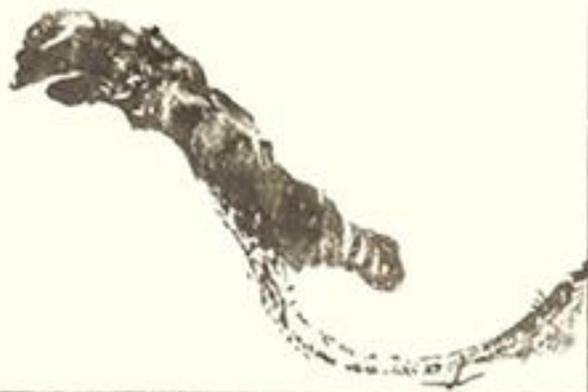


**Suggestive Bird Pictures  
in Japanese Art Books  
from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries**



common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)  
by Masayoshi Kitao, 1814

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## Introduction

According to Isamu Kurita<sup>a</sup>, “the Japanese do not value a work of art as merely a product of human artistry and technical skill. Nor do they look upon artworks as objects created for sensual enjoyment. In the Japanese aesthetic, a work of art is created fundamentally as a **suggestion** (my bolding) of the greater realm of nature, providing a means by which a person, gazing upon the work or taking it in hand, can come to appreciate greater truths that otherwise are beyond human ken.”. These statements help explain why many Japanese artists only **suggested** the external form of the objects they drew by simplifying their shape and colors. This **suggestive** art can be divided into three categories based on the extent to which shape and color were simplified:

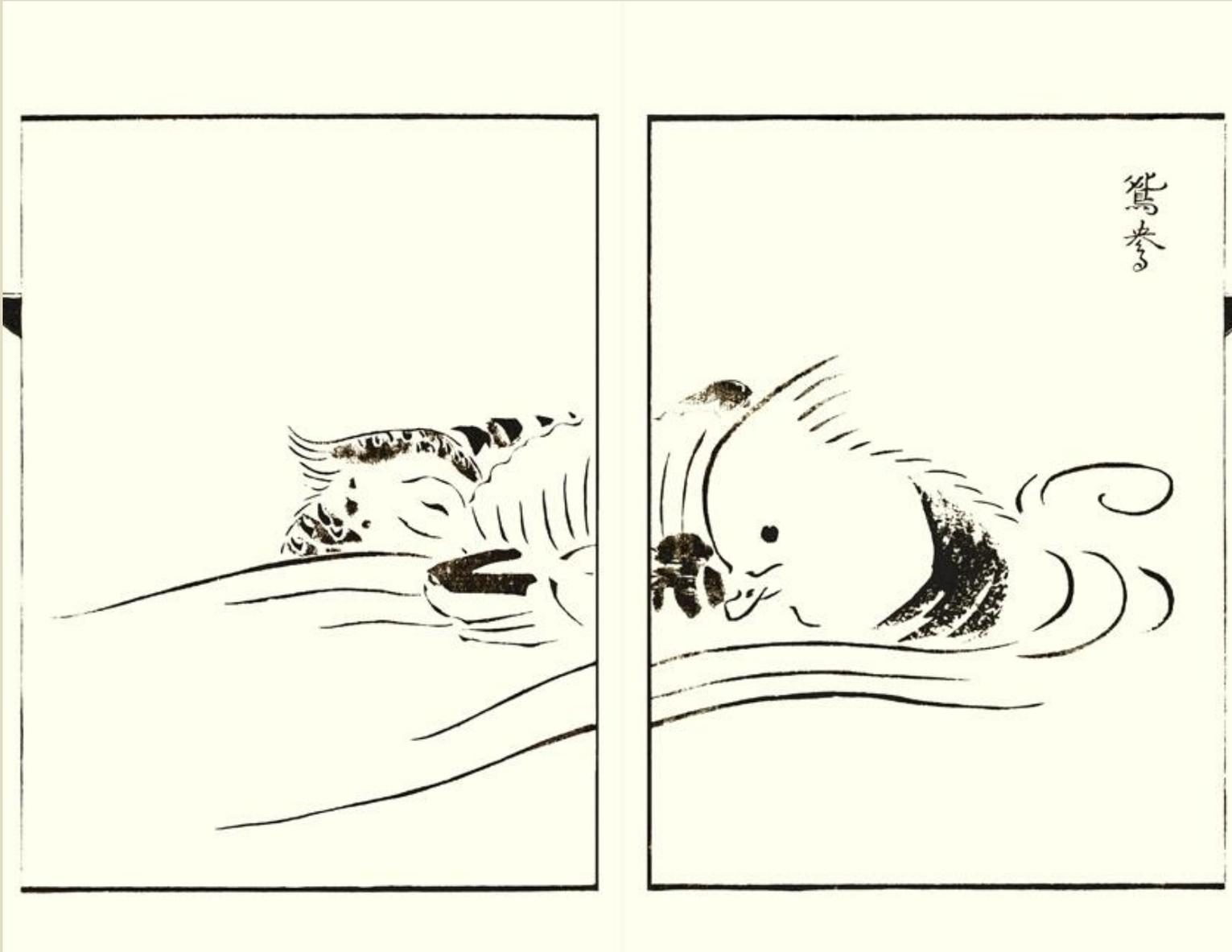
1. **Incomplete shape, only shades of gray** – the outline of an object’s shape was only partly completed and the object’s true colors were replaced with shades of gray.
2. **Complete but distorted shape, only shades of gray** – an object’s shape was completely outlined but it was purposely distorted to emphasize one or more of the object’s characteristic features and the object’s true colors were replaced with shades of gray.
3. **Complete but distorted shape, partial color** – an object’s shape was completely outlined but it was purposely distorted to emphasize one or more of the object’s characteristic features and some, but not all, of the object’s true colors were shown.

