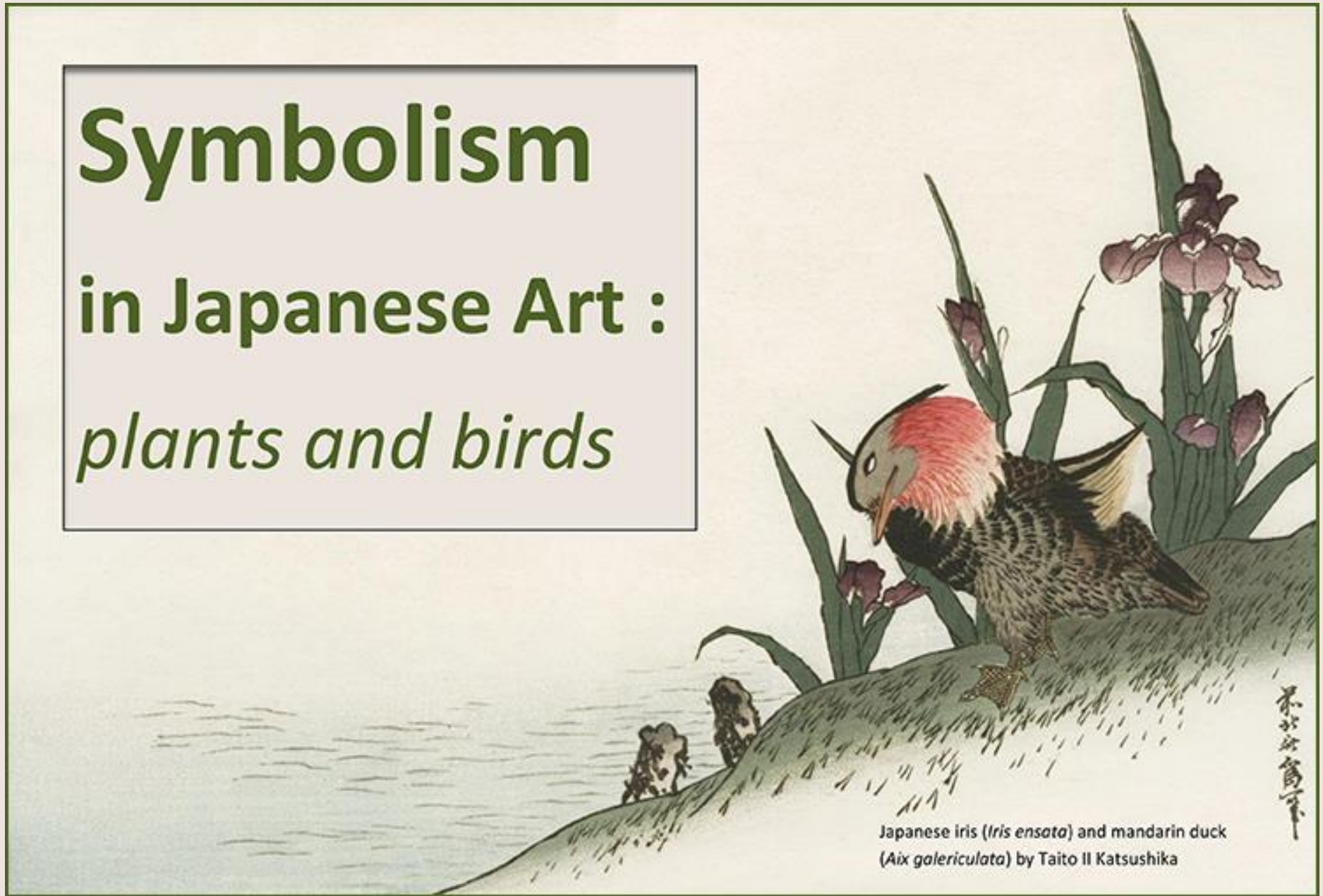


# Symbolism

## in Japanese Art :

*plants and birds*



Japanese iris (*Iris ensata*) and mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*) by Taito II Katsushika

