**Chiaki Ajioka**

**Munakata, Shik­ō (1903-1975)**

Munakata is one of the most significant Japanese woodblock artists of the 20th century. Born as a son of a local blacksmith in Aomori, northern Japan, Munakata’s formal education was limited, but poetry inspired his love of his native land. The literary content of his work often required large or series formats, which distinguished his prints from those of his contemporaries, sometimes to their annoyance. Munakata initially exploited the strong contrast of black and white, but later introduced colour by way of applying it on the reverse of the paper. His extremely poor eyesight shaped his working method of forming the image in his mind and quickly transferring it onto the block. *Yamato the beautiful* (1936) attracted attention of Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961) and other leaders of the Mingei movement, who became Munakata’s mentors and sponsors. In 1938, his *Utō* became the first printed work to be awarded the First Prize at the government-run annual art exhibition, and the *Two Bodhisattvas and the Ten Disciples of the Buddha* won a major prize at Kokugakai exhibition the following year. After WWII the *Ten Disciples* was awarded a prize at Saõ Paulo Biennale (1955), then the Grand Prize for prints at Venice Biennale (1956), bringing Munakata to the world stage.

**References and Further reading**

<http://www.lantecweb.net/shikokan/english/g01main.htm>

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