

## WOODBLOCK PRINT TECHNIQUE



Hasui's prints, typical of those in the *Shin hanga* (New Print) movement, are primarily modest adaptations of the painted designs submitted by the artist. The block cutter and printer work to reproduce that design, perhaps making slight changes in tone and texture based on consultation with the publisher and artist. The rare examples shown here demonstrate the printmaking process as well as the careful decisions—and revisions—behind the finished work.

## THE LANDSCAPE PRINT TRADITION



Landscape prints became popular in the early 19th century as Japan gained a new sense of national identity in the face of foreign threats. Amid the accompanying boom in domestic tourism and travel literature, print publishers sought a subject free from censorship and the fickle market for pictures of courtesans and actors. Hiroshige's great success in the 1840s established the idea that almost any location could become a "famous place" (*meisho*). Kiyochika expanded the genre in the 1880s with prints from naturalistic watercolors executed on-site. In the 1910s, publisher Watanabe Shōzaburō revived woodblock prints. For landscapes, he initially chose Takahashi Hiroaki to make those for the tourist trade and Itō Shinsui to produce "creative new prints" (*sōsaku shin hanga*). These artists, along with Yoshida Hiroshi, constituted Hasui's inspiration and his competition.

## HASUI AS PAINTER AND ILLUSTRATOR



Trained as a painter, Hasui created sketches and watercolors as the basis for his woodblock prints. Even after achieving fame for his woodblocks, Hasui produced several magnificent screens in the *nihonga* (neo-traditional Japanese painting) style as well as numerous watercolors. Before establishing himself in prints, Hasui worked as an illustrator. Ever the populist, he contributed designs for magazines, books, posters, and even postal first-day covers throughout his career.

## A LIFE IN PRINTS



Born to a prosperous Tokyo family in the textile business, Kawase Hasui began his formal study of art as a young adult. Although he eventually mastered both Western oil painting and neo-traditional Japanese painting, he made his name designing landscape prints for the publisher Watanabe *Shōzaburō*. Hasui lived in Tokyo his entire life but spent months each year on sketching tours around Japan (and its Korean colony) filling notebooks with drawings that he later turned into watercolors. Watanabe's artisans used these watercolors to create woodblock prints for publication. Hasui took pride in his standing as the only Japanese artist to earn a living solely from print designs. Near the end of his life, when the Japanese Ministry of Education declared the orthodox woodblock print technique an Intangible Cultural Property, Hasui was asked to design a commemorative print, and his final sketching tour was captured in the film shown here.

## EXPERIMENTAL PRINTS



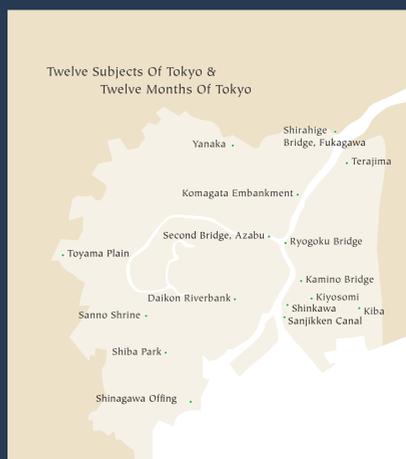
Hasui's first prints were experimental. With their elongated formats, "painterly" textures, dense colors, and aura of mystery, they bear little resemblance to orthodox Japanese landscape prints. Instead, they recall aspects of the 19th-century European paintings that Hasui studied. Intriguingly, they also resemble the woodblock prints created by Henri Rivière around 1900. Despite these unique features, Hasui's initial prints established his characteristic themes of twilight, weather, people at work, and the beauty found in prosaic scenes.

## SOUVENIRS OF TRAVEL, FIRST SERIES



Hasui's trips in 1919 and 1920 to the prefectures north and west of Tokyo led to the sixteen-print series titled *Souvenirs of Travel* (*Tabi miyage*). These prints, of a relatively regular size and grounded point of view, established Hasui's reputation as a master of landscape. He dynamically balances light with darkness, stability with movement, and revealing prospect with comforting refuge. Hasui's comments about these prints attest to his interest in capturing poetic mood (mournful, grand, lonely, dreamlike), regional flavor, and the formal properties of shape, color, and texture.

