

# Japanese scenes of winter snow go on display at Fitzwilliam Museum

**Snow Country:**

**Woodcuts of the Japanese winter**

2 October 2012 to 13 January 2013

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Curated by Craig Hartley

The beauty and poetry of the snowbound landscapes and pastimes of Japan are being explored at the Fitzwilliam Museum this winter in an exhibition of stunning woodblock prints.

Japanese artists have long responded to the beauty of a world changed by frozen forms and stilled by a blanket of white snow.

This selection of prints by artists such as Hokusai and Hiroshige includes stories from poetry and myth, with journeys, ambushes and skirmishes in the snow; children throwing snowballs and building snow-rabbits; the everyday struggle of travellers making their way through snowdrifts; the stillness of people indoors gazing out at the unbroken spell of freshly frozen snow; and the almost abstract world of a pure snowy landscape where people play little part.

These landscapes and figure prints shows how the snow becomes a major component of graphic expression, whether it is depicted by the pure white of the paper, or by white pigment thrown onto the print surface, sometimes to dramatic effect.

Snow has always been prominent in the life, literature and art of Japan. Winds from Siberia blow clouds from the Sea of Japan onto the central mountain ranges, with the result that more than half the country experiences heavy and prolonged snow each winter. The area of heaviest snowfall north of the mountains is known specifically as 'Snow Country' (yukiguni), where towns and villages are cut off by snow drifts of up to six metres until spring arrives.



Hiroshige, *Mount Yuka in Bizen Province*



Hiroshige II, *Kintai Bridge*



Hiroshige, *Mountain and river on the Kiso road*

Trumpington Street  
Cambridge CB2 1RB  
England

01223 332900  
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Press enquiries: email  
fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk

Life has adapted to the demands and limits of a snowbound winter. Architecture developed to cope with heavy snowfall and deep drifts; special tools and machines emerged to shovel or sweep the snow; fashion – especially footwear – evolved to deal with the cold and slush. The long cold winter months were devoted to processes like weaving linen and making paper, which took advantage of the snow. Fibres were laid out in snow-bleaching fields, utilising the bleaching effect of ozone produced as the snow melted in the sun.

So the very whiteness of the paper in the prints in the exhibition – which creates the purity of the snow in the images – was created by snowmelt, when mulberry fibres were bleached in the mountains of Snow Country.

‘Snow Country’ is also famously the title of a wonderfully poetic novel and short story by Yasunari Kawabata (the first Japanese writer to win the Nobel prize for literature in 1968). The story is set in Niigata, deep in Snow Country, and captures the isolation of the people and the purifying beauty of the snow in a land where ‘the depths of the night became white’.

The exhibition explores these links between literary expressions of Japan as a ‘Snow Country’, and its presentation in Japanese woodcuts and woodblock books, some of which include poetic text as part of the image.

All the exhibits are from the collection of The Fitzwilliam Museum.



Hokusai, *Hunters in the snow*

- Ends -

For further information and images contact the Marketing and Press Office:  
Telephone: 01223 332941 | Email: [fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk)

Trumpington Street  
Cambridge CB2 1RB  
England

01223 332900  
[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

Press enquiries: email  
[fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk)

## Notes to editors:

### **Snow Country: Woodcuts of the Japanese winter**

12 October 2012 to 13 January 2013

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

**ADMISSION FREE**

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00

Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00

CLOSED: Mondays, 24-26 & 31 December 2012 and 1 January 2013

### **The Fitzwilliam Museum**

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

Trumpington Street  
Cambridge CB2 1RB  
England

01223 332900  
[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

Press enquiries: email  
[fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk)