

TOKYO MODERN — I

KOIZUMI KISHIO'S "100 VIEWS" OF THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL (1928-1940)

BY JAMES T. ULAK

EARTHQUAKE
& AFTERMATH

CELEBRATING
PLACE

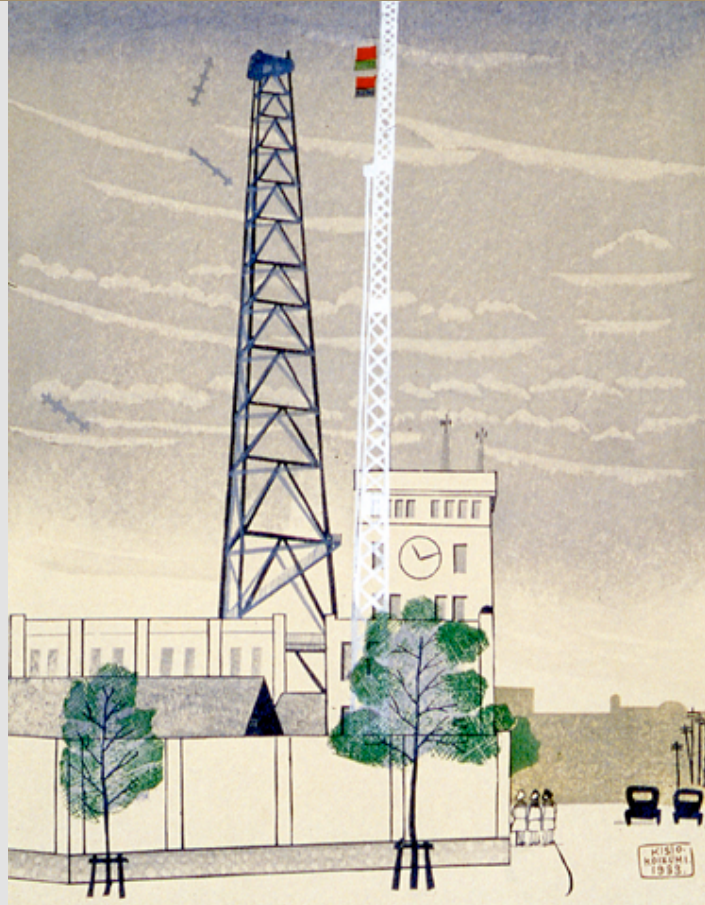
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On September 1, 1923, a devastating earthquake struck the Kantō plain where Tokyo and Yokohama are located, causing fires that created a windstorm that in turn propelled a raging conflagration.

Enormous portions of the two great cities were destroyed. As many as 140,000 people are estimated to have perished, and more than two million were made homeless.



A little more than two decades later, on March 9, 1945, as the U.S. war with Japan entered its endgame, the U.S. Army Air Forces introduced a new tactic of aerial bombardment in a nighttime raid on Tokyo. Over 300 four-engine B-29 bombers were sent in at low altitude and dropped incendiary bombs that destroyed—in a matter of hours—over fourteen square miles of the most densely populated city in the world. The number killed in this single air raid was around 130,000, and again over two million were made homeless. In the weeks and months that followed before Japan's surrender in mid-August 1945, Tokyo (and sixty-five other Japanese cities) were subjected to an ongoing campaign of firebombing. At war's end, the capital city was mostly rubble.

Among the many things that the war and obliteration bombing destroyed was memory of the exuberant rebirth of Tokyo that took place after 1923. The earthquake was a catastrophe—but also the occasion for massive reconstruction in modern, up-to-date ways. “New Tokyo” became a catchphrase of the time. Imposing structures of steel and stone were one manifestation of this. Mass transit including a subway system was another. Yet another manifestation of rebirth was the emergence of vibrant inner-city districts devoted to governance, commerce, and entertainment. After the earthquake, Tokyo began to emerge as one of the world’s great cosmopolitan cities.

One of the most graphic celebrations of this modern metropolis took the form of woodblock prints by an innovative generation of artists influenced by Western individualism and expressionism. Their creations were known collectively as “creative prints” (sōsaku-hanga); and, for anyone who loves history, one of the most invaluable contributions of these artists to our ability to imagine the city reconstructed after 1923 only to be pulverized again in 1945 was the creation of not one but two print sets offering “100 views” of the “new Tokyo.” These visions of the city are reproduced and analyzed here.

* * *

“Tokyo Modern — I” introduces the “100 Views of Great Tokyo in the Shōwa Era” created between 1928 and 1940 by printmaker Koizumi Kishio. An accompanying “visual narrative” here enables viewers to explore eighteen thematic pathways—digital city tours, if you will. This introduction provides a scholarly guide to Koizumi’s opus and draws out tensions and undercurrents in his ostensibly modern city—including the pull of the past, the pervasive imperial presence, and the growing intrusion of militarism.

“Tokyo Modern — II” is a complete gallery of Koizumi’s famous series, including all revised scenes (thus totaling 109 prints in all). Included here are the cryptic annotations Koizumi provided for the series after it was completed in 1940.

Between 1928 and 1932, eight other woodblock artists working in the “creative prints” mode also produced a subscription series titled “100 Views of New Tokyo.” The variety of their styles, as well as the urban scenes they chose to depict, complement Koizumi’s renderings to enhance our appreciation of the dynamic sense of cosmopolitan rebirth that prevailed in the wake of the earthquake. The complete set by these eight artists is also made accessible for the first time here, in “Tokyo Modern — III.”

“Modernity” and its contradictions is a subject of great comparative interest, and “Tokyo Modern” can help us rethink both modernization and our various roads to war. At the same time, these graphics provide a rare window on the dynamic baseline to the “postwar Japan” we too often isolate from its prewar and wartime past.



*The Wolfsonian-Florida International University
generously provided the bulk of the prints
from Koizumi’s “100 Views” shown in parts I and II.*



EARTHQUAKE & AFTERMATH

At 11:58 am on September 1, 1923, an earthquake struck eastern Japan with devastating force, completely incapacitating Tokyo and Yokohama, Japan's primary port city. The earthquake struck just as charcoal and wood-burning stoves were being stoked to prepare for the noon meal. A comparatively small percentage of the destruction was actually caused by the tremor. Fire, propelled by what would otherwise have been a welcome breeze and fuelled by the wood structures that filled the congested metropolis, caused most of the devastation. The intense heat consumed nearly all of the existing oxygen and created a bizarre sequence of windstorms that only accelerated the destruction. Planned firebreaks, in the form of parks and boulevards, were virtually nonexistent. Official estimates put the number of deaths at 104,619, over ninety percent of them in Tokyo. Approximately seventy percent of the metropolitan population of 2,265,000 was left homeless.

Municipal and national governments were ill-prepared to respond to this catastrophe, and declaration of martial law was virtually the first reaction. The earthquake almost immediately exposed the raw social tensions of the period. Many citizens were only too willing to give credence to rumors that resident Koreans were poisoning water sources and torching buildings. Military police and vigilante groups used the cover of chaos to eliminate union organizers, communists, socialists and all brand of left-of-center radicals. On September 16, police arrested the prominent radicals Osugi Sakae (1885–1923) and his wife, Itō Noe (1895–1923). They were taken to the Kameido police station and killed. Within the first few weeks of September the opportunistic purging of unwanted ethnic and political elements resulted in an estimated 6,000 deaths.

Photos of the Earthquake Aftermath

*Destruction caused by the Great Kantō Earthquake
that devastated Tokyo and Yokohama on September 1, 1923*



Photographs by August Kengelbacher

On December 28, 1923, four months after the earthquake, Namba Daisuke (1899–1924) joined a crowd at the Toranomon intersection awaiting the motorcade of Prince Regent Hirohito, who was to open a new session of the parliament. Namba, a radical harboring grievances over government suppression of nonconformist views and, most immediately, outraged by the murder of so many Koreans and radicals in the wake of the earthquake, fired a pistol at the prince. The shot missed its mark, but the incident—ultimately concluding with Namba’s execution—shook the nation. The assassination attempt provided impetus for passage of a Peace Preservation Law on February 19, 1925. This law laid the foundation for subsequent legislation and regulations that would formalize official intolerance for dissenting ideologies.

Thus, the maelstrom of the Kantō earthquake provided two crucial elements that, in the ensuing several decades, would lead to the construction of an “imperial capital”: (1) a fire-cleansed canvas upon which a new city could be constructed, and (2) the legal/ideological methods for structuring an urban and political landscape amenable to an evolving imperial ideology that was premised on ancient myths and traditions but, at the time of the earthquake, was in reality less than 50 years old—dating back only to the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

There is an abundance of textual and visual documentation about the earthquake and subsequent reconstruction of Tokyo—a process that was most evident during the 1930s. Central to recovery was a secure source of natural resources, most readily available in the northeastern Chinese territory of Manchuria. Ensuring such access became a development parallel and not unrelated to reconstruction at home, leading to increased Japanese militarism and eventually war.



*One section of a 12-part Kantō Earthquake Scroll, 1925
by Nishimura Goun*

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution F1975.12

The long journey from Tokyo's earthquake-devastated landscape to a city reordered, rebuilt, and renewed, was narrated in official literature as a kind of "march of progress," a sequence of mercantile successes and modernizing projects. Yet, contrary news—resistance and war in China, political assassinations at home—gave Japanese reason to view the newly formed city and its outlying empire with some skepticism. And beneath the vicissitudes of daily life the earthquake had left a permanent memory scar that quietly mocked optimism. Living in the new city required adjustment to changed configurations, different points of emphasis, and, most importantly, resetting awareness of the places that conveyed a sense of identity and stability.

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CELEBRATING PLACE

"I wrapped my legs in puttees, as was customary for Japanese hikers, and walked for hours through the still-burning areas of Tokyo in order to sketch the devastation," wrote print artist Hiratsuka Un'ichi (1895–1997) the very day after the earthquake struck. Those sketches formed the basis for a 12-print series that was issued in 1925. In simply executed images—all devoid of people—collapsed bridges, toppled stone lanterns of famous temples, and tents to house the homeless erected on park grounds were rendered with lightly incised strokes.

