

SHIKŌ MUNAKATA A Way of Seeing

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SHIKŌ MUNAKATA (1903–1975) was a vivid presence in 20th century Japanese art. The fortunate, if rare, artist to achieve worldwide recognition during his lifetime, he envisioned scenes from his imagination, traveled the world for inspiration, visited museums to study the art of the past and the present, and turned to everyday subjects (including himself) to give expression to his inventive observations. Defying conventions, his works—whether dynamic Buddhas, Pan-Asian deities, prismatic landscapes, or fanciful natural motifs—record not only what the artist conjured, but illuminate a highly original process informed by spontaneity and emotion.

Speed was MUNAKATA's essence. The self-taught artist painted, sketched, and carved at a furious pace, bringing new energy to the venerable tradition of the Japanese woodblock print. Primarily celebrated as a woodcut artist, he also created a robust body of works on paper, equally at ease with calligraphy, painting, and lithography. With his bold, expressive lines and sketch-like appearance, MUNAKATA developed an innovative style that remained a constant across a remarkable range of mediums and formats.

A Way of Seeing features nearly 100 works drawn from Japan Society's significant collection—many of which have not been on public view in over 50 years—that represent important developments in the artist's oeuvre. From his first landscape series of 1964 to his early experimentation with the lithograph and techniques such as back-coloring (urazaishiki), the works on view present a glimpse into the rich trajectory of MUNAKATA's 50-year career. The installation marks the 125th exhibition at Japan Society's Gallery, and underscores MUNAKATA's first time in the United States, as a Japan Society Fellow in 1959 in New York—his second "home," as he affectionately referred to it. Encouraging close examination of his works and exploring his methods, this exhibition offers the opportunity to see the visionary MUNAKATA through the artist's eyes.

TIFFANY LAMBERT, Curator

GALLERY 1 Munakata's Tōkaidō Road

GALLERY 1 MUNAKATA'S TŌKAIDŌ ROAD

Tōkaidō, the coastal road between Tokyo and Kyoto, was the main transit and economic artery in early modern Japan. The views of the 53 stations along the road were a favorite subject of *ukiyo-e* artists from the 17th to 19th centuries, with perhaps the most prominent series created by UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE (1797–1858) as well as others by HOKUSAI (1760–1849). On the occasion of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, MUNAKATA was commissioned by Suruga Bank to create a contemporary view of Tōkaidō. The suite became the artist's first landscape series.

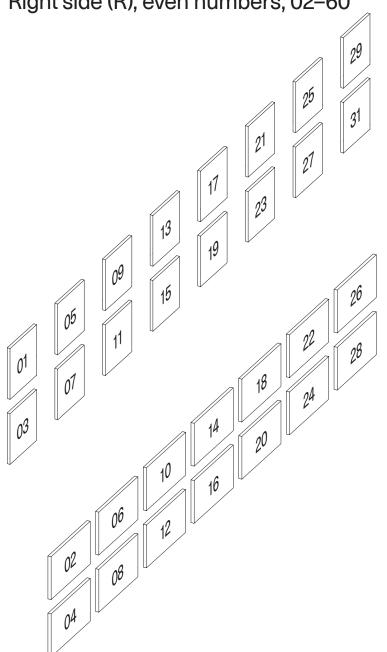
MUNAKATA made seven research trips to sketch the stops along the route between April 28, 1963—coincidentally, the same day HIROSHIGE left to draw his 53 Stations of Tōkaidō—and February 1964. In the following pages, we reproduce excerpts from MUNAKATA's personal diary that he kept while on these trips. In it, MUNAKATA details how he produced the series non-sequentially (*Mishima* no.12 was completed first; he sometimes visited a given site multiple times before finalizing a sketch to print) and how there were often fellow artists, journalists, and film crews in addition to his family accompanying him on his travels.

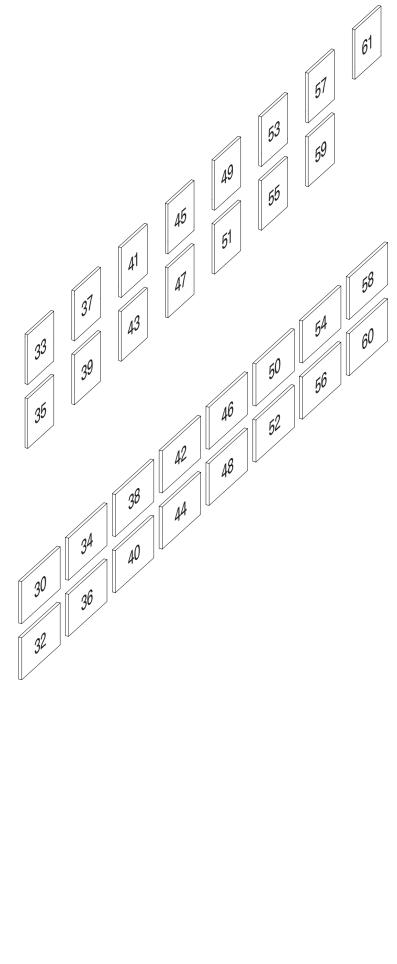
The Olympics boosted the rapid development of infrastructure in Japan; the Tōkaidō Shinkansen (bullet train) opened the same year. MUNAKATA's series portrays modern Japan set with busy cities, railways, and oil refineries. In his interpretation, a section of the road to Osaka—the second largest city in Japan—was added, increasing the number of stations to 61, all of which are on view for the first time in the United States since 1965. (The complete set of 64 includes two covers and a flyleaf.) The full series consists of black-and-white horizontal views that alternate with brightly colored vertical imagery—inspired by the Nebuta Festival in his native Aomori in northern Japan—creating a rhythmic composition.

Munakata's Tōkaidō Road Series (Tōkaidō Munakata Hanga), 1964. 61 woodblock prints, 58cm × 47cm each, in landscape (even numbers; black and white sumi ink prints) and portrait (odd numbers; hand-colored prints).

Each print is an edition of 8/10, except no. 21, 24, 30, 31, 35, 58, which are unmarked. Collection of Japan Society.

