

A foolish couple / copy the *shunga* / spraining a wrist
Anon, 1861

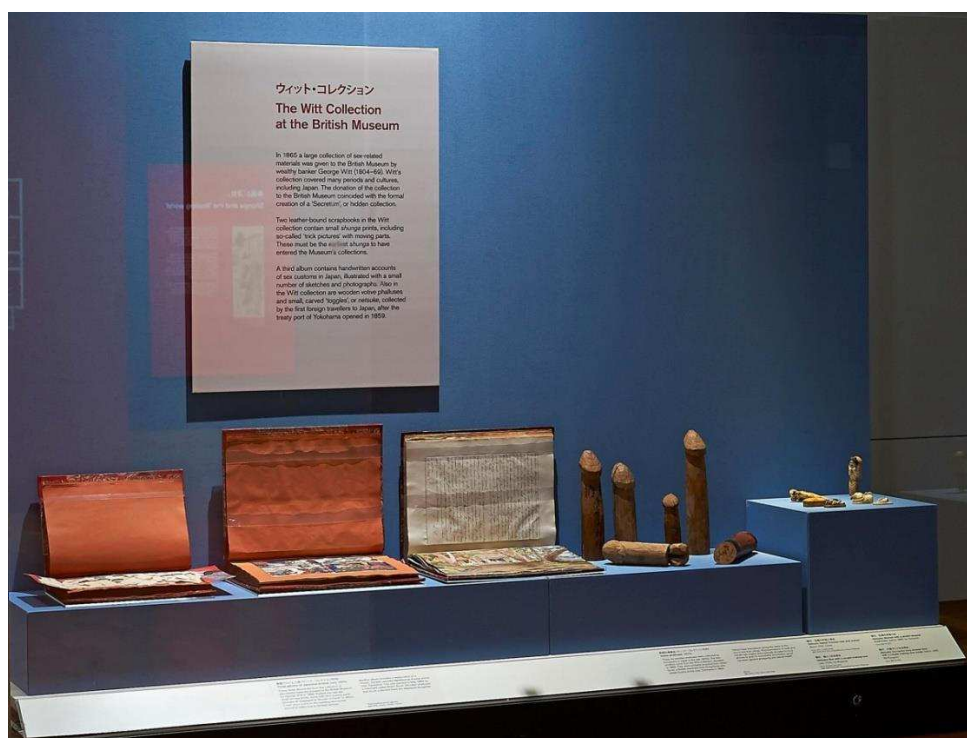


Figure 64 View of a case in *Shunga and the Modern World*, including an in-case panel on the Witt Collection, several *nensuke* and wooden votive phalluses (photograph courtesy of the British Museum)

Another form of interpretive text was the in-case panels (as in Figure 64), which were not present in all cases. Francis explains why these were used selectively:

There's times when we've got specific stories that are attached to objects so there's the first contact of Japan and England, there's the *shunga* that came from China, there's the Witt collection. So there's

those smaller, individual stories and where that is the case we have these mini in-case panels for some more depth.⁶¹²

The fifth type of interpretive text were annotated ‘decode’ panels, used particularly in the section on parodies, to give further explanations and background information, which was necessary for modern viewers to be able to understand the works. For example, one panel showed an enlarged reproduction of a page from an original text, *Treasure Book of Medicine, Day and Night*, 1692 (reprint of 1762), alongside a *shunga* parody version of it, *Treasure Book for Women on the Way of Love, Day and Night*, c. 1764 by Tsukioka Settei, for comparison. The panel decodes the pun on the words for massage and masturbation. The translated extract from the accompanying texts allows viewers to see that not only do the images in Settei’s version closely follow those of the original but also appreciate the main source of humour of these parodies by revealing the similarity and play on words between the two texts.

One commendable point is that, by including translations or summaries in the interpretation the curatorial and interpretation team treated the text in *shunga*, which can easily be overlooked, as an integral part of the print or book as a whole. Gerstle, who published a translated version of another of Settei’s parody books⁶¹³, reveals the importance of translating the text in *shunga* parodies of didactic textbooks,

the pictures [were] obviously erotic, but the text was really fascinating because it was also creating a discourse on a different kind of ‘ideal’ woman than that being proposed in the strict Confucian texts.⁶¹⁴

He goes on to explain that previously the text in most *shunga* books, whether it is narration or dialogue, has been largely overlooked and that one of the aims of the research project was

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Gerstle, *Great Pleasures for Women*

⁶¹⁴ Gerstle, “Interview on Shunga Project and Exhibition.”

to have people really examine the complete book not just the image, not just to pull out an image and make use of it for some point. But to make sure it's understood within its own context.⁶¹⁵

Showing *shunga* as they would have been seen at the time, not as an individual image but in the context of a set, an album or a book was an important curatorial decision. Clark discusses how they utilised the space to the advantage of the material so that

people were invited to particularly enjoy the sets. We haven't showed any of the sets in their entirety, no sets are shown all 12, but we've shown half of the really important sets, six, and that did seem an ideal place [for a ledge] because the work was so close to the glass and you can rest your elbows and you can really take time to enjoy it.⁶¹⁶



Figure 65 View of part of the *Masterpieces of Shunga* section, showing half of the works from *Utamakura* displayed together as a group.

This can be seen in Figure 65, which shows how six scenes from *Utamakura*, which had been dismantled and mounted as individual prints, were displayed as a group. Additionally, a seventh scene from another impression of the set can be seen, below and to the right, still in book format.

One visitor voiced his appreciation of the curation and interpretation:

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Clark, "Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition."

It does a good job of showing the depth of the parodies. ...Liked how it placed it in the context of the society at the time. Male, 55-59, Japan (LB027)

Contextualisation

The way that the exhibition contextualised *shunga* was a highlight for 23% of respondents, who commented on enjoying the social, historical and cultural contextualisation provided in the interpretation.

It was very well curated: providing information on the history of *Shunga*, the social context etc. Very educating. Female, 17-19, UK (TW045)

It is not surprising that contextualisation was a common answer, given that a large section of the exhibition focused on explaining the social and historical contexts for *shunga*, particularly in terms of the concept of the floating world, the theatre and brothel districts, and the literature and religious views of the time.

In addition to this, featuring European work by Rowlandson and Raimondi in the introduction and by Picasso and Beardsley in *Shunga and the Modern World* helped to situate *shunga* within a wider cultural context. It gave the predominantly European audience something more familiar, in terms of style, social history and cultural context to relate *shunga* to and use as a basis for comparison.

I liked that we can make parallels with today and what we see, not just on Japan but universal things. The last room, the bits of Western art confirmed connections, lynch pins, which were in my mind from the beginning of the exhibitions. Male, 35-44, UK (LB063)

Perhaps a further reason for such strong contextualisation was because the curators and interpretation team anticipated an audience unfamiliar not only with *shunga*, but Japanese art in general. As Francis explains,

I'd like to say that we assume no kind of knowledge and that you explain Edo to people and the different kind of eras, you're not relying on that or art historical backgrounds.⁶¹⁷

He goes on say that when working on the object labels, he continually asked questions such as 'who are these people?' or 'what is the social context?', not only to humanise the figures but also to ensure a balance of artistic and historical knowledge with contextual information. Francis concedes that there may still be some terms that were not explained in depth, and cites Confucianism, which is mentioned in relation to the parodies, as an example: 'there isn't a big panel about Confucian tradition and Confucian morality, [but] I think you can work out that it's a conservative [religion]'⁶¹⁸. This demonstrates one of the strengths of the exhibition, which is that the curators and interpretation team did not underestimate visitors' intelligence or curiosity; they credited viewers as being able to infer information and as a result do not talk down to them. Although it was in reply to another question, one respondent commented,

The information was easy to read but you could have explained more cultural details, special vocabulary and terms, but I was able to infer the meanings of most of them. Male, 35-44, UK (LB063)

Selection

Another curatorial aspect that impressed visitors was the selection, where 18% praised the exhibition for the breadth, variety and quality of the works displayed:

It was put with a European context at the beginning, which gave it breadth. Female, 60-64, UK (LB044)

The collection was broad and in wonderful quality. Female, 25-34, UK (TW027)

The exhibition featured almost 200 objects drawn from 24 public and private collections from around the world including the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the V&A, London, Nichibunken, Kyoto and the Fornitz, Bertholet, and Uragami private collections as well as the BM's own collection. Clark explains one of the

⁶¹⁷ Francis, "Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting Shunga."

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

reasons why so many private collectors, several of whom preferred to remain anonymous, agreed to loan works to the exhibition:

Generally, people are collecting *shunga* because they're enthusiastic about it and obviously they are quite happy generally to share that enthusiasm with the scholars when we explained what we were up to, the seriousness of our project.⁶¹⁹

That the curators were able to secure the cooperation of so many respected individuals and institutions meant that they were able to select pieces of a consistently high quality. The curators chose works which, as well as displaying the aesthetic quality of *shunga*, at the same time would represent the varied nature of what has come to be categorised together as '*shunga*', which respondent's appreciated:

I liked the different styles and the explanations. The diversity and the more modern versions as well. Female, 45-54, UK (LB071)

[I liked the] Variety of exhibits from different time periods. Female, 20-24, UK (TW018)

Indeed, the *Shunga* exhibition spans centuries, styles and media: from the lavishly painted Kano school handscroll adorned with gold leaf in the early seventeenth century; to the black and white woodblock printed books of Moronobu, often called the father of *ukiyo-e*, in the late seventeenth century; to the sets and albums of full-colour woodblock prints by *ukiyo-e* masters Utamaro and Hokusai in the late eighteenth century; to the quickly-brushed hanging scrolls of Kyosai in the late nineteenth century; and the more modern *shinhang* prints of the early twentieth century.

In addition to the breadth illustrated by these selections, variety was added by displaying three-dimensional objects including ivory or wooden *netsuke* carvings, a box of nineteenth-century sex toys, two kimono in free-standing cases and a selection of wooden votive phalluses taken from Shinto shrines, some of which can be seen in Figure 64. As one visitor commented,

⁶¹⁹ Clark, "Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition."

I liked the variety; there was not just prints but also work by European artists, sex toys, kimono, they break up the monotony and add to your mental picture. Female, 25-34, USA (LB051)

Layout

Another aspect, liked by 17%, was the layout of the exhibition, which was partially chronological and partially thematic, as it produced a sense of flow and development. These display strategies were used to make best use of the space available, as originally the exhibition going to be shown in a different space, Room 35. The *Shunga* exhibition occupied a larger than normal space because Rooms 90 and 91 are usually used for separate displays. One of the ways that 3-D designer Jon Ould and graphic designer Paul Goodhead unified these two rooms in to one coherent space was through the colour scheme, which featured bold red against more neutral blue and grey backgrounds. Ould explains how the red, vertical triangular displays were another unifying feature, which also helped people to navigate the space:

So we came up then with the idea of these - toblerones we call them - we could put a piece of bold graphics on that would instantly tell you which section you are at right in the middle, but you could stand here and look right through and you'd be able to see right through to the end, knowing that that's the extent and the whole thing's brought together.⁶²⁰

The 'toblerones' and colour scheme seem to have been effective, as one visitor remarked,

I appreciated the red panels because they gave a rhythm to the exhibition and clearly defined and explained the different sections. Female, 25-34, France (S065)

These triangular displays were placed at the beginning of each section, positioned at an angle, which acted as a divider for the large space and signalled to visitors that they were entering a different section of the exhibition, the theme of which was explained in the section text panel. As well as dividing the space, the red panels were each topped with a cropped detail from Kiyonaga's *Sode no maki* series as a visual motif (see Figure 58, Figure 63, Figure 66), which were also used on promotional posters and leaflets, to maintain the cohesion of

⁶²⁰ Goodhead and Ould, "Interview on Exhibition and Design Relating to Shunga."

the exhibition as a whole. Goodhead points out that several of the panels also featured ‘an orientation plan so that people can know there’s various sections ahead, they’re at the start of this little journey’⁶²¹. The orientation plan, visible in Figure 66, also allowed viewers to pace themselves accordingly.



Figure 66 View of part of the introductory section, with orientation plan and section panel text visible on a vertical triangular display, or ‘toblerone’ (photograph courtesy of the British Museum)

The visitor’s journey starts at the introductory section where the key themes are raised. Clark describes how this section was used to set the tone and indicate the route:

It is a fairly small, intimate space and it really encourages people to engage with absolutely every one of the introductory objects, I hope. It also channels people immediately left, which is what we wanted.⁶²²

Visitor tracking figures⁶²³ demonstrate the effectiveness of angling the vertical triangular displays at the beginning of each section. In the introductory section, 82% of visitors chose to go up along the left wall, although only 16% then went to the wall cases on the bottom right, with 48% of visitors viewing the island cases before moving on to the next section. Upon entering *Contexts for Shunga* 46% of

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Clark, “Interview on Shunga Project and 2013 Exhibition.”

⁶²³ At three points in the exhibition, 50 visitors were observed and their route was tracked for direction and object engagement.

those tracked immediately went left. Of the 32% of visitors who chose to start by reading the section text panel, 61% then went left.

The feedback also confirms that the layout and design features functioned as intended; one respondent explained,

I really liked the layout as you were clearly led around from one section to the next, not a labyrinth like some exhibitions. This way I knew I wasn't missing anything. Female, 25-34, UK (LB068)

The focus of the two sections after the introduction was chronological, with *Early Shunga (Before 1765)* displaying medieval handscrolls and pre-cursors to *shunga*, and then *Masterpieces of Shunga* covering the prime of *ukiyo-e* from 1765 until 1850. 1765 was a pivotal date as that was when *ukiyo-e* shifted from black and white printing, with one or two colours occasionally being added by hand, to full colour printing, often called *nishiki-e* (brocade prints) for their array of colours and patterns. The chronological approach is picked up again in the final section, *Shunga and the Modern World*, which covers the transition from the end of the Edo period to the Meiji era, as well as what came after.

The two sections in between were thematic, addressing the issues of censorship and context respectively. Clark explains how the two display strategies were chosen, in part, to help achieve the aims of the exhibition:

In principle, I think the exhibition is trying to do two main things, both of which are very important. One is to insist on the status of *shunga* as art. ... And on that basis, after you've experienced that, confirmed that then going on to broaden out, to try and begin to reconnect *shunga* with the wider world, and only begin to [show it] is a complicated issue and explore how it relates to other genres and other themes.⁶²⁴

Approach

That the curators acknowledged that *shunga* was a complicated issue was appreciated by around 8% of respondents, who remarked on the open and mature way that sex, a potentially sensitive subject, was handled.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

I liked that it didn't shy away from the subject matter. Female, 25-34, UK (LB033)

The various interpretive texts (apart from the translations) took an adult tone and used anatomical terms rather than slang names for body parts, which gives them a matter of fact tone but without being scientific. The use of terms like 'having sex', 'vulva' and 'penis' also helped to avoid romanticising *shunga*. Similarly, Francis comments, 'I think within the language that was used there's a...restrained or an adult way of addressing it, which isn't hyperbolic or titillating'⁶²⁵. Visitors echoed this and offered further praise for the tone and approach used:

The combination of good historical context and information and a surprising playfulness, for example juxtaposing sexy toys with prints. Female, 25-34, UK (LB067)

The descriptions were sensitively and at times poetically written. Female, 45-54, USA (LB012)

Informative but relaxed approach to a topic that is still seen as taboo. Male, 35-44, UK (LB046)

Existence of exhibition

The notion of *shunga* as still being taboo was underscored by 7% of respondents, who thought the best thing about the exhibition was the existence of the exhibition itself:

The very fact that there is such an exhibition. Female, age withheld (TW005)

[I liked] The fact that these images were exhibited at all. Male, 35-44, UK (TW020)

These kinds of comments emphasise the importance of the BM exhibition and act as a reminder that although in recent years *shunga* has been gaining acceptance it has rarely been exhibited. *Shunga* is still restricted in Japan and has not yet been the subject of an exhibition there⁶²⁶. However, Japan is not the only country where sex art remains proscribed. As one visitor comments,

⁶²⁵ Francis, "Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting Shunga."

⁶²⁶ An exhibition of *shunga* opened in Japan in September 2015, shortly before this thesis was submitted and will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

[The best thing is that] You can see arts that are forbidden in China.
Female, 25-34, China (S041)⁶²⁷

Some respondents felt that an exhibition like *Shunga* was overdue, with visitors commenting on how pleased they were that an influential and respected institution like the BM was acknowledging sex and sexuality, as these topics are an important aspect of human experience, and they can relate to them. These kinds of responses reinforce visitor feedback from the 2006 Room 3 display on cultural attitudes to sex and sexuality, *Warren Cup: Sex and Society in Ancient Greece*, as the exhibition report noted,

The majority of visitors were pleasantly surprised by the exhibition, and many thought the subject matter was entirely appropriate for the British Museum as it reflects modern society and the interests of visitors.⁶²⁸

The role of institutions in reflecting visitors' interests, particularly those of GSM visitors, will be explored further in Chapter 6.