"Scenes of Tokyo after the Earthquake"

Images from a 12-print series issued in 1925

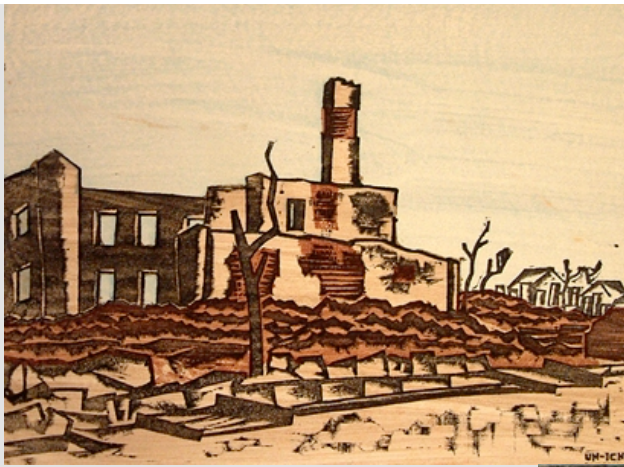
by Hiratsuka Un'ichi



Great Gate at Shiba

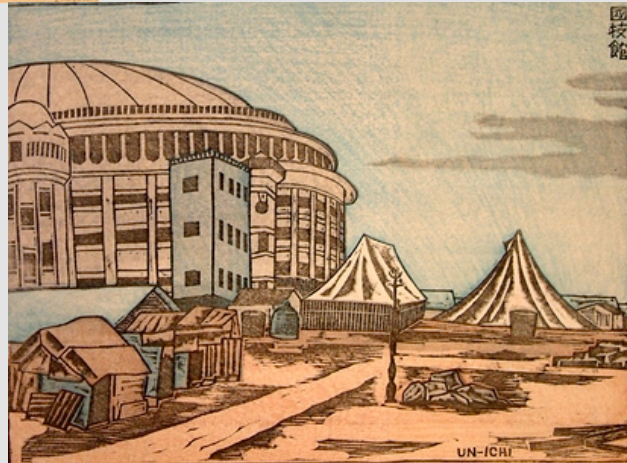
Azuma Bridge





Seiroka Hospital, Tsukiji

*National Sports Palace
showing tents for people
made homeless by
the earthquake*



*Asakusa Shrine showing toppled
stone lanterns*



*The Russian Orthodox Nicolai Cathedral
with damaged dome and tents
for homeless*

Five College Museums/Historic Deerfield Collections

Hiratsuka's walk through the devastated city was the most recent incarnation of a ritual as old as historical memory. Deep within Japanese religious sensibility is the notion of the animate quality of "place"—not as a generic category but as an abode of spirits. Animism located the unquantifiable qualities of the spirit world in the materiality of auspicious features of the natural world—mountains, gorges, valleys, rocks jutting from cliffs, ancient trees, waterfalls.

Honoring place recognized the productive cycles of the natural world: the stability of climate, recurrence of planting and harvest, and generally beneficial relationships among humans. Sites singled out for praise in rituals and verse date back to at least the 6th century, and as time passed this became more codified in religious practices, court rituals, and literary conventions. The four seasons formed the thematic foundation, and the range of human emotion was poetically reflected in the nuances of the changing natural world. For example, a poem combining the name of Mt. Kasuga in Nara with reference to the cry of deer and, under their hooves, the crunch of autumn leaves created a series of indelible associations relating that specific place with autumn, melancholy, love's longings, and the evanescence of human existence. The famous early 13th-century anthology *100 Poems by 100 Poets* (Ogura Hyakkunin Isshu) became the best known of a number of collections created during the 12th and 13th centuries that employed the organizing number "100" as a formula for establishing a canon of poets and themes. (The number probably derives from earlier Chinese practice to denote something complete, bountiful, and auspicious.)

The long journey from Tokyo's earthquake-devastated landscape to a city reordered, rebuilt, and renewed, was narrated in official literature as a kind of "march of progress," a sequence of mercantile successes and modernizing projects. Yet, contrary news—resistance and war in China, political assassinations at home—gave Japanese reason to view the newly formed city and its outlying empire with some skepticism. And beneath the vicissitudes of daily life the earthquake had left a permanent memory scar that quietly mocked optimism. Living in the new city required adjustment to changed configurations, different points of emphasis, and, most importantly, resetting awareness of the places that conveyed a sense of identity and stability.

From the late 16th century, with the political stabilization of Japan under the reign of the Tokugawa clan, “place” also came to be understood as notable sites within the growing urban landscapes of Edo (later Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka. Elite patrons commissioned folding screen paintings that offered panoramic views of Kyoto, the ancient capital that had vigorously rebounded from the devastation caused by a century of civil war. These views of the city acknowledged the role of the merchant class in restoring prosperity, made note of key shrines and temples, and paid due attention to the abodes of the powerful. Somewhat later, similar paintings were made of Edo, the eastern metropolis and residence of the Tokugawa shogun. Edo was the de facto seat of power, while Kyoto remained the nominal capital. The periodic destruction wrought on these cities by earthquake and fire occasioned additional rounds of image-making to announce reconstruction and return to normalcy.

Publishers of woodblock prints—a medium originally introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries to record life in the pleasure quarters of the great urban centers—discovered a wider audience and lessening pressure from government censors when urban landscapes, sites along the great highways connecting Edo and Kyoto, and other explorations of national geography were chosen over more salacious subjects. The heyday of this landscape and place-related print subject matter occurred in the first half of the 19th century when Hokusai (1760–1849) and Hiroshige (1797–1858) created series that employed age-old numeric formulae of literature to clever advantage. Hokusai’s 36 Views of Mt. Fuji—the “36” being a reference to the 36 immortal poets of ancient times—exemplified this, alongside various renderings of “100 views of Edo” and other locales.

Use of the formula continued after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when the celebrated illustrator and print designer Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847–1915) and others documented the increasingly Western look of Tokyo (the name Edo was changed to Tokyo in 1868). While there is a documentable line of development from religious, through poetic, to more reportorial celebrations of “place” over the course of nearly 12 centuries, one outlook did not supplant the other. Site-specific associations continued to accrue over time to become, ultimately, richly unmanageable. The process of grafting new sites onto a preexisting canon of culturally significant places acknowledged the inevitability of change and at the same time alerted the audience to an unfolding interpretive complexity.

Different Times, Same Place

Famous places in Tokyo (formerly Edo) were revisited by different artists in different eras, as seen in this juxtaposition.

Hiroshige (1850s)



Kiyochika (1870s-80s)



Koizumi (1930s)



Location: Shibaura



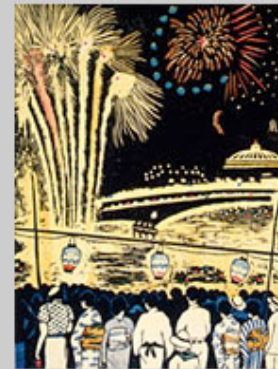
Location: Kanda River



Location: Edo Castle



Location: Mukojima



Location: Ryōgoku

Hiroshige images: Freer Gallery of Art Study Collection
FSC-GR-71, FSC-GR-64, FSC-GR-70, FSC-GR-60
Freer Gallery of Art F1994.30

Kiyochia images: Robert O. Muller Collection, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
S2003.8.1179, S2003.8.1142, S2003.8.1108, S2003.8.1162, S2003.8.1194

Koizumi images: #6 & #66, Wolfsonian-Florida International University
#21, #30, #25, private collection

As time passed, of course, new artistic conventions were introduced and new places were commemorated alongside more traditional ones. In his early 12-print rendering of Tokyo after the earthquake, for example, Hiratsuka Un'ichi chose to include the Russian Orthodox Nicolai Cathedral, obviously a relatively recent Western addition to the Tokyo skyline. At the same time, there were two revolutionary developments embedded in these ostensibly "naive" prints: production method and subject matter. Hiratsuka's images were direct and rough. Every site was immediately recognizable, but the materials and tools of production were never disguised. There was no artifice of technique to suggest that these images were other than transferences from an engraved wood surface to paper. Moreover, a print series completely devoted to impressions of urban destruction—each of the 12 prints notably devoid of human form—was unheard of. Despite a significant tradition of the visual celebration of recovery from destruction, hard-eyed views of ruins were quite unexpected.

***Sōsaku-Hanga* (Creative Prints) & *Shin-Hanga* (New Prints)**

Hiratsuka was an early practitioner of the fledgling *sōsaku-hanga* (creative prints) movement that, in theory if not always in practice, embraced printmaking as the creative act of one individual, including initial sketches, block carving, and impressing paper on to pigment-loaded blocks. Emulating European artists, Hiratsuka and others emphasized individual expression rather than the old tradition of guild-style production involving artists, woodblock cutters, printers and the like. Seen against the backdrop of a trend in social liberalism, particularly during the 1910s and 20s, creating prints in this style allowed the medium to be used as a sounding board of personal expression relating to social issues. Prints by *sōsaku-hanga* artists were not to be confused with the socialist and communist posters and prints that circulated during the first thirty years of the 20th century, or with paintings and photographs that conveyed searing social messages. In early 20th-century Japan, publishers, designers, artists, and technicians who favored the woodblock format were consciously striving to redefine themselves as inheritors of a medium that had fallen out of favor and been usurped by the technologies of mass-image production.

Turn-of-the-century printmakers such as Kiyochika and his colleagues had enjoyed a brief moment of extraordinary productivity in depicting one of the most dramatic aspects of Japan's emergence as a modern state—namely, its astonishingly successful engagement in up-to-date warfare against China (in 1894 to 1895) and Russia (1904 to 1905). The new subject matter this offered was stunning. Massive warships engaged in great battles at sea. Huge artillery produced enormous explosions. The emperor's disciplined soldiers and sailors confronted not feudal adversaries as in the past, but foreign armies and navies.

By the first decade of the 20th century, however, the woodblock medium stood at a crossroads—confronted, as it were, by a sort of cultural schizophrenia that drew them toward Western-styled perceptions and expressions of modernity on the one hand and, on the other hand, more traditional forms and subjects. In response, the modern print movement advanced along two distinct paths: the European-inspired expressionist direction exemplified by Hiratsuka and the *sōsaku-hanga* or “creative prints,” and a more traditional, idealized, and intellectually uninquisitive route known as *shin-hanga* or “new prints.” The *shin-hanga* had considerable appeal, including among foreigners who were attracted to a romantic and “traditional” image of Japan that was, in considerable part, imaginary. It was artists working in the *sōsaku-hanga* medium, however, who more accurately captured the turbulence, contradictions, energy, and modernity of post-earthquake Tokyo.



Shin-Hanga

The shin-hanga or “new print” style that emerged in the early 20th century used the traditional guild production process to create richly refined woodblock prints of bird-and-flower subjects, female beauties, and neo-romantic scenes.

“Woman in Blue Combing Her Hair,” 1920, by Hashiguchi Goyō

S2003.8.121



Many renderings by artists working in the “new print” mode conveyed a sense of timeless and unchanging tradition, even while occasionally romanticizing the intrusion of modernity.

