



Utagawa Kuniyoshi: The Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaido

Sarah E. Thompson

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Originally published in 1852 and 1853, *The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido?* is a richly entertaining series of woodblock prints created by master artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi (Japanese, 1797-1861). The seventy-two finely executed prints include one for each resting point along the well-traveled Kisokaido (Kiso Road)--a historic route stretching from Edo (modern Tokyo) to Kyoto--plus views of the two endpoint cities and an additional series title page. Kuniyoshi never traveled the mountainous Kisokaido, but he drew from historic events, kabuki plays, popular legends, and classical literature to illustrate his vision of the towns and stations along the road.

This stunning collection of colorful *ukiyo-e* prints exhibits Kuniyoshi's artistic mastery and clever sense of humor. Each work incorporates three elements: the main picture, an inset landscape depicting the particular station, and a title block. Using parody and pun (both for humor and to avoid government censorship), Kuniyoshi associated each point on the route with one of the most beloved stories of his day--from a reimagined *Odyssey* to the Japanese fairy tale of Urashima to popular kabuki scenes with courtesans and other "floating world" characters. He made that story the subject of the main picture and put clues to its identity in the title block. Kuniyoshi delighted in these hidden messages and used every inch of the paper to tell his story.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi: The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido? celebrates the beauty, charm, and ingenuity of Kuniyoshi's work with more than seventy-five full-color illustrations, including reproductions of all the prints in the treasured series. Sarah E. Thompson provides an introductory essay on the history of *ukiyo-e* and a description of each print.

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