## Introduction

A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else. Perhaps the most familiar symbol is a word invented by humans to communicate an idea or refer to a particular object. Other types of symbols are included in pictures drawn by artists to communicate with the viewer in a non-verbal way. Plants and birds are often used for this purpose in Japanese art. Certain plants and birds are associated with a particular time of the year (e.g., autumn) based on their appearance or disappearance (e.g., flowering time or seasonal migration). They may also be associated with a certain human emotion (e.g., love) or trait (e.g., beauty) because of their shape, color or behaviour. Knowledge of these symbolic associations allows the viewer to understand the artist's message. Japanese viewers acquire this knowledge as children during the educational process. Non-Japanese viewers learn about their own culture's symbols as children and, consequently, may lack the knowledge required to fully appreciate Japanese art featuring plants and birds. To address this knowledge gap, the symbolic associations of plants and birds are explained for forty-five examples of Japanese art in this virtual exhibition. These forty-five examples were chosen from prints in the Reader Collection of Japanese Art to include the plants and birds used symbolically most often by Japanese artists. For each picture the following information is provided: the English name and scientific name of the plants(s) and bird(s) depicted, their symbolic associations and the name of the artist who drew the picture. Pictures are grouped and arranged by the species' seasonal association (spring, summer, autumn, winter).

Additional information about Japanese plant and bird symbolism is available in the following books:

Baird, Merrily. 2001. *Symbols of Japan*. Rizzoli International Publications Inc., New York.

Ball, Katherine M. 1969. *Decorative Motives of Oriental Art*. Hacker Art Books, New York.

Baten, Lea. 1989. *Japanese Animal Art*. Shufunotomo Co. Ltd., Tokyo.

Volker, T. 1975. *The Animal in Far Eastern Art*. E.J. Brill, Leiden.

## Plant

Plum (*Prunus mume*)

Symbol of spring, summer, longevity,  
elegance, happiness, purity,  
sweetness, prosperity

## Bird

Japanese bush-warbler (*Cettia diphone*)

Symbol of spring, beauty, sweetness,  
love, happiness

## Artist

Jō



## Plants

1 Peach (*Prunus persica*)

Symbol of spring, summer, meekness,  
virtue, marriage, health, longevity

2 Field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)

Symbol of spring

3 Violet (*Viola* sp.)

Symbol of spring

## Bird

Green pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*)

Symbol of spring, power, love,  
prosperity, beauty

## Artist

Bairei Kōno



## Plant

Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*)

Symbol of spring, love, youth

## Bird

Barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Symbol of spring, summer, elegance,  
delicacy, meekness, loyalty, fertility,  
prosperity, sweetness

## Artist

Hokusai Katsushika



## Plants

1 Hall crabapple (*Malus halliana*)

Symbol of spring

2 Japanese kerria (*Kerria japonica*)

Symbol of spring

## Bird

Green peafowl (*Pavo muticus*)

Symbol of spring, beauty

## Artist

Bairei Kōno



**Plant**

Cherry (*Prunus* sp.)  
Symbol of spring, summer, beauty,  
delicacy, loyalty, prosperity,  
ephemerality

**Bird**

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)  
Symbol of spring

**Artist**

Bunrei Maekawa



## Plants

1 Chinese milk-vetch (*Astragalus sinicus*)

Symbol of spring

2 Dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.)

Symbol of spring

## Bird

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Symbol of spring

## Artist

Seisai Itō





## Plant

Chinese quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*  
or *Chaenomeles lagenaria*)

Symbol of spring

## Bird

Meadow bunting (*Emberiza cioides*)

Symbol of spring

## Artist

Shundei Nakamura



(*Chaenomeles lagenaria* Koidz.)

(*Emberiza cioides cioides* Boni.)

**Plant**

Weeping forsythia (*Forsythia suspensa*)  
Symbol of spring

**Bird**

Eurasian bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)  
Symbol of spring

**Artist**

Shizuo Ashikaga



**Plant**

Willow (*Salix* sp.)  
Symbol of spring

**Bird**

Oriental greenfinch (*Carduelis sinica*)  
Symbol of spring

**Artist**

Mihoko Kasamatsu



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Mihoko Kasamatsu

## Plant

Sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*)

