

Shades of Black



Introduction

Shades of black is a characteristic feature of both a **suiboku**^a painting and a **mezzotint** print.

Suiboku (水墨) is a Japanese word which literally means ‘water(水) black ink(墨)’. When used with reference to painting it refers to a style in which objects are drawn using only shades of black ink. Different shades of black, ranging from black to gray to almost white, are achieved by adding black ink unevenly to the paint brush and (or) by varying hand pressure when using the paint brush to draw the shape of an object on paper or silk. The artist’s objective is to create a sense of light and shade, as well as a sense of volume and rhythm, by applying different shades of black ink. This painting technique was first developed in China during the Sung dynasty (960–1274) and taken to Japan by Zen Buddhist monks in the mid-1300s. The same technique was also used in Japan during the 1700s and 1800s by artists who adopted a closely related style of Chinese painting called *nanga* (南画). The shared goal of *nanga* and *suiboku* painters was to capture the essence (i.e., spirit) of the object being depicted by eliminating unnecessary details which, in their view, included the object’s true colors. In Japan, copies of *suiboku* and *nanga* paintings were often included in woodblock-printed picture books which were sold to aspiring artists and art devotees. Ten examples of *suiboku/nanga* art which depict flowers and (or) birds were chosen from picture books in the Reader Collection of Japanese Flower and Bird Art and included in this exhibition.

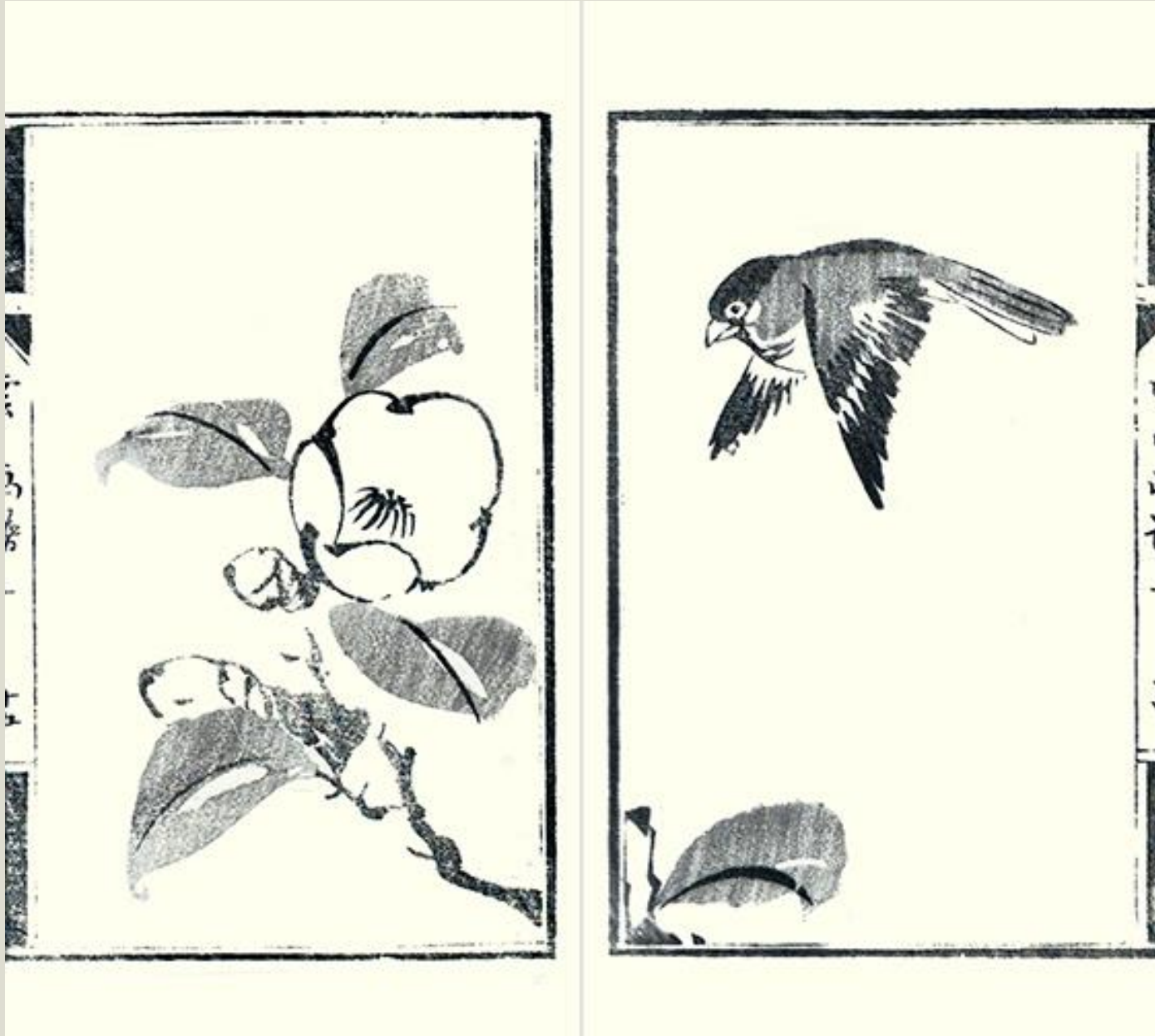
The word **mezzotint**, derived from the Italian words *mezzo* (half) and *tinta* (tone), is used to describe a method of printmaking which emphasizes tonal variation in the color of the object depicted. To create this tonal variation the entire surface of a metal plate is first roughen using a metal tool. Then portions of the plate are smoothed to reduce the depth of cut to differing degrees. When black ink is added to the plate the deepest cuts hold the most ink and will print darker than shallower cuts. To transfer these different shades of black ink to paper it is pushed into the cuts using a mechanical press. The first mezzotint prints were made in Europe in the mid-1600s. In Japan, artists only adopted this method of printmaking in the mid-1900s when a variety of European printing methods were introduced into the curriculum of art schools. Ten examples of mezzotint prints which depict flowers and (or) birds were chosen from prints in the Reader Collection of Japanese Flower and Bird Art for inclusion in this exhibition.

