

**Yamakawa Shuho** was born in Kyoto with the name **Yamakawa Yoshio**. His first art teacher was the painter **Ikegami Shuho**, from whom he received his artist's name. He later became the student of the famous artist, **Kaburagi Kiyokata**, well known for his paintings and illustrations of beautiful women, or [bijin-ga](#). In Kiyokata's art school, Shuho worked alongside such students as **Kawase Hasui**, **Ito Shinsui**, and **Torii Kotondo**. In 1919, he made his artistic debut, entering *Nihonga* (Japanese-style) paintings in the government-sponsored **Teiten** exhibition. During his adult years, Shuho worked primarily as an illustrator, but he is best known for his woodblock prints. In total he designed around 20 prints, published primarily by the **Bijutsusha** house and by [Watanabe Shozaburo](#).

Shuho's first *bijin-ga* prints were published in the late 1920's. Most of these prints hark back to the past, representing the feminine ideal of the older, more conservative generation. The women in these prints appear to be geishas wearing traditional clothing and elaborate age-old hairstyles. They are demurely passive, their eyes turned away from the viewer in dreamy, somewhat pensive contemplation.

Shuho also portrayed at least one modern girl, or [moga](#), in his early *bijin* prints. The print [Autumn](#) depicts a vibrant young woman wearing fashionable clothing and a chic moga hairstyle called the "radio roll". Her expression has a direct, alluring quality which, though not aggressively challenging, is certainly not demure. Her clothing with its Western card designs alludes to the gambling trend that was popular among young people. Gambling, eventually outlawed in the early 1930's, was definitely against the mores of the conservative Japanese establishment. This print subtly illustrates the

changing status of young women in Japanese society, and their growing independence.

Shuho's work was mainly traditional, probably influenced by his publishers and his conservative teacher Kiyokata. In 1936, he designed a 10 print series of traditional Japanese dancers. He later established the Seikinkai ('Blue Collar Society') with a fellow *bijin-ga* artist, [Ito Shinsui](#), in 1939.

During the early years of World War II, Shinsui and Shuho worked with the publisher Watanabe to create two prints of Tokyo Station. Each print features a *bijin* with the station buildings in the background. Shinsui showed the station as it had been 70 years earlier (in [1872](#)), and Shuho depicted as it was at that time (in [1942](#)). Though one might expect the scenes to look very different, given the extent of the technological and social changes since the Meiji period, they do not. A tiny airplane and car are the only modern fixtures in Shuho's print. Though their hairstyles are different, the women in the two prints look remarkably similar. Each has a solemn purity and reserve that recalls the traditions and values of old Japan.

It may not be surprising that these prints were actually wartime propaganda, commissioned and distributed by the Japanese government as patriotic symbols. Certainly the people who viewed these prints would have had strong feelings of national pride and nostalgia. Unfortunately Yamakawa Shuho's career was short in comparison to many of his contemporaries. In 1944, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage, leaving behind a small legacy of *bijin-ga* prints and paintings.