“Tennōji Temple in Snow, Osaka #139, 1927, by Kawase Hasui

S2003.8.686



“The Great Gate, Shiba, in Snow,” 1936, by Kawase Hasuiō

S2003.8.853



Oda Kazuma's rendering of a snow-covered bridge is a perfect example of the nostalgia for a bygone past that was typical of shin-hanga prints.

"Matsue Bridge In Snow," 1924, by Oda Kazumay.

S2003.8.1626

At the same time, however, Oda also produced urban scenes like this industrial cityscape that seems more typical of sōsaku-hanga preoccupations.

*"River Scene,"
ca. 1920
by Oda Kazuma*

S2003.8.1627





This iron bridge was a favorite subject of both shin-hanga artists, as seen here, and sōsaku-hanga artists like Koizumi (see below).

“Kiyosu Bridge,” 1936, by Kawase Hasui

S2003.8.761

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Robert O. Muller Collection

In 1924, at the same time Hiratsuka’s earthquake series was circulating, Koizumi Kishio (1895–1945) published an instructional guide titled *How to Carve and Print Woodblocks*. This well-received and thoroughly practical work underscored a fundamental shift in the use of the woodblock print as a genre. For centuries print production was a guild activity in which the triumvirate of designer, block carver and printer worked under the direction of a publisher. Koizumi’s publication was a tool made available to any individual inclined to pursue the medium as a hobbyist or professional. His little book established the print as a form of personal expression.

Koizumi was a known figure in the world of personalized printmaking. From the age of sixteen he had been immersed in the avant-garde world of artists and publishers who were intent on broadening the horizons of the conservative Japanese art establishment through the infusion of European perspectives. In 1920, he issued a 12-print series celebrating views of Tokyo, especially in the old eastern part of the city around Asakusa, and other works followed. Much of this, however, still remained largely nostalgic. It took the Kantō earthquake and city that emerged from its ashes to propel Koizumi to the front rank of original chroniclers of Japan’s dramatic leap forward into modernity. His deservedly famous *100 Views of Tokyo in the Shōwa Era* (*Shōwa Dai Tokyo Hyakuzue Hanga*) was produced over an exceptionally long period of time, beginning in 1928 and continuing to late 1940.

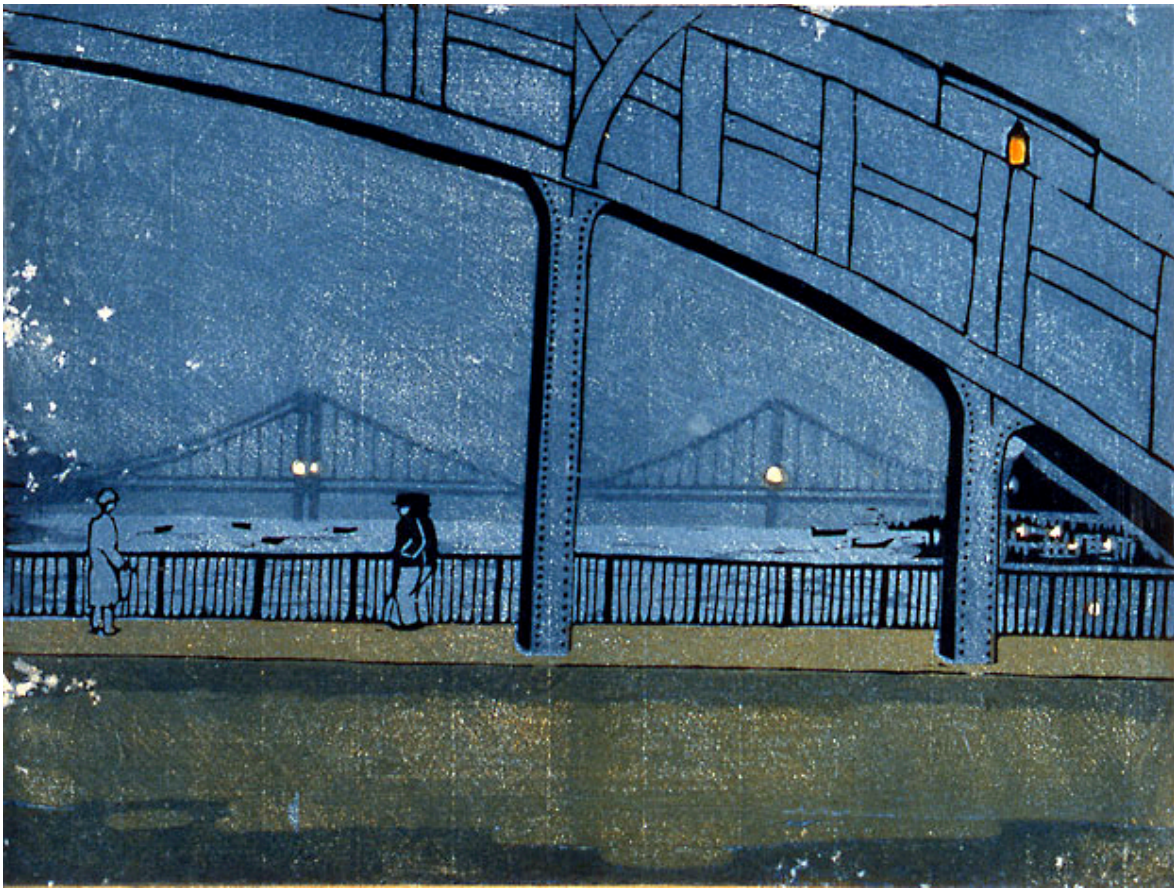
"100 Views of New Tokyo" by Eight Artists

In 1928, at virtually the same time that Koizumi launched his homage to the new Tokyo, eight of his fellow artists working in the *sōsaku-hanga* mode announced a subscription series titled 100 Views of New Tokyo (*Shin Tokyo Hyakkei*). The eight artists—Hiratsuka Un'ichi, Onchi Koshiro (1891–1955), Fukazawa Sakuichi (1896–1946), Kawakami Sumio (1895–1972), Maekawa Sempan (1888–1960), Fujimori Shizuo (1891–1943), Hemmi Takashi (1895–1944), and Suwa Kanenori (1897–1932)—agreed to produce the series over a period of four years, with each artist contributing 12 to 13 views.

Creating a memory of the swiftly changing city—or better, a snapshot of an existing moment—was the purported objective of the subscription series. There seems to be no record of a rivalry between the consortium and Koizumi. It is reasonable to suggest that all of these images were created not only in celebration of a rebirth, but also as a kind of memory hedge against possible future catastrophe and destruction. No one at the time, of course, could have predicted that a scant two decades after the earthquake Tokyo again would be turned to rubble, this time by the wartime firebombing carried out against over sixty Japanese cities by the United States.

Koizumi's "100 Views"

Why Koizumi chose to launch a series on his own is not clear, but becomes clearer when considering evidence buried in his selection of scenes. Koizumi's role as a nominator of new places, as a subtle provocateur introducing political innuendo in a traditional format, may be seen as his unique contribution to the genre. His submission to the 9th annual Imperial Exhibition (*Teiten*) in 1928 was the print that became the first view in his Tokyo series, the Eitai and Kiyosu bridges.



"Eitai Bridge and Kiyosu Bridge (#01)," September 1928

Koizumi Kishio launched his "100 Views of Great Tokyo in the Shōwa Era" in the fall of 1928 with this image of two bridges spanning the Sumida River. The steel structures—rivets and electric lights prominent—symbolized the city's reconstruction and the Western-clothed figures embodied its modernity.

The series started off slowly: the inaugural print in 1928, two prints in 1929, five in 1930, jumping to 11 in 1931, and then, with the exception of only six in 1933, moving at a pace numbering in the mid-teens until near completion in 1937. In 1940, six other images plus variant versions of places commemorated earlier were produced. Random prints of other sites actually raised the number in the series to one-hundred-and-nine views. Considering his other commissions and work as a woodblock cutter, Koizumi's output was impressive.

The aesthetic appeal of Koizumi's series lies in the understated personality that pervades the views. The idiosyncratic perspectives of a single individual are readily apparent, as is the soft, loving attention given to his highly distinctive cosmology. In some of his most effective compositions, Koizumi adopts a perspective that looks up to the main feature in the scene, whereas his panoramas or bird's-eye views seem more detached. Powerful forms frequently burst beyond the frame of the print, suggesting an uncontrollable scale. Other scenes allow the composition to emerge like an opening fan, with greatness bestowed upon the subject by a benevolent blue sky. Still other prints variously employ the upper register of the composition to draw the eye from bottom to top. Views not so notable in ingenuity of composition or other technique can elicit an intellectual interest—or, sometimes, simply provoke the viewer's curiosity and even perplexity about the artist's choice of subject.

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CELEBRATING REBIRTH

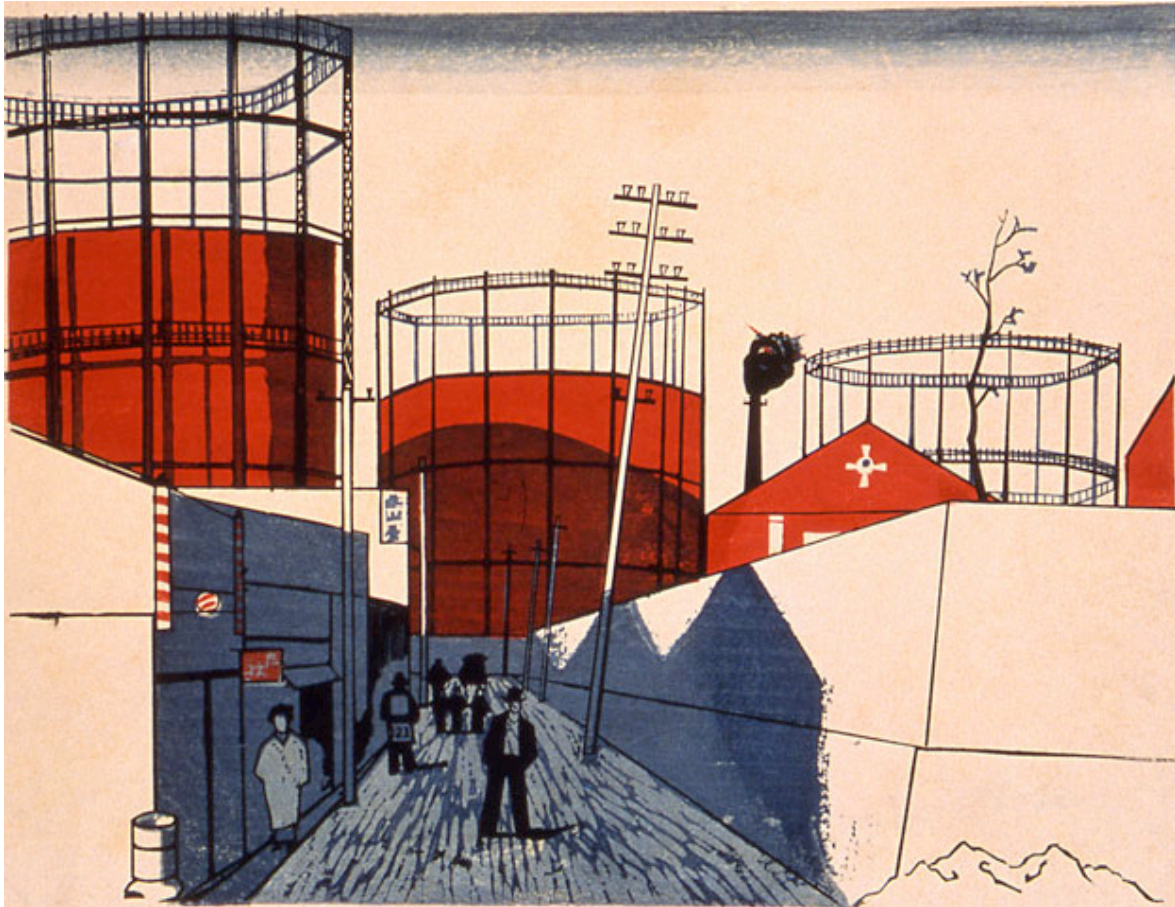
Koizumi's Tokyo was above all a celebration of rebirth after a catastrophic natural disaster. This was true also of the parallel series by his eight compatriots. Accelerated industrialization was integral to this rebirth, incorporating iron and steel to create a modern city of Western-style buildings and massive infrastructure that went beyond anything imagined before the earthquake.