Symbol of summer, purity, immortality

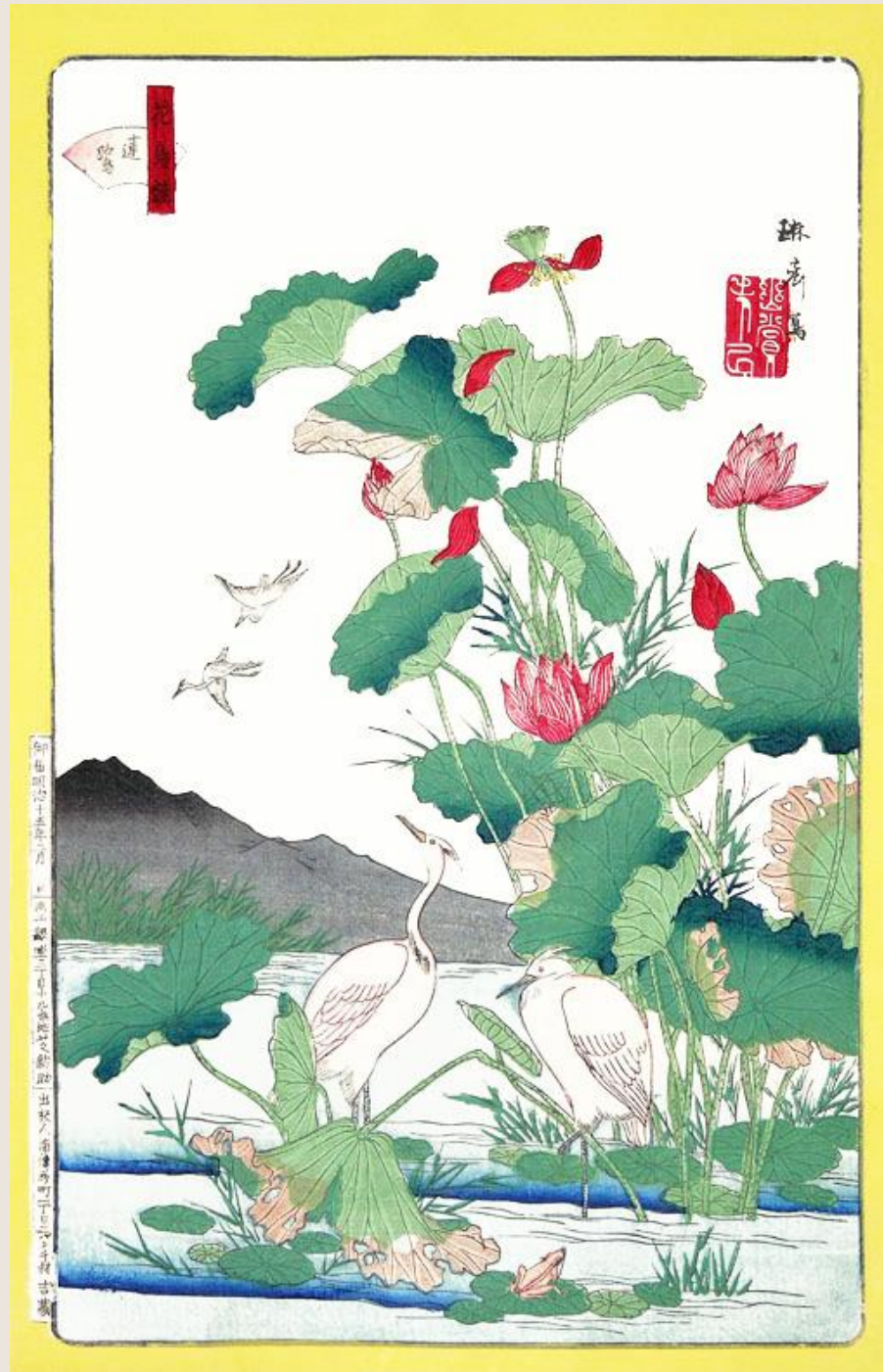
## Bird

Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Symbol of purity, longevity, delicacy,  
mount of the gods

## Artist

Rinsai Shiba



## Plants

1 Japanese iris (*Iris ensata*)

Symbol of summer, power, boldness,  
loyalty, courage, victory, eloquence

2 water-lily (*Nuphar japonicum*)

Symbol of summer

## Bird

Lesser cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*)

Symbol of summer, rice-planting time,  
unrequited love, past emotions, sadness

## Publisher

Katsugorō Inoue



## Plant

Princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*)  
Symbol of summer, kindness, power