An aspect of shunga

50% of all respondents chose an aspect of *shunga* as the thing they liked best. This can be divided into an artistic aspect, the attitude to sex, humour, and the subject matter itself, as seen in Table 12.

Artistic aspect

Artistic quality was the most prominent answer with 44% of the 102 respondents who listed an aspect of *shunga* as their favourite element mentioning it and the beauty, colours, and details of the works.

[I liked] the sheer gorgeousness of the drawings, the vibrancy, the detail, the tenderness exhibited in the artists' work. Female, 45-54, UK (TW011)

Attitude to sex

⁶²⁷ Although sexually explicit art is not permitted to be shown in mainland China, *shunga* and Chinese sex art have been displayed in Hong Kong at Sotheby's in *Beyond the Paper Screen*, 2013, and *Gardens of Pleasure*, 2014, respectively, as mentioned in Chapter 4.

⁶²⁸ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, "Pleasure You Can Measure: Visitor Responses to the Warren Cup Exhibition," 29.

Another pleasing aspect of *shunga* was the attitude it displays towards sex, which 28% of visitors mentioned and variously described as open, mature, tender, naughty, wholesome, erotic, tasteful, risqué and unashamed.

[I liked] The striking difference to the puritanical western view current during the same period. *Shunga* was displaying sex as joyful and fun. Male, 55-59, UK (TW023)

My favourite thing about the exhibition was that it showed the female perspective of desire, sex and sexuality - something which is missing from almost all mass media and modern art. ...gave insight into the idea that women are both active participants in sex and who enjoy sexual pleasure too. Female, 35-44, UK (TW043)

Subject matter

The subject matter itself was the best aspect for a further 10% of the respondents. Given that sex is largely absent from the majority of European art of the same period other than in coy or implicit ways, visitors found it refreshing that *shunga* explicitly focused on sex. For example, one visitor liked

the sense that all this was for people to see, not to be hidden away - I found this to be the most exciting thing really. Female, 45-54, UK (TW011)

Humour

Humour was another feature that was frequently noted, with 17% of people mentioning their enjoyment of the jokes, comic elements, satire, 'the funny bits' and the sense of humour.

A specific work

Of the 56 respondents who mentioned a specific work as the thing they liked best about the exhibition (see Table 13), somewhat surprisingly 21% chose a non-*shunga* object - the kimono, pictured in Figure 67. One visitor explains,

The two kimono were a rest for my eyes. Female, 25-34, UK (LB068)

Whilst another respondent appreciated the choice of objects in themselves and not just as a break from the sex:

The material objects on display (e.g. kimonos, dildos) assisted in creating a comparative 'real world' setting for the images. Female, 25-34, UK (TW004)

'The octopus' (Figure 62) was named by 21% and 'the ghost' (Katsukawa Shun'ei's hanging scroll *Shunga yurei zu* (*Erotic Ghost Paintings*)) by 9%. Visitors did not elaborate on the reasons for choosing these works, other than that they were unusual. Given that the majority of visitors were unfamiliar with *shunga* and Japanese art in general, it is likely that respondents would not necessarily remember the names of pictures or artists and these two works not only stand out, but are also easily referenced. Furthermore, 'the octopus' is actually on display twice. Online respondents were less likely to give a specific work in answer to this question, so it is plausible that they too found it tricky to remember names or titles in an unfamiliar language especially after days or even weeks had elapsed between their visit and filling in the questionnaire.

Other works which caught viewers' attention, this time for their beauty and artistic skill, were the hanging scrolls *Shiki kyōen zu* (*Contest of Passion in the Four Seasons*) by Hosoda Eishi (Figure 27) and prints from Utamaro's *Utamakura* set (Figure 65), especially the oft-reproduced scene of two lovers in a tea-house (Figure 54). The humour of Kawanabe Kyosai's hanging scroll, c.1871 - 1889, of a playful cat pawing at a man's dangling testicles as he leans over during sex was also noted as a favourite piece by several respondents.

A section of the exhibition

As discussed, the exhibition was divided up, chronologically and thematically, into six sections. *Early Shunga (Before 1765)*, *Censorship*, and *Contexts for Shunga*, specifically the section on parodies, were each mentioned by 24% of the 38 respondents or 19%, who named a particular section of the exhibition as the thing they liked best. Additionally, the topics of censorship and parodies, and the visitors' enjoyment of and engagement with them, frequently cropped up in answers to other questions.

Learning

The opportunity to learn, understand and gain insight into Japanese art, culture and history was mentioned by 11% of the 205 respondents as the best thing about *Shunga*.

I came for knowledge and I got it from the labels. Female, 25-34, UK (LB068)

I learned a lot about Japanese art history. [It] Made me question what I know about erotic art, which was only from a Western centric viewpoint. I won't look at Hokusai's prints in the same way afterwards, but I mean that in a positive way, I'll look at them in a different context. Female, 25-34, UK (LB067)

That visitors enjoyed learning is a testament to the effective contextualisation and interpretation strategies used.

5.4.4 Room for improvement

In order to find out if there was anything about the exhibition that visitors disliked, Question 13 asked 'what do you think could be improved?'. The responses can be roughly grouped into seven areas: 'nothing', more information, crowding, layout, label readability, additional media, and lighting (see Table 14), each of which will be discussed in turn. One point of note is that the majority of the responses were constructive criticism rather than general expressions of dissatisfaction or negativity. It is possible that visitors who answered the questionnaire with an interviewer, because they were literally faced with someone working on behalf of the British Museum, felt compelled to refrain from harsh criticism. However, this would not have been a factor for visitors who completed the questionnaire anonymously online, who account for approximately one third of respondents.

Nothing

Interestingly, the most common answer, from 30% of respondents, was "Nothing!". Whilst this must be flattering to those involved in the planning, design and execution of the exhibition, for the purposes of finding out visitors' opinions on *shunga* it was not illuminating. For this reason, many visitors who

initially responded saying ‘nothing’, or that they were happy with the exhibition as it was, were given further prompts from the interviewer to encourage discussion. Those who went on to give an additional response when prompted were not counted as answering in this category.

More information or examples

Many of those who were prompted tended to offer a suggestion, usually about an area that they would have liked more information on, rather than a criticism. A desire to see more information or examples of certain types of objects was expressed by 28% of respondents, or 34% if those who specifically wanted an audio guide, video, or interactive are included. It is however worth bearing in mind that many of the people who said they wanted to be able to see or learn more were doing so because they had been prompted by the interviewer, and even possibly because they felt obliged to offer an answer. Nevertheless, this type of response should be seen as a positive. The fact that visitors wanted more, and gave specific examples of areas that caught their interest, shows that they not only looked at the objects and information available to them but that they also engaged with it.

For example, one respondent wanted to follow up on what she had read in the interpretation:

I would have liked more information. Saw the information about *shunga* being in a bride's trousseau mentioned on a panel and was expecting to see an example of it nearby but couldn't find one.
Female, 45-54, UK (LB070)

Several respondents wanted more information and artworks which contextualised *shunga* in comparison to other cultures:

I would particularly like more on Picasso's collection and the influence of *shunga* on European artists. Thought there could have been something discussing links between *shunga* and the Kama Sutra. Male, 65+, UK (LB028)

It was not just artworks that visitors would have liked to have seen more of, several visitors also specified cultural artefacts:

The material objects on display (e.g. kimonos, dildos) assisted in creating a comparative 'real world' setting for the images. A few more items would have been of interest to me. Female, 25-34, UK (TW004)



Figure 67 View of the two kimono on display in free-standing cases (photograph courtesy of the British Museum)

This notion of a 'real world setting' was enhanced by displaying two kimono hanging in free-standing, fully-transparent cases, which allowed visitors to see the clothes as they would have been worn rather than as a decorative piece of fabric, which can sometimes be the effect when kimono are displayed flat in table or wall cases. Visitors were then able to mentally transpose these three-dimensional, vibrant, tactile garments from the cases on to the people depicted within the prints and paintings, thus the kimono and the way they were displayed helped to bring the *shunga* to life. As one visitor explained, these everyday objects helped to contextualise a historically distant culture:

Maybe could have had more objects like the kimono, such as shoes, a pillow, hairpins etc. that you can see in images, to give a sense of the period and what life was like there. Female, 25-34, UK (LB068)

Despite their appetite for more, the majority of visitors were satisfied with the amount of information in the exhibition, as can be seen in Table 3, where 95% of respondents said they were satisfied (64% very satisfied, 31% quite satisfied). Again 95% were satisfied with the number of prints and other items displayed (77% very satisfied, 18% quite satisfied).

Furthermore, visitors showed an awareness of the limitations and practicalities of providing more information or examples:

I would have liked more context on Japan at that time, who would have used it and more on the politics and censorship, but I understand that the exhibition would get too complicated if it went in every direction. Male, 20-24, UK (LB030)

I would like to see more of the scrolls unrolled, but I guess there's not space for that. Female, 25-34, USA (LB051)

Crowding

Crowding was an issue raised by 20% of respondents, who felt that the exhibition was too crowded and could be improved by letting in less people.

It was a bit crowded; people were 'queuing' round the walls. Male 25-34, UK (LB032)

Far too many people for the kind of display. Due to content, people spent more than usual time looking and reading-!!- and it was impossible to stay focussed. cabinet displays too low so could only be read if immediately in front. Gender withheld, 60-64, Canada (TW050)

The small format of prints, illustrated books, handscrolls, and *netsuke*, requires close viewing, especially in comparison to a large oil painting or sculpture, which many people are able to view at once and from a reasonable distance.

Additionally, visitors tended not to flit around the exhibition, but instead went methodically from one object to the next and carefully read the interpretation. These two factors resulted in people queuing in order to take their 'turn' in front of each artwork. This kind of viewing behaviour suggests a high level of visitor engagement and an eagerness to learn. Several respondents felt that the crowding interfered with their ability to interact with the objects:

Maybe [let] less people in at a time - it was fairly busy and sometimes difficult to read/contemplate images properly with other people milling around. Male, 55-59, UK (TW029)

The exhibition operated a timed entry system with a limited number of tickets available for each slot in order to avoid such an issue. On average just under 1,000 people attended the *Shunga* exhibition each day. However, weekends and certain timeslots were particularly busy. On average the exhibition was at 72.2% capacity, but 22% of the time this figure was 90% or above. A small number of respondents, around 3%, felt it was the objects that were 'crowded' and that there should have been more space between works.

Clarity of layout

Another area for possible improvement was the clarity in the layout or flow of the exhibition, with 9% of respondents mentioning it:

The room is too rectangular, need to get people to zigzag, to break up the queue and create more flow. Male, 35-44, UK (LB038)

Found the layout a little confusing; went round in U shape, breaking off to look at centre exhibits, so went from earliest to most recent and back to earliest. Female, 45-54, UK (LB066)

It was not clear where the next phase begins, whether we were meant to go round room by room or not. Female, 25-34, UK (LB060)

This contradicts the 10% of visitors who, in response to the previous question, said that the layout, and the clarity of it, was what they liked best.

There were orientation plans throughout the exhibition space on most of the triangular vertical displays (as visible in Figure 66 and Figure 67) and on the walls. Additionally, in the first two rooms, each side of each section was labelled and numbered to indicate the suggested order of viewing. For example, the left side was titled *1 Early Shunga* and the right side *2 Early Shunga*, then in the next room the left side was headed *3 Masterpieces of Shunga* and the right *4 Masterpieces of Shunga*, but as these were above eye-level they largely went unnoticed. Goodhead described these headings as,

an attempt to at least guide those who want to be guided, to the route they should take but because it's a relatively free, open space people will do whatever they want. They will take it in the order they want.⁶²⁹

Label readability

Label readability was raised by 7% of respondents, who commented that the text could be bigger and the positioning of labels made them more difficult to read. These issues were mentioned in relation to crowding as can be seen in some of the comments on that.

The text was too small and because you needed to be close up to read the labels it made it a bit crowded. Female, 25-34, UK (LB034)

This is in line with responses to a question on how easy the information was to read, with 9% neither satisfied nor unsatisfied and a further 3% not very satisfied. Nevertheless, it should be noted that for the first two weeks of the exhibition the large-print booklet of the interpretation was not yet available.

Additional media

As previously mentioned 6% of visitors felt that the exhibition could have been improved by the addition of either an audio guide, app, interactive or video display. For example:

I would like more information on the history of the time and the political environment. Multimedia or interactive, watch a video or listen to audio to help learn more in different ways. Female, 25-34, USA (LB051)

There was one interactive in the exhibition: a postcard with a hidden *shunga* image which was revealed by pushing a button to shine a light through it. However, this was demonstrative rather than informative and was not commented on by any of the respondents to the questionnaires.

⁶²⁹ Goodhead and Ould, "Interview on Exhibition and Design Relating to Shunga."

As noted previously, several visitors commented that they would like to see one of the handscrolls in its entirety. Given spatial considerations, a more practical way to achieve this would have been digitally, as several respondents suggested:

I would love to be able to see a full scroll unrolled, physically or digitally, to see all 12 scenes as mentioned in the labels. Female, 45-54, UK (LB035)

Whilst an interactive display, perhaps something similar to the one by the V&A for the Mazarin chest, would undoubtedly have enhanced the exhibition, this was most likely ruled out due to the exhibition's mid-range budget. However, six of the 17 handscrolls on display were from the British Museum's own collection. These have already been (at least partially) digitised and, along with further information, have been put on the BM online collections search, which is freely accessible to the public. It would therefore have been cheap and easy, with the addition of a small caption or text panel, to draw visitors' attention to this fact and provide them with a link. This way, visitors would have been able to satisfy their curiosity, expand their knowledge, and view additional scenes in a scroll. A link to the online collection would also have been pertinent for prints displayed from albums, sets or illustrated books for the same reasons.

One visitor's suggestion implies that additional media could help to alleviate the issues of crowding, flow, and label readability, as well as offer more information for those who wanted it:

An audio guide or app so you can take in the information while you look at the art and you could stand back and let other people without the audio guide read the labels. Female, 60-64, UK (LB044)

Originally it was intended that there would be an audio guide, but based on the feedback from potential exhibition visitors at the formative evaluation sessions this idea was dropped as the participants in these group discussions expressed uncertainty. Whilst an audio guide had the potential to offer more information, it also could be seen as a distraction. More significantly, visitors were shocked by the explicitness of the dialogue in *shunga* and were averse to hearing this read aloud. Participants reacted strongly to the translated dialogue:

It's far more shocking. I thought the print was beautiful. I find that distasteful. Female participant

It cheapens it and is more vulgar. Female participant⁶³⁰

On the other hand, an anecdotal example from unstructured visitor observation shows that not all visitors were so shocked by the dialogue in *shunga*. A mature couple perusing the exhibition was overheard as the wife was reading the object labels, dialogue and onomatopoeic noises included, aloud to her husband, who had forgotten his reading glasses, with no signs of discomfort. Instead, they shared a laugh or a smile and moved on to the next work. This reinforced the earlier observation that respondents over 50 were more comfortable openly discussing *shunga* and sex than the younger visitors, perhaps because they have had more exposure to discussions and depictions of sex. For example, the answers to 'What are the main messages you will take away with you from the exhibition?' showed the relaxed attitudes from some of the older respondents:

There's nothing new! Female, 45-54, UK (LB061)

Sex is fun! Female, 65+, UK (LB049)

It is something really important - we need to loosen up and be more celebratory. There is nothing wrong with enjoying sex. Female, 65+, UK (LB048)

Then again, there is undeniably a big difference between a hearing a friend or partner and a stranger reading out text with sexual content. The differences in impact between reading, hearing, and seeing will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Lighting

The lighting was an issue for 7% of respondents who felt that it was a little too dark, particularly in the final section, *Shunga and the Modern World*.

The lighting made it difficult to read the curatorial information and sometimes difficult to see details. ... I have a problem with the

⁶³⁰ TWResearch, "Shunga: Formative Evaluation Research."

darkness and poor lighting. I see no reason for it. Female, age withheld (TW005)

Whilst the small size and fine line work on many of the *shunga* prints and paintings may have made it more difficult for some visitors to see them as clearly as they would have liked, as with other works on paper Japanese prints are known for their sensitivity to light and, as with any exhibition, for conservation reasons light levels may have to be lowered.

