

Hasui Kawase: Master of the Shin-Hanga Movement

Hasui Kawase was born in 1883 and lived until 1957. At 28, after being rejected as too old to study art, he was finally accepted to train under a teacher and his skill was soon recognized. He then formed a lifelong cooperation with publisher Watanabe Shozaburo, who initiated and steered the shin-hanga (New Print) movement, revitalizing the traditional ukiyo-e art form in the wake of interest from the West as evidenced by work of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists.

Ukiyo-e, meaning "Pictures of the Floating World," refers to a style of Japanese woodblock print and painting from the Edo period (1603-1868), which depicted landscapes, city life, famous theater actors and beautiful courtesans, sumo wrestlers, historical or storybook themes and erotica. These were produced by a team of artist, carver, printer and publisher, who worked closely together to create the final print. Shin-hanga also utilized a team to create the print. But unlike ukiyo-e, which used bold outlines, bright colors and flat, sometimes asymmetrical compositions, shin-hanga, which was influenced by Western Realism, used perspective, colored lines, 3-dimensionality and nuanced color to depict nature in terms of light.

Hasui Kawase worked nearly exclusively on landscape (or townscape) prints. Unlike ukiyo-e masters before him who portrayed famous places and landmarks around Japan, Kawase preferred to focus on lesser known locales, emphasizing tranquil scenes which celebrated the Japanese traditions he admired. However, he would also acknowledge the modernization Japan was experiencing at the time. His prints would include electric poles, ferries and similar conveniences. He considered himself a realist. He is quoted as saying, "I don't sketch subjectively but objectively. When I sketch, I can omit but I cannot deceive."

Kawase was named a Living National Treasure by the Japanese government. He was the first to receive this outstanding title and it has become the greatest honor an artist can experience in post-war Japan. He died in 1957, after having created more than 600 prints in his lifetime.

In the KIA piece, *Morning on Daikon Gashi (Daikon Wharf)* from the series, *Twenty Views of Tokyo (1927)*, we have a tranquil scene of dawn at a fishing wharf. The sun is not yet over the horizon, or maybe just, being blocked by the buildings in the distance. The gradation of color shows the translucency of the water and how the light is reflected. The buildings in the foreground are all monotone and in shadow suggesting a busy day hasn't yet started. The water is calm and the boats are still. As our eye is drawn to the light of the rising sun, we see light action on the bridge as people are arriving to begin their work day. They are distant and we cannot make out details, the people are part of the scene but not the focus. The proportion and perspective give us a sense of depth as we look down the waterway. The lack of detail on the buildings in the distance let us know they are far from the viewer, just their forms are suggested. The texture of the rocks along the wharf is only clear in the close rocks, the details of the rest blends into the mist. The boats are well used and sit ready for a new day of work. The depiction of the power or telephone lines are a modern addition to an otherwise very traditional setting. Kawase has created a scene, as if from a play, the backdrop is serene and peaceful yet there is certainly an energy as the day is about to start and the hustle and bustle of the work day is on the verge of commencing.

General questions: What time of day is it? (if not revealing title) What is the first thing we notice? What do we hear? What do we smell? How does this make us feel?