^a also called **sumi** (墨) painting

1 **Suiboku** - Sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*), knotweed (*Polygonum* sp.) and barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), included in *Sessa Bokugi* (i.e., Polished Ink Play), edited by Shinroku Yano, published in 1881, woodblock print 145 x 235 mm



2 **Suiboku** – Camellia (*Camellia japonica*) and Java sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*) by Unzan Yamazaki, included in Unzan Gafu (i.e., Picture Album by Unzan), published in 1880, woodblock print, 180 x 150 mm



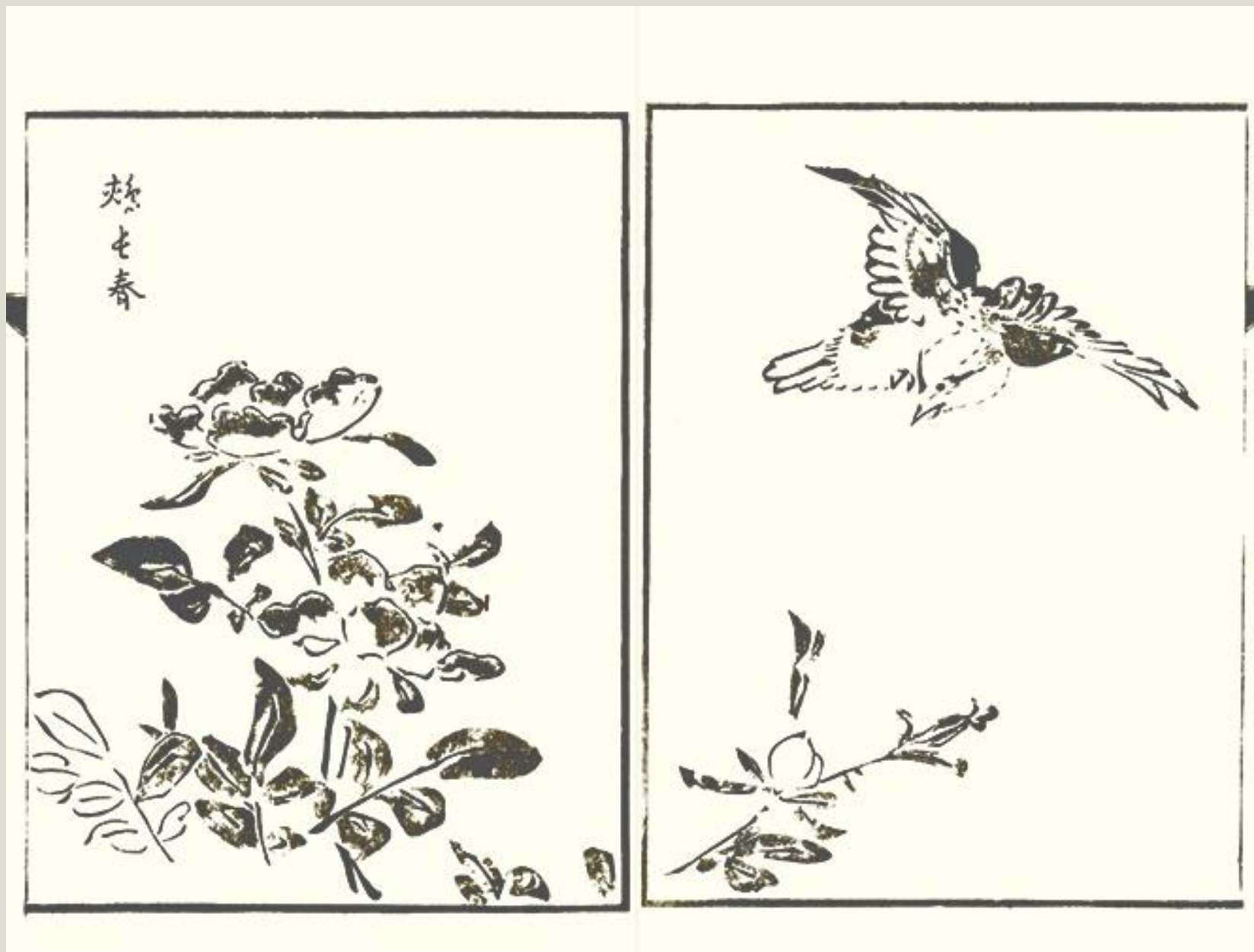
3 **Suiboku** – Pine (*Pinus* sp.) and Eurasian jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) by Kazan Watanabe, included in Kazan Gafu (i.e., Picture Album by Kazan), published in 1880, woodblock print, 200 x 145 mm



