The National College of Art & Design

"JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINTS OF THE 17th, 18th and 19th CENTURY and THEIR RELATION TO and INFLUENCE ON 19th CENTURY EUROPEAN ARTISTS"

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:
FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART and DESIGN
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART DEPARTMENT OF PRINT

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MARCH 1982

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INTRODUCTION:

"In the painting (and prints) of the Edo period may be seen a tolerably complete reflexion of the political and intellectual allegiances of the day"....."yet the rise of a wholly new devotion to genre subjects must be attributed to the change in class allegiance, and to the desire of a population newly conscious of its security and economic pull to see its extravagant pastimes and fashions blazoned forth".

This quote, from an introductory essay in the catalogue from the English exhibition "The Great Japan", held in the Royal Academy, exactly describes the subject matter of the woodblock colour prints, which I am dealing with primarily in this thesis.

These prints, which in the last century became known throughout Europe, influencing many Western artists from the printer Henri Rivere (1864-1951) through to more household names like Cezanne (1840-1906) and Toulouse Lautrec (1864-1907). With them they brought an inkling of life in Japan, previously a mystery to most Europeans. Many of the scenes depicted give a somewhat idealistic representation of Japanese life at that time. The prints are mainly the product of the Ukiyo-e school, an art form which blossomed in Edo and which represented the lower classes emulating the culture of the nobility and reflecting the taste of the townsmen of the Edo period.

The Edo period of Japanese history is that in which the effective government of the country was located at the centre of Kyoto, now known as Tokyo. In 1602 Tokugawa Ieyasa was made Shogun, a military dictactor who was only nominally subservient to the Emperor. His rule was legalized, and his laws lasted from 1603 until 1868, when the Tokugawa house restored power to the Emperor. These dates define

a political phase of Japanese history and a period of social organization known as "EDO". It is also sometimes called KINSEI, or the Early Modern Age.(1)

The Ukiyo-e school represented an independent art form that evolved, both in technique and content, from an older genre tradition. Genre painting is called Fuzoku-Ga and depicts manners and customs in Japan - basic themes being landscapes of the four seasons, famous places, various annual activities and illustrations of incidents from Japanese literature.

However, it is not just the subject matter of these prints which has held the interest of Western people and artists for so many years - it is the unique style with which these scenes are executed, the unusual view point and perspective and the genius for expressive line, pattern and design, surrounding vivid opaque colour.

Ukiyo-e art dominated Japanese art for almost two hundred years, arising in the seventeenth century and lasting until the nineteenth century. The title translates as "floating world picture school" and describes human form and landscape feature as elements of a pictorial pattern. The title came to be associated not so much with the transience of life, but more with the pleasures of that transient life. It was with the depiction of these pleasures in the bustling cities of Edo and Osako - courtesans of the Yoshiwara (Japanese brothel) headquarters, the Kabuki theatre, boating on the rivers, Sumo wrestling - that the "pictures of the floating world" artists concerned themselves. The Ukiyo-e school did not, however, emerge suddenly, just as the bustling society of Edo it depicted, did not

(1) Professor Masanide Bito - Society and Economy in the Edo Period "The Great Japan Exhibition" catalogue Page 23 1981.

develop overnight, but was the result of a gradual evolution.

There were two principal painting schools up to the seventeenth century - the Kano and the Tosa. Each of these schools identified with one of the opposing political factions - the first being associated with the Shogun's circle, the other with the Emperor's.

The Kano school, with its roots in classical Chinese painting, specialized in idealized landscapes, Kacho and scenes of myth and legend, often with some hint, veiled or explicit, of Buddhistic teaching; the Tosa, on the other hand, was a more native product which repeated time and again scenes of court splendour, of civil war or romantic medieval adventure.

During the seventeenth century the work of both schools was in a decline, it was becoming continually repetitious of old masters and employing conventional devices, without the narrative power and vigour of the original masters. Also towards the end of the sixteenth century there was a decline of the old aristocracy, the rise of Samurai and the new, large urban areas with their working population of townsmen, all conspired to undermine traditional concepts in art. There arose a desire for something fresh and original with which the newly dominant classes of society could identify and which they could find relevant to their lives - however Ukiyo-e art is not just art "for the people, by the people" - appreciation of it in many of its forms demanded considerable sophistication.

Separate groups began to emerge under the inspiration of painters too individualistic to submit to academic restraint - there was no one founder of the school, though most historians attribute its start to Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-94).

There are several other reasons for the start of this new Ukiyo-e school - all stemming from a demand from the general public. In the seventeenth century education was more widely disseminated than ever before - under the rule of Tokugana Shogunate - and a middle-class of tradesmen, artisans and merchants emerged. It was for this class that the Kabuki or popular drama - depicted so well by the artist Sharaku - the Marionette theatre and an immensely varied amount of programmes and literature was required. It was to illustrate the publications of the day that some of the first Ukiyo-e woodcuts were made.

This new middle class also created a great demand for pictures that could be displayed, the illustrated book was not enough anymore. In every upper-class home there was the "tokonoma", a quiet corner of a room where a picture could be contemplated with undisturbed serenity. In these homes, the picture was usually a painting, but because prints could be reproduced two hundred times, every home could now afford one, which were at first printed on separate broadsheets, called Ichimai-e, bigger than the normal illustrated book. At first these prints were black outline - it was not until 1740 that colour as well as outline was printed from woodblocks, and even then, and for the next twenty years, these colours were limited to two, usually red and green.

BUDDHIST INFLUENCE ON WOODBLOCK PRINTING:

Another very important reason for the demand and popularity of the woodblock print can definitely be attributed to Buddhist monks. Up to the sixteenth century no printing was done outside a temple and very few books not related to Buddhism were produced at all. The manuscript directly preceded the printed book, and as Buddhism found increasing favour among the Japanese aristocracy, there was a corresponding demand for copies of Buddhist texts(2). Despite the early invention of printing, which is usually attributed to the Chinese, the hand-written manuscript remained the principal vehicle for disseminating the written word in Japan until the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the demand for Buddhist scripts became so great that they had to be printed. Buddhist temples contained two valuable commodities required for printing - time and labour - needed for felling trees, carving blocks and manufacturing paper. It was woodblock printing which became the important medium in spreading the knowledge of Buddhism in Japan. The early woodblock prints were the only method for providing souvenirs of objects of worship for Buddhist pilgrims.In the fourteenth century Jodo monks were the first to print their text in Japanese characters - before, the custom had been to produce the text in Chinese only, sometimes with reading marks added for native use. Most monks at that time could read both Chinese and Japanese, but now someone who read only Japanese could, for the first time, read a Buddhist text, although this probably did not extend readership to the peasants, who were, for the most part, illiterate. It did mean, however, that when the text was read to an audience, it was understood.

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(2) David Chibett - The History of Japanese Printing & Book Illustration New York, Kokansha International Ltd. 1980 Pages 40-45.

Another unique development by the Jodo monks was a piece of work first printed in 1315, consisting of a single sheet portrait of Honen with a brief religious text. This was the beginning of single sheet illustrations for worshippers, which made it possible for religion to be preached in the home, especially for peasants who could not read.

At this early stage, however, illustrations were copied from Chinese hand-painted and printed illustrated texts. This is because, firstly, a great deal of time was spent on beautifying manuscripts with calligraphy and the application of gold and silver leaf - printed texts were more for everyday use and therefore illustrations were considered unnecessary adornments. Secondly, illustrations were more expensive and exceptions to the rule were financed by private patronage - for example the "Diamond Sutra".

Thirdly, illustrations were provided in the text for the following reasons: functional; where they served to illustrate the text more clearly: devotional; where a religious object was depicted for venerative purposes : and, very occasionally, purely decorative, although this was a very minor aim of Buddhist monks.

It is unfortunate, in some ways, that Japanese Buddhist monks, with the resources at their disposal, displayed such reluctance in illustrating their printed works before 1600, but, on the other hand, artists of the Edo period, and printers, more than made up for this deficiency.

Whatever the reason for, and demand for, woodblock prints, a flourishing print publishing business gradually established itself in Edo in the mid-eighteenth century, due to the organization of the Ukiyo-e schools. Originally, in the seventeenth century, the world of Ukiyo-e had (unlike

the "official" art of traditional schools, such as Kano and Tosa) been a loosely organized group of artists. The only exception to this rule had been the Torii school, which had dominated the production of theatrical posters and the like, since the end of the seventeenth century, when it had first begun to specialize in such work , this school had maintained a strict monopoly. Now, in the eighteenth century, other Ukiyo-e artists also began to feel the need for some such organization. The increasing wealth of the Edo merchant gave him increasingly extravagant tastes, and the polychrome print evolved partly in response to his new requirements. There was a large demand for big editions of the more popular types of prints, which led artists to form schools of followers who would carry on the styles which they had established and which had proved so lucrative. A natural result was the development of exclusive artistic cliques aimed at protecting the interest of the artist and his followers in society. The Ukiyo-e painter was an artisan earning his living by piecework. One catered for the merchant class, the other mostly with life in the gay quarters and the theatres. The Ukiyo-e was the product of an introverted, decadent society, which was beginning for the first time to spend less time concentrating on religion and life after death as an escape from suffering around it, and to spend more time on the joys that make life worth living. In Japan this meant steeping oneself in pleasure and fantasy far removed from true rationality and individualism, as will be seen in the following chapters.

