

**Speech at the opening of the exhibition “DREAMED JAPAN –
IMAGES OF THE FLOATING WORLD”.**

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It is a great pleasure for me to talk on Ukiyo-e at the opening of the exhibition “DREAMED JAPAN – IMAGES OF THE FLOATING WORLD”.

During the isolation from other nations for about 250 years, Japan blossomed a lively culture domestically.

When Japan reopened its trading ports with the West in 1854, an influx of Japanese art and craft had a massive impact on their fine arts and designs in Europe and the United States.

Ukiyo-e was the representative example of the influx; most of them were wood print. The distinctive characters of Ukiyo-e, radically different from the Western tradition, proved an influence through a host of movements from Impressionism to Art Nouveau in the 19th century.

Artists strongly influenced by Ukiyo-e include Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Gustav Klimt, Paul Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, to name just a few. Even Claude Debussy chose the Great Wave of Hokusai, a famous Ukiyo-e painter, for the cover of his music *La Mer*, suggesting its inspiration on his music.

Nevertheless, in Japan, Ukiyo-e were not valuable works of art treasured by a limited number of nobles or samurai. They were a mass media.

Ukiyo-e was a culture carried by ordinary people. Such people rose in stature due to economic expansion in the Japanese capital around two centuries ago.

Ukiyo-e depicted the cutting-edge customs of the commonality of Edo, which is now Tokyo. They were travel journals that introduced tourist

spots and fashion magazines that carried stylish cosmetics and costumes. What's more, they were posters of Kabuki theatre and portraits of Kabuki actors as well.

This year, Japan and Latvia celebrate the centenary since Japan recognized Latvia *de jure* as a member of the Entente.

I am delighted that a cutting-edge exhibition themed on Ukiyo-e takes place in Riga, the capital of Art Nouveau, in such a memorable year.

Lastly, I would like to conclude my speech with sincere thanks to everyone who organized this exhibition and all of you who attend here today.

I sincerely hope that many people will dream of Japan and enjoy the Japanese culture through this exhibition.

Thank you.