4 **Suiboku** – Common reed (*Phragmites australis*), aster (*Aster* sp.) and white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons*) by Chikutō Nakabayashi, included in *Yūsai Gafu* (i.e., Picture Album by Yūsai), published in 1846, woodblock print, 370 x 285 mm



5 **Suiboku** – China rose (*Rosa chinensis*) and yellow-throated bunting (*Emberiza elegans*) by Gessai Numada, included in *Gahō Hikketsu* (i.e., *Brushwork as a Principle of Painting*), published in 1799. woodblock print, 350 x 260 mm



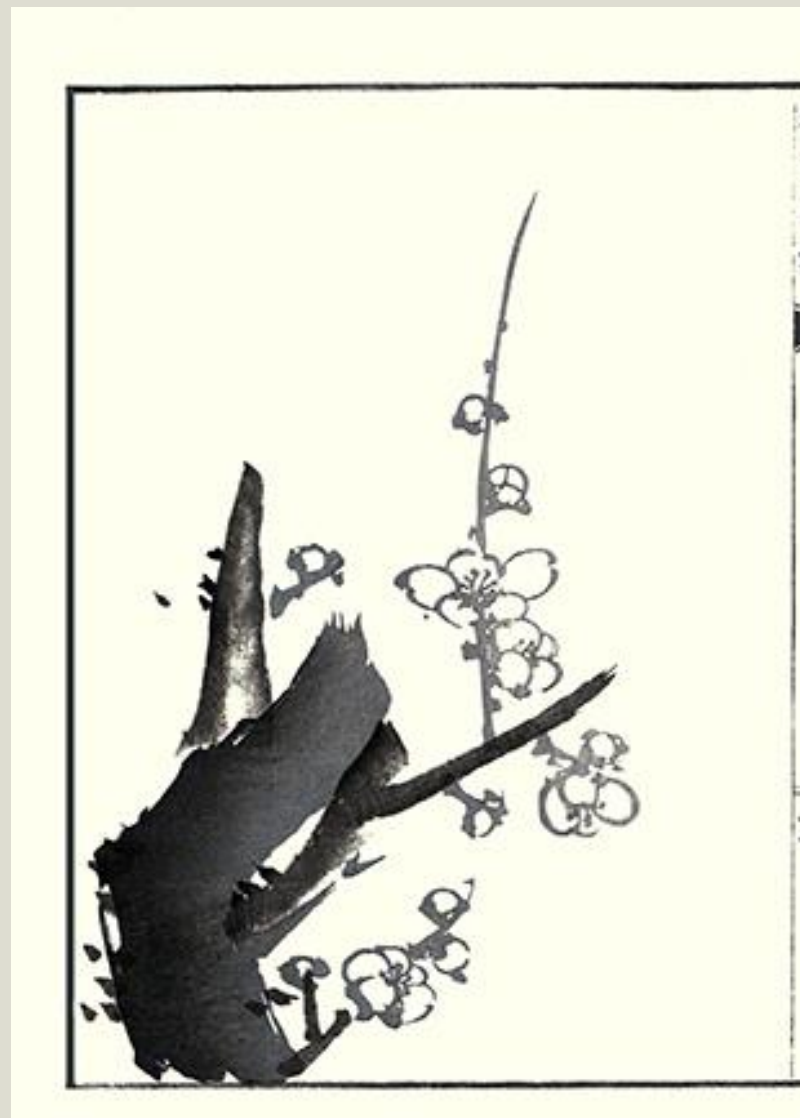
6 **Suiboku** – Barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) by Masamori Matsuoka, included in Kanga Hitori Rakufu (i.e., Spontaneous Chinese Drawings for Pleasure), published in 1883, woodblock print, 310 x 230 mm



