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JAPN 314
Essay One
2018/10/12

Ukiyo-e and the Wedded Rocks of Futami

Scenes of beautiful landscapes, entrancing women, iconic sumo wrestlers, monotony of daily life, cute caricatures, and even mythical figures in folk stories have all been depicted in the style of art known as *Ukiyo-e*. Even though this art form stemmed from pre-existing art styles and movements in Japan, it gained national popularity during the late Tokugawa Period, 1603-1868. The ease of access of paper, woodblock printing technology, and economic climate spurred the demand for various sized prints of various themes. Because of this, artists were easily able to mass-produce, through art schools, a wide range of prints. Of these prints I will focus on three produced by Utagawa Hiroshige, Katsukawa Shunko, and Shotei Hokujo. I will be looking at these three artists depiction and style of the *Meoto Iwa* rocks of Futami. These rocks are known in english as the wedded rocks, due to their connection of a ceremonial rope, signifying a bond between the two. The reason why I chose the wedded rocks, was because it shows the appreciation of landscape and travel during this time period. With the unification under the Tokugawa government many people were able to travel, work, and appreciate art, placing an emphasis on the art appreciated. Landscapes at this time were particularly fascinating, because it was during the Tokugawa period, where western art was beginning to influence Japanese art. In many landscapes there was a slow shift from top down view to western perspective painting. While perspective paintings were available they weren't as popular as the traditional floating world aesthetic.



Utagawa Kunisada. (1832). Sunrise at Futamigaura.

First I will discuss Kunisada Utagawa, a prominent member of the Utagawa school of art and an *ukiyo-e* painter in the late edo period. While Utagawa's artwork focused mainly on *kabuki*, *actors*, and *bijinga*, where he produced a monumental amount of designs. In *Sunrise at Futamigaura*, we see a heavily stylized depiction of the wedded rocks at low tide and a dramatized sunrise in the horizon. Compared to other works in *ukiyo-e*, Utagawa uses a little Prussian blue to accent the waves, surrounded by dulled down colors. Another common style seen in landscapes is the de-magnification of people surrounding natural rock formations, emphasizing the strength and beauty of nature. This print was contained in a ten picture landscape set produced by Utagawa, was most likely commissioned. The use of a famous location, art subject, stylization, and the author's prestige greatly improved the image's reception.



Katsukawa Shunko. (1762-1830). Travellers at Futamigaura.

Katsukawa Shunko preferred subjects were that of close up *yakusha-e*, pictures of actors of the edo period. *Travellers at Futamigaura*, similar to other travel-themed prints, utilizes recognizable landscapes and the light hearted depiction of travelling. Shunko wasn't well known for his landscape prints, but rather his close up *yakusha-e*, prints that focused on famous actors of the time. Shunko's content and style differs from Utagawa, by the utilization of empty space and the muted red and green colors on the travellers' clothing. This image is a lot more lively, and focused on human interaction where we can see a higher class man and woman enjoying their conversation, a man helping a woman with her shoes, and even in the background a group of men looking up at the ceremonial rope that connects the two rocks. This is a classic example of a travel print, all that is missing is the illustration of fuji, which is visible from this location.



Hokuju, Shotei. (1820-1830). Futami Bay in Ise Province.

Finally *Futami Bay in Ise Province* by Hokuju, the stylized landscape and expression of geometric shapes is a trademark of Hokuju's work. It was the sharp edges and soft colors that grabbed my attention of this particular woodblock print. Hokuju was even a disciple of Hokusai, and was his renown pupil pushing his own styles into his artwork. The image falls into a mixed genre of landscape and travel, having the travellers being to scale with the landscape and still utilizes the focus of the wedded rocks. This image also shares the use of monks under the ceremonial rope, travellers, and the presence of ships in the background.

From all these different prints, we can better understand how famous landmarks were depicted in ukiyo-e, some exaggerated the landscape and people, while others toned down the magnification of either. The use of colors also varies depending on the artist, the commissioners desired outcome, and even availability/price of materials. It was because of the Tokugawa's economic success these paintings were propagation throughout Edo and nearby regions.

Bibliography

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