

# the Whitworth

## Audio Descriptions transcript

April 2021

### AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Audio descriptions of artworks from the collection of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.



**AUDIO DESCRIPTION 7: Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō: Evening Snow at Kanbara. Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). Woodcut (Colour). Mrs Max Mayer (gift, 1934).**

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## **Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō: Evening Snow at Kanbara**

### **Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)**

This print is called Evening Snow at Kanbara, and is a part of a series of works by Utagawa Hiroshige called The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō produced in 1833. It is a Japanese print of a snowy, cold landscape. There are three figures in the foreground. Roughly nine buildings in the middle-ground and some snow-topped mountains in the background to the left of the print. It is framed on the left side by a tree seemingly drowned out in the falling snow. The sky is visible above the scene, its dark, inky blackness broken up by falling snow, travelling down towards the stooped, cold figures traversing through the thickly settled snow. There are only five colours on this print: jet black, an intense blue, a burnt red, a tan colour and beige on a yellowed paper support. Most of the background is printed in black ink, showing a severe contrast with the now yellowy white snow. There are Japanese characters written atop this scene and on its left in black ink with other characters in red ink alongside them.

The three figures are hunched against the freezing-cold winds in bulky coats. They are sporting wide conical hats, protecting their skin from the falling snowflakes. One figure is turned away from the other two, walking to the left side of the scene, perhaps they were meeting each other in the middle before this scene, perhaps not. This figure wears a dark blue coat, which is slowly

turning white from the snow falling on his shoulders, and his large hat is so tall and wide, his face isn't visible at all.

The two other figures walk towards the right side of the frame, both likewise huddled and wrapped up in thick-looking coats- the one standing nearest to us wears a pair of trousers which are the same colour as that navy coat the man on the left wears. Both of these men have hats like the man on the left, but the rims are wider and don't cover as much of the face. You can see a sliver of pale skin peeking out from under the hats. These hats are called Sugegasas and indicate that these two people crossing towards the right side of the print are either travellers or Buddhist monks, or both.

It is unsurprising that these figures may be travellers or pilgrims, as the Tōkaidō, which roughly translates to 'eastern sea route', was one of the most important travel routes in Japan at this time, going along the curve of the largest and most populous Japanese mainland, Honshū. It was one of the five roads that connected the capital shōgun city Edo, now modern-day Tokyo, to Kyōto, the imperial city. The stations, which Kanbara is one, would be where travellers would have to present their travelling permits- like passport control at an airport.

Works like this, which depicted contemporary daily life in Japan (in a heightened style) were very popular during the mid-nineteenth century. Prints like this were called ukiyo-e, which translates to 'floating world'. This was because all the

images depicted were transitory events- fleeting moments. A famous ukiyo-e print is The Great Wave by Hokusai, in which a wave is suspended and frozen in time, similar to the still snow which never really falls onto the figures in Evening Snow at Kanbara.