7 **Suiboku** – Florist's chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum grandiflorum*) by Kyōshō Tachihara, included in Meika Gafu (i.e., Picture Album by Celebrated Artists), edited by Tōkei Mano, published in 1814, woodblock print, 190 x 255 mm



8 **Suiboku** – Plum (Prunus mume) by Meimon Suzuki, included in Meika Gafu (i.e., Picture Album by Celebrated Artists), edited by Tōkei Mano, published in 1814, woodblock print, 190 x 255 mm



9 **Suiboku** – Plum (*Prunus mume*) and light-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus sinensis*) by Sekisui Watanabe, included in *Meika Gafu* (i.e., Picture Album by Celebrated Artists), edited by Tōkei Mano, published in 1814, woodblock print, 190 x 255 mm



10 **Suiboku** – Cherry (*Prunus* sp.) and light-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus sinensis*) by Shokatsukan Shimizu, included in *Meika Gafu* (i.e., Picture Album by Celebrated Artists), edited by Tōkei Mano, published in 1814, woodblock print, 190 x 255 mm



11 **Mezzotint** – Japanese-lantern
(*Physalis alkekengi*) and Japanese
quail (*Coturnix japonica*) by Toshio
Suda, 400 x 480 mm

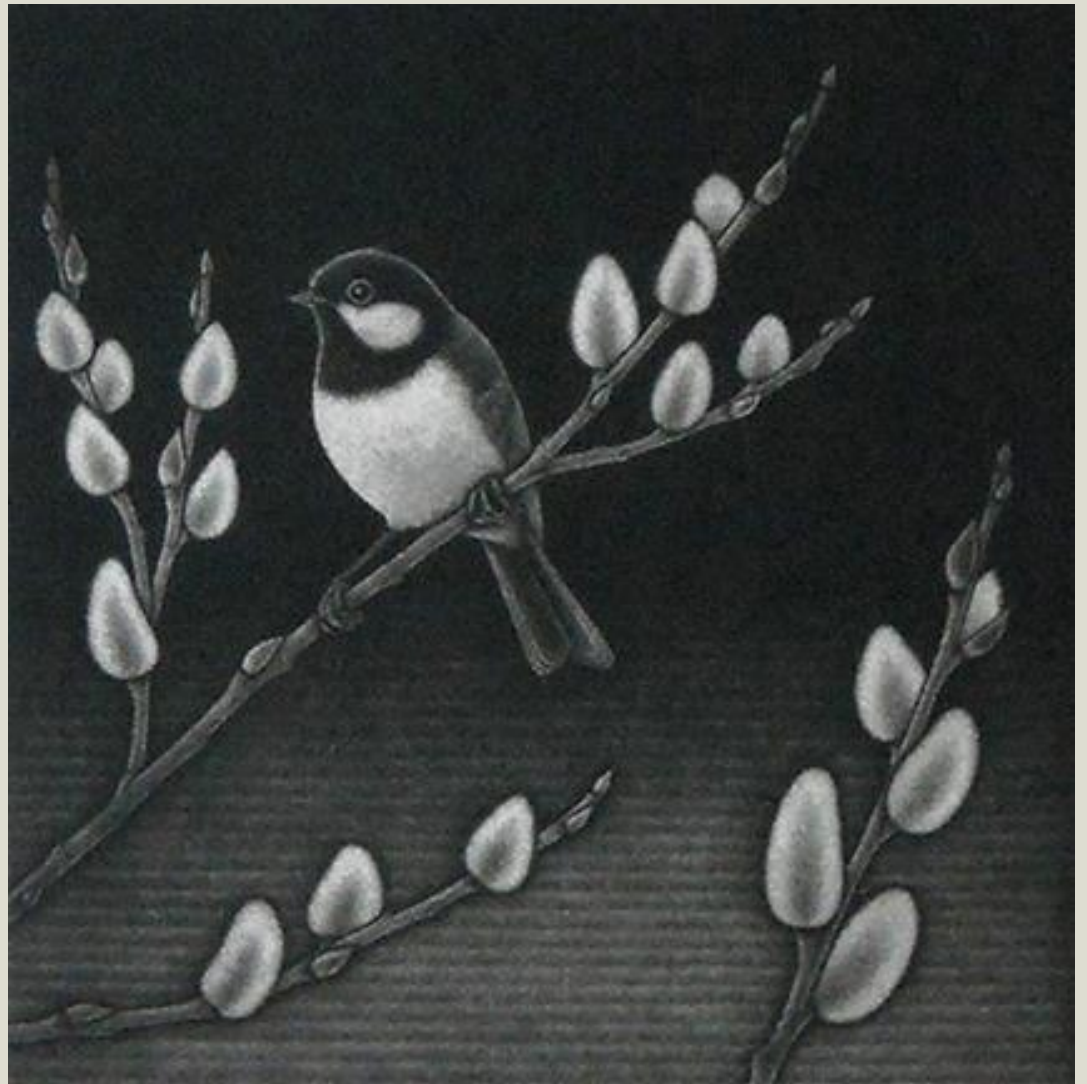


12 **Mezzotint** – Willow (*Salix* sp.) and willow tit (*Poecile montanus*) by Akira Fujie, 265 x 370 mm



1922

Akira Fujie



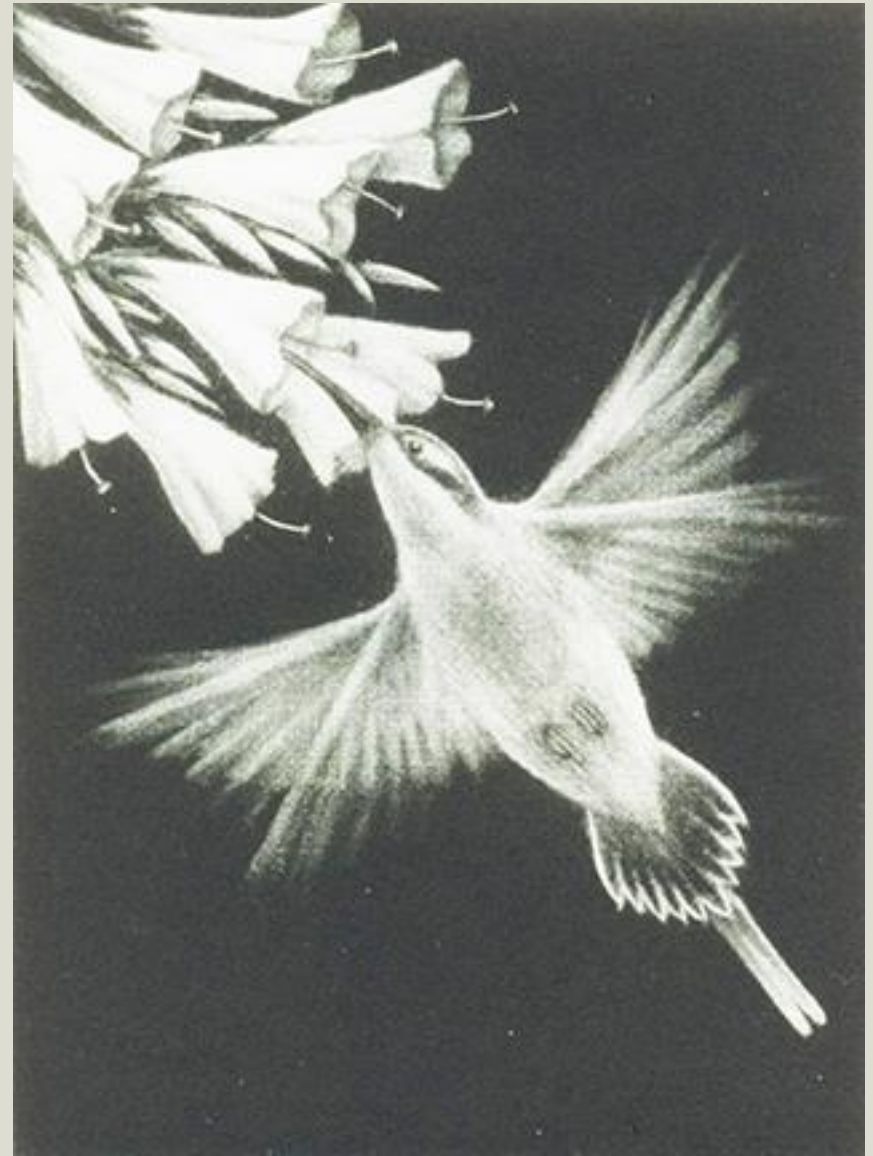
13 **Mezzotint** – Penstemon (*Penstemon* sp.) and hermit hummingbird (*Phaethornis* sp.) by Shigeki Kuroda, 180 x 215 mm



