

HOKUSAI



Page 4:

Self-Portrait of Hokusai at Eighty-Three, 1842.

Ink on paper, 26.9 x 16.9 cm.

Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden.

Author:

C. J. Holmes

Layout:

Baseline Co. Ltd

61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street

4th Floor

District 3, Ho Chi Minh City

Vietnam

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"My only pleasure is becoming a good artist."
— Hokusai

BIOGRAPHY

- 1760: Katsushika Hokusai is born in Edo.
- 1763: The three-year-old Hokusai is adopted by Nakajima Ise, a mirror polisher working for the Tokugawa Shogunate. Soon in his childhood, he begins to learn woodblock carving. His career starts when he becomes an apprentice as an engraver at age fourteen.
- 1778: Hokusai enters the studio of Katsukawa Shunshō, one of the leading woodblock artisans of the time, where he learns the technique of woodcut printmaking. After one year, he publishes his first works, actor prints, under the name Shunrō.
- 1789: Hokusai leaves the establishment because of a disagreement with the master's successor, Shunko. This is a major turning point in his life.
- 1790s: First known *surimono* by Hokusai produced. Moves away from the standard motifs found in *ukiyo-e* (actors and courtesans) towards landscapes and scenes of daily life in Japan. This reorientation represents a breakthrough on a personal level as well as one on in relation to *ukiyo-e* art. During this period he attains success as a woodblock artist, doing a number of series on the legend of the *Chūshingura*.
- 1800: He produces the *Famous Places in Edo* and fifteen sketch books which were published in 1814 under the title *Hokusai manga*. After undertaking about thirty

果敢為軍

different pseudonyms, he assumes the name Katsushika Hokusai, as he is known today. His unusually-large amount of name changes reflects the change in his artistic creativity.

- early 1830s: He produces the landscape prints which are now considered his greatest works. While this series was still coming out, he began his other famous series, such as *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces (Shokoku taki meguri)* and *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei)*, comprised of forty-six prints.
- 1834-1836: Due to his age, Hokusai suffers from intermittent paralysis which affects the quality of his work. However, he continues to paint and jokingly assumes the name 'gakyō-rōjin' (the old man mad with painting). Completes the three volumes of *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku hyakkei)*, *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)*, and the bird and flower series, all in this period. The last notable work was a series entitled the *One Hundred Poets (Shūga Hyakounin Isshu)*.
- 1839: Hokusai suffers the loss of all his paintings and drawings in his workshop during a fire. Although he continues to produce more works, principally brush-painting, for the next ten years after the loss of his collection in the fire, the quality falters compared to his earlier works.
- 1849: He dies on 18 April (or 10 May), at the age of ninety. After his death, copies of some of his woodblock prints are sent to the West, and along with the works of other *ukiyo-e* artists, his prints influence Western masters such as Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.



HOKUSAI'S LIFE

In the autumn of 1760, a child was born in a humble suburb of Edo whose place in the world's art was destined to be important.

His adoptive parents were from the artisan class; the father a maker of metal mirrors to the court of the Shogun, the mother a member of a family that was not without celebrity in its time, but had lighted upon evil days. Her grandfather



Kintoki the Herculean Child with a Bear and an Eagle

c. 1790-1795

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 37.2 x 24.8 cm (*ōban*)
Ostasiatische Kunstsammlung, Museum für Asiatische Kunst,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin





had been a retainer of the courtier Kira, in whose defence he had fallen by the hand of one of the forty-seven *ronin* during the midnight attack, the climax of that tragic episode of 17th-century Japan. Perhaps to this soldier ancestor, we may trace the pride and independence that characterised Hokusai all his life, just as the employment of his father might be supposed to influence the child's tastes and capacity in the direction of art.

Actor Ichikawa Komazô III as Shirai Gonpachi
and Actor Matsumoto Kôshirô IV as Banzui Chôbei

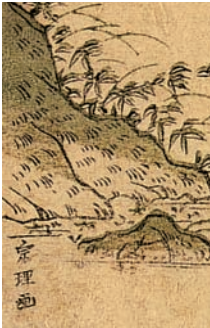
c. 1791

Diptych, *nishiki-e* (polychrome woodblock print), 31.8 x 13.7 cm;

31.8 x 14.4 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





Possibly because he was not an only son, he left home at fourteen to be apprenticed to an engraver. Though he did not remain at this trade for more than four years, the experience thus gained must have been exceedingly useful to him later in life, when he had to direct the men who were cutting his own work. At the age of eighteen he left this employment to join the school of the great designer, Shunshō,



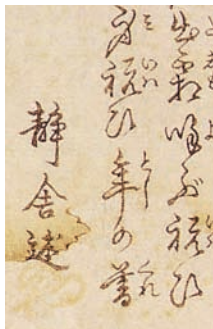
Collection of Surimono Illustrating Fantastic Poems

c. 1794-1796

Surimono, *nishiki-e* (polychrome woodblock print), 21.9 x 16 cm
(each page, *koban*)

Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.





whose colour prints are among the treasures of modern collectors. Under his guidance, Hokusai became an apt imitator of his master's style. His originality, however, could not long be suppressed. An enthusiasm for the vigorous black-and-white work of the Kano school irritated the old professor, whose dainty art aimed at very different ideals.



A Mare and Her Foal

1795-1798

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 35.5 x 24 cm (*aiban*)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

春興戯句

たのびてみるうき世に後こそめ
子の懐疑いありやとをを鑑やうさ
大衆愈なつてあさまも決断なきつ
小料理ふらねも味うとぶ初松魚
料理ハうち懺でも外へ立
こそつきなきあーあめん小春酒
大和回りとてせてきあま
小春令とてせうも花月の客
大菊ハひつ下の昭我よなきうけ
あはれもうーとてきあま式連
大一座むきの仕もおねおねひ
あか福解ねもおねおねひ

静舎述



宗理画
孝行



At last, in 1789, a quarrel over the painting on a shop sign resulted in the expulsion of the disobedient pupil. No doubt such an inquisitive, unconventional scholar must have sadly perplexed a master who had long been regarded, and quite rightly, as one of the leaders of the popular school. Yet in those years spent under Shunshō's guidance, the younger man

Two Women Puppeteers

c. 1795

Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print)
Private collection, United Kingdom





must have learned all that was to be learned about *ukiyo-e* art, and no further advance was possible for him until he gained his freedom.

Thus, at the age of twenty-nine, Hokusai was cast adrift upon the world to try to make a living by illustrating comic books, and even writing them. He was attracted for a time by Tosa painting, and worked in imitation of it; but,

An Oiran and Her Two Shinzō Admiring the Cherry Trees in Bloom in Nakanochō

c. 1796-1800

Double-length *surimono*, *nishiki-e* (polychrome woodblock print),

47.8 x 65 cm

Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris



work as he might, he was unable to make a livelihood. At last, in despair, he quit art and turned hawker, selling at first red pepper and then almanacs. After some months of misery, an unexpected and well-paid commission to paint a flag aroused hope in him once more. Working early and late, he succeeded in executing illustrations for a number of novels,

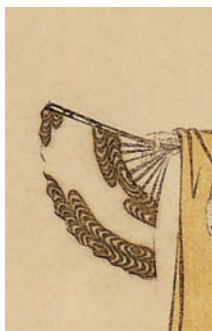


Concert under the Wisteria

c. 1796-1804

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.2 x 38.4 cm (*ōban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





and designed many *surimono*s – the dainty cards used for festive occasions – which gradually improved his reputation. It was about this time that he learned, or rather came in contact with, the rules of perspective, and began to catch something of the grandeur of the early art of China.

In the spring of 1804, he made a popular hit by painting a colossal figure in the court of one of the Edo temples. On a sheet of paper more than

Suehirogari

1797-1798

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 20.7 x 31.9 cm
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.





eighteen yards long and eleven yards wide, with brooms, tubs of water, and tubs of ink, he worked in the presence of a wondering crowd, sweeping the pigment this way and that. Only by scaling the temple roof could the people view the bust of a famous saint in its entirety. Hokusai followed up this triumph by painting, on a colossal scale, a horse, the fat god Hotei,

Spring at Enoshima (Enoshima shunbō)

from the series *The Threads of the Willow*
(*Yanagi no ito*), 1797

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.9 x 38 cm (*ōban*)
British Museum, London

江島
春望

北斎
宗理
画





and the seven gods of good luck. At the same time, to show the range of his powers, he made microscopic drawings on grains of wheat or rice, and sketched upside down, with an egg, a bottle, or a wine measure. These tricks gained him such a reputation that he was commanded to draw before the Shogun, an honour almost without precedent for a painter of the artisan class.

Act I (Shōdan)

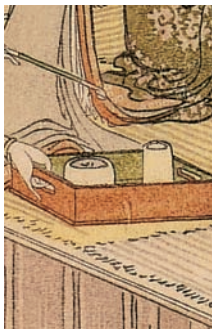
from the illustrated book *Chūhingura*
(*Shinpan ukie Chūhingura*), c. 1798

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 22 x 32.7 cm (*aiban*)
British Museum, London





In 1807 his connection and squabbles with Bakin, the famous *gesakusha*, began. They first collaborated on a book, *The One Hundred and Eight Heroes*. Their collaboration lasted about four years, and was dissolved by an unusually violent quarrel. The pair seemed indeed to have been ill-matched. Bakin, serious, distant, absorbed in his literary studies, possibly a bit of a pedant, was no companion for the quick,



An Artisan's Shop

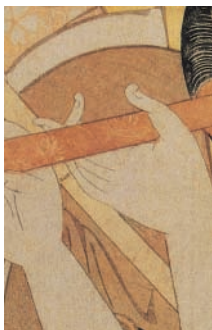
from the album *The Mist of Sandara*
(*Sandara kasumi*), 1798

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 20 x 31.6 cm (*aiban*)
Clarence Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





capricious artist. Hokusai's first acquaintance with the actor Baiko was equally characteristic. Baiko, who was especially famous for his manner of playing ghosts, one day sent to ask Hokusai to draw him a new kind of phantom. No reply came, so Baiko called in person. He found the painter in a room so filthy that he had to spread out a rug he had prudently brought with him before he could sit down.



Women with a Telescope

from the series *The Seven Bad Habits*
(*Fūryū nakute nana kuse*), late 1790s

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 36.8 x 24.8 cm
Kobe City Museum, Kobe





To his attempts at polite conversation and his remarks about the weather, Hokusai made no answer, but remained seated without even turning his head, until at last Baiko retired, angry and unsuccessful. In a few days he returned with humble apologies, and was well received, and from that time forward the two were friends.



Dawn of a New Year

from *Mad Poems for Fresh Grasses*
(*Kyōkabatsunwakana*), vol. I, 1798

Kyōkabon, *nishiki-e* (polychrome woodblock print), 16.3 x 22.5 cm
British Museum, London





In 1817 Hokusai went to Nagoya for six months, staying in the house of a pupil. Here he repeated the *tour de force* that had gained him so great a reputation at Edo, by painting a great figure, in the presence of a crowd of spectators, on a sheet of paper so large that the design could only be shown by hoisting it onto scaffolding with ropes.