Other

One point of interest is that only seven out of the 205 respondents, 3%, commented on the sexual nature of *shunga* in response to this question, with the majority of suggestions relating to general and practical museum issues such as crowding, layout, text size, or lighting. Having laid out an overview of the exhibition and the feedback, some of the issues specific to *shunga* that were raised by visitors will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

5.5 Other Responses

A plethora of reviews, evaluations, reflections, and opinions about the exhibition and catalogue have been published in the wake of the exhibition, with the majority being positive, engaged, and constructive. See, for example, Swinton's detailed 10-page review of the exhibition catalogue in *Impressions*⁶³¹. I originally intended to cover these sorts of media and academic responses to the *Shunga* exhibition in this chapter and to compare them with the feedback from visitors. However, there are two important reasons why I am unable to analyse the media and academic responses to the exhibition here. The first is that spatial constraints on this thesis prevent the depth of analysis required to provide significant insight. More importantly, the second is that several articles which summarise and discuss media responses to the exhibition have already been published in both English and Japanese⁶³². Crucially, these articles have been

⁶³¹ Elizabeth de Sabato Swinton, "Review: Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art," *Impressions* 36 (2015): 232-42.

⁶³² Akiko Yano, "日本の春画をイギリスはどう見たか：メディアの反応を手がかりに (Britain Encounters Japanese Shunga : Media Reactions to the 2013 British Museum Shunga Exhibition)," 文化資源学 (*Bunka Shigengaku*) (特集 春画と日本社会 *Special Issue Shunga and*

written by three of the exhibition's four co-curators and the BM's Head of Interpretation.

Yano published an article detailing the reactions of the UK media to the exhibition⁶³³; Ishigami also discusses responses to the exhibition in her article 'Kuroi kaaten no mukougawa: Daieihakubutsukan *shungaten* to nihon' ('Behind the Black Curtain: The British Museum *Shunga* Exhibition and Japan')⁶³⁴. Ishigami sets out the details of the *shunga* project and the associated events and outcomes (symposia, talks, publications), which occurred in addition to the exhibition⁶³⁵. In 'Sexhibition: Reflections on *Shunga* in London, Looking Forward to *Shunga* in Tokyo' Clark has a section in which he notes the sheer variety of publications which have responded to the BM exhibition⁶³⁶. Frost has produced a number of articles and conference papers about the exhibition, including an evaluation published as part of a themed issue of the Interpretation Journal⁶³⁷. That the Association for Heritage Interpretation devoted an entire journal issue to 'Interpreting Emotional and Challenging Topics', shows that the topics explored in the exhibition are currently relevant and that they need to be part of a wider debate. It also indicates that institutions are becoming increasingly willing to engage with challenging issues.

To an extent, the evaluations by Clark and Frost have utilised some of the same information as I have discussed above. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Frost, Clark, and other staff members of the BM very generously shared their thoughts, knowledge, and the formative evaluation findings with me, which I have incorporated into the summative evaluation material. Secondly, the visitor questionnaires and observations were carried out jointly by myself and the BM interpretation department to be utilised by the BM and *Shunga* project team as

Japanese Society), no. 13 (2015): 137-46; Aki Ishigami, "Kuroi Kaaten No Mukougawa: Daieihakubutsukan Shungaten to Nihon," *博物館研究 (Museum Studies)* 49, no. 8 (2014): 18-21; Clark, "Sexhibition: Reflections on Shunga in London, Looking Forward to Shunga in Tokyo"; Stuart Frost, "Evaluation: 'Shunga' at the British Museum," *Interpretation Journal* 19, no. 2 (2014): 15-17.

⁶³³ Yano, "日本の春画をイギリスはどう見たか (Britain Encounters Japanese Shunga)."

⁶³⁴ Ishigami, "Kuroi Kaaten No Mukougawa."

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁶³⁶ Clark, "Sexhibition: Reflections on Shunga in London, Looking Forward to Shunga in Tokyo."

⁶³⁷ Frost, "Evaluation: 'Shunga' at the British Museum."

well as in this thesis. Nevertheless, their articles offer insights from different perspectives.

The successful opening of a *shunga* exhibition in Japan in 2015 can also be seen as a ‘response’ to the BM exhibition (or perhaps as a response to the responses to the exhibition). However, an analysis of Eisei Bunko’s *Shunga* exhibition and the responses to it, as the first dedicated *shunga* exhibition in Japan, deserve to be the focus of at least an article or two in the future. These topics cannot be sufficiently covered in this thesis, but will be briefly raised in Chapter 6 and will be the subject of subsequent post-doctoral work.

6. Discussions

Several of the key issues that were raised in previous chapters will now be re-considered and developed in this chapter in light of visitor responses to the *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition. Although not an exhaustive list of concerns that an institution may encounter when dealing with sex art, it is intended that my exploration of these issues will be a fruitful starting point for those contemplating the collection or display of *shunga*. How curators see the role of their institution will determine, to an extent, how, or even if, they engage with sex art. For this reason, I begin by questioning the role, or roles, of institutions and this will frame the discussions that follow. The museums and galleries discussed in this thesis are predominantly public institutions but they often blur the line between public and private space. This notion is explored further in relation to the private nature of the content of *shunga*. Following this, a section on the power of language explores the reservations raised by visitors with some of the terms used to describe *shunga* in the exhibition texts, as well as with the dialogue that takes place within *shunga*. The sexual content of *shunga* and the notions of ‘art’ and ‘pornography’, as discussed in Chapter 1, are revisited to engage with visitor responses to the art/porn debate. Subsequently, examples of how the BM handled the particularly sensitive topics of under-age sex, the presence of children, and non-consensual sex in the *shunga* exhibition are examined. Furthermore, in light of the inclusion of artworks depicting same-sex couples in the *shunga* exhibition, how the BM has engaged with GSM-related *shunga* is briefly sketched. Finally, a recent development in attitudes to *shunga* in Japan is noted.

6.1 The Role of Institutions

Over the last two and a half centuries, through its exhibitions, publications, collections, and research, the [British] museum has interacted with and contributed to wider scholarly and intellectual trajectories and has influenced public understanding on many topics.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁸ Lissant Bolton, “Living and Dying: Ethnography, Class, and Aesthetics in the British Museum,” in *Museums and Difference*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 335.

A key question that arose whilst carrying out research on *shunga* and museums was ‘What is, or should be, the role of institutions?’. This question has, of course, been debated within museum studies, but it is not just a theoretical exercise; as George Hein points out ‘Examining the role of museums in society as a major cultural force is not only important to us as museum professionals, it is justified by their powerful influence in society’⁶³⁹. Preziosi and Farago succinctly summarise the scope of that authority by describing the museum as ‘an institution for the construction, legitimization, and maintenance of cultural realities’⁶⁴⁰.

Similar to my approach to the term ‘art’ in Chapter 1, I do not propose a single ‘correct’ role as a definition of the purpose of institutions. Instead, as a reflection of their complexity, I suggest a cluster of overlapping and interconnected roles, a more in-depth appraisal of the roles of museums that are most pertinent to the issues raised in this thesis, and a call for clarification from whose perspective such roles are to be assumed. Visitors and non-visitors, directors and trustees, politicians and governments, academics and researchers, artists and creators, curators and other museum staff will all see the roles of institutions differently. In keeping with previous chapters, and much of the existing museum studies literature, the focus will be on the roles of museum as understood by visitors and ‘professional “content-providers” (art historians, curators, and others)’⁶⁴¹.

Regardless of the ideal roles that institutions arguably should have, in the twenty-first century museums fulfil social, political, cultural, aesthetic, archival, educational, academic, emotional/spiritual, and economic roles to varying degrees⁶⁴². Of this wide range of intersecting roles, the educational and social ones will be examined in relation to museums’ engagement with *shunga* to

⁶³⁹ Hein, “The Role of Museums In Society: Education and Social Action,” 358.

⁶⁴⁰ Preziosi and Farago, “What Are Museums For?,” 2.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁴² MHM in their previous exhibition evaluation reports for the BM have identified four key visitor motivations, with corresponding categories of how visitors see the role of museums: spiritually driven visitors view the museum as a church, emotional as spa, intellectual as archive and social as attraction. For example, see Morris Hargreaves McIntyre “Mysterious, Enigmatic, Spiritual,” 16-18. However, this seems to oversimplify the matter as visitors often have more than one reason for visiting. Additionally, there is the potential for a great deal of overlap with ‘emotional’ and ‘spiritual’ depending on the degree of religiousness or secularisation in society, which is culturally dependent.

address whether public institutions should be proactive or reactive about sensitive subjects. Like artworks, museums not only reflect the culture and society around them but also affect them. For this reason, regardless of whether museums take a reactive or proactive approach with sex art it will have an impact on society.

A DCMS report, evaluating the value and future of museums, recognises that ‘Museums are centres of knowledge, with a clear - and growing - role as educators’⁶⁴³. That education is a fundamental role of museums has consistently been promoted by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill⁶⁴⁴ and is now generally agreed on, but the extent of what ‘education’ should encompass, particularly in terms of social aspects is disputed. Hein argues that ‘an appropriate educational role in museums includes social action’⁶⁴⁵. On the other hand, it has been argued that public institutions should be ‘neutral’ and that they should not engage with social issues or put across a particular viewpoint on one side of a debate or the other, especially on contemporary or sensitive issues. Yet, Gaynor Kavanagh noted that research within museum studies has disproven the notion that ‘the museum is a neutral space, innocent of conveying anything but the word-for-word content of labels and the silent unambiguous messages transmitted by objects “speaking for themselves”’⁶⁴⁶. Due to this partiality, their influential power, and their public nature, museums cannot avoid having political and social roles. In addition, since most museums receive public funding, they are seen to have a responsibility to the public, as Robert Janes puts it, ‘the time-honoured assumption that museums exist for the public good’⁶⁴⁷.

From their formation in the late-eighteenth century, museums were seen as having a particular kind of educational role, which was ostensibly self-improvement, but in actuality was social reform of the lower classes. Thankfully those elitist and patronising ideas of ‘public good’, namely that museums should

⁶⁴³ Museums and Cultural Property Division, “The Value of Museums,” 6.

⁶⁴⁴ especially in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, ed., *The Educational Role of the Museum* (London : Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁴⁵ Hein, “The Role of Museums In Society: Education and Social Action,” 363.

⁶⁴⁶ Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museum Languages : Objects and Texts*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (Leicester : Leicester University Press, 1991), 4.

⁶⁴⁷ Robert R. Janes, “Museums, Social Responsibility and the Future We Desire,” in *Museum Revolutions : How Museums Change and Are Changed*, ed. Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila E.R. Watson (London : Routledge, 2007), 141.

play civilising and moralising roles in society, are no longer in effect. Instead, the idea of ‘public good’ is now seen as a responsibility to preserve, research, and display collections for all. One way to understand how institutions can achieve these functions is to see the role of museums as ‘mediators of knowledge, information and experience’⁶⁴⁸. Mediating is less patronising, paternalistic and moralising than the approach of museums in previous centuries. Previously museums were seen as guardians of knowledge, but as mediators institutions offer information not as the authoritative voice on the subject imposing the ‘correct’ opinion upon visitors, but with a plurality of voices in the capacity of sharing and engaging with knowledge.

Museums now, in their educational and social roles, combine the dissemination of knowledge with notions of diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, in their role as public institutions museums have a responsibility to widen accessibility and diversity, provide knowledge in a range of formats and levels of engagement, and to represent society and cultures more accurately. Interestingly, displaying artefacts relating to sex and sexuality could help museums achieve these, as it would increase inclusion and the chance of identification for visitors, generate discussion (which potentially increases knowledge and awareness), and more accurately portray society. Frost likewise argues for the inclusion of sex and sexuality within displays on the basis of accuracy and integrity:

An exhibition which did not explore the significance of sex and sexuality where this was relevant would contribute to inaccurate and misleading history.⁶⁴⁹

Frost’s argument brings to mind the saying that if someone is not part of the solution, then they are part of the problem. Since museums are seen to ‘hold the record of our history, helping us to make sense of the present by throwing light on the past’⁶⁵⁰ it is vital that this history is not deliberately misleading. By excluding sex and sexuality, which are fundamental aspects of human experience, museums silence and exclude a significant number of people from engaging with the past as well as their present. By including sex and sexuality,

⁶⁴⁸ Museums and Cultural Property Division, “The Value of Museums,” 11.

⁶⁴⁹ Stuart Frost, “Museums and the Collecting, Displaying and Interpretation of Sex and Sexuality” (MA thesis, 2001), 42.

⁶⁵⁰ Museums and Cultural Property Division, “The Value of Museums,” 4.

museums can draw attention to historical inaccuracies and exclusions and provide a space to engage with these issues.

How active should institutions' involvement with sex and sexuality in their educational and social roles be? Liddiard cautiously suggests that

the role of the museum is very much a reactive one, slowly reacting to shifts in popular thinking. However, in the context of the history of sexuality, it may well be that museums also have the capacity to act in a proactive manner, vigorously promoting alternative and innovative interpretations of the past.⁶⁵¹

This shift from reactive to proactive fits with the pattern that has emerged from the BM's interaction with sex art. For decades, the BM has been challenging the boundaries and breaking away from institutional censorship. It is possible this has positively affected the tolerance level of social censorship, or, conversely, visitor feedback suggests that society's tolerance for sexually explicit art has increased and it is only now that institutions are catching up to this fact. Many respondents felt that an exhibition like *Shunga* was overdue. Visitors frequently commented on how pleased they were that an institution as popular and well respected as the BM was acknowledging sex and sexuality, as these topics are an important aspect of human experience, which are relevant and relatable, but for a long time have been omitted.

Jennifer Barrett suggests that institutions should be both proactive and reactive, 'dynamic and continually adapting to, and sometimes initiating, changes in society'⁶⁵², if they are to fulfil their roles in the twenty-first century. Whereas Amy Levin advocates a more clearly proactive role for museums: specifically, the consideration of GSM, feminist, or BAME perspectives 'engages museums in a program of inclusivity. Thus the museum's educative mission becomes more explicitly political, and *the institution becomes a site for the creation of knowledge* rather than a temple for the worship of accepted doctrine'⁶⁵³. This

⁶⁵¹ Mark Liddiard, "Changing Histories: Museums, Sexuality and the Future of the Past," *Museum and Society* 2, no. 1 (2004): 26.

⁶⁵² Jennifer. Barrett, "Museums and the Public Sphere" (Chichester : Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 112.

⁶⁵³ Amy K. Levin, "Introduction," in *Gender, Sexuality and Museums : A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (London : Routledge, 2010), 8 emphasis added.

interactivity between visitors and museums is a strong reason for institutions taking a proactive role in their educational and social remits.

6.2 Public and Private Space

In examining the roles of museums, notions of space - particularly public and discursive space - have been a recurring theme. However, the idea of institutions being public spaces is complicated when examined in relation to sex art. Firstly, how the personal nature of *shunga* affects space will be considered. Following that, the public nature of institutions and the impact of that on *shunga* will be discussed.

6.2.1 Personal space

There may be a psychological element to the feeling of crowding remarked on by visitors to the exhibition rather than it solely being a physical matter. In addition to the close viewing required by the small format of most *shunga*, the sexual nature and intimacy of the material may have altered visitors' perceptions of 'personal space' by making them more aware of their own bodies and of the proximity of other people's bodies. As their size suggests, originally *shunga* books, prints, and handscrolls would have been viewed in the home, a private space, not necessarily alone, but they were not displayed in public. Displaying *shunga* in the public space of a museum emphasises the artistic aspects of *shunga*, but negates or at least diminishes some of its other functions, namely arousal, seduction, and masturbation. Visitors viewed works intended to be aesthetically pleasing, amusing and arousing, but only the former two responses are permitted to be expressed in a public space. So whilst people were happy to exclaim over the beauty of the works or to laugh and discuss the humorous elements with companions, the sexual component may have made visitors more aware than normal of the proximity of others, resulting in the feeling that their 'personal space' was being transgressed. Erskine-Loftus describes personal space as 'An aspect of private space which does directly intersect with the public space of the museum'⁶⁵⁴. Similarly, the *Shunga* exhibition creates an intersection of private and public space, by putting artworks that depict private acts and

⁶⁵⁴ Erskine-Loftus, "What Are We Silently Saying?" 166.

were intended to be enjoyed in a private space into a public one. This blurring of traditionally held spatial boundaries might have resulted in a sense of unease which visitors experienced and expressed as ‘crowding’.

That visitors are more aware of their proximity to one another is something for museums to consider when planning to exhibit *shunga* or other sexually explicit works in the future. Perhaps using a slightly larger space or adding extra space between objects would allow visitors to maintain their personal space and avoid the perceived discomfort of ‘crowding’. Or perhaps these measures will be unnecessary because as visitors become more accustomed to institutions engaging with sex and sexuality they will feel more comfortable encountering them in the blurred space of museums.

6.2.2 Museum space

Museums are assumed to be a public space because, as Barrett explains, ‘it was the foundational concept for the idea that museums and their collections should be open and accessible to all, rather than the private property of wealthy collectors’⁶⁵⁵. Furthermore, she points out that ‘exhibitions are conceived for the public, and the subject matter is therefore considered to be of public importance’⁶⁵⁶. This relates back to the role of museums as public institutions to provide not only information but also a space for discussion. However, perhaps the term ‘semi-public space’ as suggested by Erskine-Loftus⁶⁵⁷ would more accurately describe museums as there are limitations in public access due to set opening hours, special exhibition entry fees or, in the case of *Shunga*, an age advisory.

