

The Development of Color Printmaking

1 The earliest appeared as book illustrations in ink monochrome. By 1695 publishers were selling monochromatic images printed on a single sheet of paper. To achieve these prints, the artist's original ink design was transferred to the block. A carver carefully removed everything except outlines and patterns, left in relief. After applying ink, the printer placed a sheet of paper on the block and rubbed the back of the sheet with a round tool called a baren.



Cat. no. 2

2 The first hand-colored Japanese prints were made in the early eighteenth century. Called "vermillion pictures" (*beni-e*), they featured pinkish red pigment made of safflower petals and light green grass sap.



Cat. no. 14

3 "Lacquer pictures" (*urushi-e*) were popular in the mid-eighteenth century. For these, animal collagen glue was applied to black ink to impart a lustrous quality reminiscent of lacquer. This technique was used primarily for hairstyles and costume details.



Cat. no. 12

4 Starting about 1744, registration guide marks were carved in blocks, allowing printers to align colors. Hand-colored prints were superseded by "crimson pictures" (*benizuri-e*), printed with a few colors, including pink, yellow, and green.



Cat. no. 20



Guide mark at the corner of a printing block

5 The adoption of consistent registration marks made full-color and multiblock printing possible in the mid-1760s. Multicolor prints, produced by taking impressions from a woodblock set, are called "brocade pictures" (*nishiki-e*) because they resemble colorful silk brocades.



Cat. no. 34