PART II

ACTUAL TECHNIQUES OF PRINTING AND MATERIALS USED:

The indirectness of making a print creates opportunities to specialize some European and modern Japanese print artists tackle the entire process singlehandedly but the traditional Ukiyo-e prints, with which I am dealing, usually involved the combined efforts of four men: the designer (or artist), the engraver, the printer and the publisher.

The process involved in producing a colour wood-block began with the artist making his drawing on thin, transparent paper, which was afterwards pasted face down onto the surface of a prepared piece of cherry wood or similar close grained wood and destroyed in the process of cutting. The engraver - never the artist himself - cut around the artist's brush strokes, afterwards cleaning the wood from between the lines, thus leasing them in high relief. Then the printer took the first impressions in black ink from the engraved blocks, thereby securing prints that were reproductions of the painter's original brush drawing. The artist now proceeded to indicate on one of these proofs where colour was to be printed and the engraver then cut additional blocks, normally one for each colour. The master printer, using water-based colours mixed with a little rice-paste(3) was then able to produce the full colour-print by imprinting each sheet successively on the six or eight or more blocks corresponding to the number of colours. Accuracy of register, of first importance as a print passed from one block to another to receive its succession of colours, was secured by a guide mark for the proofer, consisting of a right-angle cut at one corner of each

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(3) Jan Tschichold - Chinese & Japanese Woodblock Printing
Leonardo Vol. 4 pages 75 - 79, Pergamon Press 1971

block and a straight line at an adjoining side, aligned with one side of the right angle.

PAPER

According to David Chibett, who wrote "The history of Japanese painting and book illustration", paper was invented in China as early as 105 A.D. by Ts'Ai Lun. Ts'Ai Lun, according to the book, was a eunuch who seems to have been charged by the court with the responsibility of collecting information and reporting on various experiments in papermaking that were taking place in China. This man probably supervised other people's experiments, as inventing paper must have been an evolutionary process which took years to complete and which probably began even earlier than 105 A.D. There is evidence of "quasi-paper" made from silk fibres, but the paper "discovered" by TsAi Lun was composed of tree bark, old rags and fish nets. It took until 400 A.D. before paper really replaced bamboo and silk as a principal writing surface.

According to another better known book on this subject "Block printing and book illustration in Japan" by Brown[4], the earliest known paper to be discovered so far was found in 1942 near Knarakhoto in Mongolia, and was made from coarse plant fibre.

In Japan, paper was generally made from either the mulberry plant or "tori No Ko" which included eggshells. In the case of paper used for printing woodblocks, the bark of the mulberry was most commonly used.

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(4) Louise Norton Brown Block Printing & Book Illustration in Japan London & New York 1924 pages 48-51.

After removing the bark from the tree, it was chopped up and left to soak for at least 100 days in water. The pieces were then pounded into a mortar to separate the inner from the outer bark. The outer bark was then removed. Lime or soda ash was mixed with the remaining pulp, heated over a fire to boiling point for at least eighty days and nights and then washed repeatedly until the fibres were completely softened[5]. This pulp was then strained and pounded into a doughy substance, which was bleached with one of various agents, depending on the region. This bleach was then removed by further soaking and the mixture was placed in a large vat (fune in Japanese). Some starch was then added to prevent the finished sheets from sticking together.

To make uniform sheets, a frame was dipped into the vat to scoop up a quantity of the mixture. This frame had a bamboo mat or screen stretched between its upper and lower parts to retain the fibres of pulp while allowing the water to drain away. The sheet obtained in this way was pressed to get rid of any remaining water and dried on heated wood or brick walls.

Paper mulberry fibres are extraordinarily tough and absorbent, yet does not cause the ink to run. When it arrived at the printers, helpers had to size it with a flour paste and alum solution to prevent strike-through. It was then stacked in large piles, with very damp sheets between every twenty or thirty sheets to establish a regular dampness that would be kept consistent throughout the entire printing, even if it took up to twenty days, as was often the case. This controlled moisture kept the paper from either shrinking in dry air or expanding when coming into contact with wet colours, and also when printing it takes colour well and renders sharp lines.

(5) David Chibett pages 19, 20, 24

INK

The ink used by block printers was called sumi, and was made in Japan by one of two traditional methods, both of which involved the erection of 'rooms' made from paper SHOJI (sliding screens) with several windows in the four walls. In the first method, bundles of lighted pine twigs were thrust through the openings, and as the twigs burnt, soot was deposited on the walls and ceilings. When sufficient soot had accumulated, the room was dismantled and the soot scraped from the Shoji. Resin was then mixed with the soot to the required consistency of ink.

The second method had a similar principle, but involved the burning of wood oil (PAULOWNIA) in bowls which were set inside the "room". The process then continued as the first.

The coloured inks and pigments used by the Japanese woodcut printer consisted of mineral and vegetable materials and were either mixed with gum water or rice paste, with occasional additions of alum. A quite individual effect is achieved when a light coating of rice paste is applied to the block before the colour. Graduated colours were achieved by dampening the surface of the paper at the appropriate place. When the painter has used a running tone, which he achieves by repeated application of the same thin colour with a brush on to an already inked block, wet on wet, or by brushing away the colour from the printing relief or by printing different quantities of colour in succession from the same block.

Other embellishing devices used by the printer are the use of mica dust in backgrounds. The mica, a mirror like metal dust, was applied to the paper while it was still wet during the process of paper-making, or applied by stencil or block when patterns were required. Also mica

dust was used for picking out mirrors and frosty or icy surfaces; there was also the application of metal dusts, either sprinkled or applied by block; and "gauffrage", or blind-painting, for indicating the patterns and folds of dresses, by lines in relief but without colour.

PRINTING

The various types of wood used for carving were originally made from azusa, or the catalpa tree, although sometimes the wood of the Japanese Ninoki (Cypress) was also used. By the Edo period, however, the Yamazakura, or wild cherry, was used. The wood was cut in planks 17 to 19 mm. thick, and was then allowed to dry in the shade and was prevented from warping by means of a special wooden clamp known as a Hashibami. The hardest wood, in the centre of the trunk, was used for outlines and the slightly softer exterior was used for the colour blocks. This wood was soft enough to carve swiftly and freely, hard enough to accept detail and still retain its edge and clarity through many printings. It was porous and partly absorbent.

The design, on a thin sheet of paper, was placed face down on the block by means of a rice-starch paste and, after drying, the upper surface of the paper was rubbed away and hemp seed oil was applied to make the remainder transparent so that the engraver could see the design clearly. Blocks were cut parallel to the grain as opposed to diagonal in the west and it was only the wood surrounding the line or area that was cut away, leaving the design in relief in reversed image. The tools used were either flat or hollow chisels (nomi) and a wooden hammer was used with larger chisels to remove the background. Wooden plugs could be inserted into the block if the engraver made a mistake.

When carved, the block was placed on a sloping table and ink was applied

with a wide brush, mixed with a dab of paste. The entire surface was covered and brushed many times before a sheet of dampened paper was lifted, dropped firmly into the registration slots and flicked forward and down on the block with the thumbs. A "baren" was then used to rub the surface of the paper. Sometimes shading could be achieved at this stage by drying the block before rubbing.

The necessary colours, one after the other, with generally the lighter colours first, were then printed - over printing of colours was rare. An edition of two hundred copies was standard because after that the blocks began to swell from the water in the pigment and registration was lost.

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Before ending my introduction to the Ukiyo-e school, and its craft, I would like to mention a little bit about the background of the artists and craftsmen involved in producing these prints.

Art in Japan began more than 15 hundred years ago - there were artists in Japan one thousand years before America was discovered and five hundred years before England had a name! Therefore, there are many ancient laws a young Japanese artist must learn before he can begin to acquire a style of his own.

At the age of six a Japanese child is sent to school and taught to write the phonetic signs (forty-seven in all) which constitute the Japanese syllabary. They must learn to write these with a brush. These figures are called Katakana and are a simplified version of the real Japanese script which can consist of more than a thousand characters, all more complicated than any in the Katakana. The more advanced script is called Hiragana.

So before the age of twelve all children are well used to the art of calligraphy and are well able to use a brush, along with learning the rudiments of art. They were also required to have a free and skilful handling of the brush, always with strict attention to the stroke, the brush must not touch the silk or paper before reflection has determined what the stroke or dot is to express.

There was also an established order for drawing the human face and figure: nose and eye-brows first, then eyes, mouth, ears, sides of the face, chin, forehead, head, neck, hands, feet and finally the clothed figure (in Japanese art the entire nude is seldom painted[6] and never before the seventeenth century).

