

Finch & C^o



JAPANESE 'SHUNGA' ALBUM OF TWELVE EROTIC SCENES

A FINE JAPANESE 'SHUNGA' ALBUM OF TWELVE EROTIC SCENES HAND COLOURED WOOD BLOCK PRINTS
ON FINE PAPER WITHIN TWO SILK COVERS

MID 19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 16CM HIGH, 24CM WIDE – 6¼ INS HIGH, 9½ INS WIDE

LITERATURE

'SHUNGA' IS THE GENERIC NAME GIVEN TO JAPANESE EROTIC PAINTINGS, PRINTS AND ILLUSTRATED BOOKS. IT MEANS 'SPRING DRAWINGS'. EROTIC ART WAS ENDEMIC THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND HAS BEEN PRODUCED THERE FOR CENTURIES. WHEN THE PRINTS FIRST REACHED EUROPE IN THE 19TH CENTURY THEIR IMPACT WAS IMMEDIATE AND STARTLING. THEIR COMPLETE RELIANCE ON LINE AND FLAT AREAS OF COLOUR REVEALED A SET OF ARTISTIC VALUES QUITE OPPOSED TO THE TRADITIONS, WHICH HAD DOMINATED WESTERN ART EVER SINCE THE RENAISSANCE. MANY EUROPEAN ARTISTS OF THE TIME ESPECIALLY THE IMPRESSIONISTS WERE DEEPLY INFLUENCED BY THE JAPANESE PRINTS WHOSE IMAGES APPEARED TO THEM TO BE REVOLUTIONARY.

SHUNGA WERE PRODUCED BY ALMOST EVERY JAPANESE ARTIST OF NOTE, BUT THEIR SUBJECT MATTER OFTEN CONDEMNED THEM TO OBSCURITY IN THE WEST. THE JAPANESE APPROACH TO SEX WAS CONDITIONED BY A VERY DIFFERENT MORAL SYSTEM. THE EMPHASIS WAS ON ORDER AND SOCIAL OBEDIENCE. THERE WAS LITTLE SENSE OF PERSONAL SIN AND THE BODY WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE SPIRIT. IN JAPAN SEX WAS NOT ELEVATED TO A STATUS OF MYSTICAL SIGNIFICANCE AS IN INDIA AND CHINA, BUT WAS SEEN AS A NATURAL, INTRINSICALLY ENJOYABLE EVENT. THERE WAS NO EQUIVALENT TO THE WESTERN CONCEPT OF PORNOGRAPHY WITH NO CONNECTION BETWEEN MORAL CORRUPTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SEX. A HOST OF PRACTICES, EVIDENT FROM THESE PRINTS, MORE OR LESS FROWNED UPON IN THE WEST, WERE COMMON IN JAPAN.