Four examples of each of these three categories of **suggestive** art are presented in this virtual exhibition. These examples were chosen from twelve 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Japanese art books published to illustrate this style of art. All twelve books are included in the Reader Collection of Japanese Art. This collection focused on Japanese animal art so birds are the subjects of all twelve pictures.

<sup>a</sup> Kurita, Isamu. 2005. Japanese Art and the Japanese View of Nature. [www.moa-inter.or.jp/english/setsugekka/setsu-kurita.html](http://www.moa-inter.or.jp/english/setsugekka/setsu-kurita.html)

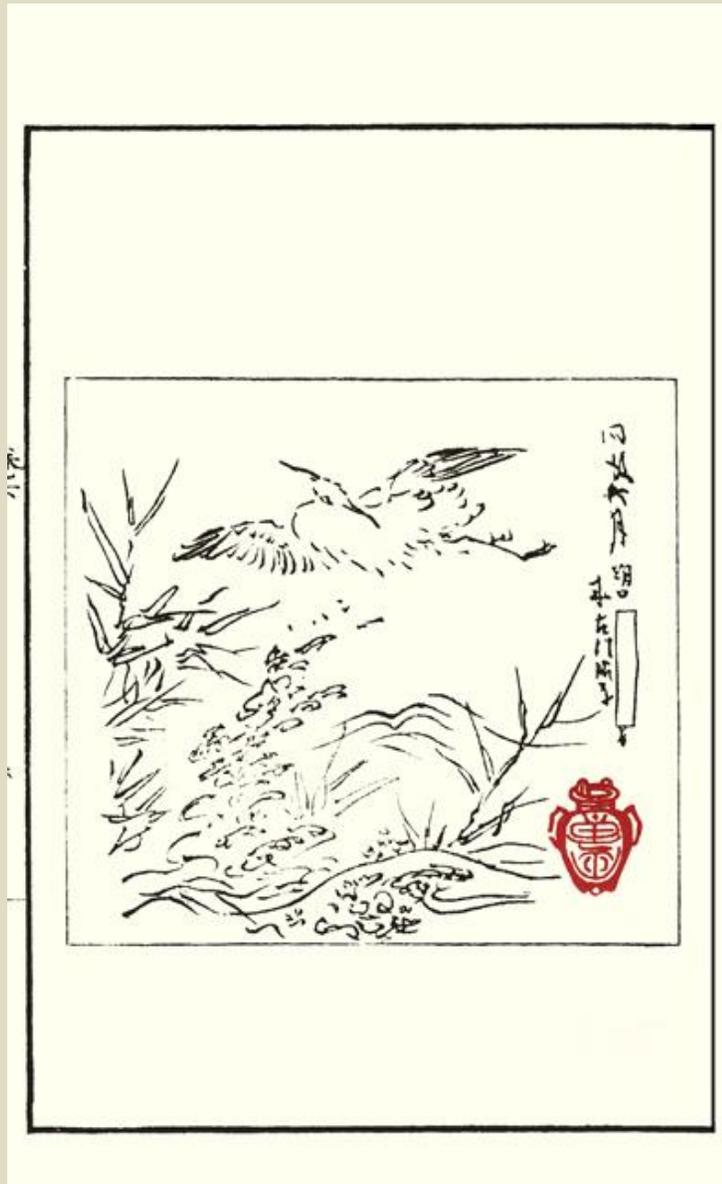
**Incomplete shape, only shades of gray**

Mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*) included in Gahō Hikketsu (Brushwork as a Principle of Painting), published in 1799.



**Incomplete shape, only shades of gray**

Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) by Tan'yu Kanō, included in *Shūchin Gafu* (Picture Album of a Collection of Rare Paintings) edited by Dairō Ishikawa, published in 1802.



**Incomplete shape, only shades of gray**

Little ringed plover (*Charadrius dubius*) by Morikuni Tachibana, included in Unpitsu Soga (Brush Movements in Coarse Painting), published in 1749.