*"Mitsui Bank &
Mitsukoshi Department Store
(#03)," April 1930*

*Tokyo's reconstruction as an
international city is
expressed by the Mitsui
Bank's classical colonnaded
façade, designed by a New
York architectural firm.
Although Mitsukoshi
Department Store (right)
withstood the earthquake, it
was reconstructed by 1927,
with modifications
continuing through 1934.*

Steel bridges, elevated highways, oil-storage tanks, a sprawling subway system, and proliferation of coal-powered trains and electric trams were all part of the new Tokyo.



“Senju Town with Storage Tanks (#04),” June 1929

The starkly modern feel of this rendering of oil storage tanks prompted Koizumi to note that this print “was well received and its ‘left wing’ style was a source of comment.”



*“Drawbridge at Shibaura
(#06),” September 1930*



*“Suehiro Street in Senju
(#96),” August 1937*



*"Togoshi Ginza Station
(#27-revised),"
July 1940*

*New railway lines
connected the
suburbs to the
commercial center in
downtown Tokyo.
The signboard
promotes the Japan
Creative Print
Association, with
which Koizumi was
affiliated.*

*"View of Sunamachi
[Jōtō Ward] (#54),"
July 1934*



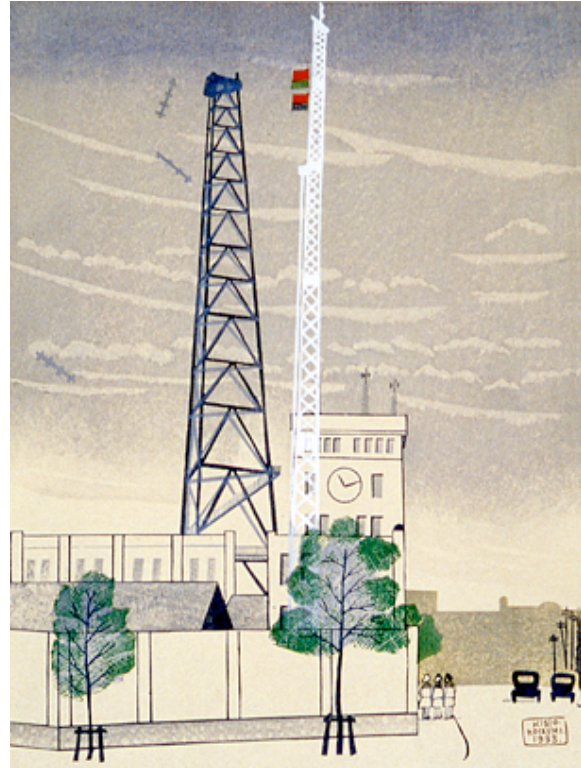
So were expansive parks and stadiums—the land often bestowed from estates of great wealth. Such public places amounted to recognition of the need for generous spacing in a cramped city, as well as a practical need for firebreaks. Quite possibly, they also reflected official concern with forestalling civil unrest. At least one rationale for the creation of the parks was to achieve more egalitarian dispensation of grand urban spaces.

*"May Sports Season at Meiji Shrine
Outer Gardens (#27),"
May 1932*

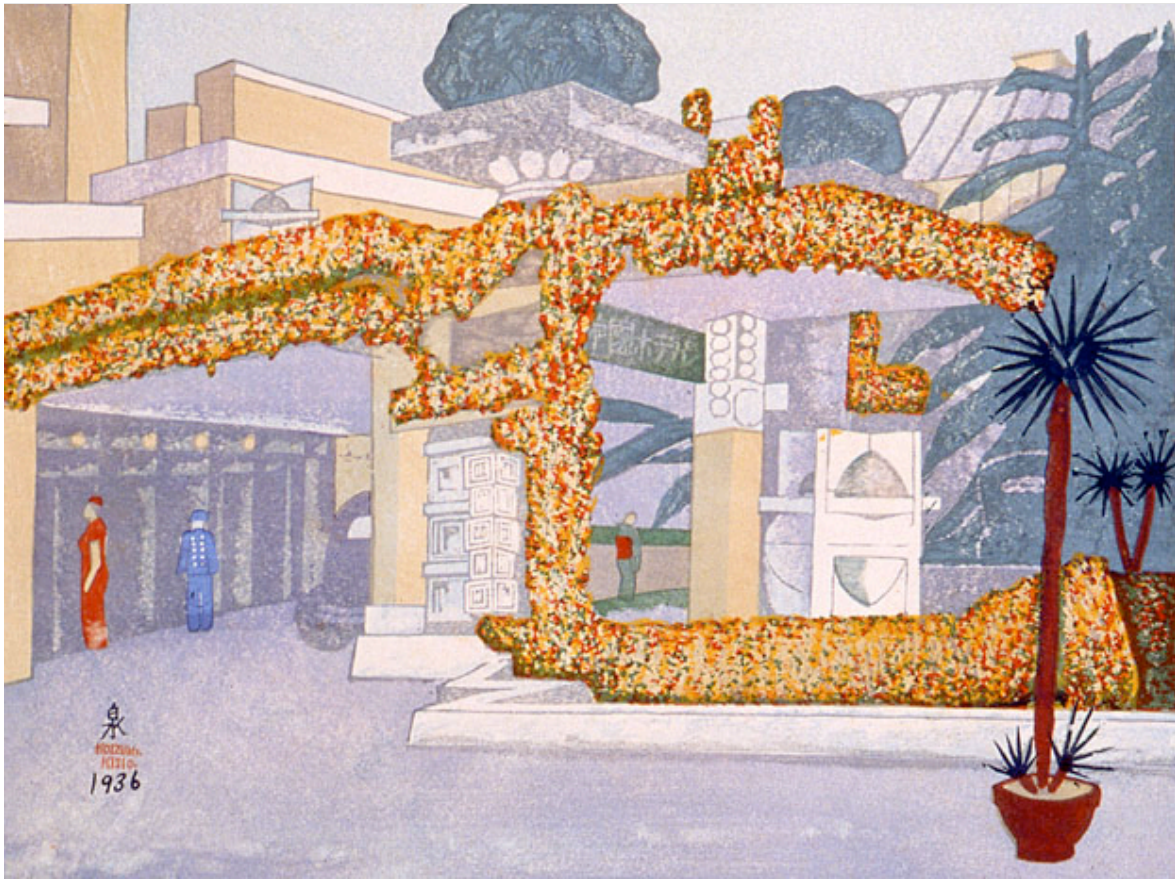
At the same time, celebrating “new Tokyo” also involved celebration of lively cultural forms associated with being modern and up-to-date. The new above-ground and below-ground public transportation system, for example, stimulated the emergence of what amounted to virtual mini-cities at key terminals such as Shinjuku, Shibuya, Ueno, and the great “Tokyo station” itself. Huge department stores combined Western influences with attractive features from Japan’s own rich commercial tradition to become little cultural sites in and of themselves—complete with restaurants and exhibition halls. A “café culture” flourished, alongside drinking places, movie theaters, cabarets, and dance halls.

Certain of Koizumi’s images celebrated earlier markers of modernization, such as the Central Meteorological Observatory that withstood the earthquake. In this case his print, issued ten years after the catastrophe, was a homage to survival and resilience as well as renewal. Other images convey an almost charming comfort with diverse aspects of “the modern.”

*“Central Meteorological
Observatory (#41),”
September 1933
May 1932*



The Imperial Hotel famously designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, which also survived the earthquake, is festively decorated, somehow suggesting that such an expansive international perspective ensures continued survival.



"Entrance of the Imperial Hotel (#83)," October 1936 June 1929

The Imperial Hotel, designed by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, was constructed between 1916 and 1923 and survived the earthquake with minor but not disastrous damage. As Koizumi observed, the hotel served "an international and cosmopolitan clientele as well as being a social club for the elite." It was demolished and replaced in 1968.

*"Tokyo International
Airport at Haneda (#87),"
March 1937*

*Although the first
powered air flight in
Japan took place in
1910, regular mail and
commercial flights did
not begin until the mid-
1920s. The airport at
Haneda was completed
in 1932. By 1935,
Japan had 235 planes
in civil aviation,
providing regular
service to Korea,
China, Taiwan, and
Manchoukuo, as well as
domestic flights.*



Golf, the quintessential
Anglophile sport, is
viewed from under the
eave of a traditional
Japanese building.

*"Golf Course at
Komazawa (#82),"
September 1936
May 1932*

Public parks replace the scars of earthquake devastation.

"Hibiya Park with Fresh Leaves and Azalea Blossoms (#05)," July 1930



Imposing houses of finance, thoroughly modern and even neoclassical, are softened by lush greenery, strolling schoolgirls, and the putter of automobiles.

"Municipal Hall and Kangyō Bank (#35)," October 1932

Over and over, Koizumi dwells with affection on the city at night, including the Ginza glittering with neon lights. This is Koizumi's celebratory trajectory: a city almost indistinguishable from any other great world metropolis. In many of the prints, hints at locality come only in the form of the occasional kimono-clad figure, or a sign in Japanese.



