

**Large print
exhibition text**



Please do not remove
from the exhibition

Hokusai
beyond the
Great Wave

The British
Museum

This guide provides all the exhibition text in large print for the period Friday 7 July until Sunday 13 August.

There are further resources available for blind and partially sighted people: Books with large print images and descriptions of selected objects can be found at the exhibition entrance, along with books containing tactile images of selected objects, labelled in Braille. There will be a live audio descriptive tour and handling session on Saturday 22 July at 16.00. An audio introduction to the exhibition can be found on the Access section of the exhibition webpage: britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/hokusai/access.aspx

For any queries about access at the British Museum please email access@britishmuseum.org

Information on the doors:

No photography

No mobile phones

Light levels in the exhibition are low. This is because some of the artwork is light sensitive and can only be displayed for short periods.

Wall quote on left:

己六才より物の形状を写の癖ありて
 半百の比より数々画図を顕す
 といえども 七十年前画く所は実に取り
 るに足るものなし

From the age of six I had a penchant for copying the form of things, and from about fifty, my pictures were frequently published; but until the age of seventy, nothing I drew was worthy of notice.

Hokusai's postscript to **One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji**, volume 1, 1834

Large panel on the right:

北斎—大波の彼方へ

Hokusai beyond the Great Wave

The world-famous print 'The Great Wave' was published about 1831, when artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) was in his early seventies. Within just a few years, however, he had largely withdrawn from the commercial world of colour woodblock printing in which he excelled.

The self-styled Gakyō Rōjin (Old Man Crazy to Paint) believed the older he got, the greater his art would become. He was determined to create a legacy of sublime painted works. Living with his artist daughter Ōi, in the great city of Edo (present-day Tokyo), Hokusai painted ceaselessly, right up to his death at the age of ninety.

This is the story of Hokusai's art in old age.

Supported by



Map caption:

Map of north-east Asia showing Japan's neighbouring countries, its major cities and Mt Fuji.

Modern political boundaries are for reference only. The names shown and the designations used do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the British Museum.

Image caption:

Both Banks of the Sumida River at a Glance by Hokusai, 1806. Hokusai was born in Edo in 1760. He grew up in the merchant and artisan neighbourhood on the east bank of the Sumida River. In the early 1800s, Edo had more than one million inhabitants, as did London.

Image caption:

Hokusai in his eighties, illustrated by Utagawa Kuniyoshi during the 1840s.

Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Panel on the left:

Hokusai's early years: from twenty to sixty

Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) emerged from the floating world (ukiyo-e) school of art, which celebrated the hedonistic pleasures of the vast city of Edo, present-day Tokyo.

As a young child named Tokitarō (later Tetsuzō), the artist was adopted by Nakajima Ise, a mirror-maker. He trained as a woodblock cutter in his teens. Then in 1779, aged twenty, he joined the studio of Katsukawa Shunshō, a leading floating world artist, until his teacher's death in 1792.

From his thirties onwards, Hokusai began to develop an encyclopaedic and eclectic repertoire of new subjects and styles. His forties and fifties were particularly successful, with a flood of illustrations for popular fiction and special commissions for figure paintings. By the time he was sixty-one in 1820, he had both expanded and exceeded the boundaries of floating world art.

Image caption:

Hokusai published his first image of a wave in 1779. It can be seen on the screen in the background of this print.

Photo © Tokyo National Museum

Tall case on the left:

玉卮弹琴图

Chinese immortal Yuzhi and her dragon, about 1798

Ancient China represented a great cultural storehouse for Japanese artists. Hokusai was no exception. He explored Chinese themes and beliefs throughout his long career. Here, Yuzhi, an immortal in Chinese mythology, summons a white dragon to bring her single-stringed **chin**, a kind of harp.

At the bottom of the left scroll, Hokusai has signed this work 'Hokusai Sōri'. Beneath this, he impressed in red one of his personal painting seals, 'Creation is my master'.

Pair of hanging scrolls, ink and colour on paper
Private collection, USA

Family label:

Fancy that!

Hokusai wasn't always known as Hokusai. His childhood name was Tokitarō. During his lifetime he changed his name over 30 times. Look out for the different seals and signatures he used as you go around the exhibition.

柳下傘持美人图

Beauty with an umbrella under a willow, 1801–1804

A young woman looks back as she walks in high clogs. The green tresses on the willow and red azaleas signal late spring. Paintings of beautiful women were a staple of the floating world (ukiyo-e) style of art, which celebrated the pleasures of urban living. Hokusai developed his own style of idealised beauty.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Hokusai Museum, Obuse

『椿説弓張月』

Warrior hero Tametomo, 1807

In his forties, Hokusai illustrated adventure stories, collaborating with famous authors such as Takizawa Bakin. **Strange Tales of the Bow Moon**, published from 1807 to 1811, ran to 29 volumes, making the publisher a great deal of money. In the story, warrior hero Minamoto no Tametomo (1139–70) subdues imaginary islands on Japan's periphery.

From **Strange Tales of the Bow Moon**, illustrated book, woodblock

Trustees of the British Museum

為朝図

Warrior hero Tametomo, 1811

Warrior hero Minamoto no Tametomo (1139–70) possessed the strength of many men. According to legend, the inhabitants of the imaginary island of Onoshima struggled, even as a team, to bend the string of his mighty bow. With its richly layered colours and cut gold leaf, this is one of Hokusai's most technically complex paintings.

The scroll was specially commissioned by publisher Hirabayashi to celebrate the successful publication of **Strange Tales of the Bow Moon**. It is inscribed with a Chinese-style poem by author Takizawa Bakin. With his own earnings from the project, Hokusai was able to build a new house.

Hanging scroll, ink, colour, gold and gold leaf on silk
Trustees of the British Museum

Alcove on the left:

北斎と仏教(北辰信仰)

Hokusai, Buddhism and the cult of the North Star

The artist took the name Hokusai in 1798, when he was thirty-nine. This change of name announced his independence as an artist and signified his spiritual beliefs. Hokusai was a fervent follower of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism.

The name 'Hokusai' means 'North Studio', reflecting his lifelong faith in the power of the North Star, the one fixed point in the heavens. He specifically worshipped Bodhisattva Myōken, the deity who personifies the Big Dipper, a constellation that points to the North Star. Taito, the name Hokusai used in his fifties, also reflects these beliefs. It means 'Receiving the Big Dipper'.

About 1810, Hokusai used the painting seal 'Raishin' (Thunder Tremor), referring to an incident in his life. According to one story he was struck by lightning after worshipping at the Myōken hall at Yanagishima, on the eastern edge of Edo.

風流東部方角 柳島法性寺妙見堂の図

Myōken hall, 1785–1787

This drawing for an unpublished print shows the Myōken hall at Yanagishima in Edo, where the artist worshipped. People are admiring the sacred pine tree where the deity is known to appear. Hokusai was an ardent believer in the power of the Buddhist deity Bodhisattva Myōken. This is a significant work from his earliest period in the 1780s, when he used the name Shunrō (Spring Brightness).

Block-ready drawing, ink on paper
Victoria and Albert Museum

日蓮像

Monk Nichiren, about 1811

Monk Nichiren (1222–82) founded a leading sect of Japanese Buddhism. Here, Hokusai depicts Nichiren seated on a rock reading a holy sutra (sacred text). The ritual chant inscribed on the painting was adopted by Nichiren himself, 'Praise the marvellous law of the **Lotus Sutra**'. Hokusai was said to chant sutras when walking in the street.

Hanging scroll, ink, colour, gold and gold leaf on paper
Hikaru Museum, Takayama

Panel behind on the left:

北斎の改名について

Hokusai's changing art names

Hokusai had a restless and enquiring nature. During a long career lasting more than seventy years, he signed and sealed his prints, paintings and books with dozens of different art names. The six most important were: Shunrō, Sōri, Hokusai, Taito, Iitsu and Manji.

Hokusai, his most famous name, was adopted in about 1798, when he was thirty-nine. A small print, **Three Terrapins** (left), announced this change of name to his friends and acquaintances. In old age, Hokusai most commonly used the art names Iitsu and Manji, which he used from the ages of sixty-one and seventy-five, respectively.

画壇への登場から還暦

Hokusai's early years: from twenty to sixty

Each name change reflected a significant life event, artistic goal or spiritual belief. Sometimes he would pass on one of these names to a pupil.

Image caption:

Photo © Private collection, Japan

Image caption:

Signature aged 39, 1798 'Drawn by Hokusai Tokimasa'

Signature aged 75, 1834 'Brush of Manji, Old Man Crazy to Paint, changed from the former Hokusai litsu, aged seventy-five'

Hokusai frequently combined his art names and as he grew older the strings of names grew longer. His red painting seals, impressed after the signature to authenticate the work, often contained more names.

富士と大波

Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Panel on the right:

富士と大波

Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

In 1820, Hokusai renamed himself litsu (One Again), reflecting the East Asian belief that at sixty-one a person's life cycle begins again. And indeed, many of his greatest works were still to come.

Hokusai's most famous print, popularly known as 'The Great Wave', was probably published in 1831, when he was in his early seventies. It was one of a series, **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, which celebrated the sacred mountain in many different guises. As he aged, Hokusai increasingly identified with Mt Fuji as a source of long life, even immortality.

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

The prints in **Thirty-six Views** were striking for their sense of deep perspective, learned from European art, and for the use of imported Prussian blue, a synthetic pigment new to printing in Japan.

Image caption:

Boar Hunt at the Foot of Mt Fuji by Hokusai, 1806. During this period Mt Fuji was venerated as a deity in both the Shinto and Buddhist religions that are jointly practised in Japan.

Photo © Hie Jinja shrine, Kisarazu

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Wall behind:

『柳の糸』 江島春望

Spring view, Enoshima, 1797

Travellers from the city ask local children for directions. Hokusai's print of this island has a perspective and composition like Shiba Kōkan's painting of the same view (right). The small wave about to break on the shore, seen here, is a precursor of the print 'The Great Wave', produced 25 years later.

From **Willow Tresses**, album, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Tall case on the right (label on the wall):

司馬江漢筆 七里浜図

Shichirigahama beach, about 1800

Shiba Kōkan (1747–1818)

This distant view of Mt Fuji from the beach at Kamakura, past the island of Enoshima, is by Shiba Kōkan, the leading European-influenced artist of the day in Japan. He has used a deeply receding perspective and painted it to look like an oil painting. Hokusai's print of 1797 (left) copied an earlier version of this painting that was displayed in 1796 at the Atago shrine in Edo, present-day Tokyo.