Crossing a Bridge

from the *kyōka* album *The Stamping Song of Men*
(*Otokodoka*), 1798

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 20.6 x 36 cm (*aiban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





More important, however, than this advertisement of his dexterity, was the publication of the first volume of the *Hokusai manga*, which, according to the latest authority, appeared around this time. The word has been variously translated as 'various sketches', 'spontaneous sketches', 'rough sketches', 'casual sketches', and so on.

Mount Fuji behind Cherry Trees in Bloom

c. 1800-1805

Surimono, *nishiki-e* (polychrome woodblock print), 20.1 x 55.4 cm
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam





This volume was the first of the famous series of fifteen which contains so much of the artist's best work.

In 1818 he continued his travels, visiting Osaka and Kyoto before returning to Edo. It would seem that Hokusai met with but moderate success there. The place was the headquarters of the classical schools of painting. Years later, when nearly seventy years old,

Standing Courtesan with an Apprentice

c. 1802

Kakejiku, ink and colour on silk, 76.5 x 41.2 cm
Hokusai Museum, Obuse





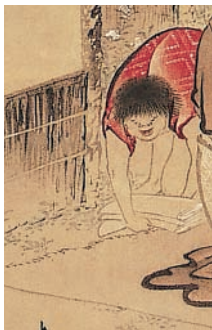
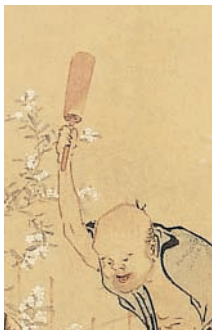
he was attacked by paralysis, but cured himself with a Chinese recipe that he found in an old book. Whatever the merits of the medicine, the old artist was thoroughly cured, for it was about this time that he produced the three sets of large colour prints which are, perhaps, his most important works,

The River of Jewels near Ide

c. 1802

Ink, colour, and *gofun* on paper, 100.9 x 41.4 cm
Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba





Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces (Shokoku taki meguri), Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran), and the Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei). It is possibly owing to the misfortunes of the following years that these series seem to be incomplete. Certainly Hokusai had good reasons for not undertaking any commissions that did not bring in money,

The River of Jewels near Mishima

c. 1802

Ink, colour, and *gofun* on paper, 88.2 x 41 cm
Hokusai Museum, Obuse





for in the winter of 1834 he had to flee from Edo and live in hiding at Uraga under an assumed name. The reason for this flight is uncertain, except that it was caused by the misdoings of a grandson. When writing from Uraga, he would not give his address, though he suffered great privations. When important business recalled him to Edo, he visited the capital secretly.

Woman beneath a Willow in Winter

c. 1802

Black and coloured ink on paper, 136.5 x 46.2 cm
Henry and Lee Harrison Collection





It was not until 1836 that he was free to return safely, but at an unpropitious time. The country was devastated by a terrible famine, and Hokusai found that the ordinary demand for art had ceased. In the following years, his patience was again severely tried by a fire that burned his house and all his drawings.



Two Women and a Servant on the Banks of the Sumida;
a Man Sealing the Bottom of a Boat

from the series *Birds of the Old Capital*
(*Miyakodori*), 1802
Galerie Berès, Paris

海原夕風
あゝ〜〜〜
うゝの白雲舟
ちゝゝや無
久良武

松風音成
は〜〜〜
門松〜〜
る〜〜
七〜〜
雪の白魚

梅枝堂為安
は〜〜
餅のち〜
す〜〜
あゝの餅
妻の〜

秋羅門盛宅

佃人業よあれ
てハ吸物の

白魚の
顔ある
網





Only his brushes were saved. The poor old man had to keep more constantly than ever to his work, both as a consolation in his troubles and as means of avoiding starvation. Year after year he went on designing with undiminished power and activity. And though he never emerged from the state of chronic poverty, he never seems to have been again threatened by positive want.



Panoramic View of the Sumida Banks with the Shin Yanagibashi and Ryogokubashi Bridges

from the *Illustrated Book of the
Two Banks of the Sumida in One View*
(*Ehon Sumidagawa ryogan ichiran*), c. 1803

Ehon, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 27.2 x 18.5 cm each
Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden





Hokusai was twice married, and had five children: two sons and three daughters. The eldest son was a scamp, who inherited the mirror-making business, and was a cause of endless trouble to his father. The younger became a petty official with a taste for poetry. His eldest daughter married her father's pupil Shighenobu,



Panoramic View of the Sumida Banks with the Shin Yanagibashi and Ryogokubashi Bridges

from the *Illustrated Book of the Two Banks of the Sumida in One View*
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Ehon, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 27.2 x 18.5 cm each
Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden





and, before she was divorced from her husband, became the mother of the child whose excesses made it necessary for Hokusai to go into hiding at Uruga. Another daughter died in youth. The youngest, Oyei, married a painter; but her independent spirit led to a speedy divorce, and she returned home to be, for many years,



Panoramic View of the Sumida Banks with the Shin Yanagibashi and Ryogokubashi Bridges

from the *Illustrated Book of the Two Banks of the Sumida in One View*
(*Ehon Sumidagawa ryogan ichiran*), c. 1803

Ehon, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 27.2 x 18.5 cm
Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden

壺山樓
高喜

竹の

浜も

虹乃彩

こゝろ

こゝろ

あゝれ

橋つと

ねり





the devoted companion to her father, whom she did not long survive. Her portrait of Hokusai when about eighty years old forms the frontispiece of De Goncourt's book. When the house got quite unbearably filthy, the pair did not clean it, but relocated. Hokusai thus changed his abode no less than ninety-three times in the course of his life.



Three Women with a Telescope

from the series *Album of Kyōka – Mountain upon Mountain*
(*Ebon kyōka*), 1804

Ebon, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print)

Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, D.C.



In spite of the enormous mass of his work, he remained poor. His devotion to his art made him proud and inaccessible to those who came to buy his drawings without showing him proper deference. But many stories are told of his kindness to children, and of his behaving with great delicacy of feeling under trying circumstances.



Gods and Poets

c. 1804

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18.4 x 51.1 cm
Museo d'Arte Orientale - Edoardo Chiossone, Genoa





Though his artistic reputation among his own class was enormous, and had even spread to the Shogun's court, he was only known by sight to his intimate friends.



Except his daughter, Oyei, Hokusai had no pupils in the ordinary sense of the word, but he had followers who were able to catch something of his manner. Of these, his son-in-law



Tea House for Travellers

c. 1804

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 39 x 52 cm (*yoko nagaban*)
 Museo d'Arte Orientale - Edoardo Chiossone, Genoa

物連中

八 吾 八

野 八 郎 助
野 良 助

野 市 郎

野 喜 郎
野 八 郎 助

豐 竹 大 夫

竹 本 村 大 夫

竹 本 越 大 夫

竹 本 佳 大 夫

六

松 主 物 連 中

諸 藩 中 物 連 中

同 藩 中 物 連 中

海 中 物 連 中

海 中 物 連 中

海 中 物 連 中

口





Shighenobu was the earliest. Hokusai's mature style was more closely imitated by Hokkei, a fishmonger turned artist (and a graceful artist, too), who taught Gakutei, the celebrated designer of *surimono*s, and Hokuba, whose book illustrations show a genuine appreciation of Hokusai's dexterity, but lack his spirit and insight.



Two Women and a Child on the Shore

c. 1804

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18.9 x 51.6 cm
Museo d'Arte Orientale - Edoardo Chiossone, Genoa





The remaining artists who directly imitated Hokusai need not be taken into account, but three other painters of distinct originality owe much to his influence: Keisai Yeisen, Kiosai, and Yosai. Nevertheless, if we seek to trace the influence of Hokusai, we shall not find its clearest evidences in such work as this, any more than we can lay at his door the utter decay into which the Tosa, Buddhist, and Kano schools have fallen.

Illustrated Book of the Two Banks of the Sumida in
One View (Ehon Sumidagawa ryogan ichiran)

1805

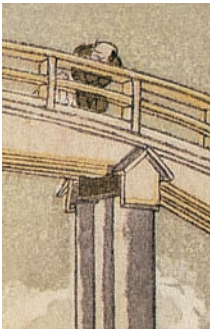
Ehon, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 28.5 x 19 cm each
Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba





HOKUSAI'S PRINTS AND DRAWINGS

Hokusai, as we have seen, lived to his ninetieth year, and for the greater part of his life did nothing but draw. The latest catalogue makes him the illustrator of nearly 160 different publications, many of them comprising a number of volumes. As the volumes contain on average fifty pages apiece, each with its illustration, the quantity of his engraved work alone almost defies computation.



Mount Fuji under High Bridge

from an untitled series of landscapes in Western style
c. 1805

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18.4 x 24.5 cm (*chūban*)

William S. and John T.

Spaulding Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





In addition to this enormous mass of prints, we have to reckon with the studies for these compositions, as well as the innumerable random sketches made to please his own fancy or that of a customer, and with the more elaborate paintings, of which only a limited number have ever been exported. We must always remember, too, that Hokusai, though popular with the lower classes, was hardly known, even by name, to amateurs of position,



The Swordsmith Munechika and the God of Inari

1805

Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18.2 x 50.4 cm
Clarence Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





except perhaps in his native Edo. Though a number of his prints in very varied degrees of perfection are not uncommon, his drawings and paintings are for the most part inaccessible to the general public, remaining as they do in the hands of a few collectors.

Hokusai's engraved work may be classified as follows:

(a) All work done up to 1810: Novels, *surimono*s, and the *Views in Edo*.



Young Girl from Ōhara

c. 1805

Ink, colour, and *gofun* on silk, 95 x 30.3 cm
Museo d'Arte Orientale - Edoardo Chiossone, Genoa





(b) The books of sketches: The *Hokusai manga*, the *Gwafu*, and their companions, with *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku hyakkei)*.

(c) The books of legendary subjects in the Chinese manner.



(d) The large sets of plates, *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces*, *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces*, etc.



Act V

from the series *The Syllabary Chūshingura*
(Kanadehon Chūshingura), 1806
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.1 x 37 cm
 British Museum, London





As we have seen, Hokusai began his art education under the eyes of Shunsh. His prints of this period would pass for those of his master. But his work soon after leaving the school is so unlike that of the older man that one is not surprised at their quarrel. Shunshō's ladies are short and plump; Hokusai's are as tall and slender as those of Utamaro. Shunshō's colour is a delicate harmony of pink, grey,

Act I (Shōdan)

from the series *The Syllabary Chūshingura*
(Kanadehon Chūshingura), 1806
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25 x 37 cm (*ōban*)
 British Museum, London





yellow, and pale green. Hokusai uses a powerful green, a warm brown, and occasionally strong blues and definite crimson, which are not attuned so easily. The drawing of the younger man is already exquisitely refined, as we can see from the *surimono*s, which are more carefully engraved and printed than the picture books. Indeed these dainty little works represent



Ushigafuchi at Kudan (Kudan Ushigafuchi)

from an untitled series of landscapes in Western style
c. 1800-1805

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18 x 24.5 cm (*chūban*)
William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





Hokusai's early work at its best; just as in the novels, from the intrusion of the text into the page and from dependence on the subject matter of the story, it is seen at its very worst.

