



A Fascinating Historical Journey Through Erotic Japanese Art

“If you can publish Shunga,
why can't you exhibit it?”

Shunga and the Japanese

Directed by Atsushi Ogaki

Produced from the 1600s to early 1900s, Shunga is a form of explicit erotic art. Banned in Japan for almost 100 years, Shunga inspired artists like Picasso, Rodin and Toulouse-Lautrec. In Japan, despite being forced underground, Shunga has influenced modern forms like manga and anime. *Shunga and the Japanese* tells the story of Shunga, why the form was banned in the very country which created it, and how a few brave men and women worked to bring it back into the cultural fold.



A look into the true,

little-known world of Japan's paradoxical society.

Fall 2015: Tokyo's Eisei Bunko Museum holds Japan's first-ever exhibition of Shunga, traditional Japanese erotic art. Through interviews with Shunga researchers and others, this documentary traces the long, hard road to making that exhibition possible—and why Japanese society went from creating Shunga to rejecting it. This is a film about the tireless efforts of those dedicated to preserving the freedoms of publication, exhibition, trade and study.

In 2013, the British Museum held an exhibition called *Shunga: Sex and pleasure in Japanese art*. The huge success of that exhibition inspired members of a Shunga association to attempt to bring it on tour to Japan. However, negotiations with over 20 museums ended in rejection. This prompted former prime minister Morihiro Hosokawa to wonder: "if you can publish Shunga uncensored, why can't you exhibit it?" With the chivalrous spirit of his samurai family line, Hosokawa decided to host the exhibition himself at his museum, Eisei Bunko. It soon attracted over 200,000 visitors, becoming one of the country's most successful art exhibitions ever.

Through the film, we learn how Shunga, broadly enjoyed by nobles, samurai and the common people alike in the Edo period, gradually became regulated by the Shogunate—and once Japan entered the Meiji Era and began to westernize, totally banned. Even following World War II, when scholarly freedoms were reintroduced, research into Shunga remained at a standstill. Interviews with researchers and others trace this story, plus the larger history of ukiyo-e woodblock prints and the Japanese art world.

In Japan, Shunga were once considered the highest form of art—so much that some would even wrap them around their bodies for spiritual protection. But this form of art, once a vital part of Japanese life, slowly became removed from society, turned into a taboo due to an invisible wall of self-regulation. This film reveals the mysterious and fascinating relationship between Shunga and the Japanese.

Appearances: Shugo Asano (President of the International Ukiyo-e Art Museum), Naoyuki Kinoshita (Institute of Cultural Resources, The University of Tokyo), Tadashi Kobayashi (Chairman of the International Ukiyo-e Art Society), Nobuo Tsuji (Emeritus Professor of the University of Tokyo), Morihiro Hosokawa (Eisei Bunko Museum Chairman), Timothy Clark (British Museum Japan Department Curator)

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