

Traversing the Urban Landscape
Through the Floating World of Japanese Prints

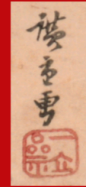
Curators' Talk April 10th 5 p.m.



Clear Weather after Snow at Nihonbashi Bridge, ca. 1839-42, Edo Period, Polychromatic woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 24.2 x 36.7 cm, University of Puget Sound Collection

Kittredge Gallery
University of Puget Sound
Presents

*A student-curated exhibition
featuring the Japanese Ukiyo-e
master
Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)*



Researched and curated by

*Sarah Laurie Johnson
Lee Nelson
and Sandra Brandon*

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*Traversing the Urban Landscape
Through the Floating World of Japanese
Prints*

On View March 11 - April 20, 2019
Opening Reception March 13 5-7 p.m.
Curators' Talk April 10th 5 p.m.

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Traversing the Urban Landscape through the Floating World of Japanese Prints

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in Japan around 1820, the 'Urban Landscape' emerged as an essential source of inspiration for artists of the *Ukiyo-e* aesthetic movement. Japanese artists presented "images of the floating world," which became a type of art that served the common people and their urban and spiritual lives, rather than imperial patrons. The University of Puget Sound holds ten prints by the great Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). A close examination of them through exhibition will address issues such as the innovation of the woodblock print known as *Ukiyo-e* in pre-modern Japan, the revolutionary subject of the "Urban Landscape," and the connection between their cultural, economic, political, and social histories to appeal to a modern audience on a global scale.

Combining *Uki* for sadness and *yo* for life, the word *Ukiyo* originally coined the Buddhist idea of the transitory nature of life, involving a cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth. This rather pessimistic notion was reversed during the Edo period (1603-1868). The Japanese character that means "float" has replaced the homonym meaning "transient" to express an attitude of *joie de vivre*. This hedonistic culture that glorified life in the "floating world" has been particularly well expressed in the production of woodblock prints, an innovation that allowed for mass reproductions of images and text, rendering that captivating art accessible to anyone who desired their extravagant images. Even today, *Ukiyo-e* prints allow a window for travel into the transient floating world of the Japanese urban landscape.

We invite the viewer to keep in mind the following questions throughout your journey to the "floating world" of Japanese woodblock prints: **What are the peculiarities of these works and how do they differ from Western works? How did the Japanese artists modify compositions, framing, and their use of colors compared to Western artists of the 19th century?** (SJ)

SUB-TOPIC: *UKIYO-E* STYLE/THE PROCESS

The *Ukiyo-e* style represents the final phase in the long evolution of Japanese genre painting of the seventeenth century up until the end of the nineteenth century. Based on previous developments that focused on human characters, *Ukiyo-e* painters concentrated their representational scenes on enjoyable activities in landscaped environments, which were shown close-up, with special attention to contemporary affairs and fashion. *Ukiyo-e* prints were often depicted on Japanese screens or scrolls, lending to their narrative feel. Although different artists brought their own signature styles, the pictures were united by a common vision and sentiment that utilized aerial perspectives, precise details, clear outlines, and flat color, furthering the earlier *Yamato-e* tradition of Japanese art.

Towards the end of his life, Hiroshige printed in a considerably lower quality, as he had produced too many and too fast in order to meet the demand of the market. He died at the age of 62 of cholera on October 12, 1858 in Edo. With an output of an estimated 5,400 prints, Ando Hiroshige was one of the most prolific artists of the *Ukiyo-e* art form. (SJ)

SUB-TOPIC: JAPONISME

During his lifetime, Hiroshige was well known and commercially successful as an artist. But Japanese society did not take too much notice of him, and it was not until his discovery in Europe that his real reputation began. *Ukiyo-e* was one of the first forms of Japanese art that found its way across the seas to Europe and America with the opening of trade routes between the countries in 1853; in doing so, this form of art influenced many Western painters and decorators, inspiring the late nineteenth century artistic movement known as *Japonisme*. In particular, it was the Parisians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like the inhabitants of Edo, who popularized and appreciated the aesthetic value of these famous “*estampes japonaises*” or Japanese prints. Even today, these prints allow any audience to enter this marvelous world of grace, delicacy and sensitivity, created by Japanese artists of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries.

