

HIROSHIGE

Matthi Forrer

HIROSHIGE

Prints and Drawings

with essays by
Suzuki Jūzō and Henry D. Smith II

Prestel

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Foreword

The Royal Academy's connection with Japan began in 1982 with the "Great Japan Exhibition", a celebration of the art of the Edo period. In that vast survey of all the arts it was possible to show only a representative selection of colour woodblock prints. In London we have been fortunate in having the opportunity to study this most refined art more closely, first at the Academy's exhibition of the work of Katsushika Hokusai in 1991, then at the British Museum's show of Kitagawa Utamaro in 1995 and now again with our exhibition of prints and drawings by Utagawa Hiroshige.

The Hokusai exhibition, curated by Matthi Forrer and held in the year of the British Japan Festival, was a revelation to connoisseurs and public alike, showing as it did the finest impressions of Hokusai's prints from throughout the world. Now we are delighted to be able to honour his contemporary Hiroshige in the year of the bicentenary of his birth. Once again we extend our warmest thanks to the exhibition's curator, Matthi Forrer, who has travelled the world in search of the best impressions of prints by the master just as he did for the Hokusai exhibition.

Quality of impressions is crucial to a full appreciation of the subtlety of Hiroshige's art. Through the most delicate of adjustments of line and colour Hiroshige was able to convey every nuance of the passing seasons: of mist, of snow, of rain, of early spring light or of fireworks over water on a sultry summer night. Like Hokusai, Hiroshige made numerous series of prints, and his *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road*, the highway that runs from Edo to the Imperial capital, Kyoto, proved to be immensely popular. Indeed, some of his landscapes were in such demand that editions of thirty or forty thousand were printed. Hence the importance of showing only the best impressions in perfect condition.

We are deeply indebted to all those who have generously lent to this exhibition. We also extend our warmest thanks to The Nippon Foundation, whose support has made this exhibition possible. Suzuki Jūzō, the world's foremost scholar on Hiroshige, and the distinguished historian Henry D. Smith II contributed essays to the catalogue. We are confident that this exhibition of Hiroshige's work will provide as much pleasure as that of Hokusai.

Sir Philip Dowson CBE
President, Royal Academy of Arts

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Matthi Forrer

Author's Note

The items in the catalogue are arranged according to subject matter and, within each thematic group, chronologically. Prints of birds and flowers (cat. 1–5) and a selection of views of Edo (cat. 6–16) are followed by series devoted to Japan's chief roads, the Tōkaidō and the Kisokaidō (cat. 17–49). These are followed, in turn, by views in the various provinces of Japan (cat. 50–92), interrupted by a group of still lifes (cat. 81–5), and by a selection from the artist's last great series, *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo* (cat. 93–106). Preceded by images in which mist, rain, snow and moonlight play a particularly important part (cat. 107–26), the final section contains a number of drawings and other items relating to the genesis of individual prints (cat. 127–40).

The catalogue entries are arranged as follows:

Titles. Each entry has a descriptive title against the catalogue number. Where this is followed by a further title, this title is a translation of the Japanese that follows it in parentheses, which, in turn, is the title as it appears on the print. Where applicable, the series title as it appears on the print is given in translation and, in parentheses, in Japanese. Here, and throughout this volume, Japanese written characters are transliterated according to the Hepburn system of romanisation, with the usual modifications.

Publishers and dates. The name of each publisher is followed in parentheses by that of his firm where this also appears on the print. Dates given are those of the first publication of a print or series of prints, which can often be derived from the seals (see below). These dates sometimes depart from those customary in the literature on Hiroshige; the reasons for this are explained in the essay on pp. 11–27 of the present volume.

Signatures. Signatures are transcribed as they appear on the prints. The words *ga* and *hitsu* following the artist's name mean “drawn by” and “brush of” respectively and are a convention in Japanese art comparable to *pinxit* and *delineavit* in the West.

Seals. Apart from the artist's and publisher's seals that frequently appear on a print, the censorship seals may be of particular importance in establishing the date of a print (see Glossary). These dates appear in the form of the zodiacal sign for the year; the month given is that according to the lunar calendar in use in Japan until 1872. Throughout the present volume the zodiacal sign is translated into the equivalent year in the Gregorian calendar and the month is given in Roman numerals; where applicable, the day has been added in Arabic numerals. Thus “1858/X/9” refers to the Ninth Day of the Tenth Month in the Year of the Horse.

Block-cutters. Block-cutters are named wherever possible, with the full name followed in parentheses by the abbreviated form as it appears on the print.

Dimensions. Most prints and books were issued in Japan in standard formats. These are cited here by their indigenous names (*aiban*, etc.), which are explained in the Glossary, and followed by the exact dimensions of the sheet, in millimetres, height before width.

Owners. Where known, the names of former owners of works, preceded by “ex-”, are given in parentheses following the name of the present owner.

References. In the text of an entry “(a)”, “(b)”, etc. denote the various impressions and states of a print. These designations are used again, in square brackets, in the references at the end of the entry, which are mainly intended to direct the reader to additional reproductions. The literature in the references is cited in abbreviated form; full details are to be found in the Select Bibliography.

