

Experiencing Landscapes in Japanese Prints

Landscapes that depict specific sites in Japan were so admired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that this genre has its own name — *meisho-e*, meaning “pictures of famous places.” This selection of color woodblock prints presents some of the most popular locations, including different views of Mount Fuji, particular settings in the city of Edo (called Tokyo since 1868), and stops along the Tokaido, “East Sea Road.” People bought these prints either as souvenirs of places they visited or to have some experience of places they would not otherwise be able to see in person.

The prints of Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858) displayed here are from two different series representing stations on the Tokaido. This road ran along the Pacific coast of Japan’s main island of Honshu and connected Edo, the administrative capital of Japan’s military governor (shogun), with Kyoto, the location of the imperial residence. Officials, merchants, and pilgrims alike used the Tokaido, making it the busiest of the five major roads on Honshu. The government maintained and controlled these roads; travelers were required to present the proper documents and sometimes pay tolls at the Tokaido’s fifty-three stations. Much like our modern highways, facilities for lodging, eating, and tourism grew up around these stations.

Utagawa Hiroshige II (also called Shigenobu, 1826–69), was born Chinpei Suzuki; a pupil of Ando, he took the name Hiroshige when Ando officially adopted him. Using this name also clearly demonstrated his accomplished roots to important artistic circles, publishers, and print buyers. Hiroshige II continued Ando’s practice of making landscape prints of famous locations. The two prints by Hiroshige II shown in this exhibition portray snowy scenes from locations along the Kanda River in the capital of Edo.

A revival of nineteenth-century printmaking styles and techniques occurred in the early to middle twentieth century. Unlike nineteenth-century Japanese artists, Kawase Hasui (1883–1957) and Yoshida Hiroshi (1876–1950) traveled extensively across Japan and studied European artistic practices, including oil painting. Their prints included here blend Eastern and Western conventions of landscape, creating new styles of *meisho-e*.

The Artists and Practices of Japanese Color Woodblock Printmaking

The process of color woodblock printmaking in Japan typically involved at least four different tradespeople: an artist who designed an image, a carver or team of carvers who prepared multiple blocks to fulfill an artist's design, a printer who printed images from multiple blocks, and a publisher who supervised the entire process and distributed the prints. Artists did not carve the blocks or make prints from them. Publishers initiated projects and commissioned artists to make designs. Most prints credit the artist and publisher by stamps of their names. Two prints in this exhibition identify the carver; Koizumi Kanegoro (also called Hori Kane) cut the blocks for Utagawa Hiroshige II's *Ochanomizu* and *Shohei Bridge*, from the series *Views of Famous Places in Edo* of 1862. Printers' names are very rarely recorded, and none of the printers of the works in this exhibition are known.

Color woodblock printing required superior technical abilities on the part of carvers and printers. Each color of an image represents a separate block, meaning that the more colors in a design the more blocks were required. Carvers had the challenge of translating artists' designs, which were usually painted in ink and watercolor, into distinct areas of color to be carved from different blocks. Printers had to prepare inks, apply ink to each block each time it was printed, and precisely line up each block one at a time to create a finished image. A skilled printer could complete 200 to 300 basic prints a day. Designs with color gradations – used in almost every landscape displayed here, usually in skies or water – demanded significantly more time. A master printer could finish about twenty to thirty prints with gradations per day. Very little is known about the training of carvers and printers, although the apprenticeship of carvers is thought to have lasted at least ten years. Considering the accuracy and efficiency required of printers, the duration of their apprenticeships was likely just as long. Carvers and printers are unacknowledged artists in the complex, meticulous process of making woodblock prints of superb quality and compelling design.





Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)

Yokkaichi: Mie River, 1833–34

From the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*, also called the *Hoeido Tokaido* or *Great Tokaido*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi (Hoeido)

Gift of Mr. Alvin John Accola in memory of his wife Katharine Mize Accola (68.34)

In this blustery scene from the forty-fourth station of the *Tokaido*, Ando captures a fleeting moment and suggests a multisensory experience of a place. A man chases his straw hat, while the mantle of the figure to the right whips in the brisk wind. The reeds and tree branches bend dramatically to the left in the force of the gale. The impermanence of nature, transitory weather conditions, and individuals' different responses to them are key themes of Japanese landscapes.



Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)

Tsuchiyama: Spring Rain, 1833–34

From the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*, also called the *Hoeido Tokaido* or *Great Tokaido*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachi (Hoeido)

Gift of Mr. Alvin John Accola in memory of his wife Katharine Mize Accola (68.35)

Tsuchiyama, the *Tokaido*'s fiftieth station, was known for its heavy spring rains. Ando probably did not experience these, because we know he travelled the Tokaido in summer. Rather, he invented this scene based on the area's reputation. The figures in the immediate foreground are compressed at the bottom of the composition, seemingly pushed down under the torrent of rain. Abrupt cropping of elements in the foreground is a distinctive feature of the designs of Ando and his followers.



Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)

***Kanagawa: View over the Sea from the Teahouses
on the Embankment, 1855***

From the series *Famous Views of the Fifty-three Stations*, also
called the *Vertical Tokaido*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo (Koeido)

Gift of Ruth Ellis in memory of her husband, President Elmer Ellis (98.48)

This print series is often simply referred to as the *Vertical Tokaido* to distinguish it from Ando's series of the same subject from over twenty years earlier (two prints from this earlier series are included in this exhibition). The vertical orientation of these prints is noteworthy, because it suggests the influence of Chinese landscape painting on Japanese art. Unlike Western landscapes that are typically horizontal, East Asian landscapes are often vertical, depicting sweeping views with sharply contrasting foregrounds and backgrounds.



Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)

Oiso: Saigyo's Hermitage at Snipe Marsh, 1855

From the series *Famous Sights of the Fifty-three Stations*, also called the *Vertical Tokaido*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo (Koeido)

Gift of Barbara Stratton Bolling and Deborah S. Booker
in memory of Arthur Mills Stratton (76.561)

This print features a significant historical and spiritual site – the small hut of the Buddhist monk, hermit, and poet Saigyo (1118–90). After becoming a monk, Saigyo spent his life travelling Japan and residing temporarily in shelters he built at sacred locations. His poetry often reflects his deep appreciation of nature, making the pilgrimage destination of his former home an appropriate reference for Ando's landscape. Two travelers, perhaps pilgrims visiting this site in reverence to Saigyo, approach the hut from the right.



Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)
Numazu: Ashigara and Fuji in Clear Weather after Snow, 1855
From the series *Famous Sights of the Fifty-three Stations*, also
called the *Vertical Tokaido*
Color woodblock print
Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo (Koeido)
Gift of Doris Carpenter (78.32)

Mountains were useful landmarks for travelers on the Tokaido, especially Mount Fuji with an elevation over 12,000 feet. Although Mount Ashigara in the center is nearer to the station at Numazu, Mount Fuji towers over it in the distance to the left. Mount Fuji is one of Japan's Three Sacred Mountains and was added to the list of World Heritage Sites in 2013, because it has been an inspiration to artists and poets over the centuries.



Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)

Ejiri: Tago Bay and Miho no Matsubara, 1855

From the series *Famous Sights of the Fifty-three Stations*, also called the *Vertical Tokaido*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo (Koeido)

Gift of Barbara Stratton Bolling and Deborah S. Booker
in memory of Arthur Mills Stratton (76.560)

Miho no Matsubara is a sacred grove of ancient pine trees, still a natural refuge today in the modern city of Shizuoka. Some of the trees are over 600 years old. Ando depicted the view looking northeast over the bay, across the pine grove, toward a stunning view of Mount Fuji. Along with Fuji, this pine grove was added to the World Heritage List in 2013, in order to preserve it for future generations.



Utagawa Hiroshige I (called Ando, 1797–1858)

Mitsuke: Ferry on the Tenryu River, 1855

From the series *Famous Sights of the Fifty-three Stations*, also called the *Vertical Tokaido*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo (Koeido)

Gift of Barbara Stratton Bolling and Deborah S. Booker
in memory of Arthur Mills Stratton (76.562)

Transportation on the Tokaido was by foot, horse, or cart; large cargo was shipped by sea. At Mitsuke, the Tokaido's twenty-ninth station, the current of the Tenryu River was too strong for porters to carry travelers' packs overhead. Ando's print shows the ferries that were necessary to keep travel and trade moving on the Tokaido. These ferries and the food seller in the foreground are examples of the kinds of services that cropped up on Japan's roads.