In landscape, the general rule was to paint what was nearest first and farthest last - as quickly as possible. There was also a fairly standard rule of proportion which applied to most landscape painting - that was, if a mountain was to be painted, for example, ten feet high, the trees should then be one foot, a horse one inch and a man "the size of a bean"[6 also] This is evident in many of the landscape prints of both Hokusai and Hiroshige.

Photographic accuracy is never aimed at - whatever a Japanese painting or print fails to contain is purposely omitted, and when sketching, what first attracts the eye is to be painted - everything else is secondary.

Continuity of style within the Ukiyo-e school, and indeed in any other painting school, was the result of the strict method of training. Each great artist began as an imitator of his master. This continuity of style went back through generations of artists. These artists then

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(6) Henry P. Bowie On the Laws of Japanese Painting
Dover 1911 Peter Smith Pages 23-24 and 56.

developed an individuality in drawing and treatment of subject that stamped his prints as plainly as the signature or seal on them; and he, in turn, was successfully imitated by his successors, which emphasise his distinctive achievement as an innovator.

One thing all Ukiyo-e artists had in common, however, was their genius for expressive line, pattern and design, and the vivid opaque colour they all used. They had a manner of employing human form and landscape feature as elements of a pictorial pattern that was unique only to themselves. Many attempts have been made to imitate these features by European artists ever since the Japanese prints were first discovered. (Japanese ports were opened on the 31st March 1852 by Commodore Perry, but it was not until 1862 that the first international Japanese exhibition was held in London and the first in Paris in 1876[7]. Once seen though, many European artists shared the same Japanese patterns. Certain subjects and techniques suited the age so exactly that they can be said to have led to common decisions. Thus groups of European artists shared a common interest in, for instance, patterned backgrounds, tall narrow formats or cut off foreground objects.

The Japanese woodcut changed many established rules and traditions of composition. This system of "cutting off", along with the Japanese characteristic "birds' eye view" are only two of many devices, many of which will be discussed in further chapters, all of which created new methods of depicting distance, new sight-lines and a new portrayal of startlingly realistic imagery.

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Siegfried Wichmann Japonisme London Hudson 1980
Page 8 of introduction.

As I discuss individual Japanese printer/artists, I will also try and compare and parallel them with some of their European counterparts.

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JAPANESE PRINT
A servant holding his master's armour. By Kunisada 1786-1864
Japanese Coll. Ac.2302

SUZUKI HARUNOBU 1724-1770
Osen's tea house

CHAPTER TWO

INDIVIDUAL PRINTERS, THEIR LIVES AND WORKS, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON EUROPEAN IMPRESSIONIST ARTISTS

1. MORONOBU

I have chosen to discuss the work of Hishikawa Moronobu (1625-1694) not so much for the specific individuality of his work, or even any direct personal influence he had over any European artist, but more because he is traditionally considered the founder of the full polychrome print, or Nishiki-e, as it was called. He was responsible, more than any other artist for giving shape to a rather shadowy concept. It is for this reason - the fact that he influenced the more prolific artists' whose work appeared during this period, who, in turn, influenced the work of many of their European counterparts, that I consider his work important.

Moronobu was born the son of an embroiderer at Hoda in the Awa province. Here he learned something of his father's work, but finding the employment distasteful, he left Hoda and went to Yedo to study painting. From here he moved to Kyoto and took up his studies under a master of the Tosa school. Around 1660 he began to study under the master Kano Tan'Yu (1602-74) in Edo[8]. He is normally regarded as an Edo artist, although many of his books, particularly in the early period, were, in fact, published in Kyoto. He was responsible, between 1658 and 1694 for illustrating approximately 150 books of varying size and subject matter.

It is clear that he received a thorough training in both the Tosa and Kano styles of painting. As prolific in print-making as in

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(8) Louise Norton Brown Block Printing & Book Illustration in Japan, London & New York 1924 pages 129, 130, 132-4.

book illustration, Moronobu was responsible for the development of the Ukiyo-e school.

His work can be viewed under three phases: he admired three artists whose work influenced his at different stages of his career: the earliest was Kano-Tanyo, then Hanabuse and finally Iwasa Matebei. While under the influence of Kano Tanyo, Moronobu made his biggest contribution to the history of book illustration - his development of the native Japanese "Ehon" or picture books. These existed before his time only in works copied from Chinese books or adapted from them. Probably the reason for the initial popularity of "Ehon" was the growth of a semi-literate audience in the cities who preferred books with pictures to solid text. An obvious subject matter for books of this type was everyday life in the cities and, in particular, the Yoshiwara (brothel) pleasure quarters.

Moronobu's first step in this direction was the celebrated and erotic Yoshiwara Makura, or pillow, of 1660, which contained illustrations of forth-eight traditional lovemaking positions. This type of eroticism was an important feature of Ukiyo-e art, and can be seen in more detail in the work of Utamo, who I will discuss next, and whose influence can easily be seen in the work of Degas and Toulouse Lautrec, whose preoccupation with the brothels of Paris in the eighteenth century is very similar. Many other artists of the Ukiyo-e school besides Utamara, all of the highest reputation - Harunobu, Hokusai and Hiroshige - took pride in this kind of work, although it was always frowned on by the authorities. These books, usually in the form of Hyoban-Ki, or critiques of courtesans, were designed for the use of patrons of the pleasure quarters. It is interesting to note that the illustrations of Yoshiwara Makura are not thought suitable for reprinting even in today's permissive age. However, we can still see plenty of evidence of other work by Moronobu in his

trees and waves, drawings of women, books of designs for screens etc.

There is a generally accepted idea that a change came over Moronobu's style after he left Kyoto, to be attributed to his admiration for Iwasa Matabei's pictures. Whatever change took place, however, was probably mainly due to the greater freedom of thought and life in Edo and in reality the difference was rather in scale and subject matter, his style remaining about what he had settled on in the early Kwanbun period. It is not certain that even this change of subject was due in any great degree to Matabei, and although the artists paintings doubtless had their effect upon him, the gay life of the city itself was probably the real factor in bringing about his new choice of theme, for everywhere the artist went he must have seen living models, who had inspired Matabei's work, and around whom such a large part of Edo life flowed.

His last work, drawings for the "Sugata-Ye-Hyakutun Isshu" was published in April 1695, just after he died, because in the preface of the book, the editor states that Moronobu's death occurred before the appearance of the book.

That Moronobu was a master of many different styles is obvious, but towards the end of his career he showed a marked preference for the Ukiyo-e and left his pupils to carry on with that style. It can be said that Moronobu's works marked a watershed in the development of Ukiyo -e since they contain elements of Tosa, Kano and Ukiyo-e.

Whatever his role in the development of Ukiyo-e itself, Moronobu was certainly the first artist to work in the field of Ehon, which, in themselves, make individual broadsheets of colour prints possible and subsequently popular, and he was also famous as a painter, a designer and a single sheet artist.

KITAGAWA UTAMARO 1754-1806
Portrait of Hanaōgi

UTAMARO

Kitagawa Utamara is probably one of the more household names, along with Hokusai, even in this part of the world, when the subject of Japanese woodblock prints arises. He is one of the most significant figures in the history of Japanese art and one who has had an incalculable influence on Western artists.

He was born in Edo in 1753, where he lived all his life. He studied first under Toriyama Sekien, who is claimed by some of Utamaro's biographers to be his father. Sekien was born in Edo and had his initial training in the academic school of painting - the Kano[9] and in 1770 he established a school where he not only included the Ukiyo-e method of painting but also a certain mode of seventeen syllable poetry called Haiku.

One aspect of Utamaro's prints, and indeed those of his contemporaries, which has especially interested me is the characters or type which usually is incorporated or accompanies some of these prints. I have since discovered that, besides a signature, some of these messages include poetry to illustrate the image, or vice versa. There are three main types of poetry which appear on these Ukiyo-e prints - the Haiku, which is probably the best known, the Kyoka and the Waka.

The Haiku is a form of poetry written in the 575 syllable form popular from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Illustrated prints with Naikus were called Haiga. Another popular format which also appears in these prints is Kyoka which has a 57577 syllable form. This is more humorous verse and is associated principally with the

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(9)
J. Hillier Utamaro New York Phardon Press 1961
Pages 7 - 8.

pleasure-quarter society in Edo.(10) One of the main Kyoka publishers was Tsutaya Jusaburo whom Utamaro lived with after he broke up with Sekien. This split came in 1780, when Utamaro was twenty-seven and had got over the stage of providing illustrations for various cheap popular literature, which was the way most artists began their career.

Tsutaya Jusaburo, usually known as Tsutaju, was a man of exceptional character who had the gift of not just discovering genius, but of prompting it to yield its maximum. He was a publisher who attracted some of the greatest artists and writers who provided healthy rivalry and new influences for the still relatively young Utamaro. Moving in with Tsutaju was also a good business move as it provided prospects of useful commissions.