Terms that are used regularly throughout the volume are explained in the Glossary.

All verse translations from the Japanese and the Chinese are by the present author.



Travellers on a Sloping Road (cat. 129), detail

The Art of Hiroshige

MATTHI FORRER

Hiroshige and Hokusai are generally regarded as the two leading landscape artists in Japanese printmaking. Any list of the “Big Six” Japanese masters of the woodblock print, in which Utamaro would naturally figure as the specialist in portraits of beautiful women and Sharaku as the specialist in portraying kabuki actors, could justifiably include Hiroshige as the foremost specialist in landscape. Choice of the two artists to complete the list—Harunobu with Kiyonaga, Moronobu or Toyokuni—would vary according to taste, but Hiroshige’s place in this company is assured.

Landscapes undoubtedly constitute the most important and constant factor in Hiroshige’s oeuvre, and they therefore dominate the present selection of his prints. Yet he by no means concentrated exclusively on landscape. During his early period, he focused on prints of beautiful women, actors and historical figures. This was followed by a long period in which he produced landscapes and prints of birds and flowers, and, in turn, by a period of yet more landscapes, this time with fashionably clad women in the foreground, as well as several series on historical and time-honoured, “classical” themes. Later still, he concentrated on prints with a humorous content. Nor should we forget that, like all print designers, Hiroshige also created designs for more practical purposes, not only fan prints and envelopes, but also advertising prints and boards for the game of goose. Moreover, throughout his career, he designed illustrations for countless books, many of them in more than one volume. Space precludes discussion of all these aspects of Hiroshige’s career here. The present essay will therefore focus on certain features of his life and art, notably his work of the 1830s.

YOUTH AND EARLY CAREER

Utagawa Hiroshige was born in the Yaesugashi district of the Japanese capital, Edo (present-day Tokyo). The generally accepted year of his birth is 1797, though this is based solely on the memorial portrait of him by Utagawa Kunisada, which states that Hiroshige died in 1858 at the age of sixty-two. From 1758 on, his father, Andō Genemon, occupied an official position as fireman in Yaesugashi, in the present-day ward of Marunouchi in the Chiyoda district of Edo. A family document drawn up around 1866 states that Hiroshige’s first name as a boy was Tokutarō. Later, he also bore the names Jūemon and Tokubei. He is supposed to have assumed the name Jūemon himself at the age of thirteen, shortly after he had lost both his parents and taken on the responsibility of caring for his family. Hiroshige inherited his father’s position, and the regular income thus accruing to

him may have encouraged him to embark on the precarious career of a print designer and may also help to explain why that career was so slow in getting off the ground.

Information on Hiroshige's early career is fragmentary and derives mainly from posthumous sources; however plausible, it cannot be confirmed by other evidence. For instance, a source dating from Hiroshige's lifetime reports that, at the age of ten, he made a painting of a delegation of the king of the Ryūkyū Islands to the shogun. Although a painting does exist that matches the description (*Kobijutsu*, 1983, no. 1), it is hardly possible to draw any conclusions from it. Even if an authentic work by the young Hiroshige—and the position of the signature is highly unusual—its extremely amateurish drawing bears no relation to later, better documented work by the artist. Another early work by Hiroshige is of more importance: a New Year's print showing a still life that consists of a hat used in *nō* dances and a small drum (*Kobijutsu*, 1983, no. 2). The print was dated to 1813 by Uchida Minoru, but must have been designed for the New Year of 1819. The signature, "Ichiyūsai Hiroshige", is probably the first datable use of this name on a print and corroborates information given in other sources, namely that Hiroshige received his training as a print designer from Utagawa Toyohiro (1763?-1828). The earliest mention of this was made in 1833 by Hiroshige's fellow artist Keisai Eisen (1791-1848) in *Miscellaneous Writings by the Old Anonymous (Mumei-ō zuihitsu)*, a biographical work on print designers. Another source states that, as a child, Hiroshige had already received lessons in the traditional Kanō painting style, from Okajima Rinsai, an amateur painter and fireman who lived in the same ward. This would certainly not have been an unusual step. It is also conceivable that Hiroshige, as mentioned in yet another source, tried to obtain tuition at the age of fourteen or fifteen from the most successful designer of portraits of kabuki actors of his day, Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825). However, Toyokuni supposedly rejected him as a pupil, and he turned instead to Toyohiro. This would have been in 1810 or 1811, when Hiroshige was thirteen or fourteen, the usual age to begin learning a profession; but the claim, made in the first serious attempt at a biography, Iijima Kyōshin's of 1894, that he received the artname Utagawa Hiroshige from Toyohiro as early as 1812 seems improbable. By this time Toyohiro was producing no more than illustrations for one or two popular novels by Santō Kyōzan every year, and Hiroshige's alleged initial choice of teacher is wholly understandable: not only was Toyokuni highly productive, illustrating almost ten popular novels a year in addition to designing a large number of prints, he also seems to have ensured that his pupils received commissions. Toyohiro does not appear to have had this to offer: the designs for book illustrations that Hiroshige, like most aspiring print designers, created in order to make a name for himself can only have been isolated commissions that were obtained with difficulty. This goes some way towards explaining the paucity of biographical details on Hiroshige's early career.

