A new perspective

Understanding the role of architecture in the Ukiyo-e printing tradition through Hiroshige Utagawa

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MSc Architecture, Technical University Delft

T.R. van der Eng

t.r.vandereng@student.tudeft.nl

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Everhard Korthals Altes

Abstract *Ukiyo-e* or "pictures of the floating world" is the woodblock printing tradition which dominated the Japanese art world throughout the Edo period in imperial Japan from the start of the 17th century until deep into the 19th century. The Ukiyo-e are generally characterized by its vibrant colours, dynamic compositions and depiction of everyday life and popular culture. The subjects where a mirage of the hedonistic lifestyle a new middle class sought. These included pornographic scenery, the kabuki theatre, courtesans of the brothels and landscapes. However not a main subject itself, architecture in its many forms and scales makes appearances in a considerable amount of prints. Yet when consulting the literature, which contains an abundancy on the mentioned print subjects, composition, and ways of working, little can be found about the direct role of the architectural depiction within the Ukiyo-e tradition. This paper serves as a first attempt to uncover this role of architecture. Through a combination of a literary study with a personal analysis, the depicted architecture is dissected in the work of the master Hiroshige Utagawa (1797-1858). The research showed two distinct ways architecture was deployed: directly used to explain a history, a place or as an amplifier of a series' subject. This often goes together with an insurance of recognizable architectural structures. Then there is the more indirect and subtle way in which architecture is utilized by Hiroshige in which the architecture is a tool which helps transferring an emotion, feeling or bold composition. Throughout his work, it turned out it was more important

that the architecture served as a tool to make a place readable and a print digestible for the public. It became clear Hiroshige understood the properties of architecture and adopted its characteristics to his needs or altered them when necessary. This research serves as a first foundation for further research on the specific relation between the Ukiyo-e and architectural depiction. Cross-analysis with other masters, and throughout different eras within the Edo period can perhaps offer more insight in the topic.

Introduction

Ukiyo-e or "pictures of the floating world" is the woodblock printing tradition which dominated the Japanese art world throughout the Edo period in imperial Japan from the start of the 17th century until deep into the 19th century. The Ukiyo-e are generally characterized by its vibrant colours, dynamic compositions and depiction of everyday life and popular culture. The rise of this artform is attributed to a combination of factors: the general peaceful era established by the Tokugawa shogunate together with the rise of a wealthy middle class which was constricted by a tight bureaucracy but did not have any opportunity to partake in politics resulted into a culture of opulence and exuberance which would not find its equal throughout Japanese history (Neuer & Yoshida, 1979). The initial subjects which were printed were a reflection of the hedonistic everyday life and interests of this 'common men' consumer: pornographic scenery (*shunga)*, the kabuki theatre (*Yakusha-e)*, courtesans of the brothels (*Bijin-ga)* and mythical and poetical stories about lovers and warriors (*Musha-e)*. Over time due to the establishment of proper travel routes the topics became supplemented by landscapes and natural sceneries (*Fūkei*) (Tinios, 2010).

Having studied a fair amount of prints myself for my personal work, my interest was piqued. Because, while the previously mentioned subjects are very clear in their appearance, a lot of prints contain some form of architectural depiction. This made me wonder what the intention of the masters where upon crafting these prints in regards to the architecture they included. Was it just a matter of course or was there more to it? I feel that the relation between architecture and its contemporary arts in the shape of paintings, sculptures, and so on, can be found throughout history and makes only sense when one agrees with the fact that architecture can be considered as one of these artforms similarly, as many architectural writers like Vitruvius and Boullée claimed before me. Within this symbiotic relation, artistic information, inspiration and the mutual goal of rendering a certain zeitgeist's ideas about beauty is exchanged. Yet when consulting the literature, which contains an abundancy on the mentioned print subjects (Neuer & Yoshida, 1979, Tinios, 2010, Haft, 2013), composition (Liotta et al., 2012) and ways of working (Yoshida & Yuki, 1966), little can be found about the direct role of the architectural depiction within the Ukiyo-e tradition.

This paper serves as a first attempt to uncover this role of architecture. But since the Ukiyo-e printing tradition spans over 250 years of work, artists and ideas, some boundaries had to be put in place to generate a feasible study. For this reason, this paper focusses on the work of one master: Andō Tokutarō, better known under his artist name Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). Considered one of the most important Ukiyo-e masters, his work consists of over 8000 prints throughout all genres within a period in which Japan slowly started opening its borders again to the rest of the world, making him an inspiration for artists such as Van Gogh and architects like Frank Lloyd Wright (Forrer, 2017, Kuma, 2015). Since his name appears in nearly every piece of literature dedicated to Ukiyo-e, I deemed it logical to commence this architectural art analysis along his work. This led to the main question of this paper:

What role does the depicted architecture play in the works of Hiroshige Utagawa?

Presently, four principal overarching themes are in place that will guide this research. Each theme will be supported by a broader general literary review that will lay the groundwork for a subsequent analysis of Hiroshige's oeuvre. The themes consist of a combination of formal elements of art analysis, together with shared elements of architectural analysis. The result are four themes which are chaptered as follows:

2.1 Storytelling As previously stated, architecture is rarely a subject of prints itself. To gain insight in the role of architecture, first the relationship between the depicted architecture and stories within the prints should be pinpointed. Specifically the recognizability and narrative, enabled by the architecture, is discussed.

2.2 Composition Since architecture and artworks such as woodblock prints are about composing space, whether this is two- or three-dimensional, it is important to uncover if architecture is deliberately used for this cause within Hiroshige's work. Framing, spatial organization and scale of architecture will all be discussed.

2.3 Colour, materialization and texture The use of colour and (expression of) materialization is another important commonality between the printed arts and architecture which is used to express beauty, emotion or technical skill. This chapter focuses on how Hiroshige uses this to shape the architecture and with what goal.

2.4 Architectural realism Within this last chapter, several examples of notable architectural structures which Hiroshige recorded more than once, are analysed and compared. Herewith an idea is shaped about the importance of architectural realism from the artist's point of view.