For the first time, artists were inspired and responded to the interests and preferences of the general public. This graphic treatment of space, combining a vigorous graphic outline drawn from Chinese tradition and Western perspective, is seen especially in the works of Vincent Van Gogh, who found artists like Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) very admirable. In a letter from 1888 to his brother, Theo, he says, "I envy the Japanese the extreme clarity that everything in their work has. It's never dull, and never appears to be done too hastily. Their work is as simple as breathing."

Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and Claude Monet (1840-1926) have also been influenced by *Ukiyo-e* artists like Hokusai and Hiroshige, not in taste, but the principles that are the essence of this art. The practice of clear tones, the taste of simplifications, the boldness of certain cuts were absolutely new in the layout of paintings. Thanks to the Impressionists of the nineteenth century, and the artistic movements Art Nouveau and Modernism, the most famous images of Japanese art and the short period of *Ukiyo-e* are well known in Europe, and often collected. Today, we are able to trace the stylistic influences superimposed on Western art by reflecting on the images of this period in Japan. (SJ)

Work Cited:

Elisseeff, Danielle. “Le Monde Flottant De L'ukiyo-e, La Pérennité De L'éphémère.”
Department of Asian Art. “Art of the Pleasure Quarters and the Ukiyo-e Style.”
<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let686/letter.html>



Clear Weather after Snow at Nihonbashi Bridge (Nihonbashi yukibare), from the series Three Views of Famous Places in Edo (Edo meisho mittsu no nagame)

Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797–1858)

ca. 1839-42, Edo Period

Polychromatic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

This print captures Nihonbashi Bridge, the center point of urban commercialization in pre-modern Japan, allowing the viewer to join the commoner's life within the floating world. The woodblock print uses a neutral color scheme of greys, blues, and white, evoking the calm, yet occupied lives of the citizens in Edo during the middle of winter. The audience has an aerial view of the bridge, inviting observations of the urban landscape. In the distance, the residence of the shogun is present, alluding to the ruling power over Edo. However, even more apparent in the print is Mt Fuji towering over the city, symbolizing the dominance of nature in Japanese society. (LN)



Clear Weather after Snow in the Precincts of the Kanda Myojin Shrine (Kanda Myojin keidai yukibare no zu), from the series Famous Places in the Eastern Capital (Toto meisho)

Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797–1858), Publisher Nunokichi
ca. 1840–1842, Edo Period
Polychromatic Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

Hiroshige presents the viewer with a combined representation of the idyllic winter season in the Eastern capital of Edo and the spiritual harmony between Shintoism and Buddhism of its inhabitants. Upon closer observation, the viewer can see Hiroshige's intricate, yet delicate brushwork of the natural and architectural elements. This work is a manifestation of the *Ukiyo-e* principles, illustrated in the 5-color Japanese woodblock print. With both Buddhist and Shinto shrines in this artistic presentation, Hiroshige "paints" a native face of the inhabitants who live close to nature, praying for a prosperous new year. (SJ)



View of Toeizan Temple at Ueno (Ueno Toeizan no zu), from the series Famous Places in the Eastern Capital (Toto meisho)

Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797–1858)

ca. 1833-1838, Edo Period

Polychromatic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

This woodblock print depicts Ueno park on Mount To-ei. Toeizan Temple, a school of Esoteric Buddhism, is a beautiful setting where many would come to see the annual cherry blossoms, like the commoners found in this print. Because of the aerial view, the people are not well defined, leaving the expressions and characteristics to the imagination of the audience. The color scheme is fairly cool-toned, with greens, blues, and tans. This allows for the temple to be more present in the print, with its bold, red color. The temple's red is accented in the print by some of the visitors' clothing, connecting the people to the space. In the succession of prints in our exhibit, we see a movement from a Shinto Shrine to a Buddhist Temple, presenting the cultural dynamic of religion in Japan. This print is comparatively rare and not commonly found in Western collections as compared to the rest of the prints in our exhibition. (LN)



Plum Garden at Kameido (Kameido ume yashiki no zu), from the series Famous Places in the Eastern Capital (Toto meisho)

Utawarai Hiroshige I (1797–1858), Publisher Sanoya Kihei (Kikakudo)

ca.1832–38, Edo Period

Polychromatic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

This framed narrative depicts a close-up of the beauty of life in the Japanese urban landscape environment. Bright, complementary colors of red and green centralize the images of people throughout the scene as well as the trees, epitomizing the concepts of *Ukiyo-e* during the Edo period. Looking closely, we can see a wide range of figural representations, each displaying characteristics with a personal likeness — not only is the landscape balanced and well-defined, but so are the inhabitants. This scene captures the essence of the “floating world” as many people celebrate the transient life in nature. Enjoying bento, wine, poetry, and business, the scene illustrates a particularly cheerful moment in time. (SJ)



