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Author: Salaman, Malcolm Charles (1855-1940)

Illustrator: Hokusai [Katsushika Hokusai] (1760-1849)

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MASTERS OF THE COLOUR PRINT

Hokusai

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1930

MASTERS OF THE COLOUR PRINT

1. ELYSE LORD
2. J. R. SMITH
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4. W. GILES
5. P. L. DEBUCOURT
6. HIROSHIGE
7. BRESSLERN-ROTH
8. HOKUSAI

Others in Preparation

*Printed and Engraved in
England by Herbert Reich,
Limited, 43 Belvedere Road,
London, S.E.1.*

[PLATE I](#) [PLATE II](#) [PLATE III](#) [PLATE IV](#)

[PLATE V](#) [PLATE VI](#) [PLATE VII](#) [PLATE VIII](#)

Of all the artists who designed the *Ukeyoye*, or popular prints, of Japan there was none like Hokusai, none with his natural independence of all artistic traditions and conventions, none who revelled so happily and freely in depicting every phase and aspect of the people's life he saw with his own eyes, or imagined with his own mind, none who was so pictorially versatile and original in conception, so wonderfully facile with a magic of draughtsmanship. "From the age of six I began to draw," wrote the master in his virile old age, "and for eighty-four years I have worked independently of the schools," and he playfully described himself as "the old man mad about drawing." Connoisseurs of his own country, accustomed only to admire and reverence art that followed the sacred traditions and ideals of the classical schools, would despise Hokusai as a vulgar artisan playing to the populace, while tolerating with respect the stately pictorial graces of such *Ukeyoye* masters as Harunobu, Kiyonaga and Utamaro, yet modern opinion in Europe and America has discovered Hokusai to be one of the great artists of the world, and Whistler himself paid him

homage along with Rembrandt and Velasquez. For Hokusai lived till his ninetieth year, and all the time his art was changing, developing, progressing, so that, as the years passed, his popular prints were impressed with masterpieces that only he could have designed. That is why so many more Western than Eastern writers have concerned themselves with Hokusai and great collections of his prints have been formed in Europe and America. One finds studies of him among the writings of the brothers de Goncourt, Bing, Anderson, Fenollosa, Strange, Laurence Binyon, Charles Holmes, Arthur Morrison, Duret, Gonse, Revon, Arthur D. Ficke, and the naively enthusiastic Japanese, Niguchi. Even those who are inclined to hesitate between Japanese and Western opinion find it difficult to deny to Hokusai's maturity the status of a master of imaginative design, revealing, in the conception of a scene, the very soul and wonder of it, such as one might see, perhaps, in a beautiful dream. His splendid maturity dates from 1812, when his epoch-making *Mangwa* began to appear, and it was signalised, between 1823 and 1830, by the *Thirty-Six Views of Fuji*, the *Waterfalls*, the *Bridges*, *Living Images of the Poets*, *Hundred Poems explained by the Nurse*, in original chromatic harmonies, and, a little later, *The Hundred Views of Fuji*, in monochrome.

Hokusai was an amazing personality, generally in the straits of poverty, yet always cheerfully, laughingly humorous, happy in the strivings of his art, working ceaselessly till his dying day, when he cried for further life. "If Heaven would give me but ten more years, nay, even five, I might still become a true artist." He was one of the most genuine and generous creatures that ever lived. However his plain-speaking might rebound against himself, money meant nothing to him except the means to subsist and buy material for his art. A peasant born, a peasant he remained all his long life, never pretending to be anything else, but he had in his soul the very genius of happiness, and could laugh away troubles with the joy of his art. So, wherever he might be—and he is said to have changed his dwelling-place over ninety times, sometimes to a hovel with bare necessities—beyond the pot-boilers he might have to draw under the pressure of circumstances, his artistic ideals shone always for the aspiring industry of his genius. Hokusai was born in the Honjo district of Yedo, as Tokyo used to be called, in the year 1760, while Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough, Chardin and Fragonard, and Goya were still painting, and he died in 1849, the year that Rossetti, Millais and Holman Hunt founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood under the inspiration of my revered old friend Ford Madox Brown. And, between these dates, the little art of the colour-print in England and France, which had not yet begun to effloresce, reached the acme of its brief fashionable favour, while in Japan, the polychrome woodcut which was just about to develop from its simpler form, in the creative hands of Harunobu, into the beautiful distinctive art it attained, was only temporarily arrested from decadence by the original genius of the two masters, Hiroshige and Hokusai.