Left side (L), odd numbers, 01–61 Right side (R), even numbers, 02–60





Munakata's Tōkaidō Road Series (Tōkaidō Munakata Hanga), 1964		R14	HARA A Line at the Foot of Mt. Fuji (Suso		Shell-covered Walls (Kaikaki-danbori)	L47	KAMEYAMA In Front of the Castle Ruin
			Ichimonji)	R30	HAMAMATSU		(Jyōsekizen)
L01	TOKYO The First Mile Post on Nihonbashi Bridge	R16	KANBARA Canal in the City (Machi Horiwari)	R32	Platform for Admiring the View (Chōken Dai) ARAI	R46	SHŌNO Herons Among the Rice Fields
L03	(Kyōōriteigenpyō) KAWASAKI Baseball in the Field	L17	YUI Construction at Sea (Umi Kōji)		Deserted Sandbank (Karasuhama)	R48	(Yaburotetsu) SEKI Facing Suzuka
DOS	(Kusayakkyū) SHINAGAWA	L19	SHIMIZU The Color of Sunset at the Port (Minato	L33	SHIRASUKA View of the Beach (Hama Chōbō)	I 40	(Suzuka Makkō) SAKANOSHITA
NUZ	The Eight Mountains (Yatsuyama-dai)		Boshoku)	L35	TOYOHASHI Maneki Castle	L49	Mt. Hisshu (Hisshuzan)
R04	YOKOHAMA A Noshi-shaped Cloud (Noshi-gumo)	R18	View of the Temple Gate (Nagame		in the Dusk (Maneki-shiro Tenshu)	L51	MINAKUCHI Natural Spring by the Shrine (Syazoiwaki)
L05	HODOGAYA Little Shrine Near	R20	Sanmon) SHIZUOKA National Flag at a	R34	FUTAGAWA Rock Bodhisattva	R50	TSUCHIYAMA Calm and Pure
L07	a Bridge (Kyōshidō) FUJISAWA		Prefectural Office (Chōkokki)	R36	(Iwa Bosatsu) GOYU	R52	(Seikei Seishu) ISHIBE
	Solitary Gingko Tree (Hitori-ichō)	L21	MARIKO Threatening Clouds		Rice Cake Vendor (Mochi Yatai)		Lazy Afternoon (Hiruma Kan)
R06	TOTSUKA Nightingale in the Bush (Yabutsuka	1 22	Above Mt. Tōgetsu (Tōho Sōun) FUJIEDA	L37	AKASAKA Age-old Pines (Kinen Namiki)	L53	KUSATSU Ubaga Rice-cake Stall (Ubaga
R08	Uguisu) HIRATSUKA Mt. Korai	LZS	Row of Greenhouses (Onshō Renretsu)	L39	OKAZAKI Clouds in a Row (Renren Gumo)	L55	Mochiya) KYOTO Kiyomizu Temple
	(Kōraiyama)	R22	OKABE The Mountain's	Doo	FUJIKAWA		in the Snow (Yuki Butai)
L09	ŌISO Eternal Snow		Shadow in the Dusk (Yama Kageru Yoi)	NSO	At the Edge of a Stone Lantern	R54	ŌTSU
	(Tokunaga Shinsetsu)	R24	SHIMADA Shimada Hairstyle	R40	(Tōseki Daigiwa) CHIRYŪ		Evening Calm by the Lake (Kojō Yachō)
L11	HAKONE Cypress at the Old Checkpoint		and Bridge (Hashi Shimada-mage)		Iris Festival (Tojakusai)	R56	FUSHIMI Shrine of the Harvest Deity
	(Sekisho Sugi)	L25	KANAYA Opening My Heart	L41	Sudden Thunder		(Hon Inari)
R10	ODAWARA Karesato Castle (Karesato Jiro)	l 97	Before Mt. Fuji (Kyōkin Gyōkai) KAKEGAWA	L43	(Kyūraiden) KUWANA Waves at the	L57	MUKŌMACHI Crossing Over- passes (Kadō Kōsa)
R12	MISHIMA Teahouse Among the Maples	LZ7	Staircase to the Pavilion (Yagura Kaidan)		Entrance to the Shrine (Torii Nami)	L59	HIRAKATA Large Apartment Complex (Daidanchi)
	(Kaede Chaya)	R26	NISSAKA	R42	NAGOYA	R58	YODO
L13	NUMAZU Looking up the Mountain from		Mysterious Stone (Sayonaki-ishi) FUKUROI		Diagonal Rain on Main Street (Menuki Syau)		Windswept Castle (Shōsekiran) MORIGUCHI
L15	Matsubara (Matsubara Gyōten) YOSHIWARA		Kireto Canal (Kireto Bori)	R44	YOKKAICHI Industrial Complex (Konbināto)		Sudden Rain Shower at the Yodogawa River
	Mt. Fuji Viewed from Left Side (Hidari Fugaku)	L29	MITSUKE Crimson View (Kurenai Chōbō)	L45	ISHIYAKUSHI A Temple Gate	l 61	(Yodagawa Kyū-u) OSAKA
	(i ildair i ugaku)	L31	MAISAKA The Canal's		at Dawn (Mongaki Gyōi)	LUI	A Crowded City (Gaishin Zattō)

YOKOHAMA: A NOSHI-SHAPED CLOUD (Noshi-gumo)

January 26, 1964

"We made a turn from a national highway. Visited the property of the Ford company. The landscape changed— There were ships, the sea, and construction cranes. An active landscape. The wild grass was dead, and dandelions were flowering. MR. SHIMOZA-WA1 dug out a dandelion and wrapped it. Nice feeling. Originally called Kanagawa [in the Tōkaidō series by HIRO-SHIGE]. I avoided Yokohama's downtown area and chose this rather quiet place where we can see the marine tower on the right-hand side. The concrete building on the far end of the cove and the half-broken ship in the foreground made me feel that this crowded scenery is desolate. The strong wind added sentiment to the landscape. I arranged my tools and used these tools to make three designs. I walked with MR. TOKUNAGA² to the car joyfully chatting about my work."

12 MISHIMA: TEAHOUSE AMONG THE MAPLES (Kaede Chaya)

April 28, 1963

"Arrived at Mishima. I made a few drawings at Shirataki Park. The torii at Mishima Shrine was what I expected. The videographer from NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai) was busy recording. I also drew the tea house and the large camphor tree behind the tea house in the shrine yard. Oden, cake, and sweet dumplings were delicious. I was stuffed with delicious oden. I thought the tree that grew over the roof of the tea house was a camphor tree, but CHIYAKO3 said it is a maple tree. But the branches grew like a camphor tree. This was the first carving I made in the Tōkaidō series. The knife carved invigoratingly, so invigoratingly."





HARA: A LINE AT THE FOOT OF MT. FUJI (Suso Ichimonji)

April 28, 1963

"Half of Mt. Fuji was vaguely seen. I made a couple of drawings of Mt. Fuji. We were late getting to Hara. I drew a couple of sketches of Mt. Fuji over the grass field and a stream in both portrait and landscape orientations. The old Tōkaidō and the town of Hara were beautiful."

January 20, 1964

"I made some corrections to my previous Mt. Fuji drawing from Hara, and then we had lunch. The driver showed us the motel close to Numazu and parked. I drew Hara Fuji from a room. We met MR. SUGIURA of Tōyō Densan Corporation in his factory and I asked his recommendation for today's accommodation. He drove us to Hakkeien in Nagaoka, Izu, and we stayed there. We had a view of Mt. Fuji and the accompanying hills. The sunset was pink."