Sannô Shrine at the Nagata Riding Grounds (Nagatababa Sannôgû), from the series *Famous Places in the Eastern Capital* (Tôto meisho)

Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797–1858)

ca. 1832-38, Edo Period

Polychromatic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

The woodblock print presents Sannô Shrine centered, with a balanced symmetry, very linear, and an apparent vanishing point not seen in the other prints on display, presenting the western one-vanishing-point perspective gained from Rangaku, or “Dutch Learning,” in Edo, Japan. The image depicts men, women, and children visiting the shrine, which would be a typical religious activity among many Japanese citizens. The people present in the print are moving, not fixed, creating an interesting dynamic. The colors used are neutral toned, with a beautiful blue centralizing the print around the shrine. Because of the perspective of facing the shrine, the viewer is invited to step into the world, becoming a participant in their world. (LN)



Tomioka Hachiman Shrine, Fukagawa (Tomioka Hachimangu, Fukagawa)

Utagawa Hiroshige (1798-1858)

ca. 1840s, Edo Period

Polychromatic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

This image captures the image of a torii, the entrance of a Shinto shrine. The scene before us invites us into the life of the Japanese visiting the shrine. Framed by Shinto faith and the natural world, we see several generations of families coming together. We see the use of neutral colors for the back ground, while the people stand out with vivid colors. The lively nature of the image invites the viewer to join, become part of the festive activity. (SB)



Inside Zojo-ji Temple in Shiba (Shiba Zojoji sannai no zu), from the series *Famous Places in the Eastern Capital* (Toto meisho)

Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797–1858), Publisher Sanoya Kihei (Kikakudo)

ca. 1832–38, Edo Period

Polychromic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

Although nearly identical in content, reflecting the spiritual importance of the urban environment and landscape, these prints are a perfect example of how no two “original” copies of a woodblock print are exactly the same. Upon a physical and critical examination of the two, it is quite clear that they vary in brightness and concentration in color. This delicately marked difference reveals the uniqueness of the woodblock printing technique – perhaps the printer who made the prints was running low on ink, applied different amounts of pressure, or maybe the block was wearing down. It is impossible to know for sure, but perhaps these two prints are examples of one of the first copies made, and one of the last.

We are very fortunate to have two original copies of the same print in our collection. The curators challenge the viewer to spot the subtle differences between the two prints. In your observation, try to note the visual differences resulting from the *nishiki-e* printing process. (SJ)



Visit to the Fudo Temple in Meguro (Meguro fudo mairi)

Utagawa Hiroshige (1798-1858)

ca. 1834-36. Edo Period

Polychromatic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

This image depicts a Tendai Buddhist temple in Temple in Meguro, located in Tokyo. Meguro gets its name from the black-eyed statue that is one of five Fudo Myo-o (immovable deities) that protect Tokyo from harm. During the Edo period, this temple became a popular pilgrimage site. In this print the structure and grounds stand out in vivid colors as the nature in the background is kept in neutral dark tones. As you descend the stairs to the temple it is surrounded by clouds and trees, as if the sacred space is floating. (SB)



View of Matsuchiyama (Matsuchiyama no zu)

Utagawa Hiroshige (1798-1858)

ca. 1840-42

Polychromic woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper

In this image, we return to Edo in the summer, standing back to a distance to enjoy the full landscape of the city. In the background, we can see Mt. Fuji, as well as the Matsuchiyama temple rising up from the dark expanse of trees. Centrally we see the social and commercial hub of the city come to life in bright vivid colors. The image perfectly captures the social, religious, and natural environment of Edo, as well as *Ukiyo-e* principles. (SB)



Object on Display:
Japanese Woodblock Plate of Four Pages
From Chiba Ichiryu's *Book of Flower Arrangement (Nageire Hanasusuki)*, 1767, Vol 2.
Private Collection



Video on Display:

The Ukiyo-e Technique: Traditional Japanese Printmaking (2014)

By Keiji Shinohara, The Smithsonian Institution

<https://pulverer.si.edu/node/190>

Master printmaker Keiji Shinohara demonstrates the tools site and techniques of making a woodblock print. (17 minutes)

We invite the audience to get comfortable and enjoy a few minutes (or the entirety) of this educational video, provided by the Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art, to gain a greater understanding of the unique process that Hiroshige and those in his workshop undertook to achieve the delicate quality of prints, as demonstrated by the ten on display from our collection.

