

# Henri Rivière's Thirty-six Views of the Eiffel Tower

Henri Rivière was first exposed to Japanese prints at the legendary Montmartre cabaret, Le Chat Noir, where he illustrated the café's journal and also directed its famous shadow theater. At the Chat Noir he met dealers in Japanese art, including Siegfried Bing and Tadamasa Hayashi, and started to amass his own collection of prints. Inspired, Rivière began making his own woodcuts, which he printed on Japanese paper with handmade ink. *The Thirty-six Views of the Eiffel Tower* began as sketches made while the tower was being built for the 1889 International Exposition in Paris. During the 13 years that passed between his initial drawings and final publication of the book, the temporary structure developed into the symbol of modern Paris. Rivière's series of subtly colored lithographs were created as a deliberate homage to Katsushika Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*—a series of color woodcuts in which Mount Fuji appears somewhere in

every image. Hokusai used unconventional cropping, asymmetrical compositions, and bird's-eye views. Rivière followed suit in his series as he showed the tower from every conceivable view: looking out through the iron beams, barely visible from the city's outskirts, and partially built as the structure assimilated into the winter cityscape. By comparing the sleeping volcano of Mount Fuji to the controversial tower, Rivière challenged the building's "temporary" status.

In the preface to Rivière's gorgeous book, the art critic Arsène Alexandre wrote:

*Here, the purpose is to describe the daunting beauty of Paris, to tell it again in all its forms and colors to those carefree, ungrateful Parisians who are forever forgetting it. To make this album a memento of beauty for those who live now and a testimonial for all those who will follow.*