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20 SHIZUOKA: NATIONAL FLAG AT A PREFECTURAL OFFICE (Chōkokki)

May 27-28, 1963

"I came to make my design three times. The first time, there was a heavy rain, the paper got soaking wet and the brush got sticky like mochi. When I came for the second time, the brush head fell off and I could not draw. I spilled sumi ink the third time, but somehow I managed to use the spilled ink to make a draft. It was a sunny day and the national flag at a prefectural office was shining beautifully. The national flag is for Sunpu.4



FUKUROI: KIRETO CANAL (Kireto Bori)

January 18, 1964

"I came across this landscape when I was walking on the road back. After I finished drawing, CHIYAKO asked what the place was called, and one of the children surrounding me answered "Kiretotsu." I have no idea how to write it, but I gave phonetic equivalent letters, 裂戸(kireto). It was my ita-affection that caused me to arrange cattle egrets in a row on the trees in the middle."

34

FUTAGAWA: ROCK BODHISATTVA (Iwa Bosatsu)

May 27, 1963

"I wish I could see falcons, because someone said there is a place near here that is famous for falcons. The pine trees along the road were covered with dust. The landscape is somewhat artificial, and I did not feel easy, but I sketched the Rock Bodhisattva Mountain. My old friend Mrs. H. is from here, and later she said there is a place that is famous for peonies, but I did not go there because it was not the season. I wanted to see falcons and peonies."





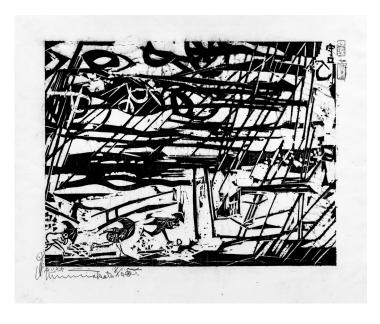
YOKKAICHI: INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (Konbināto)

May 11, 1963

"I wanted to express the active city that is fueled by the logistic systems in modern organizations. There were two wide rivers that I drove across before arriving in this city last evening. The darkness of the evening was serious. On the other hand, the daytime was unexpectedly bright. It felt like the whole city was constructed by the machines. It started raining. Got out of the car and made a couple of drawings of the landscape with the industrial complex. Slow progress because of the rain. The ink pot was turned over, and CHIYAKO managed to collect the ink. We changed the location and I made another two drawings. Then moving to the intersection, I included the newly constructed Shimei Dōro in my composition. The rain got harder." 60 MORIGUCHI: SUDDEN RAIN SHOWER AT THE YODOGAWA RIVER (Yodagawa Kyū-u)

"In Moriguchi, I am thinking of drawing the Yodo River to the edges of the picture plane. I have never seen a river as wide as the Yodo River. They still use old style ferry boats called Heita No Watashi to cross the river. The buildings, chimneys, and iron towers on the other side of the river looked like they were floating on the river surface and covered with vapor. I made Yodogawa Kyū-u after I left this place, and it is not the real landscape at all. One more to complete sixty-one pictures."





GALLERY 2
Experimenting with
Technique and Expression

GALLERY 2 EXPERIMENTING WITH TECHNIQUE AND EXPRESSION

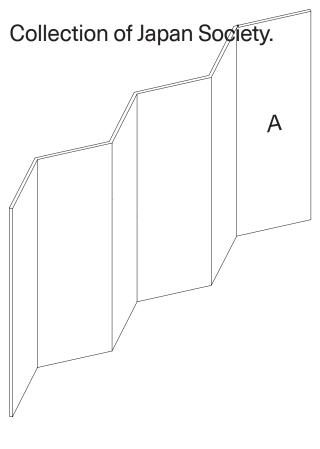
A method that MUNAKATA introduced to printmaking was hand-coloring the image by applying paint to the reverse side of the paper, allowing it to seep through without obstructing the lines of the print—a technique referred to as *urazaishiki*. The technique, used in the six-panel screen containing 24 individual prints, *Eulogy to Shōkei*, dates back to ancient silk paintings from the mid-12th century. MAIO, the exhibition architects of this installation, were inspired by MUNAKATA's use of *urazaishiki* in their conception of the back-lighting viewed throughout the exhibition.

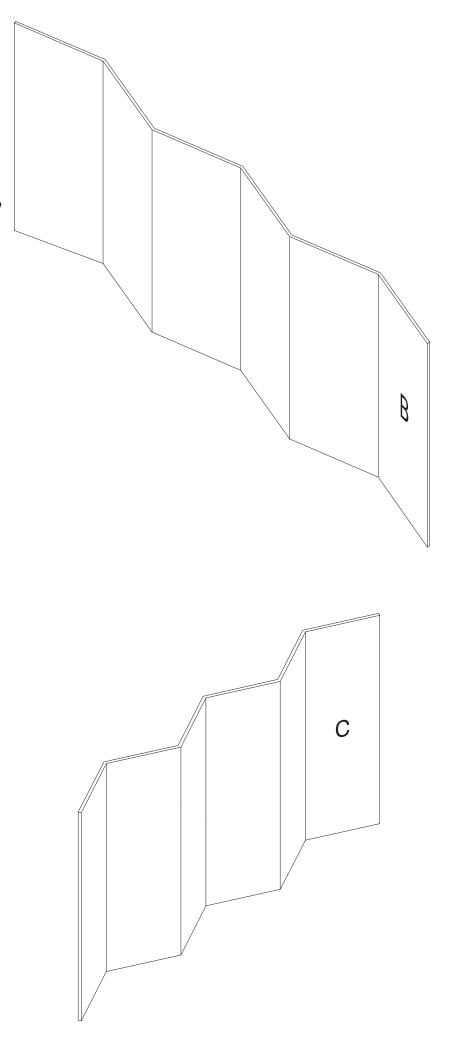
Eulogy to Shōkei was created in September 1945 in Toyama Prefecture, where MUNAKATA and his family had evacuated to escape the air raids in Tokyo. The screen was created in honor of MUNAKATA's mentor and one of the leaders of the Mingei (folk crafts) movement, the celebrated potter KANJIRŌ KAWAI (1880–1966). In May 1936, MUNAKATA spent 40 days in Kyoto at KAWAI's residence and kiln, Shōkei-gama, where he studied Mingei thought and Buddhist teachings. Represented are 20 female figures that symbolize the natural world, the guardian deity Aō, and three Buddhist saints (arhats) in an unusually restrained and reverential manner. With this piece, he combined intaglio carving and relief carving techniques. It was also the first time the artist experimented with carving white contour lines on a black background, a major turning point in MUNAKATA's career.