In 1796 he had come in contact with the rules of perspective through a fellow countryman, Shiba Gokan, who had studied a Dutch book on the subject; while it is evident from the *Promenade in the Eastern Capital*,



The Sanctuary of Juniso in Yotsuya, Edo

late 1800s

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), *chūban*
Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo





published in black and white at the end of 1799, and in colour in 1802, that he had been looking carefully at the popular guidebooks illustrated in the Chinese style. Possibly it was thus that he was led to appreciate the great art of the mainland, with its vigorous-if-mannered naturalism that was to be an increasingly prominent influence in his drawing. During the next four years he made enormous progress, and *The Streams of the Sumida River*,

Five Women, One Smoking a Pipe and Two Others Measuring a Piece of Fabric

c. 1810

Paint on silk, 40.8 x 78.9 cm

Hosomi Collection, Osaka





published in 1804, looks like the work of another hand. The pictures in the earlier book are broken up by bars and streamers of conventional pink clouds; the figures are for the most part too numerous and too tiny, the landscapes wearisome with excess of detail. Only here and there does some more successful design – a bridge packed with a struggling

The Seven Gods of Fortune

1810

Ink, colour, and gold on silk, 67.5 x 82.5 cm
Museo d'Arte Orientale - Edoardo Chiossone, Genoa



crowd or a wide plain under snow – give some hint of greatness. The naturalness, which was the backbone of the Chinese tradition, was beginning to produce its effect, and the absolute freedom of the *Hokusai manga*, revolutionary as it seemed to the artist's contemporaries, was really only one more step in a regular process of evolution.

The Hero Tametomo Surrounded by Demons on Onigashima Island (Island of the Demons)

1811

Paint on silk, 54.9 x 82.1 cm

British Museum, London





The *Hokusai manga* is a series of volumes of sketches of all kinds of subjects. As the dates of the appearance of the earlier part of the series are uncertain, it is impossible to say more than that internal evidence points to the series having started some years before 1817, the latest date proposed.

Within the limits of their schemes of black, grey, and pale pink, the good things in the



Male Pheasant

from the album *Pictures after Nature by Hokusai*
(*Hokusai shashin gafu*), c. 1814

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 22 x 33.8 cm
Frederick W. Gookin Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





Hokusai manga were never surpassed, even by Hokusai himself, though the collection of his compositions published in the year of his death in three volumes, under the title of *Hokusai Gwafu*, maintains a higher average of excellence. Two other volumes, the *Santai Gwafu* and the *Ippitsu Gwafu*, published in 1815 and 1823, deserve mention from the similarity of name, but are merely collections of sketches recalling the less important drawings of some of



Yamauba, Kintoki, and Various Animals

c. 1814

Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 21.1 x 18.4 cm
British Museum, London

袂廻屋

捨成

室船いさくても

るる躍れとも

かゝるる躍れとも

あんなるる躍り

子をわけてやあ

おやもさるもさるる

えんかゝる躍り

四方歌壇



子守歌
子守歌のしるし



the *Hokusai manga*, with which they are contemporary. A third book, the *Dôtschu Gwafu* (1830), is generally known, from its subject, as the *Tôkaidô* series. Reprints of it are common, but, though containing some good designs, the volume is not of first-class importance.

The famous *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (1834) is so well known in this country through the edition published in 1880 (London, B. T. Batsford),



Chinese Philosopher Sôshi Watching Butterflies

from the album *Pictures after Nature by Hokusai*
(*Hokusai shashin gafu*), 1814/1819

Sumizuri-e (black-and-white woodblock print), 25.8 x 34.4 cm (*ôban*)
Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden





with an admirable commentary by Mr F. V. Dickins, that any lengthy description of the three delightful volumes would be superfluous. The last of Hokusai's books to deserve mention are three volumes of pictures of legendary heroes – *Portraits of Suikōden Heroes* (1829), *The Heroes of China and Japan* (1836), and *The Glories of China and Japan (Ehon Wakan Homare)* (1850).

Hatakeyama Shigetada Carrying His Horse

1820-1821

Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), highlights of gold, copper, and silver dust, 20.8 x 18.5 cm
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris

鐵匣屋椿成
 此は水かきしんをまのやせきうとんまのけま
 まんもけまのまはようしんをけむるものなり

四方真顔

水東居
 万一





Little is known about the sets and 'states' of Hokusai's large colour prints and thus it is impossible to treat them with exact bibliographical detail. From the style, it would seem that the *Maison Verte* was published between 1800 and 1810. It was not until fifteen years later that the great series of *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (c. 1830-1832),

The Valiant Oi and the Chinese Warrior Fan Kuai

c. 1820

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 21.3 x 18.8 cm
British Museum, London

紅
空満屋生連枝
支那金五重内

杉廻屋末枝
谷のまを叩きとけり居る男のおもやうかき酒盛

春 恥女

隙のまを叩きとけり立て力もほくつゝ修保娘

空満屋真枝

糸をを帯けてうひひもあてふるまのま枝

萬
飾
一
筆





the *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces* (c. 1834), *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces* (c. 1832-1833), the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* (*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) (c. 1835-1836), and the flower series, were designed, so that these represent Hokusai's powers at their maturity. Considerations of

Whale Hunters on the Beach at Katase, near Enoshima Island, Illustrating the Purple Shell (Murasakigai)

from the series *Shells of the Genroku Era*
(*Genroku kasen kai-awase*), 1821

Surimono, *nishiki-e* (polychrome woodblock print) with metallic pigments, 18.2 x 17.2 cm (*shikishiban*)

Clarence Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

葉見とある
せうと歌

観廬
下蔭

元禄山合



朝霧とある

福とある

ひとある

ひとある

あひある

あひある

すゝとある

はる見とある

あひある

西の方垣

真影

江の島

あひある

江の島

ささきとある

今やとある



月鏡老人
爲筆



subject-matter interfere with the artistic merit of some of the *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces*. The *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* are not only rare, but very unequal. The *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, while they contain some astonishing plates, such as *Under a Great Wave off the Coast at Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki namiura*), or *The Great Wave* (p.135),

Calligraphy Tools: an Octagonal China Jar with Brushes, next to an Ink Slab and a Stick of Sumi. In a Teapot, the Blooming Prune Tree Branch of the New Year

c. 1822

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print),
 embossing, gold and silver highlights (*shikishiban*)
 Private collection, France



the red mountain in a storm, and the red mountain rising into a blue sky barred with cirrus cloud, do not really maintain such a high average as the *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces*. In spite of much obvious convention, and a colouring which in more than one case is powerful rather than harmonious,

Dwarf Pine in a Pot with a Basin and a Towel on a Towel Rack (Mayoke)

from the series *Horses (Umazukushi)*, 1822
Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print)

20.6 x 18.3 cm

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

馬除

初日

鳴る

喜

あけ

けや

町の

山

見

すき

三景亭

真嗣

水雲





Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces have, as a set (eight plates as known), a sustained magnificence that even the volumes of the *Gwafu* cannot parallel. If the one plate from the flower series at South Kensington is a fair sample of the series, the fact that it appears to be a unique specimen is little short of a calamity, for in colour, as well as in design, the bunch of chrysanthemums could hardly be more nobly treated.

Precious Stones and Coral Illustrating the Menoseki (Agate)

from the series *Horses (Umazukushi)*, 1822
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print)
 Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

尾花梅

あけのぼる梅のすやあは
ひさしのあけのぼるあは

置まゝ

神養

あけのぼる梅のすやあは
ひさしのあけのぼるあは

四カ歌植

真顔

光あつて濁りの

綴りがすや

梅のすや

こぼれくさる



朱紫屋



Drawings made before 1810 seem to be exceedingly rare, for out of more than three hundred sketches which the writer has had the opportunity of seeing, there was not one which could belong to a period antecedent to the *Hokusai manga*. The sketches may be divided into two classes – drawings made for sale or display and drawings which were

Trees in Bloom in Yoshino

1822

Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print)

20.4 x 26.3 cm

Private collection



studies for engraved designs. As anyone acquainted with the circumstances of Hokusai's life can guess, the first class contains many sketches that are merely exhibitions of manual dexterity, without real importance. Now and then, however, there occur compositions of the utmost majesty,

Peasants Surprised by a Storm

from an untitled series in Western Style

c. 1826

Paint on Dutch paper, 27.3 x 39.9 cm

Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden



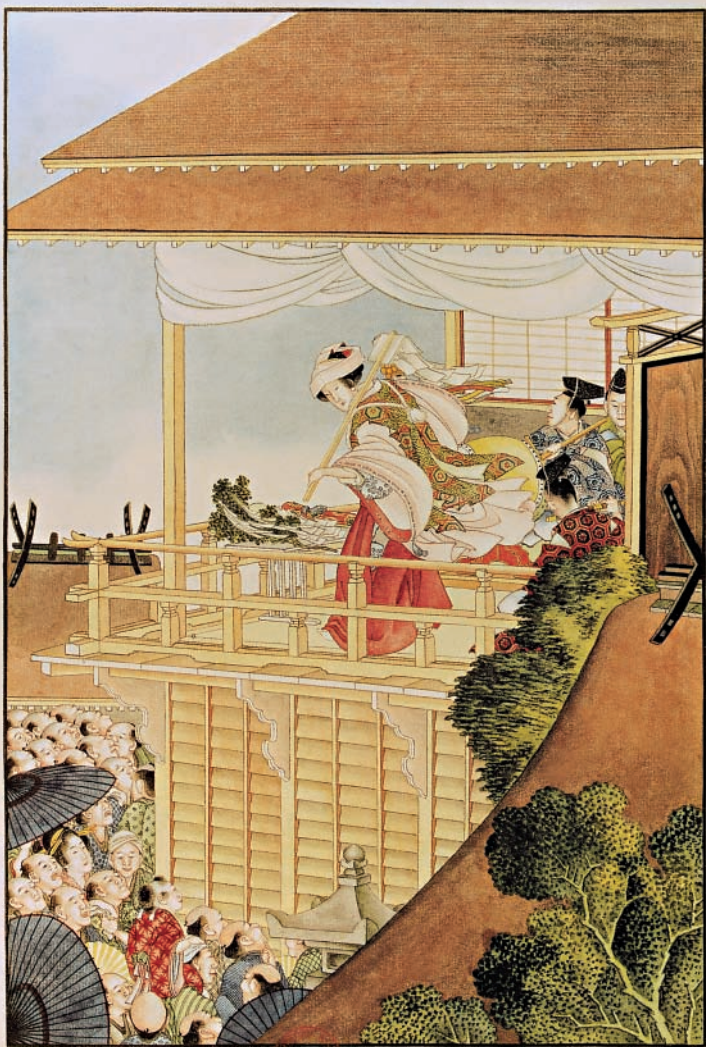


as in the drawing (sold in the Brinkley Collection) of two snow-clad peaks rising out of a sea of mist. The studies for engraved designs are much more interesting, but hardly the kind of thing we should expect. One imagines Hokusai's sketches to be vivid, hasty records of instantaneous impressions, rough, perhaps, but full of energy and dash. This is only the case now and then.

