HOKUSAI'S LANDSCAPES

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

HOKUSAI'S LANDSCAPES

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

I was first drawn to Hokusai's prints by virtue of the fact that as a printmaker I was working on a series of landscapes, and I found his endless variety of composition stimulating and his colour sense vivid and unusual. Having chosen Hokusai as the subject of this thesis initially, I was interested in relating it solely to his published landscape prints - mostly the "Thirty-six views of Fuji", the "Bridges" and waterfalls series. In researching it, however, I discovered through several visits to the Chester Beatty library a whole wealth of landscape material in book illustration and surimono format. I felt that to attempt a study of his landscape prints would be incomplete without including them. As I have studied his work, I have become aware of a deeper purpose to it and consequently I have enjoyed it all the more. Hokusai ranks as a great artist, always working with fervour and enthusiasm, and continuously seeking ways to innovate and change. In his own way he broke many laws of painting and practised the doctrine of l'art pour l'art. He went on to develop his own individual style and content and established the landscape print in its own right.

One thing that has been difficult however is the fact that he is fundamentally an Eastern artist and any criticism given here must be from a Western viewpoint. In the East, art is assessed by the Japanese, with different ideals in mind, such as a style of brushwork, consistent with the highest ideals of calligraphy and a loftiness of conception that makes the art the outer portrayal of the inner vision.

From this point of view, the Japanese rank Hokusai as quite a minor artist. In the West he is assessed like any Western artist, in terms of his spontaneous drawings, individuality of vision, pattern and composition and strong colour awareness. In this thesis, I have attempted to approach his work with a little of the Eastern and Western attitudes, and to judge it accordingly.

Hokusai's work develops throughout his career and he has many notable achievements in areas other than the landscape print. I have found it necessary to confine myself to that area, however, since any essay attempting to deal with his work would need volumes. However, sufficient information exits for me to realise that Hokusai was an artist of single-minded vision. He placed strong emphasis on individuality and originality, an attitude which was not to develop in Japan until much later. In this way he was ahead of his time, anticipating a very Western outlook before it became widespread in Japan. His work survives as a body of work of a man dedicated to his art with a passion, almost unrivalled, and with a clarity of vision and purpose outstanding in his area.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO HOKUSAI'S WORK - UKIYO-E

In the course of the sixteenth century the Japanese and the Portuguese fought incessantly over trading rights to Japan, so much so that the Japanese decided to cut all trade links with the West, except for one Dutch link through the port of Ngasaki. From this point, Japan developed in total isolation and complete self-sufficiency, shielded from influence or contact with the West. In 1635 Edo was declared capital and all noblemen or Daimyo were obliged to reside for at least part of the year there. This naturally resulted in a great rush of prosperity to the town, and so a huge consumer society developed, made up of merchants who provided goods and services, Daimyo who were in many cases in debt to the merchants through the extravagance of trying to keep an estate in the country and in Edo functioning, and the bureaucrats who worked in the governing offices. Many of the bureaucrats were rich enough to employ a large domestic staff, which resulted in further enlarging the consumer population. The middle class merchants found themselves wealthy in their new society. Despite the fact that many Daimyo were in debt to the merchants, they found themselves subject to strict decrees as regards spending money and were not allowed anything that might be considered imitating Daimyo.

Since they were not allowed to partake in Daimyo culture through dress, art or entertainment, they naturally built up their own middle-class equivalent. This revolved around the reckless enjoyment of the fleeting pleasures of life, generally regarded as beautiful women, beautiful dress, enjoyable theatre and their own art forms.

Inevitably with this attitude, a huge brothel area grew up, called Yoshiwara. By 1869 it boasted 153 "greenhouses" or whorehouses. The theatre of the Daimyo being out of bounds, they developed their own, a bawdy, exciting, sensationalist spectacle known as Kabuki. Plays were lavish and dramatic productions, often sold in broadsheet form, illustrated by contemporary artists.

The art that developed in conjunction with this was known as "Ukiyo-e", literally meaning "pictures of the fleeting world". It reflected contemporary fashions and customs. Sometimes it advertised beautiful women from the brothels. Other times it illustrated Kabuki theatre, and it also became highly involved with book illustration and later as it developed it became involved with the production of limited edition prints, commissioned by wealthy patrons to celebrate specific events or pieces of writing. It was essentially an art of the masses.

Nonetheless it should not be denigrated because of this. The Japanese people are extremely visually aware. As small children they learn to write quite complicated characters and thus they get a good appreciation of the intricacies and subtleties of brush-painting and calligraphy from quite an early age. Ukiyo-e used brush-painting but the most common form was the woodblock print. This was accessible to a wide audience and was relatively quick and simple to produce. As it developed some of the finest work was produced.

Originally, the woodblock print was used by the Buddhists to produce images and prayers of Buddha that would be easy to distribute. This was the case from about 770 AD. until Ukiyo-e developed. Printmaking was initially in one colour only, and on special paper. The Japanese were one of the earliest people to work on paper using quite a laborious method.(1) Briefly, the bark of the Mulberry tree was soaked for one hundred days. It was then pounded and the outer and inner bark were separated. Lime or soda ash was added to the inner bark, and it was soaked again at a high temperature. The fibres were by then completely softened so it could be strained in meshes and left to dry.

The woodblock used was cut out of cherry tree wood - the inner wood was used for outline and the softer outer wood of the bark was used for colour printing. Four people were involved in the production of a print. These were the artist who drew the image, the engraver who stuck the drawing to the block and cut it, leaving the black areas in relief, the printer who printed it and finally the publisher who bound and sold it. The first credited Ukiyo-e printmaker was Moronubu. He exploited the woodblock to produce bawdy and explicit prints of Japanese men and women in erotic positions, and his prints were all about sexual encounter as indeed were most early Ukiyo-e. (2)

(1) See Henry P. Bowie, On the Laws of Japanese painting, P27

(2) Initially Ukiyo-e and the erotic were considered synonymous. This changed with the addition of other subjects.

They were a welcome relief to the middleclass used to the classical painting schools of Kano and Tosa.(3) Moronubu worked successfully through the 1660s, but despite this, the Ukiyo-e school went into a decline following his death. In 1687, however, a young actor named Kiyomoto came to Edo and founded another school based on prints about the Kabuki theatre. These were prints advertising actors in particular roles or depicting particular scenes from current plays. The Kabuki theatre and Ukiyo-e were interdependent for a long time, as Ukiyo-e could draw from Kabuki theatre and sell well, while Kabuki, in turn profited from the advertising Ukiyo-e brought. From the start of Kabuki prints, little attempt is made to give a specific likeness to a particular actor, instead a role or character was portrayed, giving characterisation to the actor in question that were most suited to that role. The prints were thus unlike portraits or posters in the West of actors in roles where the beauty of specific actors is portrayed.

After Kiyomoto other artists came up to satisfy the growing demand. The Ukiyo-e became widespread, and enjoyed a "golden age" between about 1760 and 1820. Some Western influence filtered through in the final era producing some curious combinations of Eastern and Western style. Also around this time, (late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) there was the fruition of the landscape as a subject in Ukiyo-e, as travel laws relaxed to enable artists to travel through Japan and record what they saw.

(3) These schools used images from Buddhist legends and court legends.

CHAPTER 2: HOKUSAI - BOOK ILLUSTRATION AND SURIMONO

Hokusai's life spanned that golden age of Ukiyo-e, when technical mastery was supreme and a degree of refinement evident in the artistic criteria and judgement applied to Ukiyo-e by audience and artist alike. His prints range enormously in subject and often combine text and illustration in a manner that is essentially Japanese and therefore lost to us in translation.