What Hokusai's real patronymic was it is difficult to say. He chose to be known in the course of his life by a wilderness of appellations. According to the accident of circumstances he could change from one name to another. For the last fifty years of his life he called himself, with occasional variations, Katsushika Hokusai, adopting the first name from the quarter of Yedo in which he lived, and the second from the god Hokushin, for whom he had a special reverence. His father was a mirror-maker, strangely enough, since it was in *Ukeyoye*, the "Mirror of the Passing World," that Hokusai was to win his immortality. He began humbly. A boy of keen intelligence, he is said to have been a bookseller's assistant when he was twelve, imbibing an early interest in books. Next, at the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to a wood-engraver, and the work he did in this capacity during four years must have been of great value to him when, later, designing his prints, and though some of his early woodcuts are still extant, and perhaps are not remarkable, I can feel the technical spirit that influenced his designs to their splendid simplicity. Yet craftsmanship did not suffice, and at the impressionable age of eighteen he resolved to devote himself to art. He entered the studio of Katsukawa Shunsho, one of the most distinguished masters of the *Ukeyoye* school, who made a specialty of delineating actors in dramatic parts. He had a great influence and a number of pupils, and so readily did Hokusai conform to his conditions that he was soon allowed to call himself Katsukawa Shunro, with which name for a while he signed his prints. Having learnt, however, all that he wanted of Shunsho's teaching, Hokusai's natural independence irked at the restricted conventions of *Ukeyoye*, even though he experienced and reflected the masterly influence of Kiyonaga's style. So he turned for inspiration to the Kano school of painting, but this "treachery" so roused his master that he was incontinently expelled from the studio, and forbidden to use the name that Shunsho had awarded him. This artistic adventure, however, came to an end when Hokusai, having painted for a dealer a poster in the Kano manner, which was alien to his temperament, saw it torn in pieces as bad work by Shunsho's favourite pupil, and kept silence under the indignity, for he realised the criticism was just, and never forgot it. "If Shunsho had not insulted me," he said long afterwards, "I should never have become a great draughtsman." During his early years he was feeling for a style of his own, adopting the manner first of one master that appealed to him, then of another, assuming a new name for the practice of each, though his drawing would always reflect something of his own personality in an accent of realism. He illustrated many books, but in his attempts to discover his own art he was reduced to such poverty that for a bare subsistence he hawked trifles in the streets of Yedo. In 1789,

however, the year he began an odd friendship and collaboration with Bakin, the celebrated novelist, an unexpected commission to paint a festival banner was so generously paid for, that for the time he was comparatively "set upon his feet." Hokusai's reputation as a painter now increased, and he set himself again to the practical study of various chosen artists, especially of the Tosa school and the Ming painters of China, and from these studies he evolved his matchless personal style. Innumerable are the stories that exemplify the simple straightforwardness and generous self-denial of Hokusai's life, and the unbending independence of his character, especially in any question that affected his art, as, for instance, the stand he made for the national honour in his dealing with the Dutch ship's doctor. In 1799 for the first time he took the name of Hokusai, and in 1804 it was that he secured the wondering favour of the multitude by painting on a colossal scale, and with extraordinary means, a figure of the piercing-eyed Dharma, the most powerful of the saints of Zënism, and a favourite subject of the medieval artists, crowning this success by meeting in professional rivalry, in the Shogun's presence, a celebrated *Ukeyoye* artist, and beating him by a trick of humorous audacity that was not without a touch of fantastic genius, which appealed to the imagination of the people.

