

Seki Juku in Ukiyo-e

In 1832, the shogunate commissioned the artist Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) to accompany an official procession from Edo to Kyoto, the length of the Tokaido road. The sketches Hiroshige made became the basis for his *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road* series, which went on to become a runaway commercial success. (The series actually consists of 55 prints, since it includes Edo and Kyoto in addition to the stations along the way.) Published soon after Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) had released his renowned *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, Hiroshige's series established landscapes as a new and popular theme for ukiyo-e. He himself would go on to produce more than 20 Tokaido print series over the rest of his life. The accompanying three pictures show Seki Juku as Hiroshige depicted it in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.

***Seki: Early Departure from the Honjin* (ca. 1833–34)**

from *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road*

It is not yet dawn, and the retainers of a daimyo are getting ready to set off from the back of the *honjin*, the inn reserved for lords, nobles, and shogunal officials. There are hangings to protect the lord from prying eyes. A green palanquin awaits him while the bearers smoke a quick pipe before their day's work begins. This *honjin* still stands, but now serves as a private home and the offices of a construction company. The picture comes from Hiroshige's very first series of Tokaido prints.

***Entrance Hall of the Inn in Seki* (1840–42)**

from *Gyosho Tokaido*

This picture shows the *mise no ma*, or front room, of an inn in Seki Juku. Note the traveler at the front who is refreshing his tired feet in a footbath, with his staff, his hat, and his luggage beside him.

***Junction of the Side Road to the Shrine* (1855)**

from *Famous Sights of the Fifty-Three Stations* (“Vertical” or “Upright” Tokaido)

Part of a series of ukiyo-e in the portrait format, unusual for landscapes, this shows the junction at the east end of Seki Juku where the Tokaido road forks. This is where pilgrims from east and west would turn down the Isebetsu Kaido to make the 60-kilometer journey southward to Ise Grand Shrine. Just like today, a torii straddles the entrance to the road. Note the gradient of saturated blue in the sky at the top of the picture. Hiroshige was a master of this *bokashi* technique, which had a profound influence on French Post-Impressionists like Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec.