

CHECKLIST

Ando Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797–1858  
*Oiso*, station nine from the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road (Hoeido Series)*

1832–34

Color woodcut

*Gift of John C. Richardson, Class of 1941, in memory of his father, Edward C. Richardson, Class of 1905; PR.972.63.9*

Ando Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797–1858

*Mitsuke*, station twenty-nine from the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road (Reisho Series)*

1848–49

Color woodcut

*Gift of John C. Richardson, Class of 1941, in memory of his father, Edward C. Richardson, Class of 1905; PR.972.64.29*

Munakata Shiko, Japanese, 1903–1975

*Oiso*, station nine from *The Tokaido Road Series*

1965

Color woodcut

*Museum purchase; PR.965.65.2*

Munakata Shiko, Japanese, 1903–1975

*Mitsuke*, station twenty-nine from *The Tokaido Road Series*

1965

Color woodcut

*Museum purchase; PR.965.65.1*

Munakata Shiko, Japanese, 1903–1975

*Maruko*, station twenty-one from *The Tokaido Road Series*

1965

Color woodcut

*Gift of Diantha C. and George C. Harrington, Class of 1961; PR.2001.13*

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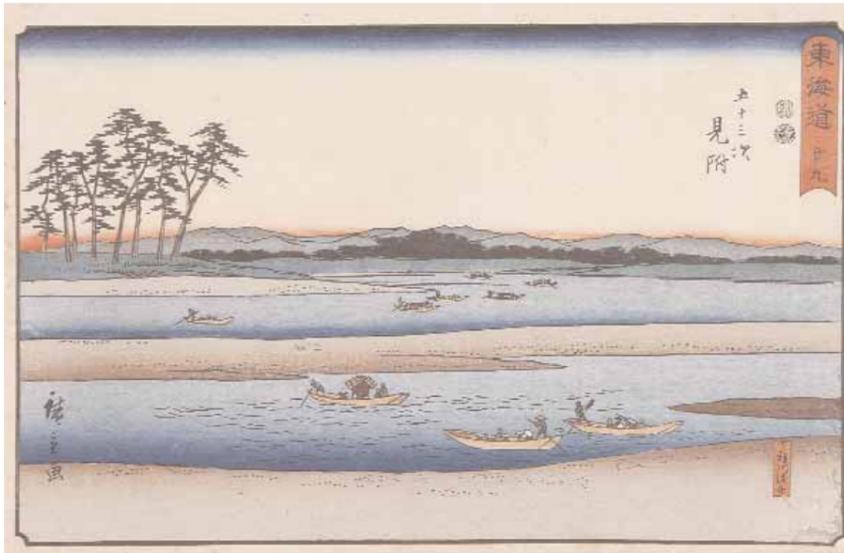
Designed by Christina Nadeau, DPMS



Munakata Shiko, *Oiso*, station nine from *The Tokaido Road Series*, 1965, color woodcut.  
Museum purchase; PR.965.65.2

## DECORATION *and* FUNCTION

### The Evolving Relationship of Colors and Lines in the Japanese Print Tradition



Ando Hiroshige, *Mitsuke*, station twenty-nine from the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road (Reisho Series)*, 1848–49, color woodcut. Gift of John C. Richardson, Class of 1941, in memory of his father, Edward C. Richardson, Class of 1905; PR.972.64.29

My first encounter with Munakata Shiko's *Tokaido Road Series* in the Hood's collection left me enthralled. I was fascinated with these expressive and vibrantly colored prints, which at first appeared rather chaotic. In time, however, Munakata's printed line and bright coloring produced a harmony that laid bare a traditionally Japanese subject matter—the Tokaido Road. Munakata's energetic interpretation of *The Tokaido Road Series* was commissioned for the 1964 Summer Olympic Games, held in Tokyo, and hence was appropriately nationalistic in theme.

The Tokaido Road was the main thoroughfare in Tokugawa, Japan. The road connected Kyoto with Edo, the capital of the Tokugawa shogunate, and it quickly became central to the economic, political, and cultural landscape of nineteenth-century Japan. This established infrastructure encouraged a pilgrimage culture that in turn made travel a popular theme in Japanese visual culture. Ando Hiroshige's *Hoeido* and *Reisho* versions of *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road* are among the most vivid depictions of the Tokaido

landscape and set a precedent for the landscape print tradition. This installation presents both Hiroshige and Munakata's prints of the Tokaido Road in order to explore the evolving relationship between line and color in the Japanese print tradition over the past century.

In the early Japanese print tradition, the roles of line and color were highly compartmentalized: line mostly served to outline the composition, while color decorated the delineated spaces. The distinctive roles of line and color are exemplified in Hiroshige's *Oiso* from the *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road*: fine, descriptive lines clearly outline a group of weary travelers and their packhorses, staggering toward their rest stop for the night. In this print, color is subservient to line. Hiroshige ingeniously combines the straight, strong lines of rain with the clearly articulated hunched figures to communicate misgiving and nostalgia. While the earthy tones of the print undoubtedly enhance its poetic atmosphere, the role of its color is more decorative than functional. In black and white, this print would still be able to communicate its narration to the audience, however somberly.

