

Ukiyo-e Prints and Parisian Artists

Artists working in Paris at the end of the 19th century were inspired by Japanese art, especially *ukiyo-e* color woodblock prints. Ukiyo-e is the term used to describe imagery created during the Japanese Edo period (1615–1868) that reflected the tastes and amusements of a rising class of merchants. Many of these newly wealthy urbanites pursued hedonistic pleasures in the licensed pleasure quarter of Edo (modern-day Tokyo), famed for its brothels, Kabuki theater, fashionable restaurants, and street entertainment. Sensing a market for art that reflected these interests, ukiyo-e artists created vivid images of famous actors and beautiful courtesans, along with scenes of daily life, seasonal pastimes, views of famous places, and familiar landscapes. When 19th-century artists in Paris discovered ukiyo-e prints, they found a model for art that pictured contemporary concerns, and redoubled their efforts to produce art with themes of the French landscape, modern entertainment in Montmartre, café culture of the Parisian street, and everyday activities.

Ukiyo-e artists mastered a distinctive style that featured asymmetrical compositions, novel vantage points, bold areas of flat color, sumptuous patterns, and strong, fluid outlines. Artists in Paris were inspired by these lavish color woodblock prints, but few actually worked in this medium. The prints in this exhibition employ the techniques popular in Paris at the end of the 19th century—lithography, etching, and aquatint. The examples of ukiyo-e prints on this panel display the stylistic aspects of Japanese art that impacted art created in Paris at the end of the century.

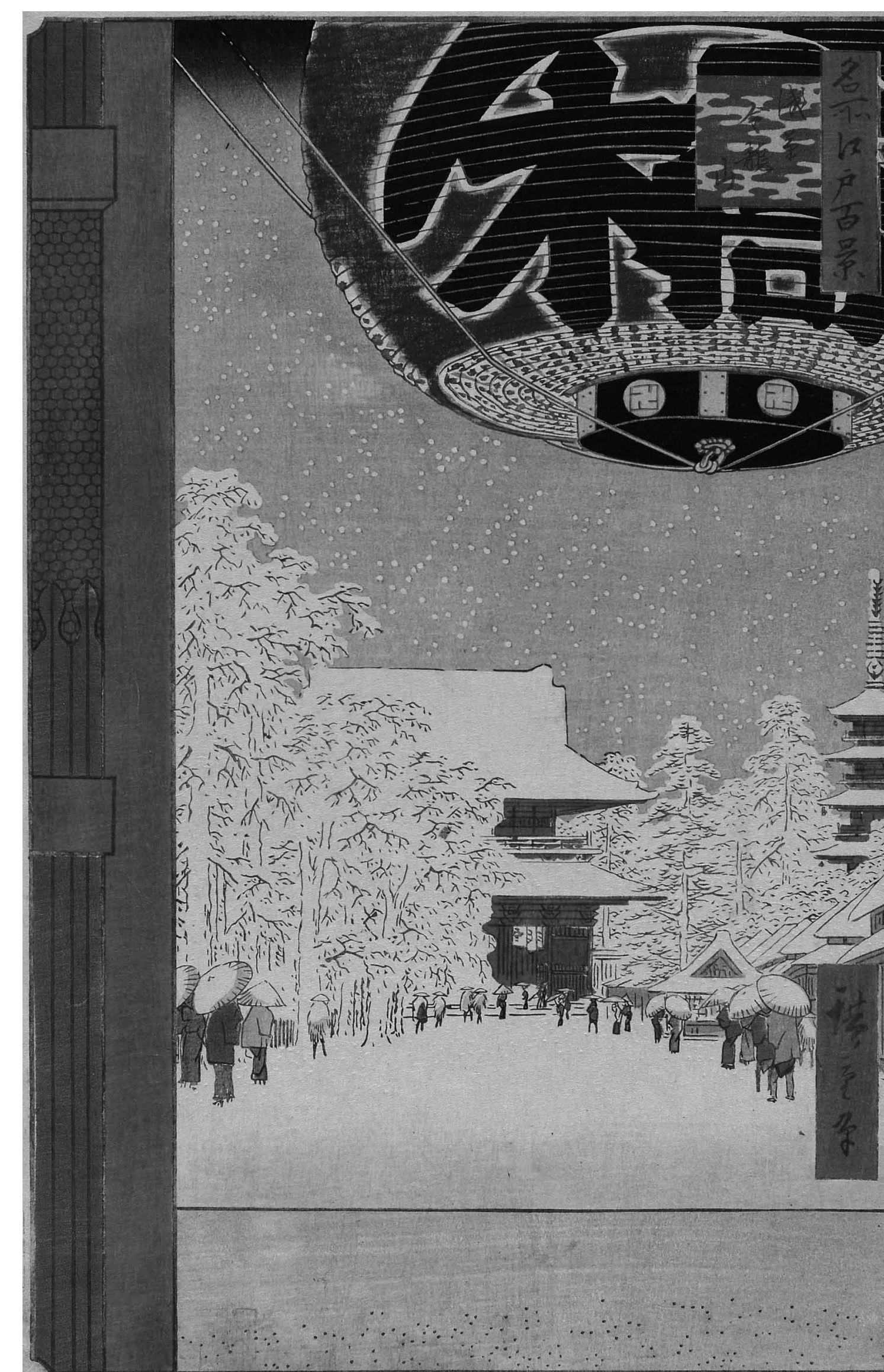
For a more in-depth exploration of ukiyo-e prints, please visit “**Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Prints,**” on view in Target Gallery **October 30, 2011, through January 8, 2012.**

Aesthetic Principles of Ukiyo-e Prints

Kitagawa Utamaro’s favorite subjects were the beautiful women of Edo and the courtesans of the Yoshiwara pleasure district. The women in his portraits were the fashion icons of the day, modeling finely detailed hairstyles, sumptuous kimonos, and a variety of accessories. Parisian artists were inspired by Utamaro’s finesse with **multiple patterns, bold outlines, and delicate colors.**



Kitagawa Utamaro, Japanese, 1753–1806, *Courtesan Hitomoto of the Daimonjiya House*, 1801–2, color woodblock print. Bequest of Richard P. Gale, 74.1.154



Utagawa Hiroshige was known for his daring and unusual compositions, especially those from his series *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, which challenge the viewer to look over, under, and through various obstacles to find the subject. Parisian artists were inspired by Hiroshige’s **cropped views, truncated forms, asymmetrical compositions, and depictions of changing weather conditions.**

Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797–1858, *Kinryūzan Temple at Asakusa*, from the series *One Hundred Views of Famous Views of Edo*, 1856, color woodblock print. Gift of Louis W. Hill, Jr. P.75.51.381