Time Line:

1545-1563: The Counter-Reformation begins with the Council of Trent. Catholic resurgence that is initiated in response to the Protestant Reformation

1600: Europe enters the Baroque Period

1603: Start of the Edo Period. Japan is reunified under the military rule of the Tokugawa family

1609: The Dutch formally establishes trade relations with Japan and are allowed to remain after Japan's seclusion from the West

1618-1694: Hishikawa Moronobu produces the first ukiyo-e woodblock prints

1639: The shogunate completed a series of policies that resulted in complete isolation from the West (sakoku) Hiroshige was born

1797: Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige was born

1820: 'Urban Landscape' emerged as an essential source of inspiration for artists of the Ukiyo-e aesthetic movement

1854: The Kanagawa Treaty is signed, ending Japan's policy of national seclusion

1858: Utagawa Hiroshige dies

1868: End of the Edo Period (SB)

Detailed Timeline:

Edo Period (1600-1868)

In 1600, Japan was reunified under the military rule of the Tokugawa family, with Ieyasu as shogun. His military regime was headquartered in the town of Edo (present day Tokyo). For 250 years, Japan had relative political stability, but with a strict social order. The state was divided into four groups: samurai (*shi*), farmers (*nō*), artisans (*kō*) and merchants (*shō*). There were also two other groups known as the outcasts (*eta*) and the 'non-people' (*hinin*).

One of the most significant factors that contributed to the growth of cities and success of the economy is the isolationist policy that the Japanese implemented. The arrival of Christian missionaries and economic involvement by the Portuguese, Spanish, English and Dutch, the shogunate enacted a policy of complete seclusion from the West in 1639. The economic boom that followed led to the rise of the merchant class and geographical diversity. Edo and Osaka became great centers of cultural art, a role once held by Kyoto. The art produced was very different from the past's aristocratic and military forms. This was the time of Matsuo Basho (1644-94) the great haiku poet, Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) playwright for the bunraku puppet theatre. This was also the period of ukiyo-e woodblock prints of the 'floating world' - inexpensive prints that were created for the commercial market.

Detailed Timeline (Continued):

International world

Only the Dutch were allowed to remain on the Bay of Nagasaki, the only port open to international trade. Some of the Ukiyo-e prints were brought to the west through the Dutch, it did not reach the same level of popularity as in the 1860's with the end of the Edo Period and its policy of isolation.

The Chinese were also limited to Nagasaki but were still able to play a major role in Edo culture. The naturalistic style of Shen Nanpin was influential to the development of Nanga or Bunjinga painting. Chinese monks of Obaku Zen created painting and calligraphy that contributed to the creation of Japanese Zenga paintings. Chinese books and paintings would go on to influence artists like Maruyama Okyo (1733-1795) and the Maruyama-Shijo school of painting.

The Western world of art during the 1600's was just leaving the Renaissance period, moving on to Baroque art which emphasized detail, movement, lighting, and drama. Running parallel was the Counter-Reformation that had a significant influence in themes and elements incorporated in Western art. To the north, the Dutch Golden Age of painting focused more on still life, genre, and landscape painting. (SB)



Photo of timeline, leading to neighboring exhibit.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the curators of this exhibition, who researched, wrote the text, and planned the show:

Sarah Laurie Johnson '19

Lee Nelson '19

Sandra Brandon '19

Professor Zaixin Hong oversaw the student curators and lent his woodblock to the show.

Lastly, thank you to Magdalena Maher Shelton, who gave the collection of prints to the university.



*Front Row: Curators (left to right) Lee Nelson, Sandra Brandon, and Sarah Laurie Johnson
Back Row: Professor Zaixin Hong and Kittredge Gallery Manager, Peter Stanley*

Press Release

Curated by Puget Sound students Sandra Brandon '19, Lee Nelson '19, and Sarah Laurie Johnson '19, the show is titled *Traversing the Urban Landscape Through the Floating World of Japanese Prints*. Featuring a selection of Japanese [Ukiyo-e prints](#) by artist Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), the show illustrates the role of cities and surroundings in people's lives.