MUNAKATA continued to experiment with this technique, as witnessed in the pair screens, Zarathustra (shown flanking Eulogy to Shōkei). The effective style of white lines on an entirely black surface is reminiscent of other works by MUNAKATA, particularly Shell Tribe (1963); In Praise of Flower Hunting (1954; on view in Japan Society's Murase Room); and In Praise of Great Joy: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1952), for which he carved 36 blocks using a single chisel to achieve the composition, which was inspired by ornamental Celtic lettering. Zarathustra recalls the ancient Iranian prophet of the same name whose teachings challenged traditional Indo-Iranian religion and eventually became the official religion of Persia. MUNAKATA often created his prints independently and only later fashioned them onto a single screen, as evidenced in this pair of screens. The right print on the screen to the right of Eulogy to Shōkei is In Praise of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (1951).

A & C Zarathustra, undated Pair of six-panel folded screens, 174cm × 330cm (entire screen).

B
Eulogy to Shōkei (Shōkeishō), 1945
24 woodblock prints, hand-colored,
mounted on a six-panel folded
screen, 46cm × 32cm (each print);
169cm × 533cm (entire screen).





Eulogy to Shōkei (Shōkeishō), 1945

Right to left, top to bottom:

B01 THE HUMAN WORLD (Shigan)

B02 MANDARIN DÚCK (Enō)

B03 *NIGHT FALLING* (Yoburi)

B04 SHELLS (Kaizoku)

B05 THUNDER (Raimon)

B06 GUARDIAN KING (Unō)

B07 THE MESSENGER (Kotsushi)

B08 THE ANCIENT CLOTH (Furuginu)

B09 THE BUDDHA'S WISDOM (Bodai)

B10 TORNADO (Tatsumaki)

B11 CARP (Koizoku)

B12 THE WHISPER (Fūbun)

B13 WILD CHERRY BLOSSOMS (Yamatozakura)

B14 GUARDIAN KÍNG (Aō)

B15 MORNING CHRYSANTHEMUM (Asagiku)

B16 FALLING LEAVES (Ochiba)

B17 THE MIDDLE WAY (Chūgan)

B18 PEONY (Botan)

B19 THE FESTIVAL PATTERN (Saiha)

B20 AUTUMN BELL-FLOWER (Rindō)

B21 GOURD (Hyōtan)

B22 CHINESE ROBE (Karagoromo)

B23 YOUNG CHESTNUT (Wakaguri)

B24 THE ENLIGHTENED WORLD (Higan)







In 1952, SHIKO MUNAKATA won the Prize of Excellence at the Second International Print Exhibition in Lugano, Switzerland. This win was followed by first prize at the São Paulo Biennial Exhibition in Brazil in 1955 and the Grand Prix at the 28th Venice Biennale in 1956, both in the Print Division. In January 1959, he traveled to the United States at the invitation of Japan Society in New York, the first of four trips MUNAKATA made to the United States, the last of which was in 1974. During each visit, he made New York his home.

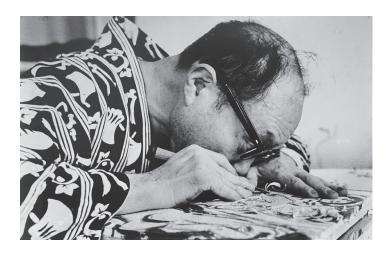
Born in the city of Aomori in Aomori Prefecture, located in the northern-most region of Honshu, MUNAKATA spoke with an amicable Tohoku accent that elicited warm laughter from his audience before interpreters ever had time to do their jobs. Similar to his impactful work, his personality quickly found its way into people's hearts.

Then there were his trademark thick glasses. MUNAKATA's binoculars, which he affectionately referred to as his "second pair of eyes," were necessary at close distances, even when watching television. Still, his poor eyesight, which would usually be considered a fatal flaw for a painter, posed no problems for MUNAKATA—he simply loved to draw. Rather, his relative blindness was a valuable asset: he saw only what he wanted to see. Everything he saw with his eyes was etched into his mind, beautifully distorted and eternally stored away.





Woodblock printing has long existed as part of Japan's printing tradition. Ukiyo-e woodblock prints, which flourished during the Edo period (1603–1867), are also a part of this tradition. Printing ukiyo-e was the cumulative work of a trio of artisans: the painter, who drew the original picture; the woodcarver, who carved several woodblock molds, one for each color; and the printer, who overlaid paper onto these woodblocks to "print" impressions that were faithful to the original.



As time marched on, the trend to treat prints as their own formative works arrived. The Sosaku Hanga movement, which began in the early 1900s and reached its zenith in the 1930s, is one example. Rather than continue the three-way division of labor, the artist would draw, carve, and print on their own, intending to reframe the print as a work of art. The production of woodblock prints was especially popular among painters. In 1924, at the age of 21, MUNAKATA came to Tokyo with aspirations to become an oil painter and was similarly entranced. But by 1927, he had begun making his own woodblocks and gradually became immersed in the process.

Sumizuri ink-printed woodblock prints are the ultimate two-dimensional art form. Expression of shadow and depth is near impossible. But for the extremely near sighted MUNAKATA, it was the perfect medium to express himself. By distorting and designing the shapes of things, he thought that he might create a beauty equivalent to masterly crafts—a more artisanal, universal beauty in contrast to the idiosyncratic beauty so often sought by artists themselves. It was easy for MUNAKATA to transfigure shapes found in nature and the many other things that populated his memory and permeated his very being. MUNAKATA even reached a point when he could draw his pictures without looking.



When I was a child, I loved to watch my grandfather work on prints in his studio. I would curl my body into myself to take up the least amount of space possible, open my eyes wide, and listen while I watched him work. He would

carve so close to the wood that his nose would be buried in its grooves. His craft was intensely serious yet full of joy. I can still hear the swish of the wood sliding and rotating on the desk and the refreshingly rhythmic carving of figures on wood, his snorts and grunts mixed in between. I'll never forget those moments.



MUNAKATA carved his woodblocks by turning a piece of wood without ever changing the angle of the hand holding the chisel. His work was a series of intricate processes, but decidedly different from painting, where the painter whisks their brush here and there as they observe their subject in full. For MUNAKATA, the whole picture was already in his head. He would guide his knife through the wood, looking only at his hands. It never took long for him to reach a point where his hands would carve away at the surface on their own, the characteristics of indelible mental images a perfect match for his ultra-nearsighted work. In 1932, after his work won his first prize at a public exhibition and was purchased by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MUNA-KATA decided to live as a printmaker.

Sosaku Hanga prints were hardly recognized for their value in the art market at the time. As a result, MU-NAKATA drew illustrations for children's books, poetry collections, and literary magazines, which led him to develop relationships with many literary figures. MUNAKATA always possessed a keen sense of language and a deep love of literature. He expressed ideas born from words in the form of nature and carved poems into wood alongside his illustrations, creating a unique world that mixed verbal and visual.