Propitiatory Dance

c. 1826

Ink and colour on paper, 45.2 x 31.5 cm
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



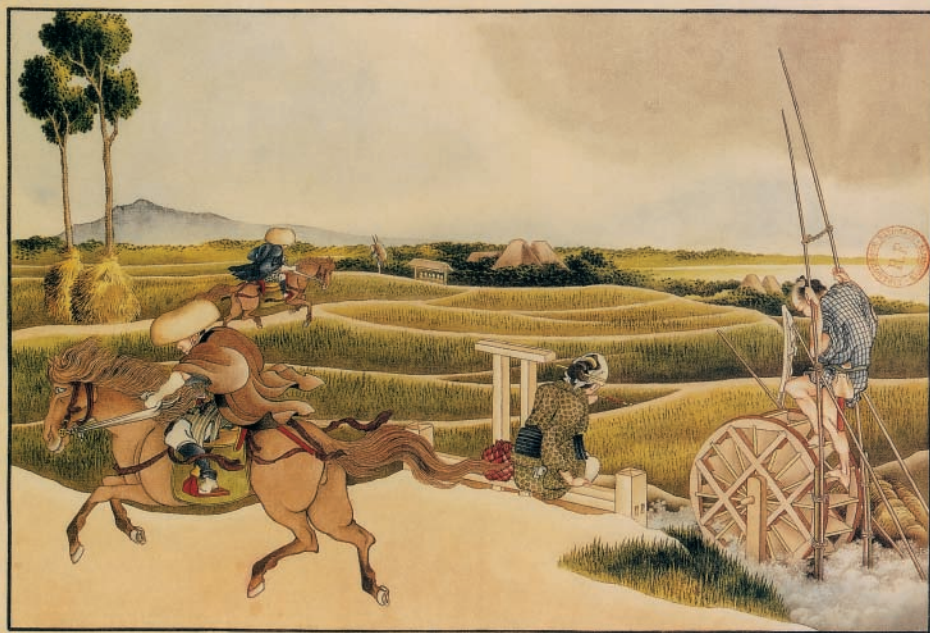


Hokusai's methods seem to have been as deliberate as his success was complete. Again and again one comes across big studies for the little figures in the *Hokusai manga* and the *Gwafu*, drawn from the first with extraordinary delicacy and finish, a preliminary sketch in red often underlying the decisive work in black, but ruled across for accurate reduction, so that there may be no chance of error.

Samurais on Horseback

1826

Coloured ink and colour on paper, 31.6 x 45.4 cm
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





When one sees Hokusai's drawings, one cannot help feeling that the engraving was really a failure, so vast is the difference between the sketches and the prints. Curiously enough, sketches for complete compositions are very rare. The studies are nearly always studies of single figures. Possibly these were only combined when drawn onto the tissue paper

View of Koshigoe from Shichirigahama (Shichirigahama yori Koshigoe o enbo)

1829

Surimono, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print),
20.5 x 17.9 cm (*shikishiban*)

Ostasiatische Kunstsammlung, Museum für Asiatische Kunst,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin

七里ヶ澤より
腰撃眺望

老鳥一寫意

鹿壽菴

蝠磨

ふあやとち

あつりひの

あふ

あふ

あふ

あふ

あふ

穂長堂

江の原を

あふ

あふ

新金川

あふ

あふ





which was pasted onto the block, so that the original design of the whole composition was destroyed in the cutting.

HOKUSAI – THE PAINTER OF LIFE



Though naturally based on the work of his predecessors, the religious designs of Hokusai present one or two marked variations from the current artistic tradition.



Sumo Wrestlers Ki no Natora and Otomo no Yoshio

c. 1829

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print) with gold and silver,
21.3 x 18.8 cm

Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, D.C.

鄂二士角抵

西之誰當玉
音、鵲橋標
偏誇英勇力
笑語臨天舒

前集

卷之五



The masters of the Kano and Buddhist schools, if not aristocrats themselves, lived with the aristocracy and regarded their art as a kind of ritual, consecrated and governed by an immemorial usage, as strict in its limitation of saintly actions and attributes as was the Spanish Inquisition. In the hands of the earlier men by whom the formulae were first defined,

Mount Fuji Seen from the Rice Fields in Owari Province
(Bishū Fujimigahara)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26 x 38.2 cm (*ōban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris



富嶽千景
尾州
不見原

千景
尾州
不見原



the artistic impulse retained something of the freshness of youth. In the course of several centuries of imitation, religious painting had become a thing of use and wont like the faith it embodied, and lived only by the light reflected from its past history. It had ceased to be in sympathy with popular opinion, for its conventional deities remained in a conventional heaven very far away from the realities of human existence. The Japanese, always attracted by the

The Temple of Hongaji at Asakusa in Edo

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1831

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), approx. 25 x 38 cm (*ōban*)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





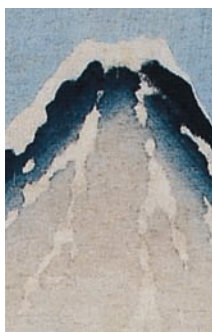
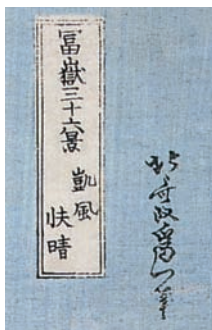
sensuous side of things, joined in either Buddhist or Shinto ceremonies as the taste of the moment prompted, and regarded all gods alike with a feeling of easy companionship. Hokusai was the first to give effect to this sentiment in art. Indeed, in his determination to mark the links that join the immortals with mortal men, he is not afraid of caricature.

Mount Fuji Seen from Kanaya on the Road to Tōkaidō
(Tōkaidō Kanaya no Fuji)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1831
Nishiki-e, 25 x 38 cm (*ōban*)

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





The fat Hotei was half human even with the strictest of the old masters. But they never revelled in the extravagant inflation of his paunch that delighted their less reverent junior. At the same time, Hokusai was the first to make goddesses really beautiful by blending with their traditional attributes the grace and suavity of the living women around him. His gods, in fact,

Blue Fuji

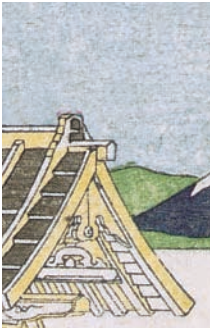
from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Aizuri-e (blue woodblock print), 25.5 x 35.5 cm (*ōban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris



富士山景
雲
快晴

時宗
長閑



are gods of the people, who have put off their austerity and remoteness to become real and familiar comrades. Monsters, ghosts, and demons are treated in the same spirit. They remain superhuman because it is the essence of their nature, but they are no longer misty and indefinite, or even invincible. Hokusai's dragons,

View of the Mitsui Store on Suruga Street in Edo
(Edo Surugacho Mitsumise ryakuzu)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), approx. 25 x 38 cm (*ōban*)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





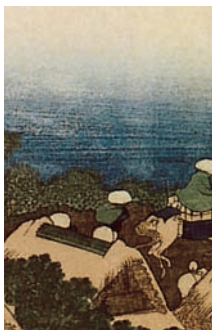
for instance, are drawn with a detail of scale and claw and spine that makes their plunge from a whirl of storm-cloud seem quite a possibility. The gigantic spider with the horrible appendages of a cuttlefish, the fox with nine floating, waving tails, the giants, and the demons are described with a nicety that, if it makes their terror less vague, makes it at the same time more actual.

Aoyama Pines

from the series *Thirty-Six Views on Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.7 x 38 cm (*ōban*)

Private collection



Yet, lest we should be frightened too much, the monsters are generally represented as getting the worst of it in their meetings with mortal heroes. The dragon drinks the nine fatal cups of sake, the spider is slain by the glaive of Hiraiño-Hôsho, and the thunder demon kneels in terror before the prodigious infant Kintoki. An exception must be made in the case of the ghosts. Hokusai's phantoms are usually very unpleasant. Even the caprices of Leonardo,

Dawn at Isawa in Kai Province

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.3 x 36.9 cm (*ōban*)
Private collection





Bruegel, or Goya never invented anything as ghastly as the apparition of the murdered wife in the tenth *Hokusai manga*: that monstrous, mutilated, idiot embryo, whose claw-like hands and single glaring eye are eloquent of irresponsible ferocity. Had the artist been cursed with the bitterness of a Salvator, he evidently could have done work of a kind it is not comfortable to think about.

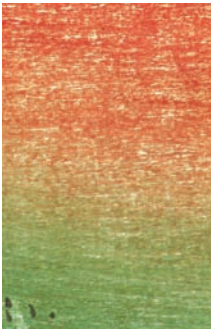


The Back of Mount Fuji from Minobu River
(Minobugawa ura Fuji)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1835

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.6 x 38 cm (*ōban*)

Peter Morse Collection



Fortunately Hokusai bore the world no grudge, and did not always draw ghosts. His manner changes when he has to deal with the national heroes of China and of his own country. The grace and fluency which characterise his sketches of contemporary subjects are replaced by the decisive angularity that marks the finest Chinese naturalism, though its calm grandeur is entirely absent.

South Wind, Clear Sky, or Red Fuji (Gaifu kaisei)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26.1 x 38.2 cm (*ōban*)
British Museum, London





The accusation of conventionalism or absurdity which might reasonably be brought against the prints of heroes, if the compositions were not so majestic, the execution so perfect, and the vigour of the movements so fresh and so unusual in a century that has apparently forgotten Rubens, fails absolutely when Hokusai comes to draw the men and women about him.

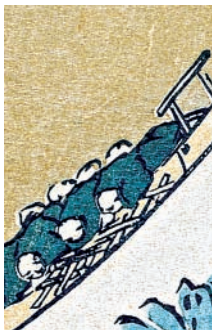


The Sazai Hall of the Temple of the Five Hundred Rakan (Gohyaku rakanji Sazaidō)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.5 x 37.9 cm (*ōban*)
Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden





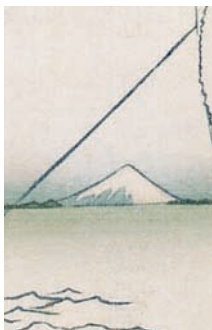
His touch smooth, undisturbed, unerring, includes in its easy sweep men, women, and children in every stage of motion or rest, noting affectionately those instinctive, momentary gestures which make action natural. With the stiff ceremonials of the court he has no sympathy, but never tires of drawing the people among whom he lived,

Under a Great Wave off the Coast at Kanagawa
or The Great Wave (Kanagawa oki namiura)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.9 x 38 cm (*ōban*)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York





the artisans, shopkeepers, and country folk in all their varied amusements and employments. Actors alone he avoids. The sets of the forty-seven *ronin* are of course exceptions, but they are works of his early manhood, when perhaps a certain pride in his ancestry may have caused him to regard that one legend as something apart

At Sea off Kazusa (Kazusa no kairo)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

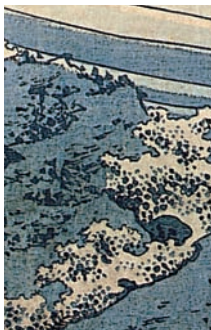
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26 x 38.4 cm (*ōban*)
Private collection





from the ordinary theatrical world that was so popular with his contemporaries. The humanity he really loves is for the most part a busy humanity.