It is difficult to assess what Hiroshige owed to Toyohiro. Some writers have attempted to demonstrate, none too convincingly, that similarities exist between city views by the two artists. These are, however, highly standardised images and, in fact, Hiroshige's earliest known prints display much closer similarities to those of the successful designers

Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865) and Keisai Eisen. These early works depict kabuki actors (1818), beautiful women (probably *c.* 1825–9, although usually dated slightly earlier) and famous heroes of the past like those found in the prints of such contemporaries as Kunisada and Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861). However, they are little more than curiosities, Hiroshige failing to match the quality of his models. The publisher Iwatoya Kisaburō seems to have been virtually the only person to have recognised talent in Hiroshige’s designs and it is therefore hardly surprising that none of the early biographical sources mentions these early prints. What *is* surprising is that Hiroshige’s role as an illustrator of popular novels was also marginal in the 1820s. His main contributions to this field were illustrations for two novels by Tōri Sannin (1790–1858), *Ongyoku nasake no itomichi* (4 vols., 1820) and *Dehōdai mucharon*, Part 2 (6 vols., 1822). Hiroshige also wrote and illustrated a few small works himself, such as *Shirai Gonpachi* (1 vol., 1824) and *Yoshitsune senbonzakura* (2 vols., 1824). He seems to have achieved a measure of success in 1827, when he illustrated a number of novellas, but this vanished completely during the following years. Illustration does not appear to have been where his future lay, and indeed, it was not until well into the 1830s that he started to receive commissions for illustrations for the annual de luxe poetry albums issued by clubs of amateur poets (cat. 41–8, 91, 92).

EARLY VIEWS OF EDO

After the death of the publisher Iwatoya Kisaburō around 1830, Hiroshige visited the well-known writer Takizawa Bakin (1767–1848), who introduced him to the up-and-coming publisher Chōjiya Heibei (Bunkeidō). There are no signs of a collaboration between Hiroshige and Chōjiya, who was chiefly a publisher of books and therefore not the person to help promote, as Iwatoya had done, Hiroshige’s activity as a designer of prints of beautiful women.

Hiroshige’s search for regular cooperation with a publisher may well have guided him to the new subjects that appear in his work from the early 1830s on: views in Edo and birds and flowers. Both genres had a place in the tradition of Japanese printmaking, though very different ones. Views of easily identifiable places in Edo first occur as a regular theme in prints dating from the end of the eighteenth century, notably those by Torii Kiyonaga and Katsukawa Shunchō in the then fashionable triptych format. In these the city functions primarily as a foil for fashionably dressed women as they walk through Edo, visit temples, cruise on the Sumida River, picnic during the cherry blossom season or frequent teahouses in the Shiba and Takanawa wards along the Bay of Edo to the south of the city. As we shall see, the genre was to become a vehicle of Japanese experiments in Western-style perspective.

From 1800 on, the residents of Edo became increasingly aware of what their city had to offer and, probably as a result of growing prosperity among the urban population, many people found opportunities to visit temples, teahouses and restaurants or, in the summer, to go on trips to the coast or to drift on the Sumida River and explore the quiet stretches

on its eastern bank. The first record of this phenomenon can be found in de luxe poetry albums. Amateur poets, mainly drawn from the class of well-to-do citizens, wrote poems on famous places in the capital, usually illustrated by Hokusai. Individual prints depicting famous places in Edo are exceptional, the more inexpensive prints in a small format that were produced for a wider audience being especially scarce. In the early 1830s this suddenly changed, perhaps as part of a revival of interest in the period 1800–5. The seeds of such a revival may be found in the de luxe albums of *kyōka* poems of the 1820s, of which famous places in Edo commonly constitute the main theme. At the same time, these albums bear witness to increasing interest in other places in Japan, and a further indication of a fairly wide-ranging change in taste may perhaps be seen in the fact that the publishers Suharaya Mohei and Ihachi appear to have stepped up pressure on writers and illustrators to complete *Famous Places in Edo* (12 vols.), a large-scale undertaking initiated at the end of the eighteenth century and finally brought to a conclusion in 1834.

The major innovation of the 1830s in prints of famous places in Edo was to issue them in the standard *ōban* format. This is no doubt primarily attributable to the success of Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, the series, published by Nishimuraya Yohachi from 1830 onwards, that marks the recognition of the landscape print as an independent genre. The influence of the *Thirty-six Views* on Hiroshige's earliest major series, *Famous Views in the Eastern Capital*, published c. 1831–2 by Kawaguchiya Shōzō, is unmistakable (cat. 6, 7). Hiroshige's series does not seem to have been reprinted often enough for it to be counted an overwhelming success. Perhaps the prints were rather too expensive for that: surviving impressions are often meticulously printed in fine pigments on high-quality paper.