In the midst of all this, he was profoundly moved by an encounter he had with philosopher and religion scholar YANAGI SOETSU, who founded the Mingei (folk crafts) movement. The two first met in 1936. YANAGI attempted to provide academic guidance in the Buddhist scriptures to MUNAKATA, who was self-taught and had created his own unique world of prints. Growing up in an underprivileged area that experienced a string of poor harvests, MUNAKATA was imbued with a very primitive religious spirit from childhood. MUNAKATA grew up close to his illiterate grandmother, TSURU, whom he described as "a woman whose body exuded faith," and he would read the sutras to her. As a child, he never understood their meaning. However, as

an adult, MUNAKATA would forgo eating and sleeping to work on embodying this world in the form of prints after realizing the profundity of the doctrines within them.

At the heart of YANAGI's theory on the beauty of *Mingei* was the concept that some greater power beyond the individual does the work. This is the beauty of tariki, a Japanese term meaning "other power," the idea that beauty dwells in a place beyond the self. MU-NAKATA also thought that the existence of "another power" made the creation of woodblock prints possible. A drawing's expression changes during the printing process: the artist turns their illustrations over and lays them onto the wood before carving them out. The surface of the uncarved portion remains in its natural state while the carved area gives way to a white wooden color. The artist applies the ink, places the paper on top, and prints using a baren—a disk-like hand tool with a flat bottom and a knotted handle. It is only after removing the paper and flipping it over that the artist sees their work for the first time. In this world. direct expression is only allowed by repeatedly denying the self. Therein lies the beauty of woodblock prints. MU-NAKATA was deeply inspired by YAN-AGI's ideas and learned a great deal from the *Mingei* movement.

The Two Bodhisattvas and Ten Great Disciples of Buddha was born in the early summer of 1939, three years after MUNAKATA's first encounter with YANAGI. "The Ten Great Disciples" is the term given to a group of the ten most distinguished disciples of the Buddha, each of whom is said to have excelled in one of the Buddhist virtues. MUNAKATA spoke at length about this work, often saying that he was inspired to make the *Ten Great Disciples* after seeing the statue of Subhuti (Subodai in Japanese) in a museum at Kofukuji Temple in Nara.

"On a good day, I was able to carve three panels, and I finished all ten in just one week's time. I didn't even bother to make a rough sketch. I just let my drawings manifest themselves on the wood."

"I thought I could settle on a title later, so I just drew human figures approaching enlightenment. Later, when I looked them up in the encyclopedia, I found that the faces and postures I had carved were frighteningly close to those of the Ten Great Disciples."

"When they were finished, I realized that ten was not enough for the twelve byobu screen panels, so I added Fugen and Monju, the two Bodhisattvas who served as disciples to the Buddha in the Mahayana. That's when I saw that the ten disciples were divided into two groups, one on the right and one on the left, and they became the yin and the yang, which is in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. The work had become something I could never have conceived of on my own."

Despite this eloquent commentary, it is known from an earlier letter to

YANAGI that MUNAKATA had actually conceived the idea of creating this set of works at least a year and a half before making the images. MUNAKATA left behind hundreds of rough sketches that he drew to familiarize himself with his subjects. It seems certain that he carved them all in the span of a single week, but that was at least a year and a half after he first hit upon the idea. He spent hours and hours thinking and practicing until drawing these figures was second nature to him.

So what had he been thinking about for a year and a half? That is what the woodcuts can tell us. In most cases, the artist carves both the front and back sides of a single woodcut. Warping may occur if only one side is carved, but artists can often avoid this problem if they use both sides. *The Ten Great Disciples of Buddha* uses the front and back of five woodblocks.

MUNAKATA's consciousness of the composition and contrast of the motif is as plain as day. The black and white folds of the robe are mirror images of each other, with one side of the woodcut used for white and the other for black. The orientation of the body is also bisected by the front and back of the board. One pair is right and right, another is left and left, and two more are half right and half left. The remaining pair is front- and upward-facing, respectively, for variation.

Each woodcut tells the story behind one of the disciples' names. There is an order to *The Ten Great Disciples*, which are listed according to their virtues. They are shown in order from the top left to the bottom right of the illustration. 1 to 5 are on one side of the woodcut. The remaining 6 to 10 are on the reverse. One cannot help but admire how deliberate MUNAKATA's composition is.



There is the supernatural Mandgalyayana (Mokkenren), with his beady eyes, and the eloquent Purnamaitrayaniputra (Furuna), with his gaping mouth. Aniruddha (Anaritsu), who is said to have possessed "divine vision," looks toward the sky, while Mahakasyapa (Maka-kasho) holds something carefully, a mendicant known for his ascetic practice. Ananda (Ananda), with his big ears, is known for his memory, and Katyayana (Kasennen) has a big mouth to explain the Buddha's teachings. Sariputra (Sharihotsu), the first disciple of the Buddha, completed his ascetic training in only 15 days and is known for his intelligence, shown here with his forehead wrinkled. Subhuti (Subodai), who understood sunya (voidness)—the most profound concept in Buddhism—is shown with his head in his hands, looking lost and deep in thought.

The above are the first names as they appeared at the Japan Folk Art Museum in 1939. Both the order and the names have continued to change in many ways since then. The only ones whose positions and names remained unchanged are Sariputra, Mandgalyayana, and Subhuti. And while Purnamaitrayaniputra's name has remained the same, his position has changed.

MUNAKATA emphasized the importance of tailoring his prints to fit the byobu folding screen from early on in his career. The folding screen is a handy device for displaying many works that form one extensive work when joined together or when an artwork covers a large surface area. The Ten Great Disciples of Buddha could be considered MUNAKATA's starting point for this style. While each piece is an independent work of art in and of itself, they can be joined together to form a single screen to an even greater effect. MUNAKATA believed that rhythm was what produced this effect. And at the heart of it all is the cadence of black and white.

The works are arranged in order from most white to most black, and the figures look to the right and left for variety. The artwork would lack rhythm if the figures were all facing toward the center. The world within an artwork can expand with changes brought about by either sustaining or interrupting this rhythm. MUNAKATA would continue to search for ways to create this variety for the rest of his life.



I believe that MUNAKATA was an extremely talented designer with a prodigious eye for balance. He was always thinking about the arrangement of black on white in his work. If a piece spanned multiple works, he considered how best to arrange them. As a result, his finished works are agreeable to look at, and I think that this agreeability is part of what attracts people to his work.