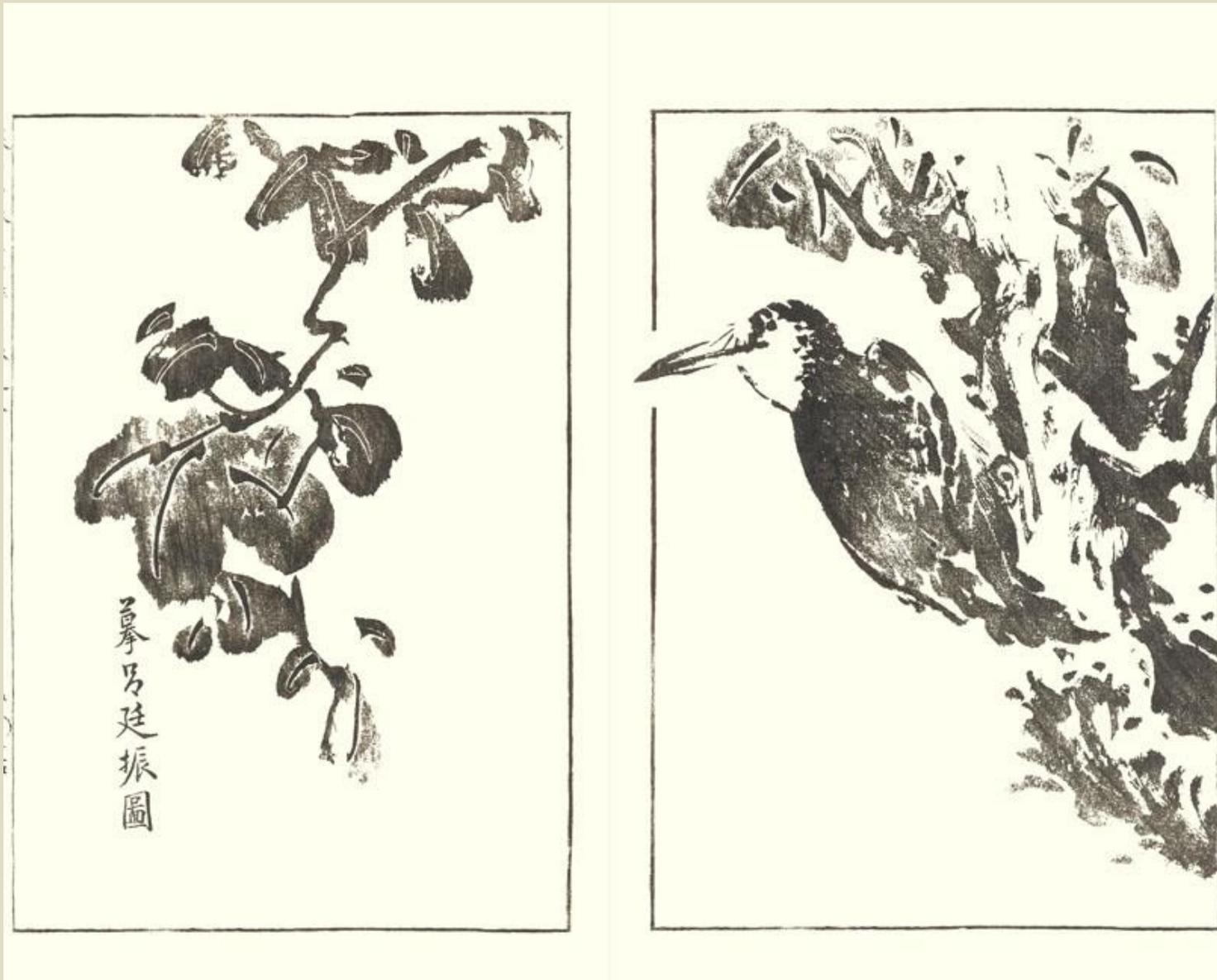
**Incomplete shape, only shades of gray**

Winter wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) by Masayoshi Kitao, included in *Shinki Issō* (Clean Sweep of the Mind), published in 1814.