His career as an artist, began in 1778 when he left his apprenticeship as a mirror engraver to pursue Ukiyo-e printmaking as a full-time career. He studied under Shunsho (1726-1793) in one of the most technically proficient studios of the time. Shunsho was also known for his unprecedented attempt at realism in Kabuki actor prints. By 1779 Hokusai had adopted Shunsho's gō or art name, which would indicate both his emergence as an artist in his own right and his success within the studio. (1) He was to change his name at least fifty times during his life, in adopting new styles or processes or later to acknowledge himself as having a particular skill, for example "Gwakyo Royin" after 1833, meaning "old man mad about drawing".

(1) In Japan, to adopt ones master's art-name (gō), or to change ones own name when adopting new styles or subjects is quite common in order to acknowledge a particular influence or source. Hokusai shall be referred to as Hokusai throughout this essay for convenience.

(2) See Jack Hillier Hokusai Paintings, Drawings and Woodcuts

However, at least one print is extant using the Sunsho art name of Katsukawa Shunro and is regarded by Ukiyo-e experts (2) as a competent if not outstanding print. It reflects the influence of the teacher on the pupil in format and design. he was also illustrating many Kibyoshi or "Yellow-back" books which were cheap novels of the time. These display a literacy which indicate that he read widely which would account for his great knowledge of Japanese folklore and customs evident in later work.

He actually wrote some of the texts he illustrated but these are held to be of no great consequence by those most competent to judge in Japan. (3) Also extant from this period (c.1786) are two sets of prints called "Eight Views of the Otokodate" and "Festivals of Greenhouses". (4) This type of numeration is typically Japanese and evident throughout his career. The Japanese have a love of specific numbers for specific subjects: "One hundred Poets", "thirty-six views of Fuji", "Fifty-three views of the Tokaido", etc. The two sets show the influence of Kiyonaga in the warm colours used and the naturalistic style of drawing.

Hokusai was beginning to drift away from Shunshos influence, finding his rules and techniques too rigid. In 1785 following a row with him, he abandoned Ukiyo-e, whether through necessity or design is not recorded. It is possible that as a very new artist on the "scene", he may have found it difficult to get a publisher.

(3) Ibid Page 15

(4) i.e. brothels

The next record of him dates from 1796 when he began to produce work under another name:- Hyakurin Sorii - he became reasonably established quite quickly. Through the main source of influence, Sori, he learnt of two earlier artists whose work influenced him enormously, Korin (1660 - 1716) and Sotatsu (active in the first half of the seventeenth century - dates of birth and death unknown). Both used an essentially Japanese approach, a combined power of evocative drawing and composition done in a spontaneous manner. Korin in particular had a remarkable flair for design and frequently sacrificed natural form for compositional purposes. This was to be a feature of all of Hokusai's work but especially his landscapes. Through Korin, Hokusai also learned the use of bizarre and weird imagery in art.

From about 1800 Hokusai began to produce a lot of book illustration, too. Book illustration in Japan has an importance unlike that of the West, and it ranks as highly as a text (5), so as an important illustrator, he developed quite a high profile. In 1796, we see the development of the landscape in his work (see illustration fig. 1) - peasants travelling on a river bank with a view of Fuji. The treatment of the landscape is developed by 1798 when we see it treated sensitively in "Haru-no-Miyabi" or "The Beauty and the Elegance of Spring".

(5) A story is told of Hokusai fighting with an author, Bakin, whose work he was illustrating. As a result, Bakin was replaced by another author, indicating the stress placed on image rather than text.

Fuji features quite often in these early prints, and indeed in 1797, in "Beach scene at Enoshina", we see the sea and Fuji dealt with in a manner that is echoed later in the famous print series "The Thirty-six views of Fuji". Even in these early illustrations we can trace his development as a landscape artist. The figures are well drawn, but the background is deftly suggested rather than portrayed. The landscape is seen in these stages as the setting within which human events occur, and is not appreciated for its own right.

The next main work of Hokusai was the illustration of the text "The Chushiningura" of which he did three versions, one in 1798, and one in 1806, both broadsheet editions, and one book of 1802. The Chushiningura was a play about the old Japanese values of loyalty and revenge. Briefly the play runs as follows. An ambassador who is forty-seven is continuously insulted by another member of court and is provoked into fighting. It is an offence to draw swords in court, so he is obliged to take the honourable way out and commit seppku (6) in the presence of the court. The servants avenge the death of their master by killing the antagonist and then go on to give themselves up to the court and commit seppku themselves. It is based on a true story on an event in the court and is the embodiment of the Confucian saying: "Thou shalt not live under the same heaven, nor tread the same earth with the enemy of thy father or Lord".

(6) Seppku was a suicide ceremony in which the guilty party disembowelled himself in the presence of others.

Ukiyo-e embraced this text and did many versions in book form, in theatre and in print. The story was added to and changed and it became a complex entangled plot involving lovers' quarrels and intrigue and suspense. Hokusai's versions of the play are interesting because they show an awareness of Western engraving and perspective.(7) In the two early versions he uses Uki-ye, an exaggerated perspective fashionable at the time, but in the 1806 version, he begins to use perspective in its usual way. He blends extremely well with the Japanese elements of his work. We see in this the first successful blend of East and West in a manner that remains within the Japanese idiom.

Many other works from this time show the development of the landscape and the environment as subject matter in Ukiyo-e. In his book "The art of Hokusai in book illustration", Jack Hillier refers to this as "poetic topography", as Hokusai continually explores and examines what is around him for use in his prints. For example, "the print and book shop of publisher Tsutaya Jsabiro of Edo" from his series "Azuma Asobi" of 1799. In 1800 he published "Tokei Shokei Icharin" - "fine views of Edo at a glance", incorporating all notable sights of Edo at the appropriate time of year - the cherry trees in blossom, girls on parade from the greenhouses and so on. It is characteristic of the Japanese that no-one would have considered showing anything of Edo at its worst.

(7) Probably seen in Dutch engravings imported through Ngasaki in the early 1800's

The sordid side of life at the brothels, or even the cherry trees in bleak winter, or the sadness and rejection of the courtesan who is too old are never touched upon, nor the poverty or misery of fellow man. The prints seem concerned only with portrayal of beauty.

Three more prints of Fuji date from 1803 - "Haru-no-Fuji", and also in 1803 "Ehon Kyoka Yama Mata Yama" was published meaning "Range upon range of mountains". This is a typically Hokusai piece of exaggeration - it refers to the part of Edo which was a little hilly but could in no way be considered mountainous. It is an attractive series in which often the two facing sheets make up one image, of which half is peopled and the other totally landscape (see fig. 2). The figures dominate the landscape, but it is emerging nonetheless as a stronger element of the work.

In 1805, the "Ehon Sumidagawa Ryogan Icharin" was published which was a set of illustrations of "both banks of the Sumida river". It is difficult to discuss these as single images because the book runs melodeon format along the river taking us near and far from it, through day and night through the seasons. This book represents the summit of this particular phase of his career. He has developed the landscape as his most positive and individualistic contribution to the contemporary illustrated book. It was the first notable success of a book dominated by landscape, and it also helped Hokusai develop a style that was instantly recognisable as his own.

The Hokusai prints "Shashin Gwafu" printed in 1814 are pictures of nature, and treat landscape in a variety of ways. The prints range from the classical to the very typically Ukiyo-e. Some show great ingenuity in printing techniques (see illustration) and the landscape illustrations show a great emphasis on simplification and abstraction.

Between 1812 and 1819, Hokusai published the Manga or Mangwa which are ten volumes of sketches of every facet of Japanese life. They show extraordinary perception of nature and the human being. James A.Michener writes:

> "I have long been perplexed as to why it was the Manga that caught popular fancy - and holds it still - since in so many respects the others (8) were superior. And I have concluded that it is the Manga's simple honesty, it's peasant force, its lack of pretension that have kept it popular with artist and layman alike".(9)

Certainly the Manga seems to be a down-to-earth account of a huge number of day activities and past-times of the Japanese captured in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner.

(8) He is referring to his other illustration and prints

(9) Jack Hillier, The art of Hokusai in Book Illustration,P107.