Around this time - 1780 - Kiyonaga Koryusai, the printer who took over from Harunobu as leader of the Ukiyo-e school, retired and Utamaro assumed leadership. Of practically the same age as Kiyonaga, Utamaro was slower to develop and had a different training, but under the influence of Masanobu and Moronobu, he began to display an individualism in his work. His work, at this time, included designs for beautiful illustrated books and his broadsheets were marked by powers of compòsition and imaginative design.
"Utamaro's art is the very anti-thesis of the literal photograph, it is an art that wills rather than accepts, that selects, composes and translates, making the everyday memorable, the prosaic poet".

J. Hillier
(from "Utamaro - Colour Prints & Paintings")

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(10)
M. Anesaki Buddhist Art New York 1978 Pages 44 - 45.

In 1788, his "Insect Book", a beautiful set of prints of flowers and insects, was published and this was followed by many sets - including the famous "Twelve hours of the green houses", into which he devoted his more mature powers. The chief reason for this set, as for others, may have been to display the latest fashion in dress. An artist's popularity in Edo depended to some extent on his ability to depict the most fashionable and the most exclusive dresses, or even perhaps, to create new models and novel patterns for fabrics. Utamara actually designed prints advertising the creations of famous houses of fashion in Edo, many of whom were designing lavish garments of brocades and silks - which were far beyond the means of the people. For anything like a just comparison to this superficial elegance we have to go to eighteenth century France, the France of Toulouse Lautrec. The comparison between Paris and Edo, the "Paris of the East", was never closer than at this time.

Both artists can also be closely compared, as they both spent most of their time in the brothels of their respective cities, depicting the women at different stages of dress or undress, in repose or active, in groups or alone. They both have the same "succes de scandale" which popularized their work, like that of Gauguin and Degas also.

There was, and still is, however, a vast difference between the Japanese view of promiscuity and our own Western view. In Europe there are things that are deemed immoral that elsewhere are quite customary. "Yoshiwaras" in Japan were a way of life. It was not looked upon as a wholly innocent diversion for young men, but,because of the entirely different sense of moral values prevailing, we should be careful to distinguish it from the apparently similar institutes in Paris.

Besides having subject matter in common, Lautrec found Utamaro's studies of women interesting for purely compositional reasons. His need for a swift delineation of space to focus on the figure itself led him to adopt certain Japanese solutions - a decorative application of outline and silhouette, broad areas of unmodulated colour, sharp diagonals and receding planes, a tilted viewpoint and the cutting of figures at the canvas edge to suggest depth and continuity. This cut-off device - previously unheard of in European painting, provided a stereotyped abbreviation of the objects depicted, leaving enough essential information of the most important subject matter in the composition. This technique appealed to many French impressionists, although they varied it in more individual ways. The fact that they dared to leave out half the body or even face in a portrait or let it be cut off by the lower edge of the picture, was not in accord with the conventional climate of the European monarchies of the nineteenth century. Toulouse Lautrec exaggerated these truncated figures to the point of almost absurdity. Several of Lautrec's major compositions rely on such devices to connect the foreground centres of interest, often including detailed "portraits" with quickly sketched backgrounds. The "Cirque Fernando" exhibits many of these characteristics, particularly the great dissecting curve of the edge of the ring, itself absolutely unmodelled, and the abbreviated humourous silhouette of the clown at the left.(11)

In "Jane Avril Dancing" (illustrated) the horizontal lines framing the two distant spectators echo the waistline and upraised leg of the dancer, functioning at the same time space and surface pattern. Lautrec's debt to Japanese prints through Degas' work is clearly

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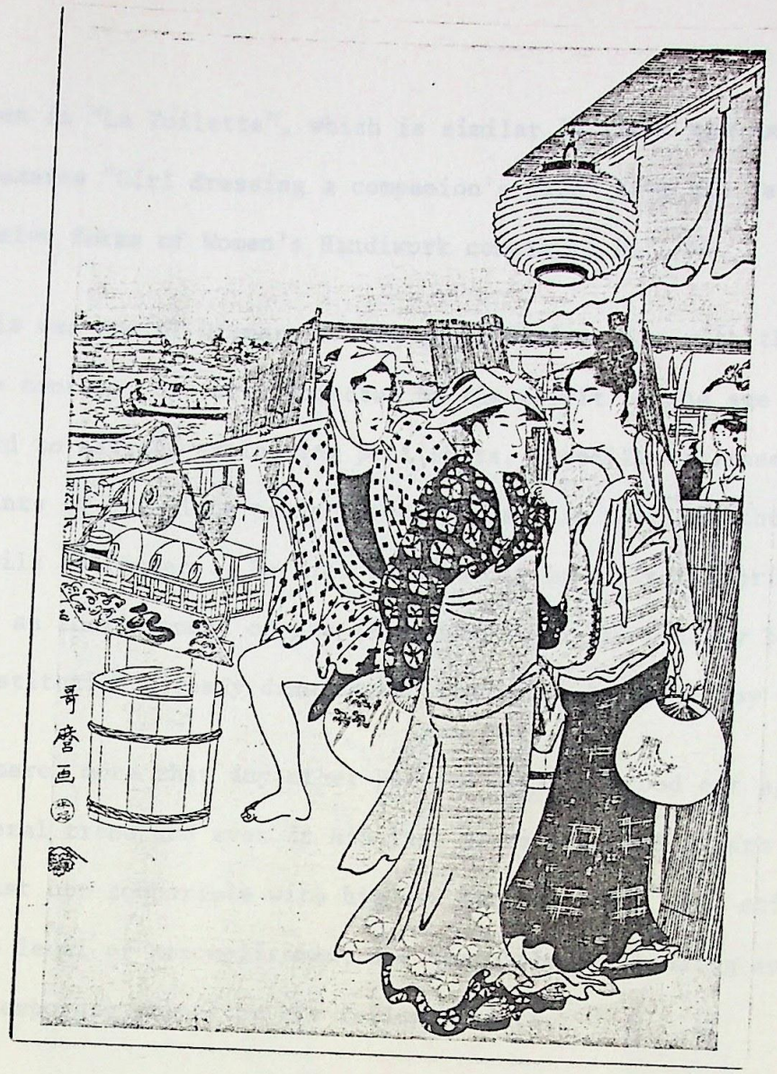
(11) Richard Shone Toulouse Lautrec Thames & Hudson London 1978 Page 5.



KITAGAWA UTAMARO 1753-1806
The water-vendor

seen in "La Toilette", which is similar in theme and execution to Utamaros "Girl dressing a companion's hair" from his series Twelve Forms of Women's Handiwork completed in 1798.

This was one of Utamaro's last great series, for with the turn of the century, his art, infected by the spirit of the age and the need to satisfy exploiting publishers, steadily worsened. Some prints of this late period issued under his name are the work of pupils or forgers. He died in 1806 not long after imprisonment for an infringement of the censorship laws had finally broken a constitution already damaged, so tradition declares, by dissipation.

Utamaro, more than any other Ukiyo-e artist, stood out against the general trend and even in his last years produced prints that, whilst not comparable with his own earlier work, were still on a high level of accomplishment and certainly outstanding among contemporary prints by his fellow artists.

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TŌSHŪSAI SHARAKU 1794-1955

Ichikawa Ebizo

SHARAKU

Toshusai Sharaku is one of the greatest figures in the history of Japanese art and, unfortunately, the most mysterious. In his attempt to achieve a new kind of realism in his portraits of actors, he became famous and admired for his works of fierce expressionism that defy classification as "typically Japanese" prints. All that is definitely known about him is that all his extant work was done in the years 1794 and 1795 - nothing is known of his birth. It is generally believed that he himself was once a No actor (No was the name given to classical actors and drama).

His work, however, has a strength of its own which does not seem to require an historical background and education to support it - it stands alone. We can see his exceptional talent for ourselves by just looking at his work and without reading any books. His art is distinguished by his sensitive economy of line and his ability to describe an entire figure with a fragment of gesture, to suggest texture and mass with just a flat-colour surface.

He is important for the intensity of characterization and forcible draughtsmanship in his work and his sensitive economy of line. His bizarre and sometimes sinister harmonies of colour, accentuated by his dark mica backgrounds compel the attention even though sometimes they can be disturbing. The protruding eyeballs, unnatural grimaces are interpretations of the intensity of expression affected by these actors - but there is evidence that the actor had to struggle to express himself within the limitations of his medium.

Sharaku was not the first artist to produce actor-portrait paintings and prints - they had been done before by artists of the Torii school, which was commissioned exclusively by the theatre. These pictures had few artistic pretensions, whereas Sharaku's portraits are

overwhelming in their conveyance of character. They are subtly arranged so as to give, not merely a facial likeness of the actor being portrayed, but hints of his stature as an actor and the quality of his art - maybe even a rough idea of his age.