Hanging scroll, oil pigment on silk
The Museum Yamato Bunkakan, Nara

Wall to the right:

伝統的な視点

Traditional perspective

Mt Fuji, painted between 1802 and 1816 by Kano Isen'in Naganobu (1775–1828), shows how perspective was traditionally shown in East Asian painting. Distant objects were placed high up in the composition.

キャリアの転機: オランダ人発注の肉筆風俗画

**A career-changing commission:
scenes of Japanese life, 1824–1826**

These scenes of Japanese life are from a larger group painted for visiting Dutch merchants of the East India Company (VOC). Contact with the outside world was strictly regulated until 1859, ten years after Hokusai's death, when the country reopened to international trade. Although unsigned, the paintings are considered to be by Hokusai and his pupils.

This foreign commission was unusual for Hokusai and it emboldened him to continue his experiments with European techniques: a low horizon, a vanishing-point perspective and effects of light and shade. The smooth 'old Dutch paper' supplied by the VOC enabled him to paint in extremely fine detail.

After this, Hokusai radically changed the way he composed landscapes, as can be seen in many of the prints in the series **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**.

花見図

Flower-viewing party, 1824–1826

Two merchants' wives are on a spring outing to enjoy the blossoming cherry with their servant and a boy: there is surely a picnic in their bundles. Hokusai paints the flowers and the patterns on their robes in minute detail. The figures are more deeply coloured on their left sides, suggesting light is coming from a single source, as in European art.

Ink and colour on old Dutch paper
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-1-4482m

Object label (top):

端午の節句図

Boys' Festival, 1824–1826

This is a rooftop platform for drying laundry – an unconventional setting for a picture.

Surrounded by banners and a flapping carp kite for the summer Boys' Festival, a baby reaches for his mother's breast. The faces are sensitively modelled and there is elaborate light and dark patterning on the robes. Traditionally, Japanese artists did not paint the way light falls on objects in this way.

Ink and colour on old Dutch paper
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-1-4482h

Object label (bottom):

初夏の浜辺図

Fisherman's family, 1824–1826

A fisherman and his wife patiently knot a net, while boys play on a large anchor. The cuckoo in the sky signifies early summer. On the right, dwellings are perched on a rampart of eccentrically shaped rocks. The shadows cast by the objects on the beach were revolutionary for Japanese art at this time.

Ink and colour on old Dutch paper
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-1-4482k

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Object label (top):

賀奈川沖本杓之図

Honmoku, off Kanagawa, 1807–1809

Two cargo boats navigate a giant wave. Hokusai is experimenting with a European-influenced style. A printed picture frame surrounds the novel perspective view with its low horizon and light and dark shading. The title gives evidence for the precise location of Hokusai's later print, **Under the Wave off Kanagawa**, otherwise known as 'The Great Wave' (1831).

Colour woodblock
Kawasaki Isago-no-Sato Museum

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Object label (bottom):

千絵の海 総州利根川

Tone River in Sōshū province, 1833

Bracing his legs against the side of the boat, a fisherman pulls up a large scoop net. On the far riverbank a village can be glimpsed through the delicate gradation (shading) of the net. The location is the mighty Tone River, perhaps its lower reaches.

From **A Thousand Pictures of the Sea**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Case on the right:

『北斎漫画 七編』 阿波の鳴戸

Whirlpools at Awa, 1817

Swirling whirlpools splinter into fingers of foam against a rock. Looking at Hokusai's picture, people in Edo could imagine travelling to Awa, a famous beauty spot in Japan's inland sea. In his preface, author Shikitei Sanba (1776–1822) confesses, '... rousing myself, I discovered I had been at my desk by the window all along, asleep with this little book as my pillow'.

From **Hokusai's Sketches (Hokusai manga)**, illustrated book, woodblock
Uragami Mitsuru collection, Japan

『今様櫛搔雛形』 さいくなみ他

Carved waves, 1823

Hokusai offers several hundred miniature designs for craft artists to copy for decorative hair combs and tobacco pipes. He instructs them to flip the design for the reverse side of the comb (right page, top left). The lower design on the left page, 'Waves striking against each other', anticipates the power and dynamism of 'The Great Wave'.

From **Modern Designs for Combs and Tobacco Pipes**, illustrated book, woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

『富嶽百景 二編』海上の不二
Fuji from the sea, 1835

Just a few years after 'The Great Wave', Hokusai created this version for an illustrated book. Seen from out at sea, a flock of startled plovers rises from the waves like spray over Mt Fuji and tentacles of foam coil extravagantly. The printing block was expertly cut by Chōhyaku, whose name, unusually, appears bottom right.

From **One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji**, illustrated book, woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Panel on the right:

富嶽三十六景

A life-saving commission: Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji, 1831–1833

Hokusai's late sixties were a time of personal hardship. During the late 1820s he suffered a minor stroke, but recovered using a home remedy. His second wife, Koto, died in 1828 and a grandson ran up huge debts. Publisher Nishimuraya's commission for the print series **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji** restored his fortunes.

Early designs from the series, in Hokusai's bold new style, made extensive use of the imported pigment Prussian blue, which had been recently adopted by Japanese publishers. Later designs, including 'The Great Wave', progressively introduced more colours, evoking how light steadily illuminates the landscape as the sun rises.

The series proved so popular that an additional ten designs were published. Landscape views, thereafter, became a major new genre in Japanese prints.

Case below the panel:

『富嶽百景 初編』木花開耶姫命

The deity Konohanasakuya-hime, 1834

Mt Fuji is venerated as a deity in both the Shinto and Buddhist religions that are jointly practised in Japan. Konohanasakuya-hime (Princess of the Flowering of Tree Blossoms), the Shinto deity of Mt Fuji, holds a sacred mirror and branch from the **sakaki tree**. For Hokusai, this mountain was a talisman of long life, a possible source of immortality.

From **One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji**, illustrated book, woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

『今様櫛搔雛形』 なつのふじ他

Mt Fuji combs, 1823

Hokusai shows Mt Fuji in various seasons and settings as haircomb designs. The book includes an advertisement for the series **Eight Fuji Views**: 'Expressing with the tip of the brush how the landscape changes in the four seasons, fair weather, rain, wind, snow and mist, in accordance with heavenly creation'. Although that series was not published, the idea must have developed into **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, published from 1831 to 1833.

From **Modern Designs for Combs and Tobacco Pipes**, illustrated book, woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Wall to the right:

東海道名所一覽

Famous places on the Tōkaidō highway at a glance, 1818

Mt Fuji is by far the largest natural feature in the Japanese archipelago. Here, Hokusai manipulates the 500 km of the Tōkaidō highway, with its 53 post stations, to fit into an extra-large print. Edo, present-day Tokyo, is at the bottom right and Kyoto is at the top right. Hokusai designed four aerial views of Japan and one imagining China

Colour woodblock
Leiden University Library, Special Collections

初版の藍摺り

Early designs entirely in blue

The first five designs of **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji** were printed entirely in shades of blue, combining Prussian blue and traditional indigo. This subdued palette evoked, perhaps, the muted colours of the landscape just before dawn.

The publisher Nishimuraya promoted this novelty in another of his publications issued at the beginning of 1831:

Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji, drawn by Old-man litsu, the former Hokusai, printed in blue, one view on each sheet, published progressively. These pictures show how the form of Mt Fuji varies from place to place, for example as seen from Shichirigahama beach or Tsukuda island, all different and particularly helpful to those studying landscape. If carved progressively in this manner, they could even exceed one hundred. They are not limited to thirty-six.

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Object label (top):

富嶽三十六景 武陽佃島

Tsukuda island, Musashi province, early 1831

The island of Tsukudajima was situated in Edo bay, home to a thriving fishing community. Here the bay is busy with passenger, pleasure and cargo boats. This is one of two blue prints mentioned by name in publisher Nishimuraya's first advertisement for the series in the New Year, 1831.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Henry L. Phillips
Collection, bequest of Henry L. Phillips, 1939

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Object label (bottom):

富嶽三十六景 信州諏訪湖

Lake Suwa, Shinano province, early 1831

Lake Suwa is surrounded by the mountains of present-day Nagano prefecture. Shapes often echo one another in the **Thirty-six Views**. Here, the shape of the shrine's roof echoes that of Mt Fuji's slopes.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Howard
Mansfield Collection, purchase, Rogers Fund, 1936

Wall quote:

当春は、銭もなく、着物もなく、口を
養ふのみにて、二月中旬に不相成候
ては、春にはなりかね候。

**This spring, no money, no
clothes, barely enough to
eat. If I can't come to an
arrangement by the middle
of the second month, then
no spring for me.**

Hokusai's letter to a publisher, 1830

富嶽三十六景 相州梅澤左

Umezawa manor, Sagami province, early 1831

Umezawa was a stopping place on the Tōkaidō highway. Clouds of pink-tinted morning mist part to reveal a blue Mt Fuji. Cranes, symbols of good fortune, feed and preen in the foreground. In this second group of five prints from the series, Hokusai begins to introduce colour into designs that are still mainly blue – suggesting dawn breaking.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Family label:

Fancy that!

This was printed using a colour called 'Prussian blue'. It was very unusual to use just one colour, but Hokusai wanted to capture the soft tones of the early morning sky before the sun had risen.

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

富嶽三十六景 駿州江尻
Ejiri, Suruga province, early 1831

With a single line, Hokusai draws Mt Fuji in silhouette. Playfully, he shows how a strong wind affects the landscape and the people travelling along the Tōkaidō highway. Stripping leaves from the bending trees, the wind sends a hat and a stream of tissues flying up into the sky.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Family label:

Fancy that!

Mt Fuji is Japan's highest peak and considered a sacred place by people there. This print is part of a series called **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, but Hokusai actually designed 46 prints of the volcano.

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

富嶽三十六景 凱風快晴(ピンク富士)
**Clear day with a southern breeze ('Pink Fuji'),
late 1831**

Although the design is abstract and monumental, Hokusai manages to convey a particular time of day and type of weather.