"Night View of Ginza in the Spring (#12)," March 1931

The 1923 earthquake completely leveled the Ginza's shops, department stores, restaurants, and cafés. By 1930, the district was entirely rebuilt, doubling its pre-1923 size. The brightly lit electric advertising signs and the headlights of motorized streetcars and automobiles pierce the darkness, proclaiming the city's progress.

Some of the eight artists who contributed to the "100 Views of New Tokyo" subscription series were even more attracted to the modernity of post-earthquake Tokyo at the level of popular culture. Like Koizumi, they peopled their scenes with urban residents dressed in both Western and more traditional clothing. This was, indeed, one of the signs of a comfortable hybrid lifestyle. At the same time, Koizumi's compatriots also were attracted to subjects that he himself, for whatever reasons, did not choose to celebrate. These included miniature golf, a "Shell" gas station, cafés, and a truly garish and expressionist Ginza crowd scene—as well as the interiors of a movie theater, dance hall, and "casino follies" revue. Viewed together with Koizumi's series as a celebration of the reborn metropolis, there is an overall sense of great variety, vibrancy, and urban *esprit*.

“100 Views of New Tokyo,” 1928-32, by 8 Artists

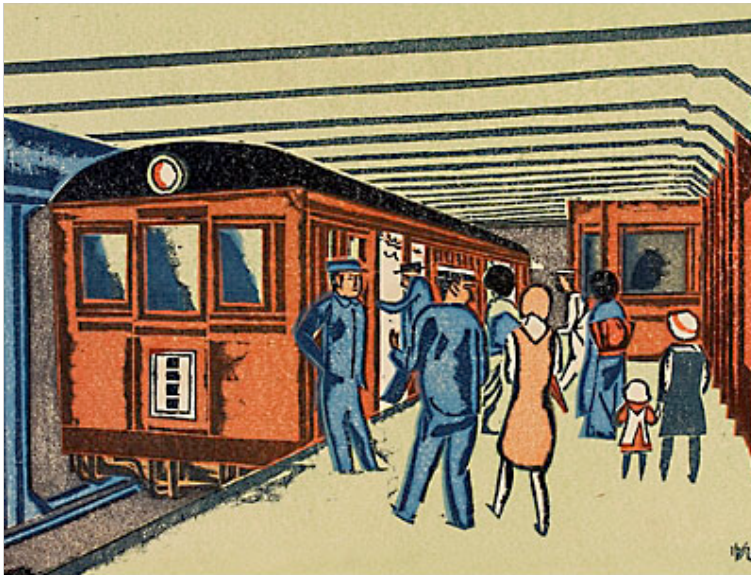


Some of the eight artists who contributed to the “100 Views of New Tokyo” subscription series were even more attracted to the modernity of post-earthquake Tokyo at the level of popular culture. Like Koizumi, they peopled their scenes with urban residents dressed in both Western and more traditional clothing. This was, indeed, one of the signs of a comfortable hybrid lifestyle.

*“Cafe District in Shinjuku (#83),”
10/1/1930,
by Fukazawa Sakuichi*

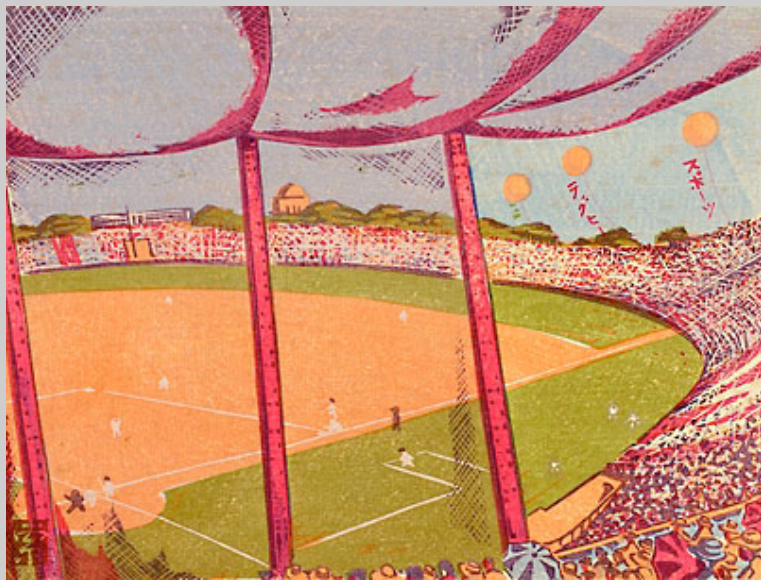
*“Miniature Golf (#10),”
9/1/1931,
by Maekawa Senpan*





"Subway (#11),"
1931,
by Maekawa Senpan

"Meiji Baseball Stadium (#86),"
12/1/1931,
by Fukazawa Sakuichi



"Rising Sun Shell,
Showa Street (#84),"
6/1/1930,
by Fukazawa Sakuichi

"Movie Theater (#29),"
12/1/1929,
by Onchi Koshiro



"Ginza (#65),"
8/7/1929,
by Kawakami Sumio

Images courtesy of Carnegie Museum of Art

At the same time, Koizumi's solitary control over his "100 Views" enabled him to linger longer than his compatriots over what was familiar, traditional, and old. His pathways or wanderings to so many places over so many years thus also give loving attention to the seasons and the soothing presence of water (rivers, ponds, and canals), for example, as well as to Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and traditional folk festivals. As it turned out, thirty-four of the sites he commemorated matched or approximated places celebrated in Hiroshige's classic 1850's treatment of Edo. Old and new commingled, and nostalgia went hand-in-hand with the powerful pull of modernity. Even while celebrating rebirth and the throbbing pulse of ever accelerating urbanization, Koizumi sought out and discovered quietude.

He also, as closer scrutiny of his series reveals, uncovered more unsettling undercurrents. One was urban sprawl and the emergence of suburbs that often obliterated attractive vestiges of the past. Another was imbedded in the very celebration of industrialization and modern infrastructures—for oil tanks, steel constructions, and the like were an everyday reminder of the nation's dependence on foreign resources. The period from 1928 to 1940 when Koizumi produced these prints coincided with the years that the nation's increasing dependence on overseas markets and raw materials resulted in heightened international tensions and, ultimately, militarism and war.

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TOKYO MODERN — I

KOIZUMI KISHIO'S "100 VIEWS" OF THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL (1928-1940)

BY JAMES T. ULAK

EARTHQUAKE
& AFTERMATH

CELEBRATING
PLACE

CELEBRATING
REBIRTH

MODERNITY'S
UNDERCURRENTS

SOURCES
& CREDITS

MODERNITY'S UNDERCURRENTS

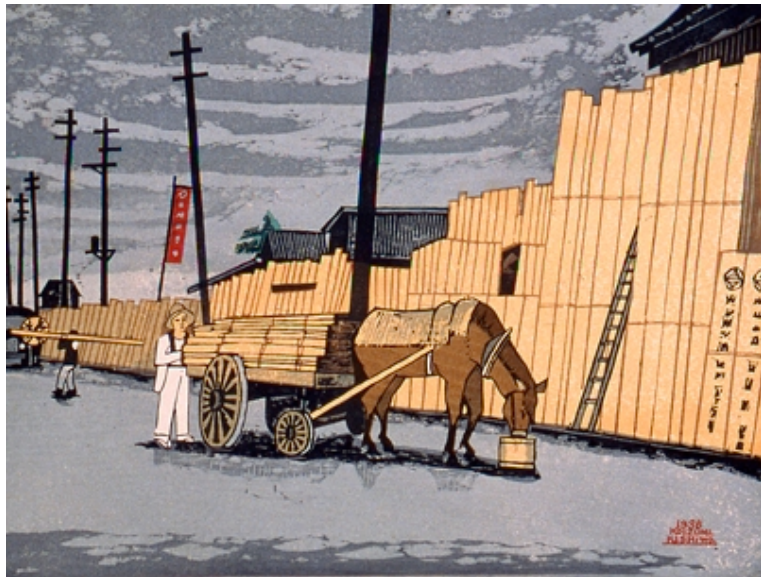
In celebrating Tokyo's rebirth, the "creative prints" (*sōsaku-hanga*) artists revealed themselves to be thoroughly bourgeois urbanites. Industrialization drew their attention mostly in the form of engineering projects, smokestacks, Western-style buildings, and the revolution in mass transportation. Working-class activities were observed fleetingly at best. In Koizumi's series, for example, this includes dying cloth for kimono and two contrasting versions of a picturesque lumberyard.



"This is an unusual view from the old days," Koizumi wrote in his 1940 annotation for this print created ten years earlier. "I wonder if it still exists?"