There are four main groups which represent the development that occurred in Sharaku's art.(12) The first group - which consists of twenty-eight prints inspired by plays performed by the three Kabuki (Japanese theatre) troupes during May of 1794. All these are half length ⅋ portraits - "Oban" size (38.2 x 23 cm) with mica-dust backgrounds which are achieved by using a special plate. The ink has first to be mixed with a fairly viscous glue solution.By burnishing or polishing the printed areas Sharaku achieved a dense, saturated area of colour with a well-defined outline. These backgrounds are immensely effective in throwing the face into prominence - almost as though it were being seen in a mirror.

The second group of prints - thirty-eight in all, were inspired by plays shown in July and August of 1794. Of these eight are "Oban" size with mica-dust backgrounds, 30 are "Hosoban" size (33 x 14.3 cm) - full length features. A few of these prints also have mica-dust backgrounds, but the majority of the Hosoban prints have backgrounds in a single flat colour. The prints contain pairs of actors which betray an astonishing skill in the arrangement of the figures. In his use of colour he tried various means to suggest texture and mass as far as possible by flat-colour surfaces, saving the brighter colours for very sparing application at crucial places - in this way achieving an even greater effect than if they had been used lavishly. The use of flat-colour surfaces to suggest mass was a feature of the polychrome

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(12) Suzuki Masterworks of the Ukiyo-e Sharaku

TŌSHŪSAI SHARAKU 1794-1795
Ichikawa Komazō

print as a whole at that time, but the skill with which the method was used was particularly great in Sharaku's work.

In the prints which contain pairs of actors, the artistic interest lies in the subtle interplay between the two figures and the tug and balance of personalities. They seem to hold the same fascination as a confrontation between two ideally matched wrestlers. The hosoban prints in the same group show only one standing figure in each work, yet despite the confined nature of the medium their spiritual power is undiminished.

The third group of prints - which consist of sixty-one depictions of plays performed during the Kabuki season in November of 1794, and wrestlers who participated in the "Sumo" tournament held in the same month. Three are Oban size, thirteen are Aiban (34.5 x 22 6cm) and forty-five hosoban. In this group, however, there is a sudden decline in artistic distinction and power. They seem to lack the subtle organic relationship of the previous prints - there is a more blatent preoccupation with the depiction of external features and bizarre postures. The aiban half-length portraits retain some of the old spiritual quality, but still more apparent is a striving after the merely decorative. This decline becomes even more apparent in the fourth and final group of works - which include 14 prints inspired by plays performed during the New Year Season 1795. In these prints there is a coarsening of line, and distressing dis-association of feeling - the works seem to exclude an indefinable air of desolation.

Nobody knows what prompted Sharaku to print, or by what process they made their appearance. Were they made for sale or intended for free distribution?. The extravagance of using mica-dust, the deliberate choice of comparatively low-ranking actors along with their more famous colleagues and subjects for half-length portraits; and

the fact that all Sharaku's prints were published by the same firm - Tsutaya Juzaburo - also Utamaro's publisher - such things would suggest an order from a particular sponsor for prints to be distributed for a particular purpose.

We do know for definite, however, that Sharaku was a very talented artist and printer and his work has heightened the appreciation of Japanese prints in the eastern world. Paul Gaugin (1842-1919) was obviously very strongly influenced by Sharaku's direct method of working in his strong white-on-black woodcuts which he completed in 1894[13] Before this he had been a sculptor in wood so he had a good background in learning the intricate and exacting technique of woodblock carving. He did these prints to recollect his recent visit to Tahiti. He printed his blocks himself, without a press and often without a roller, all he needed being a very light coating of ink. The irregularity of the pressure produced unexpected modulations and semi-tones that contrast with the great unfilled spaces and areas of flat colour[14] His prints seem to have achieved a meditative depth he was sometimes unable to achieve in his paintings. Painting his woodcuts on layers of transparent paper created a translucent effect which corresponded to the dark atmosphere he described under the heading "The night was dark".

Gauguin eventually tired of this technique which was not as popular in Western Europe at that time as it was in the east.

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(13) Frank Whitford Japanese Prints & Western Painters Hampshire 1977 Cassell & Collier MacMillan Publishers Ltd. Page 172/173.

(14) Claude Roger Marx Graphic Art of the 19th Century Thames & Hudton, London 1962 Pages 170, 171, 235-237.

"It is just because it represents a return to primitive time" he writes to Daniel de Monfried in 1899" that this engraving is interesting; wood engraving as used for illustrations is daily becoming more sickening, like photogravure. I am sure that within a reasonable time my engravings, which are so different from what is being done nowadays, will have become really valuable".

(page 237 "Graphic Art of the nineteenth century")

The popularity of the woodcut was revived once again in the twentieth century, mainly because of the easy availability of authentic Japanese prints which made the medium so appealing. Many artists, however, considered wood or stone plates merely as contrivances for multiplying copies of a composition. The art of engraving is often on the point of extinction, but what successful printers realize, and what the Japanese always knew, is that the essence of engraving lies in the line, its thickness and continuity, how and where it is placed; but its lifeblood is the ink which joins the incised lines of the plate or raised surfaces of the wood-block in unity with the paper.

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KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI 1760-1849

Morning at Koishikawa

THE LANDSCAPE PRINTERS: HOKUSAI AND HIROSHIGE

Japanese people have always had a deep devotion to nature, and this feeling gave rise to pure landscape art long before such a thing appeared in European painting. In the Ukiyo-e school, the prime interest was in "genre" painting - depicting manners and modes of the ordinary life of the day, with landscape forming only the background. By the time Utamaro's work became popular, the background was often given greater prominence - some of Utamaro's later prints are pure landscape, but it was left to Hokusai and Hiroshige to develop this last achievement of the colour print art, one that, I personally, find more pleasure in than any other. Both artists use the medium of colour-technique to its full capacity in portraying their individual landscape, and it is this portrayal that makes both their work more intimate than that of their fore-runners.

HOKUSAI (1760-1849)

The number of ideas reflected in the vast amount of Hokusai's work probably resulted from the many masters he studied with. His father was a mirror maker to the Tokugawa court and Hokusai, who seems to have worked for a publisher from the age of twelve - where he learned many printing techniques - began his artistic career under Katsukawa Shunsho in 1777. Shunsho was trained in a sub-school of Ukiyo-e that confined itself to painting, but he found his true vein in the theatrical print at a time when the Torii family was at a peak.

Hokusai was expelled from the Katsukawa school in the mid 1780's, where he had begun illustrating a number of Kibyoshi novels. These were "yellow cover" books of the Kusa-Zoshi genre of fiction, and in them the emphasis was placed on illustration and their themes included moral tales, stores for children and humorous adventures. Hokusai

was probably expelled because of his refusal to adhere to the Katsukawa line.(15)

Over the next few years he studied under several artists including Tawaraya Sori and Shiba Kokan, who, with Katsukawa Shunsho, was also at one stage a pupil of Harunobu, one of the founders of the Ukiyo-e school. It is believed that his studies with Yusen were another reason for his expulsion from the Katzukawa school, but by temperament alone Hokusai was unable to stay long with any one school. He quarrelled frequently with his masters and was plagued by poverty and family, which many times caused him to leave Edo.

His earlier work covers almost every sphere of Ukiyo-e activities including actor prints in the Shunsho manner, but his finest work is preeminently in the realm of landscape, and it is this work which primarily excites me, especially the great series he completed in 1820 - the "Thirty-six Views of Fuji". This was completed when Hokusai was 69 and at this stage in his life he had completed a great variety of projects - he inaugurated a new phase in the use of Western modes of expressionism where he attempted to create a sense of space which represented a creative use of Western techniques as opposed to the awkward imitations of Western perspective which enjoyed a temporary vogue as a kind of interesting optical illusion.

To gather material for his series of thirty-six views, he travelled through remote country districts, especially those around Mount Fuji, exposing himself to the countryside and all its moods. As a result, he succeeded in opening up new insights into the depiction of nature. The medium he used, which imposed broad treatment, firm outline and flat washes of colour, seemed to inspire him to design in a synoptic manner, ignoring the accidents of nature and weather to achieve the essential hill, the sea and the sky, though true to the

style of the Ukiyo-e it is only rarely that man is absent, dwarfed and intimidated though he may be by the element forces around him.