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Shigeki

ペンステモンとヒメドリ



14 **Mezzotint** – Iris (*Iris* sp.) by Shinji Andō, 160 x 145 mm



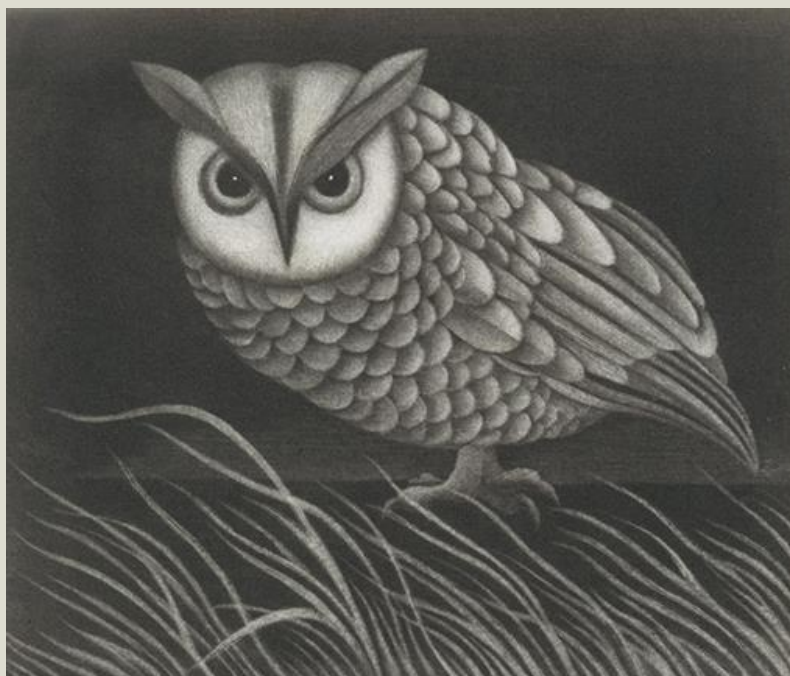
Shinji Andō



15 **Mezzotint** – Scops owl (*Otus* sp.)
by Kōichi Sakamoto, 185 x 150 mm



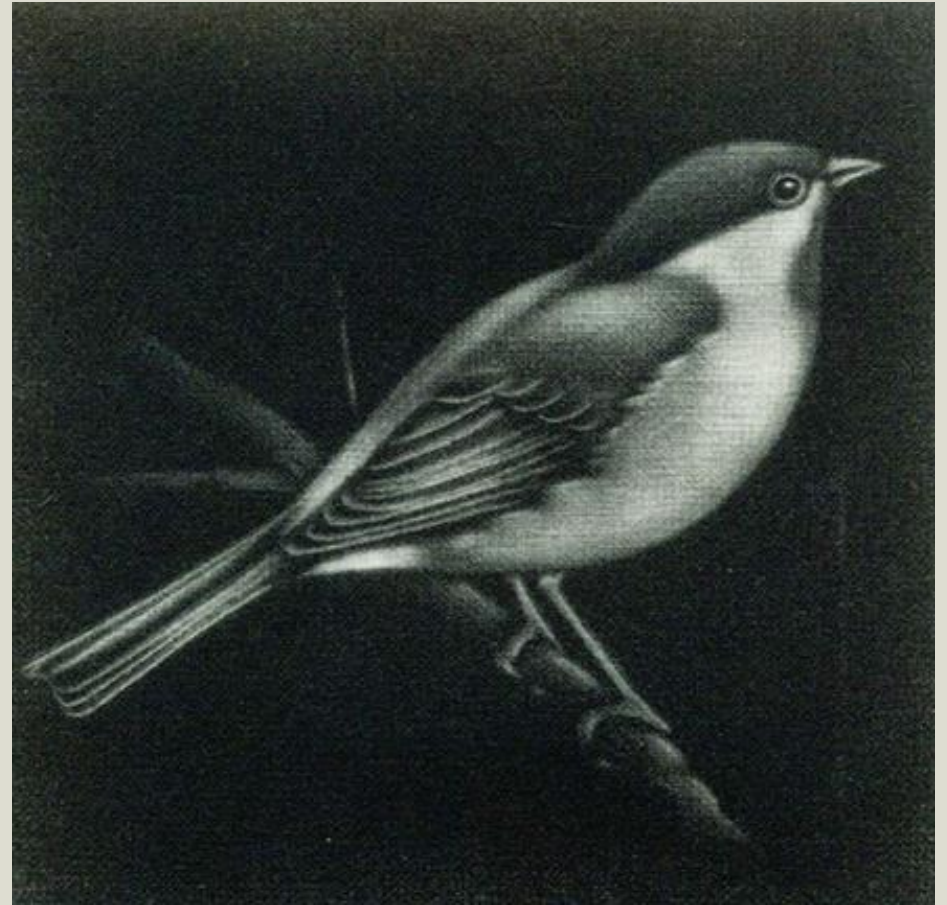
4/100 2023 422 Kōichi Sakamoto



16 **Mezzotint** – willow tit (*Poecile montanus*) by Kazuyoshi Kurahashi, 150 x 150 mm



40/100 21) /Kurahashi



