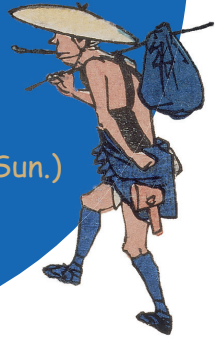




Thematic Exhibition

An Ukiyo-e Journey: Images of Travel from Edo Japan

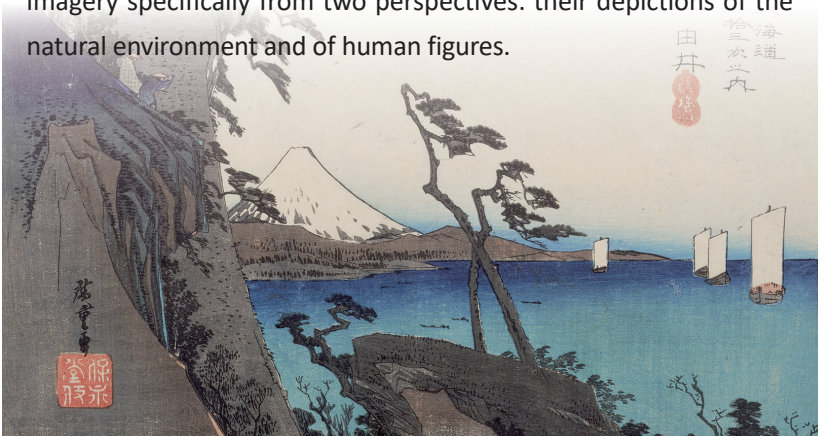
January 4 (Tue.) - January 30 (Sun.)
2022



Foreword

As the Edo period drew to a close, a growing interest in topography throughout Japan sparked a boom in the publication of colorful single-sheet woodblock prints of landscape scenes. A great many such prints were even included among the burial goods interred at the mausoleum of the 13th Lord of Owari, Tokugawa Yoshitsugu (1836–1849), who died at the age of 14.

This exhibition presents works by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), who was regarded as the foremost landscape print artist by the end of the Edo period. A selection of his work explores the characteristic nostalgia and familiarity of Hiroshige's travel imagery specifically from two perspectives: their depictions of the natural environment and of human figures.



Part 1

Illustrating the Major Travel Routes

Having emerged victorious from the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu embarked on a reform of the national transportation network. This led, during the rule of the second shogun, Hidetada, to the establishment of the so-called "Five Highways"—namely the Tōkaidō, Nakasendō, Nikkō, Ōshū and Kōshū Kaidō overland routes—all originating at Nihonbashi in Edo.

Sweeping views of these roads could be found in works of art from the early Edo period onward, mostly on handscrolls and large-format folding screens, but such works did not specifically illustrate the features of individual post stations along the roads.

As travel became more popular, series of Ukiyo-e prints depicting the various stations along the full length of these roadways were produced. Further developments included numerous color prints in the form of boardgames (*sugoroku*), in which players proceeded along the various routes, stopping at post stations along the way. This section presents images that depict the major Edo highways in their entirety.

Part 2

Geographic Studies, Illustrated Guidebooks, and Travel Literature

It is easy to imagine that travel, even if it was undertaken in the name of pilgrimage to a shrine or temple, would have been quite enjoyable in itself. Itineraries were planned as leisurely visits to famous sites while enjoying the mouth-watering local specialties of each region.

The first known practical guidebook for such travel was the *Miyako meisho zu-e* (Illustrated Guide to Famous Places in the Capital), published in 1780. It introduced famous sights in the ancient capital of Kyoto accompanied by realistic illustrations, making it both useful as well as enjoyable to look at. This was followed by other types of books, such as illustrated guides to specific provinces or sightseeing guides organized by post stations along the major roads.

This section introduces local geographic studies, guidebooks of famous places, travel literature, and other documents that were published in response to the growing interest in the local features of the various regions throughout Japan.

Part 3

Illustrated Guidebooks and Scenes of the Road

Illustrated guidebooks described famous and historic sites in the various regions of Japan based on empirical research. On the other hand, Ukiyo-e prints of these same places of interest focused less on accuracy and instead reflected more personal interpretations by the artists that made the prints more memorable and enjoyable.

Chiryū station in Aichi Prefecture had three well-known features that appeared in illustrated guidebooks and Ukiyo-e prints: Yatsushashi, which had been one of Japan's most famous sites since Heian times but which had completely disappeared in the Edo period; the historic Chiryū Shrine; and the annual horse market. Here we will see how these three scenes were depicted by various artists.

Part 4

Hiroshige's Landscapes

Utagawa Hiroshige was popular for his many images of places of interest and scenes along the major land routes. His specialization was so well-established that he was ranked as the top artist of the *meisho-e* ("pictures of famous places") genre in the *Edo sunago saisenki* (1853) report on the leading print artists of the day.

This section will examine Hiroshige's landscapes from two perspectives: his depictions of environmental features, such as the time of day and the weather; and his depictions of human figures. Through his use of these features, he is able to create images that are brimming both with nostalgia and a sense of the adventure of the open road.