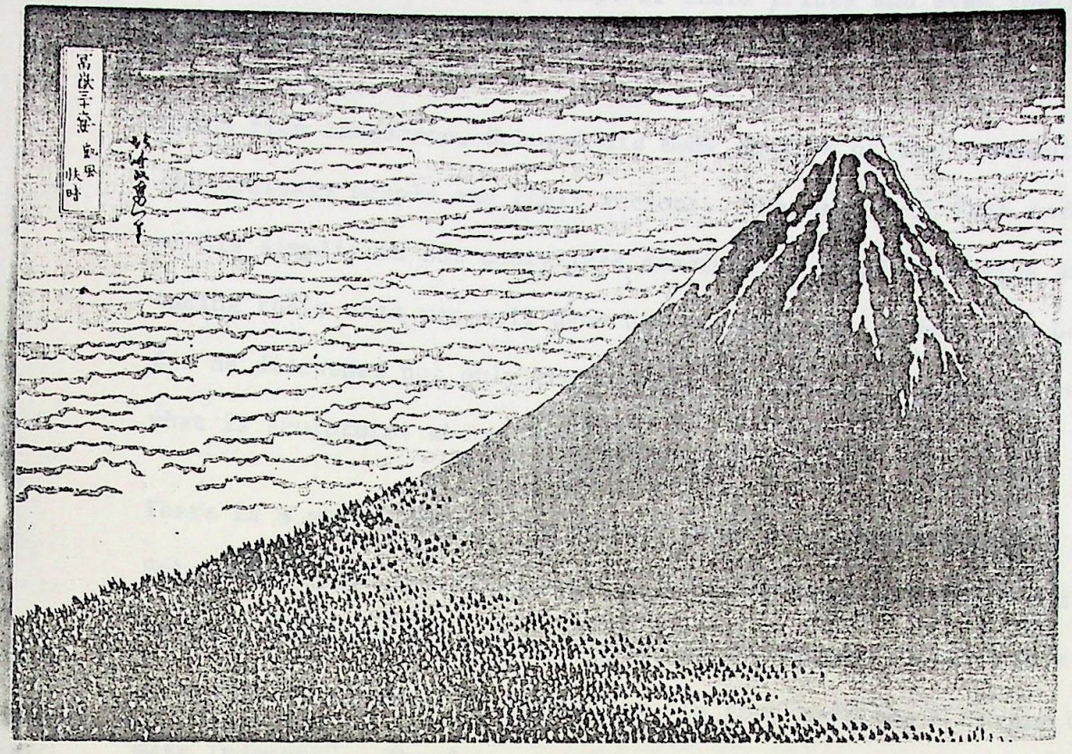
At this stage of his life, Hokusai's work must have been selling well. In 1808, he built a stylish new studio, and had a considerable standing in Edo society, yet tradition says he was almost always poor and indifferent to wordly affairs and that he changed his address over ninety times. He also used to change his artistic pseudonymn frequently passing his previous name on to one or another of his followers. His passion for moving to new living quarters must have been bound up with a restless artistic spirit.

After "The Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji", he completed his two other famous series "Unusual Views of Famous Bridges Throughout the Country" and "Waterfalls Throughout the Country", both of which show a remarkable diversity and invention in depicting landscapes, although not quite reaching the same standard as "Thirty-Six Views".

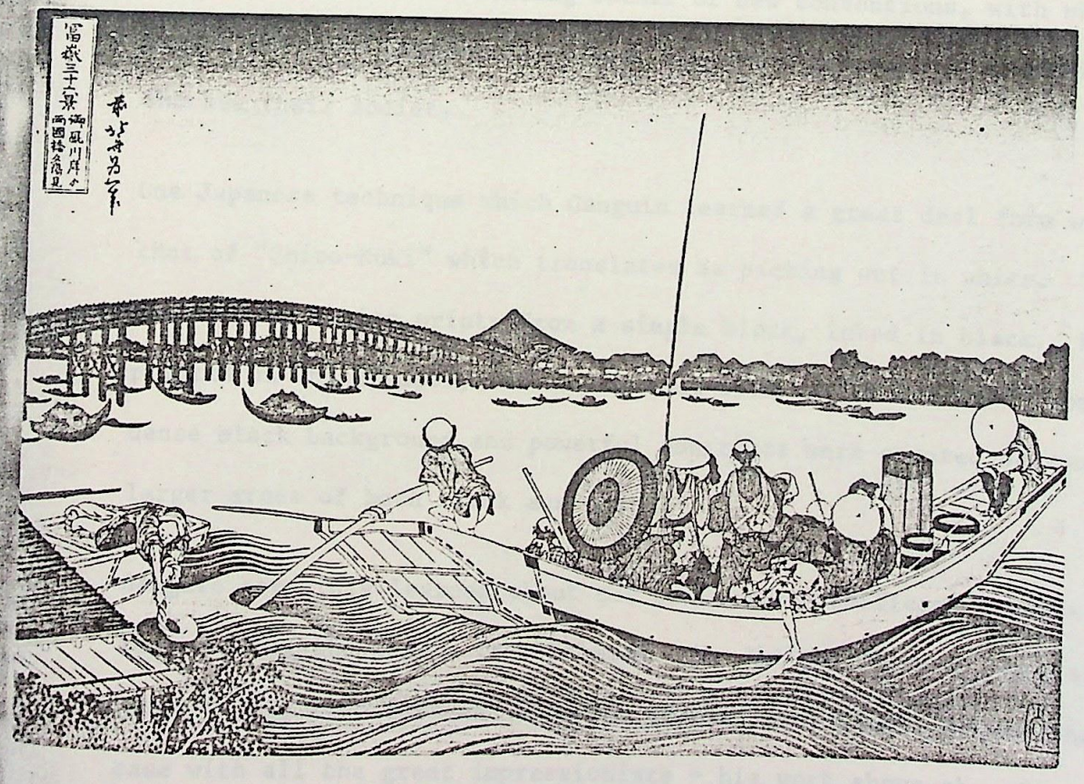
Hokusai was an extremely ambitious artist right up to his death, continually wanting to improve his work and always consciously aware of younger rivals, not least of Ando Hiroshige, thirty years his junior, although there will always be enough room in Japanese art for both a Hokusai and a Hiroshige.

His work always contains a supreme power for reducing the disorder of nature to a formal pattern - for instance, his rain, his trees etc., but yet they never seem conventionalized or unreal. Van Gogh is only one of many artists who studied and was influenced by his work, as was Gauguin, Degas, Lautrec and Henri Riviere.

Riviere (1864-1951) was obsessed with Japanese art, but always had a special admiration for Hokusai and Hiroshige, which led him at one



KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI 1760-1849
Fuji in clear weather



HOKUSAI
Sunset over Ryōgoku Bridge, Edo

stage to imitate the very shape of their prints and even their signatures.

Aside from landscape, Hokusai did many studies of the movement of the ordinary people and their actions. The matter-of-fact indolence of his simplified but unstylized drawings of people sleeping and taking their ease may well have had an enduring influence on Gauguin, for he discerned not only the everyday quality of a gesture, but also what is sculptural about it.

There is a strong similarity between Gauguin's representations of Polynesian women sprawling heavily and crouching with knees and elbows on the ground and the poses in drawings by Hokusai "I painted a nude of a young girl" Gauguin wrote "in that position a trifle can make indecent". The fact that Hokusai had often depicted people in postures that offended the norms of nineteenth century European prudery made him the founding father of new conventions, with which Degas, Toulouse Lautrec and a host of second-generation impressionists shocked their society.

One Japanese technique which Gauguin learned a great deal form was that of "Shiro-Nuki" which translates as picking out in white. This was done by taking prints from a single block, inked in black. When printed on white paper, the white lines seem to come forward from the dense black background and powerful contrasts were created between larger areas of both black and white.

Gauguin certainly learned about the basic and significant gesture of representing the figure from Hokusai. He did not, however, concern himself only with form and movement in his innovations; as was the case with all the great impressionists - his work shows the effect

of confrontation with the content and the techniques of Japanese art. Manet, Monet, Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec all show the effect of the same encounter.

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Hokusai's prints always seem to inspire either enthusiasm or criticism - people are never indifferent to his work. This is perhaps the result of a highly talented artist working in a period when Uikyo-e had been exhausted in terms of style and subject matter, but if variety and interest and pure technique and craftsmanship are the chief qualities of an artist, then Hokusai was an excellent artist.