17 **Mezzotint** – Blakiston's fish-owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*) and scops owl (*Otus scops*) by Kōji Ikuta, 460 x 260 mm



18 **Mezzotint** – Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*) by Ryōnosuke Shimomura, 115 x 140 mm



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R. SHIMOMURA



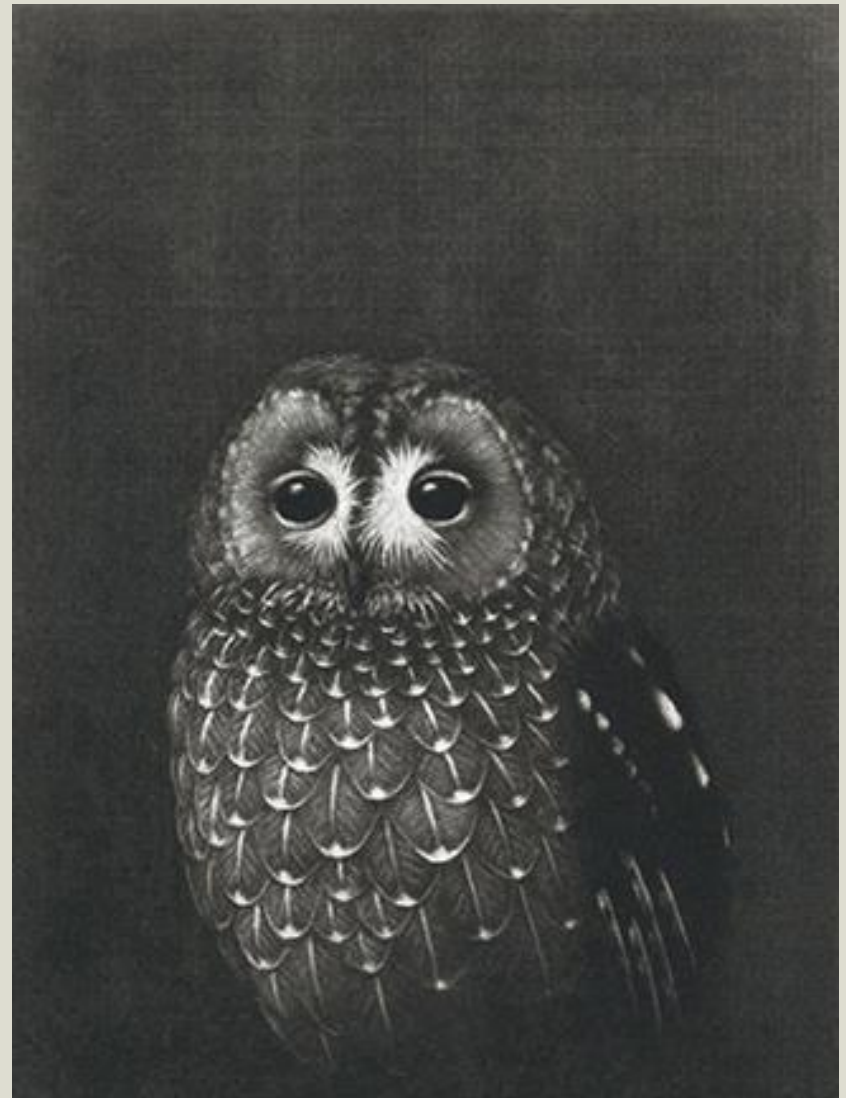
19 Mezzotint – Ural owl (*Strix uralensis*) by Tadashi Ikai, 195 x 225 mm