Hokusai was also illustrating a large number of books on natural form and bird-and-flower subjects and erotic art. I feel the erotic art should be discussed briefly here because it shows a development in Hokusai's work. His early erotic art is strictly Ukiyo-e in its portrayal of languid and beautiful courtesans making love in sensuous but not passionate manner. By 1810 the languid beauties have become writhing passionate forms, depraved women abandoned totally to sexual pleasure. It was a feature of Ukiyo-e in general that the women were depicted in less graceful form in all of Ukiyo-e, but in erotic art in particular. Hokusai especially, changes tone. A good example is the 1814 print of the amorous octopus (10). Whereas earlier prints dealing with this theme were somewhat tentative in suggesting sexual liaison between woman and octopus, the 1814 print shows a woman writhing in ecstasy. Michener puts it well:

> "One sees the ultimate human experience: the longing, the savagery, the joy - the ridiculousness and the unsatiated hunger of sex." (11)

Hokusai makes us like voyeurs watching people in lesbian acts, having oral sex, masturbating and always with uncomfortably acute perception. He has totally stripped sexual encounter of any glamour or love, portraying it with all its sordid side exposed .

(10) The amorous octopus is a common theme in Japanese art - it involves an octopus caressing women with all its arms while having oral sex with her or raping her.

(11) James A Michener: "The Floating World" , P 182 .

During this period Hokusai also worked on a large number of surimono mainly concerned with landscape and its relationship with man. I will begin the next chapter by discussing the Japanese attitude to landscape both in Ukiyo-e and in classical art.

CHAPTER 3: THE GREAT LANDSCAPE PRINTS OF HOKUSAI

The concern of the West with landscape has varied from time to time. Various movements have exploited its atmosphere, the spirit of the landscape and its abstract qualities, but it has also been used as a means of identification and of showing off property. The Japanese have never been involved in the latter attitude when painting landscape. The last thing the Japanese wanted to convey in their landscapes was a sense of locality. What they sought was to establish a sort of universality within the particular; time and place and weather became relatively unimportant as early landscapes (Yamato-e) were bathed in a sort of unearthly light which rendered everything from foreground to distance clear, and in which nothing casts a shadow or is hidden by mist. The essence of the landscape was in its interpretation - the outer portrayal of the inner conception of the landscape. Sometimes even distance didn't matter as long as the "spirit" of landscape was evident.

Initially Ukiyo-e artists found the medium of woodblock prints unsuited to landscape. Its uncompromising line seemed particularly unsuited to it, for the subtle gradations of tone they were used to seeing in landscape. In 1789 Utamaro attempted a few pure landscape prints that were quite interesting but he seems to have abandoned it after that. Most Ukiyo-e artists used landscape as a background to an event they were recording, but some used it as a place to identify with in the Western style.(1)

(1) Notably Hiroshige, later, in about 1833 in his famous series: "53 stations of the Tokaido which included each place name and the customs of the area with each print.

Hokusai's books: "Range upon range of mountains" and "On the banks of the Sumida river" are the first to enjoy landscape for itself. The book illustrations of black and white contain the sweeping line and simple strong composition of the later work.

In 1823, Hokusai began his most famous series Fugaku Sanju-Kokkei, or "The thirty-six views of Fuji". Fuji is regarded with a love that almost amounts to adoration by the Japanese. Jack Hillier has suggested that even its composition is aesthetically Japanese and that if it hadn't been there, they would have had to invent it. (2) It stands alone in a flat plain and its snow-capped peak is all the more arresting in its isolation. It is nothing less than an obsession with the Japanese - a sort of symbol of the history and aspirations of the Japanese people, and their love of the scenic beauty of their land. In the early landscape paintings (Yamato-e) of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Fuji is depicted with studied reverence encircled by clouds. Fuji is also seen in the decorative arts in metal work and lacquer box on sword guards, and surimono, tray-pictures (3), representing national independence and beauty.

Hokusai's series, of which there were eventually forty-six (ten were added to the original series), seem to be made up of ten core prints printed in black line with colour, and the rest added to them at different stages, printed in prussian blue with colour. Fuji serves as a link between the prints, within which Hokusai creates his own landscapes.

(2) Hokusai and the art of Book illustration, P212.

(3) These were miniature gardens made of stone, water and small twigs on trays.

In these he explores the relationship between man and his environment. This humanist interest was new to Japanese art which previously ignored the human side of landscape. Hokusai rejected the sentimental approach of his fellow Ukiyo-e artist and sought to apprehend nature in its more universal aspects, which together with the human interest makes up an attitude neither typically Ukiyo-e or typically classical. He felt that the creativity involved in creating prints was akin to the creativity of nature that he saw going on around him. He seems to identify the energy sources of nature and refashion and reorder them as he chooses. He respects the physical reality of this environment and its power, as well as its ongoing creation. Some of the landscape forms have a human presence as he endows them with human attributes. He makes the waves' foam like claws or fingers and his clouds have a presence that is only that of Hokusai. Yet within that seemingly subjective view he seems to distance himself from the landscape and recognises nature as a force outside of himself that speaks for itself without need of help from him. To a certain extent the landscape is the stage where the actors come and go to play their brief parts. It is a place where each man creates his own experience through his senses and his intellect. In portraying man like this he is recognising him in a way that is highly significant to Japanese art and partially explains his appeal in the West. He is allowing man to have his individual experience, and stressing the singularity of the individual.

This individualistic approach ties up with another feature of Hokusai's art, ie his endless inventiveness and eccentricity of composition which marks the work as his own. There seems to be inexhaustible forces at work within his composition.

He delights in big circles or triangular forms within the composition but he revels in the unexpected. This attitude combined with his extremely vivid colour sense, made his work a revelation in the West and was to influence a lot of Western artists in a way that was quite profound.

Almost all of the thirty-six views contain human figures. One senses that they are more than just compositional devices, and yet are not as dominant as in the early work, where the landscape became a background for them. They have individual quirks and personalities and are portrayed sympathetically but without too much comment on the sad or humorous situations they seem to be in. The figures display Hokusai's skill as a draughtsman and his interest in the figures as separate entities with motion and life of they own. In all of their pursuits, they have their own importance, and they seem to have a transient sense of existence while Fuji has its own permanency emphasised by contrast with these tiny figures. The figures are from all classes, and not as in other Ukiyo-e prints drawn only from the merchant classes. They range from peasant to Daimyo, inclusive. Each figure is portrayed with a sympathetic humour that is effective in giving each a separate individuality and existence of its own.

In some of the prints, the more famous ones the human element has disappeared, and the landscape is pushed beyond the boundaries of Ukiyo-e ie in "Thunderstorm below the Mountains", (fig.6), "Red Fuji"(4) (fig.7), and also in a lesser way in "Great Wave off Kanagawa" (fig.8).

(4) Also called "Fuji on a breezy day"

In these the dominating presence and permanence of Fuji is stressed. It is seen as an impassive force unaffected by the turbulence of the environment or the calm. Fuji is a majestic symbol of permanency.

The composition of the works is strong, having regard to the rules that applied to Ukiyo-e composition. They are perfectly placed within the page and seem to possess the inner harmony so essential to the Japanese. The balance and colour contrive to capture a fleeting moment forever. Western artists coming into contact with the prints were quite astounded by the similarity of aims as they thought, and also by its similarity to what was developing in Europe. The extraordinary balance of the Fuji prints allowed Hokusai to explore the sky with pinks and browns and to use black, blue, green, red and browns on Fuji. This is particularly striking in view of the fact that hitherto Fuji had been only depicted in white. Hokusai interprets the landscape in his own individual way. He rescues it from the cliched "pretty" landscape of some of his contemporaries and gives it his own sensibility.

The prints represent a huge range of landscapes. In some, the figures dominate, in others, an interior or city view is important. In "Fuji from the Nihon bridge" (fig.9), Fuji rises above the docks area and serves as a reason to play with perspective. The scene is full of people in the foreground and middle distance, while in the far distance the clouds that represent eternity surround Fuji.(5)

(5) An old tradition dating from Yamato-e, source: Chester Beatty library.

