ART INSTITUTE PRESENTS GHOSTS AND DEMONS IN JAPANESE PRINTS
Exhibition showcases the renowned Clarence Buckingham Collection

The Art Institute of Chicago will present the exhibition *Ghosts and Demons in Japanese Prints*, drawn from the museum’s celebrated Clarence Buckingham Collection, **October 11, 2014, through January 4, 2014**, in Gallery 107.

Supernatural beings have long been common features in Japanese legends, and with the popularity of Kabuki, made their way onto the stage. This exhibition of approximately 30 prints draws upon well-known folk tales as well as their Kabuki adaptations in works dating from the early 18th century to the last years of the 19th century.

Highlights of the exhibition, which was organized by Janice Katz, the Roger L. Weston Associate Curator of Japanese Art, include the series *One Hundred Ghost Tales (Hyaku monogatari)*, by Katsushika Hokusai. The series features chilling images of ghouls against bright blue backgrounds drawn from Japanese legends.

One of the most frightening prints illustrates the story of Kohada Koheiji, a Kabuki actor who was drowned by his wife’s lover but later came back to haunt the couple’s bedside. The print depicts the skeletal ghost of Kohada as he pulls down a mosquito net to peer eerily at the sleeping couple in their bed.
The Art Institute’s collection boasts one of the best editions of the *One Hundred Ghost Tales* series (1831/32), of which only five images are known. The series title refers to a game in which people would gather at night to tell scary stories, putting out a candle after each story until the room was completely dark. A distinguishing feature of these small-format works is the bright-blue color made possible by the newly affordable Berlin blue pigment. Although this hue appears cheery today, in the Japan of Hokusai’s day it was associated with death and the occult.

Many of these prints show scenes from *kaidan mono*, or Kabuki ghost plays, which were popular in the early 19th century. The productions included dramatic special effects, such as quick costume changes when an actor transformed into a ghost or the use of trap doors and a flying apparatus to terrify or excite the audience. The plays were most often performed in the heat of summer, the traditional time for telling ghost stories, as the tales were meant to give the audience a chill. The timing also coincided with the Japanese Festival of the Dead, or *Obon matsuri*.

Also included in the exhibition are depictions of Shoki, the Demon Queller, a legendary Chinese figure who is said to have failed the examinations to become a scholar-official and subsequently committed suicide. The emperor, upon hearing of this tragedy, had Shoki buried with high honors, therefore securing his protection after death as a spirit guardian. In Japan, Shoki is depicted dressed as a Chinese official, with a dark robe, boots and cap. He wields his sword and could subdue even the most frightening goblins.

Support for *Ghosts and Demons in Japanese Prints* is provided by the Sonnenschein Exhibition Endowment.

**Image:** Katsushika Hokusai. *Kohada Koheiji*, from the series *One Hundred Ghost Tales (Hyaku monogatari)*, c. 1831. The Art Institute of Chicago. Clarence Buckingham Collection.