Hiroshige became *the* artist who recorded the famous places in Edo only with the group of prints published by Sanoya Kihei (Kikakudō), probably commencing in 1832 (cat. 8–10). The difference in success between *Famous Views* and this second group may be explained in part by the location of their publishers' shops: Kawaguchiya's was in the centre of the city, at Ryōgoku Hirōkōji, close to Ryōgoku Bridge, while Sanoya's shop was at Shiba Shinmeimae, which all travellers to or from Edo along the Tōkaidō Road had to pass. No doubt tourists on this route ensured a good turnover of prints of this kind, which were eminently suitable as souvenirs. Certainly, the series published by Sanoya was issued in very large editions and was often reprinted even fifteen or twenty years later. Sales of some prints must have exceeded fifteen or twenty thousand.

The different clientele targeted by these publishers is reflected in the various formats in which they issued prints of famous places in Edo. Kawaguchiya—and Fujiokaya Hikotarō, another publisher whose shop was in the centre of the city—also used the tall, narrow *tanzakuban* format, while Kihei strove for diversity in smaller formats, such as the *aiban*, *chūban* and *koban*, aimed at the tourist with a smaller purse. It is difficult to determine whether or not a series of thirty prints by Hiroshige of famous places in Edo, published in the *koban* format by Enshūya Hikobei at Nihonbashi, the starting point of the Tōkaidō Road, was intended primarily for the tourist market. The same applies to a few dozen other designs by Hiroshige that were issued in small formats by various minor,

virtually unknown publishers. Yet it may well have been the diversity of markets catered for by publishers in different parts of the city that enabled Hiroshige to continue producing successful views of Edo for the rest of his career. Undoubtedly, the enormous popularity of this theme—which accounts for roughly a quarter of the artist’s entire oeuvre of prints—and of such other topographical subjects favoured by Hiroshige as the stations of the Tōkaidō Road and views of Lake Biwa in Ōmi Province was aided by the fact that, in the course of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of people in Japan were able to travel.

In view of the rather limited range of subjects, Hiroshige’s success in keeping alive interest in images of Edo was no mean achievement. Although the number of famous locations expanded somewhat over the years, some ten or twelve remained “musts”. For instance, of a total of almost eight hundred prints in the standard *ōban* format, Hiroshige devoted more than fifty to the Ryōgoku Bridge, more than forty to Ueno, Takanawa and the Kinryūzan Temple at Asakusa, and more than thirty to the Yoshiwara, Susaki and Gotenyama.¹ These subjects were often combined with almost equally obligatory features, such as snow (Sumida River and Asakusa), moonlight (Takanawa), evening light (naturally enough, in the Yoshiwara, Edo’s pleasure district), fireworks (above Ryōgoku Bridge) and cherry blossom (beside the Sumida, in Gotenyama or in Ueno). That Hiroshige was concerned to maintain his reputation as the leading artist for views of Edo’s famous places can be deduced from his last great series of prints, *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo*, which is an impressive demonstration of vigorous powers of invention by a sixty-year-old artist (cat. 93–106).

BIRDS AND FLOWERS

Some of the above remarks also apply to Hiroshige’s prints of birds and flowers, which probably began to appear in 1832: the number of different birds is limited and here, too, there are regular combinations, such as kingfishers and irises, tits and camellias, nightingales and cherry blossom, hawks and pine trees, the Indian peacock and the equally exotic peony, originally imported from China. Hiroshige tried to achieve a virtual monopoly of this field, as he had of views of Edo. It was a theme, however, that possessed a longer tradition: already found in Chinese and traditional Japanese painting, it was first made the subject of prints—either in albums or as single sheets—by Koryūsai (c. 1770), Utamaro (1790), Kitao Masayoshi (1789) and Kitao Shigemasa (1805). Subsequently, it formed an important part of the emergent interest in naturalism evidenced by such innovators as the Chinese-influenced Nagasaki school of painting and the Dutch-influenced tradition of the Akita Ranga, supported by the *daimyō* of Akita.

Yet fascination with naturalism is not sufficient to explain the large demand for prints of birds and flowers. An important part was also played by the considerable interest that poets, both of the traditional *haiku* and, especially from the 1780s on, of the more popular *kyōka*, displayed in birds, fish, insects and flowers. In addition, aviaries both reflected and contributed to the popularity of birds, not only those constructed by many a



Fig. 1 Utagawa Toyokuni,
*The Garden of the Kachō
 Teahouse in Edo, c. 1792.* Museo
 d'Arte Orientale, Genoa

daimyō or samurai, but also those kept by some of the larger teahouses, especially in Edo. (Aviaries of the latter kind, in which exotic birds naturally stole the show, can be seen in prints from the 1780s and 1790s by Kiyonaga, Shunchō and Toyokuni [fig. 1].²) Hiroshige was thus able to study at first hand even the many foreign birds depicted in his prints. The naturalness of his birds as they fly through the air or perch on a branch is astonishing and the artist's extraordinarily sharp powers of observation are revealed in his ability to "freeze" wings in flight.

In their books on Hiroshige, neither Uchida Minoru (1932) nor Suzuki Jūzō (1970) attempted to estimate the number of the artist's designs on the theme of birds and flowers. Yoshida Susugu did so in his article of 1967, but that has been superseded by a study written by Ōkubo Junichi, who gives the following figures: twenty-five designs in the *ōtanzaku* format (the widest of the tall, narrow sheets favoured for this genre), most of them published by Wakasaya Yoichi, and a total of sixty-three in the slightly narrower *chūtanzaku* format, forty-two of them published by Kawaguchiya Shōzō, eight by Fujiokaya Hikotarō and thirteen by minor or unknown publishers. Ōkubo mentions a further 105 designs, in the much narrower *aitanzaku* format, bringing the total number of tall, narrow-format designs alone to almost two hundred. The majority of these contain a poem. It is sometimes claimed that such prints were often pasted on screens or sliding doors as a form of interior decoration. This cannot be ruled out entirely, but I have never come across an instance of the practice and, if it was as common as has been suggested, one would expect to find more copies in mediocre or poor condition, soaked off the screens or doors after having been exposed to smoke and cooking vapours for decades.

Hiroshige no doubt achieved a fair degree of success in the early 1830s with his views of famous places in Edo and his images of birds and flowers, yet his decisive breakthrough came with *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road* (cat. 17–28, 110–13). Tradition has it that the origins of this series of prints lay in the artist's being selected to escort the white horse that was presented each year to the emperor by the shogun. On this mission he travelled the Tōkaidō Road from Edo to Kyoto in the Eighth Month of 1832. Upon returning to Edo in the Ninth or Tenth Month, the traditional narrative continues, he approached the publishers Takenouchi Magohachi and Tsuruya Kiemon, offering them designs for prints that he had made on the basis of sketches done during the journey. This account, culminating in sudden recognition of a hitherto neglected talent, has greatly appealed to the romantic imagination and has remained largely unchallenged. Yet it is based solely on the biography of Hiroshige written in 1894 by Iijima Kyōshin, whose only evidence was an unconfirmed statement by Hiroshige III (1843–94), a pupil of Hiroshige's who adopted the name of his teacher some seven years after the latter's death. If the course of events described by Iijima is apocryphal, this would have important consequences for the dating of the Tōkaidō series.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that ascribing precise dates to individual prints is virtually impossible before 1852, when date seals replaced the *kiwame* seal as part of the Japanese censorship regulations. In the case of *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road* we do at least have a *terminus ante quem*: in 1834 the series was published in two albums with a foreword, dated in the First Month of that year, by Yomo Ryūsui and a list of contents. If the traditional story of its genesis is correct, the entire series of fifty-five prints must have been issued over a period of little more than a year. Although the publication of the series was a collaborative enterprise between the hitherto totally unknown Takenouchi Magohachi and the more established Tsuruya Kiemon—they issued eleven designs jointly, while the rest were produced by Takenouchi alone—this is still a quite exceptionally fast rate of production. It appears unlikely that the work of a designer who can hardly be said to have “arrived” would be put on the market at such speed and it is also improbable that a beginner like Takenouchi would have had the resources or credit to invest so heavily in woodblocks and paper. It therefore seems natural to assume that the publication of *The Fifty-three Stages of the Tōkaidō Road*, an undertaking on a virtually unprecedented scale, was spread out over a longer period, commencing, say, in 1831, if not in 1830.

This more plausible chronological framework allows Hiroshige's participation in the mission to the emperor—if that, too, is not mythical—to fall during the period before he relinquished his official position as fireman in 1832 in favour of Andō Nakajirō (who then became head of the Andō family). A further advantage is that one can imagine a keener rivalry, or at least reciprocal influence, between Hiroshige's Tōkaidō series and Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* of c. 1830–5. That said, it is hard to point to parallels between the two series, beyond, perhaps, similar ideas in, for example, Hokusai's Mishima

Pass and view of Ejiri, on the one hand, and Hiroshige's stations of Hamamatsu and Yokkaichi on the other. The revised dates for the Tōkaidō series do, however, make the advertisement that appeared with the publication of the series as a whole in 1834 less surprising than it would otherwise seem. This advertisement announces publication of similar, yet smaller series, of places along the routes to Ōyama, Enoshima, Akibayama and Ise. Only two of these prints—both of the route to Enoshima—have survived,³ though a few others have possibly been preserved in the form of drawings. The advertisement also announces two further series, *Eight Views in Ōmi Province* and one devoted to the stations of the Kisokaidō Road, both of which have survived, as well as some books on the theme of “One Hundred Poems of a Hundred Poets”, which have not been preserved, at least not under the titles given in the advertisement. The publisher Takenouchi would hardly have advertised such an impressive list of forthcoming work by Hiroshige if he had not seen drawings for at least some of the projected series, yet the customary dating of the *Fifty-three Stations* makes it unlikely that the artist could have found time to design other prints. Everything points, in fact, to a working relationship between Takenouchi and Hiroshige that could scarcely have become so well established in the short time allegedly taken to produce the Tōkaidō series.