Methods and goals

In the conclusion all findings are combined and a first idea about the role of architectural depictions in the Ukiyo-e printing tradition is shaped. This research has been conducted through reviewing existing literature, in combination with intrinsic analyses on Hiroshige Utagawa's works. These were provided by online platforms of art institutions, together with the print room of the Rijksmuseum. To gain a most complete view of Hiroshige's work within this study, works ranging from early career up to his last are all included (see diagram 1). I acknowledge the methodological limitations that comes with such an personal analysis and the establishing of the previous mentioned themes. The goal of this thesis is not to establish final answers, but rather to open up the conversation about an underexposed element of an
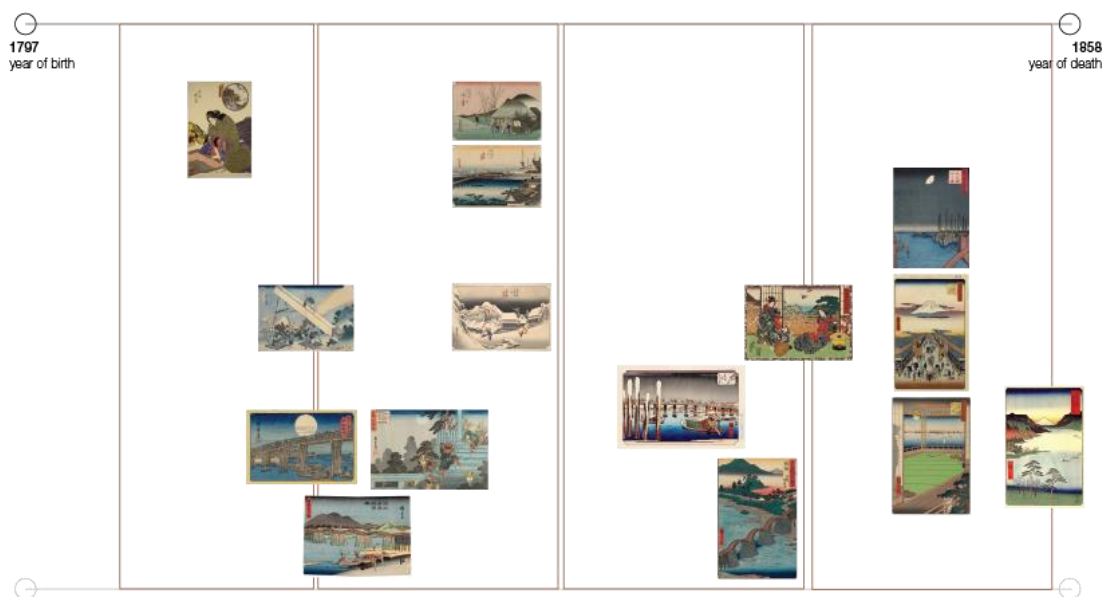

Diagram 1 key figures on timeline of Hiroshige's life (life periods constructed according to Forrer, 2017)

already heavily studied artform. This research can hopefully provide a first basis for further and widespread research on this new perspective.

Position and writing style

This paper will involve analyses of the works conducted by the author, as stated in the introduction. As I (the author) consider personal interest and perception to be a crucial aspect of architectural analysis and writing, I argue that this does not have to be clouded by a cryptic and informal literary writing style or jargon. Accordingly, when deemed necessary, the personal pronounce will be used. Furthermore, it is important to note that I am aware of my position as a white, West-European architecture student analysing the works of a Japanese master. Since analysis is always bound to a perspective, this cannot be unmentioned. Still I believe that through thorough literary studies, combined with the knowledge gathered in the field of architecture, expressing this perspective helps build the academic canon.

2.1 Storytelling

In the realm of Ukiyo-e printing tradition, storytelling and conveying a message through artistic work have played crucial roles throughout history. Complex and sophisticated narrative is central to Japanese traditional culture (Toshidama gallery, 2020). Within the different genres that flourished over the centuries in which the printing tradition peaked, such narrative was conveyed in a combination of an aesthetic strategy, a subject and often the production of series rather than single works (Haft, 2013).

Firstly, there are the three so-called 'Aesthetic strategies' which are *Mitate. Yatsushi* and *Fūryū*. *Mitate* (look and compare) is structured as a binary juxtaposition where the viewer is invited to make the connection between two images offered in one artwork The pictorial designs offered imaginative multiple layers of meaning which coexisted, rather than blended. These works were often reflective of itself and its contemporary audience as well as referential towards earlier works or historical periods (Fiorillo, 1999). *Yatsushi,* often mistaken for *Mitate,* is a strategy wherein a classical scene is depicted in a (at the time) modern way. Here, courtesans were often central figures (Haft, 2013). Lastly there is the strategy called *Fūryū*, in its origin meaning 'gorgeous, elaborate designs intended to surprise other people' (Haft, 2013). This aesthetic value was earlier referenced to amongst others Japanese theatre and architecture similarly.

 Subsequently, these aesthetic strategies are combined with a subject. In the Ukiyo-e tradition the range of subjects is relatively limited, mostly consisting of *kabuki* theatre scenes and their actors (*Yakusha-e*), courtesans (*bijin-ga*), love-making scenes (*Shunga)* and landscapes (*Fūkei*) (Neuer,& Yoshida, 1979). Given that these works were mostly intended for the merchant class of society, the mentioned subjects make sense considering these topics were most relatable and digestible for this particular audience. Together with these aesthetic strategies, which offered more layers to the works, the prints became more than just appealing to the eye.

 The third part adding to the complexity of the story-telling, is the production of series that related to each other, naturally telling a story. They compensated for the limited amount of genres by being utilized in playful manners: sets of series where linked to a wide range of well-known numerical set: four seasons, five Confucian virtues, seven Gods of good fortune, twelve hours of the day, and so on (Tinios, 2010).

Hiroshige, throughout his life, was a versatile artist who explored various genres popular during his time, using different aesthetic strategies in his creations. He often worked in series that shared commonalities in their depictions and were part of larger stories, although each work could also tell its own tale based on location, emotion, or cultural history (Forrer, 2017).

 As a subject, architecture was mostly associated to the *Fūryū*-strategy (Haft, 2013). However, architecture as a genre on its own did not really existed within the Ukiyo-e tradition. Rather, it was deployed as a tool in various scales to assist or lead the stories being told. In this manner it makes an

appearance in many series. This can be seen in an example of the series *The 53 stations of Tokaido (Tōkaidō Gojūsan-tsugi)*. This particular series tells the story of the Tokaido road (see figure 1).

Figure 1 The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road, n.d.

This was one of the most important and well-trotted routes which connected the two capitals (Edo and Kyoto). Hiroshige's travelogue (*Meishoki)* series, in particular, chronicled the traveller's journey and everything that it involved: from poetic natural sceneries, to local cultural differences and from the loneliness that comes with the act of traveling, to challenging weather conditions (Forrer, 2017).

Throughout the series, Hiroshige focuses on various aspects of "the journey," including the travellers themselves, as seen in *Mishima* (see figure 3); the landscapes, seen in *Sakanoshita* (see figure 2); and the relationship between the location, the traveller, and the landscape, as in *Mariko* (figure 4). In all works, the environment and clues ranging from subtle to obvious, are utilized to engage the viewer as a fellow traveller.