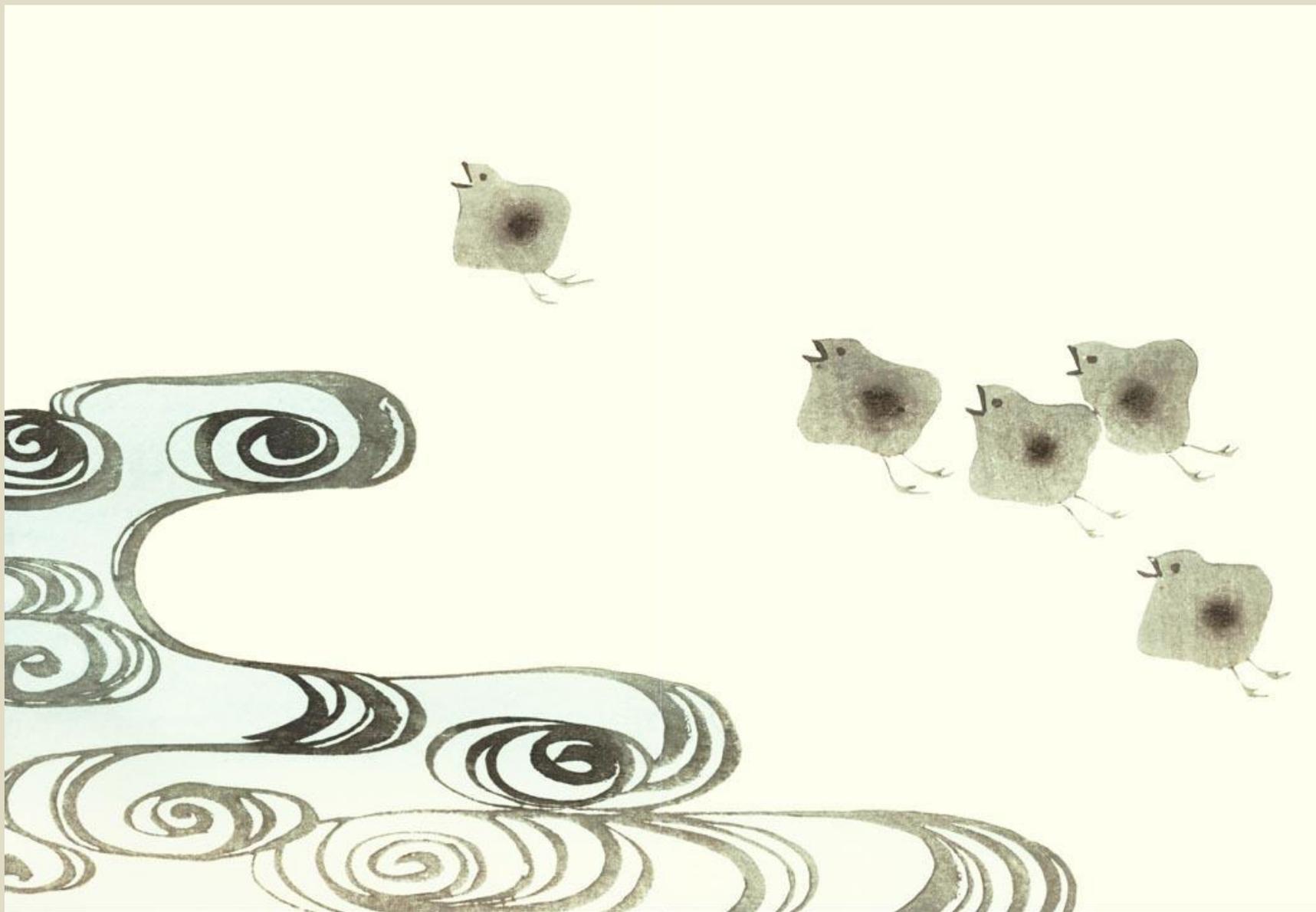
**Complete but distorted shape, only shades of gray**

Greater-spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) by Ryōtai Tatebe, included in *Kanyōsai Gafu* (Picture Album by Kanyōsai), published in 1762.