The advertisement describes the Kisokaidō prints as “a series of naturalistic views, with landscapes and people”. The express mention of people would seem to suggest that they had been the key to the success of the Tōkaidō series: the human presence in the prints enabled viewers everywhere to speculate about people's activities in the places depicted. Such speculation, and discussion, must have played an important part in the reception of practically all types of print. It is not difficult to imagine how prints of kabuki actors, for example, could serve as a pretext for friends to gather together of an evening and compare notes on various actors' performances. Hiroshige's landscapes will have encouraged similar discussions. Who is the man in the palanquin in *Travellers Passing a Shrine in the Mist*, for instance, and what are the figures on the left doing (cat. 19)? Or again, *A Roadside Restaurant* may have elicited debate on where the best *torooshiru* could be eaten (cat. 23). And just what is happening in Seki (cat. 27)? The subtitles of the prints went some way to providing an explanation, but much was left to the viewer's imagination. The latter was no doubt also fed by an extremely popular novel by Jippensha Ikku (1765–1831), published serially between 1802 and 1809, which describes the doings of two adventurers from Edo during their journey along the Tōkaidō Road. The novel spawned a sequel and all kinds of imitations, ensuring that it retained its popularity with a large public until the late nineteenth century.

Publication of the Kisokaidō series, which was begun by Keisai Eisen and was issued jointly by Takenouchi and Iseya Rihei, is usually held to have started in 1835. As with the Tōkaidō prints, Hiroshige's contribution to the series maintains a balance between images that emphasise the landscape and those that favour the human figure (cat. 35–40). Eisen's designs, on the other hand, are far more strongly orientated towards the latter and feature all kinds of figures engaged in a variety of activities, including a group of blind people attacking one another with their sticks. Indeed, the advertisement's “naturalistic

views, with landscapes and people” might almost be taken as a description of Eisen’s designs. If that were so, not only would Eisen have begun the series earlier than generally supposed—probably *c.* 1831–2—but also Hiroshige’s involvement in the project could have dated from 1834, the year of the advertisement. The traditional date of 1835 for commencement of publication of the series is based on a reference to that year on an umbrella in Eisen’s design for the station of Nihonbashi. Yet with more reason this can be interpreted as marking the beginning not of the series, but of the collaboration between Takenouchi and Iseya, since both their trademarks appear on this print.

THE “EIGHT VIEWS IN ŌMI PROVINCE” AND WESTERN INFLUENCE

In contrast to the Tōkaidō and Kisokaidō series, the prints in *Eight Views in Ōmi Province* (cat. 68–75), advertised as “in ink with light colour washes”, do not encourage speculation on the part of the viewer: they are pure landscapes with an almost classical atmosphere, completely in accordance with the traditional poems printed on them. The *Eight Views* thus represent a new departure for Hiroshige, who perhaps wished to demonstrate the breadth of his talent. This series is one of his most coherent and impressive, and the fact that the artist later devoted more than fifteen series to the same theme, most of them in smaller formats, may indicate that he himself regarded it as particularly suited to his talents.

The series consists of eight views of Lake Biwa in Ōmi Province. Series of eight depictions of a certain place originated in Chinese poetry and painting in connection with the Hsiao and Hsiang rivers near Lake Tung-T’ing, in Hunan Province, but the genre was absorbed by Japanese painting at an early date. Japanese places were gradually substituted for the Chinese ones, as in one of the earliest known examples in woodblock printing, which dates from the late seventeenth century. The genre became more common in prints during the early eighteenth century, which often bore the same poems as Hiroshige’s prints. By the end of the eighteenth century such series of eight images were often displayed in the street in viewers that were fitted with a special lens, producing the illusion of depth. By the early years of the next century, therefore, the genre was familiar to a large section of the public, as evidenced by a few rather experimental prints in a small format by Hokusai. Such images had become a focus of Japanese interest in Western-style perspective and remained so until the 1820s, several series of views in Ōmi, such as those by Shinsai, Shuntei and Kunitora, displaying strong Western influence.

Against this historical background, Hiroshige’s *Eight Views* emerge as specifically “Japanese” landscapes in their adoption of more traditional perspective and in their use of colour woodblock printing techniques. Comparison of Hiroshige’s series with Shinsai’s *Eight Views in Ōmi Province* of *c.* 1820, for example, reveals striking compositional similarities between both artists’ views of Ishiyama and Seta. Although Hiroshige retains the bend in the shore of the lake (cat. 69, 70), his horizon is a straight line. Shinsai’s horizon is curved, a specifically Western element derived, of course, from the knowledge that the earth is spherical (fig. 2). Another point of difference is that, while in Shinsai’s images the cliffs around the lake are coloured in a variety of bright tints, Hiroshige tries to create the