Figure 2 and 3 Hiroshige, A., 1833-34. (L) Sakanoshita (R) Mishima, Morning mist

In *Mariko* (figure 4), Hiroshige very cleverly embedded all the characteristics of this station in the print. These include the early plum blossoms found is this specific region, the local delicacies served (as shown on the sign in front of the building) and the more general traditions that resides with such inns (*ryokan*), reflecting a highly respected part of culture within Japan (Shelby, 2003).

In this specific work, architecture emphasizes the story of the traveller. Showcasing a tea house which serves as a place of rest as part of a journey, rather than being of place of destination. The open façade welcomes you in. Showing this being public domain. Blurring the lines between the

Figure 4 Hiroshige, A., 1833-34. Mariko, a specialty tea shop

'outside route' and 'inside tea house', the high centre within the tea house of which we are given a glimpse of, is the first element which can be considered as a barrier. The outside placed furniture strengthens this idea ever so more. The direction of route is, next to being indicated by the departing traveller on the left of the image, pushed by the composition, divided into an 'explained' scene on the right and the 'unknown' on the left. Here again is the open structured façade on the left of the tea house a directory of the route. The open structure is an example of the harmony of Japanese architecture and nature, where buildings are not seen as individual objects, but as part of the existing environment (Beita & Fujii, 2013). The mimicking in shape, colour and gradient of the thatched roof to the mountain in the back enhances this idea. The secondary roof on the right side mirrors the tea house, indicating that more inns could be found within Mariko, which makes sense considering that ten percent of the village was made up of travellers' accommodation (Shelby, 2003). This rather simple trick enhances the image of the village being an accommodation for passers-by.

As opposed to the direct way in which the architecture conveys the story being told in *Mariko*, Hiroshige also inserted architectural elements in a more subtle and symbolic manner. This he did already early in his career in the a series titled '8 views of woman, inside and outside' *(Soto to uchi Sugata hakkei)*. This small series of four works depicts the *Biijn-ga* (beautiful women) genre which Hiroshige practiced thoroughly throughout his early period. In this particular series the works can be seen as diptychs with the central images of the courtesans are seconded by small corner images depicting seemingly unrelated sceneries, thus clueing this to be a *Mitate* series. In one of these works we are presented an image in which a woman is warming herself by a charcoal fire over which an image of a figure pulling a boat along a jetty sits (see figure 5).

*Figure 5 Hiroshige, A., 1821-22. Indoor:
Geisha in night robe warming her hands over a
charcoal fire Outdoor: Girls on a jetty pulling a
boat*

The way architecture is utilized here can be viewed as rather poetic. The hearth with the glowing fire (*irori*) is a traditional fireplace found in Japan. Next to serving as a place to cook, providing heat- and even improving a home's durability, these *irori* also served as the place where families gathered in colder days. The idea of such a warm place of commune is contrasted- by Hiroshige in this image by the sole woman staring melancholic into the hearth.

Considering the *Mitate*-style genre inserted in this series, the relation of the courtesan and the scene in the upper right corner is open to interpretation. From analysis, my suggestion would be that the series portrays the contrast of the indoors with the outdoors. The comfortability of the indoors that the courtesans enjoy however comes with the boundaries of free movement and travel since they are bound to their *Ageya* (brothels).The women are seeming to be plunged in thought yet statically stuck while unidentifiable figures are on the move in the corner images (see figure 6-8). The small architectural gestures are used strengthen the idea of a comfortable inside (figure 5 and 6) which is simultaneously a contained space (figure 8), while the outdoor images portray a certain freedom.

Altogether, it has become clear that Hiroshige cleverly intertwined the three directories of storytelling in accordance to what exact story he wants to convey. Architecture is not a direct centre of the works, but is used in a range from a more obvious tool which explain the history of a place or emphasizes the subject of a series, to a more subtle tool which evokes emotion or invites the viewer to investigate the meaning hidden in the printed layers.

Figure 6-8 Hiroshige, A., 1821-22. From left to right:

Indoor: Woman awakening from sleep, Outdoor: Wild geese homing, and a kago hurrying on the road

Indoor: Woman going to rest and calling her servant by clapping her hands, Outdoor: Evening snow on the verandah

Indoor: Courtesan fully attired offering kiseru (smoking pipe) to her lover outside
Outdoor: Night Rain on the Grille

2.2 Composition

As previously discussed, the building of narrative within the Ukiyo-e prints has its own distinct traits. This goes similarly for the compositional characteristics when compared to western art styles dominating Europe at the time. The mathematical preciseness and anatomical 'correctness' which neo-classical and (while more expressive) romanticistic artists at the time pursued, is something which the Japanese masters did not strive for in their works (Smith & Smith, 1964, Liotta et al., 2012). Yet the masters of the Ukiyo-e movement did utilize certain techniques in such ways that the output is radically striking. Before examining the role of architecture in Hiroshige's compositions, first it is necessary to define the most particular characteristics of Ukiyo-e composition.

Figure 9 Utagawa Kunisada, 1847. The tale of Genji, chapter
5.

First of all there's the common use of multiple planes in the composition structuring. This enables the creation of depth and dimensionality without having to use dramatic shadows or perspective. On the contrary: the colours where contained mostly to monochromic areas outlined by the bold black key lines. With this planar structure, front-, middle- and backgrounds are easy distinguished and a sense of

depth is established (Toshidama Gallery, 2021, Liotta et al., 2021). The parallel projection preferred by the Ukiyo-e artists eradicated the need of a vanishing point so beloved by Western artists since its renaissance resurgence. Figure 9 shows the combination of the multiple planes and the parallel projection (Toshidama Gallery, 2021).

Secondly, there is the matter of direction, which is often expressed in the use of strong diagonals and with that, also in composition. This generates an often expressive, dynamic composition where motion is heavily emphasized. This diagonal lining moreover helped guide the viewer along a work or inwards, or towards a so-called *Oku:* a metaphysical centre and one of the important directories of Japanese spatial atmosphere (Liotta et al., 2012). This concept is not confined to the printed arts but actually derived from the physical experience. In figure 10 this use of diagonals is visible. In the obvious wooden element as well as the subtle counter diagonal of the right side hill. The wavy hilly ground combined with the smoke prevents an vanishing point or horizon from looming. Here the *Oku* is contained within.

Figure 10 Hokusai, K., ca. 1830. 36 views of Mt. Fuji: In the Totomi Mountains

Furthermore, there is the frequently used Negative space (*Ma*) technique. This specific technique makes use of the contrasting qualities of composed colours. Similarly to the use of multiple planes this enabled the Ukiyo-e masters to use monochrome planes of colour without striking as flat. The technique was used to highlight important element of the works. In the work below, (figure 11) Hiroshige makes smart use of this technique, where the viewer is led from the close-bridge to the clear blue water contrasting this reddish brown. From there the view goes up again to a contrasting light on the horizon which darkens into the night sky. The journey ends with the bold bright half-moon.