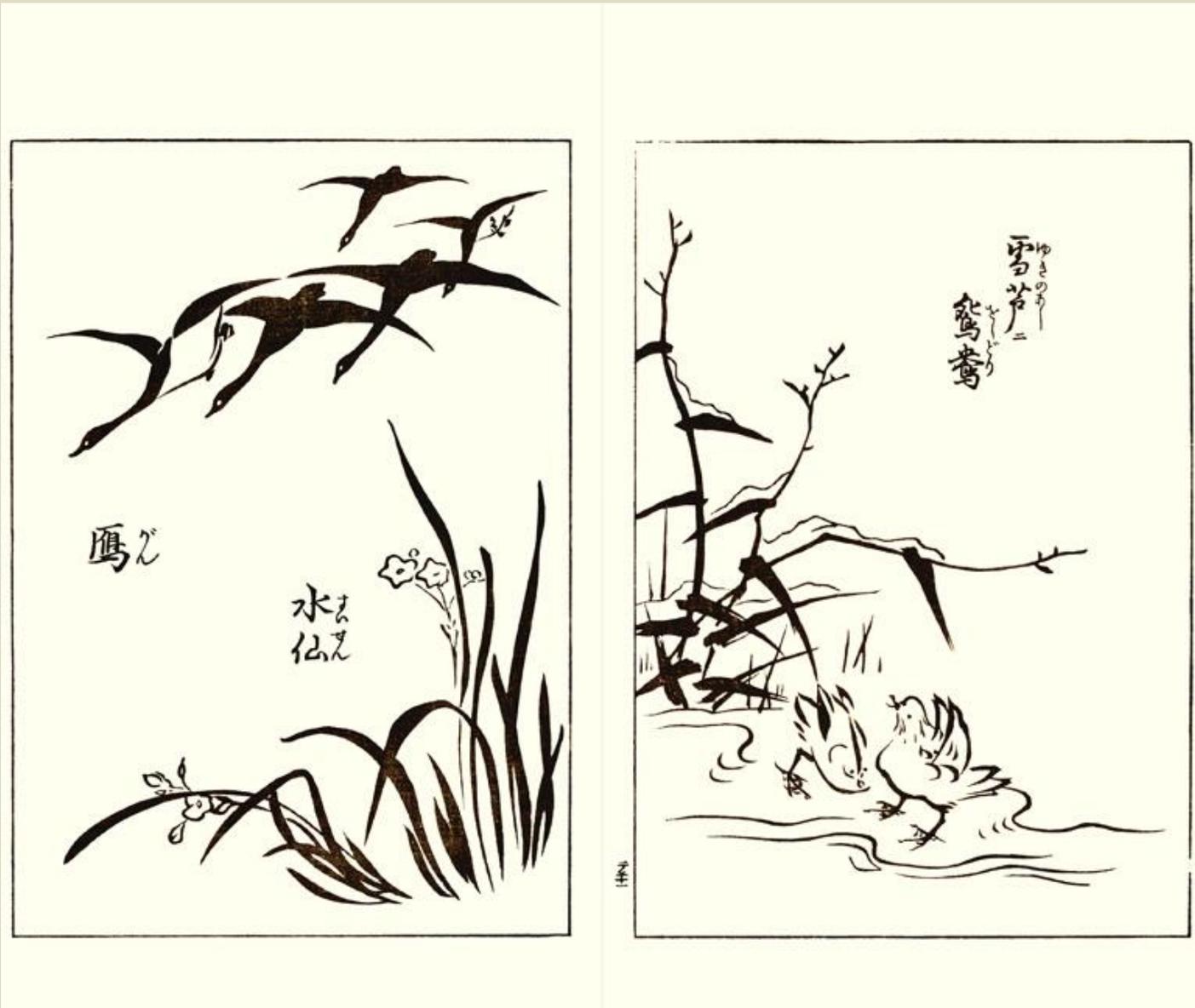
**Complete but distorted shape, only shades of gray**

Little ringed plover (*Charadrius dubius*) by Kōrin Ogata, included in Kōrin Gafu (Picture Album by Kōrin) edited by Hōchū Nakamura, published in 1802.



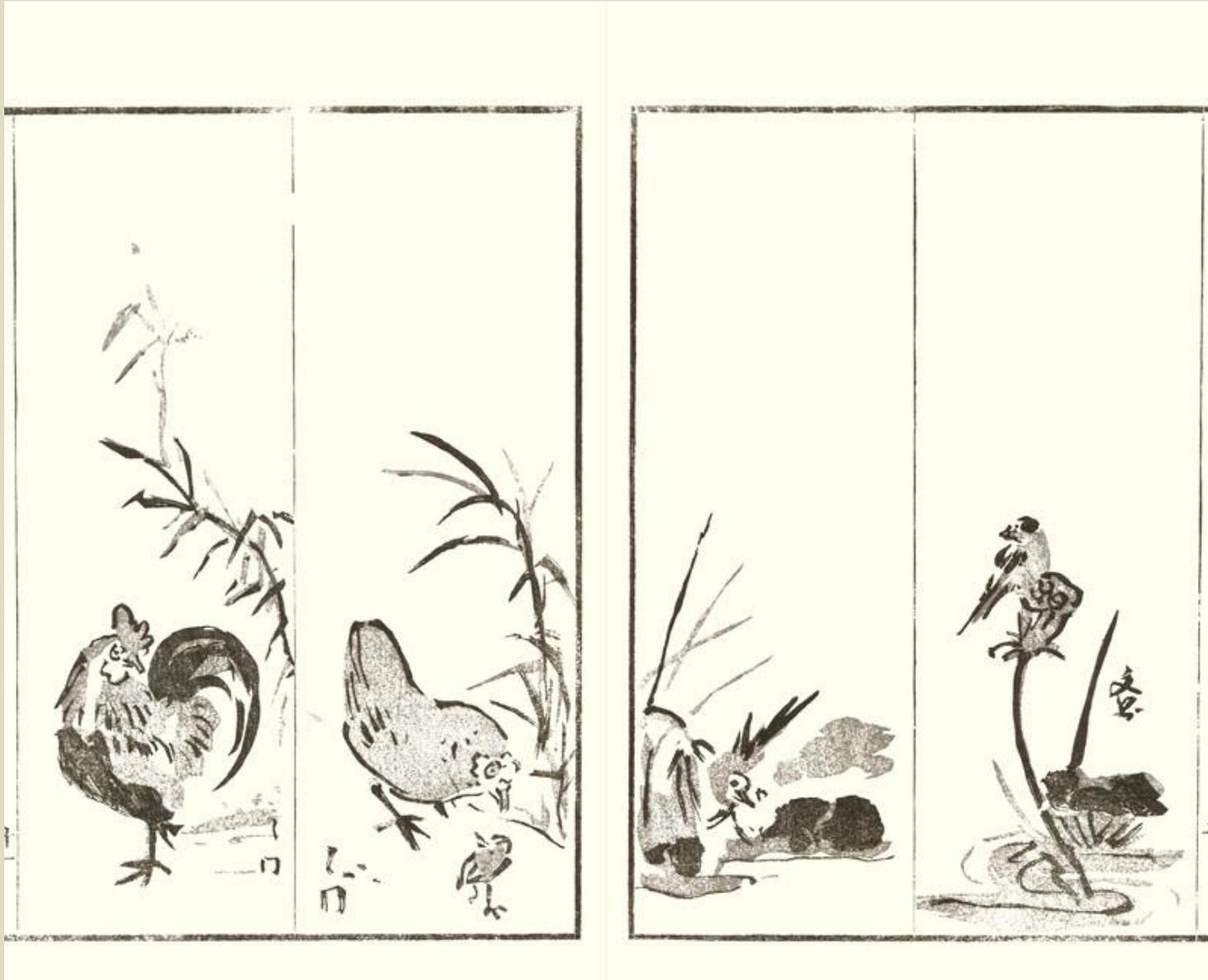
**Complete but distorted shape, only shades of gray**

