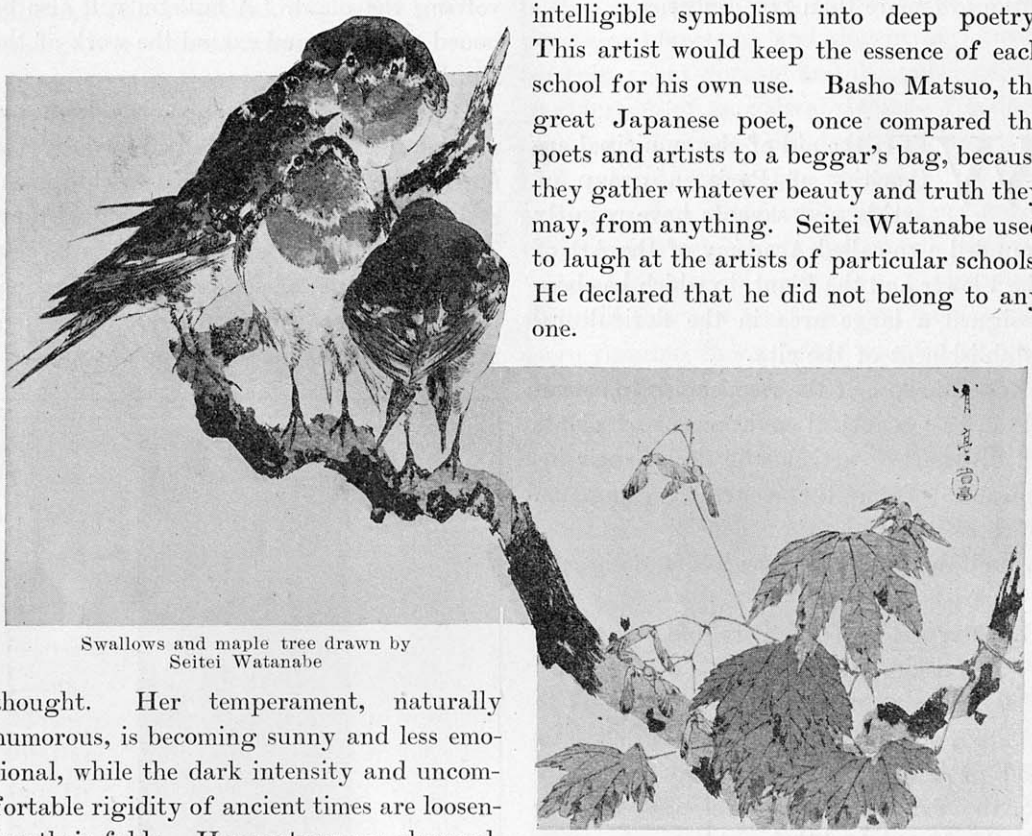
SEITEI WATANABE. BY YONE NOGUCHI

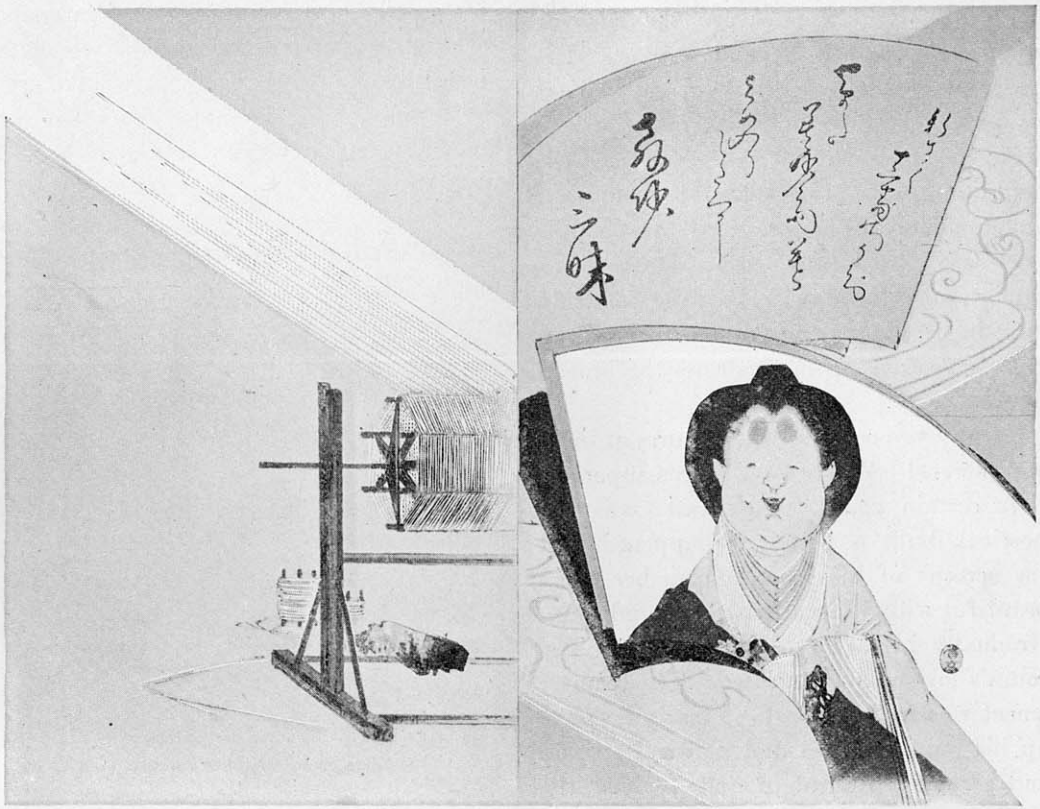
THE modern Japan found a satisfactory expression of art in Seitei Watanabe. The imagination of Japan has been growing wider and wider under the influence of Western thought. Her temperament, naturally humorous, is becoming sunny and less emotional, while the dark intensity and uncomfortable rigidity of ancient times are loosening their folds. Her customs are changed. However, she is pathetically clinging to her old traditions with a somewhat apologetic smile. What vast learning she has gained in the last thirty years! Happily, she is breaking away from the prejudices which she unreasonably cherished for centuries and centuries. Such is Japan. Such is the art of Seitei Watanabe.