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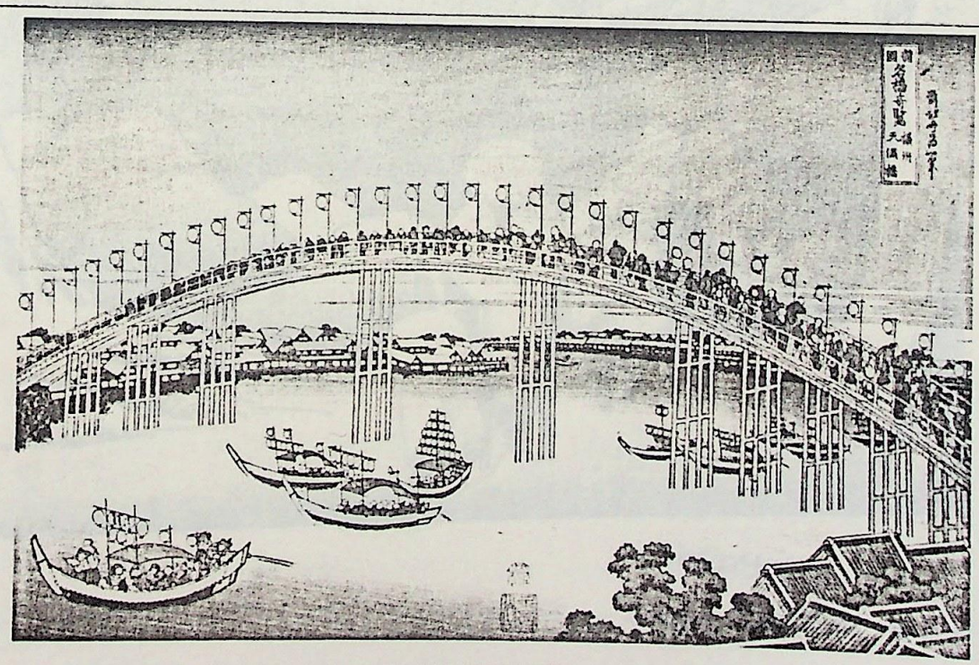
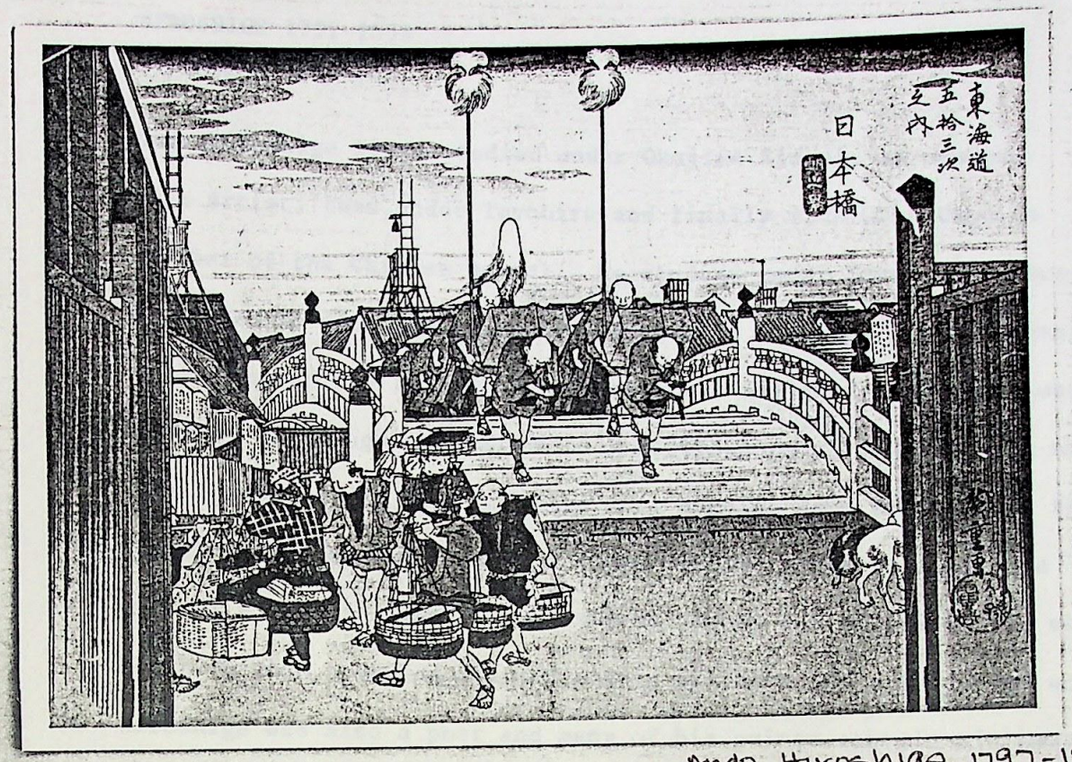


JAPANESE PRINT
Temma Bridge, Province of Sesshu. By Hokusai 1760-1849 Japanese Coll. Ac. 1970



Ando Hiroshige 1797-1858
morning scene at nihonbasi

HIROSHIGE
snow scene at Oi

HIROSHIGE 1797-1858

Ando Hiroshige first studied under Okajima Rinsai, an obscure Kano artist, then under Toyohiro and finally with OOka Umpo, a teacher of the Chinese school. He studied under Toyohiro because he failed to gain admittance to Toyokuni's academy. With Hokusai, he was one of the last of the great print designers and landscape artists. Although one can trace a resemblance to Toyoshige in much that Hiroshige did (see illustration "Evening Rain at Oyama"), the latter artist worked with much richer colour and abandoned to a greater extent the use of intervening clouds and stylized rain which had been such a marked characteristic of Toyoshige's landscape work.(16) Hiroshige was also a poet and many of his prints contain his verse with illustration.

His genius for landscape was not made evident until 1826 with a series of Edo views, and was definitely confirmed in 1834 by the first of his series of prints of the "Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido" - the great highway between the new and the old capitals, Edo and Kyoto. From that time on, Hiroshige hammered out one set of prints after another, thousands of designs of Edo, the suburbs, of Lake Biwa at Otsu and Kyoto. He sold more editions of prints than any other Japanese printer - where most artists would have a run of 200, Hiroshige's copies ran into thousands. For this reason, there are many bad quality prints by Hiroshige to-day, which accounts for some of the criticism of his work. Another reason why there are so many badly coloured and uninteresting prints attributed to Hiroshige is that they have been mixed up with the work of Hiroshige II and III

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(16) Chibett Pages 21, 56, 57.

probably pupils of Hiroshige I. It is, however, quite obvious from the prints themselves that later prints are distinctly inferior and could not have been done by the same artist. There are very few authentic prints of his - there seems to be just pathetic late copies, which bear little resemblance to the work of this great artist. Of his thousands of prints, there are at least 100 masterpieces, including his famous snow scenes and rainy scenes.

The rain scenes, especially one famous one from the series of "100 Famous Views of Edo" - the embankment near the pleasure quarter - account for his initial Paris and London success. His use of bold parallel lines laid right upon the face of a print to indicate rain was both startling and artistically pleasing. Van Gogh was most impressed with these prints, copies of which he had in his collection.

Mist also provided the occasion for several wierd and futuristic prints, the outstanding being the scene at Miyanokoshi on the Kisokaido, where a farmer and his family cross a bridge in the foreground while in middle distance strange trees rise against the moon in a half mist, and in the background a vaguely outlined traveller moves towards a ghostly house. In many ways this print catches the exact feeling of a misty night.

It is inevitable that the two Japanese landscape masters, Hokusai and Hiroshige, should be compared. Hokusai, coming first, was the bolder and more inventive - he established major patterns for Ukiyo-e landscape. Hokusai was also a better designer - while Hiroshige placed himself in just the right spot to catch a marvellous composition without actually having to use designer's devices to achieve a balanced composition.

In depicting specific atmospheric conditions such as rain, mist, fog and twilight haze, Hiroshige is markedly superior, but in rendering snow, Hokusai, in his black and white prints and drawings, achieves magnificent effects, which Hiroshige no doubt studied. In his mastery of atmosphere and space, Hiroshige can be compared to Cezanne - both artists had marvellous perception and an honest eye for everything that was true in nature.

"Everything... in art is theory developed and applied in contact with nature...the artist must scorn all judgment that is not based on intelligent observation of character. He must beware of the literary spirit which so often causes painting to deviate from its true path - the concrete study of nature ....."

From a letter by Cezanne to Charles Camoin 22.2.1903(17)

Another artist who can also be considered closely linked with Horoshige is Van Gogh who once said

"In a way, all my work is founded on Japanese art..... Japanese art, decadent in its own country, takes root again among the French Impressionist artists"

From a letter by Van Gogh to his brother(18)

Van Gogh did not simply want to comprehend Japanese art through copying it, but to dig down to the very roots of Japanese culture in order to be able to generate original creative impulses.of his own from the encounter.

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(17) Nicholas Wadley Cezanne & His Art Hamlyn London 1975 Page 105.

(18) Wichmann - Japonisme Page 9.

He had learned to value brilliant colour from the Ukiyo-e masters and he deliberately chose some prints by Hiroshige to copy in all their bright colourful beauty. One of these is a copy of "Ohashi bridge in the rain" (illustrated) and another "Flowering plum tree in the Kameido garden" (also illustrated in this thesis) - both copied from the set of 100 Views of Edo, by Hiroshige. In Van Gogh's oil painted copies, however, he went one better, adding two red borders, decorated with Japanese characters, which, comically, advertise brothels. It is thought that he saw signs from the "green houses" (brothels) in the Yoshiwara quarter of Edo in Samuel Bing's gallery, which was situated at 22, Rue de Provence, Paris, and which provided a healthy reference to Japanese prints for artists living in France. Van Gogh must have made a note of this Japanese script, without even knowing what is meant, and used it on the border of his paintings.

His purpose was to intensify the value of the local colours by placing the bright red border around them - a sign of his belief in the importance of colour values, and in the primary role colour played as a signal. It could be said that some of his copies appear more Japanese than their models!