White-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons*) on left page and mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*) on right page by Kōrin Ogata, included in *Kōrin Manga* (Sketches by Kōrin) edited by Kagei Tatebayashi, published in 1817.



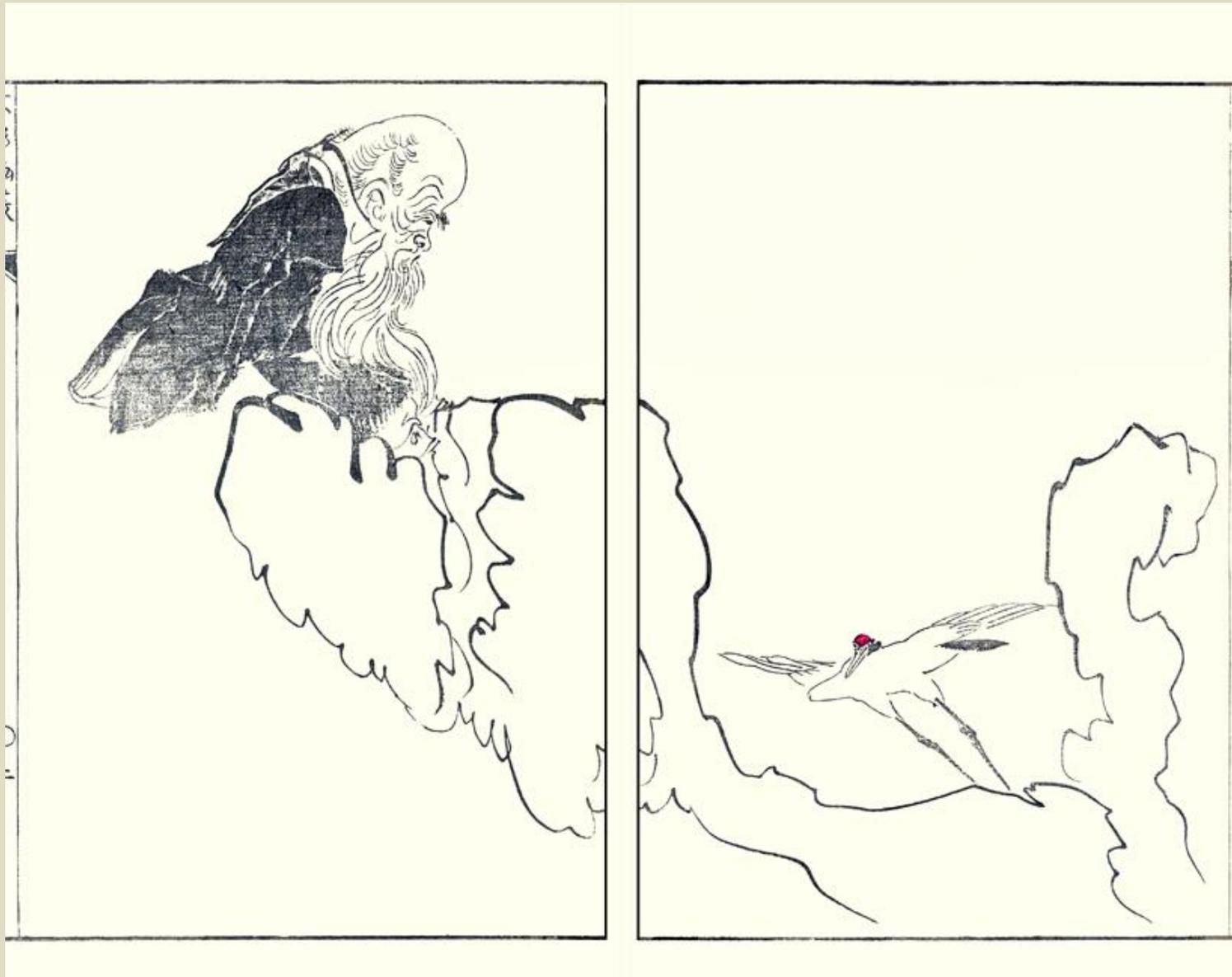
**Complete but distorted shape, only shades of gray**