Figure 11 Hiroshige, A., 1857. Tsukudajima from Etai bridge

Hiroshige the composer

A large part of Hiroshige's fame and appreciation is much due to his mastery over the composition (Trede & Bichler, 2015). As an adolescent he was able to study the western techniques which originally made their way to Japan from Portugal (*Nanban*) and the Netherlands (*Rangaku)* via the Chinese mainland while Japan's borders remained very tightly concealed (Liotta et al., 2012). The latter, literally meaning 'Dutch learning' later became synonymous with the studying of western scientific learning (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). The most notable influence these techniques brought was that of the linear perspective. Hiroshige took upon this technique and combined it with the more traditional Japanese vertical (*Kara-e*) and horizontal (*Yamato*-e) compositional systems (Liotta et al., 2012). One of his most used perspectival approaches is that of the so-called *Sansui-ga* (pictures of mountains and water). This approach evolved into a painting method which consisted of a bird's eye view, no clear horizon and the absence of a fixed viewpoint, the last caused all the elements of the composition to become of equal importance and helps suggest the link between man and nature. In his work Hiroshige used the previously mentioned techniques of multiple planes, direction and negative space (often in combination with the Sansui-ga technique) and amalgamated this with the western techniques he picked up. This created a versatile body of work in a perfect (not mathematical) order (Liotta et al., 2012). When analysing his work it becomes clear that Hiroshige also understood the qualities of architectural depiction and how those could be used to build his images.

Hiroshige for example manipulated the three-dimensional characteristic of architecture to serve two goals in the work titled *Yoshida, The Toyokawa River Bridge (Yoshida, Toyokawabashi,* see figure 12):
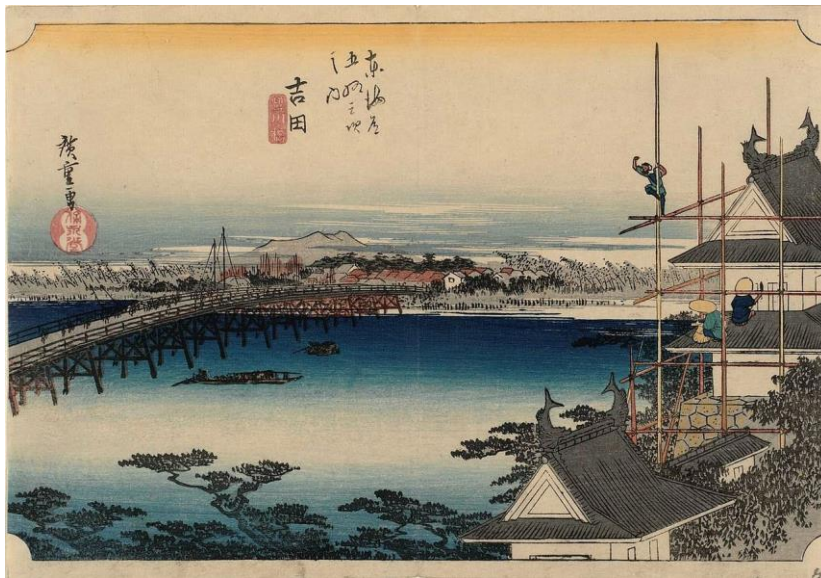

Figure 12 Hiroshige, A., 1833-34. The Toyokawa River Bridge in Yoshida

The first goal is that of layering thus creating depth. The massiveness of the architectural structure from this close distance in combination of the planar parallel projection makes the building the first plane which the viewer encounters and which the eye is drawn to immediately. From here the second goal becomes clear: the architecture's function as a conductor of the spectator's view. The building, in its parallel projection, is positioned in such a way, that it shows the spectator where to look next: the

bridge construction. From here, the eye follows the direction of the bridge to the opposite side of the river until it reaches the destination: the village under the lee of the mountain. This subtle directing ensures all elements being part of the composition, balancing the importance of the subjects depicted. This specific work also belongs in the *Sansui-ga* method and noteworthy is the attention to detail. In here the relation between man and nature, with architecture as its apparatus becomes clear: The roofing detail of the Koi carp referring to the structure's relation to the river. Then there's the bamboo shown in two shapes: in its natural appearance in the right lower corner, and as if grown from this stem, the man-made construction of the same material. In my opinion it celebrates the quality of nature in all its forms and its relation to man.

Then there is the way Hiroshige uses the sharp lines of architectural structures to emphasize the distinction of layers with which he expands contrast. In the work *Kanbara, night snow* (see figure 13), Hiroshige creates an imaginary Kambara covered in a thick pack of snow (it actually hardly ever snows in this area (The Metropolitan Museun of Art, n.d.)), but by doing so, Hiroshige creates a strong visual in which the outlined houses break out of this white environment while their roofs resemble the snowy mountains in shape and colour, similar to what he did in the *Mariko tea house* (see chapter 2.1, figure 4).

Figure 13 Hiroshige, A., 1833-34. Kambara, night snow

A radical turn

Between 1854 and 1856 Hiroshige made the series *Famous places in the 60-odd provinces*. What sets this series apart as a monumental advancement in Hiroshige's career is his adoption of a vertical format for all his design. In this series, this can be assigned to the mostly vertical frames he painted, but it became the groundwork for his last and most grand series: *100 famous views of Edo* (King,

2010). In the *100 famous views of Edo,* Hiroshige made the bold decision to showcase every view in a vertical frame, including the landscape prints. This created almost photography-like framed views where unexpected cut-offs makes the spectator wonder what happens around this frame only being offered a glimpse, which is exactly what Hiroshige was aiming for (King, 2010, Liotta et al., 2015).

Figure 14 & 15 Hiroshige, A., 1856-57. (L) Suruga-chō & (R) View from Massaki of Suijin Shrine, Uchigawa Inlet and Sekiya

In the work *Suruga-chō* (See figure 14) in an unusual symmetric *Sansui-ga* composition Hiroshige displays again the western-borrowed linear perspective which gets clouded around the horizon in which the *Oku* is concealed. Here Hiroshige utilized the orthogonal nature of the architecture to invigorate the perspective. The bold black lining reading as the roof tiling lets the viewer sink into the ditch which is the street. Following it all the way down until one reaches the stark, light accentuated clouds. Through the use of negative spaces, mount Fuji towers dominantly above the cloud cover.