Again we sense the permanence of the mountain. In "Fuji from Umedawa in Soshu", (fig10), we are a lot closer to Fuji (still surrounded by the clouds of eternity) and a group of cranes make up the foreground, so the human element is gone. In the coast of seven leagues (fig 11.) the mountain and surrounding landscape are portrayed in varying shades of blue with no interference of animal or human. In others Fuji serves as a sort of social commentator looking down on all walks of life - we see people flying kites, selling wares, growing vegetables looking at cherry trees. All the time we are conscious of man's insignificance in relation to his environment. "Fuji above the storm" and "Red Fuji" have both an abstracted feel to them , as if removed from all human interest.

Other things are evident about Hokusai from this series. He evidently loved pattern and repetition as in "View from the waterwheel at Oden" (fig12) where the water cascades and wheel formations both make up a pattern; or "The Mitsui store at Suraga Machi" where the triangular shape of Fuji is echoed in the patterns of the roofs in the surrounding houses. He uses tiny birds to balance compositions and to fill otherwise empty spaces. Unfortunately some of these devices have been employed in the West by notepaper printers and chocolate box makers for their motifs. The subtle gradations of tone become bland through over exposure to the inferior more cliched Western examples.

In general there is little or no detail in the foreground and this adds to the aloofness and distanced feeling. Obviously not all of the prints are successful.

In some, Hokusai has strained his use of compositional device beyond its limits and the result is clumsy and awkward e.g. "A view from the Tomi Province" (fig) where the huge triangular device for cutting wood makes a somewhat unpleasing shape which deadens the print. However the majority of the prints were held in high regard both in Japan, where they proved extraordinarily successful, and in the West where they were to prove influential with the Impressionist and post-Impressionist movements.

Other landscape series followed although they are somewhat overshadowed by the high regard in which the Fuji series are held. The next one was "Travelling around the Waterfalls country", a series of eight views of famous waterfalls around the provinces. These are in someways the most inimitable of Hokusai's prints: They are powerful in conception, masterly in Ukiyo-e design, and sometimes even bizarre in the methods he employs to convey volumes of water. Sometimes the source and destination of the falling water remains unknown, they are simply huge columns of water crashing down from the top of the print to the bottom. Then in others the flow is stressed, as it comes from an enormous, round hollow in the cliff and pours past huge rock formations and relative small figures (e.g. "The Waterfall of Amida" (fig/4) so called because the round formation of the rock resembles the head of Amida Buddha). In "The Kirifiuri fall in Kurokami" we can trace the flow through the rocks from above to see it land with spray on the river below while sightseers look on. The colours used are rich and vivid. It is never intended that the water is realistically represented, it is always drawn in tones of dark to light blue and dark again. Pattern is important for conveying its flow, its incline and its speed as it gushes by the most direct way to its destination.

The spray is suggested by white dots against the blues. The surroundings in contrast to the water are less dynamic and seem to give the environment a stability which serves to emphasise the speed and motion of the water. The rocks are often dealt with in a curious indeterminate yellow colour and in spongelike forms. His colours are simple throughout - warm and cool green, maroon, yellow, and various tones of an ultramarine-like blue. The "Waterfalls" sometimes contain people, in others they are treated in a manner not unlike some of the Fuji prints and are left to stand for themselves. They serve generally as a reference to us so that we will understand the power and energy of the waterfalls. The human being pales into insignificance by contrast with this creative power, and once again Hokusai reminds us of the transience of the human , and impresses a sense of order and permanence on nature's most chaotic elements.

In 1827, following these, Hokusai began a series of prints "Novel views of Famous Bridges in Various Provinces". The cloud shapes are important elements in the bridges series, as the composition invariably fades into the cloud formations towards the far distance in the print. The prints show a great love of pattern and seem to reinstate the love of human interest in his work. He causes us to notice particular features of the bridges - the hanging bridge over a huge gaping chasm, the bridge at Osaka with its lanterns for the lantern festival, the eight-fold bridge with its curious twisted composition, all emphasising the futility of the human effort to sublimate nature.

Although Hokusai was a little more restricted by the subject of this series, he was obviously extremely interested in it, and this enjoyment comes through in the prints. He seems to delight in how they stand, and what they are made of, their structure and precision and their roots in the water. He delights in the unexpected as in the rare "Bridge of Boats" (fig 15) where the bridge is composed of the bases of boats joined in a long meandering walk across the river. We see more human involvement in the prints, and more emphasis on seasonal changes, capturing a fleeting moment when a particular group of people cross a particular bridge on a particular day. The bridges series shows the development of the sympathy that Hokusai has for his fellow man. The prints were completed between 1827 and 1830.

The next series of prints are relatively tame by contrast. I feel that when the series is only a small number, Hokusai doesn't investigate the possibilities as deeply as when he has larger numbers on the same subject. With the smaller series he can only take the topic so far, and hence loses a little of that dynamic individualistic approach, and returns to Ukiyo-e format in style and content. The next series is "Eight views of the Luchu Islands". It is hard to believe that they date from the same period as the previous two sets. It has been suggested that they are taken from the drawings of another artist, and this would seem appropriate, bearing in mind their strange composition and slight change of style. There is little of the variation we have come to associate with Hokusai in either subject or composition. The colours, too, lack his touch, using blue and green mostly with yellow, red and brown applied in tiny patches.

Very effective use is made of the white of the paper. However the is a certain quietness in them which has left them in relative obscurity in contrast with the other series. From another artist they would probably be more appreciated, but having regard to Hokusai's other work they rank as relatively unimportant.

Thus we come to the end of a period of intense activity between 1823 and 1830. The prints seem to be at their most glorious in the Fuji series, but nonetheless the others are successful within the Ukiyo-e context. While he was working on these prints, he was still involved in producing other prints which I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: HOKUSAI'S KWACHO PRINTS AND PAINTING; FINAL BOOK ILLUSTRATION

It seems amazing that while producing the landscape prints, Hokusai could find enough time to produce a huge number of other prints as well. He worked continuously on surimono and he also produced two series of "Kwacho" prints, i.e. bird-and-flower pictures, between 1820 and 1830. Some of the surimono are of an equal standard with his best Fuji prints, and certainly would rate as very well designed and executed Ukiyo-e. Both these and the still-life surimono display extreme virtuosity and control of the woodblock medium. The printing is more refined and elaborate than in the ordinary print, and he frequently uses embossing, and more expensive inks such as gold and mica dust which gives a glow to the inks printed over it.

The bird-and-flower prints are more in keeping with Western art imagery because they are to an extent less stylised than the landscapes, and they also do not rely on the Japanese puns or characters to be understood.

The prints are competently done, and are regarded as among the finest of Japanese art but are held to be not as innovative as his landscapes. While the former succeeds very well within the context of Ukiyo-e the latter somewhat transcends Ukiyo-e and takes the meaning further. Some of the still-life prints are clever in a different way to either landscape or Kwacho. For example, "Plover shells" of 1822 uses the idea of a lacquer box on a grey cloth to suggest gulls floating on water.

The poetry used in these prints is sometimes interesting too, out of the sheer difference between East and West:-

"A misty spring journey; walking along without tiring, on the sea the ships are lightfooted, too".

by Shinsoan Hayo. The scene illustrated depicts three travellers walking up a hill with paniers over their shoulders and big large hats. The print is often not as closely related to the poem as such an illustration would be in the West. The print is usually in delicate colours and line and thus is sometimes less bold than the landscape, and hence is less involved with the questioning of the subject.

All of Hokusai's prints seem to display a superb knowledge and awareness of nature. He said himself in 1823: (1)

"I finally came to understand somewhat the nature of birds, insects, grasses and trees. Therefore at eighty, I shall have made great progress, at ninety I shall have penetrated even further the deeper meaning of things and at one hundred each dot, each line, shall surely possess a life of its own."