Swallows and maple tree drawn by Seitei Watanabe

You will find here and there in Watanabe the sure trace of a certain classic school; a graceful solitariness, like that of Tosa; a far away imaginativeness, like that of Kano; the memory, as it were, of an old lover, which will not be put aside. Again, in Watanabe, the old conventionalism turns delightfully into a hint of dignity, and unintelligible symbolism into deep poetry. This artist would keep the essence of each school for his own use. Basho Matsuo, the great Japanese poet, once compared the poets and artists to a beggar's bag, because they gather whatever beauty and truth they may, from anything. Seitei Watanabe used to laugh at the artists of particular schools. He declared that he did not belong to any one.

Art is not the expression of one school, but the interpretation of the world and life. It should be universal. Some years since we used to despise the artists of Ukio-ye ("Floating World Pictures"), calling them artisans. We denounced their art as vulgarity. But Watanabe rushed among them, carrying his high ideals and superbly



Design for the book cover of Bimyo Yama's novel: "Kyoshi no Samma" (For Teaching's Sake)

trained hands. He said art was nothing if it was not an expression of our human life. He applied his best art to depicting subjects common in streets and home. He put his hand to book illustrations.

He is the great leader of the illustrators to-day. How our old artists persisted in drawing only the scenery of mountains and rivers! How they protected themselves from approach to the every-day subject of human life!

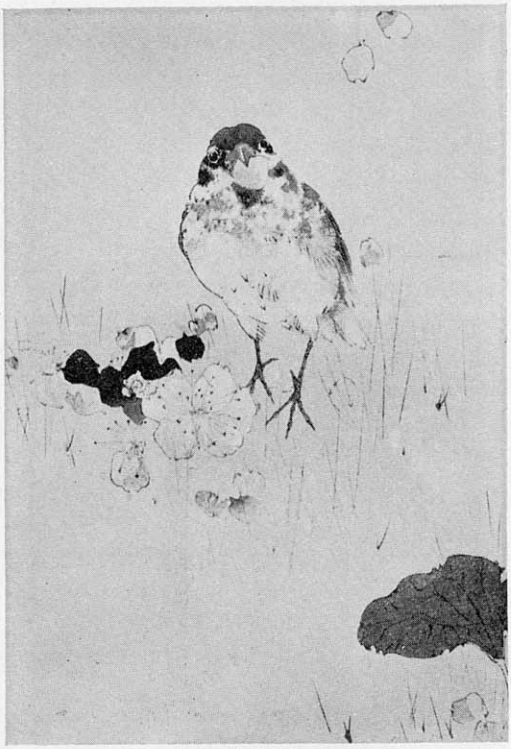
The designers were not classed with the "artists" some years ago. Watanabe, who never has any prejudice, tried at once to spread his own wings into the designing art. He was commissioned by "Kosho Kaisha" (a chinaware and lacquer-work factory) in 1875, to work for the advancement of design. Nearly all the best designs of chinaware or lacquer work which are seen in the Japanese shops in this country are from his originals. Sosuke Namikawa made him a head designer for his cloisonné factory. The reputation which the Japanese cloisonné has gained abroad is largely due to his art. He has received a hundred medals from various societies and expositions.

He is the most versatile artist in subject as well as treatment, that Japan has ever produced. He is authoritative also in the historical picture. His art made an epoch, it is said, when he returned from France, some

ten years ago. He learned the laws of perspective, and light and shadow. His clever adaptation never shows crudity. That he never exposes the Western influences abruptly in his choicest art. What a well-bred atmosphere in his picture! And what an abundance of suggestion! His single lines are charmingly sure. However, I cannot understand why he falls suddenly into the hereditary formalism of making an impossible face, when he draws the human figure.