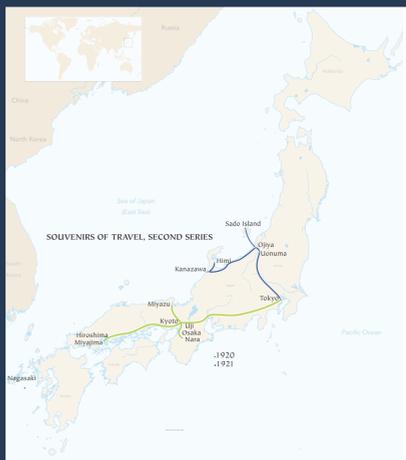
## TOKYO SERIES



Hasui traveled widely throughout Japan, including the neighborhoods of Tokyo, his hometown. The four-hundred-year-old capital was the subject of many

print series in the 19th century, and Hasui added two of his own. *Twelve Subjects of Tokyo (Tōkyō jūnidai)* mixes urban and suburban scenes, varying the season, time of day, and weather to invest the booming modern metropolis with a sense of timelessness. In the five prints that make up *Twelve Months of Tokyo (Tōkyō jūnikagetsu)*, later abandoned, Hasui further contributes to the evolving list of “famous places” (*meisho*) by creating new ones and interpreting some well-known sites in new ways.

## SOUVENIRS OF TRAVEL, SECOND SERIES



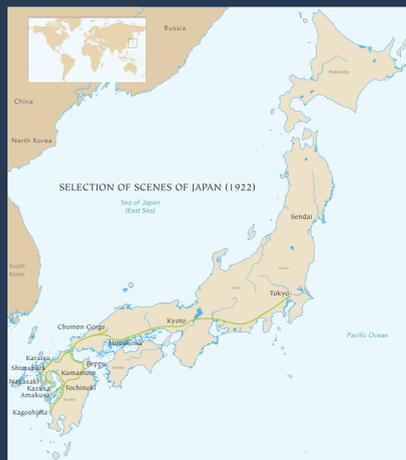
Containing twenty-eight prints, *Souvenirs of Travel, Second Series* is almost twice as large as the first series, an increase that hints at Hasui's rising sales. Represented are the Kansai region (Osaka, Nara, Kyoto), the Japan Sea coast, and the island of Shikoku as sketched by Hasui on trips in 1920 and early 1921. Many of the scenes are obscure, avoiding the kind of picturesque views popular in postcards. Hasui's idiosyncratic focus, even in depictions of famous locales, makes the viewer work to connect the image with the title. The suppression of subject increases interest in formal elements of tone and texture and thus heightens the interpretive position of the traveler-artist.

## MITSUBISHI VILLA SERIES



On the recommendation of Hasui's teacher Kiyokata, the Mitsubishi corporation commissioned Hasui to create eight prints showing the Fukagawa Villa. In 1886, the second Mitsubishi president, Iwasaki Yanosuke, hired English architect Josiah Conder to design what may well be Japan's first completely European-style villa. Burned in the 1923 earthquake, the villa is recorded in two of Hasui's prints. Most of the eight prints in the series, however, feature the elegant strolling garden, dating from the early 18th century. Hasui's depictions of the old garden often reference prints by the 19th-century print master Hiroshige.

## SELECTION OF SCENES OF JAPAN



Hasui's long journey to western Japan in 1922 yielded sketchbooks full of views, ranging from familiar sites in Kyoto to exotic Nagasaki. The resulting prints were published as the series *Selection of Scenes of Japan* (*Nihon fūkei senshū*), which was sold by subscription through the Ukiyo-e Study Group (Ukiyoe kenkyūkai), a circle of Japanese print enthusiasts. Although many of the images seem like naturalistic snapshots of vibrant scenes, the compositions are deceptively complex. In these last prints made before the epoch-changing earthquake of 1923, Hasui found a compelling visual formula that he would explore for the remainder of his career.