He seems to be continuously striving after greatness by which he means perception of the essence of things and understanding of their nature. His Kwacho prints are the finest of their type. (2)

(1) He was seventy-three in 1823

(2) J. Hillier: " Hokusai Paintings, Drawings and Woodcuts", P87

It seems incredible too that even at eighty he is concerned to continue to develop as an artist and he is extremely lucid about what the aims of his art are. He produced a consistently enormous body of work throughout his seventies and eighties so we frequently forget that he suffered quite a lot from poverty throughout. The situation in Japan was uncertain in the 1800s. The Shogunate was in decline and country alternated between strict censorship and unbridled licence, and between comparative prosperity and dire poverty. Japan was an extremely unstable country tottering on the brink of revolution. The Ukiyo-e print was in decline. With the exception of Hokusai and Hiroshige no outstanding prints were produced after 1800 because publishers dropped standards to supply to the large demand. Hokusai himself has written letters describing his abject poverty and at other times has issued invitations to the opening of a large studio paid for by himself. He seems to have maintained his personal artistic integrity in the face of an extremely fragile environment. He was exiled from Edo in 1834 as a result of a disgrace involving a grandson, but continued working. He wrote from there that in spite of suffering from great hunger: "My arms are as strong as ever and I am working furiously. My one aim is to become a great artist". He returned to Edo in 1836 and survived the famine of 1838 by producing an enormous amount of drawings and brush paintings. He was to concentrate on these for the latter part of his life (about 1836 to 1849). Some are similar to woodblock print outlines, in others he allows the brush free rein to exploit the ink-painting medium to the full, using subtle washes contrasting with thick dark lines. His brushpaintings are not rated highly in Japanese art, but I feel that they are strong and that they show a great ability as a draughtsman for economy of line.

One of the reasons he is not rated highly in Japan is that he lacks the gracious touch of other painters. I feel that this is because, in his drawings as in his prints, Hokusai was not content to adopt a specific style or set of rules and stay with it. He experimented ceaselessly, always getting closer to bridging the gap between Eastern and Western art, using Western styles within a Japanese idiom. He wanted always to innovate and change. He is criticised by Morrison who wrote: "that classical perfection of touch was not Hokusai's" (3) but I feel perhaps that this was not his aim and it seems an unfair comparison.

Hokusai did concentrate on painting for the last part of his life but he also produced a trilogy of illustration and a series of prints: "One hundred views of Fuji", "Fugaku Hyakkei" and "One hundred poems explained by nurse". Hokusai does not actually illustrate specific poems with specific drawings in the latter. He makes a kind of puzzle whereby the author is named on the drawing and the viewer guesses which poem the print is about. They are strong confident Ukiyo-e prints combining successfully Hokusai's knowledge of landscape and still life. His colours have reached their richest height (probably because at this stage all colours were available in Japan, whereas hitherto the range had been somewhat limited) and the overall effect is of a highly imaginative and competent collection.

(3) Quoted from "Paintings of Japan 1911," in J Hillier, "Hokusai Paintings, Drawings and Woodcuts"

Hokusai's flair for book illustration was still being exploited and he published some novels of less importance artistically in the late 1830s, "The Toshien" or "Warriors" in particular was highly successful in Edo and continually republished. This was a set of drawings of adventures on an epic scale. They portrayed a great and glorious race of Japanese warriors who perform an enormous range of heroic deeds, all in a highly theatrical manner. The drawings are rhythmic and dynamic in design and execution, but the primary attraction for the Japanese was in the telling of these fantastic tales, and not in the artistic merit of their illustration.

In 1834 Hokusai published the first two volumes of the trilogy Fugaku Hyakkei (figs.16,17). The third was brought out after some delay following his death, although it is believed to have been done at the same time. The books are literally pages of views of Fuji seen from every conceivable angle. They are the result of an obsession which Hokusai, in common with other Japanese, seems to have felt for Fuji. They were also the result of Hiroshige's "Fifty-three stations of the Tokaido" being published, an enormously successful series on a subject Hokusai had dealt with in 1804. Hokusai had only been emerging as a Ukiyo-e master at this time, but nonetheless his later version of Hiroshige's seems to have galled him by their success. The "One hundred views of Fuji" were his attempt to win back his share of the market. They were extremely successful as a Ukiyo-e trilogy.

"The one-hundred views of Fuji" highlight the human element of the views more than in the original thirty-six views. Fuji is seen in an enormously varied way, sometimes dramatically in the foreground, sometimes veiled in a mist in the background. Other times it is through a bamboo grove, or an umbrella maker's yard, once it is even in the reflection in the drink of a tippler's cup. At some points, it is reflected in lakes but all the time it is the first thing our eye seeks and then we see its relationship with the environment. Men and women carry out their everyday tasks in front of it, and often there is a burst of activity in the middle distance, while Fuji remains placid and remote in the background. There is a sort of reverence for the eternal mountain in these prints, while man is once more sympathetically portrayed. Hokusai seems to have seen himself as a sort of encyclopaedist of Japanese life and custom around Fuji. Hardly any aspect of the province is left untouched.

It is exquisitely printed in black and white with subtle gradations of grey that give it depth. Other artists had used Fuji, notably in Minsetsu's series of 1785, but these are extremely orthodox by contrast with Hokusai's. The book is prefaced by another author who writes:

> "We are taught to admire high peak hidden amid gorgeously hued clouds... the brush of Zen Hokusai...in the one hundred illustrations that follow fills us afresh with sense of beauty and majesty of peerless mountain... Fuji is lifted high in solitary grandeur...our souls penetrated with a delight subtle as the perfume on a passing breeze...we see the genius of the master in every stroke of the brush". (4)

(4) Luiteo Tanekho...1834.. translated by unknown in Chester Beatty library.

Certainly we get this sense of awe and reverence for Fuji and it becomes almost a symbol for Fuji, and it becomes almost a symbol for Japan. The second print of the first book shows the creation of Fuji. Fuji appears tall and gracious and rises out of the frame of the drawing while the humans bow to her greatness. The men to the foreground are prostrate before her. From then Fuji is seen in a hundred ways, each completely different. Jack Hillier writes of it that it is almost like a motion picture sequence. We are switched like a camera from viewpoint to viewpoint, from high level to low levels. As we flick through the book our attention is dominated by Fuji, in different moods and tempos. The ecstasy of sighting Fuji is captured in volume two when a old man clasps his hands in joy at the sight of Fuji perfectly framed in a round window.

However, it is the common touch that keeps our attention. Like the manga we are reminded continuously by the honest interpretation of the workers, of the workers, of the humdrum life going on around. Even when the view is not peopled and we see Fuji alone, we are conscious that life is going on around her beneath the view. Whereas before we could view it as a presence abstracted beyond human interest, now we see it in the context of humans. Hokusai takes it unconsciously beyond Ukiyo-e levels, and the mountain becomes a commentary on man's relationship to his environment and to nature and this assumes the stature of an epic.

The last books of Hokusai's life are interesting for their outlook. They involve a series of books for craftsmen containing designs for textiles printers, comb makers and also ways in which to paint different subjects. He had begun publishing this type of book in 1823 and resumed in 1848, the year before he died. These are interesting but serve a different more practical purpose to his other books and consequently lack the quality of the other book illustrations and prints. Even on his death-bed it is reputed that he asked for ten more years so that he might become a great artist:-

> "Give me about ten years more of life, nay, even but five year and I will become a true artist". (5)

(5) Quoted by Richard Lane: "Masters of the Japanese Print" P257

CONCLUSION

Hokusai's influence in the West has been considerable, but in Japan he commands less respect. There, Ukiyo-e in general commands little attention, being regarded somewhat as a middle class popular culture. The fact that the prints sold so cheaply (1) and that the books (Kibyoshi) were printed on such cheap paper have meant that they are regarded almost as "Kitsch" and has left them relatively ignored. In fact, now, surimono are beginning to be appreciated there, but the bulk of good Japanese prints are to be found outside the country. Works about surimono and woodblock printing which were first written in English are only now being translated into Japanese, instead of the other way around.