The exhibition “reveals how depicting the ‘urban landscape’ for the burgeoning middle class was revolutionary, and how that revolution and the artist’s style ricocheted around the world up to the present day,” says Johnson.

The exhibition will be the first time Puget Sound’s Hiroshige prints have been on display in Kittredge Gallery since they were donated by Magdalena Maher Shelton to the university in 1999.



Photo from Curators' Talk & Reception on April 10, 2019

The Trail Article

“Students Curate Japanese Print Exhibit in Kittredge Gallery” by Keara Woods.
Published on March 29, 2019. University of Puget Sound *The Trail*

The first thing you see when you walk into Kittredge’s Hiroshige prints exhibit, titled “Traversing the Urban Landscape Through the Floating World of Japanese Prints,” are two seemingly identical pieces hanging up on the wall.

However, upon closer inspection, the eye can detect minute differences between the two pieces.

The wall tag next to the works states that “these prints are a perfect example of how no two ‘original’ copies of a woodblock print are exactly the same.” While made from the same woodblock, the wall tag explains that the differences in the vibrancy and saturation of the color could be due to a variety of factors, such as the amount of pressure applied by the printer.

The exhibit was put together by three University of Puget Sound seniors — Sandra Brandon, Sarah Laurie Johnson and Lee Nelson — art history professor Zaixin Hong and Kittredge Gallery Manager Peter Stanley. In whole, the exhibit is made up of a lot more than meets the eye. It features an authentic woodblock found in a Tacoma antique store, a selection of 10 prints by Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige and a demonstrative video.

The woodblock has an image carved into it that is then covered in ink and printed onto a piece of paper.

“After finding it, I contacted my Japanese scholars and they looked at it and it was a historical piece because the content is very relevant. It is a book about floral arrangement,” Hong said.

A major focus of the exhibit is Japanese ukiyo-e artists’ interest in the urban landscape, ukiyo-e art in general, and the artistic movement Japonisme. “The prints are all ukiyo-e, which means sad-life. They’re all reminiscent of the floating world, which is the other translation of ukiyo-e.

The artists were attempting to capture the landscape and people, and they focused on common people instead of just painting governmental officials or stuff like that so it’s supposed to just capture life,” Nelson said. “They’re always really pretty though, so it’s always a prettied view of some sort,” he admitted.

The origins of the 10 prints on display are shrouded in mystery. They were all done by Utagawa Hiroshige, a master of the ukiyo-e print tradition who worked during the early to mid-19th century. “We figured out the name of the donor but we don’t really know where they came from before that,” Nelson, one of the University of Puget Sound seniors who worked on the exhibit, said.

The prints were donated by Magdalena Maher Shelton to the University of Puget Sound in 1999. They were found by librarians and given to Stanley, who then contacted and collaborated with Hong and his students to make the exhibit happen.

“Two semesters ago Peter informed me that our library found the 10 pieces and then the library handed them over to the gallery,” Hong said. “Peter asked whether we can work together to use this set of prints as part of the art history course and part of my Japanese art class. The timing is perfect,” he said.

Hong is referring to Art History 492: Curatorial/Art History Research Practicum, a quarter-unit class that runs every spring. The three students chosen for the class this spring were awarded the opportunity to work directly with the Hiroshige prints in order to put the exhibit together.

The three students allowed to enroll in the class were handpicked by Hong and had to go through an application process that involved an interview with him. The class met one hour a week and followed Stanley’s schedule.

“Peter had very clear deadlines so our second week we had the text deadline and by the third week we had the timeline done,” Hong said.

Nelson confirmed that keeping up with all of the deadlines was one of the most difficult aspects of the class. “The biggest obstacle was definitely just the timeline of getting it all done just because it approached really fast and we had a lot of due dates within the first week already,” he said.

The class started at the same time that the spring semester did, but because the exhibit was scheduled to be up by March 11, the students had just a little bit over two months to get everything ready.

“Working within those time constraints and also meeting only once a week as well was kind of difficult,” Nelson said.

The exhibit will be up until April 20 and can be viewed during Kittredge’s daily hours, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 12 to 5 p.m. Saturday.



Students engaging with the wall text and Hiroshige Prints at the curators’ talk on April 10, 2019.