The southern breeze in the title suggests late summer when little snow is left on the summit of Mt Fuji. The view is from the eastern side of the mountain, its upper slopes struck by the sun rising over the Pacific Ocean. This is expressed in early impressions of the print with a delicate pinkish-brown. The light blue was inked unevenly between the clouds to create a 'mackerel sky' and subtly gradated (shaded) around the peak to give Mt Fuji a halo.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
Bequeathed by Mme Charles Jacquin 1938

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

富嶽三十六景 凱風快晴(赤富士)
**Clear day with a southern breeze ('Red Fuji'),
late 1831**

This version of the print is known affectionately in Japan as 'Red Fuji'. This is because for most impressions a darker orange-red pigment was used for the slopes of Mt Fuji, combined with a darker blue for the sky.

Over time, the wooden printing blocks become worn and small breaks appear in the printed lines. Careful examination of these breaks has confirmed that 'Pink Fuji' is the earliest colour scheme for this design and that this one is later. In general, the earliest impressions are considered to represent the artist's original vision most faithfully.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Wall on the right:

富嶽三十六景 山下白雨
Sudden rain beneath the summit, late 1831

Hokusai imagines Mt Fuji on a late afternoon in summer, casting its shadow on clouds to the right, behind the peak. The dramatic flash of lightning on the lower slopes signals a summer storm down at the level of human habitation. The massive scale of the mountain dwarfs even the weather.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Object label (top):

富嶽三十六景 御厩川岸より両国橋夕陽見

**Viewing sunset over Ryōgoku bridge
from the Onmaya ferry, about 1832**

Setting out from the east bank of the Sumida River, ferry passengers look away from us to admire Mt Fuji silhouetted against the evening sky. Hokusai captures the psychology of strangers who are brought together, but who studiously ignore one another.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

Object label (bottom):

富嶽三十六景 礫川雪ノ旦

Snowy morning, Koishikawa, about 1832

After heavy overnight snow, people are enjoying the view of Mt Fuji in crisp morning sunshine. Koishikawa was an area of wealthy samurai residences and large religious complexes.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by R.N. Shaw

Object label (top):

富嶽三十六景 隅田川関屋の里

Sumida River, Sekiya villages, about 1832

Three samurai horsemen, perhaps official messengers, race along the dykes through empty fields. The repetition of the forms of the horsemen with their wind-blown robes accentuates their speed. On the north bank of the Sumida River, Sekiya was a rural area on the edge of Edo.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon RA

Object label (bottom):

富嶽三十六景 諸人登山

**Various people climbing the mountain,
about 1833**

Since at least the AD 600s, pilgrims have climbed sacred Mt Fuji. Here, they climb towards a cave to rest. A pink sky suggests they will shortly make their final ascent to view the sunrise from the peak. This is the only design to show what it was like to be on Mt Fuji and perhaps completed the series, which was so successful that Hokusai was commissioned to design ten more. As here, they were printed with black outlines rather than the earlier blue.

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon RA

Wall behind:

「神奈川沖浪裏」の制作過程一彫り

Reproducing 'The Great Wave': cutting the woodblocks

This film shows some of the stages involved in creating a reprint of 'The Great Wave' using the traditional colour woodblock technique.

Here, the master cutter creates the 'keyblock' by reproducing the outlines of Hokusai's block-ready drawing. The original print was probably produced using four printing blocks of seasoned cherry wood, each carved on both sides.

Duration: 2 minutes. There is no sound.
© The Adachi Foundation for the Preservation of Woodcut Printing, Tokyo

「神奈川沖浪裏」の制作過程一摺り

Reproducing 'The Great Wave': printing from the woodblocks

This film shows some of the stages involved in creating a reprint of 'The Great Wave' using the traditional colour woodblock technique.

Here, the master printer can be seen adding each colour individually and in sequence within the outlines of the design produced from the 'keyblock'.

For 'The Great Wave', one side of a woodblock would have been used to print the indigo outlines and text first. Three more sides were used to print the Prussian blue shades of the sea. Another four sides were used to print the pale grey, dark grey, pale yellow and pink (now faded, for the clouds in the sky).

Duration: 2 minutes. There is no sound.
© The Adachi Foundation for the Preservation of Woodcut Printing, Tokyo

Wall on the right:

百人一首うばが絵説

法性寺入道前関白太政大臣(版下絵)

Poet Fujiwara no Tadamichi, 1835–1838

Oarsmen row hard to steer through crashing waves away from treacherous rocks.

In order to create a woodblock print, such as 'The Great Wave', Hokusai first did a neat 'block-ready' drawing, like this one. This was then pasted face-down onto an uncut block made of cherry wood. The block maker cut through the drawing, thereby destroying it. He cut away the background of the design, leaving behind delicate ridges of wood that printed the outlines.

The poem reads:

**As I row out into
the wide sea-plain and look
all around me
the white waves of the offing
could be mistaken for clouds!**

By Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1097–1164),
translated by Joshua Mostow

From **One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets,
Explained by the Nurse**, block-ready drawing, ink on paper
Victoria and Albert Museum

Wall quote:

…波の爪先が船を捕まえているようだ
と、だれもが感じるだろうね。

**... these waves are claws,
the boat is caught in them,
you can feel it.**

Letters between artist Vincent Van Gogh and his brother,
Theo, 1888

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

富嶽三十六景 神奈川沖浪裏
**Under the wave off Kanagawa
(‘The Great Wave’), late 1831**

Three fast boats, delivering fish to market in Edo (present-day Tokyo), head heroically into a great storm wave. Oarsmen crouch forward, ready to battle the elemental power of the ocean.

Playing with a European-influenced perspective, Hokusai dwarfs Mt Fuji by inviting us to look through the hollow of the wave from out at sea. Spray falls from its tentacles like snow onto the sacred peak. The vibrant tones of the imported pigment Prussian blue emphasise the depth and force of the wave.

As many as 8,000 impressions of this popular design were printed. For the price of little more than a double-helping of noodles, anyone in Edo could have purchased their own impression of ‘The Great Wave’.

富士と大波
Mt Fuji and 'The Great Wave'

From **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Acquired with the assistance of the Art Fund and a
contribution from the Brooke Sewell Bequest

Family label:

Fancy that!

Hokusai was over 70 years old when he created ‘The Great Wave’ for which he is world famous. It’s also a picture of Mount Fuji. See if you can find the volcano.

Panel on the left:

目に見える世界
Worlds seen

Hokusai gave dynamic expression to the Japanese Buddhist belief that all phenomena – both animate and inanimate – have a spirit and are interconnected. He began with a close investigation of the ‘form of things’. He then used his unique style and inventive compositions to transform the commonplace into the extraordinary, encouraging us to identify closely with the world around us.

In the early 1830s, following the success of **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**, Hokusai collaborated with the same publisher, Nishimuraya, to produce several follow-on print series. These featured large and small flowers, waterfalls and bridges.

From 1839 onwards, when Hokusai was in his eighties, he received important painting commissions for nature, still life and figure subjects. He began to concentrate more and more on these painted works, always including his age as part of the signature.

Image caption:

Hokusai’s 1828 woodblock illustration of the Edo premises of Nishimuraya, the publisher of **Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji**.

Wall on the left:

横大判花鳥画

Large flowers, about 1831–1832

In the 1810s and 1820s, Hokusai produced several brush drawing manuals in which he demonstrated three traditional brush styles: precise brushstrokes (formal), controlled sketching (semi-cursive) and rapid sketching (cursive).

In this series of ten prints he experimented with the standard brush techniques by designing five prints in the formal style and five in the cursive style. Differences between the signatures suggest that the cursive-style prints were issued first.

Object label (top):

芙蓉に雀

Hibiscus and sparrow, 1831–1832

A single sparrow darts out of a hibiscus bush. The flowers are outlined in a style similar to **Poppy** (right), but the leaves are an even more daring example of rapid sketch-like (cursive) brushwork, which brings the entire flower to life.

From 'Large flowers', colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Object label (bottom):

杜若にきりぎりす

Iris and grasshopper, 1831–1832

It takes a few moments to spot the grasshopper hidden amongst the delicate and precisely depicted leaves. A band of Prussian blue pigment rises from the bottom to represent the water in which the irises are growing.

From 'Large flowers', colour woodblock
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

芥子

Poppy, 1831–1832

A strong wind blows in from the left, but, led by the central flower, the poppies resist. The open blossom almost appears to be snarling in self-defence. Hokusai outlined this flower with a single, writhing rapid brushstroke that seems to have a life of its own. In contrast, the patterning of the petals is delicate, giving the poppies a lively presence.

Here, in one of his finest designs, Hokusai combines a mastery of painting technique with a deep understanding of nature that seems to endow his subjects with an intense, inner life.

From 'Large flowers', colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by Morton Harcourt Sands

豎中判花鳥画

Small flowers, about 1834

Publisher Nishimuraya advertised this print series as 'brightly coloured bird-and-flower pictures in poetry-card format'. He was offering the public inexpensive versions of detailed brush paintings done in brilliant pigments. The prints were grouped in five pairs, each pair sharing a similarly coloured background.

鶇・白粉花

Mirabilis jalapa and grosbeak, about 1834

Hokusai depicts the blooms of **mirabilis jalapa**, the 'four-o'clock flower', in all their variety. Native to the Americas, the flower may have reached Japan via Holland, entering the country through the port of Nagasaki. The short verse at the top right reads:

**Four-o'clock flowers
thrive on the far side of fences,
behind the peonies.**

From 'Small flowers', colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

鶇・垂桜

Weeping cherry and bullfinch, about 1834

Hokusai depicts a male bullfinch, distinguished by its pink marking from cheek to throat. The bird and flower stand out in relief against the background of deep Prussian blue. In his 1848 **Picture Book: Essence of Colouring**, Hokusai explains in detail how to draw and colour a bullfinch like this.

From 'Small flowers', colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Case on the right:

『北斎写真画譜』 杜若

Iris, 1819

Among Hokusai's many illustrated books, this one stands out for its high production values. The subjects range from deities to landscapes, flowers, birds, and animals.

Many are drawn meticulously with the neat and precise brushstrokes of the formal style.

The irises, here, were later reworked as a print, published between 1831 and 1832.

From **Hokusai's Album Drawn True To Life**, album, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Object label on the back wall:

梅に鶯(団扇絵)

Plum and warbler, about 1821

A warbler swoops down as if by invitation from the just-opening plum blossoms. Done in the precise, formal brush style, this typical spring design (above) has a bright, festive charm.