The complementary juxtaposition of colours in nature reminded him of the same thing in Japanese woodcuts: in both cases the colour values are intensified. Hiroshige's picture of a bridge with a squall (Ohashi bridge in the rain") of rain sweeping across it lends this intensity of colour to the depiction of a moment in time in a natural setting. Van Gogh copied the hurrying figures, the diagonal composition, the lightness of the colours with sympathetic understanding.

The Japanese woodcut had at its disposal a great capacity for variation and it possessed a rich diversity of techniques to ensure that the setting to be depicted could be most magnificently transfigured. The mica print produced reflexes of light within the print which European painters had never before seen in this form. There were also embossing techniques which give movement to the surface by means of their shadowy forms. These techniques lead away from any naturalistic imitation into the realm of abstraction yet without changing the form of the object.

Henri Riviere (1864-1951) was obsessed by Japanese art, with special admiration for Hokusai and Hiroshige which led him at one stage to imitate the very shape of their prints and even their signatures - somewhat like Van Gogh. Riviere, however, achieved his greatest success in the delicate art of colour-washed wood engraving, and through his study of the work of Hokusai discovered the subtle harmonies of light and shade. In his prints, Brittany appears like some island in Japan. Unlike his Japanese counterparts, Riviere was his own printer, using water based colour which he mixed himself to achieve the required density of transparency of tone.

In Japan there is a type of picture called a bunjin-ga or symbolic landscape. Hokusai and Hiroshige both chose sensational events in the landscape in order to transform the effect of reality into symbolic, unique pictorial events, gusts of rainy wind, storms, cold, the sea with its powerful waves, raging waterfalls, darkened ravines, lightning at evening and pointed needles of rock in the sea. One of my favourite woodcuts "The Waterfall of Oji Fudo" by Hiroshige uses one of these devices - the waterfall is displayed as a large-scale ornament in the centre of the print and brightly coloured. The waterfall is the central motif in Far Eastern art. It is central to the Japanese view

of nature.(19) It is a constant feature, also an event, it is the element which brings movement, yet is kept within the bounds, dominating the structure of the rocks.

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(19) Japonisme by Siegmund Wichmann

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

"The continent of the print is the land of the repeatable image"... "the medium of the print arose from the need to repeat, or duplicate, an image"(20)

It has often been argued that print is an indirect medium, therefore it is not a fresh and spontaneous transition from the artist's mind to his palette. As a print student, I can only disagree with this - the very indirectness of the medium creates opportunities to specialize and exploit the process.

The artist's design is fixed to a plate, screen or, in the case of the Japanese, a block. The master image is transferred, usually to paper by inking and pressing. The material of the template must be soft enough to accept the image, but hard enough to sustain its many printings. A material this hard imposes limitations and conditions on its use, limitations which can either just be accepted or, better, used as an opportunity to achieve an effect impossible in any other medium. Printing is not just editioning an image many times, it is an independent process with independent results. Durer achieved this transformation with engraving, Rembrandt with etching, the Japanese engravers with the woodblock print.

Henry P. Bowie, who wrote "on the Laws of Japanese painting"(21) seems to think that in Japan, prints were a cheap substitute for art for the lower classes.

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(20) Roger S. Keyes. Introduction essay: Catalogue for exhibition of Japanese colour prints at the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, New York Collection of James B. Austin Page 10.

"A print is a lifeless production, and it would be quite impossible for a Japanese artist to take prints into any serious consideration...." I would consider this to be an extremely narrow minded opinion. True, one of the origins of the woodblock print was to make certain images more accessible to the lower classes, bit it grew from its somewhat ruder beginning to become the most forceful, refined, intricate and accomplished form of colour printing the world has yet known. Their importance lies less in their own invention than in their role as contributors, by the revival of traditional methods, to the artistic atmosphere into which these prints were received in Europe in the 1860's.

The prints affected each of the artists I have mentioned, and each stage of their development in printing, in different ways. The style and subject of the prints provided a source that was rich enough to satisfy painters whose ambitions and needs were often entirely individual.

It was not then until the prints came to Europe that their full value was realized and they were recognized as a major new art form. It is sad, however, that although the opening of the Japanese ports brought us in the Western world the gift of these beautiful prints, it also contributed in part to the deterioration in the art of the Ukiyo-e school. Whereas Western artists took from the Japanese only what they needed to create an original style, or to crystallize the styles towards which they were already tending, the Eastern artists adopted and digested Western painting in all its manifold forms, abandoning their delicate use of water-colour and brushstroke, The characteristics which European painters "borrowed" - the emphasis on pattern and especially of irregular symmetry; the conventionalizing of natural forms, the arbitrary use of colour, the absence of chiascuro, and the re-arrangement of the disorder of nature, became gradually incorporated

with their own ways of seeing and painting. The Japanese, on the other hand, surrendered these characteristics at a great disadvantage to themselves and the traditions of their art.

Perhaps this art form, Ukiyo-e, had already run its course. It dominated Japanese art for well over two hundred years. Most of the artists were men of humble backgrounds and the movement was an embarrassment to the more orthodox artists of the Kano and Tasa schools who, throughout the period, were patronized by the nobility. Its origins and subject matter were basically popular and it catered for a mass audience, which might well be described as the world's first true consumer society. In the end, however, it became more dependant on its audience than its audience on it, and just as Ukiyo-e was born and prospered in a period of social change, so a new era engendered by contact with the West gave birth to a new kind of audience and brought an end to Ukiyo-e.

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GLOSSARY

AIBAN — Ai means in between, Han means print, so the Aiban is the print format between Chuban size and Hoso-e. Size approximately 33.0 x 23.0.

BAREN — Smooth wood or bone tool used to transfer ink to paper in printing. The paper is applied face-down to the inked block and the 'baren' is then rubbed over it in a circular motion.

BENI-E — "Red picture" is the literal translation, but it is also a term used to describe a print in which the colour has been applied from more than one block, as opposed to being hand-painted. It was one of the vital stages in the evolution of polychromatic prints.

BIJIN-E — Pictures of beautiful women.

CHUBAN — Chu means medium, han means print, so this is the medium size print. 22.0 x 16.00 approximately.

EDO — Present day Tokyo. Capital of the Tokugawa Shogunate

HOSO-E — Hoso means narrow, thin, E means picture - a long thin painting or picture. 32.0 x 15.0.

INKAN — Signature stamps on prints.

IPPAI-TORI — Full production or edition of prints - usually 200.

KABUKI — The popular theatre of the Tokugawa period. Though it had its origins in the dance and mime aspects of the aristocratic No and Sarugaku theatres, it developed into a lavish dramatic expression of the lives and dreams of the common people.

KOBAN — 'KO' means small, 'Han' means print, size 14.0 x 11.0.

MEIJI — The title given to the Emperor Mutsuhito and his reign (1868-1911).

MINO — Fine quality Japanese paper named because the best sheets originally came from Mino, a town near Kyoto.

NISHIKI-E — 'Nishiki' means brocade - a brocade picture or extravagantly polychromatic print.

OBAN — 'O' means large - large print approx. size 39.0 x 26.0

SHINTO — Religion of Japan before the eighth century and the introduction of Buddhism, and regained importance again in the 18th century when it became the state religion, proclaiming the Emperor as the descendant of the Sun Goddess.

SHOGUN — Military ruler of the country - headship of the leading clan. Between 1600 and the Meiji Restoration the controlling clan was the Tokugawa family.

SHOJI — Sliding door in a Japanese house, made of opaque white paper stretched over a wooden frame.

SUMI — Ink used for writing and drawing. The Japanese borrowed the Chinese method of writing with brushes, a flat palette and a hard ink-stick. The ink-stick, when moistened with water and rubbed onto the palette, produced an ink whose density was infinitely variable, according to the amount of water used.

SUMO — A kind of highly ceremonial wrestling unique to Japan.

SUMO-E — Prints depicting the stars of the Sumo.

TAN — A yellowish red, one of the first colours to be used in the Ukiyo-e prints.

UKI-E — Perspective pictures. The technique of depicting perspective was imported from the West, probably by the Dutch, and used in prints from the 18th century onwards. It was always regarded with curiosity and reached its greatest popularity as a genre in the early 19th century.

UKIYO — A Buddhist term, meaning "the sad world" or "the floating world", with connotations of the transcience of earthly existence. By extension, the word also came to mean "the floating world" of urban pleasure - seeking in the peaceful regime of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

UKIYO-E — "Pictures of the Floating World" a blanket term covering all pictures, whether hand-painted or printed, depicting scenes from Japanese life. These include not only prints showing the pleasures of the merchant classes but also 16th century screen and scroll paintings and prints of subjects such as the Sino-Japanese War and the opening of Parliament by the Emperor Meiji, and landscapes.

URUSHI-E — Lacquer pictures; prints with certain areas made to look 'lacquered' or shiny by mixing the colours with glue. The technique was first used around the middle of the 18th century.

YOSHIWARA — A district of Tokyo. An elaborate red-light district was opened here in about 1615 and contined to function until prostitution was outlawed in 1957.

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