How does viewing *shunga* in the public, or semi-public, space of a museum differ from viewing *shunga* in a private or domestic space as would have been done in Edo-period Japan? One key difference is ownership, which relates back to the

⁶⁵⁵ Barrett, “Museums and the Public Sphere,” 164.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁵⁷ Erskine-Loftus, “What Are We Silently Saying?” 165-166.

discussion of the functions of privately commissioned art in Chapter 1.2.2⁶⁵⁸. The proximity permitted by owned work, whether privately commissioned or commercially purchased, is transformed into distance when these are displayed publically, as in the example of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Figure 1). The small scale and formats of Edo-period art required personal interaction in a way that European paintings did not, for example turning the pages of an *ehon* or unrolling a handscroll section by section. How does a book being displayed open at a fixed point, or a handscroll shown already unfurled, change the way these artworks are encountered and experienced? In addition to not being able to touch an object, a standard consequence of museum exhibitions, public display of *shunga* removes the personal interaction, intimacy of viewing, and the choice of which scene or page to look at, which limits the diversity of representations and the potential for identification and engagement.

On the other hand, it could be argued that in viewing works of art the aesthetic element can still be experienced as personal (privately) even though it takes place in the public setting of a museum. From this perspective, museums could be seen as existing somewhere between public and private space. Museums blur the lines between private/personal and public/universal, and create overlap, by being 'spaces where people can explore personal beliefs in amongst universal truths'⁶⁵⁹.

Notions of public and private space affect how *shunga* is categorised: displaying *shunga* in a public space, especially a museum, immediately identifies it as art in most visitors' minds. They may not even be aware of this implicit categorisation and their acceptance of it. Indeed, respondents to the exhibition questionnaire did not question whether *shunga* was art but accepted it as such, which was one of the curators' main aims. Partially this is due to the authority of the museum, but had they encountered *shunga* in a non-public space, for example in a friend's home or in a book, they may have responded to *shunga* in a different way or questioned its artistic status. This issue also relates to contextualisation, but encountering *shunga* in a private space allows for the possibility of an

⁶⁵⁸ Luxury *shunga* paintings would have been private commissions and had a similar mix of functions for their owner (aesthetic, pornographic, social status, etc.) as European private commissions.

⁶⁵⁹ Museums and Cultural Property Division, "The Value of Museums," 6.

‘erotic’ or ‘pornographic’ response to *shunga* that is arguably denied by displaying them in the public setting of a museum. Levin makes a similar point, but in relation to those who control the space rather than the type of space itself: ‘curators and exhibition designers have the ability to render objects curiously sexual or, alternately, to strip them of any sexual power by constricting the visitor’s gaze in various ways’⁶⁶⁰.

6.3 Power of Language

Curators and other museum staff can affect how an object is perceived or received by visitors through the words they use to describe it. The importance of defining *shunga* was laid out in Chapter 1, but the terms discussed here are descriptors rather than definitions. A small number of visitors questioned the use of certain descriptors in the exhibition interpretation:

Dislike use of the word 'erotic' in description - that's for the visitor to decide. Female, 45-54, UK (LB066)

Use of the descriptive words mentioned above - tender, gentle, carefree, playful, hilarious, light-hearted. I can tell what I'm seeing and can make the judgement myself as to whether it is any of these things. In some cases, the descriptors were spot on. In others though it felt as if they were using them to try and lighten the tone of something that was visceral and erotic. Female, 25-34, UK (TW051)

These visitors were recognising and questioning the implicit authority of the museum and asserting the validity of their own opinions. Their responses call attention to the inherent power of language and make explicit the impact words can have. Whilst the ability of words to affect readers is undeniable, their immediacy in comparison with images is an interesting topic, as this observation from Cather shows:

in Japan’s landmark postwar censorship trials of literature and film...literature was consistently convicted of obscenity whereas film was exonerated. Are we to conclude that, contrary to popular belief,

⁶⁶⁰ Levin, “Introduction,” 5.

words are more powerful and more potentially obscene than images?⁶⁶¹

Although not specifically referring to *shunga*, the following comparison of the power of images and texts by the curators of *Seduced*, which seems to agree with Cather's conclusion, is rather apt:

The best of the illustrated texts are highly refined in the way they evoke the sensory delights of sexual activity. Their verbal reach is not confined to the obvious visual and tactile dimensions of the illustrations, but also extends to the senses of hearing, smell and taste. Words can exercise a particular kind of magic, working surreptitiously on the mind in a way that more obvious images cannot.⁶⁶²

This fits with Berry's observation, quoted in Chapter 1, and Hartley's acknowledgement, discussed in Chapter 4, that the text in *shunga* is critical to understanding and interpreting the work. In *shunga*, as in *ukiyo-e* more generally, text and image work together rather than in opposition to one another or vying for dominance as they are often positioned in European art history.

The immediacy of images was also touched on in Chapter 1; as Williams described how, when encountering an explicit image, people cannot help but see it and, for that reason, may feel 'obscenity' has been thrust upon them. With text, however, some deliberate interaction is necessary (although both text and image require attentive 'reading' to be fully understood). Conversely, several men and women in the formative focus groups felt that the text was more explicit than the images. More specifically, it was the translations of the dialogue within the artworks that were 'shocking', 'vulgar', and 'distasteful'⁶⁶³. The dialogue was very direct and colloquial and the translations did not mask this. Consequently, the translated dialogue contrasted starkly with the more standard informative and academic voices in the rest of the interpretive text in the exhibition. The informal language was not what visitors expected to encounter in an institution like the BM and it struck visitors as very modern, which prevented them from achieving historical or cultural distance.

⁶⁶¹ Cather, *The Art of Censorship in Postwar Japan*, 194.

⁶⁶² Wallace, Kemp, and Bernstein, *Seduced: Art & Sex from Antiquity to Now*, 19.

⁶⁶³ TWResearch, "Shunga: Formative Evaluation Research," 34.

Furthermore, the translated dialogue made viewers acknowledge the sexual functions of *shunga* - the ‘visceral and erotic’ - rather than allowing them to focus on the aesthetic aspects. For example, see Chapter 5.4 for the dialogue for Figure 61, or the following which was included in the exhibition label for Figure 68:

[Man:] If I don’t do it even for half a day, I lose my appetite. This is the ninth time today. Let’s sleep for a bit, then do it seven or eight times more.

[Woman:] Ah! It feels like I’m going to faint. Really. Even deeper, up there...That’s it. I’m going to come again! Ah! Oh!



Figure 68 Katsukawa Shunchō, Fourth Month from the series *Kōshoku zue jūnikō* (*Erotic Illustrations for the Twelve Months*), c.1788, colour woodblock print, International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, reproduced in Clark et al. *Ibid.*, 192–193.

An additional point of interest relating to the power and immediacy of language is that the planned audio guide did not go ahead due to feedback from the formative focus groups, as outlined in Chapter 5. Whilst some were in favour of audio guides, for the additional information and sense of immersion and privacy they can provide, others worried that they would be a distraction and thought that a ‘performance’ of some of the text was ‘a scary concept’⁶⁶⁴. Given the explicitness of the dialogue and plethora of onomatopoeic noises⁶⁶⁵ in *shunga* is

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁶⁵ Klompmakers explains some of the onomatopoeic conventions: ‘*sūsū* indicates heavy breathing, and *chūchū* imitates the sound of kissing. The sound of the penis entering the

it is understandable that visitors would not want to hear these, as the immediacy of sound is even stronger than imagery or text - it is unavoidable - and thus could be overwhelming. For example, the translation of the dialogue for Hokusai's *Kinoe no komatsu*, Figure 62, which was included on the interpretation label is one that most visitors would not want to hear enacted:

(Octopus) Wondering when, when to do the abduction, but today is the day. At last she's captured. Even so, this is a plump, good pussy...

(Diver) The hateful octopus fu, fu, fu, fu...rather aa, aa...sucking on the surface of the inner mouth of my womb until I'm breathless, aa, eee, I'm coming!...

(Octopus) Zuu, zuu, zuu, zuu, hicha-hicha, gucha-gucha, jutsu, chu, chu, chu, guu, guu, zuu, zuu.

(Diver) Say! How about, how about the feeling of being entwined by eight legs? Oh, oh, it's swelling inside aa, aa...

(translated by Danielle Talerico⁶⁶⁶)

Art vs. Porn

The impact of categorising objects on people's perceptions of them, especially in relation to art and pornography, was discussed in Chapter 1. The debate surrounding the long-standing notion of 'art' and 'pornography' as mutually exclusive is revisited here in response to visitor comments and because it relates to the role of institutions. Wallace et al. point out that,

what the viewer deems 'acceptable' - what he or she might embrace as artistic, or eschew as pornographic - is at the same time determined by the particularities of his or her historical and cultural moment.⁶⁶⁷

The role of institutions is an important concept to explore in relation to this. Even if they think they are not actively engaging with sex art, because museums can help to shape the levels of 'acceptability' of a historical and cultural

vagina is expressed as *zuburi*, and its back-and-forth movement sounds like *picha picha*', Klomp makers, *Japanese Erotic Prints: Shunga by Harunobu & Koryūshai*, 17.

⁶⁶⁶ Talerico's translation originally appeared in Danielle Talerico, "Interpreting Sexual Imagery in Japanese Prints: A Fresh Approach to Hokusai's 'Diver and Two Octopi,'" *Impressions* 23 (2001): 24-41.

⁶⁶⁷ Wallace, Kemp, and Bernstein, *Seduced*, 6.

moment, institutions will either encourage viewers to embrace or to eschew. Several visitors were aware of this power and questioned notions of art and pornography in relation to the *shunga* exhibition:

People's expectations depend on how *shunga* is translated into English, and the line between pornography and art is not clear. ...The tone of the text was quite raunchy but probably it was the same in Japanese. Female, 17-19, Finland (LB050)

I thought the prints were presented as enlightened and unproblematic in their depiction of sexuality, I do not necessarily agree with this viewpoint. ...It was probably safe to shy away from describing the prints as 'pornographic' or 'erotic' but the intense focus on genitals in action (and the exaggeration of these body parts) made me want to have this discussion. Female, 45-54, UK (TW032)

Through exhibitions, institutions provide space for the consideration, and even legitimisation, of difficult or sensitive topics. Yet, how an institution defines an item affects how a visitor understands or interprets it. Under the institutional theory of art, the status of 'art' is conferred upon an object by the artworld, which consists of curators, museums, and galleries. Institutions like the British Museum, which is held in high esteem not just in the UK but worldwide, have authority, therefore their categorisation, or 'judgement' in effect, carries a greater weight. This became apparent when gathering feedback from *Shunga* exhibition visitors. Unlike the longstanding debate in philosophy (discussed in Chapter 1), visitors did not see 'art' and 'porn' as two mutually exclusive categories, within one of which *shunga* must be placed, but as flexible and overlapping concepts. Most people interviewed did not question whether or not *shunga* was art, partly because it was displayed and titled as such by the British Museum. On the other hand, the artworks and the accompanying interpretation provided visitors with the information necessary to decide for themselves.

That visitors can, and do, make up their own minds about objects displayed can be seen in the exhibition report *Mysterious, enigmatic, spiritual: An evaluation of The power of dogu: ceramic figures from ancient Japan*:

The Museum was interested in finding out whether visitors considered the display to be an exhibition of art or archaeology. In reality, most

visitors chose not to make a clear-cut distinction, instead appreciating the objects for both their historic and aesthetic value.⁶⁶⁸

Similarly, visitors' attitudes towards *shunga* were that they could be both porn and art and, on the whole, they did not feel it necessary to distinguish whether they were one or the other. As seen from the analysis of visitor feedback in Chapter 5, visitors enjoyed *shunga* aesthetically and for its sexual subject matter.

6.4 Handling Sensitive Topics

Shunga as a whole can be considered a sensitive topic because it depicts sexual scenes. However, within the wide range of works that *shunga* encompasses certain depictions have a greater potential to discomfort viewers, namely under-age sex, the presence of children, and rape. An example of how BM staff addressed each of these particularly sensitive topics will now be given.

6.4.1 Age of Consent

Francis described how the exhibition text for Harunobu's *Snowball* print (Figure 69) required extra consideration from the curatorial and interpretive staff:

This is a humorous image in which a wife catches her husband having an affair and throws a snowball at him. But then it became apparent to me that actually the reason she's throwing a snowball is partly because it's an adolescent girl, [but] by explicitly saying that are you encouraging people voyeuristically to look, pointing out she doesn't have pubic hair? [It] suddenly takes on this different kind of element. How do you want people to read this and react to it?⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁸ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, "Mysterious, Enigmatic, Spiritual: An Evaluation of The Power of Dogu: Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan," 39.

⁶⁶⁹ Francis, "Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting Shunga."



Figure 69 Suzuki Harunobu, *Yuki no tama (Snowball)*, late 1760s, colour woodblock print with embossing, British Museum

The exhibition label for the print did acknowledge the sexual act and the age of the girl but did not focus only on those aspects:

The composition reveals the goings-on inside a room which opens onto a garden covered with deep snow. An adult man is having sex with an immature young woman, as suggested by her lack of pubic hair. The woman standing outside under an umbrella, perhaps his wife, throws a snow-ball to cool his ardour and scold this improper behaviour. The colours of the print, unusually, are unfaded and the thick paper has been embossed to suggest the heavy layers of snow on the bamboo.

As can be seen, the interpretive text also explained the scene, revealed the contextual relationship of the people depicted, and drew attention to artistic aspects of the work. The humorous intent of the scene and the aesthetics are elaborated on in the catalogue⁶⁷⁰.

Only one visitor commented on this print, but made a helpful suggestion to include an advisory:

⁶⁷⁰ Clark et al., *Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 172.

I felt one print of underage sex was inappropriate to show, or at least I would have liked an additional trigger warning near it. Female, 20-24, UK (TW041)

Just as the advisory text for the exhibition in general allowed visitors to choose whether they wanted to see sexually explicit imagery, an additional advisory text for particularly sensitive images, such as Figure 69 or Figure 20, would allow visitors to avoid them if they felt that they would cause upset or offense. In this way, museums could accurately represent *shunga* by exhibiting challenging works whilst showing consideration for modern social mores.

An issue for institutions to bear in mind for future displays is that modern audiences are uncomfortable with adolescents being shown in sexual situations, regardless of the social mores of the time the artwork was made. For example, although today the age of consent is 16 years old, in Britain from 1660 until 1929 the age of consent for, and consummation of, marriage⁶⁷¹ was 12 for girls and 14 for boys. In Japan the Penal Code states the age of consent as 13, but after the post-war period other laws and ordinances use 18 as the age of consent. It should be noted that *Snowball* is atypical; other than the youths who appear in male-male *shunga*, whose age is ambiguous, the majority of participants in *shunga* are clearly adults. Although museums do not want to misrepresent the past and the accepted norms of the day by excluding such imagery, conversely they do not want to appear to be condoning them by including these kinds of depictions without taking into account modern sensibilities.

6.4.2 The Presence of Children

It is not just modern sensibilities that are pertinent for museums when dealing with *shunga*, but also the law, as detailed in Chapter 3. In addition to that, some of the preparatory measures undertaken to ensure the *Shunga* exhibition complied with the relevant legal acts were identified at the beginning of Chapter 5. But as Doubleday, Head of Legal Services at the British Museum, explained,

⁶⁷¹ At some points during this period parental consent was necessary for marriage for those under 21 years of age.

The law is not helpful for museums and galleries trying to present this kind of material [sexually explicit art in general]...unfortunately it is written in a way that catches all sorts of things it was never intended to catch.⁶⁷²

Shunga is one of the things which may unintentionally be caught by several acts, and the implication that the girl having sex in the *Snowball* print is young, due to her lack of pubic hair, is potentially problematic.

One particular legal act which did affect the exhibition of *shunga* is the 2009 Coroners and Justice Act, subsection 62(6), under which it is an offense to be in possession of a 'prohibited image of a child'. *Shunga* in which children are present, although not involved in any of the sexual acts, are not uncommon. Sometimes it is a young servant (Figure 43), but often it is a babe in arms being breastfed (Figure 9) or a toddler interrupting his parents, nurse or older sister (Figure 70). Since privacy was lacking in the Edo period (and likely still the case for many parents these days), they add a touch of reality to a genre that is filled with fantasy.

