

Good News from Hiroshige:

A New Interpretation of the Series "One Hundred Famous Views of Edo"

The Honolulu Academy of Arts has over three thousand woodblock prints by Utagawa Hiroshige, one of the most extensive and finest collections in the world by one of Japan's most celebrated artists. In November, this gallery will be renamed The Robert F. Lange Foundation Gallery, and in honor of the event, a selection of prints from Hiroshige's final great series "One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Meisho Edo Hyakkei)," produced in 1856-58, are on display. This series recently has received much attention as scholars begin to understand its historical significance in reflecting the spirit of the late Edo period, and it is no longer considered to consist merely of souvenirs for visitors to the capital from provincial areas.

In the tenth lunar month of 1855, five months before "One Hundred Famous Views of Edo" was published, the Great Earthquake of the Ansei era shook Edo, killing an estimated 9,000 people and damaging a vast area of the city. Many of the places depicted in the series were anonymous neighborhoods of little importance before the earthquake. However, as they were restored from the devastating destruction, they gained post-earthquake fame as symbols of Edo's renewal. Since the prints could be mass-produced, the series may have functioned as a means of spreading the good news to Edo's residents.

The Academy is privileged to have many prints from this series in remarkably good condition, allowing us to share a large selection with the public in this special exhibition. A careful reading of Hiroshige's images in the light of their historical context provides the viewer with new insights not only into the artist's creativity but also into the society in which he lived.

The Robert F. Lange Foundation has supported the Academy's Japanese art programs for nearly two decades and made possible the conservation and preservation of hundreds of rare woodblock prints from the James A. and Mari Michener Collection. In recognition of the foundation's sponsorship of the Academy, the Japanese print gallery has been renamed The Robert F. Lange Foundation Gallery. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Lange Foundation for its continuing promotion of international awareness and appreciation for Japanese culture through the Academy's collections of art.