Utagawa Hiroshige II (also called Shigenobu, 1826–69)

Ochanomizu, 1862

From the series *Views of Famous Places in Edo*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Fujiokaya Keijiro (Shorindo)

Woodblock carver: Koizumi Kanegoro (Hori Kane)

Gift of Mr. Alvin John Accola in memory of his wife Katharine Mize Accola (68.26)

Today a neighborhood in central Tokyo, Ochanomizu means “tea water,” in reference to the Kanda River. Water from this river was reportedly used to make tea for the shogun, Japan’s military dictator, who ruled from Edo (now Tokyo). Although Hiroshige II’s teacher and adoptive father, Ando, made several wintry prints, many consider Hiroshige II to be the master of snowy landscapes. This scene conveys the serenity and atmospheric effects of snow lightly falling in the evening.



Utagawa Hiroshige II (also called Shigenobu, 1826–69)

Shohei Bridge, 1862

From the series *Views of Famous Places in Edo*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Fujiokaya Keijiro (Shorindo)

Woodblock carver: Koizumi Kanegoro (Hori Kane)

Gift of Mr. Alvin John Accola in memory of his wife Katharine Mize Accola (68.27)

This print, another view on the Kanda River, captures a different kind of winter atmosphere in comparison to Hiroshige II's print to the left. The landscape is covered in snow, but the air is clear and dry in the bright moonlight. The viewer can imagine the crisp and cold feeling of breathing this air. A wide formation of birds cutting across the sky adds a sense of movement to the otherwise hushed experience of this place.



Kawase Hasui (1883–1957)

Zojo-ji Temple in the Snow, 1925

From the series *Twenty Views of Tokyo*

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Watanabe Shozaburo

Gift of Mr. Alvin John Accola in memory of his wife Katharine Mize Accola (68.40)

Beginning in the 1920s, artists like Kawase and Yoshida Hiroshi, and the publisher Watanabe Shozaburo, fostered a revival of color woodblock printmaking. The woman in this scene holds her umbrella against the forceful wind of a snowstorm while walking in front of the Buddhist Zojo-ji temple complex in Tokyo. The distinctive red Sangedatsumon Gate shown here was built in 1622 and is the only structure on the complex to survive until today through wars and natural disasters.



Kawase Hasui (1883–1957)

Rain on the Lakeside near Matsue, 1932

Color woodblock print

Publisher: Watanabe Shozaburo

Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday (76.159)

This scene — from the banks of either Lake Shinji or Nakaumi, which flank the coastal city of Matsue — suggests an interesting merger of Japanese and Western conventions of landscape. Like Ando and Hiroshige, Kawase was interested in capturing fleeting weather conditions. He represented steady rain by subtly using angled strokes painted over the printed image. The use of earth tones, horizontal orientation, and gradual recession into space are more characteristic of Western landscapes than Japanese ones.



Yoshida Hiroshi (1876–1950)
Camping at Washibadake, 1926
Color woodblock print

Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday (76.147)

In the tradition of prints of revered mountains, this image celebrates Mount Washibadake, part of the Hida range, also known as the Japanese or Northern Alps. Rather than a sweeping view of the mountain, like Utagawa Hiroshige I might have done, this design focuses on the human activity in the foreground and gives a detailed representation of the small lake in the mountain's cratered peak. An avid hiker and camper, Yoshida founded the Japan Alpine Artists Association.



Anonymous (Japanese, 19th century)
Printing block depicting a rocky coastal landscape
in moonlight, ca. 1880s

Wood

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Martin J. Gerson (63.5.3)

Modern impression of this block

Printed by Annette Case, 1960s

Ink on paper

In multicolor woodblock printing, each color requires a separate block. Therefore, this block is just one of a few that would have been inked and then pressed in consecutive layers of color onto one sheet of paper. This modern print, possibly designed by Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847–1915), allows us to see how the image would be printed from the block. The raised areas of the block are what are impressed onto the paper, like a stamp. Thin lines or delicate features of a design had to be carefully carved away to create a fine elevated surface.