

Utagawa Hiroshige

Contemporary Landscapes

Utagawa Hiroshige ([Japanese](#): 歌川 広重), also **Andō Hiroshige** ([Japanese](#): 安藤 広重; 1797 – 12 October 1858) was a Japanese [ukiyo-e](#) artist, considered the last great master of that tradition.

Hiroshige is best known for his landscapes, such as the series *[The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō](#)* and *[The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kiso Kaidō](#)*; and for his depictions of birds and flowers. The subjects of his work were atypical of the ukiyo-e genre, whose typical focus was on beautiful women, popular actors, and other scenes of the urban pleasure districts of Japan's [Edo period](#) (1603–1868). The popular *[Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji](#)* series by [Hokusai](#) was a strong influence on Hiroshige's choice of subject, though Hiroshige's approach was more poetic and ambient than Hokusai's bolder, more formal prints.

For scholars and collectors, Hiroshige's death marked the beginning of a rapid decline in the ukiyo-e genre, especially in the face of the westernization that followed the [Meiji Restoration](#) of 1868. Hiroshige's work came to have a marked influence on Western painting towards the close of the 19th century as a part of the trend in [Japonism](#). Western artists closely studied Hiroshige's compositions, and some, such as [van Gogh](#), painted copies of Hiroshige's prints.

Hiroshige was born in 1797 in the Yayosu Quay section of the [Yaesu](#) area in [Edo](#) (modern [Tokyo](#)).^[1] He was of a [samurai](#) background,^[1] and was the great-grandson of Tanaka Tokuemmon, who held a position of power under the [Tsugaru clan](#) in the northern province of [Mutsu](#). Hiroshige's grandfather, Mitsuemmon, was an archery instructor who worked under the name Sairyūken. Hiroshige's father, Gen'emon, was [adopted into the family](#) of Andō Jūemon, whom he succeeded as [fire warden](#) for the Yayosu Quay area.^[1]

Hiroshige went through several name changes as a youth: Jūemon, Tokubē, and Tetsuzō.^[1] He had three sisters, one of whom died when he was three. His mother died in early 1809, and his father followed later in the year, but not before handing his fire warden duties to his twelve-year-old son.^[2] He was charged with prevention of fires at [Edo Castle](#), a duty that left him much leisure time.^[3]

Not long after his parents' deaths, perhaps at around fourteen, Hiroshige—then named Tokutarō—began painting.^[2] He sought the tutelage of [Toyokuni](#) of the [Utagawa school](#), but Toyokuni had too many pupils to make room for him.^[3] A librarian introduced him instead to [Toyohiro](#) of the same school.^[4] By 1812 Hiroshige was permitted to sign his works, which he did under the [art name](#) Hiroshige.^[2] He also studied the techniques of the well-established [Kanō school](#), the [nanga](#) whose tradition began with the Chinese [Southern School](#), and the realistic [Shijō school](#), and likely the [perspective](#) techniques of Western art and [uki-e](#).^[5]

Hiroshige's apprentice work included book illustrations and single-sheet ukiyo-e prints of female beauties and [kabuki](#) actors in the Utagawa style, sometimes signing them Ichiyūsai^[6] or, from 1832, Ichiryūsai.^[7] In 1823, he resigned his post as fire warden, though he still acted as an alternate.^[a] He declined an offer to succeed Toyohiro upon the master's death in 1828.^[3]

It was not until 1829–1830 that Hiroshige began to produce the landscapes he has come to be known for, such as the *[Eight Views of Ōmi](#)* series.^[8] He also created an increasing number of bird and flower prints about this time.^[7] About 1831, his *[Ten Famous Places in the Eastern Capital](#)* appeared, and seem to bear the influence of [Hokusai](#), whose popular landscape series *[Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji](#)* had recently seen publication.^[9]

An invitation to join an official procession to Kyoto in 1832 gave Hiroshige the opportunity to travel along the *Tōkaidō* route that linked the two capitals. He sketched the scenery along the way, and when he returned to Edo he produced the series *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, which contains some of his best-known prints.^[9] Hiroshige built on the series' success by following it with others, such as the *Illustrated Places of Naniwa* (1834), *Famous Places of Kyoto* (1835), another *Eight Views of Ōmi* (1834). As he had never been west of Kyoto, Hiroshige-based his illustrations of Naniwa (modern *Osaka*) and *Ōmi Province* on pictures found in books and paintings.^[10]

- **Selections from "The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō"**



Print 11: *Hakone*



Print 16: *Kanbara*



Print 46: *Rain Shower at Shōno*