In contrast, Munakata Shiko's twentieth-century interpretation of the same location presents a very different relationship between color and line. Munakata was aligned with the Japanese Creative Print movement (*Sosaku Hanga*), which promoted a "self-drawn, self-carved, and self-printed" practice divorced from the segmented production line of the traditional publisher's atelier. Carved and printed by Munakata himself, this *Oiso* (see cover) uses printed lines more expressively and animatedly than its Hiroshige counterpart. However, to the untrained eye these complex lines tend toward the abstract and are difficult to decipher. To compensate, Munakata gives his color a more functional and architectonic role in the work. The reddish-brown dabs of paint that delineate the thick lines in the middle of the print identify them as stoic tree trunks. Instantly, this purposeful interaction between color and line transforms the composition into a decipherable landscape. Without color, the viewer would confront only an abstract tangle of black and white spaces.

In addition, Munakata's color preserves the chaotic architectural energy of his prints. Both Hiroshige's and Munakata's *Mitsuke* depict landscapes with a deep, Western horizon line in the middle of the print. Hiroshige creates a sense of depth by drawing a row of ferryboats that gently curves from the riverbed in the foreground to the foot of the mountain on the horizon, using line to clearly articulate the decreasing size of the boats as they move inward. In comparison, Munakata's lines in his *Mitsuke* are more expressive and whimsical. However, by applying color to both the back and the front of the print, Munakata creates a *trompe-l'oeil* effect that transforms this flat surface into a three-dimensional space. The blue paint applied on *top*

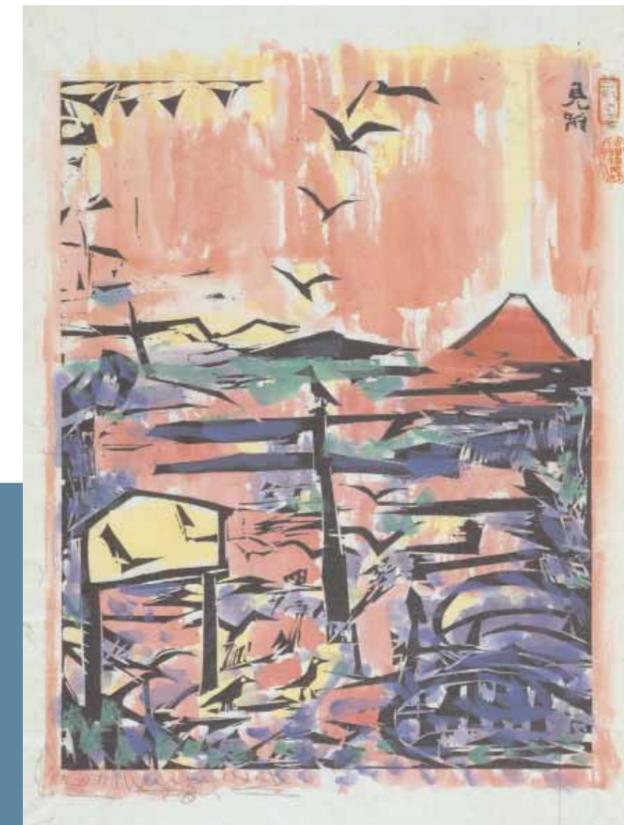
of the black lines visually emerges from the picture plane, while the strokes of pink and yellow that were painted on the *back* of the print recede inward, giving a sense of depth. The functional application of color in this print serves to heighten the expressive capabilities of the printed lines. Without it, the elements of the print would remain surface-bound, and the dignity and grandeur of Mt. Fuji on the horizon would be significantly reduced.

Finally, the functional use of color in Munakata's prints unifies different compositional styles so as to enable the printed line to be used more expressively. Munakata's quick and forceful woodcarving method often results in a single composition with two different artistic styles. Because of his working method, Munakata often departs from his preparatory sketches as he carves "freehand" on the wooden block. In Munakata's *Maruko*, Mount Togetsu and the village in the upper portion of the composition are far more representational than the greenery in its lower portion, which unravels into abstraction. However, these disjointed styles are unified and made coherent by the application of color. Munakata uses green to visually bridge the mountain and the more abstract greenery, communicating minute details in the upper portion while maintaining a sense of fluidity in the bottom portion.

More than a century apart, Hiroshige and Munakata's prints of the Tokaido Road demonstrate a changing relationship between color and line. Color has taken a more functional role of late, in turn offering the printed line (and the artist who deploys it) greater opportunities for expression.

Su-Ling Lee '07

The Kathryn and Caroline Conroy Intern



Munakata Shiko, *Mitsuke*, station twenty-nine from *The Tokaido Road Series*, 1965, color woodcut. Museum purchase; PR.965.65.1