Left page - domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*), right page - white wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) in left panel and barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) in right panel by Bunchō Tani, included in Bunchō Gafu (Picture Album by Bunchō), published in 1807.



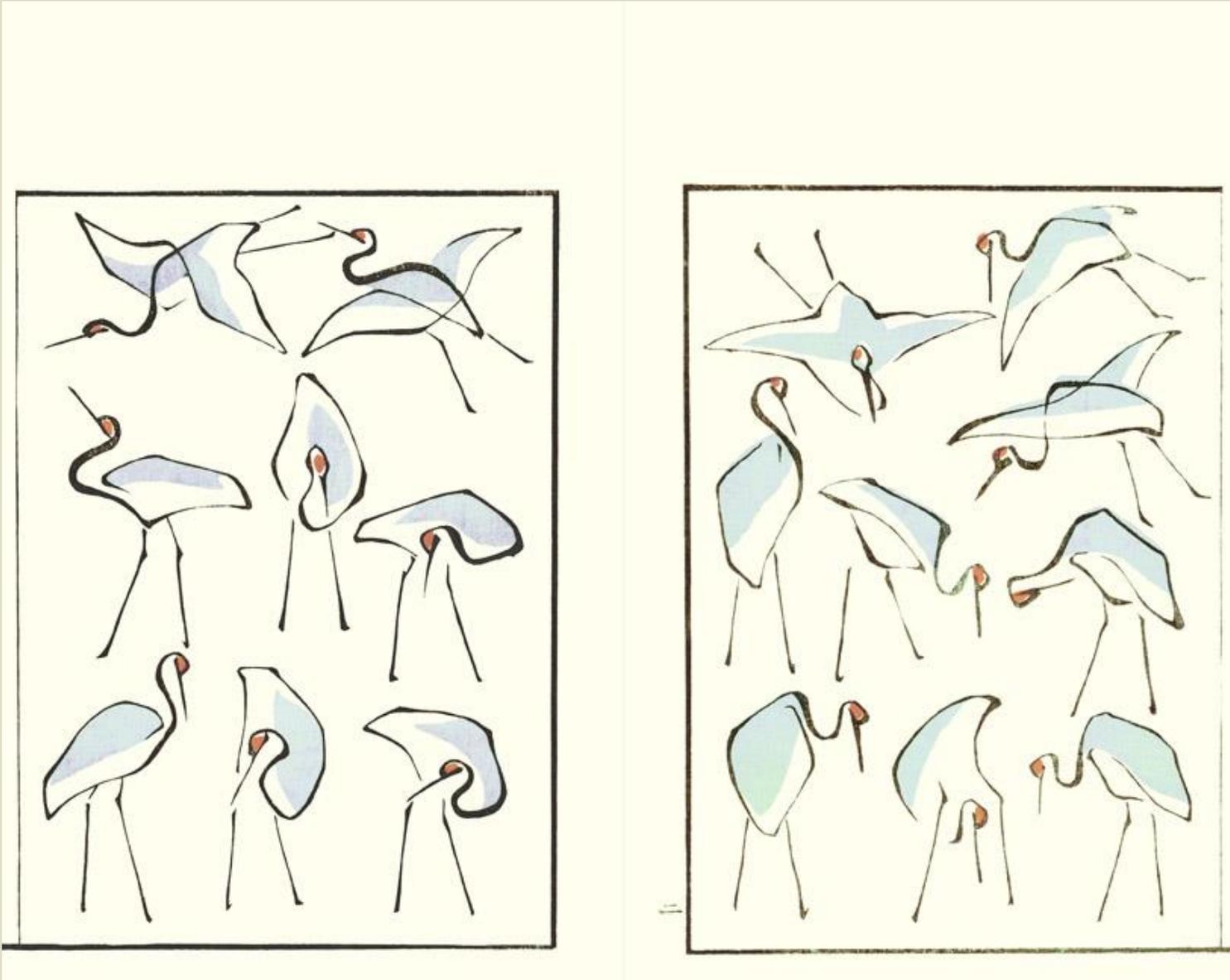
**Complete but distorted shape, partial color**

Red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*) by Gesshō Chō, included in Fukei Gasō (Thicket of Pictures without Shapes), published in 1817.