Fig. 2 Ryūryūkyo Shinsai,
Evening Glow at Seta Bridge,
 c. 1820

impression of successive outcrops of mountain. By allowing distant mountains to emerge above the fog or mist, he approaches traditional Chinese perspective, in which the various sections from top to bottom correspond to increasing degrees of proximity to the viewer. Moreover, Shinsai's relatively aggressive colour contrasts give way, in Hiroshige's prints, to sequences of transitional shades. A significant part in all this is played by light or uncoloured areas, which Hiroshige employs not only descriptively, but also as a means of conveying depth. Similar comparisons can be made between Hiroshige and his predecessors in the field of views of Edo. Again, antecedents existed in the form of prints designed to be seen through special viewers and here, too, Hiroshige manages to modify the tradition in a subtle way, not by giving the impression that he had no understanding of Western perspective, but by applying it more sparingly and in a generally less striking way.

There would seem to be two main exceptions to Hiroshige's reticence towards Western influence, the so-called *Reisho Tōkaidō* of c. 1848–9 (cat. 29–33, 127–30) and *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo* of 1856–8 (cat. 93–106). In the former series we often seem to be looking down from a high vantage point, into a street, into shops or a harbour. Yet it is debatable whether this represents Western influence at all and was not derived, instead, from the kind of perspective frequently encountered in the popular travel guides of the period, the *meishoki* (fig. 3). This bird's-eye perspective alternates in this series with broad panoramas that, with their low viewpoints (cat. 30, 129) and clear vanishing points,

Fig. 3 *Bird's-eye View of the Pine at Karasaki*, from the album *Tōkaidō meisho zue*, illustrated by Kitao Masayoshi and Takehara Shunsensai, Edo, 1797. National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden



do unquestionably betray Western influence. On occasion, Hiroshige even ventures typically Western cloud formations (cat. 33).

In *One Hundred Famous Views in Edo* Hiroshige frequently places strikingly large-scale objects, people and animals, or parts of them, in the foreground. This device, doubtless derived from Western art, was obviously intended to add depth to the composition. The results in Hiroshige's prints, however, are seldom satisfactory, appearing exaggerated or even comical, as in the print of Yotsuya, where the viewer is confronted directly with the rear end of a horse—and more besides. Occasionally, this approach does work most effectively. In the print of Massaki, for example (cat. 102), we almost feel that we are guests in the teahouse, while in that of the Kameido plum orchard (cat. 93) we enjoy a better view of the tree than the other visitors, who are kept at a distance behind a fence.

Even in these two series, Hiroshige rarely gives overt expression to familiarity with Western artistic principles, certainly less so than such contemporaries of his as Kuniyoshi, Kunisada and even Hokusai. With the exception of some isolated examples—the clear shadows cast by the moon above Saruwakamachi, say, or the reflections in the water at Kyōbashi (cat. 98, 104)—Hiroshige's treatment of light, too, owes little to the bold Western effects admired in Japan. His concern was more with the subtle play of light (cat. 39, 56, 99), notably moonlight (cat. 35, 67, 69).