With a boundless energy for work, Hokusai produced, besides remarkable book illustrations and treatises of various kinds, on drawing, design, dancing and old legends, an endless number of separate prints marked by fertile inventiveness and individual character. There were charming *surimonos*, social or festival greetings with a fancifully personal touch; groups of gracious girls in the style of Utamaro, but with a realism of Hokusai's own in the vitality of their movement, some gathering fungi, others picking tea-leaves, or boating at the season of cherry-blossom, or incidents in the easy lives of the courtezans. Then, there was the series known as *Walks round the Eastern Capital*, among which was a print of the Dutch quarters at Nagasaki, with the passing natives looking with amused curiosity at the foreigners grouped behind the window bars, and a particularly interesting one of the interior of a print-shop, the proprietor busy among his assistants with a customer. Another set was the *Fifty-three Stages of the Tokaido Road*, showing lively humours characteristic of each place—a subject that Hiroshige also treated on a larger scale—while others were *Views of Yedo*, *Views of Osaka*, *Chinese and Japanese Heroes*, one of which was the remarkable *Spirit of the Waterfall*, and various birds, flowers and fish, exquisitely studied from nature, with a synthetic magic of art. Hokusai's art, in its finer manifestations, was disciplined by an intellect that penetrated intuitively to the individual idea in all pictorial subject-matter, and Sir Charles Holmes, writing of the wonderful *Mangwa*—spontaneous sketches—which appeared in 1812, and continued publication, in fourteen volumes, over thirty years of Hokusai's life, says that it "comprises drawings of almost everything that can be the subject of pictorial art. Majestic landscapes mix with pots and pans, artisans and acrobats accompany the gods and heroes of Japanese legend. All alike are drawn with a touch that, in its squareness, its seizing of emphatic angles, has something of the best realistic tradition of China." While its genius is abundant in humour, together with the *Gwafu*, a work of like character, its universality illustrates all old Japan of actuality and imagination.

It is, however, for his great colour-prints pure and simple that Hokusai appeals to us especially here; not, of course, for the actual printing from the colour blocks, which, like the engraving, is in Japan the work of facsimile craftsmen, but for the expressive art which gave his designs their grandeur, variety of form and pattern, their vital significance, their appropriate harmonies of colour. We must turn first of all to the *Thirty-Six Views of Fuji*, extended to forty-six, published between 1823 and 1829, where we shall find designs imaginatively great, made beautifully expressive by the simplest arrangement of tints, boldly yet subtly spaced, suggesting perhaps "light that never was on sea or land." *Fuji in Fine Weather*, for instance, where the snow-crested mountain takes the eye majestically in a flush of red sunlight against a blue sky streaked with white clouds, while its lower slopes are overgrown with verdure, and *Fuji above the Lightning* ([Plate 1](#)) where a variation is played upon the same colour notes, while the beautiful form of the red mountain towers in calm indifference to the angers of Heaven. These are indeed lordly prints, giving us the very enchantment of the scene, but what is to be said of *The Hollow of the Deep Sea Wave off Kanagawa* ([Plate 2](#)) showing distant Fuji, all white and calm in a grey and pink sky, while turbulent billows toss long, crowded boats about, and the foaming crest of the waves rises, shaping itself into the fanciful resemblance of some fierce wild bird with cruel talons? Light and dark blue are the dominant hues of this wonderful design, yet, although the interpretation of nature is purely imaginative, with no touch of realism, the impression of truth is irresistible. But the impression of truth is everywhere in this dramatic survey of Mount Fuji in her actual surroundings, for it is made by a painter whose pictorial magic could command realism or fancy at will to an equal logic of interpretation. So we always find the mountain significantly related in the picture to whatever may be the subject. Perhaps it is a party in a tea-house impressed by some aspect of her beauty, or she may tower, black, red and white, above a crowd of naked coolies, carrying men and merchandise across sand banks, or haply she may smile at Yoshiwara girls watching a Daimios procession, or look wisely upon horsemen galloping towards the river Sumida, or, grey beyond the mists, may gaze on a picnic party by a famous old spreading pine, or peep between the piers of a crowded arched bridge, or, clad indifferently in the mists or the beautiful lights of day or evening,

she may accept the awed wonder of sightseers on a pagoda balcony, of workmen repairing a roof, whether of a Buddhist temple or a popular shop in Yedo, and, always symbolical of home, the sight of Fuji cheers the people active in the tea-fields, the timber-yards, or their fishing-boats. It is impossible here to particularise all the superb designs in which Fuji figures in every aspect of her beauty.

