



TITLE: *Twilight Snow at Hira*,
from the series *Eight Views of Ômi*



ARTIST: Kunisada II, Utagawa
(Kunimasa III, Toyokuni IV) (1823-1880)

DATE: 1847-52 (Edo Period)

SIZE: 14.25 x 10 inches each

MEDIUM: woodblock print; ink and color on paper

ACQUISITION #: 2014.6.1a-c

Additional works in the collection by the artist?

Yes ___ No X

STATEMENT ABOUT THE ARTIST

"Kunisada II continued in the style of Kunisada He mostly designed actor prints but was also active in other subjects like beautiful women, Genji prints [scenes from *The Tale of Genji*], or erotica, sometimes in collaboration with other artists."

- Andreas Marks, *Japanese Woodblock Prints: Artists, Publishers and Masterworks: 1680 - 1900*

UKIYO-E

Ukiyo-e, which literally translates to "pictures of the floating world," mainly refers to Japanese paintings and prints depicting pleasurable contemporary activities. However, the term is now often used to refer to Japanese woodblock prints in general. A particularly popular subject for ukiyo-e during the Edo period (1615-1868) was the Yoshiwara quarter in the city of Edo (now Tokyo), a notorious pleasure district that was the center of social life in Edo. In 1765, new technology made it possible for artists in Japan to create prints in a variety of colors. After this discovery, artists began to produce fully polychromatic woodblock prints; *Twilight Snow at Hira* is an example. Ukiyo-e prints of the Edo period generally featured commercially appealing subjects that were especially attractive for wealthy townspeople. Such subjects included Kabuki actors, courtesans, beautiful landscapes, and historical events.

VOCABULARY

Ukiyo-e: Literally "pictures of the floating world," originally referred specifically to woodblock prints depicting pleasurable scenes of life during the Edo period; it is now often used to refer to Japanese woodblock prints of any kind.

Ôban: A specific size of print (around 15" x 10"), which was the most common print size.

REFERENCES

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- Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Woodblock Prints in the Ukiyo-e Style." The Met. Last modified October 2003. Accessed March 25, 2017. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ukiy/hd_ukiy.htm.
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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Utagawa Kunisada II was the pupil and successor of Utagawa Kunisada I (1786-1865), a painter and printmaker regarded at the time as one of the best artists of the ukiyo-e movement. Kunisada II eventually replaced his mentor as head of the prestigious Utagawa school for printmakers. He signed his prints as Kunimasa during the early part of his career, then called himself Kunisada after his marriage to the daughter of Kunisada I. After the death of his mentor, he followed the tradition of the Utagawa school and took the name Toyokuni IV.

Kunisada II worked during a time of change and turmoil in Japan that was often difficult for artists to navigate. The country experienced significant political, economic, and social upheaval as it faced the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1867. Kunisada II produced numerous ukiyo-e prints of marketable subjects such as history scenes, erotic scenes (shunga), and actor portraits.

SUBJECT OF TWILIGHT SNOW AT HIRA

The *Eight Views of Ômi* series was popular among ukiyo-e artists of the Edo period. The series traditionally incorporated eight specific scenes of Japan's Lake Biwa and the surrounding landscape. One of these scenes was the spring snow on Mount Hira, which is depicted in *Twilight Snow at Hira*. Artist Isoda Koryûsai (1735-1790) and his contemporaries enlivened the traditional rendering of the *Eight Views of Ômi* by integrating fashionable courtesans and warriors into the scenes. This whimsical approach to the series was then adopted by later artists like Kunisada II.

MEDIA DESCRIPTION

Twilight Snow at Hira is a triptych made up of three vertical ôban prints. The ôban print is a specific size of print (roughly 15" x 10") which was the most common print size.

The production of woodblock prints required collaboration between four individuals: the publisher, printer, designer, and engraver. The publisher played a vital role in the process from beginning to end, as it was the publisher who chose the subject of the work and judged its quality. The designer of the work relied on the skills of the printer and engraver to effectively carry out the design.

When constructing a print, the artist transferred the design to a very thin, partly transparent sheet of paper. This paper was then pasted to a block of wood and the engraver followed the lines to chisel out the design in negative. To create the print, paper was laid on top of the inked block and rubbed with a pad to transfer the ink to the paper. For colored prints, separate carved blocks were used for each color.