Hayakawa published a book on the presence of children in *shunga*, particularly drawing attention to the humorous aspects⁶⁷³, and several years later he revisited the subject as a chapter in *Shunga no Mikata: 10 no Point (10 Viewpoints of Shunga)*. The chapter, entitled *Sōjukuna kodomotachi (Precocious children)*, demonstrates with plentiful illustrations that children in *shunga* are generally babies or toddlers⁶⁷⁴. However, one example depicts a sullen teenager attempting to masturbate but, in an amusing reversal of roles, he is interrupted by his parents⁶⁷⁵. In the *shunga* exhibition catalogue, Yano acknowledges that humour is one aspect but she looks beyond it and questions other reasons for depicting children⁶⁷⁶. She also discusses how certain aspects can be problematic for contemporary viewers, some of which relate to adolescence and the age of consent and as such are along similar lines as the discussion above in 6.4.1.

⁶⁷² Francis, "Interview on Interpreting and Exhibiting Shunga."

⁶⁷³ Monta Hayakawa, *Shunga No Naka No Kodomotachi: Edo Shomin No Sei Ishiki* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2000).

⁶⁷⁴ Hayakawa, *Shunga No Mikata: 10 No Point (10 Viewpoints of Shunga)*, 132-149.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 142.

⁶⁷⁶ Akiko Yano, 'Children in Shunga' in Clark et al., *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 404-409.



Figure 70 Suzuki Harunobu, untitled, c.1768, colour woodblock print, Rene Scholten collection, reproduced in Uhlenbeck *Japanese Erotic Fantasies: Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period* (Amsterdam: Hotei Pub., 2005), 93.. **A young child interrupts a couple having sex and the woman, likely his mother or nurse, tries to distract him with a toy.**

The legal definition of a ‘prohibited image of a child’ includes images where a child is not involved but is present when adults are engaged in a sexual act. Although this law is targeted towards photographs, which in their making could harm actual children, the way it is worded means it could be applied to artworks. Therefore, *shunga* in which children are present were excluded from the exhibition to comply with this Act.

6.4.3 Non-consensual

There was some discussion as to whether depictions of sexual aggression and rape should be included in the exhibition, not as an attempt to censor them out but rather to avoid giving visitors a misleading impression of *shunga* as a genre. Rape or violent imagery may cause viewers distress and because of their unpleasant nature tend to stick prominently in people’s memory and therefore seem to be more prevalent. Although they only account for a small fraction of *shunga*, scenes of sexual coercion did exist so to exclude them from the exhibition would be misleading. For this reason, the curatorial team included an Utamaro print depicting a hirsute man forcing himself on an unwilling woman (Figure 20) in the exhibition. As noted in Chapter 1, in *shunga* that show sexual

coercion men are usually depicted as hairy and ugly as a sign of their reprehensible actions (see Figure 21 and Figure 45). In addition, the print chosen shows the woman not as a passive victim but actively resisting both physically and verbally, as the interpretive text makes clear through the inclusion of a translation of the dialogue: "Let go of me Rihei, you old fool!" "Save your words and just keep still".

The scene was shown in context as one of six prints displayed out of the 12 that make up the album *Utamakura*, as seen in Figure 65. By including this print the curatorial team avoided falsely sanitising *shunga* but they also managed to avoid over-emphasising the issue by displaying it in an understated way. This is in keeping with the Museum's conduct in general, which Doubleday describes:

The Museum does not exist to censor things, so there is no context in which we would be seeking to censor anything. But, what we are trying to do is describe things dispassionately, accurately and in context.⁶⁷⁷

Recognising that difficult issues require more consideration, the curators discussed the age of participants, sexual coercion, the presence of children, violence and the grotesque in the catalogue. Firstly, this allowed the complexities of these issues to be discussed more fully, sensitively, and with sufficient contextual information. Secondly, it helped to avoid 'derailing' the exhibition and switching visitors' focus from the main themes to a minority of images, whilst still acknowledging that they were present in Edo-period art.

Notably across the BM as a whole there has been an increase in the inclusion of sex and sexuality in material acquired and featured in exhibitions in recent decades. Furthermore, the BM has not shied away from other sensitive topics such as death, which, like sex, is a part of life that is often not represented or openly engaged with in museums. For instance, in 2003 the 'permanent' exhibition *Living and Dying* opened in Room 24, the Wellcome Trust Gallery, which adjoins the Great Court. It explores 'the tough realities of life' and

⁶⁷⁷ Doubleday, "Interview on Legal Issues Relating to Shunga."

‘different approaches to our shared challenges as human beings’⁶⁷⁸. For a discussion of the issues surrounding the exhibition, written by the lead curator, see ‘Living and Dying’ by Bolton⁶⁷⁹.

6.5 Gender and Sexual Minorities (GSM)

Tessa Jowell, the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, in a report on ‘the contribution that museums and galleries can - and should - make to a modern democracy’ claimed that ‘Museums and galleries tell the story of this nation, its people and the whole of humanity’⁶⁸⁰. Whilst this may seem like an overstatement, many institutions, particularly national museums, have stated similar aims to represent the breadth of peoples and cultures. Wilson, a former Director of the BM, declared that ‘The Museum’s *raison d’être* is to illuminate and explain the past of the whole world through material culture’⁶⁸¹. To be able to represent ‘the whole of humanity’, and to adequately fulfil their roles as social, cultural, political, and educational institutions, museums need to include all peoples regardless of sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity, race, class, age, or disability. MacGregor makes a similar point, about the necessity of including sex and sexuality so that all aspects of culture are represented, in the foreword of the *Shunga* catalogue⁶⁸².

Gender and Sexual Minorities are understudied areas, as Anna Conlan and Amy Levin demonstrate in their chapter on the lack of inclusion of GSM in recent museum studies anthologies and texts intended as teaching aids for Museum Studies courses⁶⁸³. The assessed texts utilised various theoretical approaches and openly discussed other issues of underrepresentation so it would have been entirely relevant and appropriate for them to also address aspects of GSM. Levin edited the reader that chapter was written for, *Gender, Sexuality and Museums*, to begin to address this gap. The chapters by Frost and Petry, part of the section on LGBTQ exhibits, are particularly useful for their close attention to a specific

⁶⁷⁸ Trustees of the British Museum, “British Museum - Room 24: Living and Dying,” 2004, http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room_24_living_and_dying.aspx.

⁶⁷⁹ Bolton, “Living and Dying: Ethnography, Class, and Aesthetics in the British Museum.”

⁶⁸⁰ Museums and Cultural Property Division, “The Value of Museums,” 5, 3.

⁶⁸¹ Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, 8.

⁶⁸² MacGregor in Clark et al., *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 6-7.

⁶⁸³ Amy K. Levin, ed., *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010), 299-309.

object (The Warren Cup) and specific exhibition (*Hidden Histories*), and the display strategies used for these⁶⁸⁴. Their approaches result in bringing to the reader's attention exclusions and differences in the way that GSM artists and GSM-related artworks have been, and to an extent still are, treated by institutions. For instance, Frost states, 'it is clear that biographical or contextual details that would often be included for heterosexual artists have, until recently, been omitted when the artist has identified as LGBTQ'⁶⁸⁵. Petry also remarks on this disparity and goes on to give specific examples⁶⁸⁶.

Shunga is rich in potential for GSM-focused research as it commonly includes depictions of male same-sex couples, *onnagata* (male actors who specialised in female roles), masturbation, sex with multiple partners, and, on rare occasions, female same-sex couples and bisexual males. Issues of gender in *shunga* have recently begun to be addressed, with the examples given here emerging in relation to *shunga* exhibitions. Salel's article 'The Ephemerality of Gender: *Nanshoku* and *Wakashū* in Japanese Erotic Art' was published around the time of the *Arts of the Bedchamber* exhibition at the HMA⁶⁸⁷. Berry gave a paper entitled 'Erotics of Gender Display: Layers of Gender Performance in *Shunga*' as part of the *shunga* symposium which took place at the BM during the exhibition's opening weekend⁶⁸⁸. While both Berry and Salel engaged with performative aspects of gender and visual signifiers within *shunga*, two other papers at the BM *shunga* symposium also addressed issues of gender but from the perspective of reception, modern and pre-modern respectively. Ishigami asked 'What does *shunga* offer women today?' and gave examples from seminars she conducted with women in Japan⁶⁸⁹. Buckland drew on visual representations within *shunga* to offer an analysis of 'Women Readers and *Shunga*'⁶⁹⁰.

⁶⁸⁴ Frost, "The Warren Cup: Secret Museums, Sexuality, and Society," 138-150; Michael Petry, "Hidden Histories: Curating a Male Same-Sex Exhibition," in *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (London: Routledge, 2010), 151-162.

⁶⁸⁵ Frost, "The Warren Cup: Secret Museums, Sexuality, and Society," 138.

⁶⁸⁶ Petry, "Hidden Histories: Curating a Male Same-Sex Exhibition," 158-159.

⁶⁸⁷ Stephen Salel, "The Ephemerality of Gender: *Nanshoku* and *Wakashū* in Japanese Erotic Art," *ORIENTATIONS -HONG KONG-* 44, no. 2 (2013): 145-52.

⁶⁸⁸ Paul Berry, "Erotics of Gender Display: Layers of Gender Performance in *Shunga*" (Sex art in Japan: perspectives on *Shunga* Symposium, British Museum, 2013).

⁶⁸⁹ Aki Ishigami, "What Does *Shunga* Offer Women Today?" (Sex art in Japan: perspectives on *Shunga* Symposium, British Museum, 2013).

⁶⁹⁰ Rosina Buckland, "Women Readers and *Shunga*" (Sex art in Japan: perspectives on *Shunga* Symposium, British Museum, 2013).

Examples of GSM depictions and how the BM addressed them in the *shunga* exhibition will be considered below. It must be acknowledged that I am not even scratching the surface of such vast topics, which are deserving of focused research and analysis. On the other hand, there are two main reasons why it is important to discuss (even on a small scale) GSM in relation to the *shunga* exhibition. Firstly, the most obvious reason for discussing GSM and *shunga* is relevance. This thesis examines depictions of sex and the changing attitudes towards them, and should encompass all sexualities and gender perspectives rather than just the hetero-normative view which tends to dominate discussions. Secondly, although I do not have space here to sufficiently examine GSM representation in institutions, I did not wish to contribute to the exclusion of GSM from Museum Studies. I intend to analyse the contents and display of *shunga* from feminist and GSM perspectives in future research⁶⁹¹.

Before examining examples of GSM inclusion in the *shunga* exhibition, I will outline some other steps the BM has taken to engage more with artefacts relating to sexuality through acquisition and display, and by drawing visitors' attention to the sexual aspects of works through interpretation. In 2010 as part of LGBT History Month curator Richard Parkinson created a webtrail⁶⁹² highlighting objects in the BM's collection that depict or relate to same-sex desire and gender identity, including *shunga*. Two publications from the British Museum Press are worth noting for their focus on sex and sexuality: the *Little Book of Erotica*, first published in 1997⁶⁹³, and *A Little Gay History: Desire and Diversity Across the World*⁶⁹⁴, which developed out of Parkinson's 2010 project. Both of these books, as well as *A History of the World in 100 Objects*⁶⁹⁵, based on the radio series of the same name, include the Warren Cup. The Warren Cup has been commented on in each of the preceding chapters, but is returned to

⁶⁹¹ I tentatively addressed feminist and GSM representation in *shunga* in a conference paper, Louise Boyd, "Women in Shunga: Questions of Equality and Objectification" (Shunga and Philosophy Colloquium, British Museum, 2013).

⁶⁹² Richard. B. Parkinson, "British Museum - Same-Sex Desire and Gender Identity," accessed February 11, 2016, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/themes/same-sex_desire_and_gender.aspx.

⁶⁹³ Catherine Johns, *The British Museum Little Book of Erotica*. (London: British Museum, 2012).

⁶⁹⁴ R. B. Parkinson, Kate Smith, and Max Carocci, *A Little Gay History: Desire and Diversity across the World* (London: The British Museum Press, 2013).

⁶⁹⁵ Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

here to demonstrate the importance of including GSM in institutions and the impact this can have on visitors.

As noted in Chapter 4, in relation to the cross-cultural comparison of male same-sex couples in the *Warren Cup: Sex and Society in Ancient Greece* display,

Many visitors were surprised that any museum - and particularly the British Museum - had chosen to tackle this controversial topic in such a modern way. This was at odds with some visitors' perceptions of the organisation, and of museums in general.⁶⁹⁶

The evaluation report on the display of the cup goes on to explain that visitors wanted to be challenged and felt that sex and sexuality were appropriate subjects for modern institutions, because

The theme was resonant with visitors, and the exhibition allowed visitors to make connections with attitudes and experiences in today's societies, helping visitors to engage by making the exhibition directly relevant to modern life.⁶⁹⁷

Staff involved with the *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* exhibition took on board this kind of visitor feedback, as well as that from specially commissioned formative focus groups, and engaged with themes of sex and sexuality in greater depth.

A selection of depictions of male same-sex couples, usually referred to as *nanshoku* (male love), were displayed throughout the exhibition. For instance, in the section on early *shunga*, a copy of a fourteenth-century scroll entitled *Chigo no sōshi* (*Book of Acolytes*) (Figure 14) is displayed. The accompanying exhibition label plainly states and contextualises the contents: 'The handscroll depicts sexual relations between mature Buddhist priests and adolescent trainees, which were quite common and accepted during the medieval period. The ribald texts and pictures are candid about these male-male sexual encounters.'

⁶⁹⁶ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, "Pleasure You Can Measure: Visitor Responses to the Warren Cup Exhibition," 29.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

In the section on *shunga* contexts and parody, several depictions of male actors having sex with male clients or other actors were displayed, including scenes from volumes of (*Nanshoku*) *Hana no sugao* ((*Male Love*) *Fresh Faces of Flowers*, or (*Male Love*) *Actors Without their Make-up*), late 1770s-early 1780s⁶⁹⁸. Also displayed was a preparatory drawing by Kunisada, Figure 71, which shows an actor from the famous Ichikawa Danjurō lineage having sex with an unidentified actor, whilst they look at a *shunga* print.



Figure 71 Utagawa Kunisada, scene from a series of preparatory drawings for a handscroll, 1832-35, ink on paper, British Museum. The drawing depicts two actors, Ichikawa Danjuro VII as Benkei and an unidentified *onnagata*, having sex.

Another example of male-male sex was in the final section of the exhibition, which looked at *shunga* and the modern world. However, the men in Figure 72 are not lovers or even clients, as seen in other *nanshoku shunga*, such as Figure 23, but instead are shown in a politicised scene. The interpretation explains the image in frank terms: ‘This savage piece of propaganda from the time of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5 shows a Japanese infantryman buggering his Russian enemy. The Russian soldier is depicted as having no choice other than to accept the violent act of the Japanese conqueror.’ The use of the term ‘buggering’, rather than sex or lovemaking as used elsewhere in the exhibition to describe male-female and male-male sex, emphasises the non-consensual and aggressive intention of the act. This was clearly not a soldier’s good luck charm

⁶⁹⁸ see Clark et al., *Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 442-443.

or for protection on the battlefield as some earlier *shunga* claimed to be. It is debateable whether Figure 72 should be classed as *shunga* due to the difference in style, intent, and tone of this Meiji print compared to Edo-period works.



Figure 72 unidentified artist, *Japanese and Russian soldiers*, 1904–5, colour woodblock print, British Museum

Interestingly, one self-proclaimed gay visitor to *Shunga* was dissatisfied by ‘the lack of homosexual representation’ in the exhibition (male, 45-54, UK, LB023). However, it transpired that he had not noticed most of the 14 or so male-male images on display because, as described above, they were integrated into the relevant chronological and thematic sections throughout the exhibition rather than segregated into a separate GSM category. This reflects the more inclusive way that *nanshoku shunga* were treated in the Edo period: *shunga* were usually produced as a set of 12 prints or scenes in a scroll painting or as part of an album and it was not uncommon to include one or two scenes of male-male couples. As discussed in Chapter 1, it could be argued that *nanshoku* was given equal status with *nyoshoku* (female love) in Edo-Japan as there were no artistic distinctions in the way male-male and male-female couples were depicted.

Similarly, in the *Shunga* exhibition, the labels and other text did not differentiate in tone or the way in which scenes were interpreted based on the

sexuality of the people depicted. Instead, the accompanying interpretive texts clearly described images, often referencing the sexual acts depicted, regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of the participants. In a review of *Sex and the Floating World*, Berry wrote ‘The ease with which Screech moves between discussions of same-sex and opposite-sex amatory relations admirably avoids the ghettoization of same-sex activities within a single chapter or section’⁶⁹⁹. Berry’s praise is equally applicable to the curatorial and interpretive team responsible for the *Shunga* exhibition.