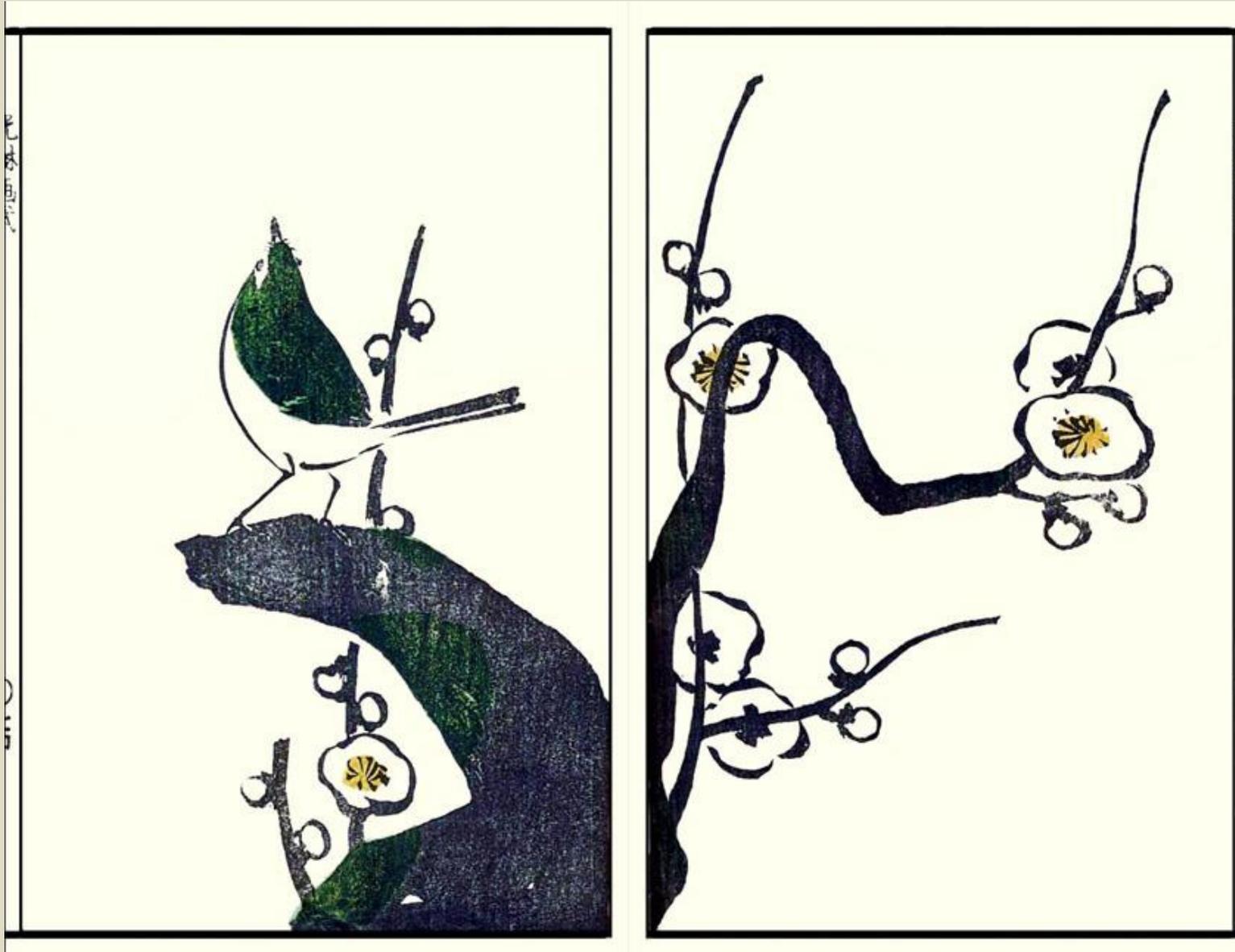
**Complete but distorted shape, partial color**

Red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*) by Hokusai Katsushika, included in Ippitsu Gafu (One-brushstroke Picture Album), published in 1823.



**Complete but distorted shape, partial color**

Japanese bush-warbler (*Cettia diphone*) by Kōrin Ogata, included in *Kōrin Gashiki* (Korin's Style of Painting) edited by Minwa Aikawa, published in 1818.



**Complete but distorted shape, partial color**

Left page – mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) and domestic goose (*Anser cygnoides*), right page – bean goose (*Anser fabalis*) by Masayoshi Kitao, included in *Chōjū Ryakuga Shiki* (Drawing Birds and Animals in Simplified Style), published in 1797.

