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The Brady Collection

Meg M. Shaw

Seven Japanese woodblock prints and reproductions, a gift of the late Dr. George K. Brady, have been acquired by the Art Library. Dr. Brady, a professor in the English Department from 1925 to 1960, spent three months in Japan in 1948 as a literary advisor to the American Military Government. He was a member of the U.S. educational commission assigned to assist Japanese scholars in establishing a humanities program. The prints and reproductions represent the work of Hokusai and Hiroshige, the two major woodblock print artists of the nineteenth century, as well as the work of Hiroshige II, one of Hiroshige’s followers. Also among the gifts from Dr. Brady are prints of Hasui and Shiro, two important early twentieth century artists. All the artists represented in the collection specialized in landscape prints.

Japanese woodblock prints became popular during the Edo Period (1603-1868), when a rising, affluent merchant class developed. The prints, which were first produced in the 1680s, were called *ukiyo-e*—“pictures of the floating world.” They depicted scenes from the urban pleasure district and nearby Kabuki theatres that this class frequented. By the beginning of the 1800s, sumptuary edicts restraining entertainment caused artists to seek different subject matter. Thus, *fukeiga, ukiyo-e* landscape prints, became popular. Their popularity was partly due to a Japanese desire to see pictures of places they could not visit because of travel restrictions imposed by the authorities.

Each print was actually the work of four different people: the painter, who made the original drawing and indicated the colors; the woodcutter who engraved the block; the printer, who determined the ink colors and printed the block; and the publisher, who planned the work and provided financing. For this reason,
prints were considered the work of craftsmen and not appreciated as works of art by the Japanese until they were discovered by Europeans. Samuel Bing, a Parisian art dealer published the journal *Artistic Japan* from 1888-1891 to promote the recognition of Japanese craftsmanship as an art form. (The Art Library has a complete set of this journal.) Many artists, especially the French Impressionists, were influenced by Japanese art and many, such as Toulouse-Lautrec, van Gogh, and Whistler, also collected it.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) is one of the best known and most innovative of the woodblock artists. He incorporated features of Western and Chinese painting in his work, bringing new life to the *ukiyo-e* print at a time when its quality was degenerating. Extremely prolific, he produced as many as 35,000 designs in his lifetime. His most significant work is a series of prints titled *The Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*. It is his mature work, produced between 1823 and 1831. The Brady collection includes an example of number 9 of the series, "Fuji in a Thunderstorm." It is a woodblock reproduction, a modern woodblock print taken from a photographically produced block or a block cut from an original print. The composition shows the Japanese affinity for asymmetry, with the mountain peak jutting up through the clouds at one side and an orange flash of lightning across its base.

A more traditional Japanese artist, Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858), is represented in the Brady collection by an original woodblock print and two woodblock reproductions. The print is from the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido* series, one of the most popular in the history of Japanese prints. There are thirty-six different versions of this series, totalling over 900 different prints. This example is probably from a rare set published by Yetatsu around 1840 or by Marusei between 1842 and 1853. It is likely to be the station of Oiso, a coastal village, and it shows people working in a rice paddy and travellers along the road. Hiroshige's favorite subjects were the moon, snow, and rain. One of the woodblock reproductions depicts "Snowfall at Gion Shrine," number six of the series *Famous Places of Kyoto*. This scene is considered the masterpiece of the set, which dates from 1830 to 1834. Hiroshige's last and longest series is *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*. A woodblock reproduction of number ninety-nine of this series, "Kinryuzan Temple at Asakusa," is in the Brady collection. The picture shows the temple buildings amidst snow covered trees. The exaggerated enlargement of a lantern in the foreground suggest
A scene from Katsushika Hiroshige's series, Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido. (George K. Brady Collection, University of Kentucky Libraries)
a view through a camera. It was at this time that lenses began to be imported in Japan. Although this series was produced at the end of his career—in fact, Hiroshige died during its production—the artist’s youthful attitude is reflected in his fresh approach.  

Hiroshige II (1826-1869) was a follower and adopted son of Hiroshige, and also married to Hiroshige’s daughter. He was not as skilled as his master, but, like Ando Hiroshige, he specialized in series of landscape prints. His best known series is One Hundred Views of Celebrated Places in Various Provinces, and the print in the Brady collection is probably from this series.

In 1868 the Tokugawa Shogunate fell and the feudal age ended in Japan. With the social revolution of the Meiji era (1868-1912), few noteworthy prints were produced. The art of the woodblock print did not begin to revive until as late as 1915. The publisher Watanabe encouraged Kawase Hasui (1883-1957) and Kasamatsu Shiro (1898- ) to produce prints, and their work became very popular. Hasui worked in the tradition of Hiroshige, but with his own distinctive style which revealed his study of Western painting. Realistic and detailed, his work was highly appreciated by the Japanese, and in 1956 he was named a Living National Treasure. He travelled throughout Japan to make sketches for his prints, creating 500 to 600 designs in his lifetime. The Brady collection includes a print of the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto, “Spring Snow,” dated April, 1932. Kasamatsu Shiro was one of the few artists of the time to carve and print his own blocks; he was a painter as well as a printmaker. The print in this collection is titled “The Yomei Gate at Nikko in the Snow,” published in 1952.

The Brady collection provides an excellent introduction to the art of the Japanese ukiyo-e landscape print. Not only does it represent the two major artists in this medium, but it also shows their influence on Japanese art by including works by their followers. These woodblock prints and reproductions make a fine addition to the Art Library, where they are presently on display.
NOTES

I would like to make a special acknowledgement to Dr. William J. Chambliss for his kindness in translating the Japanese characters that appear in the prints and providing other information.

1George Keyports Brady file, Inactive Faculty and Staff Biographical File, University of Kentucky Archives.
5Munsterberg, *Arts of Japan*, 158. A complete set of 500 Hokusai blocks of views of Edo was given to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts as early as 1889.
8Ibid., 88.
9Ibid., 139.