

Figge's Print Exhibit Resonates

Written by administrator
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I was so intrigued by Bruce Carter's terrific review of *The Floating World* at the Figge (see [Startling, Fleeting Moments](#)

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River Cities' Reader
Issue 637, June 13-19, 2007) and curious about [Sara Jones's letter](#)

published in the July 3 issue that I need to respond. I find it hard to understand the opinion of anyone who would end their letter with the line "It's not worth a special trip to the museum" in reference to Carter's review and their personal feeling about their visit to the Figge.

First of all, every trip to the Figge is "special" and worthwhile! And, second, what more enjoyable way to learn about another country's art, culture, and everyday life of a bygone era than through their art as well as their poetry? I saw many of the prints as poetic experiences!

When I went to see the exhibit, there were a gaggle of excited children in the hall - mostly about 10 years of age - viewing the prints. They had so many questions to ask their teacher, and he happily answered all of them with such patience as he explained the daily life of 19th Century Japan as depicted by the brilliantly meticulous and creative Japanese artists of that time.

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Do go see for yourselves Hiroshige's evocative woodblock *Travelers Surprised by a Sudden Rain*. The rain is suggested as a slanting ephemeral sheet; the bent trees follow the path of the rain, and one sees the bare bottom of a man. One wonders how the poor fellow keeps his footing as he and the others are accosted by the elements. A very real human difficulty to keep "a delicate balance."

Hiroshige's *Snow Scene Along the Sumida River* is depicted in shades of black and white, shades of teal and rust as the middle-aged lady tries to walk in the snow; she is elegantly costumed, and her body sways into a letter S. I believe I see a small snake down by her hem. I have to keep reminding myself that this composition is made of many woodcuts and is not one watercolor of a woman in a snow scene grasping her teal-colored coat and with the other hand her black and white umbrella that she carries like a weapon. Her feet on their elevated platforms are perished! I feel that bitter cold.

There are so many wonderful scenes in *The Floating World*, it's no wonder the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists were so excited when they first saw those prints! These Japanese artists provide us, the far distant viewers from the 21st Century, with an elegant, graceful, and humble idea of the common man's culture in 19th Century Japan. I am grateful for their resonance.

Kathleen Lawless Cox

Quad Cities Poet Laureate