Yet it is after all with the artisan class among whom he lived that Hokusai's sympathy is keenest. He knew by heart not only the figures of the workers and the action of their limbs, but the whole circumstance of their



Kajikazawa in Kai Province (Kōshū Kajikazawa)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26 x 38.4 cm (*ōban*)
Henry L. Phillips Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York



富士山麓
甲州
石川

富士山麓
甲州
石川



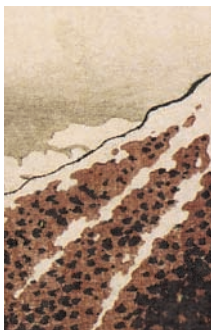
business and private lives, from the machines they work to their kitchen utensils. Volume VIII of the *Hokusai manga*, for instance, may not be particularly exciting from an artist's point of view, but a glance at it will show how thoroughly the designer was master of the details of weaving and the action of a loom. Hokusai in fact had the whole life of the lower-class Japanese at his finger tips.

Mishima Peak in Kai Province (Kōshū Mishima-goe)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.6 x 37.8 cm (*ōban*)
Peter Morse Collection





His attitude towards them is not that of a Millet – for the Japanese are a cheerful race, to whom their daily toil brings no sadness – but rather that of a Rubens, with the humour of a Daumier, and something of the feminine insight of a Watteau. He knows how men are convulsed by violent exertion; he feels the rhythmic swing of their bodies.

Rain Storm below the Summit (Sanka hakūu)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.9 x 38.2 cm (*ōban*)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





He knows the graceful bearing of the Japanese woman, the sweeping curves of her dress, the delicate fullness of her neck and limbs. He knows how children claw and crawl and waddle. Yet more than all, he knows that every motion and almost every attitude of rest has its ridiculous side, and it is this side that appeals to him.



Ejiri in Suruga Province (Sunshū Ejiri)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.7 x 38.1 cm (*ōban*)
British Museum, London





Can anything be at once more pathetic and yet more humorous than the noble composition of blind men struggling in a stream from the *Gwafu*, where we hardly know whether to pity their helplessness or laugh at the comicality of their gestures. Nevertheless, of all painters of mirth he is the one who is least dependent upon caricature.



The Fields of Umezawa Hamlet in Sagami Province
(Sōshū Umezawazai)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), approx. 25 x 38 cm (*ōban*)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





He can of course caricature perfectly, but his mirth is too genuinely artistic, his skills of hand too perfect, his eye too accurate for exaggeration to have a permanent place in his design. His contemporaries and his pupils make their countrymen too delicately graceful or too absurdly grotesque. Hokusai alone has been able to keep the middle course, and render their comeliness and gaiety with that temperate emphasis that makes them real and living.

The Coast at Tago near Ejiri on the Road to Tōkaidō
(Tōkaidō Ejiri Tago-no-ura ryakuzu)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), approx. 25.7 x 38 cm (*ōban*)
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris





In animals he is quick to note character. All his beasts are full of it, from the rat (in the print room of the British Museum) nibbling the pepper pod to the furious tiger carried down the waterfall (*Hokusai manga XIII*), or the great kindly elephant. But more than all, he loves their wildness. Birds, reptiles, fish, and quadrupeds alike cease in his hands to be the stuffed figures which even the mighty Dürer or the delicate Pisanello were content to draw,



Pit Sawyers in the Mountains of Tōtomi (Tōtomi Sanchu)

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830-1832

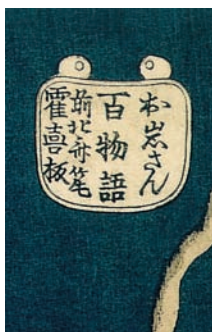
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print),
approx. 25 x 38 cm (*ōban*)

Private collection





but are “imperturbable, standing at ease with nature”. His shaggy ponies kick and prance, his puppies sprawl, his birds scream and flirt and tumble and peck, his carp whirl in graceful curves, his dories plod along with great vacant eyes that contrast strongly with the fierce glance of some great sea marauder or the deadly fixed glare of the cuttlefish. He has a special love for crabs, with their scrambling walk, their neatly-



The Ghost of Oiwa (Oiwasan)

from the series *One Hundred Ghost Stories*
(*Hyaku monogatari*), 1831

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26.2 x 18.7 cm (*chūban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





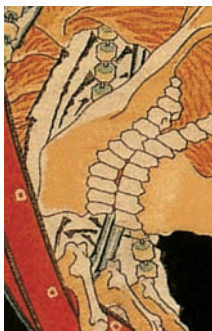
jointed plate-armour, and the double-page plate devoted to them in the *Gwafu* is one of his most successful designs. He is no scientific anatomist, he has an eye only for the outside of things, and yet he can invent animals that really seem alive. Witness the tiger among the pine needles and the curious studies, two out of several large drawings, for it. He had to invent his tiger, since that animal is unknown in Japan.

The Home of Dishes (Sara Yashiki)

from the series *One Hundred Ghost Stories*
(*Hyaku monogatari*), 1831-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.5 x 18.6 cm (*chūban*)
Clarence Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





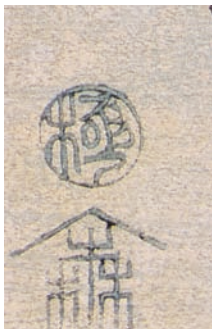
And those who are acquainted with the tiger of Japanese tradition – that inflated tabby who never manages to look fierce – will understand how little help could come from that quarter. He is equally at home with trees and plants. His drawing of leaves, flowers, and stems in detail is as perfect as it can be. But in the treatment of masses of foliage he is hindered by the national custom of doing without shadow, and so his foliage in bulk becomes frankly conventional.

The Ghost of Kohada Koheiji (Kohada Koheiji)

from the series *One Hundred Ghost Stories*
(*Hyaku monogatari*), 1831-1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.8 x 18.5 cm (*chūban*)
Clarence Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago



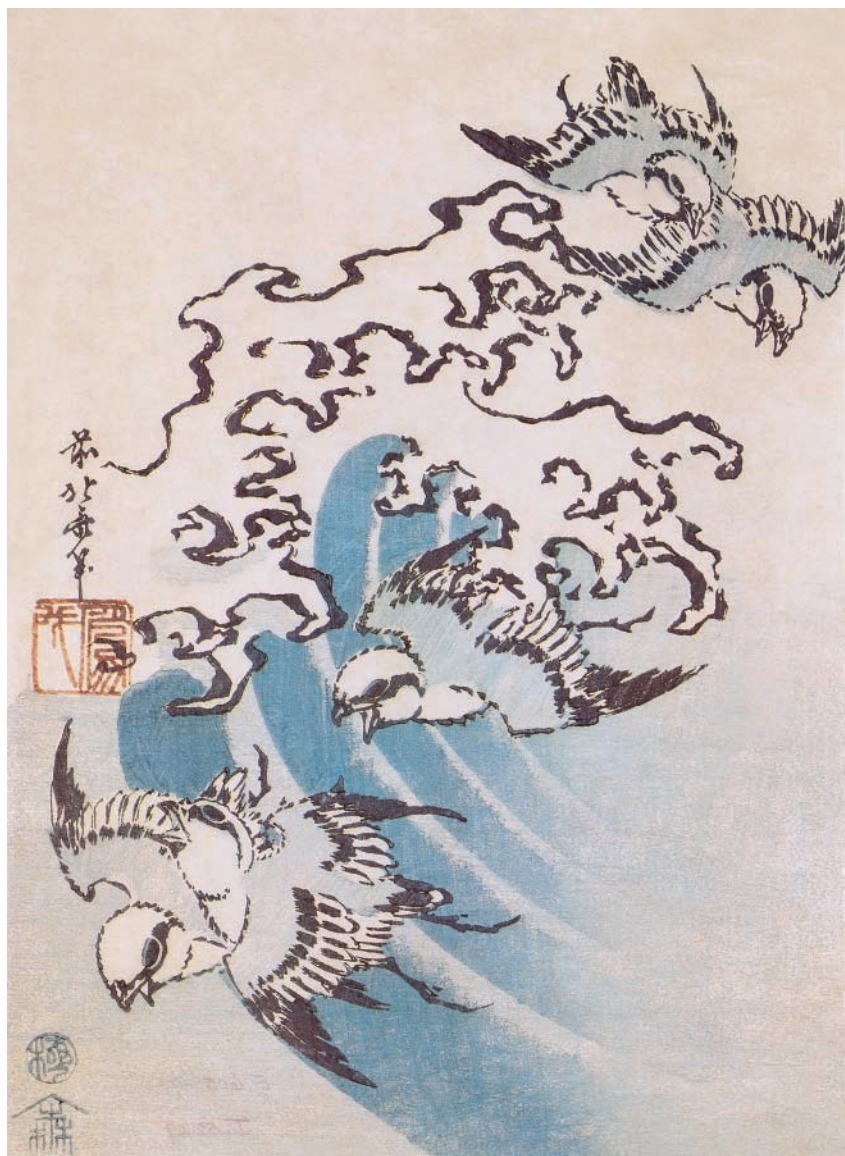


Occasionally the convention is not a happy one. Even in careful and elaborate compositions he sometimes fails to attain that last perfection of repose which marks the noblest art, through the obtrusiveness of some too-lightly-suggested bough, whose scraggy proportions irritate our scientific eyes. His love of flowers differs from that of Korin or Utamaro in a preference for broadness of mass rather than the delicacy of detail, though he can work carefully enough

Chidori Birds Fluttering above the Crests of Waves

c. 1831

Aizuri-e (blue woodblock print), *koban*
Victoria and Albert Museum, London





if he chooses. He feels the spring of a bough when a bird alights upon it, or the play of curves among the blades of wind-ruffled grass. Rocks alone seem to drive him to extravagance or to the formulae of the Chinese artists who had preceded him by a thousand years. Nevertheless, his crags, if usually impossible in structure, are imposing in mass,



Gotenyama in Shinagawa on the Road to Tōkaidō

from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*
(*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1831-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26 x 39 cm (*ōban*)

Private collection





and the comparative failure may perhaps be explained by the amorphous nature of the volcanic rocks of which the Japanese islands are in the main composed. The stones in *Hokusai manga II* are very evidently salty crystalline of some sort, just as the cleavage of the long slab jutting into the sea in *Hokusai manga VII* is quite sufficiently indicated. His attitude is always that of the painter of aspect rather than the painter of analysis. Hence,

Hawks and Cherry Trees

1832-1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 50.2 x 22.2 cm
Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, D.C.





when Hokusai deals with the nude in violent action, as in some of his large figures of wrestlers, his indication of straining muscles is not the sort of thing that would pass muster in the Academy schools. Yet where he has actual experience to go upon, where he is uninfluenced by the mannerisms either of China or of his Japanese predecessors and contemporaries, the result is very different.