## Bird

Mythical Hō-ō bird  
Symbol of longevity, power, wisdom,  
delicacy, happiness, five virtues of  
obedience, purity, loyalty, justice and  
kindness, mount and messenger of  
immortals

## Artist

Ōkyo Maruyama



**Plant**

Crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*)

Symbol of summer

**Bird**

Siberian blue robin (*Luscinia cyane*)

Symbol of summer

**Artist**

Keinen Imao



**Plant**

**Bird**

**Artist**

Japanese rose (*Rosa multiflora*)  
Symbol of summer

Water rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)  
Symbol of summer

Kashū Numata





## Plants

1 Showy Japanese lily (*Lilium speciosum*)  
Symbol of summer

2 Morning-star lily (*Lilium concolor*)  
Symbol of summer

3 China rose (*Rosa chinensis*)  
Symbol of summer

## Bird

Northern lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)  
Symbol of summer, winter

## Artist

Bairei Kōno



**Plant**

Common garden peony  
(*Paeonia lactiflora*)  
Symbol of summer

**Bird**

Great tit (*Parus major*)  
Symbol of summer

**Artist**

Yoshiharu Utagawa



## Plant

China rose (*Rosa chinensis*)  
Symbol of summer

## Bird

Blue-and-white flycatcher  
(*Cyanoptila cynaomelana*)  
Symbol of summer

## Artist

Hiroshige Utagawa



**Plant**

Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*)

Symbol of summer

**Bird**

Common moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Symbol of summer

**Artist**

Bairei Kōno



**Plant**

Bigleaf hydrangea  
(*Hydrangea macrophylla*)  
Symbol of summer

**Bird**

Common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)  
Symbol of summer

**Artist**

Hiroshige Utagawa



**Plant**

Japanese bindweed (*Calystegia japonica*)  
Symbol of summer

**Bird**

Dove (*Columba livia*)  
Symbol of loyalty, fertility,  
messenger of the peace god

**Artist**

Kōgyo Tsukioka



**Plant**

Lespedeza (*Lespedeza* sp.)  
Symbol of autumn, beauty, ephemerality

**Bird**

Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*)  
Symbol of autumn, courage, poverty

**Artist**

Yūho Tanaka



## Plants

1 Common reed (*Phragmites australis*)  
Symbol of autumn, winter

2 Fringed pink (*Dianthus superbus*)  
Symbol of autumn, summer, delicacy, love

3 Scabious patrinia (*Patrinia scabiosifolia*)  
Symbol of autumn

4 Japanese morning glory (*Ipomoea nil*)  
Symbol of autumn, love, death

## Bird

White-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons*)  
Symbol of autumn, winter, happiness, caution

## Artist

Rinsai Shiba





## Plants

1 Balloon flower  
(*Platycodon grandiflorus*)  
Symbol of autumn

2 Fringed pink  
(*Dianthus superbis*)  
Symbol of autumn,  
summer, delicacy,  
love

## Bird

Gray wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)  
Symbol of autumn, winter, happiness, caution

## Artist

Hiroshige III Utagawa



## Plants

1 Eulalia grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*)

Symbol of autumn, loneliness

2 Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*)

Symbol of autumn

3 Porcelain vine

(*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*)

Symbol of autumn

## Bird

Bull-headed shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*)

Symbol of autumn

## Artist

Koson Ohara



**Plant**

Snake gourd  
(*Trichosanthes cucumeroides*)  
Symbol of autumn, fertility, longevity

**Bird**

White-cheeked starling  
(*Sturnus cineraceus*)  
Symbol of autumn

**Artist**

Seitei Watanabe



## Plant

Rice (*Oryza sativa*)

Symbol of autumn, prosperity

## Bird

Common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Symbol of autumn

## Artist

Gessō Yoshimoto



**Plant**

Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*)

Symbol of autumn, fertility

**Bird**

Eurasian siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Symbol of autumn

**Artist**

Shizuo Ashikaga



## Plants

1 Indian chrysanthemum  
(*Chrysanthemum indicum*)  
Symbol of autumn

2 Florist's chrysanthemum  
(*Chrysanthemum grandiflorum*)  
Symbol of autumn, power, longevity,  
delicacy, happiness, courage, honor,  
purity

