

Tokyo Stories

Hiroshige:
One Hundred Famous Views of Edo

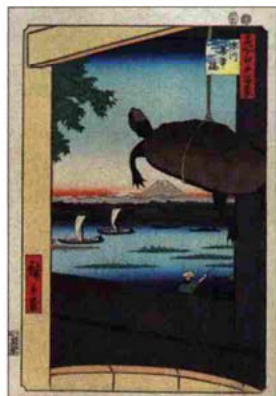
By **Melanie Trede and Lorenz Bichler**

Taschen, 294 pages, \$150

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), whose work is celebrated in this magnificent and monumental (17-by-14-inch) album, lived in the last decades of the Edo Period, a long era of civil peace and isolation. In his lifetime, Japanese art, with almost no contact with other traditions, found freedom by turning away from court and religious subjects to depict “the floating world,” or *ukiyo*, the urban, plebeian, eroticized zones of pleasure, display, and Kabuki theatricals. Cheap woodcuts freed Japanese art from traditional Chinese formality and enabled it to express national identity.

Hiroshige’s “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo,” actually comprising 119 prints, extols a real but idealized Edo, the artist’s hometown, soon to be renamed Tokyo. He began the project in 1856, seeking to repeat his earlier triumph “*Tokaido Gojusan Tsugi*” (Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido, 1833–34), which commemorated the stopping points on the road between Edo and Kyoto. These two collections placed Hiroshige on the rank of Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849).

Always popular with Western artists—van Gogh copied two works in 1888—Hiroshige’s prints combine the geometry of landscape with color juxtapositions that transform the subjects. *Sichu han’ei Tanabata matsuri* (The City Flourishing,



Hiroshige's *Mannen Bridge in Fukagawa*, 1857.

Tanabata Festival, 1857), thought to be a view from the artist’s house, is set during a festival that takes place during the heat of summer—even Mount Fuji has lost its snow. The print is unique in the collection because it contains no people. The decorations fluttering in the breeze speak volumes: a red and yellow fishing net as a prayer for a good catch; a sake bowl of celebration; an abacus, ledger, and cash box reminding us of the commercial class that made up the artist’s clientele. On the right side,

Hiroshige includes a watchtower, another autobiographical element: he descended from a line of firemen attached to Edo Castle, whose roofs also appear.

Reproducing each print in full size on its own page, this luxurious Japanese-bound boxed publication transcends the coffee-table cliché by combining beauty with information. Along with a valuable introduction, the editors include detailed elucidations with each print. —**Alfred Mac Adam**

LEFT: COURTESY PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART; RIGHT: COURTESY OTA MEMORIAL MUSEUM OF ART, TOKYO