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— Tadashi Ikai

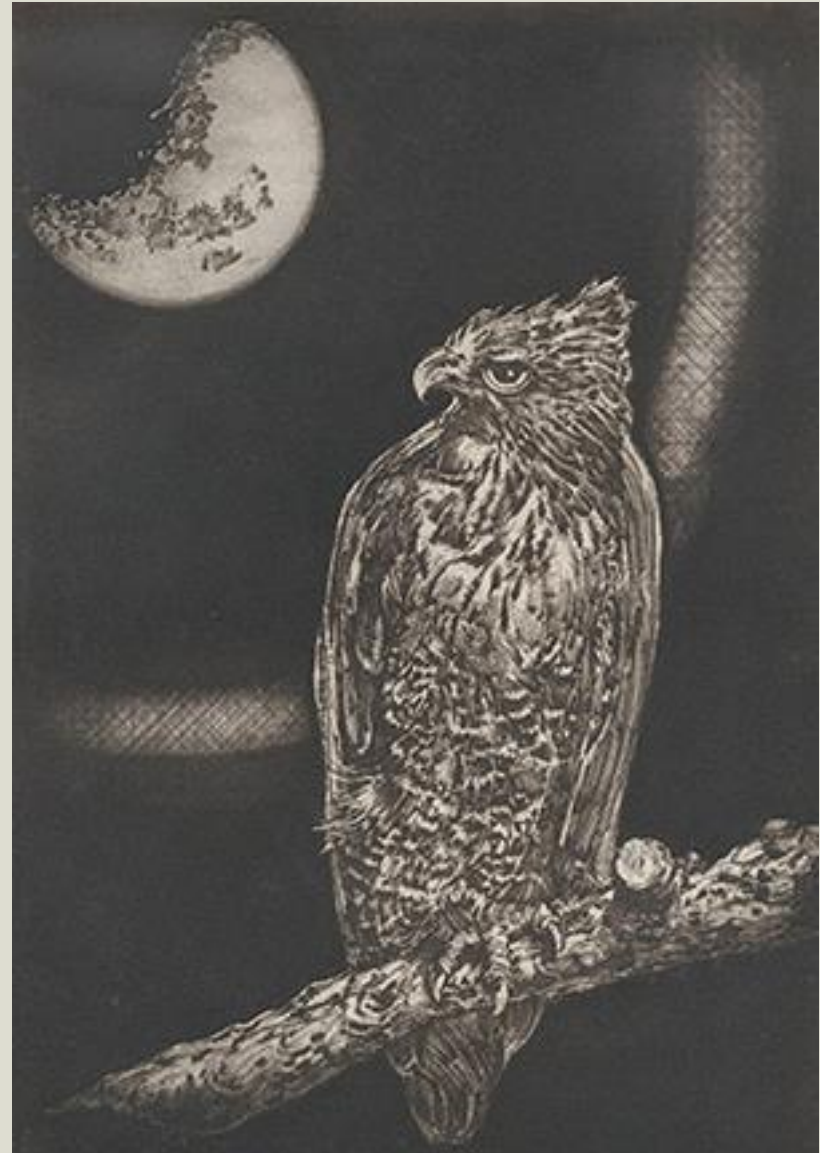
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20 **Mezzotint** – Hawk (*Accipiter* sp.) by Bin Takaba, 225 x 305 mm



Bin Takaba 20



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