## Bird

Green-winged teal (*Anas crecca*)  
Symbol of autumn, winter

## Artist

Bairei Kōno



## Plant

Heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica*)  
Symbol of autumn, winter, longevity,  
better fortune

## Bird

Brown-eared bulbul (*Ixos amaurotis*)  
Symbol of autumn

## Artist

Gorō Imae



**Plant**

Japanese persimmon (*Disopyros kaki*)  
Symbol of autumn, victory

**Bird**

Japanese white-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*)  
Symbol of autumn, summer

**Artist**

Gakusui Ide





**Plant**

Cockscomb (*Celosia cristatus*)

Symbol of autumn

**Bird**

Long-tailed rosefinch (*Uragus sibericus*)

Symbol of autumn

**Artist**

Tsunenobu Kanō



**Plant**

Japanese bittersweet  
(*Celastrus orbiculatus*)  
Symbol of autumn

**Bird**

Daurian redstart  
(*Phoenicurus aureus*)  
Symbol of autumn

**Artist**

Bihō Takahashi



## Plants

1 Asiatic dayflower  
(*Commelina communis*)  
Symbol of autumn

2 Aster (*Aster* sp.)  
Symbol of autumn

## Bird

Rustic bunting (*Emberiza rustica*)  
Symbol of autumn

## Artist

Keinen Imao



**Plant**

Cotton-rose (*Hibiscus mutabilis*)

Symbol of autumn

**Bird**

Japanese waxwing (*Bombycilla japonica*)

Symbol of autumn

**Publisher**

Katsugorō Inoue



**Plant**

Oak (*Quercus serrata*)  
Symbol of autumn, victory

**Bird**

White-backed woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos*)  
Symbol of autumn

**Artist**

Shigemasa Kitao



**Plant**

Japanese-creeper  
(*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*)  
Symbol of autumn

**Bird**

Dusky thrush (*Turdus naumanni*)  
Symbol of autumn

**Artist**

Issei Nomura



## Plant

Hardy begonia (*Begonia grandis*)

Symbol of autumn

## Bird

Golden pheasant (*Chrysolophus pictus*)

Symbol of beauty, power

## Artist

Hodō Nishimura



## Plant

Chrysanthemum  
(*Chrysanthemum makinoi*)  
Symbol of autumn

## Bird

Domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*)  
Symbol of power, courage, protection,  
beauty, happiness, herald of morning

## Artist

Sōzan Itō





**Plant**

Sasanqua camellia  
(*Camellia sasanqua*)  
Symbol of winter, death

**Bird**

Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*)  
Symbol of winter, elegance, sweetness, kindness,  
loyalty, honor

**Artist**

Chikuseki Yamamoto



## Plants

1 Camellia (*Camellia japonica*)  
Symbol of winter, death

2 Bunchflower daffodil  
(*Narcissus tazetta*)  
Symbol of winter, new  
year, spring, happiness,  
prosperity, immortality

## Birds

1 Mandarin duck  
(*Aix galericulata*)  
Symbol of winter, love,  
happiness, loyalty

2 Little ringed plover  
(*Charadrius dubius*)  
Symbol of winter,  
perseverance, victory,  
loneliness, strife

## Artist

Kiyoshi Takizawa



## Plant

Pine (*Pinus* sp.)

