



Get ready for **Japan supernatural** 2 November 2019—8 March 2020 Art Gallery of New South Wales

The chills of terror that a good ghost story brings are thought to help you feel cooler in the summer heat—so they say in Japan. How timely as the AGNSW is preparing to welcome its major summer exhibition *Japan supernatural*. Drawing on its own collection and with loans from major international galleries, the exhibition will allow you to explore tales of ghosts, spectres, imps and all kinds of magical beasts. From masters of ukiyo-e such as Hokusai to contemporary-art superstar MURAKAMI Takashi, there will be more than 180 works to see (some fragile works on paper will be swapped over due to light sensitivity). Check the website for ticketing and event details.

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/supernatural/

IMAGE **UTAGAWA Kuniyoshi** *Mitsukuni defies the skeleton spectre conjured up by Princess Takiyasha* 1845—1846
woodblock triptych print | triptych 36.9 x 74.2 cm | Donated by American Friends of the British Museum from the collection of Prof Arthur R Miller



Marking mini-milestones—the Shichi-go-san festival

Seven-five-three. These small numbers have big significance for families in Japan. Shichi-go-san (七五三), literally 7-5-3, falls on 15 November. It is a festival to give thanks for the health and happiness of young children.

Shichi-go-san has a long history stretching back to customs from the Heian Period (794-1185). Modern families might struggle to explain these customs, which were rituals children went through before they reached seven years of age, the age at which they were fully accepted into the community as an *ujiko* (member) of their local shrine. In earlier times, when child mortality was high, it was thought children needed divine protection to guard against bad luck at certain ages. During medieval times, Shichi-go-san was observed by aristocratic and samurai families, but in the Edo Period (1603-1867) it became widespread throughout society.

The wish for healthy and happy children is eternal and today many families still mark the occasion.

In most regions of Japan today, boys and girls aged three, boys aged five and girls aged seven visit a Shinto shrine with their parents for Shichi-go-san. Many children are dressed in kimono and are fussed over. For some there's a visit to a photo studio (which often includes kimono hire in the package) to record the event. Special 'thousand-year' sweets called *chitose-ame* are given to the children.

It's not a public holiday, so if you are in Japan over the weekend around 15 November, you may well be lucky enough to see families visiting shrines with beautifully dressed children, who are probably most interested in *chitose-ame*!

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