But Hiroshige did not only had the viewer spectate a scenery and its architecture from a safe distance. In *View from Masaki* (see figure 15) Hiroshige structures the composition in such a way that the spectator becomes the guest in a tea house staring out of a window opening from up close. The semi-circle creates a fluent composition in which Hiroshige orchestrated every element: From the orchid plums seemingly fitting exactly in the window frame, to the bird flock creating a branch-like line, becoming a gradient connecting the slender tree on the forefront to its background evening sky. The monochrome screen taking up half of the image is compensated by the intricate detailing throughout the landscape and steers the focus.

In conclusion, it can be said that Hiroshige understood the qualities and benefits of architectural representation combined with his clever use of traditional and imported techniques and intentionally used this as a tool to compose his works. From the three-dimensional qualities offering direction and perspective to the nature of architectural planes used for layering and create contrast. Through the use of negative space, which has a direct relation to the Japanese architecture traditions, Hiroshige manages create high contrast by layering stark monochrome objects against (for example landscape) backgrounds. Yet, to create this desired contrast, mere shape and outlines aren't enough. Colour plays

a decisive role. And to understand the role of architectural representation in Hiroshige's work, it is necessary to talk about the function of colour and textures within the Ukiyo-e tradition and the relation between the architectural representations and these colours and textures.

2.3 Colour, materialization and texture

To better understand the role of architecture in the works of Hiroshige, it is important to understand the way colour and textural expression are deployed to generate the images and its subjects. This is because colour has been imperative to the development of the Ukiyo-e prints and Hiroshige's work in particular (Edwards & Joyner, n.d., Forrer, 2017) There is a lot written on the use of colour within the Ukiyo-e tradition. This chapter will funnel towards the relation between colour, textural expression and Hiroshige's depiction of architecture in different stylistic periods of his career.

By the time Hiroshige picked up his brush in the late 1810s, the Ukiyo-e printing tradition already underwent a colour evolution over the span of 200 years prior. The earliest prints were monochromatic *Sumizuri-e* (black printed picture, see figure 16) which were already introduced to Japan via China in the eight century but previously primarily used for Buddhist texts and images (Edwards & Joyner, n.d.).

Figure 16 Moronobu, H., 1675-1680. Two lovers

But due to the rise of a merchants' (*Chōnin*) class in the seventeenth century, the demand for artworks grew bigger than the supply of coloured paintings could handle. Therefore artists reverted back to the woodblock printing technique and expanded it with a limited range of colours which were painted on by hand (Neuer & Yoshida, 1979, see figure 17).

Figure 17 Nishimura, S., between 1726-1736. In front of the left

It was not until the mid-eighteenth century when multi-coloured prints where made using different woodblock in succession (Edwards & Joyner, n.d.). The palettes of these prints were however still constrained to a few colours: shades of red, yellow and green where most applied (see figure 18).

The full-colour (*Nishiki-e*) prints started becoming popular from the 1760s and remained in vogue up until the 20th century. The colours could be printed alone, over one anther or mixed. Thus offering a wider range of possibilities of evoking the richness of the 'floating world'; from intricately coloured patterns to decorated landscapes (Edwards & Joyner, n.d.). The colour palette was extended with several synthesized pigments, like the Prussian blue which was introduced to the palette in the 1820s. Hiroshige was among the artists eagerly adopting these pigments since their precedents where unable to withstand long exposure to the natural elements and faded over time, leaving relatively timid-looking prints (Edwards & Joyner, n.d.).

Figure 18 Harunobu, S., 1766.
Descending geese of the koto
bridges

Along this progression in colour use, several techniques for specific purposed where developed to generate rich textures. Previously, monochromic prints or limited coloured prints relied more heavily on the detailing of the key block (the woodblock which contains the black outlines). With the expansion of the colour palette and multi-colour prints, other techniques could replace or strengthen this detailing. Firstly, there is the *Bokashi* (gradient). A technique in which by hand applying a gradation of ink, a soft gradient of a single or multiple colours is manufactured. This is often found in landscape works (Yoshida, T., & Yuki, R., 1966, see figure 19). Hiroshige was a fervent user of this technique.
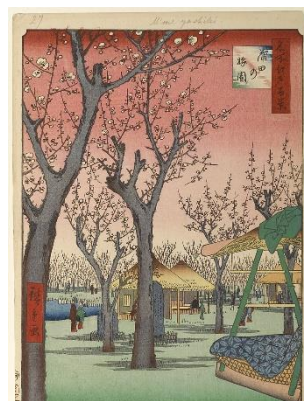

Figure 19 Hiroshige, A., 1856-1858
Plum Garden at Katama

Then there was the matter of the application of the brushstrokes. The way the paint is applied to the woodblock is decisive for the outcome of the print. Different brushes, the strength with which the paint is brushed onto the woodblock and distribution of the paint is all to be taken into consideration when generating the coloured surfaces (Yoshida, T., & Yuki, R., 1966). In figure 20 is an example of

how different strokes in different directions enhances the horizontal, vertical and diagonal axes. Lastly there're the, less frequently used, embossing technique (*Karazuri*) and its close relative *Kimetsubushi* (uniform grain printing). The first one involves the firmly pressing of the paper into the woodblock without any paint, adding depth to textures or making elements coming out of the paper (Gilbert, S., 2020, see figure 21). In the latter technique, the grain of the woodblock is intentionally used. This is achieved by roughening the surface of the block so to impress the paper into the grain. This is often reserved for larger monochromatic coloured areas, such as the water surface in figure 22 (Fiorillo, J., 1999b).

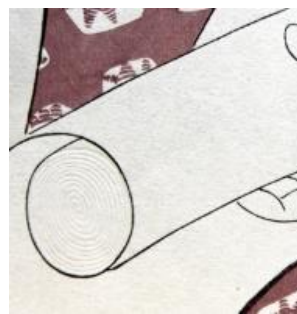*Figure 20 Hiroshige, A., 1852. The Valley of Amida's Descent at Ōyama in Sagami Province*

Figure 21 Utamaro, K., 1794-95. detail of The Courtesan Hanaōgi of Ōgiya

Figure 22 Hiroshige, A., 1858. Lake Suwa in Shinano Province

Hiroshige's architectural colours

The range of Hiroshige's work asked for a range of expression through shape, colour and texture. This is because throughout his career there exists great differences in the relation between the detail of the key block and the accompanying colours. Early work is marked by a great level of detail, which is evident in the fine lines and intricate patterns he used to capture textures of buildings, trees, fabrics
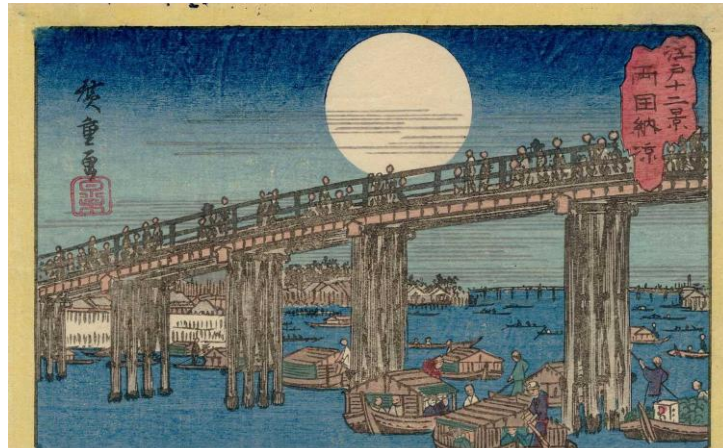