Another likely reason for that visitor’s comment is that several examples of male-male *shunga* in the exhibition were not immediately identifiable as such for those unable to read the visual conventions of *ukiyo-e*, for instance a scene depicting a *wakashū* (an adolescent male) with his older lover by Moronobu⁷⁰⁰. The book that image is part of is unusual because, as the exhibition label notes, ‘All twenty-five illustrations in this volume feature male-male sexual encounters’. Note how the BM staff have not ascribed modern concepts of sexuality and avoided the terms ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay’; instead male-male sex is described in the context of the Edo-period term and concept of *shudō*: ‘the socially-accepted practices of the ‘way of youths’’. The majority of male-male partnerships in Edo Japan could be termed as *shudō* as they featured an older male as the active partner and a youth or younger man as the receptive partner.

There was no term for female same-sex relationships. *Nyoshoku* (female love), which seems like the obvious counterpart to *nanshoku*, was actually used to refer to mixed-sex relationships, and, as noted earlier, depictions of female same-sex couples in *shunga* are few. The exhibition included one example of two women engaged in sexual activity together (Figure 73), but the interpretation label questions ‘whether this is, strictly speaking, representing a lesbian encounter’. The catalogue text suggests that it depicts an imagined version of upper-class women, who had to resort to dildos due to the lack of men ‘rather than being an expression of affective love between women’⁷⁰¹. Despite this acknowledgement of the possibility of female-same sex relationships, there is no

⁶⁹⁹ Berry, “Rethinking ‘Shunga’” 11.

⁷⁰⁰ see Clark et al., *Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 122-123.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 311.

further depiction or discussion of them in either the exhibition or catalogue. Given the rarity of female-female *shunga* it is understandable that there were no other examples displayed in the exhibition, but it is disappointing that this lack was not explained or explored further.



Figure 73 Chokyosai Eiri, *Women using a dildo* from the series *Fumi no kiyogaki* (*Neat Version of a Love Letter or Pure Drawings of Female Beauty*), 1801, colour woodblock print, British Museum. The women are shown using a dildo and an aphrodisiac cream as lubrication. This is one of the works donated by Lady Kelly, although the impression shown in the 2013 exhibition was borrowed from the V&A.

There was no concept of bisexuality as such in the Edo period but it was accepted that some men enjoyed male-male relationships and others male-female but that these were not mutually exclusive. There was a permissible fluidity of sexuality which allowed men to engage in sexual relationships with men, women or *onnagata*. Bisexuality is often invisible and/or mistakenly re-assigned as hetero- or homo-sexuality, even nowadays. Nevertheless, there are several *shunga* works which depict, what would now be termed, a bisexual encounter, usually consisting of an older man, a male youth and a young woman with the older male always doing the penetrating, as in Figure 22⁷⁰². However, this freedom of sexuality, to have sex with male youths or women, seems to

⁷⁰² For another example see Clark et al., *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, 334-335..

have been restricted to men, as even when multiple women are depicted in *shunga*, they focus their attention on the male(s) rather than interacting with each other, for example in Figure 74. The interpretive text accompanying the print does not shy away from calling it an orgy or ascribing agency to the ‘lusty young women’. Additionally, the text notes the artistic beauty and gentle humour common in *shunga*, but acknowledges that ‘The essence of *shunga* was to invent a seemingly unproblematic fantasy world of sexual wish-fulfilment.’



Figure 74 Katsukawa Shuncho, scene from the series *Shiki burui jūni-ko* (*Twelve Tastes in the Classification of Passion*), c.1785, colour woodblock print, British Museum. Six women attempt to have sex with a salesman.

Onnagata, were male actors who specialised in playing female roles, as women had been banned from appearing in Kabuki plays in 1629 to stop the illicit prostitution that female actors engaged in⁷⁰³. Some *onnagata* continued to dress, speak, and act as females offstage and they set trends in culture and fashion that many Edo-period women eagerly followed. Interestingly, whilst in Figure 71 the *onnagata* is shown with a female hairstyle and clothes but male genitalia, in a *shunga* handscroll from the Fornitz Collection, which was displayed beside the

⁷⁰³ The ban proved unsuccessful as the male actors who took over playing female roles also engaged in prostitution with clients.

Kunisada drawing in the exhibition, the *onnagata* are depicted with female genitalia, as noted in the label and catalogue text⁷⁰⁴. This divergence is fascinating and there is scope for investigating depictions of *onnagata*, both in *shunga* and in *ukiyo-e* more generally, in relation to GSM. Works depicting *onnagata* may be of particular interest to transsexual, transgender, transvestite, intersex, or gender non-binary visitors, all of whom are largely unrepresented in institutional collections.

It is hoped that more integrated displays, along with the increasing acquisition and display of objects depicting same-sex couples, are signs that institutional engagement with GSM-related artefacts is becoming more commonplace. This is significant because, as Preziosi and Farago argue, museums are ‘a key force in the fabrication and maintenance of modern identity. ...museums are essential sites for the fabrication and perpetuation of our conception of ourselves as autonomous individuals with unique subjectivities’⁷⁰⁵. For the visitor mentioned above, his sexuality was an important facet of his identity which he wanted, and not unreasonably expected, to see represented in an exhibition about sex. Nonetheless, he praised the BM for its engagement with same-sex relationships in the *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict* exhibition (2008), Warren Cup displays, and the *Little Gay History* publication⁷⁰⁶. As the examples in this section demonstrate, the role of institutions in social inclusion and widening diversity is one that is important to visitors and is becoming increasingly important to institutions and their staff.

6.6 Shunga in Japan

Finally, after much effort and debate and numerous false starts, a major *shunga* exhibition was held in Japan. In 2015, two years after the BM’s landmark *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, the first *shunga* exhibition in Japan opened. Simply titled *Shunga*, the exhibition ran at the Eisei Bunko Museum, Tokyo, from 19 September - 23 December 2015. Many well-respected figures, including politicians, were on the overview committee for the exhibition and the

⁷⁰⁴ see *ibid.*, 448-449.

⁷⁰⁵ “What Are Museums For?,” 3.

⁷⁰⁶ Parkinson, Smith, and Carocci, *A Little Gay History: Desire and Diversity across the World*.

museum's director, Hosokawa Morihiro, is a former prime minister. About half of the 133 prints and paintings displayed were loaned from the BM, but works from Eisei Bunko's own collection were also shown. To coincide with the exhibition a Japanese translation of the BM catalogue was published⁷⁰⁷, however it is several times more expensive than the English-language version. *Shunga* had a ticket price of 1,500 yen (approximately £12), which is fairly standard for a large art exhibition, but entrance was limited to over 18s only. The exhibition attracted over 200,000 visitors, received a very positive response in general and a surprising lack of criticism⁷⁰⁸.

Shungaten at Hosomi Museum, Kyoto, 6 February - 10 April 2016 was billed as a continuation of the Eisei Bunko exhibition, but as it featured many paintings not shown in Tokyo it could be called a new exhibition in its own right. A significant number of the 134 works on display were on loan from the private collector Michael Fornitz as well as from Japanese institutions Nichibunken and the ARC, Ritsumeikan. Like the Eisei Bunko show, entrance was 1,500 yen and restricted to over 18s. Approximately 82,000 people visited during the exhibition's two-month run, which is quite remarkable given that the yearly total of visitors to the Hosomi Museum is normally about 57,000⁷⁰⁹. Clearly *shunga* has piqued the Japanese public's interest. Detailed responses to the Eisei Bunko and Hosomi Museum exhibitions from academics, the public and cultural institutions, and how these will affect the social and institutional censorship of sex art in Japan, are eagerly awaited.

The BM has actively challenged conventional institutional and social censorship, through its changing attitude to *shunga*, and other sex art, over the years as seen in the dissolution of the Secretum, the shift from passive to active acquisition, and the increasing and integrated display of sex-related artefacts such as *shunga* prints and the Warren Cup. There are differing opinions on

⁷⁰⁷ Timothy Clark et al., eds., *Shunga : Nihon Bijutsu Ni Okeru Sei to Tanoshimi = Shunga : Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art*, Shohan. (Tokyo: Kabushiki Kaisha Shōgakukan, 2015).

⁷⁰⁸ Despite this, in October 2015 four weekly magazines received obscenity warnings from the police for publishing *shunga*. *Shukan Bunshin*, another weekly magazine, did not receive an obscenity warning but the editor, Manabu Shitani, was suspended for three months and had to apologise for including three *shunga* (by Hokusai, Utamaro and Kunisada) in an article about the Eisei Bunko exhibition.

⁷⁰⁹ I am grateful to Paul Berry for sharing this information with me.

whether museums should take a proactive or reactive role when dealing with sensitive topics, but this thesis posits that an important aspect of institutional exhibitions is their ability to go beyond merely reflecting or confirming current views, and to help inform and raise questions about those views. This has been the case with the British Museum as the positive responses to its *Shunga* exhibition have helped to change perceptions of *shunga*. It has even contributed to changes in the institutional censorship of *shunga* in Japan as seen in the successful exhibitions at Eisei Bunko and Hosomi Museum. If fully realised, this change would bring the censorship of *shunga* full circle: it became censored in Japan due to an awareness of the gaze and judgement of others, but now the acceptability of *shunga* in the opinion of others seems to be helping it become acceptable again in Japan.

Appendix A - Exhibition questionnaire

#.....

Interviewer.....

Date.....

Hi, my name is and I'm working on behalf of the British Museum. We are looking to find out more about our visitors and what you think about the Shunga exhibition. May I have a few minutes of your time for a brief interview? Thank you. Please do not feel pressured to answer in any particular way. We will not be offended by any negative responses.

1. Is this your first visit to The British Museum? A. Yes... B. No...
(If no when did they last visit?).....

2. What time did you enter the exhibition today? (note entry time to exhibition and time now to calculate length of visit).....

3. Did you visit the museum today specifically to visit the *Shunga*: exhibition?
A. Yes... B. No.....(If no, why have they come?)

4. Did you book in advance before coming? (If so how and when ?).....

5. How did you find out about the exhibition today? [SHOWCARD A]

6. And do you remember seeing any of the other promotional material?
[SHOWCARD A]

7. Did the exhibition match your expectations formed by the promotional material? YesNo (If no why?).....

8. Have you been to any previous paying exhibitions in the British Museum exhibitions? (If so which ones?).....

9. Have you been to any previous exhibitions in this space (prints and drawings gallery, rooms 90 and 91.If so which ones)?.....

10. Thinking about the exhibition how satisfied were you with:

	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied
The design and ambience of the exhibition					
The number of prints					
The amount of information					
The tone of the information					
How easy the information was to read					
The value for money					
Your overall exhibition experience					

11. What is your level of knowledge about the exhibition's subject matter?

A. Specialist..... B. General C. Little or no

12. Did you see any warnings/disclaimer about the exhibition's content before you came in? (*If so where?*)

13. What three to five words would you use to describe the exhibition?

.....

14. What do you like best about the *Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art* exhibition?.....

.....

15. And what do you think could be improved?

.....

16. What are the main messages you will take away with you from the exhibition?.....

.....

17. Where do you live? What is your postcode <*Or country if overseas*>.....

18. Please could you tell us about the gender, age and ethnic origin of you and the people you are visiting with today? (SHOWCARD B)

#	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

19) Which of the following cultural institutions have you visited? (SHOWCARD B)

20) Would you be willing to help with further research in the future? [*This could be a telephone interview, an online questionnaire or an invitation to a discussion group covering subjects such as arts, media, leisure or tourism*]

Name.....

E-mail/telephone.....

Showcard A (Question 5 and 6)

	Reason for coming	Seen
1. Posters or banners outside the building		
2. Poster on London Underground - where?		
3. Poster on railway lines - where?		
4. Posters elsewhere - where?		
5. Exhibition promotional postcard or flyer - where?		
6. The exhibition events brochure - where?		
7. British Museum 'What's On' guide		
8. Guidebook on London - which		
9. Mentioned on Radio - which		
10. Mentioned on TV - which		
11. Article, listing or review, national newspaper - which?		
12. Article, listing or review in a magazine - which?		
13. British Museum email newsletter		
14. British Museum website		
15. British Museum Facebook		
16. British Museum Twitter		
17. British Museum Pinterest		
18. British Museum YouTube		
19. Other website/emailed information - which?		
20. Social media from another individual/institution - which?		
21. Advert in a national newspaper - which?		
22. Advert in a magazine - which?		
23. Tourist information Centre - where?		
24. Competitions - where?		
25. Through a promotional partner- which:		
A) Waterstone's		
B) Eurostar		
C) Japan Centre		
D) Yo Sushi		
E) Frieze		
F) Other		
26. Recommended by hotel staff - where?		
27. Recommended by friend/relative		
28. Exhibition marketing at festivals		
29. Brighton Japan Festival		
30. Hyper Japan		
31. Japan Matsuri		
32. Other - please state		
33. None of these		

SHOWCARD B (Question 18)**AGE CODE**

- a) 16 or under
- b) 17 – 19
- c) 20–24
- d) 25–34
- e) 35–44
- f) 45–54
- g) 55–59
- h) 60–64
- i) 65 +

ETHNICITY CODE:

- 1) White British
- 2) White Irish
- 3) White Other
- 4) White & Black Caribbean
- 5) White & Black African
- 6) White and Asian
- 7) Other mixed background
- 8) Indian
- 9) Pakistani
- 10) Bangladeshi
- 11) Other Asian background
- 12) Black Caribbean
- 13) Black African
- 14) Other Black background
- 15) Chinese
- 16) Japanese
- 17) Other ethnic group – Which?
- 18) Prefer not to say

SHOWCARD B (Question 19)

Venue	Attended in past 12 months
Barbican Centre	
BFI Southbank	
Central London cinema	
Central London live music venue	
Kings Place	
National Gallery	
National Portrait Gallery	
Natural History Museum	
None of these	
Other central London gallery	
Other central London museum	
Other central London performance space	
Other central London theatre	
Royal Academy	
Royal Albert Hall	
Royal Opera House	
Science Museum	
Serpentine Gallery	
Somerset House	
Southbank Centre	
Tate Britain	
Tate Modern	
The Place	
V&A	
Wellcome Collection	
West End Theatre	
Whitechapel Gallery	