Fan print, colour woodblock
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
Bequeathed by Isaac de Camondo, 1911

露草に鶏と雛(団扇絵の校合摺)

**Cockerel, hen and chick with spiderwort
(proof print), 1832**

Proof prints were used by Hokusai to check his designs and indicate colour separation before the individual colour woodblocks were cut. Red ink indicated where a particular colour or printing effect should be used. In this rare survival, Hokusai changed the patterning of the hen's breast before the final print (left) was made.

Fan print mounted in a folding album, woodblock proof with red ink
Victoria and Albert Museum
Given by the Misses Alexander
Photo © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

『日光山志』龍頭滝 其一

Dragon's Head waterfall, no. 1, 1837

This guidebook explains the history, geography and festivals of Mt Nikkō, north of Edo, present-day Tokyo. It was published jointly by ten Edo firms and illustrated by many different artists. Both of Hokusai's illustrations capture the torrents of water rushing down the mountain's gorges. Their realism suggests that Hokusai actually visited Nikkō.

From **Record of Mt Nikkō**, illustrated book, woodblock
Ebi Collection, UK

Wall behind:

諸国名橋奇覧

Wondrous Views of Famous Bridges in Various Provinces, about 1834

Hokusai was particularly inspired by the structure and shape of bridges. In the spring of 1834 the publisher Nishimuraya commissioned a print series about famous bridges, following their collaboration on a series about waterfalls. Bridges also appear throughout **Hokusai's Sketches (Hokusai manga)**, the artist's popular series of manuals for drawing with a brush, published from 1814 onwards.

すほうの国きんたいはし

Kintai bridge, Suō province, about 1834

Hokusai probably used a guidebook as reference to depict this famous bridge in Suō province (present-day Iwakuni city, Yamaguchi prefecture) in western Japan. Later printings omit the atmospheric slanting rain.

From **Wondrous Views of Famous Bridges in Various Provinces**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Object label (right):

地方測量之図

Picture of land surveyors, 1848

One of Hokusai's last-known dated prints, this depicts samurai officials surveying land for sea defences. The inscription celebrates the achievements of master surveyor Hasegawa Zenzaemon II and his adoptive father, the late Zenzaemon I, a famous mathematician. It also instructs beginners on the basics of surveying.

Extra-large colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

三河の八つ橋の古図

**Old picture of Eight-plank bridge in Mikawa,
about 1834**

The Eight-plank bridge in Mikawa province features in the literary classic of the early AD 900s, **Tales of Ise**. Hokusai has added an eccentric raised section to the bridge and dressed the figures in contemporary clothing.

From **Wondrous Views of Famous Bridges in Various Provinces**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon RA

Wall on the left:

諸国瀧廻り

**Tour of Waterfalls in Various Provinces,
about 1833**

This series features eight different waterfalls from across Japan. Throughout his life Hokusai explored nature in transformation, particularly water in all its different forms: waves, rivers, waterfalls, rain and snow. Here, he emphasises the waterfalls' contrasting forms, endowing each with a distinctive personality. Some were undoubtedly drawn from life, while others suggest he referred to illustrated guidebooks.

木曾路ノ奥阿弥陀ヶ瀧

**Amida waterfall, deep beyond the Kiso
highway, about 1833**

Hokusai's lively imagination produced this striking design, which contrasts the marbled currents at the top with the sudden drop of the waterfall. Three travellers warm saké (rice wine) as they enjoy the view.

From **Tour of Waterfalls in Various Provinces**,
colour woodblock Tōyō Bunko (The Oriental Library), Tokyo

和州吉野義経馬洗滝

The waterfall where Yoshitsune washed his horse in Yoshino, Yamato province, about 1833

The dynamic zigzag of this waterfall is echoed in the shape of the horse and the two men. Several Yoshino guidebooks of the time claim a famous warrior from the 1100s, Minamoto no Yoshitsune, rode through the area on horseback.

From **Tour of Waterfalls in Various Provinces**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon RA

Family label:

Fancy that!

Nature was a big inspiration for Hokusai. He lived near rivers and canals in Edo (now called Tokyo). Fascinated by the constant movement of water, he spent his life trying to capture it in his paintings and prints.

鳥獣図

Birds and animals, 1820s–1840s

Leaping, diving or standing proud, Hokusai's birds and animals have vivid personalities rather than mere surface grace or beauty. In this way, he completely reinterprets some of Japan's most commonly depicted subjects — carp ascending a waterfall, hawks and chickens. His sensitively controlled brushwork produces soft breast feathers, slippery scales and spiky hairs protruding from a bird's beak. The insistent gaze of these creatures communicates not merely the 'form of things', but also a life force within.

Tall case on the right:

桜に鷲図

Eagle and cherry, 1843

An eagle grips a rock with its talons and scans the sky with a beady eye. Hokusai gives the bird gravity and dignity, as well as a physical reality. Each bud and flower of the blossoming cherry is observed with extraordinary accuracy.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Ujiie Ukiyo-e Collection, Kamakura

Wall on the right:

桜に鷹

Hawk and cherry, 1833–1834

A hawk rests on a decorated perch. Hokusai's bird is particularly animated, scanning the sky for a possible meal. This large vertical print imitates the format of a hanging scroll painting, but it would have been available at a more affordable price.

Colour woodblock
Tokyo National Museum

Wall behind:

馬尽

Horses, 1822

In the spring of 1822, a horse year in the East Asian zodiac calendar, the Yomo poetry circle commissioned Hokusai to create a series of 30 luxurious prints with poems, known as **surimono**. Each print featured several horse-related poems. Most of the compositions are still lifes, but they also include landscapes and scenes of daily life. Over more than four decades, Hokusai created inspired designs for large numbers of **surimono**.

馬尽 馬除

Talisman, 1822

In Japan, mirrors can be seen as talismans with magical powers that bring good luck and avert evil. Here, the smooth metallic surface of the water in the basin resembles a mirror. The reference to horses is oblique. In Japanese, the name of the print is **Mayoke** (Talisman), which includes the word 'ma' (horse).

From **Horses, surimono**, colour woodblock with metallic pigments and embossing
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon RA

馬尽 竹馬

Bamboo horse, 1822

A 'bamboo horse' is a frame carried on a person's shoulders to transport loads. This one has transported a luxurious tobacco set to a plum blossom-viewing party. The swastika on the green fabric (right) is a Buddhist symbol of eternity, as well as the mark of the commissioning poetry circle.

From **Horses, surimono**, colour woodblock with metallic pigments and embossing
Trustees of the British Museum

Tall case on the left:

若衆文案図

Young man composing a letter, 1840

This youth is pre-occupied with composing a letter, possibly to a lover. Hokusai captures the textures of the various fabrics and still-life objects with some of his most intricate brushwork.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Ujiie Ukiyo-e Collection, Kamakura

(7–20 July)

若衆像

Portraits of young men

Hokusai did many paintings of beautiful women in the early 1800s. Here, unusually, he features two sexually alluring young men. It is difficult to determine the social status of the sitters, although the style of dress, particularly the dangling sleeves, evokes that of contemporary actors who specialised in female roles. Their youth and hairstyles suggest they may also represent young male sex workers.

If the sitters are based on real people, the paintings were likely commissioned by an admirer. They form a pair, but have rarely been displayed together.

(21 July – 13 August)

静物と肖像画

Still life and portraiture

In his still lifes Hokusai gave fresh interpretations even to ordinary subjects, such as food being prepared. He also showcased some of his most intricate brushwork – capturing light reflecting off different surfaces and distinguishing between textures.

In his later years, Hokusai occasionally portrayed sexually alluring young men. It is difficult to determine the social status of the sitters, although the style of dress, particularly the dangling sleeves, evokes that of contemporary actors who specialised in female roles. Their youth and hairstyles suggest they may also represent young male sex workers.

(7–20 July)

若衆図

Young man seated on a bench, 1840

A beautiful youth, dressed in luxurious fabrics decorated with cherry blossom patterns, sits deep in thought. He sits awkwardly on the bench, but Hokusai's composition is balanced by the long sharkskin-covered scabbard of the sword. The poem reads:

**Spring breezes and spring rains assail
his lovely form.
Even the dew weighs heavily on branches
of the evanescent cherry.
Why does he seem so lost in thought,
like a beautiful woman,
As he rests there on the bench, overcome
with waves of tears?**

By 'Your Servant', translated by Robert Campbell,
Tim Clark and Kobayashi Tadashi

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by Sir W. Gwynne-Evans, Bt

(21 July – 13 August)

端午の節句図

Boys' Festival decorations, 1844

The Boys' Festival is celebrated annually on the fifth day of the fifth month. Here, the decorations consist of a model samurai helmet on a lacquer stand with a bunch of irises in a ceremonial wrapper.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Saga-Arashiyama Institute for Japanese Art, Kyoto

Panel on the left:

想像の世界
Worlds imagined

China has always been a major source of cultural inspiration in East Asia. People were forbidden to travel abroad in the Edo period (1615–1868), so Japanese scholars and artists took classical, rather than contemporary, China as their point of reference. Japan, too, had its own proud canon of literary classics and military history.

In his late career, especially, Hokusai imaginatively reinterpreted the traditions of both China and Japan, making them accessible to ordinary people. He began with what he saw, but the boundary between this and the worlds he imagined was often porous. As old age advanced, Hokusai regularly painted holy men, protective deities and terrifying ghosts, invoking and releasing their power through the force of his art.

唐土名所之絵

Picture of famous places in China, 1840

This is the last of five large bird's-eye views that Hokusai produced between 1818 and 1840. It is the only one to depict China. Unable to travel there, Hokusai and most educated Japanese of the Edo period saw China as a realm of the imagination, a distant source of ancient culture and wisdom.

Hokusai creates a detailed impression of the region's topography, with the Great Wall marking the northern border. Cartouches label China's districts, geographic features, major cities and provinces, while its houses are represented by a multitude of small triangles nestling amongst the valleys and ravines. The craft artist Egawa Sentarō cut the woodblocks for this print.

Colour woodblock
The British Library

Family label:

Fancy that!

During Hokusai's lifetime, visiting countries like China was off-limits, so people had to imagine what a place was like. Hokusai enjoyed creating fantastical images of places he'd never been to.

Tall case on the left:

花和尚 魯智深図

Chinese hero Lu Zhishen, 1823–1826

Lu Zhishen is one of the bandits from **Outlaws of the Marsh**, a Chinese novel of the 1300s. Chinese editions describe him as 'the old monk who loved to kill'. Here, he fells a pine tree with a single blow of his staff to intimidate corrupt guards plotting to kill his friend, Lin Zhong.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Private collection, Japan

Wall behind:

詩哥写真鏡

True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poems, 1833–1834

This series of ten tall-format prints depicts subjects from Chinese and Japanese poetry of the classical period from the AD 600s to the 1300s. Hokusai conjures up a distant age of high culture. He shows Japanese poets in court costume on the right and Chinese poets dressed in, to Japanese eyes, exotic foreign robes on the left.

Many educated people during the Edo period (1615–1868) could read both Japanese and classical Chinese fluently. They admired the poetry of both countries. These prints, however, have no inscribed poem, suggesting that they were aimed at an audience familiar enough with the classics to interpret the subjects unaided.

Object label (left):

無題(杜甫)

Untitled (Poet Du Fu), 1833–1834

This is a revised version of an illustration that Hokusai produced for **Illustrated Anthology of Tang Poetry** (see case right). The scene relates to a farewell poem that Chinese poet, Du Fu, wrote in the AD 700s for a friend who had departed for war. Hokusai shows the warrior looking back to the poet's hut, an echo of the poem's sense of lament.

From **True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poems**,
colour woodblock
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Object label (right):

融大臣

Poet Minister Tōru, 1833–1834

Tōru, a Japanese minister during the AD 800s, recreated the shoreline of northern Japan in his garden, importing seawater every day to keep his marine fish and shellfish alive. Here, Hokusai may have based his design on **Tōru**, a play of the early 1400s, which tells the story of the garden.

From **True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poems**,
colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Case on the right:

『新編水滸画伝 卷之二十九』

宋江婦女の難を救ふ

Song Jiang rescues a woman, 1835

Set during the late Song dynasty (AD 960–1279), **Outlaws of the Marsh**, a Chinese historical novel from the 1300s, relates the adventures of 108 rebellious warriors. Specialising in vigilante justice they punish evil bureaucrats and help the poor. Hokusai illustrated at least the first six parts of this popular edition.

From **New Illustrated 'Outlaws of the Marsh'**, illustrated book, woodblock
Uragami Mitsuru collection, Japan

『唐詩選画本 六編』 杜甫

Poet Du Fu, 1833

Late in his career Hokusai took on many projects related to Chinese culture. In this Japanese edition of a Chinese poetry anthology, he shows a general riding to war based on a poem written in the AD 700s by Du Fu. The anthology took almost 50 years to complete, employing many artists along the way.

From **Illustrated Anthology of Tang Poetry**, illustrated book, woodblock
Ebi Collection, UK

『和漢 絵本魁』 文覚上人

Priest Mongaku beneath a waterfall, 1836

Mongaku (1139–1203) mistakenly killed a married woman he loved, so paid penance beneath icy Nachi waterfall. This unusual composition transforms the book's horizontal format into a dynamic vertical. Hokusai produced four picture books depicting Japanese and Chinese military heroes engaged in heroic deeds.

From **Picture Book of the Warrior Vanguard in Japan and China**, illustrated book, woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

文覚上人(根付)

Netsuke of Priest Mongaku beneath a waterfall, after 1836

Signature: Shunkōsai Chōgetsu

Hokusai's illustrated books provided inspiration for craft artists in many fields, including carvers of netsuke (toggles). The front of this **manjū**, a rice cake-shaped netsuke, shows Priest Mongaku doing penance beneath Nachi waterfall, based on an illustration in Hokusai's **Picture Book of the Warrior Vanguard in Japan and China**, displayed alongside.

Netsuke, ivory
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Oscar Charles Raphael

Wall quote above the case:

此分は、画法にはづれ候間、
私の方にては、どうぞ此のやうになら
ぬやうに、し
と御ほり可被下候、
此類流行にても、あるべけれど、
私はいや／＼。

**If you cut for me, please do
not cut this style し ...
Recently, these eyes and
noses 
have been very popular.
But I really, really hate them!**

Hokusai's letter to the woodblock cutter Sugita Kinsuke,
warning him not to get the faces wrong again, 1836

Wall on the right:

百人一首うばが絵説

**One Hundred Poems by One Hundred
Poets, Explained by the Nurse, mid-1830s**

One Hundred Poems is an anthology of classical Japanese verse. Many books were published to help young readers understand the poems. In this series Hokusai's educator is a nurse, someone with down-to-earth experience of the world. She explains the poems through scenes of everyday life.

Hokusai created 91 designs but only 27 were made into colour prints. Fortunately, almost all the artist's superb unused block-ready drawings have survived.

Object label (top):

中納言兼輔(版下絵)

Poet Chūnagon Kanesuke, 1835–1838

Two men steer a ferry along a river channel.
Towards the stern sits a young samurai woman
(wearing a white head cloth and facing the viewer).
A young samurai sits in the centre of the group.
He represents the poet Kanesuke from the AD
900s, who kept thinking about a young woman,
but could not recall where he had seen her.
The poem reads:

**Like Izumi River
that wells up and flows,
dividing the Moor of Urns –
when did I see her, I wonder,
that I should yearn for her so?**

By Fujiwara no Kanesuke (AD 877–933),
translated by Joshua Mostow

From **One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets,**
Explained by the Nurse, block-ready drawing, ink on paper
Trustees of the British Museum

Object label (bottom):

皇嘉門院別当(版下絵)

Poet Kōka Mon'in no Bettō, 1835–1838

The poem is based on a pun in Japanese
between the phrases 'to exhaust oneself' and
'channel-marker'. Hokusai depicts a team of
exhausted workmen carting a harvest of reeds
toward a seaside inn, indicated by the posts
(channel-markers) along the shore.

From **One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets,**
Explained by the Nurse, block-ready drawing, ink on paper
Trustees of the British Museum
Bequeathed by Charles Shannon, RA

菅家

**Poet Kan Ke (Sugawara no Michizane),
1835–1836**

In AD 898, the poet Kan Ke accompanied retired Emperor Uda (AD 867–931) on an autumn excursion to Offering Hill in Nara, south of Kyoto. Recognising the beauty of the foliage, the poet suggested that a ‘brocade of autumn leaves’ might make a suitable gift for the gods. This is one of the few prints in the series to give an ancient, courtly setting to its poem.

From **One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets,
Explained by the Nurse**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

柿の本人磨

**Poet Kakinomoto no Hitomaro,
about 1835–1836**

A famous verse by Hitomaro, a poet from the late AD 600s, compares the endless feeling of a night spent alone with the dragging tail of a pheasant. Hokusai’s image of fishermen hauling a dragnet upstream as night descends captures the mood exactly. A plume of campfire smoke carries the eye to a tiny figure in a hut, perhaps the poet awaiting a visitor.

From **One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets,
Explained by the Nurse**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

Tall case on the right:

歌占図

Poem-diviner, 2nd day, first month, 1827

New Year in Japan was a time for social events and fortune-telling. Hokusai may have produced this as an ‘impromptu painting’ during such a gathering. The painting is based on a play of the early 1400s about a man able to predict the future by interpreting verses selected from those tied to his bow.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by Sir W. Gwynne-Evans, Bt

歴史・物語の絵画化

Imagining Japanese history

Like many Japanese of the Edo period (1615–1868), Hokusai possessed a strong sense of history. The ruling samurai family at the time, the Tokugawa, traced their lineage back to the Shogunate of the late 1100s, Japan’s first warrior government. The Tokugawa encouraged everyone to read historical accounts, classical fiction and drama, and even popular legends from these earlier periods – all could be treated as history.

In the richly detailed narrative paintings and illustrated books of his late period, Hokusai generally focused on just the main characters from each scene.

白拍子図

Shirabyōshi dancer, about 1820

Shirabyōshi were female entertainers. Their costumes combined elements of men's court attire, including a court hat and sword. This figure's pose recalls the climax of a dance in a drama of the late 1400s, **Benkei on the Boat**. Hokusai animates the costume with distinctive segmented outlines.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Hokusai Museum, Obuse

Wall on the right:

百物語

One Hundred Ghost Tales, about 1833

This series of medium-sized prints is based on the popular custom of friends gathering on hot summer nights to tell chilling ghost stories. Candles would be lit and then blown out one by one after each tale in the hope – or fear – that a ghost would appear when the final wick was extinguished.

The modest print format allowed Hokusai to demonstrate his mastery of composition. By focusing on essential details only, he manages to capture both the horror and humour of the uncanny. Only five of the projected 100 designs were in fact published.

こはだ小平二

Kohada Koheiji, about 1833

Spectral flames surround the ghost of Kohada Koheiji, as he pulls down the edge of a mosquito net. He is haunting his sleeping wife who, with her lover, had drowned him in Asaka swamp in north-east Japan. His evil grimace signals that his victim is in for a shock.

Hokusai brings the supernatural to life with chilling details such as the Buddhist rosary necklace, the white death shroud and the net's rim. He drew on a story that seems to have been in circulation for much of the 1700s, before being turned into a novel in 1803.

From **One Hundred Ghost Tales**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Purchase funded by the Theresia Gerda Buch bequest
in memory of her parents Rudolph and Julie Buch

Family label:

Fancy that!

Today during summer, people in Japan hold 'ghost story evenings'. Starting with 100 candles, they blow one out after each story has been told. When it is totally dark they hope – or fear – that a ghost will appear.

お岩さん

Oiwa-san, about 1833

Oiwa-san first appeared as a character in a ghost play of 1825 from the popular kabuki theatre. Tricked into using a disfiguring face cream, she dies after her husband abandons her. Here, her scarred face emerges from a paper lantern lit to honour the dead. A Buddhist prayer for the soul, '**Namu Amida butsu**' (Praise to Amida Buddha), is inscribed on its side.

From **One Hundred Ghost Tales**, colour woodblock
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
Given by Henri Vever, 1894

笑ひはんにや

Laughing demoness, about 1833

Hokusai combines Hannya, the horned ghost of a jealous woman from traditional theatre, with Yamamba, a mountain woman of folk legend. The latter was said to devour infants. Here, she looms in a round window, delighting in her own evil.

From **One Hundred Ghost Tales**, colour woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum
Purchase funded by the Theresia Gerda Buch bequest
in memory of her parents Rudolph and Julie Buch

Tall case behind:

朱描鍾馗図

Shōki painted in red, 1846

Shōki is a talismanic figure with the power to quell both demons and disease. Here, he stands ready to take on all evil. Vigorous outlines underscore his energy, while Hokusai's sophisticated shading almost enables Shōki to leap from the confines of the painting. A deluxe commission, this painting was probably used to ward off smallpox as there was an epidemic of the disease in Edo (present-day Tokyo) at the time.