THREE VIEWS OF YOUR FAVORITE PLACE

Activity Lesson Plan: K-5

Session Activity: *Twilight Snow at Hira* is part of the series *Eight Views of Ōmi*, which comprises eight scenic depictions of different areas around Lake Biwa in Japan's Ōmi province. Woodblock prints showing "views" of important Japanese landmarks and regions were popular during the Edo period. Students will learn about this artistic tradition of creating scenic prints centered on a single location. Then, students will each think of outdoor places they visit often or that are important to them. They will draw three "views" of this place that show parts they like the best, and/or that show activities the student enjoys there with friends and family.

Objectives: Students will learn about and appreciate the scenic depictions of places in Japan by different ukiyo-e artists. Students will be able to apply their knowledge about Japanese prints to their own series.

Materials: paper, pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons, worksheet
Procedure: Introduce students to "views" series by showing them Kunisada II's *Twilight Snow at Hira* along with prints from Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* and Hiroshige II's *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in the Provinces*. As the prints are shown, explain the tradition of scenic series in Japan. Before explaining what is depicted in each print, ask students what they think is happening in them and/or what their thoughts and feelings are about each print. After these examples have been discussed, ask students to each think of one outdoor place that they like and is important to them. Provide students with three sheets of paper each and ask them to draw three views of the place they chose. After students have completed their views, provide students each with a brief worksheet asking about what place they chose, what is shown in their views, and their reasoning for choosing to draw these particular scenes.

Vocabulary: Woodblock print - a picture created by pressing paper onto an inked wooden block with a carved design. This art form started in China and was later widely used in Japan.

A SNAPSHOT OF YOUR TIME PERIOD

Activity Lesson Plan: 6-12

Session Activity: Ukiyo-e prints were popular and widely distributed during the Edo period (1615-1868). They often depicted everyday activities, such as flying kites, fishing, participating in seasonal festivals, and making snowballs (as in *Twilight Snow at Hira*). Such prints give us insight into what life was like during the Edo period. Students will look at Edo ukiyo-e prints showing everyday life in Japan. Each student will then create one linoleum print showing an aspect of his/her daily life. All of the class's prints together will create a snapshot of everyday life for the students' generation.

Objectives: Students will learn about Japanese culture and traditions during the Edo period while also learning about ukiyo-e and the process of making woodblock prints. Students will be able to apply this knowledge to their own prints.

Materials: paper, pencils, pens, bone folders, 9x12 inch linoleum blocks, towels to support blocks while carving, carving tools, black ink, ink roller

Procedure: Show students *Twilight Snow at Hira* along with Utagawa Kunisada's *Cat and Beauty* and Toyohara Chikanobu's *Tanabata Festival* and *Cherry Blossom Viewing*. Explain the tradition in ukiyo-e prints of depicting scenes from daily life. Also explain the meaning and practices behind the Tanabata Festival and Hanami Festival (flower viewing) in Japan. Ask students what kinds of scenes might be shown if westerners made prints showing everyday life in our time period. Ask students to each choose one aspect of their own daily lives to recreate in the form of a print. The scene can be an activity or just an object, and should not be very complex. Students will each draw the picture on paper, and then transfer the design onto a block by pressing the paper (picture side down) into the block with a bone folder. The transferred drawing can be traced with pen to make it easier to see. Students will then carve out the parts of their pictures to be left white, will roll black ink over the blocks, and will press paper onto the block to create the print. Once all prints are finished, display them on the wall and have a class discussion about the images everyone chose.

Vocabulary: Ukiyo-e print - a woodblock print depicting pleasurable scenes of life during the Edo period (1615-1868).



Katsushika Hokusai, *Abridged View of the Mitsui Shop, Suruga Street, Edo, from Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, c. 1830, woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 10 x 15 in

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: Grade 2

Big Idea: Historical and Global Connections

VA.2.H.1 Enduring Understanding: Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

VA.2.H.1.1 Benchmark: Identify examples in which artists have created works based on cultural and life experiences.

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: 9-12

Big Idea: Historical and Global Connections

VA.912.H.1 Enduring Understanding: Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

VA.912.H.1.4 Benchmark: Apply background knowledge and personal interpretation to discuss cross-cultural connections among various artworks and the individuals, groups, cultures, events, and/or traditions they reflect.

Utagawa Kunisada, *Cat and Beauty* (detail), from *Beauties in New Styles Dyed to Order*, 1818-1830, woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 36 7/8 x 22 3/8 in