*"Dye Factory at Waseda (#08),"
November 1930*

*"Lumberyards at
Kiba (#65),"*
July 1935

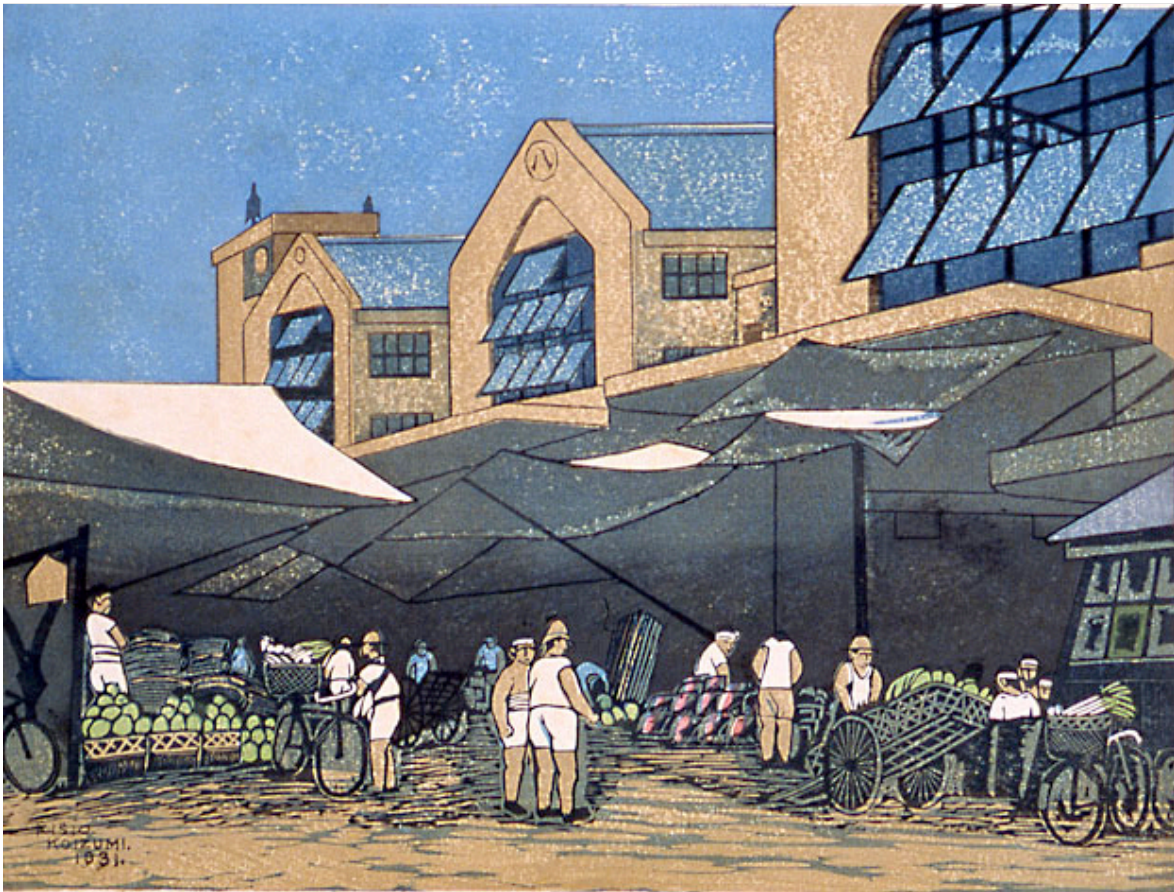


*"Lumberyards at
Kiba in the Snow
(#65-revised),"*
February 1940

Private collection



The only hint of agriculture—and the fact that the great majority of Japan's population was engaged in this—was Koizumi's rendering of the new central vegetable market in Kanda, and a nostalgic depiction of a post-earthquake suburb where daikon, the succulent big white radish, was still grown.



"Vegetable Market at Kanda (#16)," September 1931

Damage from the earthquake required the reconstruction of Tokyo's food markets, including the Central Wholesale Market at Tsukij. Vegetable sales were transacted under tented stalls along the Kanda River to facilitate the shipping of goods. The concrete-and-glass warehouse was built to withstand future earthquakes and fire.



*Harvesting daikon.
"Landscape at
Nerima Ward (#73),"*
November 1935



Evocation of the other large demographic sector that fed the nation emerged only in depictions of the great Tsukiji fish market and drying edible seaweed in Ōmori.

"Tsukiji Fish Market (#98),"
October 1937



"Drying Seaweed at Ōmori (#86),"
February 1937

This was only natural in print sets devoted to urban renewal. At the same time, it reflected only one highly select corner of modernizing Japan. There was no intimation of great discrepancies between the urban and rural sectors in modernization and living standards; no real sense of the ever-growing male and female working-class population that lived in the city in less attractive "modern" conditions; no hint of social upheaval in the form of the burgeoning labor and women's movements. In one peaceful scene, Koizumi gave his viewers an idyllic picture of lower-class urbanites fishing in a canal. It remained for an entirely different cadre of graphic artists to convey social tensions, including for example election posters calling on workers and farmers to unite against their oppressors.



"Horie-Machi in Kasai (#97)," September 1937

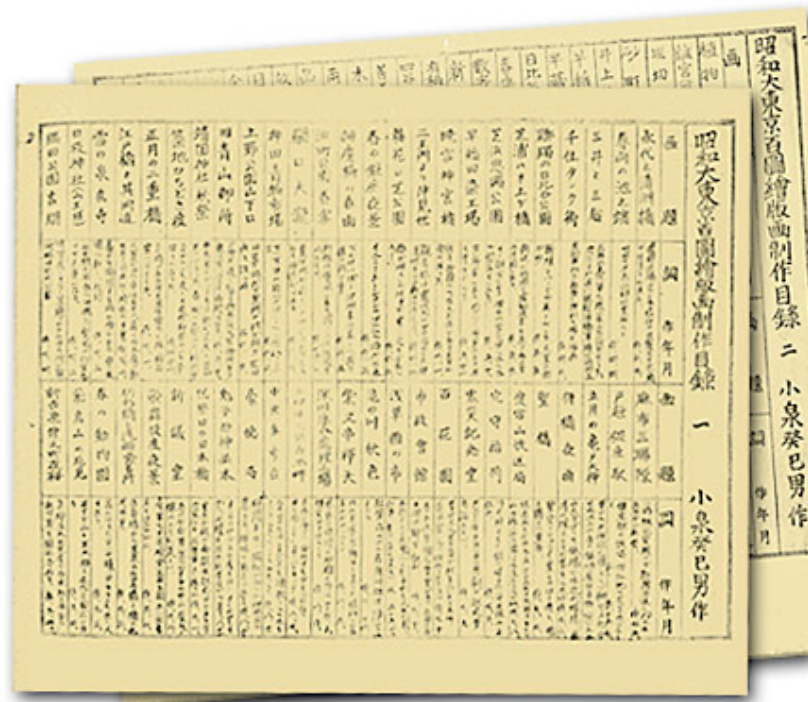
Private collection

Koizumi's caption for this pastoral image captures his generally romantic impression of lower-class city life. "A small stream meanders," this reads. "From the embankment anglers are intent on landing small fish."

What Koizumi and his colleagues did capture was contradictions and undercurrents of a different sort. One of these, of course, is apparent to us only in retrospect: the poignant knowledge that the reborn city would be wiped out again, by war, within a matter of years. At the same time, Koizumi also worked many "subtexts" into his selection of subjects. Some of this is more or less obvious. Some of it takes specialized knowledge of Japanese history to grasp.

After his "100 Views" was completed late in 1940, Koizumi prepared an idiosyncratic list of cryptic comments or captions about each print to accompany the full, marketed set. Often whimsical and sometimes just strange, these occasionally shed unexpected light on his choice of subjects.

Koizumi's 1940 annotations about his "100 Views"



As the captions help highlight, one major undercurrent in Koizumi's new Tokyo was the persistence of the past. A second was the pervasive presence of the emperor and imperial system. And a third was the growing visibility of the military.

The Past in the Present

Many of the sites Koizumi celebrated represented perseverance and continuity—the survival of old structures or relics or, if nothing remained, just the memory of what may once have existed. The "place" itself still remained integral to the spiritual identity of the city. A particularly subtle example of this is the evocative rendering of a woman under lamplight by the entrance to Ueno Park. To all appearances, this is a thoroughly cosmopolitan scene: a modern woman in Western dress walking alone at night in the electrified city. There is even a touch of red neon in the night sky.



*"Yamashita Entrance to
Ueno Park (#17),"*
September 1931

*Koizumi's interest in
the past surfaced in his
comment on this
cosmopolitan scene of a
modern woman in
Western dress walking
alone at night,
illuminated by the
street lights (and a hint
of red neon) in Ueno
Park: "In the era of the
shoguns, the 'Black
Gate' stood at this site.
The remaining pines do
not comment on this."*

To most Japanese, however, "Ueno Park" also was resonant with intimations of the past. In the early 1600s, the first Tokugawa shogun had selected this area as an auspicious site for a temple that would guard his castle and city from evil forces. (In traditional geomancy, evil was thought to come from the northeast.) In 1868, Ueno was the site of a bloody last-ditch battle ending the civil conflict in which the shogunate was overthrown. And in 1923, the site became a temporary shelter for many city residents displaced by the earthquake. Koizumi's cryptic caption for this print nicely captures his highly impressionist sense of the past in the present. "In the era of the shoguns, the 'Black Gate' stood at this site," this reads. "The remaining pines do not comment on this."

The "100 Views" also includes less indirect evocations of Tokyo's feudal and often bloody past. Most obvious, perhaps, is Koizumi's unusually conventional rendering of the Sakuradamon, or Cherry Blossom Gate of the shogun's former castle, in a blizzard.

*"Snow at Sakurada Gate
(#75),"
February 1936*

*Koizumi's cryptic
annotation for this print
was "I wonder if it was
snowing like this when
Foreign Minister Ii was
assassinated by loyal
samurai from Mito." He
was referring to a famous
incident in 1860*



This was the site of the celebrated assassination of Ii Naosuke (1815–1860), a high adviser to the shogun who had engineered the opening of the country to the foreign powers after Commodore Perry's visits in 1853 and 1854. Ii's palanquin being attacked in the snow by samurai who opposed abandoning national seclusion was a favorite subject of woodblock artists at the time, and Koizumi's caption zeros in on this association.



Concerning his selection of another site in the series, the Buddhist temple Gōtokuji, Koizumi's notation in full is simply that "This is the burial place of Lord Ii who was killed at Sakuradamon. It is also famous for a literal mountain of cat statues."

*"Gōtokuji Temple at
Setagaya Ward (#42),"
October 1933)*

Koizumi's Sakuradamon print also obliquely evokes events involving the throne that all Japanese would know intimately. One was an attempted assassination of Emperor Hirohito by a bomb-throwing Korean at that site on January 8, 1932. (An earlier attempt on Hirohito's life took place just after the earthquake in 1923, when he was crown prince.) The other was the notorious "Two-Two-Six Incident" of February 26, 1936, in which a cabal of junior officers claiming to represent the true interests of the throne took command of about 1,500 sympathetic troops, surrounded the Diet (parliament) and other government buildings, and carried out attacks on key ministers. Their goal was more rigorous overseas expansionist policies and, at home, elimination of corrupt, inefficient representative government and its replacement by something akin to a military dictatorship under the emperor. The emperor refused to support this attempted coup, and photographs of the military rebels at Sakuradamon and elsewhere—again in the snow—became part of the iconic imagery of mid-1930s Japan. As it happens, Koizumi's Sakuradamon print is dated February 1936, and thus was almost surely done just prior to the coup. Be that as it may, it would have immediately assumed this larger ambiance

Yet another provocative selection is the temple Sengakuji, famous as the burial place of Asano Naganori (1665–1701) and 46 of his loyal retainers. (The familiar number is 47, but one dropped out of the picture before events ran their full course.)



"Sengakuji Temple in the Snow (#23)," March 1932

"Seeing this temple in the snow," Koizumi wrote, "reminded me of the 47 Loyal Retainers." He was referring to a famous vendetta in 1703.

Private collection

Asano was the daimyo of the small Harima domain, near Osaka. In 1701, while preparing for his assigned role as a shogunal representative in the ritual reception of New Year's greetings from the emperor at Edo Castle, Asano was deeply offended by the haughty attitude of Kira Yoshinaka (1641–1703), a high-ranking shogunal official. After Asano attacked Kira with a sword, a capital offense within the castle precincts, the shogun required that he take his own life. Asano's retainers plotted revenge, and in 1703 assassinated Kira at his mansion in Edo. The sensational vendetta provoked varied and complex responses. The shogun and his advisors, while appreciating the loyalty of the now masterless samurai, saw the civil order violated and demanded that all of the retainers commit ritual suicide. The public at large, however, seemed to side with the retainers—who all complied with the shogun's order. Their cremated ashes were buried alongside their master's at Sengakuji.