Turtles Swimming

1832-1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 49.9 x 22.7 cm
Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





HOKUSAI – THE PAINTER OF LANDSCAPE

The geological peculiarities of Japan have already been mentioned. The long train of islands extending nearly from the coast of Siberia to the tropics contains within itself almost every variety of scenery and climate, which to a certain extent is focused, together with history, civilisation, and commerce, in the island of Nippon. Like England, this island is washed by an ocean current,

Cranes on a Snow Pine Tree

from the series *Large Images of Nature*
c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 52.7 x 23.6 cm (*nagaban*)
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





and has, in consequence, a similar climate, only rather warmer and damper. Partly owing to its volcanic nature, partly owing to the fact that the whole string of islands is merely the summit of an enormous ridge, that plunges abruptly on the east into one of the deepest depressions of the Pacific, the country as a whole is mountainous, though, with the exception of Fuji and one or two others, the mountains are of no very considerable height.

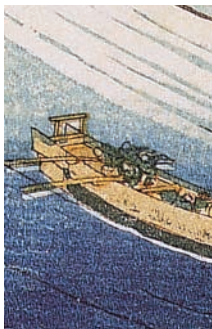
Collecting Shells at Low Tide

c. 1832-1834

Colour on silk, 54.3 x 86.2 cm

Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts, Osaka





It is well-watered by numerous rocky rivers, whose tree-clad gorges remind one of Scotland, just as certain of the seaside places at the extremity of the alluvial plains are, in the distance, not unlike some of our own watering-places. Variety of elevation and a temperate climate combine to encourage a flora of the most varied kind. The flat country, by the rivers, generally devoted to the cultivation of rice, grows plants, the bamboo for instance,

Choshi in Chiba Province (Sōshū Choshi)

from the series *One Thousand Images of the Sea*
(*Chi-e no umi*), 1832-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18.2 x 25.6 cm (*chūban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





that are semi-tropical or tropical. The hills are covered with pine trees, while the gardens and roadsides are gay with cherry and plum trees, or shadowed by cedars. The great avenues of the latter tree which line many of the now-almost-deserted highways are, perhaps, a more impressive reminder of bygone state than even the temples with their wonderful carvings and gay red lacquer that contrast so well with the dark foliage.

The River Tone in Kazusa Province (Sōshū Tonegawa)

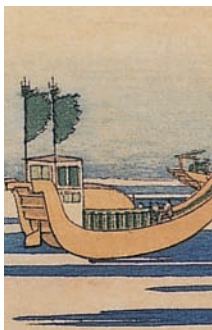
from the series *One Thousand Images of the Sea*
(*Chi-e no umi*), 1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 17.1 x 25.7 cm (*chūban*)
British Museum, London





The variations of the climate, the ever-present mist that in warm weather allows the distance to be visible only for a short time in the early morning, coupled with this diversity of scenery, make the country an ideal one for the landscape painter who can do no more than copy the scene before him.



Autumn in Chōkō (Chōkō shūsei)

from the series *Eight Views of Ryūkyū*
(*Ryūkyū bakkei*), c. 1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.8 x 37.9 cm (*ōban*)
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu



長虹秋景
琉球八景
本北齋鳥一筆



Beautiful as the country is, the beauty shown in the work of its landscape artists is a different thing from the reality. Even Hiroshige, the greatest realist of them all, who draws his Fuji with the spreading cone that one sees in a photograph, in his search for the picturesque exaggerates the slopes of minor eminences, makes rocks more rugged, trees more vast, grass more green, and seas more blue. Hokusai was born some fifty years earlier,



Chinese Poet Li Bai

from the series *Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika shashinkyō*), 1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 52.1 x 23.2 cm (*nagaban*)
Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba





and had no forerunners but the landscapists of the Kano and Chinese schools, whose toppling precipices, jagged crags, spiky trees, and intrusive expanses of flat cloud are endlessly iterated, alike in precious *kakemono* and cheap popular guidebooks. It is not until Hokusai appears in the *Hokusai manga* as a mature and individual artist that his landscape is really an important thing.

Chinese Poet Su Dongpo

from the series *Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika shashinokyō*), 1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 49.7 x 22.5 cm (*nagaban*)
Nellie P. Carter Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





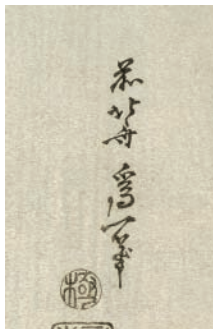
Our western feeling for landscape has always been rather for what is cheerful and pleasant. We admit the pensive poetry of Gainsborough or Corot, but do not at heart admire, as we ought to admire, the grander horizons of which Titian and Rembrandt give us an occasional glimpse. We fail to appreciate,

Fishing by Torchlight in Kai Province (Kōshū hiburi)

from the series *One Thousand Images of the Sea*
(*Chi-e no umi*), 1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 18.8 x 26 cm (*chūban*)
Kate A. Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





except in a commercial sense, the mightiness of Turner's early maturity, the grave accomplishment of Crome, the magnificence of the Lucas mezzotints after Constable, the solemnity of Wilson, Girtin, and Cozens. These latter are of course technically imperfect, yet, the imperfection once granted, they were masters of a grandeur and simplicity which their successors never equalled.

Iris and Grasshopper

from the series *Large Flowers*

c. 1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26.6 x 39.3 cm (*ōban*)

Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





The fashionable painters of our own time are content with what is sufficiently pretty and sufficiently near to the public notion of the spots and sparkles of nature to be readily saleable. Even those whose views are more serious, whose sympathies are more profound, are content with the foreground material of the wayside. A few trees nobly arranged, a heroic barn set against a misty twilight satisfy their highest ambitions.

Kusunoki Tamonmaru Masashige and
Tsunehisa Betto of Yao (Kusunoki Tamonmaru
Masashige, Yao no Betto Tsunehisa)

from the series *Heroes in Combat*
c. 1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 36.8 x 24.4 cm
Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo

綱多門丸正重



八尾此別當常久

栄吉

八



With Hokusai it was otherwise. As his figure drawing embraces the whole living world known to him, so his conception of landscape includes every phase of the scenery of Japan, from the garden with its toy crags to the immensity of mountain, ocean, and wilderness. Nor does he view them only with the tranquil insight that makes his human world so gay and humorous. He is the only artist who has ever realised the majesty of winter.

Morning Glories and a Tree Frog

from the series *Large Flowers*

1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.9 x 38.2 cm (*ōban*)

Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





The grey sky of Hiroshige is bitterly cold, but his snow almost always suggests a thaw. He has a preference for the Christmas-like side of winter weather. Hokusai knows the iron intensity of frost, as he shows by the moonlight scene among the crags in the *Gwafu*, and the terrible desolation of country buried under snowdrifts, emphasised at one time by a suggestion of utter remoteness from humanity, as in the double-

Peonies and Butterfly

from the series *Large Flowers*

1833-1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.7 x 38 cm (*ōban*)

Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





peaked mountain of the seventh *Hokusai manga*, at another, by the introduction of man, become impotent in the face of the vast impassive nature around him. Yet, while he sees that the repose of nature may be terrible, Hokusai does not forget that her motion is terrible also. An adherence to Chinese convention often makes Hokusai's drawing of breakers look fantastic, but they never fail of being furious – as furious as are his storms.



Banana Plantation in Chuto (Chuto shoten)

from the series *Eight Views of Ryūkyū*
(*Ryūkyū bakkei*), 1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.4 x 36.3 cm (*ōban*)
Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





The convention of black lines with which he represents falling rain is as effective as his conventions for water are fanciful.

Hokusai's feeling for rivers is like his feeling for mountains. He knows them well from source to sea, but has an instinctive preference for their grander aspects, the wide expanse of a reedy estuary, the massive current of the lower reaches that swings the ferry boat this way and that,



Sunset in Jungai

from *Eight Views of Ryūkyū*
(*Ryūkyū happei*), 1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.8 x 37.5 cm (*ōban*)
Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





the long pools above which the stream moves gently under pine woods, its surface dimmed by a veil of mist, and, still more, the rapids where the water whirls down among rocks and fantastic tree trunks. Best of all, he loves the waterfall, whether it takes the form of a long veil of foam sliding over the edge of a mossy precipice into some deep chasm, or the downward rush of a bulkier torrent like that in which the red horse



The Kirifuri Waterfalls on Mount Kurokami in
Shimotsuke Province
(Shimotsuke Kurokamiyama Kirifuri no taki)

from the series *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*), c. 1832-1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 38.9 x 26.3 cm (*ōban*)
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





(a memory of the legend of Yoshiitsune) is being washed, or that in the plate in the thirteenth *Hokusai manga*, where a tiger savagely struggling is swept away into space – the terror of the plunge being suggested by the plain seen below under the arch of the falling water. No other painter has looked things in the face so frankly – has dared to express the stolid, everlasting might of nature, against which scheming man and strong beast alike are powerless.



The Moon over the Yodo River and the Castle of Osaka

from the series *Snow, Moon, and Flowers*
(*Setsugekka*), c. 1833

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25 x 36.6 cm (*ōban*)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam





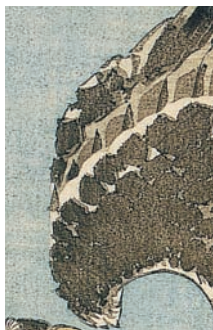
Not that man's work is wholly empty or feeble. Hokusai is not only a painter of landscape, but the painter of the life of his own country, and, as such, it is inevitable that he should deal with the landscape as modified by human effort; the structures under which men live or worship, by which they elude or overcome the opposition of nature. He knows every joint of the complicated wooden roof of the temples (*Hokusai manga* V),

Two Carp

c. 1833

Ushima-e, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 23.2 x 27.7 cm
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





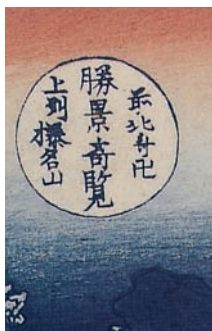
as well as the simpler panels and frames of ordinary dwelling houses, and uses their long, simple lines to contrast with more broken and lively forms. He is especially fond of ships, from the clumsy, square-built junk with its naked, active sailors to the humble craft of the fisherfolk and the ferryman's punt, whose motley crowd of passengers is always as delightful to him as was the idea of the river's might eluded by man, that seems to

Falcon in Flight

1834-1835

Uchiwa-e, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 22 x 31.3 cm
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





have directed his tastes towards selecting the *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces* as a companion to his great series of *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces* and the *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*. Apart from the opportunities of design afforded by the setting and spacing of formal architecture, he is in love with the air of dignity that these structures have when viewed from below,

Mount Haruna in Kozuke Province (Joshu Harunayama)

from the series *Rare Views of Famous Landscapes*
(*Shokei kiran*), 1834-1835

Ushima-e, nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 23.1 x 29.8 cm
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





their great timbers rising high above the vast expanse of plain or mountain seen behind and beneath them. So much for the general thoughts that seem to underlie Hokusai's landscape work. The peculiarities of detail, the first thing that strike the novice, are really matters of small importance. His clouds, his trees, his rocks, his water, even his great mountains, are frankly conventional, and only in the two last does the convention seem quite adequate. His design often verges on the extravagant, and his

Sodegaura in Shimosa Province

from the series *Rare Views of Famous Landscapes*
(*Shokei kiran*), c. 1834-1835

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 23.6 x 30.1 cm
Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba





topography on the impossible; nevertheless he has always the knack of giving that idea of reality, of life, which is characteristic of his figure subjects. At first sight a composition strikes one as unnatural, but on looking into it, we find evidence everywhere of things actually seen – a row of birds pecking and chattering on a paling, odd funguses growing inside a hollow tree, a distance alive with little, busy people. This exquisite insight is, indeed, characteristic of the artists of Japan.