Unlike many printmakers, MUNAKA-TA did not produce a limited number of editions, but printed and signed copies on-demand. In the case of *The Ten Great Disciples*, it seems that he printed dozens of editions from 1939 to 1974 as commissioned. At some point, it was decided that the names and the order of the 1967 version, which once belonged to MUNAKA-TA's private collection, would become the definitive version, and many museums followed suit. Am I the only one who thinks it would be more interesting to have different names for each period and retain the original disciple names, considering the thought he put into them?

Incidentally, I have ascertained that YANAGI SOETSU might have written the names of the disciples on the backs of the screens in the collection of the Japan Society. The names are the same as the work in the collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum printed in 1939. However, their reference numbers are in the general order of *The Ten Great Disciples of* Buddha, so I assume that they were probably added later by researchers. If we put them in order of reference number (from right to left, as is usual in MUNAKATA's works), the color of the robes and direction of the faces would be lost, resulting in a composition far from the rhythmic one that MUNAKATA intended. Therefore, this time, I proposed to exhibit the works in the same order that won MUNAKATA the Grand Prix in the Print Division at the Venice Biennale in 1956.

Looking at MUNAKATA's woodcuts in this way, I feel uneasy, as if I'm denying everything that MUNAKATA ever said, but then was it all a lie? Was there no miracle in his work? There had to have been. Perhaps the greatest miracle was that his woodcuts were saved at all. In April 1945, MUNAKATA evacuated to the town of Fukumitsu in Toyama Prefecture, leaving much of his family's possessions at his home in Tokyo. His wife, CHIYA, who had come to Fukumitsu first with their children, later returned to Tokyo once again after MUNAKATA followed his family to Toyama. She had spent more than a month making plans to send as many packages as possible to Toyama.

One of the packages she made was an English Windsor chair that MUNA-KATA loved, which she packaged using the five woodcuts from *The Ten Great Disciples of Buddha*. Nearly all of the woodcuts of his past works, including the woodcuts of the statues of Fugen and Monju, were burnt to ashes in the Tokyo air raids on May 25, 1945, having been left in an air-raid shelter in his home. The significance of MUNAKATA finding the woodcuts of his ten disciples in the package addressed to him is simply immeasurable.









I ask the reader to compare the bodhisattvas of Fugen and Monju from 1939 with one newly carved in 1948. A different touch is clearly evident here. What would have happened if one of

the ten great disciples had been lost to fire, and only the 1948 woodcut had remained? The balance of the ten would have been destroyed. This is nothing short of a miracle. I cannot help but marvel at MUNAKATA's good fortune. Whenever I think that the two bodhisattvas of Fugen and Monju sacrificed themselves for the sake of the ten disciples, I feel a lump form in the back of my throat.

During his period of evacuation, MU-NAKATA had difficulty obtaining wood to work with. There was an urgent demand for building materials all over Japan, much of which had been burnt to the ground. No wood could be spared for something like woodcut prints, so MUNAKATA carved 17-syllable haiku and 31-syllable tanka poems on wood fragments from construction materials and engraved little illustrations on other scraps of wood. Being strapped for materials taught him to appreciate them that much more, realizing that even the smallest board had a life of its own. When large pieces of wood gradually became available again, he began to think about how much he could carve without wasting precious space.

MUNAKATA called his works Hanga (板画 pictures on a board), which he described as "art work of wood on wood," explaining that he would "listen to the voices within the wood and, through carving, bring them to life." A single line carved into a wooden board can dominate an entire banga. MUNAKATA once said, "If the power of a

single line doesn't support the entire banga and the picture doesn't exude beauty, it cannot be considered great." He spent the better part of 50 years painting before mastering the meaning behind this single line.

MUNAKATA finally found his way with Hanga, which were "born from wood" and utilized the "beauty of the wood," rather than with hanga prints that merely reproduced drawings done by hand. The character for 柵 (saku), which is tacked on to the end of many of his titles, can be interpreted as the tribute paid to temples by devotees on a pilgrimage. MUNAKATA continued to pay tribute with every woodblock he made, each a guidepost along his lifelong path to *Hanga*, as if to fulfill some divine purpose. And again, each of his works is linked together to form a larger picture. It was with this in mind that MUNAKATA chose to use this character in the titles of his works.

MUNAKATA says that, as a child, his body and mind absorbed the sutras he heard his grandmother recite, and he was never able to rid himself of them. A keen ear for language and an underlying sense of religion are the wellsprings of MUNAKATA's creative process, which are also reflected in the meaning behind *hanga* and his philosophy of paying tribute through them. The religiosity felt in MUNAKATA's works stems from his pious devotion to the wood.

YORIKO ISHII, Scholar, Writer, and Granddaughter of SHIKŌ MUNAKATA

SECTION 3: SOUTH GALLERY Mediums of a Master

VITRINE

Α

Set of pens and tools, undated Varied dimensions. Courtesy of YORIKO ISHII.

В

Glazed pottery teacup, undated Earthenware decorated with calligraphy in glaze, 8.5cm × 9.8cm diameter. Collection of Japan Society.

C

Untitled, 1975
Four-page typed letter written by
BEATE SIROTA GORDON, 27.9cm ×
21.6cm. Courtesy of the FAMILY of
BEATE SIROTA GORDON.

D
Untitled, undated
Painting of owls on paper fan, varied dimensions. Courtesy of the FAMILY of BEATE SIROTA GORDON.

E
Untitled, 1965
Publications signed by the artist, varied dimensions. Courtesy of the FAMILY of BEATE SIROTA GORDON.

F
New Year's Card Woodblock, 1958
14.3cm × 8.8cm × 1cm. Courtesy of
YORIKO ISHII.

INNER CIRCLE

G

The Ten Great Disciples of Buddha (Shaka Jūdai Deshi), 1939–1948
Twelve woodblock prints, mounted as hanging scrolls, 98cm × 38.5cm each. Collection of Japan Society.

Two original carved woodblocks for the prints *Kasennen*, *Mokkenren*, *Furuna*, and *Subodai* are on loan from the Munakata Shiko Memorial Museum of Art, displayed here for the first time in the United States.

OUTER CIRCLE

The six categories listed below H–M are described in the texts that follow.

