

## **KUROKI, Ayaka. A Study of *The Twelve Zodiac Signs* by Yamamoto Hosui: A Comparison with Ukiyo-e Paintings of the Twelve Zodiac Signs**

*The Twelve Zodiac Signs* is a set of twelve paintings created in 1892 by the Meiji-period Western-style painter Yamamoto Hosui (1850–1906). This paper attempts to situate the painting among traditional Japanese artworks that feature the twelve zodiac signs.

Previous studies on this work have primarily discussed it in relation to Western art. Only a few studies have even partially pointed out connections between *The Twelve Zodiac Signs* and Japanese art. In this paper, I discuss *The Twelve Zodiac Signs* in comparison with ukiyo-e, especially those depicting the twelve zodiac signs, rather than in comparison with Western painting.

The structure of this paper is as follows:

In Chapter 1, I summarize the basic information on *The Twelve Zodiac Signs* and review previous studies. Then I state the purpose of this paper, which is to compare these works with ukiyo-e, which has not been discussed in scholarship thus far.

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of Japanese works depicting the twelve zodiac signs, and point out two ways in which they appear: the first is in order to show the zodiac signs Japanese painters depicts twelve animals, and the other is twelve independent paintings compose a set.

In Chapter 3, I compare ukiyo-e paintings of the twelve zodiac signs and Hosui's *The Twelve Zodiac Signs* from four points of view: (1) the form, (2) the expression of the twelve zodiac animals, (3) the depicted subject matter, and (4) enigmatic motifs that invite interpretation.

Regarding (3), I analyze the composition and motifs of *The Twelve Zodiac Signs* and show how remarkably similar they are to those seen in ukiyo-e. I also point out that the same pictorial expressions found in ukiyo-e are employed in this painting as well.

Similarities are seen across all four points, however, in regard to (3), while both ukiyo-e and the painting place the same importance upon the zodiac animals, Hosui's painting, which is not subject to genre restrictions like ukiyo-e, shows flexibility in the selection of subject matter. In (4), I show that the enigmatic motifs in Hosui's painting are more difficult to decipher than those in other ukiyo-e works with the twelve zodiac signs, and that it is plausible that Hosui consciously adopted ukiyo-e forms into Western painting, since his teacher, Goseda Horyu, studied under Utagawa Kuniyoshi and is thus considered to be in the ukiyo-e lineage.

In Chapter 4, I point out that during this period, most Western-style paintings adopted historical themes, while many ukiyo-e created after the early Meiji period incorporate themes related to the Tokugawa family. As such, these works clearly reflect issues faced by Japanese-born Western-style painters of the early modern period, especially in regard to the types of subjects that artists should depict.

The above discussion shows that Hosui's painting inherits features of traditional Japanese works depicting the twelve zodiac signs, such as the form, the representation of the twelve animals, the subject matter, and the motifs that invite interpretation, all features that are seen in Edo-period ukiyo-e. I conclude that these works were the last of the twelve zodiac sign-themed works in Japanese art. The use of oil paint, a newly-introduced material to Japan, adds to the novelty of the work.