Within his immediate circle Hokusai exerted a small influence, notably over Hokkei (see fig.[18]) and Hokuju. Hokkei (1780 - 1850) who produced a large amount of surimono and a series obviously influenced by Hokusai entitled "Famous Places in various Provinces", also produced books of his sketches reminiscent of the manga. Hokuju (active during the early 18th century) was a landscape artist, too and his curious blending of Eastern and Western styles brought him some recognition. Taito closely copied Hokusai's warriors and earned himself the nickname "Dog Hokusai".

(1) They were sold for the equivalent of a penny each.

Outside of this small circle Hokusai seems to have had little influence. Hiroshige's "Fifty-three stations of the Tokaido" has been contrasted with Hokusai's but they are in a different manner. Hiroshige relied more on the power of colour-printing and less on monumental design - Hokusai was more concerned with atmosphere and the capture of the fleeting moment. Hokusai's drawings are also more spontaneous. In general Hokusai is not seen as a major source of inspiration even in contemporary Japanese prints, although certainly many deal with contemporary landscapes, and it could be said that artists such as Kampo Yoshikawa (1894-.) deals in similar ambiance and moods within the landscape. Some regard Hokusai's landscapes as less successful than his early prints. The critic Kazuma Oda (2) maintains that the decreased attention to detailed drawing and the typical insistence on fantastic compositional devices are painfully obvious and that the work is an inferior product of the painters old age, totally lacking in charm. Hokusai also had critics in the West, although to a lesser extent than in Japan. Henry P Bowie who wrote on Japanese painting in 1911 writes briefly, disparagingly, on the Japanese print:-

(2) Quoted by Seichiro Takahashi: Traditional Woodblock Prints of Japan , P.137.

"The great painters have never held this school (3) in any favour. A print is a lifeless production and it would be quite impossible for a Japanese artist to take prints into any serious consideration. They rank no higher than cut velvet scenery, or embroidered scenes. They are not the living, spontaneous, palpitating production of the artist's brush...they are more or less plebian and generally sold for a penny a piece." (4)

He goes on to say that they do serve as a special record of fashions of the time but are of little merit otherwise.

As a printmaker myself, I cannot agree with this outlook. It seems incredibly narrow-minded to dismiss an art-form because of its price or because it was popular. The print has suffered to a lesser extent from the same stigma in the West and is only now beginning to hold its own. The fact that several copies of work of art are available has meant it has been cheapened in price and artistic merit. Bowie finally adds that when a woodblock is discarded:-

"they are sometimes converted in to tobacco trays which when highly polished are decorative and unique...."

(3) i.e. Ukiyo-e .

(4) Henry P Bowie: On the laws of Japanese painting ,1911

A/P. Landscape M. McLaughlin

Nonethless Hokusai's influence played a major role in Europe in the 1860s and 1870s. His work became available in Europe just as Japanese art was becoming popular, and consequently he became one of the best known Ukiyo-e artists. It was readily absorbed into a culture which had tired of its own art and was developing a new formalism. His work, made up of strong designs abstracted from random parts of nature left a large impression on many of the post-impressionists, but especially influential was the Manga which was published admittedly incompletely in Europe in the 1860s. Unlike Hiroshige his work did not become a direct model for any painting. He influenced in a more profound way in regard to colour and composition and the abstraction and simplification of shapes.

Some of Hokusai's influence filtered through in the 1862 Japan exhibition. His direct influence is evident in Britain in the applied arts: tapestry, ceramics, etc. in two plates by Bracquemond, now in the Victoria and Albert museum (see fig.19). The motifs are from Hokusai's book Ukiyo-e Gafu, showing a lobster, two flowers an insect and a butterfly. In the fine arts initially in paintings, we see the use of Japanese backgrounds or clothing for the models to pose in or a Japanese jar or print beside her as props, e.g Whistler's "Purple and rose: The Lange Lijzen of the six marks", 1864, where a vaguely oriental model in a Kimono is surrounded by Japanese items.

In general however, the British printmakers and painters were not influenced at all, it was particularly French painters who seem to have picked up on this source. From about 1888 we see Gauguin and Van Gogh modify their style to incorporate something Japanese. Ukiyo-e was hailed by some artists as the art of the people more down to earth than the classical art of Japan, in a way that they hoped Degas, Cezanne, Manet, Renoir and others were rooted in reality than the French Academy. Edmond de Concourt writes of Hokusai in a monograph of 1896 that Hokusai is the founder of "vulgar art" (5). This was a common misapprehension about Hokusai in the last century, that he was in some way founder or originator of Ukiyo-e. He was the focus of attention for this for quite some time. Now however we can admire his work for other features. The appeal in the nineteenth century apart from the myth of his creations of Ukiyo-e lay in several aspects of his work. The vertical format of the prints appealed to the Western artists as did the Polyptych. These were sources of inspiration to the Impressionists and post-Impressionists. Also attractive to them was the division of the composition or parts of it into large geometric shapes. This simplificaton of form was very attractive to French painters as it was akin to their idea of eliminating tedious detail to leave the image free and light. The Japanese power of suggesting a lot without actually burdening down the image with unnecessary information was highly developed and French painters borrowed from this source. The strange angular viewpoints of the prints both in still life and landscape was fascinating as was their compositional devices.

(5) Quoted by Frank Whitford: Japanese prints & Western painters

In both East and West, Hokusai had a large list of achievements, within the confines of Ukiyo-e and beyond. For instance, he inaugurated the use of Western modes of expression in the Japanese print in a manner that successfully combined both East and West. He was one of the first to use perspective in its unexaggerated form in the Japanese print, and one of the first to lose the awkwardness that this often resulted in. He translated perspective into the Japanese idiom quite naturally. In doing so, he established perspective for good as a feature of the Japanese print. His work as a book illustrator too, changed Japanese book illustration in general, and influences even present-day designers in his endless variety of composition, and his constant drive to innovate and change his work to maintain its originality. His skill as a draughtsman, through the Manga, especially influenced the West and he combined this skill of drawing with the refinement of the woodblock print to achieve Ukiyo-e prints that were highly successful within Ukiyo-e context. With the Sumida riverbank book and the Fuji series he established the landscape print in its own right thereby setting a tradition in Japanese print that continues to the present day. His landscapes seem to anticipate later developments in Western painting.

Various artists were influenced specifically by Hokusai. Degas although deploring the trend of "Japonisme", allowed that his work might be helped by judicious borrowing of some of their compositional devices. The colour sense of Hokusai was influential to Monet, Van Gogh, and other artists. Manet too is said to have exclaimed on seeing an exhibition on the work of Hokusai and Hiroshige:

> "It is exquisite and the prints are wonderful Damn it all, if this doesn't justify us! There are grey sunsets that are the most striking examples of impressionism".(6)

Indeed Hokusai influenced Van Gogh in drawing style, with use of dots and line. The subject matter of Hokusai is thought to have also influenced later artists such as Beardsley in his more erotic work, Klint, Egon Schiele, and others.

However as well as individual artists who borrowed bits and pieces of his work, Hokusai has a deeper level of influence. His subject matter and tone, combined with his simplification and abstraction of form anticiapted Western developments. His sense of economy of line and vivid colour sense also affected attitudes to colour and substance, but obviously the level of this influence cannot be calculated since it is more profound.

(6) Ibid.

