

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

For immediate release

May 21, 2004

EXHIBITION: *The Art of Stories Told* reveals visual versions of Chinese and Japanese tales

June 5-Sept. 5, 2004

Asian Gallery

MEDIA CONTACT

Maria Roman Navarro, Curator of Asian Art, 785.0143, mroman@ku.edu

Bill Woodard, Director of Communications, 785.864.0142, dradoowb@ku.edu

PROMOTIONAL IMAGES ATTACHED (caption info at end of release)

Lawrence, KS— Beginning June 5 and continuing through Sept. 5, the Spencer's Asian Gallery will feature an exhibition organized by Veronica de Jong, Carpenter Foundation intern in Asian Art. *The Art of Stories Told* is drawn entirely from the Spencer's renowned Asian art collection, which contains a bountiful variety of paintings, sculptures and prints that either tell stories or parts of stories, or represent subjects whose stories have been passed on from one generation to the next, even spreading to neighboring countries. The exhibition seeks to introduce museum visitors to popular stories that reflect the diversity of Chinese and Japanese literary and oral traditions from all levels of society. It also aims to highlight some of the myriad techniques used by artists and artisans to tell these stories.

These stories, whether religious, military, comical, supernatural, or historical, were popularly transformed into a visual language for a great variety of purposes. They served educational, decorative, propagandistic, and morally uplifting purposes and the details of each illustration and way of representing each version varied over time and in each region. Some stories were illustrated with a single scene or figure while other more complex tales have been conveyed through numerous scenes.

For instance, stories of the heroism of Japan's samurai were a rich source for literature, plays and the visual arts. The image accompanying this story is a print illustrating numerous *rōnin* (masterless samurai) storming a mansion at night in order to avenge their master's forced suicide. During the Edo period (1615-1868), many looked nostalgically to earlier periods when

samurai were thought to uphold virtues like loyalty and bravery. During this time, though, they were criticized for drinking excessively, gambling and shaming their class. This print, in fact, depicts the final act of the play *Chūshingura* that espoused allegiance and valor while also offering great entertainment by featuring love, comedy and action. This popular play was translated into prints many times by leading print designers, including Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) and Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1864). The visual drama and rich underlying cultural associations of this print is just one example of the many visually engaging works of art preserved in the Spencer Museum's collection.

IMAGE INFORMATION

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Japan, Edo Period (1615-1868)

The Night Attack

Color woodcut

William Bridges Thayer Memorial, 1928.7436

-30-

Spencer Museum of Art
The University of Kansas
1301 Mississippi St
Lawrence 66045-7500
785.864.4710

Also find the Spencer...

- On the Web: www.spencerart.ku.edu
- E-mail: spencerart@ku.edu

Gallery hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., & Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Thurs. 10a.m.–9 p.m.

Sun. Noon–5 p.m.

Closed Monday

- Free parking in Lot 91 after 5 p.m. on weekdays and all day weekends, excepting home football games.
- Parking garage adjacent to Kansas Union is \$1 per hour weekdays, free on Saturdays and Sundays (but unavailable on home football games).