The Amida Waterfall on the Road to Kiso (Kisoji no oku Amida no taki)

from the series *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*), 1834-1835

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 38.7 x 25.9 cm (*ōban*)
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





Harunobu, Koriūsai, Shunshō, and Utamaro add to it extraordinary invention and delicacy of line and colour. Kiyonaga, less delicate and far less inventive than they, gained and retains popularity in virtue of his striving for realism. Hokusai stands in a place apart from them all, because he combined with this insight a majesty of design, a seriousness of purpose,

Cuckoo and Azaleas (Hototogitsū, satsuki)

from the series *Small Flowers*

1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.3 x 18.2 cm (*chūban*)

Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris

子規 かき

杜鵑 さつき
花



只鷺白畫山外製
杜宇初聞第一聲

楊誠齋

宋詩為本





and a comprehension of the true relation between man and nature, that even Western art has yet to parallel. That his true greatness has sometimes to be read between the lines of his work, is the result of nationality and circumstance, of technical limitations, for which proper allowance is not usually made. Space does not allow of their being discussed at great length, but the few notes given in the following chapter may at least serve to prevent misunderstanding.

Crossbill and Thistle (Isuka, oniazami)

from the series *Small Flowers*

1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.3 x 18.2 cm (*chūban*)

Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris

鵲

小薊

槐坡

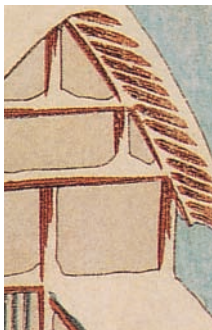
茶話



日
月
花
鳥
詩
集

小薊





CHARACTERISTICS OF HOKUSAI'S WORK

As the reader will have already surmised, by far the larger portion of Hokusai's handiwork consists of brush drawings in black and white for engraving on wood. He left a great number of paintings, but these are, for the most part, so inferior to his engraved designs that they deserve no mention here. They were probably 'pot-boilers', painted to supply some pressing need, for they are frequently hasty in handling and fortuitous in arrangement.

The Boat Bridge in Sano in Kōzuke Province (Kōzuke Sano funabashi no kozu)

from the series *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku meikyō kiran*), c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.4 x 37.2 cm (*ōban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





In considering the engraved designs, we have to realise, in the first place, the limitations under which they were produced. National tradition prohibited the introduction of shadow, but this prohibition would have had little weight with an independent spirit like that of Hokusai. His own words, already quoted, prove that he had seen how, by shadow, the Europeans produce a deceptive imitation of nature, but he adds that the Japanese artist is content with form and colour.

Lake Suwa in Shimosa Province

from the series *Rare Views of Famous Landscapes*
(*Shokei kiran*), c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 21.9 x 28.9 cm
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





That the most truly decorative painting of the West, from Giotto to Puvis de Chavannes, has in practice limited itself in a similar way is a warning against condemning Hokusai's choice too hastily.



When due allowance has been made for these peculiarities, it at once becomes evident how magnificent a draughtsman Hokusai was. His hand was so steady that he could draw like a machine. His knowledge was so complete,



Canary and Peonies (Shakuyaku, kanaari)

from the series *Small Flowers*

1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.2 x 17.9 cm (*chūban*)

Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





that he could get straight to reality with the directness of a Rembrandt. His early work shows that he could imitate the feminine airs and graces of his predecessors; his later, that he had the secret of the vigour and force of the great Chinese masters. His skill was limited only by the shores of his native island, for, as we have seen, he drew most of its contents that were worth the drawing. He was master of the life and movements of the men and beasts around him,

Bullfinch and Weeping Cherry Tree in Bloom
(Uso, shidaresakura)

from the series *Small Flowers*
c. 1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.1 x 18.2 cm (*chūban*)
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





as no other artist has ever mastered the animate world of his own country. Besides drawing real things, he could design the unreal, and has created ghosts and monsters with a spirit and individuality that are quite unparalleled. He has the misfortune to be a humorist as well, so that his inimitable caricatures, his tendency to the attitude of the laughing philosopher, have given him,

Suspended Bridge on Mount Gyodo near Ashikaga
(Ashikaga Gyōdōzan Kumo no kakehashi)

from the series *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku meikyō kiran*), c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.7 x 38.4 cm (*ōban*)
Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo



with the shallow and the ill-informed, the reputation of being merely the funny man of Japan. He draws the largest mass as magnificently as he draws the tiniest detail. His hand treats the great curves of wave or mountain, the sweeping folds of a dress, as accurately and easily as he draws the turn of an eye or a mouth, the gesture of a finger, or the engraving on a sword hilt.

Yet, with all his natural gifts, he was too much devoted to his art to run the risk of failure

The Suspension Bridge on the Border of Hida and Etchû Provinces (Hietsu no sakei tsuribashi)

from the series *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces* (*Shokoku meikyô kiran*), c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26 x 38.3 cm (*ôban*)

Gerhard Pulverer Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.





through negligence. His whole history is a record of eager, unceasing study, and those who have looked over any considerable collection of his drawings will begin to realise that even a heaven-born genius does not achieve great success without great labour.

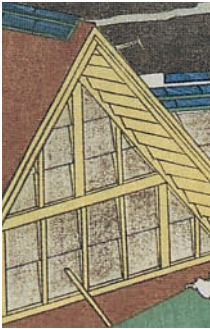
His colour cannot be praised so unreservedly. During his youth and early manhood, the colour instinct of the Japanese popular painters reached its climax in the hands of Harunobu, Hokusai's own master Shunshō,



Abe no Nakamaro

from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(Hyakunin issbu uba ga etoki), 1835
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.8 x 37 cm (*ōban*)
 De Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,
 San Francisco





and Utamaro. The climax was as short-lived as it was extraordinary, for by the beginning of the 19th century Japanese colour had fallen from its supreme perfection of elaborate harmony to the vulgar violence of Toyokuni and his followers. Hokusai, who imitated Shunshō and Utamaro with considerable success while their influence was predominant, had too much independence to rush to the opposite extreme when it became fashionable.

Fujiwara no Michinobu Ason

from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin issbu uba ga etoki*), 1835

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.8 x 36.7 cm (*ōban*)
Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





The greens and crimsons and purples that clash so violently in the work of Toyokuni were subdued and modified by him until they ceased to be discordant, and combine into harmonies that are certainly pleasant if not exactly noble. It was not, however, until the revolt against popular convention was made a certain success by the publication of the *Hokusai manga* that he ventured upon the elaborate prints in colour on which his fame of today rests.

Kakinomoto no Hitomaro

from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(Hyakunin issbu uba ga etoki), 1835
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.4 x 36.5 cm (*ōban*)
 Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit



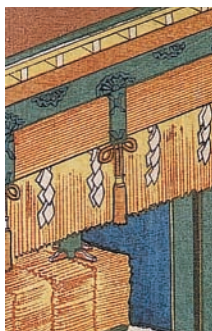


Compared with the efforts of his contemporaries, with the occasional exception of Hiroshige, the result is masterly. Yet it will not stand comparison in every respect with the best work of 18th-century Japan any more than his drawing, just because it is not conventional, it does not quite catch certain delicate graces of Utamaro's best work. The colours in Hokusai's five great series – *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces*,



The Poet Onakatomi no Yoshinobu ason
(onakatomi no Yoshinobu ason)

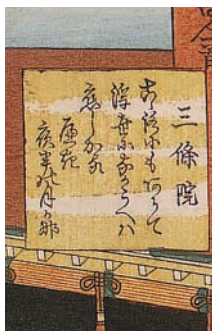
from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin issbu uba ga etoki*), 1835
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25 x 36.8 cm (*ōban*)
Private collection



Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces, the flower series, and the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* – are delightful for their frankness and purity rather than for any complex subtlety.



The result of his simple tastes is evident in all his finer plates. The combinations and contrasts of colour are quite in harmony with the characteristic features of his design – at once fresh and massive, though his preference for a hot, ferrous red is apt to be rather



Emperor Sanjo, Removed from Power (Sanjoin)

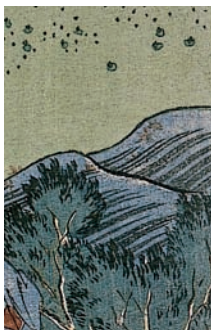
from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin issbu uba ga etoki*), 1835

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 26.1 x 36.3 cm (*ōban*)
British Museum, London





overwhelming when it is not contrasted with a corresponding amount of cool pigment. At the same time, his paintings show clearly enough that in later life this taste for hot colour became habitual. After all, it is only because Hokusai is one of a nation of colourists that his gifts in this respect seem limited. By 1830, when his enthusiasm for landscape was at its height,



Ariwara no Narihira

from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*), 1835-1836

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 24.8 x 37.1 cm (*ōban*)
Gift of James A. Michener, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu





the Chinese influence had become part of his being, until, when he worked upon the hero books, his design has an angular force through which Japanese graces peep but rarely. As the peculiarities of their execution in these latter cannot be examined without a study of the mannerisms of Chinese painting, there is no space to discuss them adequately here. It will therefore be best to

Sarumaru Dayu

from the series *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(Hyakunin issbu uba ga etoki), 1835
Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25 x 36.5 cm (*ōban*)
 Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris





confine our attention to the design of Hokusai's middle period, when the characteristics of the mainland and of the artist's own island are most perfectly blended. His design, in fact, instead of being eccentric is unusually direct and simple.

This simplicity, this avoidance of anything like equal quantities, really lies at the root of Hokusai's artistic dignity.



Ono Waterfall on the Kisokaidō Road (Kisokaidō Ono no bakufa)

from the series *Voyage to the Waterfalls of the Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*), c. 1832

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 38.1 x 26 cm (*ōban*)
Clarence Buckingham Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago





When he wishes to make anything look high he places it high up on the page, not only because this conveys the impression of its being far above the spectator's horizon, but also because an exceedingly unequal division of the page at once attracts attention to the larger mass. Therefore he conveys the impression of space, and suggests a vast environment, unseen in the actual picture,



The Tenma Bridge in Settsu Province (Sesshū Tenmabashi)

from the series *Picturesque Views of Famous Bridges from Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku meikyō kiran*), c. 1834

Nishiki-e (polychrome woodblock print), 25.5 x 37.2 cm (*ōban*)
Henry L. Phillips Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York





by letting the lines of the composition run out of it freely so that they appear to be unlimited, in contrast to the Western notion that everything must be strictly confined within the picture space, and that the corners must be rounded off or merged in shadow. If a study of Hokusai did no more than deal the deathblow of the vignette, that emasculate heresy which has for two centuries been the refuge of the tradesman and the dunce, it would confer upon European painters the boon that they need most.