Figure 23 Hiroshige, A., 1831. Enjoying the evening cool at Ryōgoku

and other elements of the scene (see figure 23). This is in contrast to much of his later work: vibrant and expressive prints where the emphasis was much more on composition and mood (Forrer, 2017, King, 2010). The timid colour palette of his early work is replaced by bold, sweeping brushstrokes and contrasting colours as can be seen in an example from one of his later series (see figure 24). How the architecture which Hiroshige depicted is perceived, is in great deal dependant on the different texturing techniques and colours he used for the subject in question. This in turn was determined by the narrative and composition.

Figure 24 Hiroshige, A., 1847. Twilight View of the snow clad Ryōgoku Bridge

In *At the Gojō Shrine* (see figure 25) Hiroshige utilizes the architecture as a décor for the narrative being told. It has the secondary function of literary and figuratively supporting the subject. This shows for example in his choice to give the shown part of the structure a monochrome treatment. This can be identified as a stone surface due to its two-tone grey colouring and dotted texture. Since in reality the structure of the column and fence would be most likely constructed out of wood (Young et al., 2007), it becomes evident that Hiroshige intentionally chose to mono-materialize the architecture to generate a clearer contrast between the figures and their décor. Moreover, even though the darker tone of grey creates the necessary depth and implies a shadow being thrown by the moonlight, Hiroshige left out any shadows casted by the figures which could possibly distract from the scene. Lastly, to strengthen

Figure 25 Hiroshige, A., 1832-34. At the Gojō Shrine, Ushiwakamaru Defeats Tankai of Shirakawa)

the narrative, Hiroshige used certain recognizable architectural elements which helps understand the 'where' of the scene. The golden lanterns down the stairs and *tōrō* (light tower) in the upper right corner are Buddhist symbols which are often found at shrines (Walther, 2022). By coating them in gold, Hiroshige emphasizes the importance of the shrine, since normally the *tōrō* are constructed out of stone or bronze.

In contrast to the previous, within the work *Moon-viewing Point* (see figure 26) the architecture plays a more primary role. In its composition, the architecture embraces the viewer, making them feel like a layer of the print. This is strengthened by the dark *Bokashi* (gradient) at the top and bottom of the work which almost create a sense of an eyelash's shadow. The clear contrast of the inside versus outside is highlighted by the *Bokashi* which make up the water and sky, pulling the view through the space towards the horizon. In contrast to this gradient in the natural elements, the architectural space is made up of uniform coloured planes. These are however true to their nature in terms of colour. Three types of brown make up a realistic wooden construction. The bonsai in the front has its own tone of brown and green, relaying again the subtle contrast inside versus outside; nature versus manmade. The detail of the woodgrain in the *Shoji* (sliding screen panel) adds an extra dimension in the texturizing and harmonizes with the otherwise monochromic architectural elements. In the *Shoji*, Hiroshige incorporated yet another quality of the screen: Hiroshige cleverly demonstrates the transparency of the delicate *Gampi* paper used in the *Shoji* by printing a shadow of a figure over the screen in a light grey tone. Next to enhancing the materiality, it gives the viewer a clue about the narrative being displayed. Finally, in the detail as shown in figure 27, the difference in brushstroke direction shows clearly. The verticality of the green, in which the grain of the wood is visible as well

versus the horizontality of the brown of the floor. Moreover, it shows the decision to print the green over the *tatami* (floor mat) division to dim the linework as opposed to the clean cut of the floorboards.

Altogether, the extraordinary craftmanship developed over the length of Hiroshige's career is evident throughout the various scales within the prints. Hiroshige understood how he could use colour and textural expression to enhance his narrative, bend its properties to reach the purpose Hiroshige needed it to fulfil, and where intricate detail was a necessity or could make place for bold colours which would speak to a spectator's emotion.

Figure 26 Hiroshige, A., 1856-1858. Moon-viewing point

Figure 27 Corner detail

2.4 Architectural realism

The previous chapters already touched upon the realism of the depicted architecture in relation to colour and texture and its important relation to narrative and composition. This last chapter attempts to investigate this architectural naturalism and Hiroshige's rhyme and reasoning accordingly. Since the consumers of the Ukiyo-e prints where mostly the 'common man' (Neuer & Yoshida, 1979), I argue a certain digestibility and recognizability of the print subjects was preferred. This is already evident through the topics of the prints, as explained in the introduction. Together with the fact that in general people tend to be attracted to things they are familiar with (Zajonc, 1968), I imagine that when Ukiyo-e printmakers recorded widely known (architectural) elements in their prints, they took the recognizability into account. In the end it was as much about the sales as it was about the art (Neuer & Yoshida, 1979). I'll be looking at two examples of famous architectural structures and the (several) ways they are depicted by Hiroshige and his peers. I specifically chose these because of the fact that Hiroshige recorded them multiple times in different parts of his life. And since it became clear that there are clear distinctions between Hiroshige's early and later career, I deemed it necessary to investigate if this was the case in regards to the architectural naturalism as well.

Kintai bridge (*Kintai-kyō*)

The Kintai bridge, first constructed in 1673 is a 5 span timber arch bridge in the Yamaguchi prefecture (Ren & Koshihara, 2017). To this day it still serves its function. And while not consisting of the original structural elements anymore, it is still built in the way originally intended and in accordance to its traditional carpentry : four stone bases together with two sets of wooden column structures support five bridge elements (see figure 28).

   The first time Hiroshige translated the Kintai bridge to a print was between 1820 and 1830 (exact date unsure, see figure 29). The eye level perspective encompasses all the structural elements, however lacking a proper perspective. But when comparing with the photo as seen in figure 28, Hiroshige did hone the qualities in such a manner that any confusion about the subject can be easily discarded. Even the detailing of the wooden bracing on both rear ends appear in their right numbers.
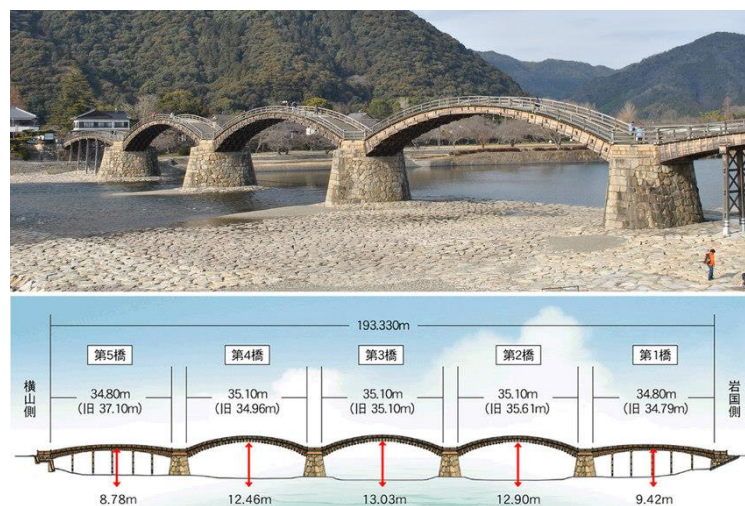

Figure 28 Ren, C. & Koshihara, M., 2013. Kintai bridge (T) & Japanese Association for Conservation of Architectural Monuments, 2005. Elevation from Downstream from Project report on Kintai Bridge;s rebuild construction (B)

Figure 29 Hiroshige, A., 1820-1830. Kintai Bridge at Iwakuni in Suo province

Figure 30 Hokusai, K., ca. 1834. Kintai Bridge in Suo province)

In the same period Hiroshige's contemporary Hokusai also captured the Kintai bridge (see figure 30). This print is clearly a different interpretation. Especially the slender figure stands out. And while it can be argued that the stone foundations are captured from their front side, this wouldn't account for the narrow spans. Still, through its unique shape and structure, it is hard not to see the budding of the Kintai bridge within the print. It seems Hokusai was less afraid to strip or distort several characteristics for his composition. This is also evident in the fact that Hokusai included the *Iwakuni* castle in the left of the print, while in reality, this is not visible from the Kintai bridge (Google maps, 2023).

When Hiroshige made his second and last print of the Kintai bridge about 25 years after the first one, he took a different approach. As explained in chapter 2.2, Hiroshige worked mostly in a vertical framing in the last phase of his life. In figure 31, the spectator is presented a bird's-eye view of the bridge which lays parallel projected, serving as a dynamic diagonal divider of the frame. While the image is more dominated by the mood created by the deep colour palette, Hiroshige didn't economize any details out of the bridge while also make it seem rather realistic from a perspective from which he would not have been able to see the bridge himself (Google maps, 2023). Moreover, he arched the walkways a bit steeper compared to his earlier attempt. This looks to more according to reality, assuming the bridge did indeed always arched under the angle as it does still (see figure 28). In spite of that, the one thing Hiroshige doesn't seem to be getting right in both his perspectives are the stone

Figure 31 Hiroshige, A., 1852. Kintai Bridge at Iwakuni in Suo province

bases. Both Hokusai and Hiroshige two-dimensionalizes the bases, turning them into a 'layer' of the print. Yet where Hokusai narrows them as if seen from their narrow front, Hiroshige perhaps felt their masses were needed to give the bridge the deserved amount of space within the frame, or it can be argued that he felt that the bridge would seem more recognizable for consumers. Because when one approaches the bridge from either riverbed, the base indeed has this mass to it (google maps, 2023, figure 28). So even when painting the birds eye view, this " eye-level experienced realism" is inserted. Altogether, it seems Hiroshige understood that he could offer a new perspective on such a distinct structure and use the recognizability of such a structure as an amplifier of the composition. He did however slightly altered the structure, to give the bridge more mass and in turn highlighting the bridge as an significant, contrasting part of the composition. Something which is missing in Hokusai's attempt.

Kinryūzan temple complex (*Asakusa Kinryūzan)*

In Japanese cultural history, the Shinto shrine complexes play a central role. The construction and lay-out of the temple complexes which houses these shrines, is in accordance to centuries of traditions and follow strict principles (Rujivacharakul, n.d.). Often these temple complexes contain a couple of key structures (see figure 32)
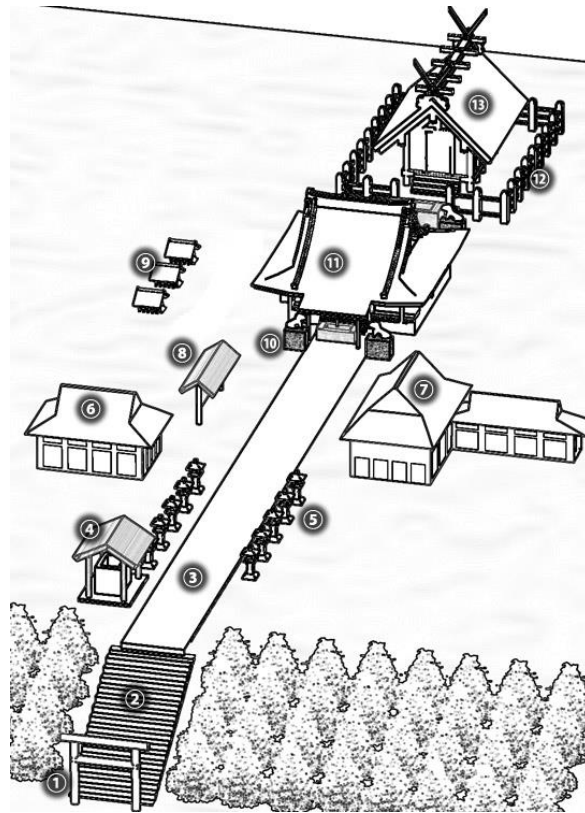

*Figure 32 Wikiwikiyarou, 2009. Plan of Shinto shrine with most important (1) the entrance gate (Torii or Roman), (3) a pathway (*sandō*), washing place (*chōzuya*), (5) lantern (*tōrō*), (6) Kagura dance platform (*kagura-den*), (9) auxiliary shrines or under-shrines connected to larger shrines (*sessha/massha*), (11) worship hall (*haiden*), (12) fence surrounding the shrine (*tamagaki*), (13) the sanctuary, most sacred building (*honden* or shinden).*

Next to containing these same structures, the materials with which these buildings where built, their construction principles and finishing where all tradition-bound ((Rujivacharakul, n.d , *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, n.d.). In figure 33 – 35, three different temple complexes are shown, which shows their resemblance in structure and colour. This can become an issue, if it were not for the personal traits which can reveal their identity. This is however not always a given. Figure 36 – 38 show the same three complexes, but from different perspectives. Where most of the prints including the Tōeizan and Kinryūzan temples have their respective distinct eight-post gate and pagoda to make the spectator aware of the subject, the Zōjō complex in figure 33 and 36 is not immediately linkable. I suggest that Hiroshige might have trusted his spectators to understand the place through its environment. In this case the distinct higher beds along the walkway and the view towards the sea give away clues about this specific temple complex when compared to others.

