Conservation of 48 *uta-e* Japanese Prints from the 1845-1848 Ogura nazoraе hyakunin isshu Series by Kuniyoshi, Hiroshige and Kunisada

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**INTRODUCTION**

*Ogura nazoraе hyakunin isshu* (Take-endsWith Based on the Ogura [Version] of the One Hundred Poets, 小倉百人一首, 1845–1848) series is a compilation of 100 broadside pictures (nishiki-e) illustrating the anthology of 100 tanka poems edited by Fujisawa no Tekka (1162-1241) in 1230 called *Ogura hyakunin isshu* (One Hundred Poets by One Poet Each). The *uta-e* series dates back to the end of first half of 19th century (Tokugawa period, 1603–1868). The prints were designed by artists of the Utage school: Utagawa Kuniyoshi (歌川国芳, 1797–1861), Utagawa Hiroshige (歌川広重, 1779–1858) and Utagawa Kuniyada (歌川国貞, 1786–1865). The depicted scenes were accompanied by short stories written by Ryokutei Banto (柳亭筆人, 1807–1858). The designs were printed on washi paper made of kozo (Broussonetia papyrifera) in oban *uta-e* size (circa 25 x 38 cm) using nashiki technique and traditional colorants and binders. (Fig. 1 & 2).

The treated 48 prints were assembled in Japan by Stanislaw Dombiński, a passionate Eastern art collector, in the interwar period. The Polish collector mounted them on larger paper sheets. He also translated the poems and stories in Polish and wrote them on the back (Fig. 3 & 4). To our knowledge it is the only existing example of the *Ogura nazoraе hyakunin isshu* stories translated into the Polish language and one of few Polish translations of the *Ogura hyakunin isshu* poems.

The main goal of the project conducted in 2012–2013 was to minimize the effects of deterioration of the prints, and preserve them for the future in good physical condition.

**CONSERVATION ANALYSES**

The conservation research included application of complementary non-destructive optical methods of identification of pigments and colorants, such as Ultraviolet Fluorescence Photography (Fig. 5) and False-Color Infrared Photography (Fig. 6), colposcopic (Fig. 7) and microscopic (Fig. 8) observation and image registration. The preliminary examination using optical methods was followed by X-Ray Fluorescence Analysis (XRF) of pigments and characteristic analytical reactions of paper fibers and binders.

**CHALLENGES IN CONSERVATION**

The main problem in this print collection was physical damage caused by external factors. It was possible to distinguish damages characterizing all the prints, such as numerous small losses (frequent tears), creases, thinned edges and piling of the fibers on the support surface (Fig. 9). Degradation of a physical and chemical nature included surface dirt, overall brown discoloration of the paper and numerous small stains. The prints were also relatively discolored due to fading of the organic dyes (Fig. 10) and darkening of lead-based pigments (Fig. 11). The presence of organic dyes was a problem because of their water-sensitivity, so an efficient and safe cleaning method had to be chosen (see below). The large number of prints created a challenge for time management, and workspace and treatment organization. To solve this problem an agenda was created, in which treatment for each print was planned and followed carefully. In order to optimize efficiency, the prints were treated in groups for each treatment.

**NEW STORAGE METHOD**

Safe maintenance of the prints and translated texts was a priority, therefore a new method of storage was planned and executed, reusing window mats which originally housed the objects in the museum. Windows of passepartout were extended to avoid direct contact with prints. Low quality backboards were replaced with a high quality white core mount boards (acid-free chemically purified pulp). The collector’s sheets were mounted on the backboard using two small pieces of kozo paper and few drops of diluted starch glue. The prints were attached to the backboard over the collector’s sheets, using false margins provided during the treatment and few drops of diluted starch glue. A larger sheet of Palatina (Fabriano) paper was placed between them as a protective interlayer. The new way of housing minimizes the possibility of the future degradation, allows us to exhibit the prints and view both sides of the print and collector’s sheet (Fig. 15).