This is a formidable list of achievements, but I feel that taken in its context, Hokusai's most important achievement was to take Ukiyo-e beyond the "fleeting world" to a less superficial level. His continuous research to find the deeper meaning of things, is evident in his work. In developing this, he developed a strong personal style of his own, an unusual occurence in Japanese art. In giving his landscapes such a personal interpretation he combined the almost spiritual conception of Japanese classical art with everyday Ukiyo-e subjects. His prints combine a knowledge of the permanency of the surroundings, with a sympathetic awareness of the plight of the human being caught in the day to day struggle for survival in what is by comparison a transient existence. In developing this theme, consciously or unconsciously, his prints explore the relationship between man and his environment. His prints reflect this in their jarring discord within well balanced design, as if echoing man's futile individuality within such a vast natural environment. His extraordinary creativity and dazzling variety of sources have widened the vision of East and West. His work survives as a model to be inspired by rather than copied, but its influence must be seen to be all the more profound because it is so incalculable.

GLOSSARY

DAIMYO	The nobility of Japan.
GO	Art-name.
GWAFU	Sketchbook.
HYAKU	One hundred.
KABUKI	The popular theatre of Edo.
KIBYOSHI	"Yellow-backs", cheap popular story books of the 18th and 19th century in Japan.
KWACHO-YE	Pictures of birds and flowers.
OTOKODATE	One of a fraternity of chivalrous men who defended the weak and wronged from oppression.
SHOGUNATE	Military dictatorship who ruled Japan between between 1168 and 1868.
SURIMONO	Limited edition prints commissioned to celebrate and event or a piece of writing.
UKI-YE	Perspective pictures.
UKIYO	Fleeting world, or gay life.
UKIYO-YE	Pictures of the gay life; denotes the graphic production of Edo period.

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Fig. 1 Peasants travelling along a river bank with a view of Fuji (1796)

Fig. 2 Picnic party at the Takeda Racecourse from Ehon Kyoka Yama Mata Yama (Range upon range of Mountains)

Fig. 3 Landscape in snow from Sashin Gwafu (184)

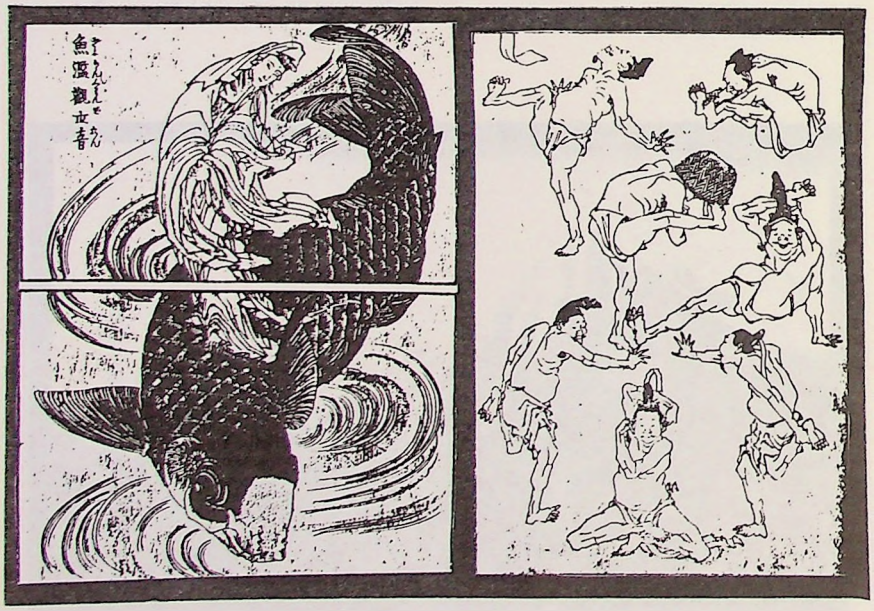

Fig. 4 Sketches from the Manga

Fig. 5 The Amorous Octopus from Kine-no-Komatsu, a collection of erotic prints, 1814

Fig. 6 Thunderstorm below Fuji from Thirty-six views of Fuji

Fig.7 Red Fuji from Thirty-six views of Fuji

Fig 8 Great Wave of Kanagawa from Thirty six views of Fuji

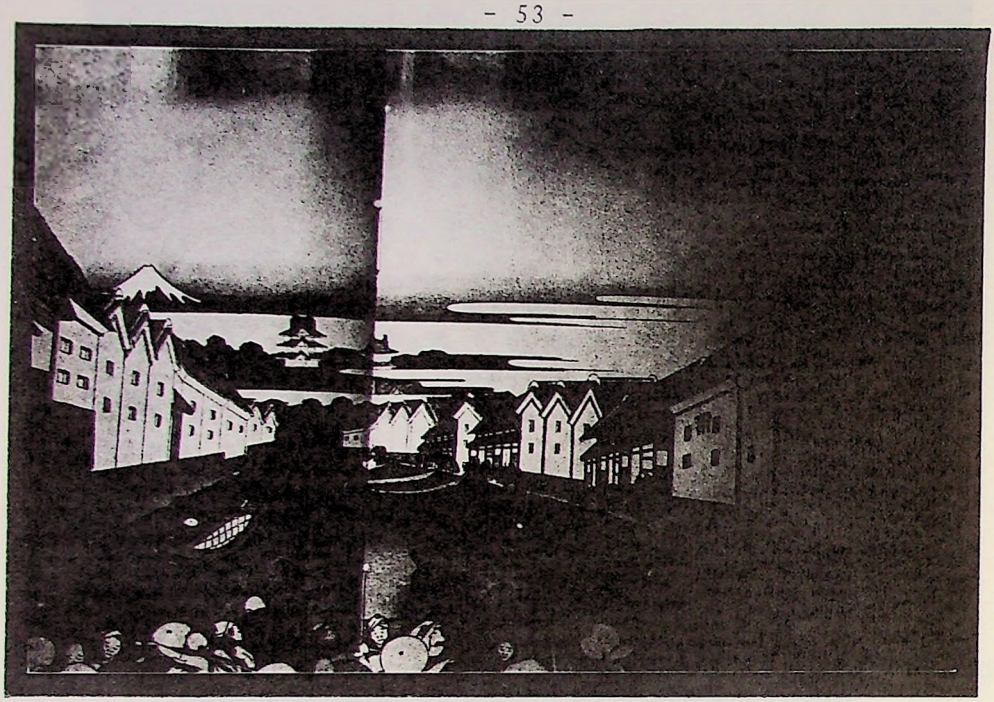

Fig. 9 Fuji from Nihon Bridge from Thirty-six views of Fuji

Fig 10 Fuji from Umedawa in Soshu from Thirty-six views of Fuji

Fig 11 The coast of seven Leagues from Thirty-six views of Fuji

Fig 12 The waterwheel at Oden (detail) from Thirty-six views of Fuji

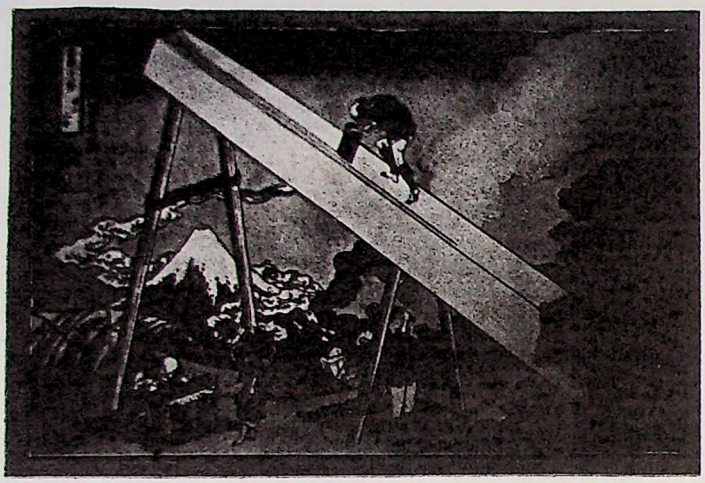

Fig 13 Fuji from Tomi Province from Thirty-six views of Fuji

Fig 14 The Waterfall at Amida from the series "Waterfalls"