Figure 33 Hiroshige, A., 1840-47 View of Zōjō Temple in Shiba

Figure 36 Hiroshige, A., 1839-42. Zōjō Temple in Shiba

Figure 34 Hiroshige, A., 1840-47. Tōeizan Temple at Ueno

Figure 37 Hiroshige, A., 1854. Tōeizan Temple in Ueno

Figure 35 Hiroshige, A., 1848-49. Kinryūzan Temple at Asakusa in Snow

Figure 38 Hiroshige, A. 1840-47. Kinryūzan Temple at Asakusa (with rain)

Taking a closer look at the example of the Kinryūzan temple complex, it becomes clear that Hiroshige deemed it more important to include all the complex' characteristic parts than a configurational correctness. Figure 39 shows a map of the complex. With the two gates (respectively 1 and 2), the main place of worship (3), pagoda (4) and washing place (5). Figure 40 shows a view from right in front of the first gate inwards to the second gate. The pagoda however should not be visible from this point of view. Yet Hiroshige decided to include it in the image. A similar thing occurs in figure 41. Here Hiroshige changed the configuration of the second and place of worship, placing them side to side in relation to the first gate and pagoda (or it can be seen as if the pagoda and first gate suddenly are located on the right side. Upon studying over 10 works Hiroshige dedicated to the Kinryūzan temple complex, it shows that this phenomenon occurs more often then not. This suggest that indeed Hiroshige deemed it more important that recognizable parts of depicted structures where included in the print, then being rightful to the composition.

All together, it seemed Hiroshige didn't mind changing or combining different perspectives to have the works produced include important characteristics of the architectural structures. I suggest that this

was due to the fact the realism of the architecture he depicted wasn't as important as to make sure his spectators understood the architectural structure and through the structure, the place it represented.

Figure 39 By Author, 2023. Map of Kinryūzan temple complex based of image retrieved from 365asakusa

Figure 40 Hiroshige, A., 1857. Kinryusan Temple at Asakusa

Figure 41 Hiroshige, A. 1854. Kinryūzan Temple at Asakusa

Conclusion

Within this thesis a first attempt was made to outline the role of depicted architecture in the Ukiyo-e printing tradition. This was done along the research question:

What role does the depicted architecture play in the works of Hiroshige Utagawa?

From the four themes investigated, several combined conclusions can be drawn which provide an insight to this question:

Firstly, there is the way Hiroshige uses architecture in relation to the stories which are being told. Hiroshige intertwines the three common directories of storytelling and weaves architectures as a supporting subject through them. It became clear that architecture is hardly ever the centre of his work, but is rather used in a range from an obvious tool which elaborates on (the history of) a place to it emphasizing the subject of a series, like the inns which tell the story of the traveller. Furthermore, it appears that architecture also makes appearances as a more subtle tool: one that is put in place to evoke an emotion or has the spectator engaging in finding the hidden meanings which are woven into the prints.

Secondly, there is the way Hiroshige uses architecture as a compositional tool. It became clear Hiroshige understood the qualities and benefits of architectural representation combined with his clever use of traditional and imported techniques, and intentionally used this as a tool to compose his works. From the three-dimensional character of architectural structure, offering clear direction or constructed a perspective, to the nature of architectural planes used for layering and to create contrast. Through the use of negative space, which has a direct relation to the Japanese architecture traditions, Hiroshige managed to create high contrast by layering stark monochrome objects against each other or non-space backgrounds such as deep landscapes.

Moreover, I found that when it came to the use of colour and texture in relation to architectural depiction, Hiroshige knew exactly what he was looking for. Fortunately, in the time Hiroshige worked, there was already a wide range of colour pigments to work with. Throughout his career he worked from a more timid pallet with great detail, to a more vibrant style in which the emphasis rested more on composition and mood. It turned out that how he depicted architecture was depending on the function the architecture served: in its more subserving role, the architecture could suddenly take on different material properties, needed to become a décor for the prints' subject. Here Hiroshige did not feel bound to a realism. But when the architecture took on a more important part of the print, as seen in the close-up interior composition, Hiroshige strengthened certain materialistic characteristics, making use of the qualities of different printing techniques like the brushstroke direction and gradients.

Lastly, this paper shone light on Hiroshige's position towards architectural realism. Here I've found that Hiroshige valued including recognizable trademarks of important architectural structures over a 'correct' realistic composition of architectural structures. He made sure that there was no confusion about his subjects. This goes for both his more detailed work and for his more expressive work, similarly. These trademarks can be the general construction, for example seen with the Kintai bridge, or full architectural structures that are part of a bigger complex, as seen within the example of the Kinryūzan temple complex. Existing literature already elaborated on the fact that a precise realism regarding for example the perspective, wasn't something the Ukiyo-e masters aimed for. Yet here it became clear that a strong composition, which included the means for the clients to immediately understand the place was valued, mattered more than a sense of compositional realism.

Altogether, it seems the role of architecture has not been an unambiguous one, but rather shifted to the needs of Hiroshige's subjects. As stated in the introduction, and confirmed through research, architecture indeed is hardly the subject of a print itself. And since the specific literature about this subject is not available yet, a certain caution is advised. Still, this research serves as a first foundation for further research on the specific relation between the Ukiyo-e and architecture. Cross-

analysis with other masters, and throughout different eras within the Edo period can perhaps offer a more accurate image.

Discussion

Throughout the research on the subject, several problems presented themselves, which need to be taken into consideration. First of all, as already touched upon in the introduction, the general discrepancies which are embedded in a personal analysis cannot go without addressing. Again stressing that writing from a personal point of view requires critical review. Through further analysis by experts from different fields and from different backgrounds, this can be improved.

Then there are the more specific issues which come with the analysis through method of online art databases. Since the Rijksmuseum only offered a limited amount of Hiroshige's prints, I had to resort mostly to online databases of his work. This leaves room for colour discrepancies, depending on scanning qualities. Moreover, what has to be considered, is the fact that the prints come in editions of several hundred to thousands copies. In the printing process, Hiroshige, as the artist, did not print these himself. So how certain colours show or how certain brushstrokes are applied, cannot completely be attributed to Hiroshige himself.

Finally, there is the matter of limitations embedded in the selection of works. As said, Hiroshige alone already created 8000 prints in his life, of which a mere 30 are discussed in this thesis. In further research, next to studying more works of Hiroshige, it is important to consider the work of fellow masters, from his working period, as well as previous, and future ones..

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