Flute Player Sitting on a Willow Branch, Contemplating Mount Fuji

1839

Paint on silk, 36.2 x 50.9 cm

Freer Gallery of Art / Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, D.C.





Hokusai's taste for Chinese methods often leads him into an imitation of their forcible angular handling that tends to make individual parts of his work look fussy. Fortunately he combines with this taste the national love for exquisitely-spaced, straight lines and long, sweeping contours that form its most perfect complement. Indeed, in the hands of his predecessors, the harmonies of gentle curves and straight lines became as languid as their colour, and Hokusai's jagged brush-work was just what

Phoenix

1842-1845

Colour on paper, 38.5 x 52 cm

Gansho Temple, Obuse



彩鳳何分翠羽身



was wanted to revive the national style. European painters too often design with small curves, and have only half understood that the perfect spacing of straight lines which makes fine architecture or fine furniture can also go a long way towards making fine pictures.

Universal, indeed, is the achievement of Hokusai that the painter who can learn nothing from a careful study of his prints must either be unfit for his trade, or a greater genius than any the world has hitherto known.

Old Tiger in the Snow

1849

Ink, colour, and *gofun* on silk, 39 x 50 cm

Private collection



Index

A

<i>Abe no Nakamaro</i>	225
<i>Act I (Shōdan)</i>	27, 73
<i>Act V</i>	71
<i>Actor Ichikawa Komazō III as Shirai Gonpachi</i> <i>and Actor Matsumoto Kōshirō IV as Banzui Chōbei</i>	11
<i>The Amida Waterfall on the Road to Kiso (Kisoji no oku Amida no taki)</i>	207
<i>Aoyama Pines</i>	125
<i>Ariwara no Narihira</i>	235
<i>An Artisan's Shop</i>	29
<i>At Sea off Kazusa (Kazusa no kairo)</i>	137
<i>Autumn in Chōkō (Chōkō shūsei)</i>	175

B

<i>The Back of Mount Fuji from Minobu River (Minobugawa ura Fuji)</i>	129
<i>Banana Plantation in Chuto (Chuto shoten)</i>	191
<i>Blue Fuji</i>	121
<i>The Boat Bridge in Sano in Kōzuke Province (Kōzuke Sano funabashi no kozu)</i>	213
<i>Bullfinch and Weeping Cherry Tree in Bloom (Uso, shidaresakura)</i>	219

C

<i>Calligraphy Tools: an Octagonal China Jar with Brushes, next to an Ink Slab and a Stick of Sumi. In a Teapot, the Blooming Prune Tree Branch of the New Year</i>	97
<i>Canary and Peonies (Shakuyaku, kanaari)</i>	217
<i>Chidori Birds Fluttering above the Crests of Waves</i>	159
<i>Chinese Philosopher Sōshi Watching Butterflies</i>	89
<i>Chinese Poet Li Bai</i>	177
<i>Chinese Poet Su Dongpo</i>	179
<i>Choshi in Chiba Province (Sōshū Choshi)</i>	171
<i>The Coast at Tago near Ejiri on the Road to Tōkaidō (Tōkaidō Ejiri Tago-no-ura ryakuzu)</i>	149
<i>Collecting Shells at Low Tide</i>	169
<i>Collection of Surimonos Illustrating Fantastic Poems</i>	13
<i>Concert under the Wisteria</i>	21
<i>Cranes on a Snow Pine Tree</i>	167
<i>Crossbill and Thistle (Isuka, oniazami)</i>	211
<i>Crossing a Bridge</i>	35
<i>Cuckoo and Azaleas (Hototogitsu, satsuki)</i>	209

D

<i>Dawn at Isawa in Kai Province</i>	127
<i>Dawn of a New Year</i>	33
<i>Dwarf Pine in a Pot with a Basin and a Towel on a Towel Rack (Mayoke)</i>	99

E

<i>Ejiri in Suruga Province (Sunshū Ejiri)</i>	145
<i>Emperor Sanjo, Removed from Power (Sanjoin)</i>	233

F

<i>Falcon in Flight</i>	201
<i>The Fields of Umezawa Hamlet in Sagami Province (Sōshū Umezawazai)</i>	147
<i>Fishing by Torchlight in Kai Province (Kōshū hiburi)</i>	181
<i>Five Women, One Smoking a Pipe and Two Others Measuring a Piece of Fabric</i>	79
<i>Flute Player Sitting on a Willow Branch, Contemplating Mount Fuji</i>	243
<i>Fujiwara no Michinobu Ason</i>	227

G

<i>The Ghost of Kohada Koheiji (Kohada Koheiji)</i>	157
<i>The Ghost of Oiwa (Oiwasan)</i>	153
<i>Gods and Poets</i>	57
<i>Gotenyama in Shinagawa on the Road to Tōkaidō</i>	161

H

<i>Hatakeyama Shigetada Carrying His Horse</i>	91
<i>Hawks and Cherry Trees</i>	163
<i>The Hero Tametomo Surrounded by Demons on Onigashima Island</i> (<i>Island of the Demons</i>)	83
<i>The Home of Dishes (Sara Yashiki)</i>	155

I

<i>Illustrated Book of the Two Banks of the Sumida in One View</i> (<i>Ehon Sumidagawa ryogan ichiran</i>)	63
<i>Iris and Grasshopper</i>	183

K

<i>Kajikazawa in Kai Province (Kōshū Kajikazawa)</i>	139
<i>Kakinomoto no Hitomaro</i>	229
<i>Kintoki the Herculean Child with a Bear and an Eagle</i>	9
<i>The Kirifuri Waterfalls on Mount Kurokami in Shimotsuke Province</i> (<i>Shimotsuke Kurokamiyama Kirifuri no taki</i>)	195
<i>Kusunoki Tamonmaru Masashige and Tsunehisa Betto of Yao</i> (<i>Kusunoki Tamonmaru Masashige, Yao no Betto Tsunehisa</i>)	185

L / M

<i>Lake Suwa in Shimosa Province</i>	215
<i>Male Pheasant</i>	85
<i>A Mare and Her Foal</i>	15
<i>Mishima Peak in Kai Province (Kōshū Mishima-goe)</i>	141
<i>The Moon over the Yodo River and the Castle of Osaka</i>	197
<i>Morning Glories and a Tree Frog</i>	187
<i>Mount Fuji behind Cherry Trees in Bloom</i>	37
<i>Mount Fuji Seen from Kanaya on the Road to Tōkaidō (Tōkaidō Kanaya no Fuji)</i>	119
<i>Mount Fuji Seen from the Rice Fields in Owari Province (Bishū Fujimigahara)</i>	115
<i>Mount Fuji under High Bridge</i>	65
<i>Mount Haruna in Kozuke Province (Joshu Harunayama)</i>	203

O

<i>An Oiran and Her Two Shinzō Admiring the Cherry Trees in Bloom in Nakanochō</i>	19
<i>Old Tiger in the Snow</i>	247
<i>Ono Waterfall on the Kisokaidō Road (Kisokaidō Ono no bakufa)</i>	239

P

<i>Panoramic View of the Sumida Banks with the Shin Yanagibashi and Ryogokubashi Bridges</i>	49, 51, 53
<i>Peasants Surprised by a Storm</i>	105
<i>Peonies and Butterfly</i>	189
<i>Phoenix</i>	245

<i>Pit Sawyers in the Mountains of Tōtomi (Tōtomi Sanchu)</i>	151
<i>The Poet Onakatomi no Yoshinobu ason (onakatomi no Yoshinobu ason)</i>	231
<i>Precious Stones and Coral Illustrating the Menoseki (Agate)</i>	101
<i>Propitiatory Dance</i>	107

R

<i>Rain Storm below the Summit (Sanka hakūu)</i>	143
<i>The River of Jewels near Ide</i>	41
<i>The River of Jewels near Mishima</i>	43
<i>The River Tone in Kazusa Province (Sōshū Tonegawa)</i>	173

S

<i>Samurais on Horseback</i>	109
<i>The Sanctuary of Juniso in Yotsuya, Edo</i>	77
<i>Sarumaru Dayu</i>	237
<i>The Sazai Hall of the Temple of the Five Hundred Rakan (Gohyaku rakanji Sazaidō)</i>	133
<i>Self-Portrait of Hokusai at Eighty-Three</i>	4
<i>The Seven Gods of Fortune</i>	81
<i>Sodegaura in Shimosa Province</i>	205
<i>South Wind, Clear Sky, or Red Fuji (Gaifu kaisei)</i>	131

<i>Spring at Enoshima (Enoshima shunbō)</i>	25
<i>Standing Courtesan with an Apprentice</i>	39
<i>Suehirogari</i>	23
<i>Sumo Wrestlers Ki no Natora and Otomo no Yoshio</i>	113
<i>Sunset in Jungai</i>	193
<i>Suspended Bridge on Mount Gyodo near Ashikaga</i> <i>(Ashikaga Gyōdōzan Kumo no kakehashi)</i>	221
<i>The Suspension Bridge on the Border of Hida and Etchū Provinces</i> <i>(Hietsu no sakei tsuribashi)</i>	223
<i>The Swordsmith Munechika and the God of Inari</i>	67

T

<i>Tea House for Travellers</i>	59
<i>The Temple of Hongaji at Asakusa in Edo</i>	117
<i>The Tenma Bridge in Settsu Province (Sesshū Tenmabashi)</i>	241
<i>Three Women with a Telescope</i>	55
<i>Trees in Bloom in Yoshino</i>	103
<i>Turtles Swimming</i>	165
<i>Two Carp</i>	199
<i>Two Women and a Child on the Shore</i>	61
<i>Two Women and a Servant on the Banks of the Sumida;</i> <i>a Man Sealing the Bottom of a Boat</i>	47
<i>Two Women Puppeteers</i>	17

U

- Under a Great Wave off the Coast at Kanagawa, or The Great Wave*
(*Kanagawa oki namiura*) 135
- Ushigafuchi at Kudan (Kudan Ushigafuchi)* 75

V

- The Valiant Oi and the Chinese Warrior Fan Kuai* 93
- View of Koshigoe from Shichirigahama*
(*Shichirigahama yori Koshigoe o enbo*) 111
- View of the Mitsui Store on Suruga Street in Edo*
(*Edo Surugacho Mitsumise ryakuzu*) 123

W

- Whale Hunters on the Beach at Katase,*
near Enoshima Island, Illustrating the Purple Shell (Murasakigai) 95
- Woman beneath a Willow in Winter* 45
- Women with a Telescope* 31

Y

- Yamauba, Kintoki, and Various Animals* 87
- Young Girl from Ōhara* 69