Appendix B - Chapter 5 tables

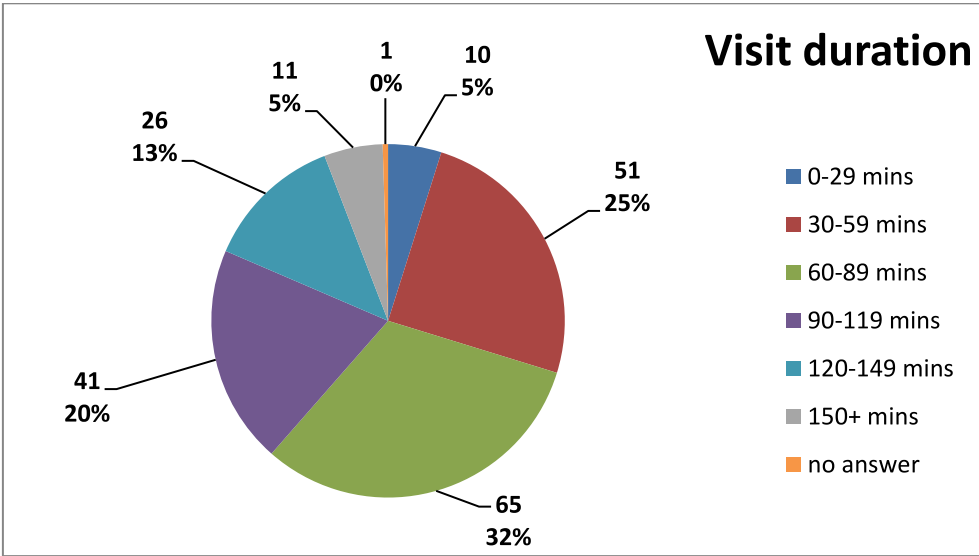


Table 2 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visit duration

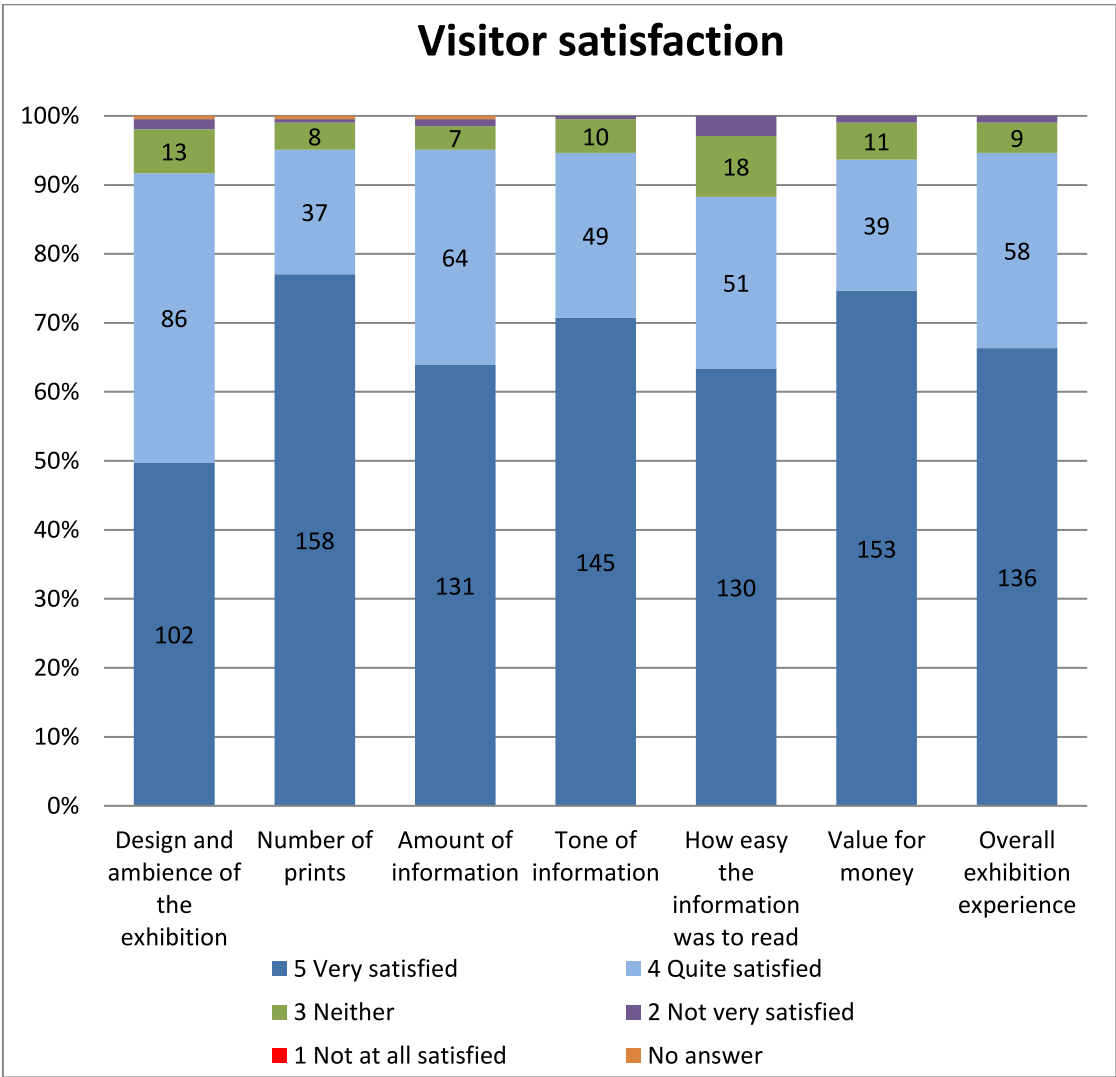


Table 3 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor satisfaction

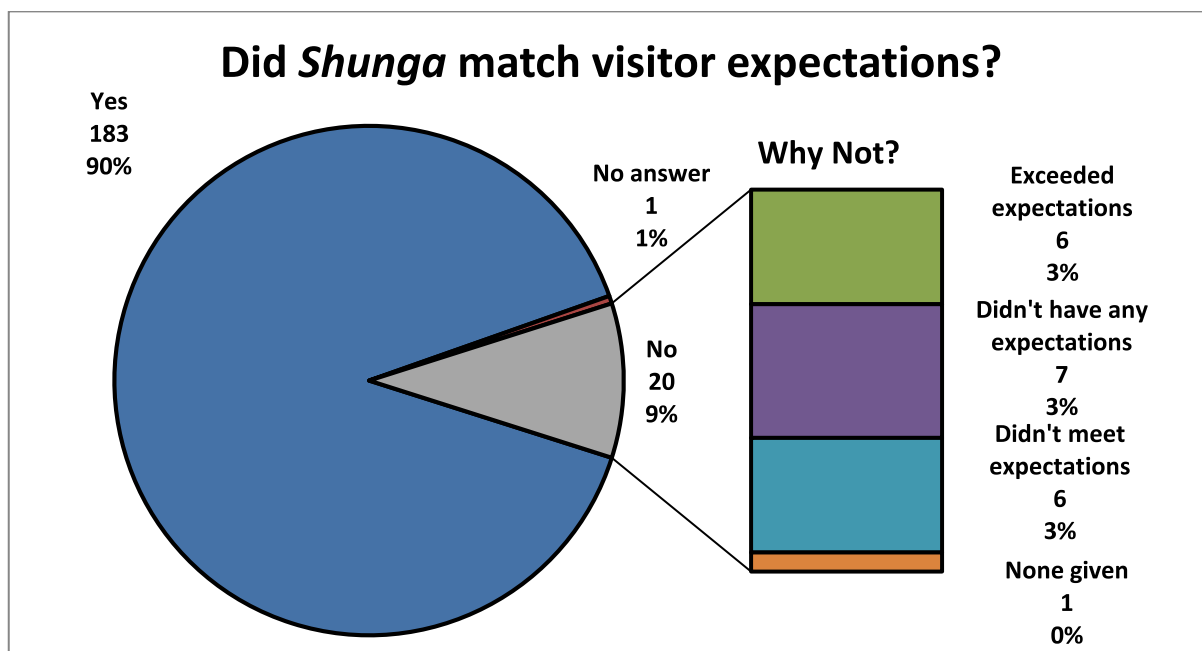


Table 4 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor expectations

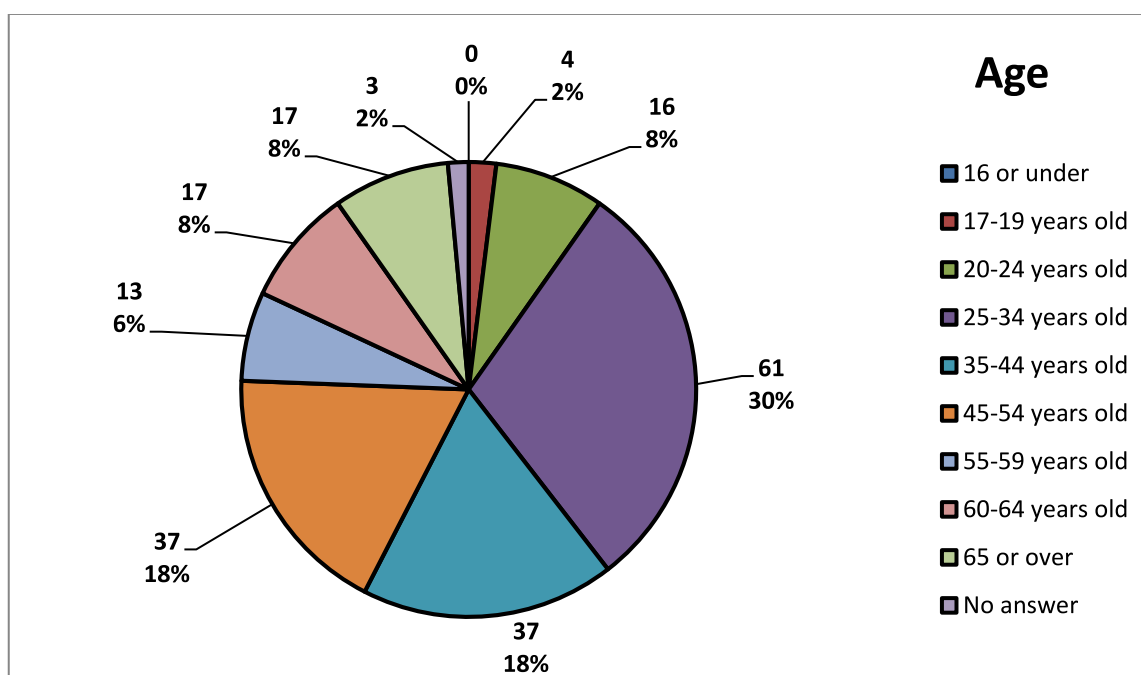


Table 5 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor age

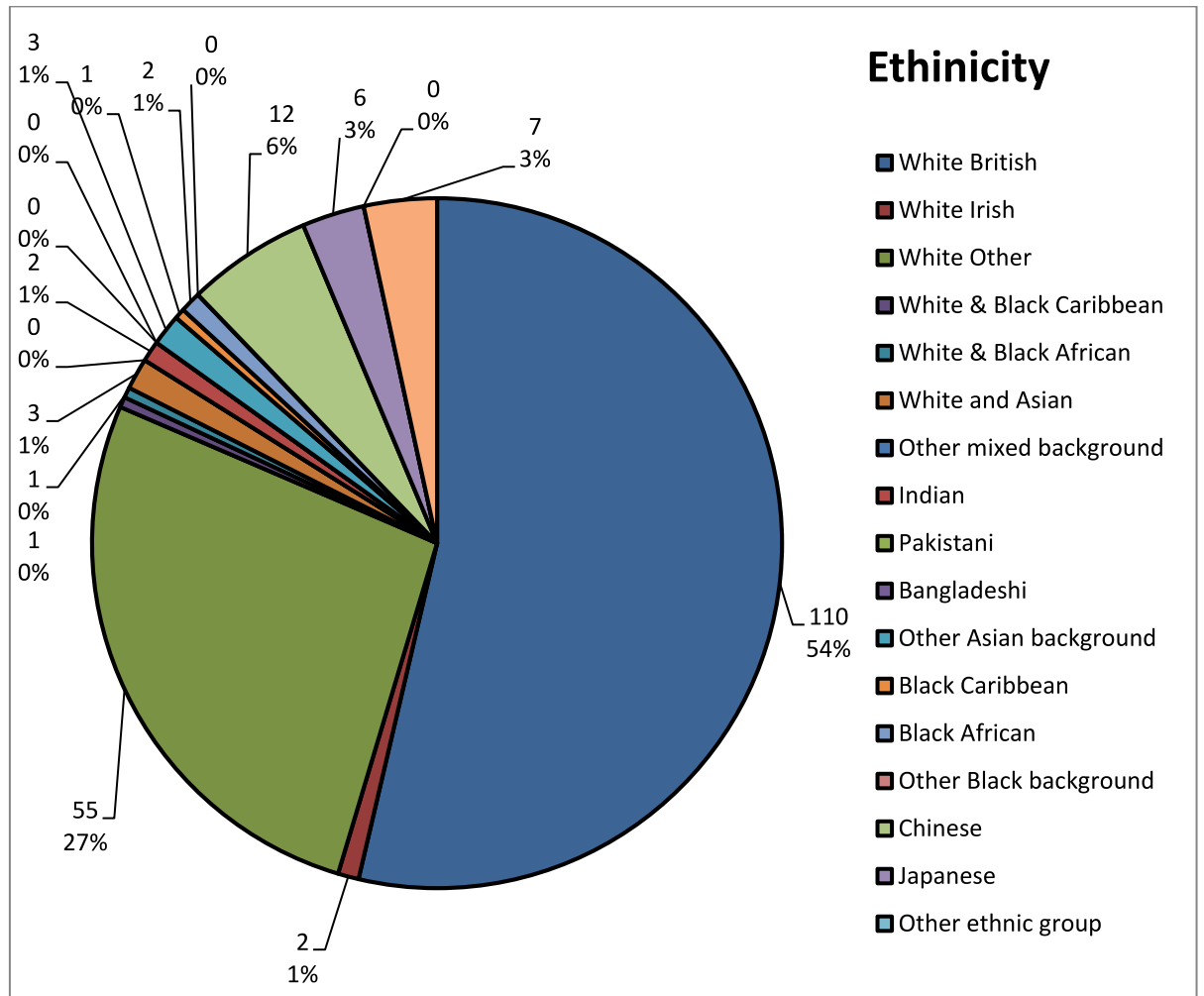


Table 6 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor ethnicity breakdown

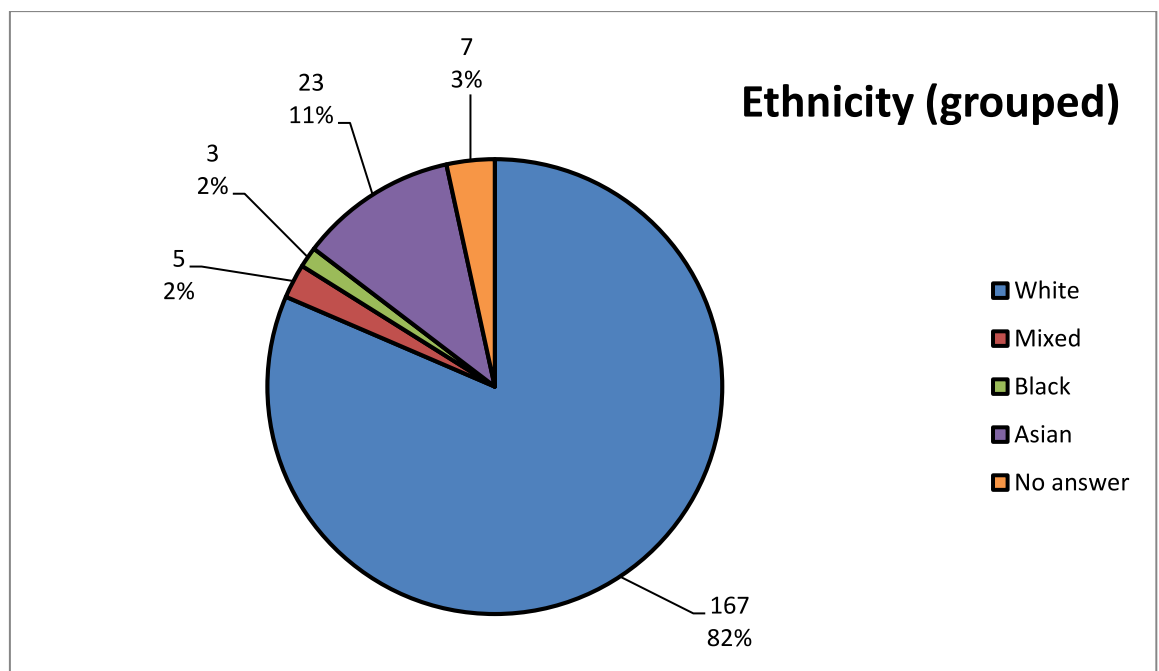


Table 7 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor ethnicity grouped

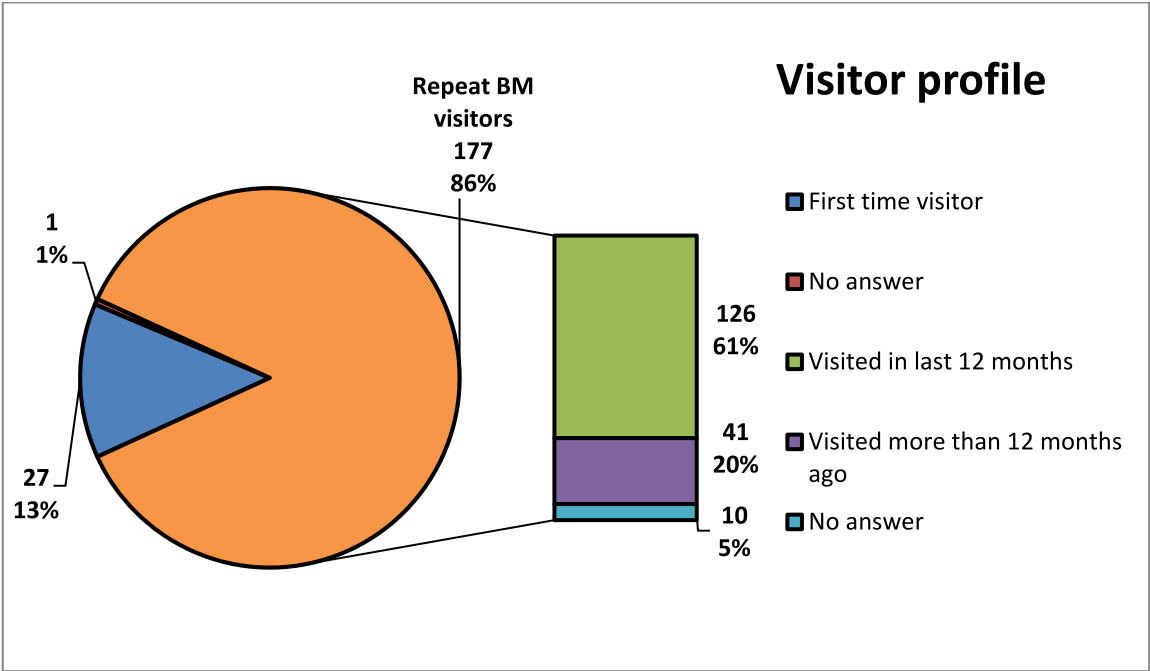


Table 8 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor profile

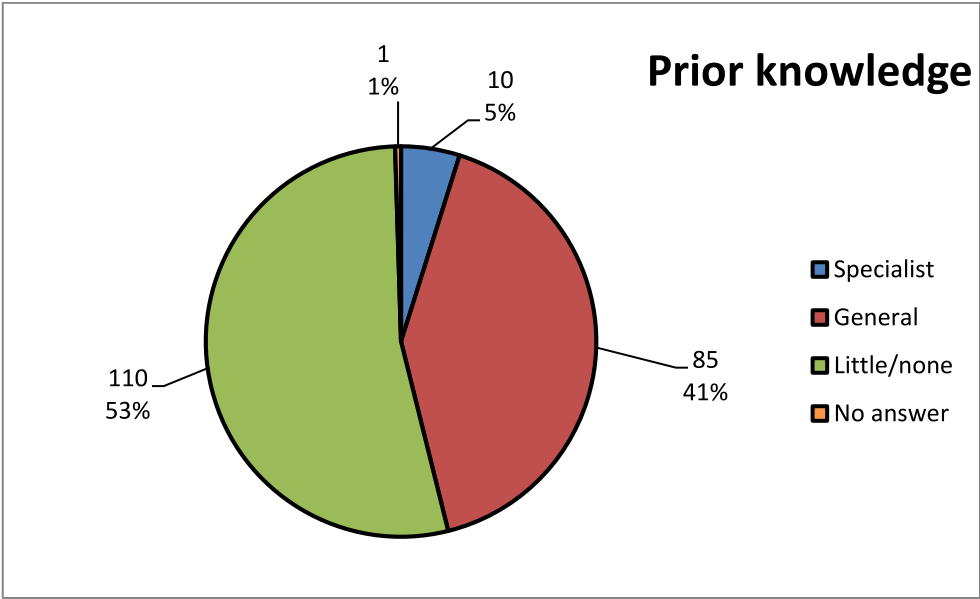


Table 9 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – visitor’s prior knowledge