H Self-Portraits

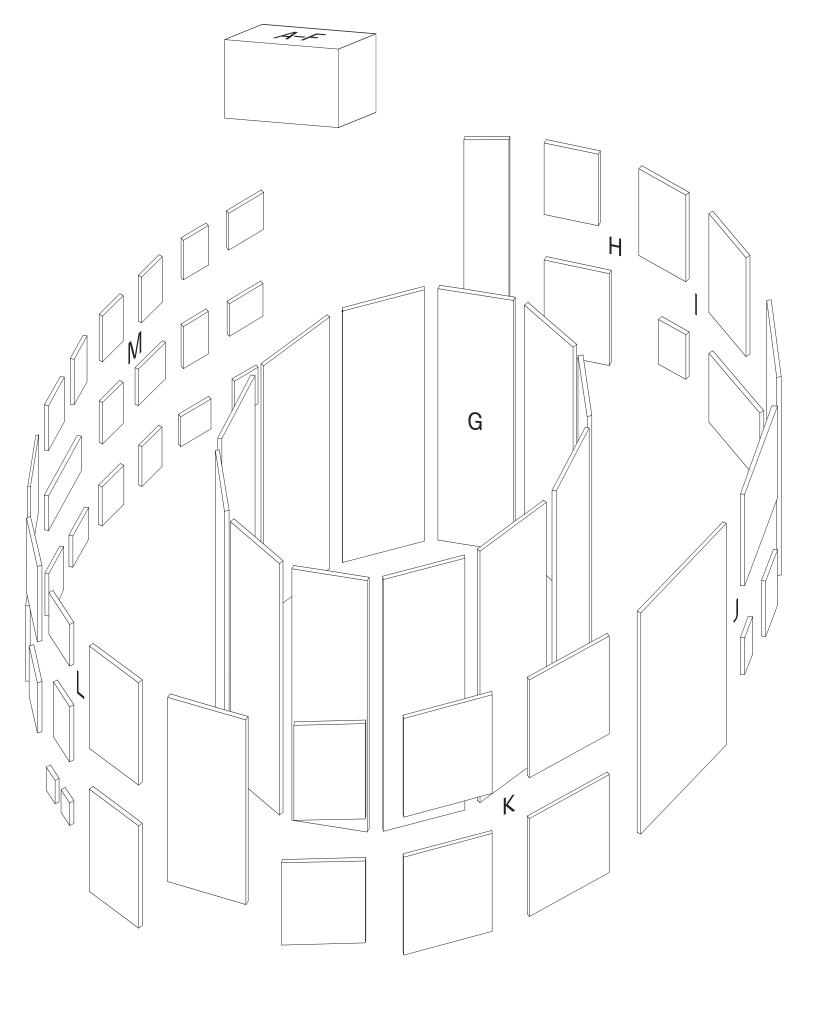
Munakata's New York

J Calligraphy

K Literature, Poetry, and Prose

L Ode to Joy

M Beate Sirota Gordon



The Ten Great Disciples of Buddha (Shaka Jūdai Deshi), 1939/1948

- G01 SAMANTABHADRA-BODHISATTVA (Fugen-bosatsu) Samantabhadra embodies the teaching, meditation, and practice of Buddha.
- G02 MANDGALYĀYANA
 (Mokkenren)
 Mandgalyāyana
 had magical powers.
 He served as one
 of Buddha's chief
 attendants.
- G03 SUBHŪTI (Subodai)
 Subhūti was distinguished for his lucid insights into the meaning of the void.
- G04 MAHĀKĀŚYAPA (Maka-kashō)
 Mahākāśyapa was a disciplinarian.
 Exceptional merit earned him a goldencolored body.
- G05 SĀRIPUTRA (Sharihotsu) Sāriputra was the wisest of Buddha's disciples.
- G06 ANIRUDDHA
 (Anaritsu)
 Aniruddha, once
 a great romantic,
 went blind by
 denying himself
 sleep. He then
 gained "the miraculous eye."
- G07 UPĀLI (Ubari) Upāli was born in slavery. He later compiled the monastic laws.
- G08 *RĀHULA*(*Ragora*)

 Rāhula was the
 Buddha's son.

G09 KĀTYĀYANA (Kasennen) Kātyāyana was a gifted scholar and a skilled debater.

G10 PŪRNAMAITRĀYA-NIPUTRA (Furuna) Pūrnamaitrāyaniputra was the Buddha's most eloquent speaker and chief preacher.

G11 ĀNANDA
(Ananda)
Ānanda, the
Buddha's favorite
disciple, was gifted
with extraordinary
memory.

G12 MAÑJUŚRI-BODHISATTVA (Monju-bosatsu) Mañjuśri embodies the knowledge, wisdom, and enlightenment of the Buddha.

SELF-PORTRAITS

MUNAKATA often devised his own idiosyncratic, invented language to describe his techniques and processes. The artist coined the term jihanzō (which literally translates as "self board image") to describe his woodcut self-portraits, the earliest of which were made in 1959 in New Yorkthe artist's first time in the United States—while a fellow in the Print Artist's Program at Japan Society. Among them is Self-portrait by the Hudson River ("Hadoson"-gawa Jihanzō), created in the artist's temporary studio in the former Park Crescent Hotel on Riverside Drive and 87th Street.

Other prints on view depict MUNA-KATA's initial experimentation with lithography in the spring of 1959 in Philadelphia, the city where the first lithographic press in the U.S. was founded. It was there that MUNAKA-TA met the renowned lithographer ARTHUR FLORY, who produced the self-portrait seen here along with the nearby Nudes (1959). (The circular FLORY stamp is visible on the front of the works.) The sunflowers portrayed in another self-portrait were inspired by VINCENT VAN GOGH, who was a self-taught artist like MUNAKATA and whom MUNAKATA deeply admired and credited as the reason he initially pursued a career as an artist.

MUNAKATA'S NEW YORK

MUNAKATA visited the United States on four occasions over the course of his lifetime: 1959, 1964, 1967, and 1974. The first and longest of his trips, in 1959, was at the behest of Japan Society. The artist made several works expressly for the institution during his extended stay of nearly seven months in New York City, a place he affectionately referred to as his second "home." It included solo exhibitions in Boston and New York, a touring series of lectures across the country, as well as the opening of the Munakata Gallery at 19 West 46th Street-the first instance in the U.S. that a Japanese artist's works were given an entire gallery. It was also in 1959 that MUNAKA-TA first saw in person the works of PICASSO, including *Guernica* (1937), which the artist is said to have looked at for many hours.

When MUNAKATA visited New York, he would often paint from memory nostalgic landscapes of his hometown in Aomori, a tradition that defines most views of nature in this period. Several works displayed here are rare in their deviation from that convention. A landscape that might recall, upon first look, mountain scenery in Japan is in fact the Catskills of upstate New York. This freely drawn watercolor painting with calligraphy reads, "I took brush in hand while in NY. The rhythm of the wind in the mountains is clear, pure, celestial."

A favorite subject of MUNAKATA's, the owl motif is an early and recurring subject for the artist since at least 1938 when they were featured in an ink painting. MUNAKATA incorporated owls on a set of fusuma (sliding door panels) that he painted for the Higashi Honganji Temple in Tokyo (1961). Like the owl, the hawk appears frequently in his work. In 1929, MU-NAKATA climbed Mt. Hakkoda in Aomori with a mountaineer who blew a whistle at the summit and a hawk appeared. To MUNAKATA, it was the manifestation of god. The 1959 sumi ink Hawk on a Rock includes calligraphy that translates to, "Painted for Japan Society by SHIKO MUNAKATA on Riverside Drive during my visit to New York."

