

Eight Views of Omi: Evening Rain at Karasaki

Karasaki is located in the north of Otsu, on the western shore of Lake Biwa. On a patch of land jutting into the water is Karasaki Shrine. The Shinto site was built in the seventh century and is an auxiliary shrine of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine, which is located further north in the Sakamoto area. The shrine is famous for its sacred old Japanese pine tree that inspired many artists including Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) and the poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694).

The Hoeido edition of Hiroshige's woodblock print of this scene is completely focused on the vast expanse of the pine tree. It is shrouded in heavy rain and viewed from the water almost seems to be floating, like the small boats in the foreground. The majestic tree painted by Hiroshige was the second generation of the Karasaki pine, planted from a cutting of the first in 1591. Unfortunately, that tree died in 1921 and the current tree is its descendant. Even after a century of growth, the new tree has not yet reached the same grand scale as its predecessor, but it still appears elegant and mystical in the rain.