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Buckland, Rosina (2010) *Shunga: Erotic Art in Japan*. British Museum Press, London. ISBN 978 0 7141 2463 6

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Abstract

This intriguing introduction to Japanese erotic art, known as shunga, is full of humour and human interest. A large quantity of paintings, handscrolls, prints and illustrated books of erotica was produced in Japan between 1600 and 1900. As urban culture expanded rapidly during the seventeenth century, erotic woodblock prints were in demand, first as books then as print series. From the 1760s printed works, produced using full-colour woodblock technology, constitute some of the finest examples of art-printing in Japan, using sumptuous materials and special printing effects. This book includes pictures by some of the most renowned artists, such as Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), who produced erotic imagery as a standard part of their work.

When creating erotica, artists usually played on sexual situations in everyday life: a wife catches her husband seducing a maid, a couple are spied on by a curious servant, and mice start copulating in imitation of the humans. Japanese erotic art was characterised by exaggeration and fantasy and, as one verse-writer warns, 'The foolish couple copy shunga and pull a muscle'. There was frequent recourse to satire and parody, often in defiance of contemporary censorship and sumptuary regulations. The background scripts, many translated here for the first time, are irreverent and amusing.

The erotic encounters depicted in shunga reflect multiple perspectives – male, female,

heterosexual and same-sex. This book examines this under-explored area of Japanese culture, and is fully illustrated with fascinating images from the rich collections of the British Museum, many of which have never been published before.

With 140 colour illustrations.

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Preface and acknowledgements

Picturing sex in Japan, 1600–1900

Features of shunga

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Japan as number one: Lessons for America, EF Vogel, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1979. No. of pages: 272. Price: \$12.50, the mechanical system slows down the conflict.

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