As it happened, just as was the case with both Ii's assassination in 1860 and the February 26 Incident in 1936, snow was falling when the loyal retainers killed Kira—creating a scene replicated time and time again in prints, theater, and later cinema. Koizumi's caption for his Sengakuji print reads simply, "Seeing this temple in the snow reminded me of the 47 Loyal Retainers. I used a new technique to render the snow."



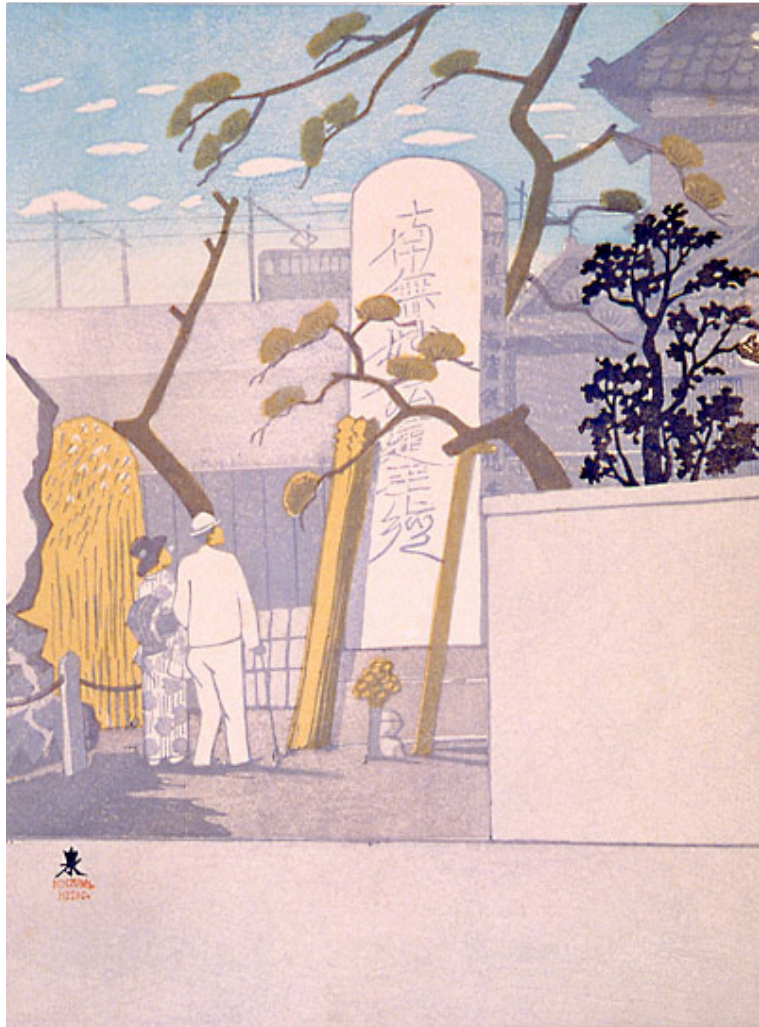
Several other sites celebrated by Koizumi also involve intriguing evocations of the feudal past. His 1936 rendering of the pagoda at Yanaka Tennōji, for example, depicts the only remaining architectural element of a temple that was another site of pitched battle between shogunal and pro-emperor forces in 1868. The loyalists were victorious, much of the temple was destroyed in the battle, and the pagoda, situated in the midst of a cemetery, also survived the Kantō earthquake.

*"Pagoda of Tennōji Temple
at Yanaka (#78),"
May 1936*

In 1935 and then again five years later, as he brought his “100 Views” to a close, Koizumi produced two versions of a particularly puzzling site: the feudal-era execution grounds at Suzugamori.

The second of these prints featured a memorial slab bearing the time-honored Buddhist invocation of the merciful Amida Buddha (Namu Amida Butsu). Koizumi’s caption merely observes that this site was the setting of a famous scene in a Kabuki play first performed in 1816, and we are left to wonder what he really had in mind. (In the play, a highly fanciful encounter takes place between a ne’er-do-well about to be executed who is rescued by a beautiful woman in what turns out to be a dream.)

*“Former Execution Ground
at Suzugamori (71-revised),”
August 1940)*



Was his attraction to this grisly place a subtle allusion to the heavy hand of the state? Was it a statement about the ultimate consequences in store for those oppose authority—even corrupt authority, as the rebels in the February 26 Incident proclaimed—in search of a greater good? We are left with a haunting image that begs explanation.

The Imperial Presence

In 1926, three years after the earthquake, Hirohito inherited the throne and Japan started its calendar over again. The new imperial reign was given the auspicious name Shōwa (Bright Peace), and 1926 became, in this modern Japanese way of calculating the years, Shōwa 1. Hirohito himself was identified most commonly as the Shōwa emperor.

The auspicious reign name was a misnomer, although this was not obvious at first. Hirohito's father, the Taishō emperor who reigned from 1911 to 1926, had been feeble and incompetent, and the new sovereign's advisers took care to ensure he would be a more authoritative monarch. There were many reasons for the ruling elites to be concerned about social stability. Liberalizing trends popularly known as "Taishō democracy" had flourished during Hirohito's father's reign. Both rightwing and leftwing movements were on the rise. The Kantō earthquake itself had exposed social tensions in the most vicious way imaginable, in the vigilante slaughter of Koreans that took place in its wake. And worse was to come: rising anti-foreign nationalism in China; the collapse of global capitalism in 1929 (and devastating impact of depression on Japan's rural areas in particular); the successful military conspiracy known as the Manchurian Incident in 1931, and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933 after that international body condemned its creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo.

Within Japan, the ideological response to this turmoil was to pump emperor-centered nationalism to unprecedented levels. Thus, at the very moment Koizumi and his compatriots were celebrating rebirth, modernity, and the emergence of a truly cosmopolitan metropolis, Tokyo—like the nation as a whole—also was being suffused with a carefully choreographed sense of national, racial, and spiritual uniqueness exemplified by the ubiquitous imperial presence. This is the second strong undercurrent that closer scrutiny of Koizumi's 100 Views of Great Tokyo in the Shōwa Era reveals.

Some of this was simply conveyed by representations of the Imperial Palace. After 1868, the imperial court was relocated from its traditional base in Kyoto to the newly designated "Eastern Capital" in Tokyo—that is what the two ideographs for Tokyo mean—and the old Edo Castle that had been the seat of power of the Tokugawa shoguns became the new imperial enclave. As originally conceived in plans dating from the early 17th century and laid out in accordance with Chinese geomancy, Edo Castle lay at the heart of the city. As the feudal and then modern city expanded, the sprawling site increasingly fell into its eastern sector.



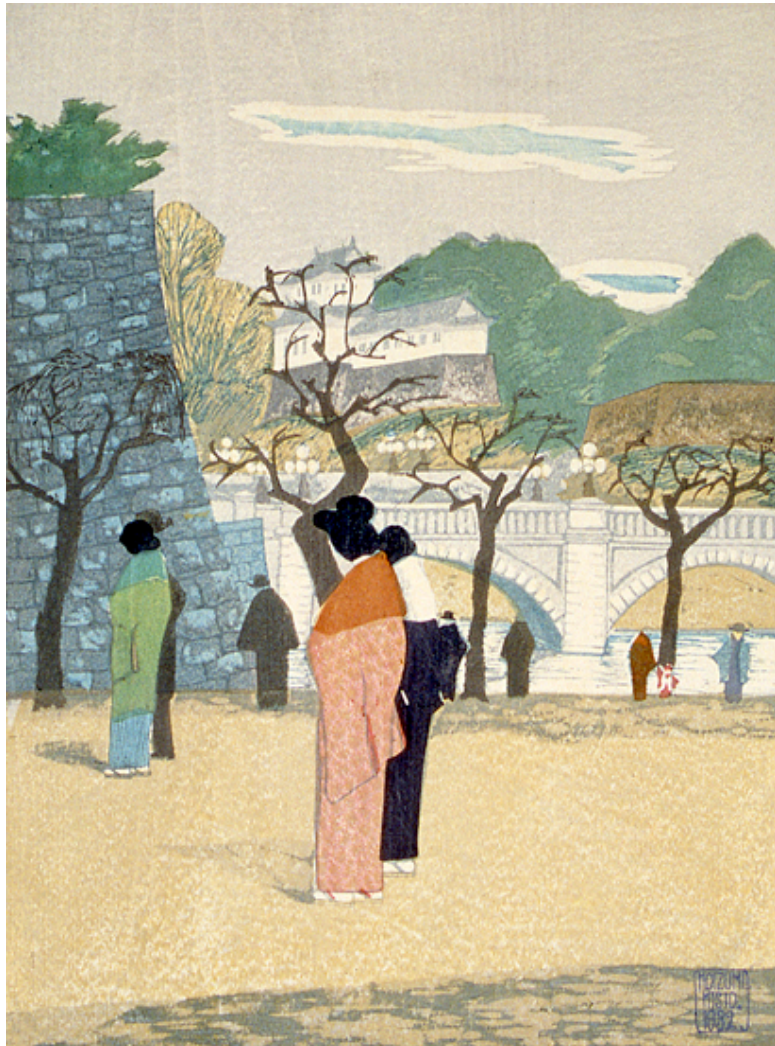
In any case, the emperor's actual "palace" was never seen. Rather, gates, bridges, moats, and other fragments of the old and largely destroyed Edo Castle came to subtly exemplify not only the imperial presence, but also the deeper feudal history of a secluded, isolated land.

*"Pagoda of Tennōji Temple
at Yanaka (#78),"
May 1936*

In 1935 and then again five years later, as he brought his "100 Views" to a close, Koizumi produced two versions of a particularly puzzling site: the feudal-era execution grounds at Suzugamori.

"Nijū Bridge on New Year's Day (#21)," January 1932

This stone bridge, built in 1887, was the primary ceremonial bridge that the emperor and important visitors used to enter the grounds of the palace. It survived the earthquake to become another symbol of continuity.



Other representations of the imperial presence were even more indirect. Several prints, for example, depict sites associated with commemoration of Hirohito's grandfather, the Meiji emperor (#9, #72). Yasukuni Shrine (#19), a major landmark in anyone's rendering of the modern city, was established by the new Meiji government in the 1870s to promote State Shinto and venerate the souls of all who died fighting for the emperor. Koizumi's annotation for his rendering of the famous Nihonbashi bridge tells us that the festive decorations he includes are celebrating "the birth of the Crown Prince." (Hirohito's first son and later successor, Akihito, was born on December 23, 1933, and Koizumi's print is dated January 1934.)