Hanging scroll, ink and red pigment on silk
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Gift of Mrs Charles Stewart Smith, Charles Stewart Smith Jr
and Howard Caswell Smith

Wall on the left:

宗教、伝奇・伝説に基づく画題

Religious and mythological subjects

A powerful driver of Hokusai's artistic ambitions throughout his career was a faith in both human and divine spiritual forces. His devotion to the North Star sustained his creative energies throughout his career, but later in life he also seemed to sense the divine all around him.

Hokusai's late work celebrates both the otherworldly power of unseen deities and the deep humanity of spiritual figures such as the Buddha and Shōki, the demon-queller. Religious themes in his late paintings and illustrated books encourage us to consider how, as human beings, we relate to the divine world, to nature and to one another.

Tall case on the left:

蓮上釈迦図

Shakyamuni on a lotus, 1823–1826

Shakyamuni (formerly Prince Siddhartha), the founder of Buddhism, sits on a lotus pedestal performing moxibustion, a traditional Chinese medicinal treatment. He holds burning rolls of dried mugwort (moxa) over acupuncture points to relieve his leg, stiff from meditating. This humorous and human depiction of the Buddha may have been an 'impromptu picture' done at a party.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper
Private collection, Japan

『釈迦御一代記図会 卷之三』

Prince Siddhartha tested by a demon, 1845

After training as a mountain ascetic for six years, Prince Siddhartha (later Shakyamuni Buddha) is confronted by a six-metre-tall demon with eight faces and nine limbs. Hokusai revels in depicting the awesome power of supernatural forces, as he did in the **One Hundred Ghost Tales** series. This unusual composition transforms the book's horizontal format into a dynamic vertical.

From **Illustrated Life of Shakyamuni**, illustrated book, woodblock
Uragami Mitsuru collection, Japan

Tall case on the left:

北斎一門合作 七福人図

The Seven Lucky Gods, 1823–1826

Hokusai and six pupils

Hokusai may have had as many as 200 pupils, including both professionals and amateurs. He lived and worked in a part of Edo called Katsushika, which he adopted as a family name. Hokusai's pupils are therefore referred to as the Katsushika school of artists. They were strongly influenced by his style.

Here, Hokusai and six of his leading pupils have together painted the Seven Lucky Gods. Hokusai playfully represents the warrior deity Bishamon by showing only an old pine tree, a helmet and spear. The pine overlooks the scene, much like a teacher supervising his pupils.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Panel on wall behind:

北斎の周辺
Hokusai's world

Until his mid-seventies, Hokusai's artistic influence and his broad popularity rested on his work as a prolific commercial artist. This required close collaboration with publishers, woodblock cutters and printers. He was also an important teacher, training pupils in person and publishing manuals for painters and craft artists.

Aged seventy-five, Hokusai entered deep old age with two new art names: Manji (Everything) and Gakyō Rōjin (Old Man Crazy to Paint). Even in his eighties, Hokusai made long journeys across Japan to Obuse in Shinano province to carry out painting commissions for particular patrons.

During these final decades he lived with his daughter Ōi, also an artist. They moved constantly around Edo (present-day Tokyo), living humbly in rented rooms.

Image caption:

Hokusai sketched himself covered in a blanket and with a piss bottle at his side. He sent this playful drawing to a publisher who was trying to hurry him.

Image caption (above):

Hokusai sometimes worked in other places in central Japan, such as Nagoya, where the project to publish **Hokusai's Sketches (Hokusai manga)** began. In Obuse, he stayed with his patron Takai Kōzan.

Image caption (right):

Places associated with Hokusai are shown on this map of Edo (present-day Tokyo), which became the capital of Japan's new military government in 1603. A defensive moat system radiated out from Edo castle, the Shogun's headquarters. Edo had separate residential areas for samurai lords, their followers, merchants, artisans, monks and priests.

Case on the right:

彫師と摺師

Making woodblock prints, 1825

Hokusai, who had been a woodblock cutter in his teens, illustrates contemporary cutting and printing techniques. Using chisels, gouges and wooden mallets, the man is cutting text characters into a cherry woodblock. The woman is rubbing a **baren**, a printer's pad, over the back of a sheet of paper to transfer the pigment from the printing block beneath.

Surimono, colour woodblock with metallic pigments and embossing
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

ばれん

Baren (printer's pad), early 1900s

The woodblock printer's essential tool is the **baren**. A tight coil of bamboo twine is sandwiched between two rigid discs of lacquered paper. This is then wrapped in a thin sheet of bamboo bark, which is knotted over the back to form a handle. Printers use **barens** to transfer pigment from the woodblock onto a sheet of paper to create the printed image.

Bamboo, lacquered paper, silk
Trustees of the British Museum

『北斎漫画 初編～十五編』

Hokusai's Sketches (Hokusai manga), 1814–1878

Manga originally meant sketches or drawings done quickly as ideas occurred to an artist. **Hokusai manga** is 15 volumes of manuals for drawing with a brush. In 1812, while staying in Nagoya with one of his pupils, Hokusai produced more than 300 sketches for volume 1. Effectively distributed by its publishers, **Hokusai manga** became widely known throughout Japan and, after 1859, overseas.

Illustrated book, colour woodblock
Uragami Mitsuru collection, Japan

『画本葛飾振』(版下絵)

Block-ready drawings of warriors, about 1836

Tawara Tōda Hidesato, a warrior of the AD 900s, here recovers treasure from the palace of the legendary Dragon King of the sea. These block-ready drawings were intended for an illustrated book of warriors. To create each printing block the master cutter pasted the appropriate drawing face-down onto a block of cherry wood and cut through the back of it. Had the book been produced these drawings would have been destroyed in the process.

From **Picture Book in the Katsushika Style**,
folding album, ink on paper,
with woodblock-printed borders and title
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Gift of Mrs Charles Stewart Smith

北斎下絵帳

Miniature drawings for craft artists, 1829–1831

Used to make decorative art objects such as the netsuke (toggle) displayed alongside, these preparatory drawings were guides for craft artists. Each vertical pair is a front and back view of a single design. Hokusai published a number of books of such craft designs.

Two albums, ink and colour on paper
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Fletcher Fund 1941

十二支（根付）

Netsuke of twelve zodiac animals, about 1880

Unsigned, style of Kaigyokusai Masatsugu
(1813–1892)

This netsuke (toggle) depicts the 12 animals of the East Asian zodiac as a miniature menagerie, including a rat, a tiger and a cockerel. The design is strikingly similar to the preparatory drawing by Hokusai displayed alongside.

Ivory with inlaid horn
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

肉筆絵手本帖

Album of model paintings, spring 1843

Hokusai would have produced many model paintings for his students to copy, but few have survived. This album contains simple plant, fish and insect subjects. It is introduced by a figure, surely Hokusai himself, declaring, 'this is the auspicious spring of my eighty-fourth year'.

Folding album, ink and colour on paper
Ōta Memorial Museum of Art, Tokyo

蛙とゆきのした

Frog and strawberry geranium, 1835–1836

Hokusai produced this album of model paintings for students to purchase and copy. Done in painstaking detail on thin paper, the paintings may have been traced from preparatory drawings and then individually coloured. During the Tenpō famine of 1835 to 1836 Hokusai relied on the income from replicating such albums to have enough to eat.

Folding album, ink and colour on paper
Hokusai Museum, Obuse

Panel on the wall behind:

画狂老人

Gakyō Rōjin
(Old Man Crazy to Paint)

From the age of six I had a penchant for copying the form of things, and from about fifty, my pictures were frequently published; but until the age of seventy, nothing I drew was worthy of notice. At seventy-three years, I was somewhat able to fathom the growth of plants and trees, and the structure of birds, animals, insects and fish. Thus when I reach eighty years, I hope to have made increasing progress, and at ninety to see further into the underlying principles of things, so that at one hundred years I will have achieved a divine state in my art, and at one hundred and ten, every dot and every stroke will be as though alive. Those of you who live long enough, bear witness that these words of mine are not false.

From Hokusai's postscript to **One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji**, 1834, translated by Henry D Smith II

Case on the left:

『富嶽百景』

One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji, 1834, 1835, about 1849

This three-volume book depicts Mt Fuji in a sequence of ever-changing and sometimes eccentric views, further strengthening the artist's relationship with the sacred mountain. The extraordinarily fine cutting of the printing blocks was supervised by Hokusai's woodblock cutter of choice, Egawa Tomekichi.

Illustrated book, woodblock
Uragami Mitsuru collection, Japan

Wall on the left:

漁師図(自画賛)

Fisherman seated on a rock, mid-1820s

Hokusai produced both the picture and one of the poems. The figure of the fisherman may be an idealised self-portrait, reflecting perhaps the artist's longing for a simple life close to nature. The other poem is by Ōi, Hokusai's daughter, who jokingly signs it with the character for 'Tipsy'. The celebratory tone of both poems seems to reflect joint successes.

Surimono, colour woodblock with metallic pigment and embossing
Trustees of the British Museum

伝北斎筆 老人図

Head of an old man, early 1840s

Attributed to Hokusai

The dynamic lines and ecstatic, open-mouthed expression of the old man compel the viewer's attention. Wearing a simple jacket and blessed with prominent earlobes, the figure resembles Hokusai's **Self-portrait, aged eighty-three**, displayed alongside.

Ink and slight colour on paper
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV2736-2

八十三歳自画像

Self-portrait aged eighty-three, 1842

Hokusai included a lively self-portrait when he sent this letter to a publisher. He is pointing energetically and chatting. Hokusai writes that he is also sending drawings produced in his early forties. He hopes some might be usable if suitably edited, even though they were created by an immature artist.

Drawing in a letter, ink on paper
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, RV-3513-1496

伝北斎、または北斎門人筆 晩年の北斎肖像

Hokusai in old age, 1840s–1890s

Attributed to Hokusai or one of his pupils

An old man rests his hands on a walking stick, turning his head to one side. The large ears correspond to descriptions of Hokusai. It is debated whether this portrait is by Hokusai or a close pupil. A similar portrait showing just the head and shoulders was published in 1893 in the first biography about the artist.