The eight prints of the *Famous Waterfalls* were published in 1827, and, though different in character, are no less notable than the Fuji set for their splendour of design, coherent spacing, and dramatic significance. Inspired perhaps by the thirteenth century Tosa masterpiece, the Nachi cascade, so often sung by the poets, Hokusai sought to picture chosen falls, and succeeded in making his own masterpieces. Among these was the *Waterfall of Onô, on the Kisokaidô* ([Plate 3](#)), with the gigantic volume of water falling from a high cliff into the turbulent stream far below, the formal dark blue and white of the water contrasting with the red, yellow, green and grey of the surroundings. Then we find delineated, in each of the eleven *Novel Views of Famous Bridges*, some ingeniously built bridge, artistically related to its natural environment, and shown with characteristic vitality serving human purposes. Here, for instance, is the *Fukui Bridge* ([Plate 4](#)), built half of yellow wood by a poor Daimio, and half of stone by a wealthy one, to connect their respective estates. What activity there is on the peopled bridge, how monumentally calm the hilly landscape beyond! Finally we arrive at what is considered to be the last of Hokusai's important series of colour-prints, *The Hundred Poems explained by the Nurse*, an anthology of which only twenty-seven poems are known to have been pictorially interpreted by him, but the designs are fertile in imagination and invention, and charming in their schemes of colour. Those chosen for reproduction are typical. This handsome bullock cart, with master and servants resting by the way, and red leaves falling ([Plate 5](#)), illustrates the exiled Kwanké's poem to the god enshrined in the Tamuke mountain, offering humbly a "brocade of maple leaves" in place of gifts of silk for his temple. Abe no Nakamaro ([Plate 6](#)), sent to China by the Emperor, in A.D. 716, with some sinister design, stands on a hillock overlooking a space of waters, with his servants making obeisance, and wonders whether the moon he sees is the same that rises over his native hills. A lively picture of waves and rocks, and women diving for *awabi* shells, with men rowing by in a boat, illustrates the banished Takamura's appeal to the fisherwomen ([Plate 7](#)). Men warming themselves at a log fire outside a snowbound hut ([Plate 8](#)) stands for a poet's homely thought, but there is a poem by Narihara delightfully interpreted by red maple leaves floating on a stream, while excited people pause on a high arched bridge to gaze at the transient beauty. By such delicately subtle motives would the pictorial genius of Hokusai be inspired as vitally as by the majestic beauty of a mountain, a waterfall, or a wave of the sea.

MALCOLM C. SALAMAN.

PLATE I

FUJI ABOVE THE LIGHTNING

No. 9 (de Goncourt's order) "Thirty-six Views of Fuji,"
published between 1823 and 1829 by Yeijudo.

*From a proof in the collection of Charles Ricketts, Esq.,
R.A., and Charles Shannon, Esq., R.A.*

(9½ × 14¾ ins.)



PLATE II

THE HOLLOW OF THE DEEP SEA WAVE OFF KANAGAWA ON THE TOKAIDO

No. 20 (de Goncourt's order) "Thirty-six Views of Fuji,"
published between 1823 and 1829 by Yeijudo.

*From a proof in the collection of Charles Ricketts, Esq.,
R.A., and Charles Shannon, Esq., R.A.*

(9¾ × 14½ ins.)