Symbol of winter, longevity

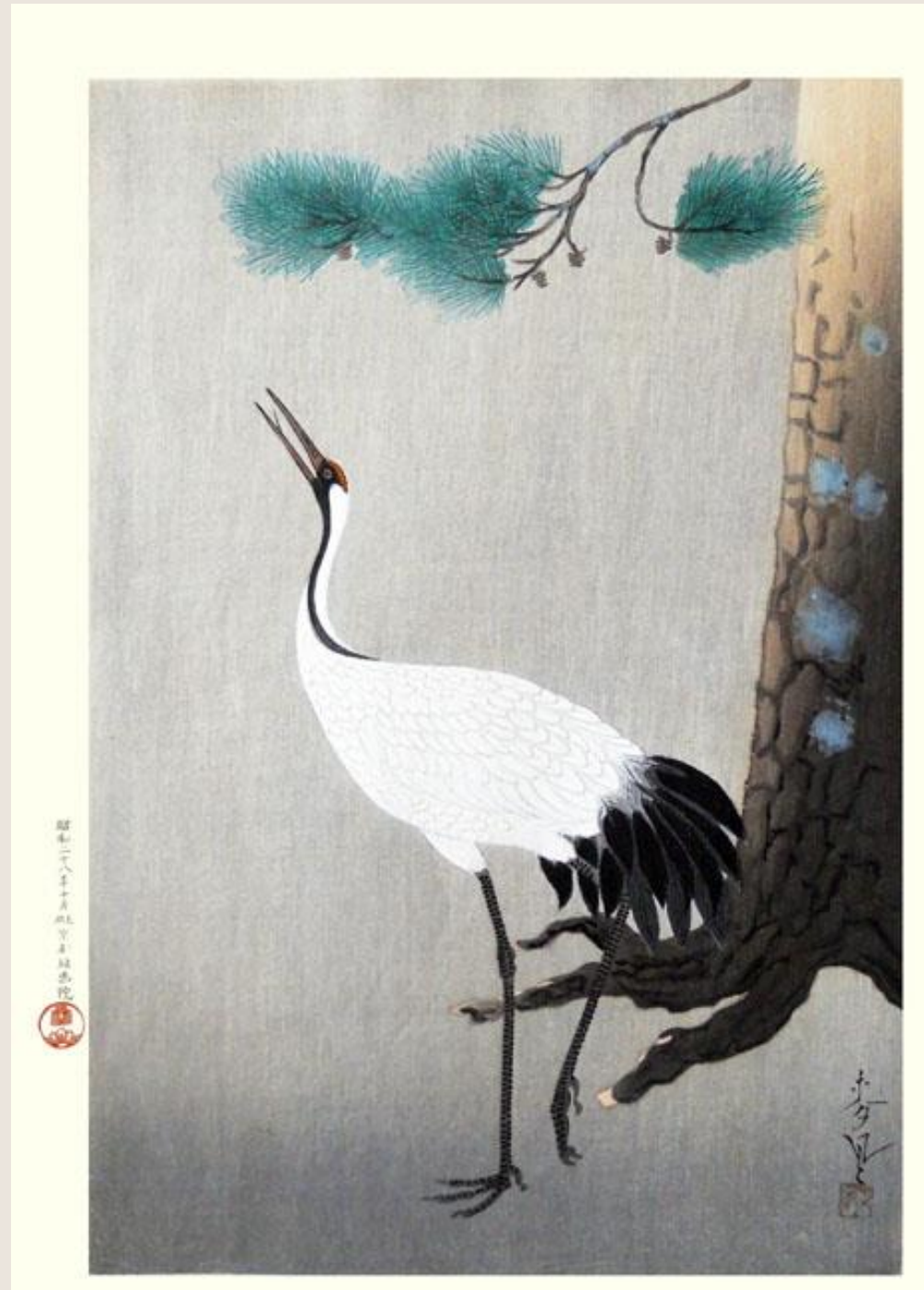
## Bird

Red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*)

Symbol of winter, longevity, prosperity, marriage, messenger or mount for the immortals

## Artist

Bakufū Ohno



## Plant

Bunchflower daffodil (*Narcissus tazetta*)  
Symbol of winter, new year, spring,  
happiness, prosperity, immortality

## Birds

1 Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)  
Symbol of winter, boldness, courage,  
victory, kindness, purity

2 Eurasian tree sparrow  
(*Passer montanus*)  
Symbol of winter, elegance, sweetness,  
kindness, loyalty, honor

## Artist

Hiroshige Utagawa



**Plant**

Common reed (*Phragmites australis*)  
Symbol of winter, autumn

**Bird**

Mallard duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*)  
Symbol of winter, autumn, prosperity

**Artist**

Keinen Imao



## Plant

Tree peony (*Paeonia suffruticosa*)  
Symbol of winter, spring, fertility, power,  
happiness, love, prosperity

## Bird

Winter wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)  
Symbol of winter

## Artist

Sūgakudō Nakayama



## Plant

Pine (*Pinus* sp.)

Symbol of winter, longevity

## Bird

Scops owl (*Otus* sp.)

Symbol of winter, ingratitude, death

## Artist

Hiroshige Utagawa



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