If only you could see his pictures of birds and flowers! Where have we his superior?

A certain count, whose taste was not poetical, built a villa. It happened that the screens of his private chamber were beautiful with Watanabe's fishes and lotos. Gradually his art worked a charm. The count's love of art increased. His temperament was soon pacified. Finally he gave up his hunting guns and political speech, and became a student of Seitei. Now the count is known as an artist. It is, as I hear, a story that he tells with great delight.



Drawn by Seitei Watanabe

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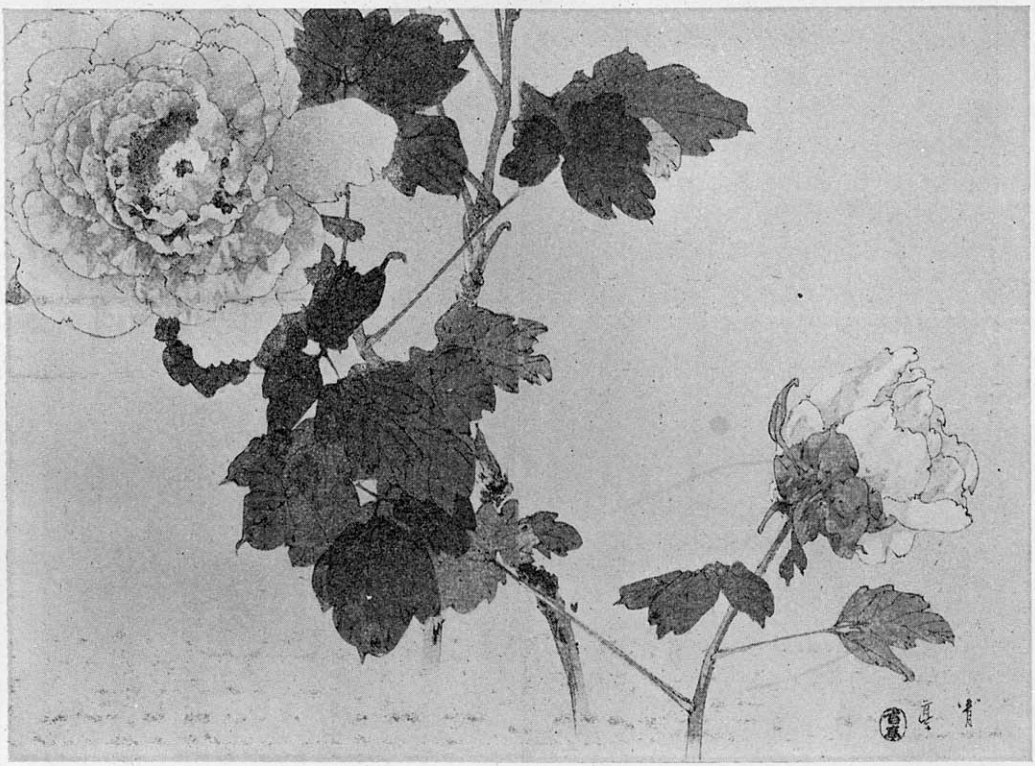
Seitei Watanabe counts the Russian and Italian ministers to Japan among his chief admirers. It has been a custom of foreign travelers in Japan for some years to secure Watanabe's pictures. His art demands a high price. A picture which he can dash off in ten minutes commands more than fifty dollars in American gold.

Watanabe studied under Yosai Kikuchi, one of the greatest masters, who has been dead now some years. He was born in Tokyo, some fifty-five years ago. He served in a certain shop as an errand boy until he was sixteen. His brother, who was keen to perceive his genius, assured his place in the world of art.



Peonies drawn by Seitei Watanabe

THE UKIO-YE SCHOOL OF JAPANESE ART (1700-1867)

TOWARD the middle of the seventeenth century the first faint traces of an influence of Western pictorial art became palpable. The artist, Iwasa Matahei, was probably one of the first who became interested in Occidental laws of composition, his knowledge being gathered largely from stray copper engravings which the Portuguese and Dutch traders had brought with them to Japan.

Although these experiments had at the start no decided effect on the Japanese style, they helped to free it more and more from the shackles of Chinese tradition. The artists were initiated into the laws of perspective and foreshortening; becoming acquainted with the study from nature and life as practised by Western artists.

Iwasa Matahei, who became famous about 1640, was the first Japanese painter who tried to represent realistic scenes. One of the common people, he threw himself wholeheartedly into study of the many entertaining phases of simple life. The idyl of a rustic love, the sports of children, the dance, the songs, the display of crowded marketplaces, and also the somewhat shadier sides of life: these apepaled to him, overwhelmed his enthusiasm and captured his dreams. Such subjects justify the title of "Floating World Pictures."

—*From Japanese Arts by Sadakichi Hartmann*