CALLIGRAPHY

While MUNAKATA is primarily known as a printmaker, he was also one of the most respected calligraphers of his day. A rare, horizontal calligraphic work, *Michi* (1959) or "road," "path," "the way [forward]," is an exemplar of MUNAKATA's style in calligraphy: it is powerful and has a vitality to it, filling the canvas nearly completely. Executed with exuberant vigor, drips and splatters of ink are evident in the final work, expressing MUNAKATA's privileging of energy and emotion in its creation.

These are features of all his calligraphies, including *Avatamsaka* (*Kegon*) from circa 1959. The *Kegon*, which

translates to "a garland [of flowers]," refers to the Buddhist sacred text *Gandavyuha-sutra*, an important sutra in China in the 7th and 8th centuries, and in Korea and Japan after the 8th century. Today, the *Kegon* school in Japan is centered at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara. *Kegon* was MUNAKATA's favorite Buddhist sutra, and he made it the subject of his first work devoted to a religious theme, *The Pantheon of the Gandavyuha-sutra* (1936).

LITERATURE, POETRY, AND PROSE

One of the most well-known and recited of all Buddhist holy texts is the Heart Sutra. MUNAKATA was a devout follower of Buddhism, and the sutra was an inspiration for several works in which he commingled excerpts of the text with his own imagery. Represented here are four of the 16 woodcuts from *The Heart Sutra*. Second Series (Tsuikai Shingyo-sho) of 1957. (MUNAKATA first attempted to illustrate the Heart Sutra in 1941, but this version was never completed.) Whereas previous works related to the sutras depicted the standard Buddhas, remarkably only three images of Buddha appear in this series. The remaining 13 prints portray nature itself—bats, grapes, a weasel, owls as a manifestation of the deities. As was typical for MUNAKATA, he did not create preliminary sketches but instead carved the boards directly from the pictures in his mind's eye using a single chisel.

In addition to religious texts, prose and poetry had long fascinated MU-NAKATA. The artist illustrated, and often contributed his own writings, to magazines, journals, and publications, including JUN'ICHIRŌ TANIZA-KI's (1886–1965) novel *Kagi (The Key)* of 1956, and SATO ICHIEI's In Praise of Nature (1936), a poetic sequence that lauds the traditional Japanese alphabet poem, Iroha. While in New York, MUNAKATA made a pilgrimage to the poet WALT WHITMAN's (1819–1892) childhood home on Long Island, and created a series of prints featuring poems from Leaves of Grass along with a print depicting the WHIT-MAN home.

ODE TO JOY

MUNAKATA greatly admired LUD-WIG VAN BEETHOVEN and, in particular, the final movement of his choral Symphony No. 9, *Ode to Joy*, a song about peace and freedom for all people. The humming heard throughout the galleries is MUNAKATA's own voice in a recording of the artist enraptured by *Ode to Joy* while he worked.

MUNAKATA created several works in honor of the German composer, including *In Praise of Great Joy: On Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Kanki-shō)*, a woodcut print from 1952 that was exhibited as part of a group of works at the 1956 Venice Biennale, for which the artist won the grand prize in the print division.

BEATE SIROTA GORDON

Coordinating MUNAKATA's visits to New York and accompanying the artist on his various trips around the country was BEATE SIROTA GORDON (1923–2014), a women's rights advocate and important contributor to the writing of the Constitution of Japan following World War II. GORDON was also the founding Director of Performing Arts at Japan Society and she served as MUNAKATA's interpreter, ultimately becoming a lifelong friend.

On view are archival photographs of MUNAKATA with SIROTA GORDON and her family, including SIROTA GORDON and the artist after completing his first lithograph in 1967, the pair at the opening of his exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum that same year, and an image of MUNAKATA painting in New York's Riverside Park in 1959, that is displayed next to the final painting.

CAPTIONS AND FOOTNOTES

COVER

Shikō Munakata, Yokkai-chi: Industrial Complex (Konbināto), from Munakata's Tōkaidō Road Series (Tōkaidō Munakata Hanga), 1964 (detail). Photograph by Nicholas Knight and Eline Mul. Collection of Japan Society. © Shikō Munakata

GALLERY 1

Munakata's *Tōkaidō Road Series* (*Tōkaidō Munakata Hanga*), 1964.
Photographs by Nicholas Knight. Collection of Japan Society. © Shikō Munakata

- 04 Yokohama: A Noshishaped Cloud (Noshi-gumo)
- 12 Mishima: Teahouse Among the Maples (Kaede Chaya)
- 14 Hara: A Line at the Foot of Mt. Fuji (Suso Ichimonji)
- 20 Shizuoka: National Flag at a Prefectural Office (Chōkokki)
- 28 Fukuroi: Kireto Canal (Kireto Bori)
- 34 Futagawa: Rock Bodhisattva (Iwa Bosatsu)
- 44 Yokkaichi: Industrial Complex (Konbināto)
- 60 Moriguchi: Sudden Rain Shower at the Yodogawa River (Yodagawa Kyū-u)

Footnotes in excerpts from Munakata's diary on Tokaido:

- Printmaking artist Shimozawa Kihatiro
- 2 Tokunaga Osamu, Editor-in-chief at Kokusai Shashin Jyōhō Sh
- 3 Munakata's wife
- 4 The old capital of the region
- 5 A deep affection toward woodblocks

GALLERY 2

Shikō Munakata, *Eulogy to Shōkei.* (Shōkeishō), 1945. Photographs by Nicholas Knight. Collection of Japan Society. © Shikō Munakata

- Morning Chrysanthemum (Asagiku)
- Wild Cherry Blossoms (Yamatozakura)
- The Human World (Shigan)
- Mandarin Duck (Enō)

Image captions for *Hanga:* Pictures on a Board essay

- Shikō Munakata carving a woodblock
- Shikō Munakata with his granddaughter Yoriko Ishii. Courtesy of Yoriko Ishii
- Shikō Munakata with his granddaughter Yoriko Ishii. Courtesy of Yoriko Ishii
- The ten disciples listed according to their virtues. 1–5 were carved on one side of each woodblock while 6–10 were carved on the opposite sides.
- 1 Sharitsu
- 2 Mokkenren
- 3 Maka-kasho
- 4 Anaritsu
- 5 Subodai
- 6 Furuna7 Kasennen
- 8 Ubari
- 9 Ragora
- 10 Ananda
 - Shikō Munakata doing his morning warmup exercise: Calligraphy, NYC. © Béla Kalman. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
- The two original bodhisattvas, Fugen and Monju, on the left from 1939.

 Munakata re-carved and revised them (right) in 1948 after the woodblocks were destroyed.

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#SEEINGMUNAKATA

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