Ranka-fu Orchid Woodblock Prints



Woodblock Print, Rank-Fu Orchid Series

"*Ranka-Fu is a series of woodblock prints showcasing the best of botanical illustration with a Japanese sensibility. Rank-Fu orchid prints are exceptionally notable for their painterly quality. Today, the Ranka-Fu orchid series is considered some of the finest Japanese botanical woodblock prints ever produced*"

Blessed with an inexhaustible supply of courage and curiosity, Shotaro Kaga, the legendary Japanese business leader and beer baron was climbing mountains in Java in 1917 when he fell in love with orchids. Over the next fifty years he devoted himself to collecting, growing, and developing new hybrids of the flower at his Villa Oyamazaki, which he built in Kyoto.



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Beginning in the late 1930s, he commissioned the painter Ikeda Zuigetsu, the leading botanical artist of the time, to make original color paintings of over 300 examples of the species in his collection. To share the orchids with a wider audience and bring some beauty to the Japanese public after World War II, he had the best-known craftsmen of the day reproduce the paintings in richly colored woodblock prints which brought together the best of botanical illustration and Japanese artistic sensibility. The result became known as the Ranka-fu series, which was published in 1946.

Unfortunately, the artist, Ikeda Zuigetsu passed on before his paintings became available to a wider audience. The wood blocks for the Ranka-fu series were carved by Oiwa Gasendo with the printing executed by Okura Hanbei, both of whom were carefully chosen for the project. The series consisted of 104 images total. 80 were wood block prints and 24 were sketches reproduced in black and white. The prints were made in an extra-large format to insure they would be impressive and dramatic and allow viewers to experience the beauty of the plants more directly.

In terms of the history of wood block printing, they became exceptionally notable for their painterly quality. At first glance they actually appear to be indistinguishable from watercolor paintings. Only 300 sets were ever published. 100 were presented to leading universities and the balance sold. Today, they are considered extremely rare and some of the finest Japanese botanical wood block prints ever produced.



Ikeda Zuigetsu, the leading botanical artist during the 1930s, was commisioned by Shotaro Kaga to make original color paintings of over 300 examples of the species in his collection