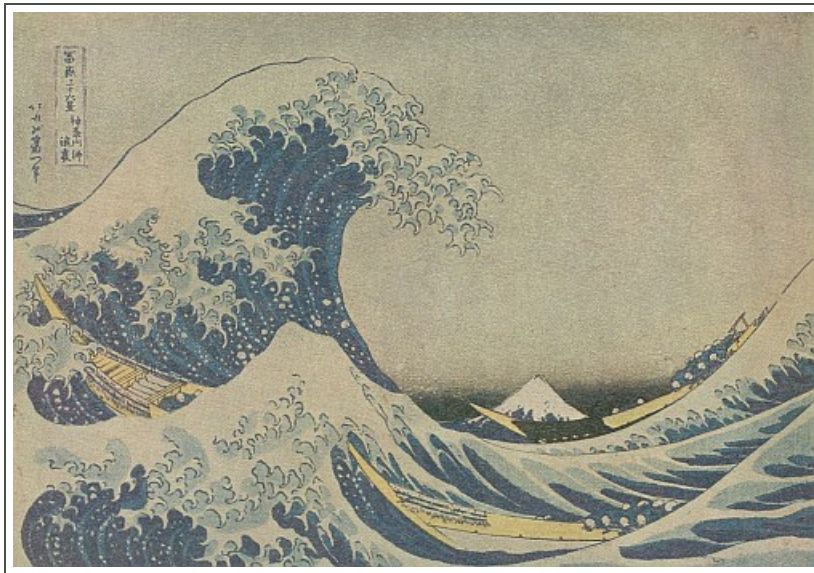


PLATE III

WATERFALL OF ONO, ON THE KISOKAIDÔ

From the "Famous Waterfalls" Series of 8 prints,
published about 1827 by Yeijudo.

*From a proof in the collection of C. Geoffrey Holme,
Esq.*

(15 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ ins.)

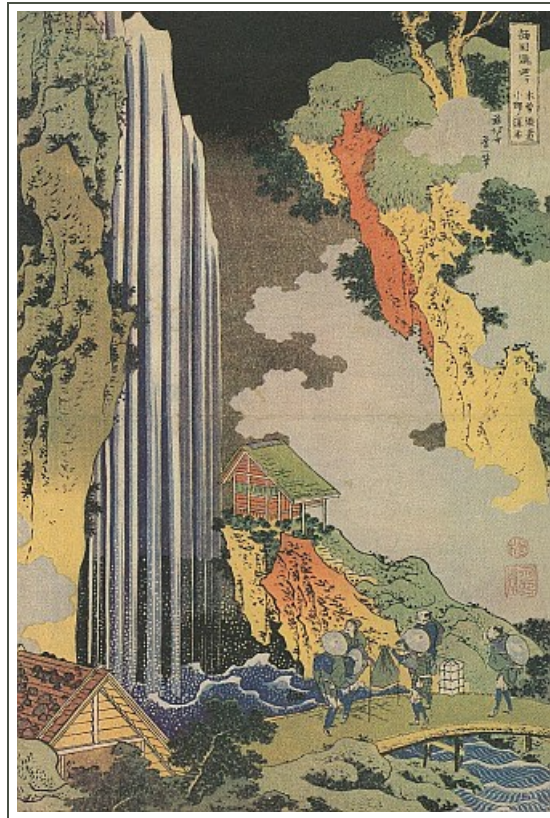


PLATE IV

FUKUI BRIDGE IN THE PROVINCE OF ECHIZEN

From the "Famous Bridges" Series of 11 prints,
published 1827-30 by Yeijudo.

*From a proof in the collection of C. Geoffrey Holme,
Esq.*

(9 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ ins.)



PLATE V

Poem by Kwanké. "At the present time since no offering I could bring, lo, Mount Tanuké! here are brocades of red leaves at the pleasure of the God." No. 24 of "The Hundred Poems explained by the Nurse." Published about 1830 by Yeijudo.

From a proof in the collection of C. Geoffrey Holme, Esq.

(9¾ × 14¼ ins.)



PLATE VI

Poem by Abe No Nakamaro. "O can it be that the moon I see wandering out into the wilderness of sky is the same moon that rises over Mikasa Hill in my own Kasuga?"
No. 7 of "The Hundred Poems explained by the Nurse."
Published about 1830 by Yeijudo.

*From a proof in the collection of C. Geoffrey Holme,
Esq.*

(9¼ × 13⅞ ins.)



PLATE VII

Poem by Sangi Takamura. "Tell the people, O boats of fisherwomen, that I row to the Eighty Isles, far in the boundless main." No. 11 of "The Hundred Poems explained by the Nurse." Published about 1830 in Yedo by Yeijudo.

From a proof in the collection of C. Geoffrey Holme, Esq.

(9¼ × 14¼ ins.)



PLATE VIII

Poem by Minamotou No Munayuki. "Winter loneliness in a mountain hamlet grows only deeper when guests are gone, and leaves and grass are withered, so runs my thought." From "The Hundred Poems explained by the Nurse." Published about 1830 by Yeijudo, of Yedo.

*From a proof in the collection of C. Geoffrey Holme,
Esq.*

(9¾ × 14¼ ins.)



Transcriber's Notes:

KISOKAIDÖ changed to KISOKAIDÔ for consistency.