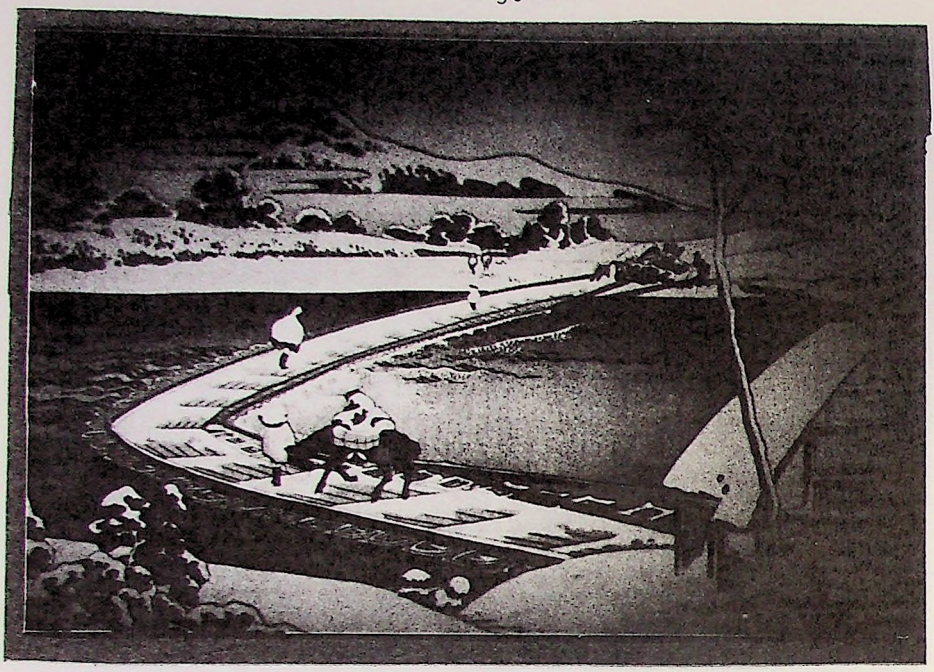

Fig 15 The Bridge of Boats from the series "Bridges"

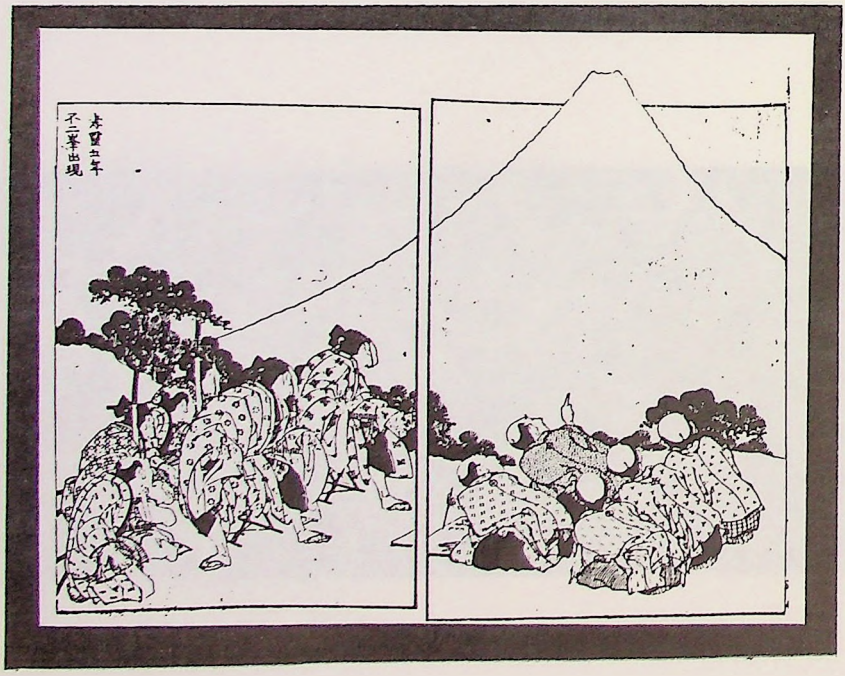

Fig 16 From 100 views of Fuji, (Fugaku Kyakkei)

Fig 17 From 100 views of Fuji (Fugaku Kyakkei)

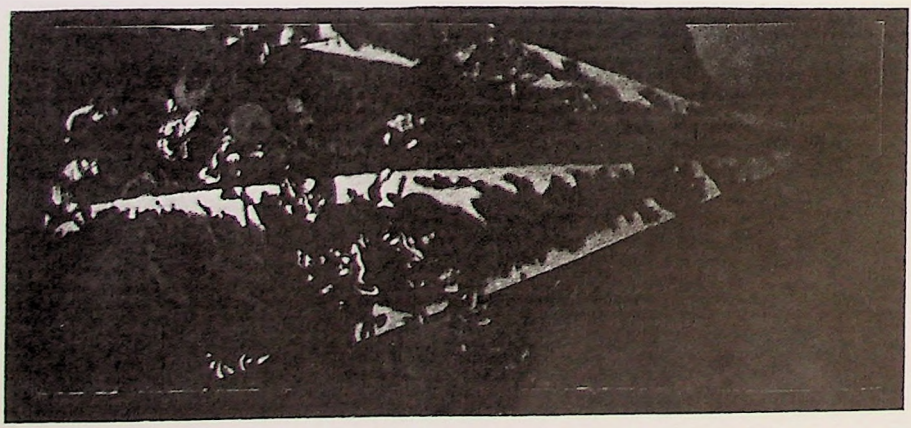

Fig 18 Pass of Omya in Sunshi from the series Famous places in various Provinces c. 1830's Hokkei

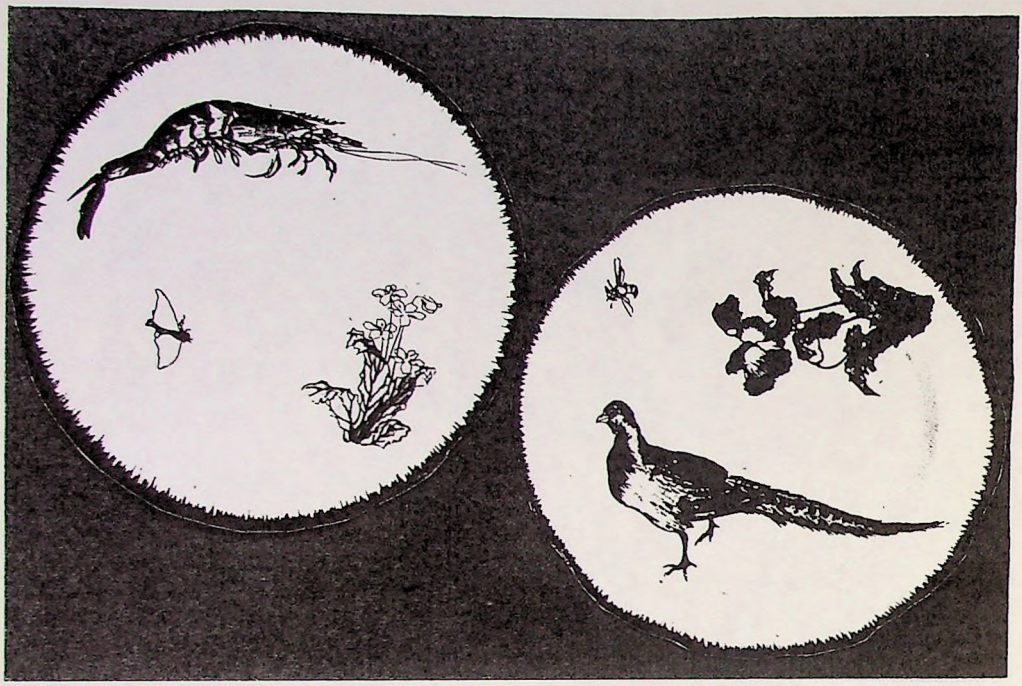

Fig. 19 Ceramics by Bracquemond showing the use of Hokusai's sketches