Ink and red pigment on paper
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
Given by Henri Vever, 1912

Wall quote above the portraits:

翁の面貌は、瘦せて鼻目常人に異ならざれども、たゞ耳は、頗る巨大なりと

Hokusai indeed had a lean face: his nose and eyes were not particularly different from those of other people, but his ears were very large.

Iijima Kyoshin, *Biography of Katsushika Hokusai*, 1893

Case behind on the left:

文邊の不二

Fuji of letters, about 1835

The decorative cloud emphasises the different worlds of the courtier-poet gazing at Mt Fuji and a scene of contemporary salt-making on Tago beach. The poet is probably Yamabe no Akahito (active AD 724–736), who composed a well-known verse celebrating Mt Fuji.

Preparatory drawing, red and black ink on paper
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris

夕立の不二

Fuji and evening shower, about 1835

Tiny villagers scurry for shelter during a sudden summer storm with lightning. As thatched roofs and trees are buffeted below by the squall, Mt Fuji appears impervious to the ragged lightning on its lower slopes. The cloud formations are much more extensive in this preparatory drawing than in the printed book displayed in the case behind.

Preparatory drawing, ink on paper
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris

Tall case behind:

日新除魔 閏九月二十一日

**Chinese lion, 21st day, intercalary ninth month,
1843**

Each day in his early eighties, Hokusai did an energetic brush drawing of either a Chinese lion or a lion dancer. He called these 'Daily Exorcisms' (**Nisshin joma**) and apparently tossed them out the window to ward off misfortune. This daily practice reveals a superstitious side to Hokusai's spiritual beliefs. Happily, the drawings were retrieved by his daughter and pupils.

Hokusai inscribed this comic poem directly onto his painting of a Chinese lion. It is full of words that sound like 'lion' (**shishi**).

**No lion [lying] around –
implion [implying] that this lion
feels quite sullion [sullen],
except when he starts to draw:
then he feels he's flion [flying] high.**

Translated by Alfred Haft

Ink on paper
Hokusai Museum, Obuse

Photograph on the right:

三代為一(露木孔彰)筆 北斎仮宅図(写真)

Hokusai and Ōi in their lodgings, before 1893 (photograph)

Tsuyuki Kōshō (Iitsu III, died after 1893)

In the early 1840s, Iitsu III, one of Hokusai's pupils, visited the artist and Ōi at their temporary lodgings in the Fukagawa district of Edo, present-day Tokyo. Much later he drew this vivid picture from memory. Hokusai leans forward in a quilt to paint, watched intently by his daughter. The text says that the quilt was lice-infested and the room littered with food wrappers. On the left side of the drawing is an old tangerine box on the wall, enshrined with an image of monk Nichiren (1222–82).

Ink on paper
Photo © National Diet Library, Tokyo

Family label:

Fancy that!

Ōi, Hokusai's daughter, was a talented artist. They were very close and often worked together. Some experts even think some of his works were actually created by her.

Wall quote above the photograph:

如何なる人に面会すとも、嘗巨燵を
離るゝことなし。画くにもまた此のご
とし。

倦む時は、傍の枕を取りて睡る。睡り
さむれば、又筆を採りて画く。

**No matter who comes
to visit, I never leave the
heater... When I'm tired I
pick up the pillow beside
me and go to sleep.
When I wake from sleep
I pick up my brush and
keep drawing...**

Hokusai explaining his winter routine to one of his pupils,
1842–1843

Case on the right:

日蓮、日象上人坐像厨子

**Shrine with Nichiren and possibly Nichizō,
1700s–1800s**

This portable lacquered shrine houses images of monk Nichiren (1222–82) and, possibly, his follower Nichizō (1269–1342). They are protected by deities associated with the **Lotus Sutra**, the central text of Nichiren belief. Hokusai's artistic practice was guided throughout his life by his faith in Nichiren Buddhism.

Portable shrine, ink, colour, gold, gold leaf and lacquer
on wood, with metal fittings

Trustees of the British Museum

Given by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

Wall on the right:

応為栄女筆 絵具製法の指導状(書状)

**Letter with instructions for mixing
pigment, 1840s–1850s**

Katsushika Ōi (about 1800 – after 1857)

Hokusai's daughter Ōi sent this letter to a pupil, probably in the town of Obuse where her father had important patrons. It instructs them how to produce a red pigment, 'Grind a pellet about this size [she draws a circle] to a fine powder and bury it in the ground for around sixty days'.

Ink on paper
Hokusai Museum, Obuse

Panel and tall case behind:

北斎と応為

Hokusai and Ōi

Hokusai married twice and had five or six children. Eijo (about 1800 – after 1857), a daughter from his second marriage, also became a talented artist. The art name she adopted, Ōi, means 'Following litsu', that is, following Hokusai.

Ōi left an unsuccessful marriage to artist Minamizawa Tōmei, perhaps in the late 1820s, to live with Hokusai until his death in 1849. Only a handful of her signed paintings is known. Unacknowledged, she may have assisted her father with some of his later works. Works bearing Hokusai's signature would almost certainly have attracted higher fees for their household income.

Image caption:

Types of women, an 1847 illustration by Ōi, shows women of different social classes, including a merchant's wife, a farmer's wife and a high-ranked sex worker. Ōi has signed the picture jokingly with the character for 'Topsy'. She was known to have been fond of alcohol.

葛飾応為筆 月下砧打ち美人図

Woman pounding cloth by moonlight, 1840s
Katsushika Ōi (about 1800 – after 1857)

Under a full moon, a woman pounds cloth on a block. The detailed brushwork features subtle gradations of blue.

Hokusai's daughter Ōi was one of his most talented students and a remarkable artist in her own right. This is a rare confirmed example of her work. The signature has been partly scraped away, suggesting an attempt to pass Ōi's painting off as a work by her father.

Ink and colour on paper
Tokyo National Museum

Tall case behind to the left:

北斎または応為筆(共作カ) 菊図

Chrysanthemums, possibly late 1840s

Hokusai and/or Katsushika Ōi
(about 1800 – after 1857)

This is one of a pair of scrolls featuring varieties of chrysanthemum painted in hyper-real detail. The compositions recall Hokusai's earlier **Large flower** print series. The signature and seal, however, do not appear to be genuine. Scholars have suggested that the paintings were in fact done, or completed, by Ōi, Hokusai's artist daughter.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Hokusai Museum, Obuse

Tall case on the right:

濤図(祭屋台天井絵)

Waves, 1845

Frames completed by Takai Kōzan (1806–1883)

All is engulfed by the sea. Spiralling waves open like portals to another dimension. Here, Hokusai's interest in Chinese Daoist philosophy may have led him to represent the 'supreme ultimate', from which everything originates.

The paintings were created in 1845 as ceiling panels for a festival cart in the town of Obuse. Hokusai also designed the decorative frames of mythical birds and beasts – and even an exotic European winged cherub. They were completed in 1846 by his pupil and patron Takai Kōzan, a wealthy and educated saké (rice wine) merchant in the town.

Ink and colour on paulownia wood
Kanmachi Neighbourhood Council, Obuse

Image caption:

Hokusai designed the warrior and the dragon sculptures for this magnificent five-metre-high festival cart, as well as the ceiling panels.

Photo © Hokusai Museum, Obuse

Wall quote on the right:

齡八旬にちかしといへど 眼気筆力
壮年にかかわらず百歳の命を保ちて
独立のこゝろざしをじょうじゅせん事
を思ふ

**Even though I'm nearly
eighty, my eyesight and the
strength of my brush are
no different from when I
was young. Let me live to
be a hundred and I will be
without equal!**

Hokusai in **Picture Book for Various Crafts:
New Models**, 1836

Wall behind:

鳳凰図(岩松院本堂天井画下絵・彩色)

Phoenix, preparatory drawing for the ceiling at Ganshōin temple, about 1845

This preparatory drawing shows Hokusai designing on a grand scale. The mythological phoenix or **hōō**, a multi-coloured omen of peace and prosperity, was commissioned for the ceiling at Ganshōin temple in Obuse. Here, the artist indicates what colours to use.

Takai Kōzan (1806–83), Hokusai's local patron and pupil, coordinated production. The painting took several years to complete, finally covering about 35 square metres. Some of the subtlety of Hokusai's design was lost, but still it overawes the worshipper in the hall beneath.

Ink and colour on paper
Ganshōin temple, Obuse

Image caption:

The ceiling of the worship hall of Ganshōin temple showing the magnificent giant phoenix, which was based on Hokusai's design, displayed alongside.

Panel on the left:

神の領域

Immortality

Hokusai died after a short illness in 1849 in the fourth month of his ninetieth year.

From the age of eighty-eight in 1847, Hokusai exclusively began to use a large red painting seal with the character 'Hundred'. Like a talisman, it expressed his wish to reach an even greater age – and immortality beyond. The following year, he published his testament and legacy to the world of painting, **Picture Book: Essence of Colouring**. This manual includes many of the bird, animal and plant motifs that appear in his late paintings.

Hokusai believed the older he got, the better his art would become. Supported by his artist daughter, he was painting sublime and technically brilliant works to the end. He revisited dragons, tigers, holy men, Mt Fuji – powerful images from his long career – one final time.

Image caption:

This lost portrait was painted in the early 1840s by Keisai Eisen, a contemporary of Hokusai, so it may be the most accurate portrait of him. It was later inscribed with Hokusai's deathbed poem:

**Maybe I'll unwind
by roaming the summer fields
as a will-o'-the-wisp.**

Translated by Alfred Haft
Photo © The Sumida Hokusai Museum, Tokyo

Tall case on the left:

九十歳よりは 又々画風を改め
百才の後にいたりては
此道を改革せんことをのみねがふ

**... from ninety years I will
keep on improving my style
of painting. After I reach
one hundred, my only desire
will be to revolutionise
this vocation.**

Hokusai's postscript to *Picture Book: Essence of Colouring*, volume 1, 1848

『絵本彩色通』

Picture Book: Essence of Colouring, 1848

The male mallard duck (right) in volume one also appears in one of Hokusai's late paintings. In volume two, he depicts Chinese lions with contrasting poses, their mouths open and closed, surrounded by a swirling mass of manes, tails and fur. In the accompanying text Hokusai gives advice on colours and how to apply them.