"Nihon Bridge on a Holiday (#44), January 1934,"

The holiday being celebrated was "the birth of the Crown Prince" the previous month.

Koizumi's print of the Akasaka detached palace, where guests of state resided and whose spacious grounds included the residences of imperial princes, adds additional layers of allusion to the imperial presence. This rather bizarre Versailles-like structure—a bit of old Europe in the middle of Tokyo—reflects the degree to which the modern monarchy sought architectural justification and resonance by quoting European palaces and halls of state.



Koizumi's notation calls "beautiful like a palace a fairyland"—and goes on to observe that Pu Yi, the puppet emperor of Manchukuo, stayed there two times."

"Detached Palace [Akasaka] (Formerly Palace of Crown Prince) (#52), June 1934

The captions to two other prints (#18, #26) make reference to the emperor's brother Prince Chichibu, who was known to have close ties with some of the most radical rightwing officers in the military.

The most subtle evocation of the imperial presence is to be found in one of Koizumi's most attractive renderings of urban élan: his bird's-eye view of the main avenue in the bustling Shinjuku district. Great department stores flank the street (Isetan on the left, Mitsukoshi on the right). An advertising balloon hovers in the sky. Tiny pedestrians and abstracted vehicles fill the thoroughfare.

"Street at Shinjuku (#61),"
April 1935

Koizumi's caption describes this part of Shinjuku as a fashionable place "for the intellectual class to gather." What he did not mention is that the bustling avenue in this print terminates at the imperial palace.



And the imperial presence? This resides in the distant "vanishing point" of Koizumi's rendering of the thoroughfare, which all Tokyo residents would recognize to be the Hanzomon gate of the Imperial Palace. Unobtrusively, the imperial presence oversees the prosperity of the nation.

Militarizing the City

In 1931, just three years after Koizumi began his woodblock series, Japan seized Manchuria—China's resource-rich "Three Northern Provinces"—and turned it into the puppet state of Manchukuo. In July 1937, three years before the series was completed, the nation embarked on a devastating war of aggression against China. In the interim, the military assumed increasing control over the political process.

Koizumi notes this militarization of domestic politics and foreign policy by peppering his street population with soldiers in khaki and singling out urban military installations in several prints. In this, his views diverge from the selections made by his eight colleagues whose 100-view subscription series was completed in 1932 and included only one truly conspicuous martial image in the form of a "military grand parade" by Kawakami Sumio. It was during the critical eight years between 1932 and 1940 that Japan's embroilment in China grew. Whether Koizumi's inclusion of signs of increasing military presence in the city was a matter-of-fact notation of a demographic reality or reflected an attitude that endorsed or regretted the new reality is unclear.



As with the imperial presence, the military presence is conveyed both directly and indirectly. Military figures appear in the prints from a fairly early date. To celebrate the new year of 1931, for example, Koizumi chose the Meiji Shrine in the snow as his theme, with tiny figures of soldiers by a Shinto torii or gateway giving life to the scene.

*"Snow Covered Meiji Shrine
Bridge at Dawn (#09),"*
January 1931

His rendering of the Sanrentai military headquarters in Azabu (where, he tells us, Prince Chichibu once was posted) was composed in May 1932, less than a year after the Manchurian Incident.

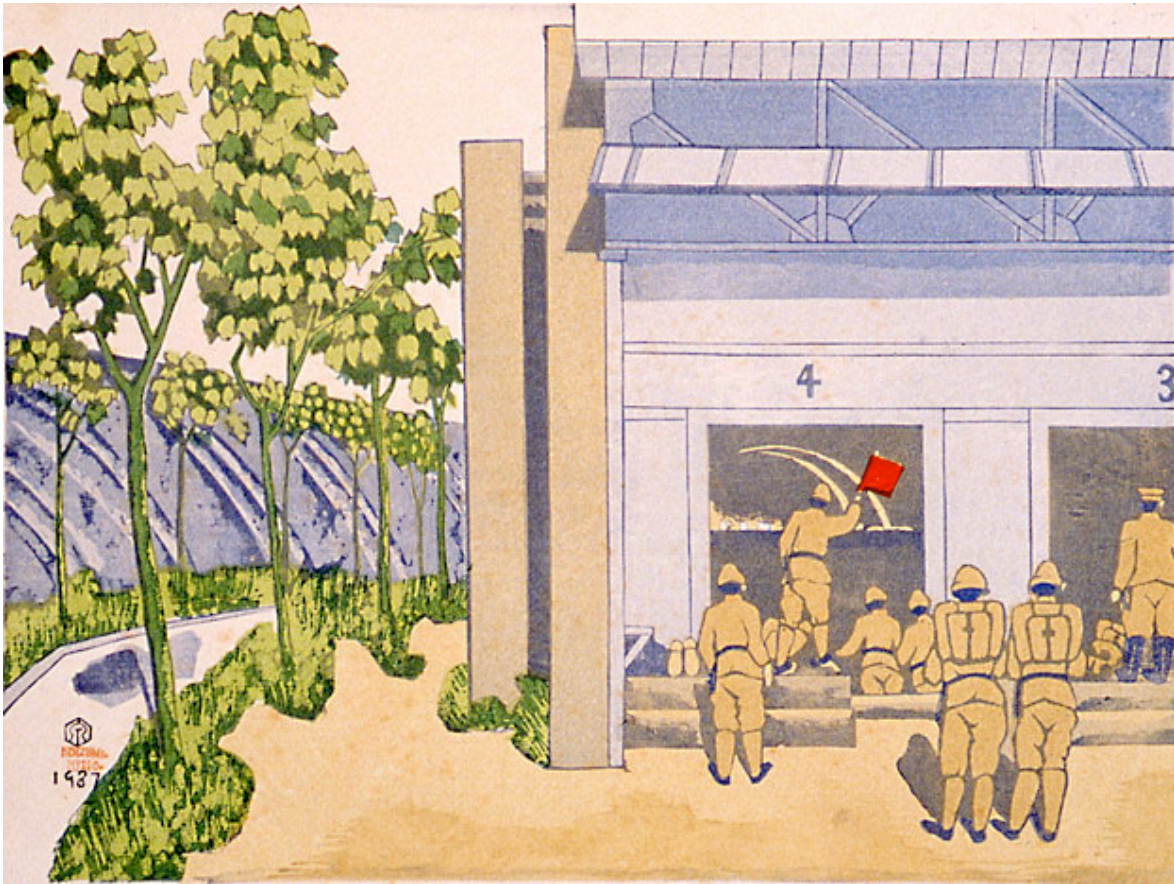
*"The Third Regiment
Headquarters at
Azabu (#26)," May 1932*



In 1935, two years after Japan withdrew from the League of Nations, Koizumi produced a print depicting fortifications built in the 1850s after Commodore Perry forced the country to abandon its policy of seclusion. (His cryptic annotation for this subtle invocation of foreign threats was a single sentence reading "The Tokugawa shogunate built this battery after being surprised when the black ships of America came to Japan.")

*"Battery at Shinagawa
(Fort in Edo Era) (#67),"
August 1935*

One particularly unsettling image—unusual in the oeuvre of the shin-hanga and sōsaku-hanga artists as a whole—was produced in June 1937, a month before all-out war against China was launched. This depicted the Toyamagahara firing range, where almost doll-like soldiers are seen honing their skills.



"Army Firing Range in the Fields of Toyama [Ōkubo] (#93), June 1937"

When this army firing range was established in Ōkubo during the Meiji era, it was in the countryside. By 1937, however, Tokyo had incorporated such surrounding areas. High walls were built around the compound to shield civilians from live munitions fire.

Koizumi's favorable impression of the scene comes through unmistakably in his caption. "This is where the elite Imperial forces are trained," he explained. "The sound of live fire is thrilling."

The military build-up emerges in even the most prosaic of scenes. A lovely fireworks display framed by a huge torii—issued in October 1931, one month after the Manchurian Incident—evokes traditional summer and early autumn festivals and the popularity of fireworks in traditional woodblock prints.



Closer inspection, however, reveals that the site is Yasukuni Shrine, the very heart of veneration of those who give their lives in battle for the imperial cause.

*"Fall Festival at
Yasukuni Shrine (#19),"
October 1931*

Another October festival nine years later—composed as Koizumi was bringing his series to a close—captures a thoroughly modern, urban crowd with a khaki-clad soldier amongst them. The military presence was obvious, but no one could have guessed from this that Pearl Harbor lay only fourteen months ahead.

*"Asakusa Tori-No-Ichi
Festival [Ōtori Shrine]
(#36-revised),"
September 1940*

*The print features the
colorful kumade bamboo
rakes associated with this
festival and thought to
ensure good fortune*



In 1942—with Japan now engaged in war on every front, and careening toward destruction that would dwarf the catastrophe of the Kantō earthquake—Koizumi's completed "100 Views" went on exhibition in Tokyo, Osaka, and Yokohama, and full editions were offered for sale through the Asahi newspaper company. That same year, Koizumi launched a new project: a projected 36-print series of views of Mt. Fuji.

This again was, on the surface, a thoroughly conventional subject and, indeed, well-established numerology. The great Hokusai had made the iconic mountain his sole subject not only in a celebrated series of woodblock prints titled "36 Views of Mt. Fuji" (1829–1833), but also in a follow-up three-volume set of images titled "100 Views of Mt. Fuji" (1834–1835). The perfectly symmetrical mountain, rising toward heaven as if out of nowhere, had been sanctified and venerated since ancient times. When Koizumi fixed his attention on this as his next project, however, it also had become something more notably and notoriously "modern": a powerful nationalistic symbol of the sublime purity and perfection of the land and its people.

Koizumi worked on this final project until his death on December 7, 1945, four months after Japan's surrender. Despite declining health, he carried out a number of trips to the environs of Mt. Fuji. As U.S. air raids in 1945 systematically destroyed his beloved "reborn" Tokyo (and 65 other cities), he took refuge with in-laws in Saitama prefecture, north of Tokyo, and at the time of his death he had completed 23 of the projected 36 views. In 1946, these were exhibited at the Mitsukoshi department store in Nihonbashi in the rubble of a metropolis once again awaiting rebirth.

23 years had passed since the earthquake, and much of what Koizumi and his fellow artists had attempted to capture in their innovative prints of a "new Tokyo" survives only in the lively impressions they left us.

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National Museum of Nature and Science, Tokyo

Click middle tab and then on any blue areas to view extensive locale-by-locale photographs of the Kantō earthquake (in Japanese only)

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