Rhiannon Paget  
Ringling Museum of Art  

**Kabuki in Perspective: The Theatre and Floating Pictures**  
In 2017, The Ringling acquired a large painting of the crowded interior of Kyoto’s Minami-za, one of Japan’s oldest kabuki theatres, during its annual kaomise event. The work was painted by a young and relatively obscure Nihonga artist called Murakami Michiho (1899–1938) and shown at the juried exhibition of the Imperial Art Academy in 1924. Rendered in dramatic single-point perspective, the painting references the genre of uki-e or “floating pictures,” a category of woodblock prints that flourished from the mid-18th century. This talk discusses how Michiho and his artistic predecessors used, consistently or otherwise, Western-style pictorial techniques to create the illusion of spatial recession — or for their own, often entirely different, purposes. Through consideration of the formal, aesthetic, and thematic elements of uki-e and other kinds of imagery that Michiho drew upon, we will seek to understand how he and his forebears represented the theater experience between the 18th and the 20th centuries.

Melissa Van Wyk  
University of Chicago  
“Trains, Games, and Print: Transportation Technologies in 19th-century Kabuki Playbills”

Promotional playbills (tsuji banzuke) for kabuki performances were often designed with small artistic embellishments to complement their otherwise largely formulaic elements. One such playbill from the late nineteenth century for Kawatake Mokuami’s Konoma no hoshi Hakone no shikabue is remarkable for its incorporation of a train map featuring locations from the play as a framing device, despite the play otherwise having little overt engagement with trains in its staging or content. Taking this print as its point of departure, this presentation argues that, far from being a novelty decoration on the print, the appearance of this train line reflects a deeper and longstanding connection between kabuki, trains, and transportation that went beyond the actual staging of modes of transport on the stage as props. In doing so, it also explores how design features for promotional playbills such as train lines and sugoroku game boards served to visually represent awareness, excitement, and anxieties about the acceleration of the movement of people, goods, and culture across distances, and how these depictions in fact built upon the particular ways that printed game boards and train maps functioned to organize, network, and disseminate knowledge visually. The incorporation of these formats in advertising performances suggest that kabuki, and the theatrical experience more broadly, was a particular apt vehicle for examining these concerns surrounding developing transport networks and technologies across the nineteenth century.

Maki Isaka  
University of Minnesota  

"A Biblio-Medium or Two-Dimensional Kabuki in Its Own Right: Publications in the Kabuki Culture"

For the most part of its history, four-century-old kabuki theater has been in a close relationship with publications, usually consisting of two important components, textual narrative and pictorial
images (mostly woodblock prints in premodern times and chiefly photographs in modern times). In particular, it is safe to state that the kabuki culture in the Edo era (1600-1867) integrated the theater industry and publication culture; the significance of publications was thus deep and fundamental. To be exact, publications here indicate not drama texts per se but other texts (e.g., actor-critique booklets, playbills, and other miscellaneous theater-books), and they were extremely significant for kabuki as a social phenomenon in Edo-era Japan. If that was the case, then, what kind of function or functions did those publications carry out? On the top of the list must be that kabuki publications functioned as a medium connecting kabuki on stage and its fandom, providing kabuki fans with information and entertainment related to kabuki theater. That should be certainly true, and it is hardly possible to argue against such a possibility. That being said, it would be too premature to reduce the role of kabuki publications only to that of a medium. On the one hand, if we only see the following two entities in isolation, that is, "full-scale kabuki theater onstage" and "kabuki publications made of pictorial and linguistic components" alone, the latter no doubt appears as a medium, by which the former will be made available to the readership. On the other hand, however, once you apply these two "extremes" in a spectrum of various kinds of kabuki experiences that existed in actuality, including but not limited to a wide range of budget options of surrogate or quasi-theatergoing (e.g., theatrical activity on a smaller scale, audio-only theater [lines and sound effects], voice-only plays [lines only], voice mimicry performing arts, instruction books on amateur voice mimicry, textual reconstruction of theatergoing [lines, stage direction, and audio visual elements]), then, kabuki publications consisting of pictorial and linguistic elements suddenly begin to appear as another version of kabuki experience, that is to say, two-dimensional kabuki in its own right.

Jonathan Zwicker  
University of California, Berkeley  
"The Three Bodies of Horigkoshi Hideshi: Performance and Medium in Meiji Kabuki"

Satoko Shimazaki  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Recording Liveness: Theater Prints and Books in the Age of Nanboku and Mokuami

Ryoko Matsuba  
University of East Anglia  
The founder of Waseda theatre museum Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) described the role of kabuki prints as follows:

‘Many examples of colour woodblock prints survive from the middle of the 18th century onward. If we organise them systematically, it is possible to reconstruct actual stage performances, the complexity of each scene, the appearance of successive generations of famous actors, their costumes, their facial expressions and gestures. We might even go so far as to say that we can use ukiyo-e prints to recreate the theatre of the past as coloured movies.’

Edo Kabuki had strong connections with contemporary visual print culture. It is well known that Kabuki performances provided the subject matter for many ukiyo-e woodblock prints and illustrated books. Ukiyo-e artists drew upon the inherent pictorial quality of Kabuki performance practice. By borrowing the poses and gestures linked to a specific moment in a performance, the artist was able to convey the emotional impact of the scene. Even if an artist did not offer a literal
depicton of a scene in an actor print, the viewer could identify the scene because he recognized the pose the artist had represented. The artists depicted not only theatrical elements such as specific costumes and props but also the essentials of certain set acting patterns. This paper will examine the ways in which kabuki performance had an impact on early modern visual culture. When new gestures and movements (acting patterns) came to be associated with certain recognized emotions and dramatic situations, they were eagerly introduced into other visual materials. This sharing, adapting and merging of imagery formed an important part of the creative process in early modern Japan.

**John T. Carpenter**
Mary Griggs Burke Curator of Japanese Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

“A Poetics of Inscribed Kabuki Actor Portraits”

During the late Tokugawa period, in both Edo and Osaka there was a remarkable fluorescence of popular poetry, both 17-syllable *hokku* and 31-syllable *kyōka*. Already in the case of early *ukiyo-e*, we witness the occasional appearance of Edo-style *haikai* (*Edo-za haikai*) on prints and the participation of Kabuki actors in this movement. By the early nineteenth century it became even more common to see poems on actor prints, whether privately commissioned *surimono* or commercially issued *nishiki-e*. Many amateur poets and often Kabuki actors themselves participated in poetry gatherings, and some poetry circles served as de facto fan clubs for famous performers. In Edo, for instance, the Mimasu poetry circle was founded with the support of Ichikawa Danjūrō V (1741–1806), who believed that training in poetry was an essential skill for an actor.

To shed light on this literary phenomenon, this presentation will analyze various poetic inscriptions on portraits of Kabuki actors, both paintings and prints, to analyze how and why they were composed and by whom. We discover that it became an established convention for poetic inscriptions to be added to memorial portraits of famous actors, sometimes composed by loyal fans, sometimes by other actors. We will also examine the use of theatrical terms and literary allusion to add levels of interpretation and enjoyment of the images of actors and scenes from plays. It is also interesting to observe how the distinctive calligraphy styles of actors and poets were harnessed to add a dynamic new visual dimension to print designs.
Utagawa Toyokuni III (1786-1865), *Summer Festival (Natsumatsuri naniwa kagami)*, Edo Nakamura theatre, 1855, Waseda Theater Museum, Tokyo

‘Actor print production in the 1830s’

**Jiayi Chen**
University of Chicago
What Can a Game Board Stage?
The Worlds of Toyohara Kunichika’s Sugoroku Prints and Beyond

The exploration of this paper arises from a printed e-sugoroku game board from the Brooks McCormick Jr. Collection at the Smart Museum of Art. Designed by the late Edo woodblock print artist Toyohara Kunichika (1835-1900), this large than normal colorful print, pieced together by six ōban-size sheets, marks one of the artist’s masterpieces depicting renowned kabuki actors in different roles. The print itself calls into question its essence, as it straddles an actor print for appreciation and a game board for play. Especially, if enacted as an e-sugoroku, the game might seem too easy to the extent that a lucky player could quickly reach the “goal” in merely two rounds of dicing. Then, how shall we make sense of the board, its gameplay element, and its relationship to the kabuki theater?

To address these questions, this paper suggests a comparative path to understand how a game board as such enriches the perceptions of stage and spectatorship in early modern Japan and beyond. By moving across ephemera of e-sugoroku prints, theatrical representations of board games, as well as visual and textual evidence of the physical stage, I argue that the game boards point to a spatial way of seeing the theater as gridded worlds (sekai). The game board prints, in other words, while serving as a ludic space where actors and audience encountered, also became a miniaturized, portable “world-as-a-theater,” inviting the players to a stage of reverie as they unfolded, moved around the flat, bounded paper.