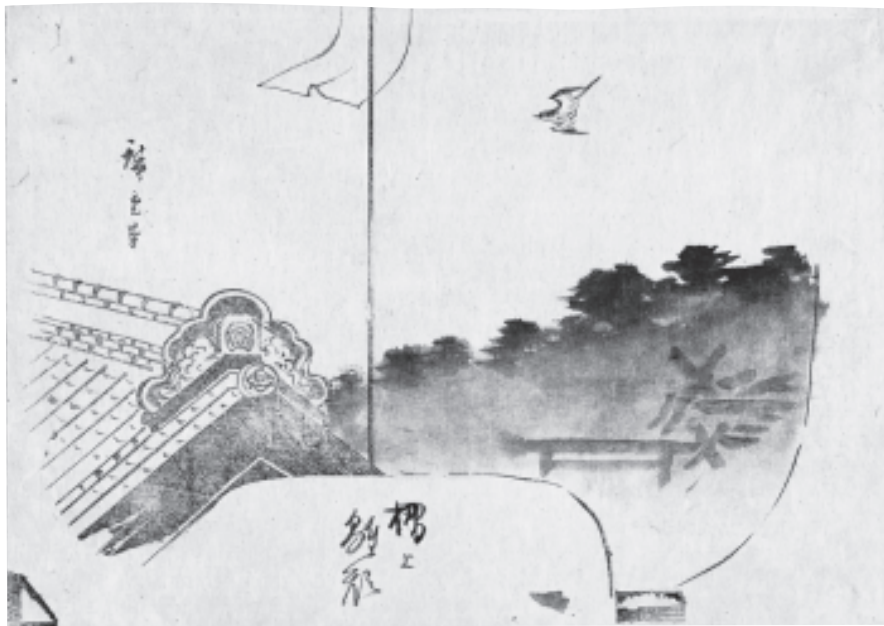


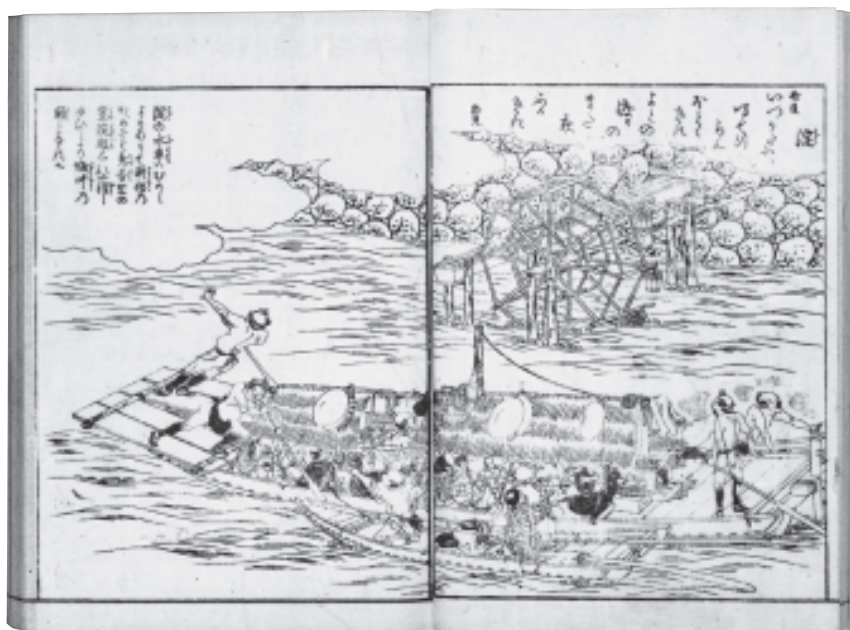
Fig. 4 *A Cuckoo and the Roof of the Komakatadō*, proof impression of a fan print, signed “Hiroshige hitsu”, c. 1857, with additions by the artist on the right-hand side. National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

ARTISTIC INTENTIONS AND WOODBLOCK PRINTING TECHNIQUES

There has been much speculation about the intentions underlying Hiroshige’s art, about the essence of that art and, therefore, about the personality of its creator. He has been termed a romantic, a humorist and even an Impressionist *avant la lettre*. Apart from his work, Hiroshige himself has left us with very little from which to gain an idea of his aims. In the preface to *A Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* he implies that he works in a different way from Hokusai when he writes that the illustrations are based on first-hand observation (“original sketches”), even though it was not possible to incorporate every detail. He has striven for realistic portrayals, since not everyone has the opportunity to visit the places depicted. He returns to the omission of details in the album *Landscape Views on the Tōkaidō* (*Tōkaidō fūkei zue*) of 1851, where he writes that “everything lacking in taste and grace must be omitted”. In 1849, in the drawing manual *Ehon tebikigusa*, which unfortunately was never completed, Hiroshige had the following to say: “Paintings are based on the form of things. So if you copy the form and add style and meaning, the result is a painting”, and also: “To depict a beautiful view the artist must know how to combine with one another each of the elements that constitute that view.”

Perhaps these few written statements are more valuable than they appear at first sight. Hiroshige’s mention of “original sketches” is certainly not in line with classical Chinese ideals, according to which an image reproduces the “idea” of a landscape, not a specific

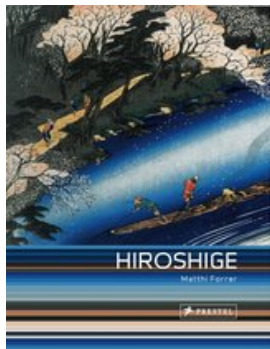
Fig. 5 *Ferry on the Yodo River*, sheets 12b/13a of volume 5 of *Miyako rinsen meishō zue*, various illustrators, Kyoto, 1799. National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden



location. Similarly, the exhortation to “copy the form”, then “add style and meaning” reverses Chinese notions, which held that “form” can result only from an “idea” that has led to an understanding of “meaning”. Hiroshige seems almost to be at pains to disassociate himself from the ancient tradition of Chinese painting and it is even conceivable that, in the preface to *A Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, he is implicitly accusing Hokusai of subservience to that tradition.

Hiroshige’s statements are reflected in his prints in a more concrete way, too. Many of his landscapes do indeed tell of a reality that has been manipulated, for example by the selection of a particular vantage point or by the omission of parts that make the view lack “style” or “meaning”. “Style and meaning” were then “added to the form” by skilful exploitation of the full potential of the woodcut medium. Although some of the sketches included here do not permit this procedure to be traced in detail—the final prints were never made—they do offer a clear illustration of Hiroshige’s ideas. In particular, the very sketchy views of Lake Biwa (cat. 131–4) betray a firm grasp of all the constituent elements of the landscape, enabling the essence of the scene to be recorded in a few flowing brush strokes.

It is not known whether rough sketches of this kind were worked up into more precise drawings—cat. 136, for example—by a professional copyist, employed by the publisher, or by a pupil of the artist, under the latter’s direct supervision. Neither can we be certain that it was at Hiroshige’s own request that a sizeable part of the boat in the foreground of cat. 136 was corrected on a piece of paper and then pasted on the drawing



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