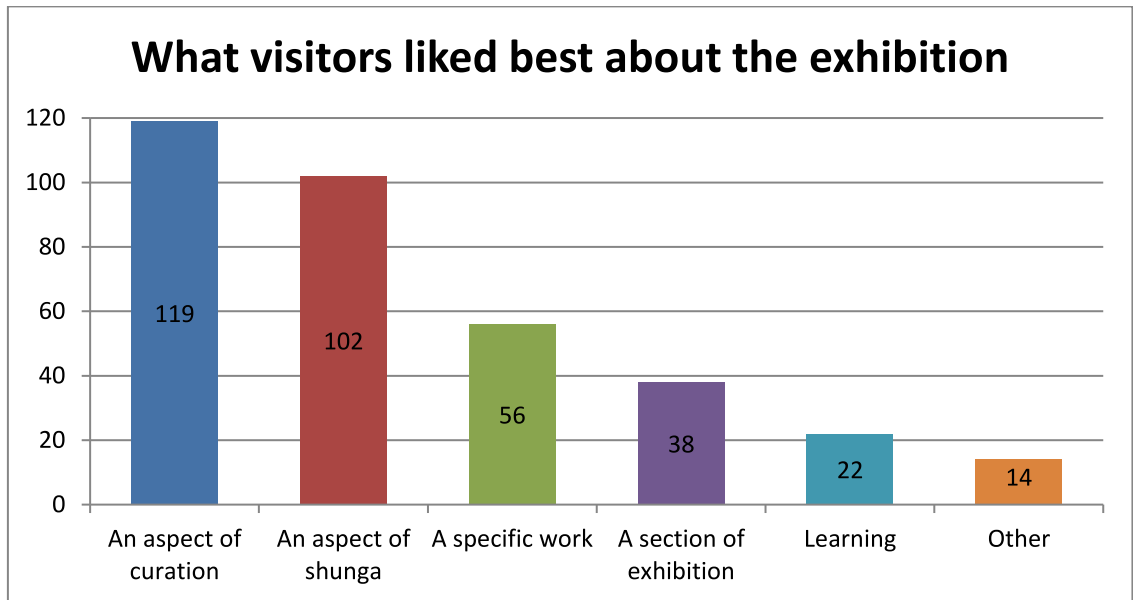


Table 10 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – liked best

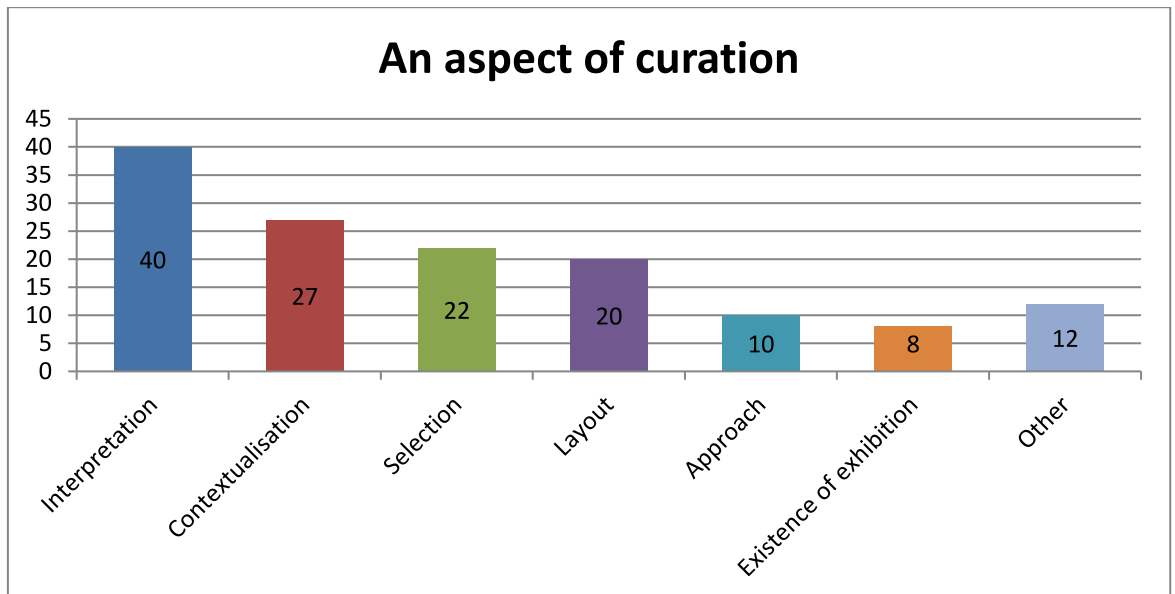


Table 11 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – aspect of curation

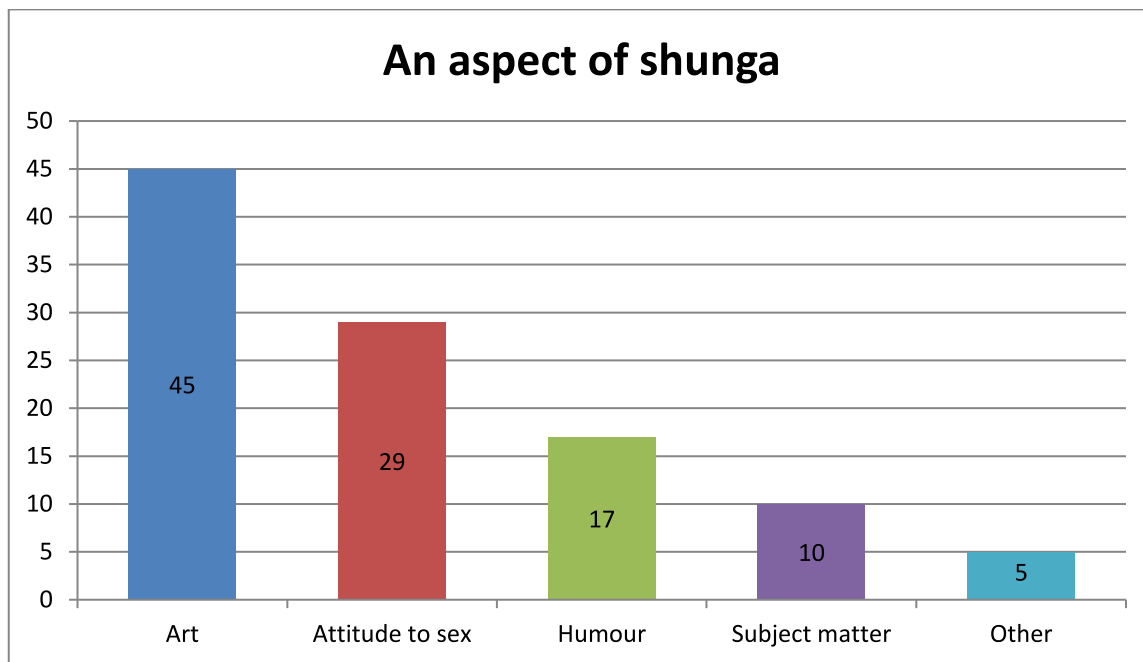


Table 12 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – aspect of *shunga*

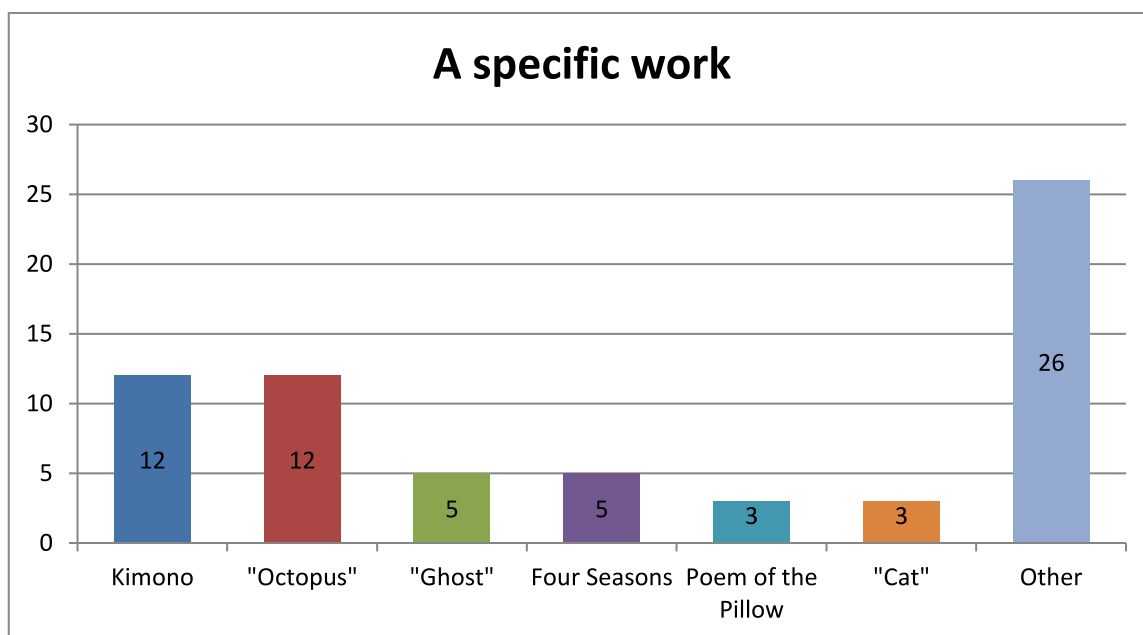


Table 13 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – specific works

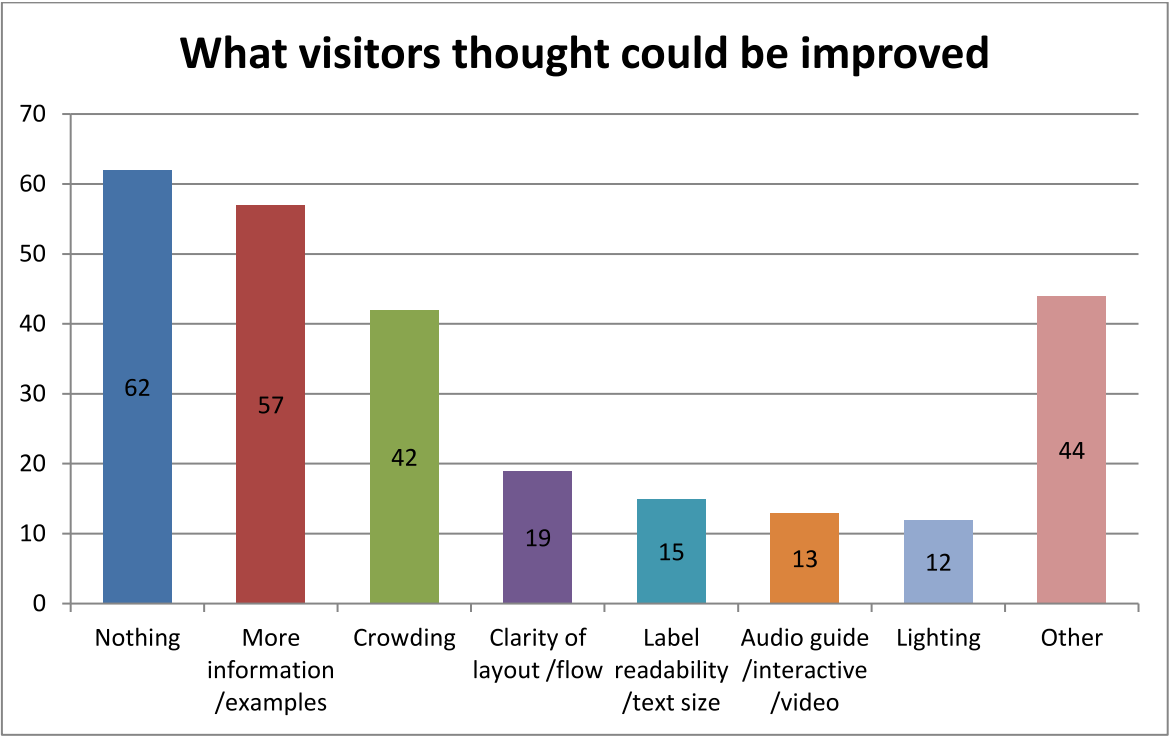


Table 14 British Museum *Shunga* exhibition – could be improved

Glossary

abuna-e - 'danger pictures', mildly risqué or titillating prints or paintings

asobi - play

bakufu - military government

bijinga - pictures of beautiful women

bijutsu - art

bijutsukan - art museum

chonin - townspeople

chunhua or *chungong hua* - 'Spring Palace pictures', Chinese sexually explicit art
courtesan - female sex-worker in a licensed brothel who was also trained in various arts

daimyō - feudal lords who held and ruled areas of land

Edo - former name for Tokyo

Edo period - c.1603-1868

ehon - illustrated woodblock-printed book

enpon - also said to be pronounced *ehon*, another name for *shunpon*

fuseji - 'conceal a letter', a self-censorship technique of replacing letters or words with 'xxx', 'ooo' or other characters - similar to grawlix

Heian period - 794-1185

hakubutsukan - museum

higa - hidden or secret pictures, alternative name for *shunga*

kamigata-e - *ukiyo-e* prints from the kamigata area, Kyoto and Osaka

karazuri - 'empty printing', embossing using woodblocks without ink

kashihonya - itinerant lending library

ken'etsu - censorship

kōshokubon - amorous books

makura-e - pillow book, alternative name for *shunga*

Meiji era - 1868-1912

mica - powdered metallic pigment

mitate - a subtle form of parody achieved through juxtapositions

nanshoku - 'male love' or 'male colours', male-male relationships

netsuke - carved toggles, usually wood or ivory

nigao-e - likeness pictures or portraits

nishiki-e - 'brocade prints', full-colour woodblock prints

nyoshoku - 'female love' or 'lust for women', male-female relationships

onnagata - male actors who specialised in playing female roles

pleasure quarters - legal areas of prostitution

sankin-kōtai - 'alternate attendance', system where *daimyō* spent one year serving the shōgun in Edo and the next in their home fiefdom

senryū - short comic poems

shikake-e - 'trick print' or 'toy print', print with flaps and/or moving parts

shōgun - military leader

shin-hanga - 'new prints', woodblock prints made in the early 20th century in the manner of Edo-period *ukiyo-e*

Shintō - 'the way of the gods', indigenous belief system in Japan

shunga - 'spring pictures', sexually explicit woodblock prints, paintings and illustrated books made in Edo Japan

shunpon - *shunga* books

sumizuri-e - 'black ink printed picture', printed using only black ink, although colour was sometimes added later by hand

surimono - 'printed things', privately commissioned prints

Tokugawa - name of the family who ruled throughout Edo period, which is therefore often referred to as the Tokugawa era

ukiyo-e - 'pictures of the floating world'

waisetsu - obscene

wakashū - adolescent male or youth

warai-e - 'laughing pictures', alternative name for *shunga*

yakusha-e - actor prints

Yoshiwara - the name of the licensed prostitution district in Edo

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