From **Picture Book: Essence of Colouring**, illustrated book, woodblock
Trustees of the British Museum

不二図

Mt Fuji through pines, 1847

Hokusai has used the natural colour of the silk to depict snow-covered Mt Fuji as seen between the trunks of two pine trees. In contrast, the foothills to the right are painted with rich colour washes. The small size of the painting belies its monumental composition.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Private collection, Japan

河骨に鶉図

Cormorant on a post, 1847

In this eccentrically composed painting, a cormorant inspects us warily. The viewpoint is from mudflats around breakwater posts. Hokusai encourages us to focus on this unpicturesque scene. When we look longer, new qualities are revealed: yellow candocks at different stages of flowering, flashes of blue plumage and stalks stretched taut.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by the Trustees of James Martin White

扇面散図

Scattered fans, 1849

Five decorated folding fans lie scattered in a heap. Hokusai recorded with extraordinary care how the light catches differently on each of the folds. He died in the fourth month of the year this was painted. His paintings, signed 'aged ninety', must have been completed within a short space of time, perhaps assisted by Ōi, his artist daughter.

Hanging scroll, ink, colour and gold on silk
Tokyo National Museum

源三位頼政図

Yorimasa killing the Nue monster, 1847

Warrior Minamoto no Yorimasa (1104–80) was ordered to subdue the Nue monster that was disturbing the sleep of Emperor Takakura (ruled 1168–80). Yorimasa aims an arrow into pitch blackness with grim intensity. A flash of lightning heightens the drama. As in many other late paintings, Hokusai here condenses the scene to its essential elements.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Private collection, USA

雲龍図

Dragon in rain clouds, 1849

A dragon writhes up out of the tornado seen inside its tail and glares diagonally down to the left. Its intense expression and gaze exudes a living, almost human consciousness.

The dragon was painted in a complex sequence of ever-darkening tones – from highlights of unpainted paper to jet-black ink flicked from the brush for final excitement. Originally the painting formed a pair with a scroll of a snarling **Tiger in rain.**

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
Given by Nobert Lagane

Family label:

Fancy that!

Hokusai was born in the Japanese year of the dragon and painted dragons throughout his life. He always felt he could improve his technique so practised every day of his life.

流水に鴨図

Ducks in flowing water, 1847

A male mallard looks quizzically at us, while another dives for pond weed. Ripples of reflected light eddy towards us as fallen maple leaves sink slowly into the water. Hokusai invites us to savour the moment.

In his 1848 manual, *Picture Book: Essence of Colouring*, Hokusai provides instructions on how to paint ducks just like these.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Trustees of the British Museum
Given by Sir W Gwynne-Evans, Bt

雪中の虎図

Tiger in snow, first month, 1849

Gazing heavenward, a tiger leaps through thickly falling snow, surrounded by swaying bamboo. The shapes of the leaves echo that of the tiger's paws and claws. Hokusai is surely expressing a joyous identification with the universe. His inscription refers to the first month of 1849, a tiger month in the calendar. In the final year of his life, Hokusai is counting out the days and months, willing additional longevity.

Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Private collection, USA

Wall on the left:

栄女筆 北岑宛北斎死亡通知書(書状・写真)
**Ōi's letter to Hokushin about Hokusai's death,
18th day, fourth month, 1849 (photograph)**

**Manji [Hokusai] was ill and treatment was to
no avail. He died from his illness early this
morning at the seventh hour [about 4am].
I wanted quickly to inform you of this
situation... Funeral tomorrow, 19th day,
fourth hour [about 10am].**

Ink on paper
Private collection, Japan

Wall quote above the letter:

天我をして十年の命を長ふせしめ
ば...
天我をして五年の命を保たしめば、真
正の画工となるを得べし

**If heaven will extend my
life by ten more years...
If heaven will afford me
five more years of life, then
I'll manage to become a
true artist.**

Hokusai on his deathbed, 1849

Panel on the left:

世界の北斎

World artist

In 1859, after more than 200 years of relative isolation, Japan began to engage more fully with the wider world. Hokusai's colour woodblock prints and illustrated books flooded out of the country as trade goods, spreading his reputation around the world. The British Museum purchased its first Hokusai print in 1860.

For the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867, French artist Félix Bracquemond copied designs from **Hokusai's Sketches (Hokusai manga)** to decorate a dinner service. Japonisme, the cultural movement of enthusiasm for the art and design of Japan, became popular in many countries, with Hokusai as a standard-bearer. In 1888, the Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh wrote, 'All my work is based to some extent on Japanese art'.

One hundred and fifty years on, 'The Great Wave' has become a global icon, affirming the immortality to which the artist aspired.

Image caption:

Picture of Western Traders at Yokohama Transporting Merchandise by Utagawa Sadahide, 1861. The port and foreign settlement of Yokohama was established for international trade between Japan and the wider world in 1859.

Acknowledgements

The Trustees of the British Museum thank the following for their generous support and assistance in the creation of the exhibition:

Supported by



**Research supported by the Arts and
Humanities Research Council**

Abeno Harukas Art Museum; Angus Lockyer; Art Fund; Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University; The Asahi Shimbun; Asano Shūgō; Embassy of Japan; Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Israel Goldman; JAPAN AIRLINES; The Japan Foundation; Japan House; Roger Keyes; Kochūkyo, Co. Ltd; Matsuba Ryōko; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Nagata Seiji; NHK; NHK PlanNet, Inc, Kinki Branch Office; SOAS University of London; Sumida Hokusai Museum; Ellis Tinios

lenders

The British Library
Chiba City Museum of Art
The Cleveland Museum of Art
Ebi Collection, UK
Ganshōin Temple, Obuse
Hikaru Museum, Takayama
Hokusai Museum, Obuse
Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto
Kanmachi Neighbourhood Council, Obuse

Acknowledgements

Kawasaki Isago-no-Sato Museum
Leiden University Library, Special Collections
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MOA Museum of Art, Atami
Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
The Museum of the Imperial Collections,
Sannomaru Shōzōkan, Tokyo
The Museum Yamato Bunkakan, Nara
Myōkōji Temple, Koga
Nagoya City Museum
Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden
Okada Museum of Art, Hakone
Ōta Memorial Museum of Art, Tokyo
Private Collections, Japan
Robert and Betsy Feinberg Collection, USA
Saga-Arashiyama Institute for Japanese Art
Sano Art Museum, Mishima
Sebastian Izzard Collection
Sumishō Art Gallery, Inc., Tokyo
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University
of Cambridge
Tokyo National Museum

Acknowledgements

Tōyō Bunko (The Oriental Library), Tokyo
Ujiie Ukiyo-e Collection, Kamakura
Uragami Mitsuru Collection, Japan
Victoria and Albert Museum

All exhibition services unless otherwise credited	British Museum
Graphic design	Northover & Brown
3D design support	AFSB Associates
Lighting design	Lux Lucis Ltd
Construction	Factory Settings Ltd
Graphic production	Echo Studios Ltd
Object mounts	British Museum and Colin Lindley
Fine art transport	Momart
Tactile and large print image books	VocalEyes

All images copyright the Trustees of the British Museum unless otherwise stated.

Additional images and film supplied by
The Adachi Foundation for the Preservation of
Woodcut Printing, Tokyo
Hie Jinja Shrine, Kisazaru
National Diet Library, Tokyo

This exhibition has been made possible by the provision of insurance through the Government Indemnity Scheme. The British Museum would like to thank the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Arts Council England for providing and arranging this indemnity.

As part of the Museum's efforts to lessen its environmental impact, materials, fittings and equipment are reused where possible. The Museum aims to make its exhibitions as sustainable as possible, sharing best practice,

resources and the latest innovations with other museums and galleries.

Every effort has been made to contact the copyright owners of images and other print and digital media in the exhibition. If you are a rights holder of an item in this exhibition and are concerned that you did not grant permission to use it, please contact the Museum's Exhibitions Department at exhibitions@britishmuseum.org

Find out more

Highlight events

Special evening events include a panel discussion on Hokusai's impact on western art on 2 June, a study of the flowering of artistic genius in old age on 30 June and an evening of themed performances and activities on 14 July presented in collaboration with Japan House.

Free lunchtime lectures and talks cover a range of themes and include curators' introductions and gallery talks.

Films presented in collaboration with Japan House include **Miss Hokusai** (2015) and a **groundbreaking documentary** made to accompany the exhibition. Filmed in Japan, France and the UK, it focuses on Hokusai's work, life and times in urban Edo (present-day Tokyo) in the early 1800s. Using extraordinary close-ups

and groundbreaking ultra HD video technology, Hokusai's paintings and prints are examined by world experts who provide fascinating insights into the artist's techniques and practices.

Enjoy free family events during half-term (29 May – 2 June) and special under 5s workshops on 9 June, 19 July and 11 August.

For the full programme and to book, visit britishmuseum.org/hokusai

For blind and partially sighted audiences there is an audio described tour and handling session on 22 July. For Deaf and hard of hearing audiences there is a live subtitled curator's talk on 10 June and a Deaf-led BSL tour on 24 June.

To book email access@britishmuseum.

Find Out More

Free related galleries and display

Japan

Rooms 92–94

The Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries

The Asahi Shimbun Displays

Japanese woodblock printing: a craft of precision

25 May – 16 July 2017, Room 3

Follow the fascinating processes of 19th-century woodblock printing, illustrated through beautiful works by Kunisada, Hokusai and Hiroshige.

Supported by The Asahi Shimbun

Shopping

The accompanying book and a range of related products are available from the Museum shops or britishmuseum.org/shop

Find Out More

Eating

Combine your exhibition visit with a delicious afternoon tea, lunch or dinner in the Great Court Restaurant.

Join in online

#Hokusai



Sign up for the Museum's enewsletter at britishmuseum.org

Become a Member

If you enjoyed Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave, become a Member and visit again free.

Membership gives you unlimited entry to exhibitions all year round – including the forthcoming BP exhibition Scythians: warriors of ancient Siberia and a new British Museum/BBC project on faith and belief.

Join on-site now to redeem the price of your exhibition ticket and enjoy a special discount off purchases you make today. Individual Membership starts at £64*, with Joint Membership and Guest facilities also available.

Member benefits include:

Free unlimited entry to exhibitions

Exclusive events

Members' Room

The British Museum Magazine

Special offers and discounts

Enquire at the exhibition shop or the Membership Desk in the Great Court.

Alternatively visit britishmuseum.org/membership

See you again soon

*Based on Direct Debit price

Evaluation kiosk:

Please tell us what you think by completing this survey. You could win £50 in our prize draw!

You can also email comments to:
info@britishmuseum.org

