

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga

Melora Cann

Meet the artists: Katsushika Hokusai

Meet the subject: Japanese artist, ukiyo-e painter and printmaker of the Edo period.

8 Pages



Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)



'Under the Wave off Kanagawa,' also known as 'The Great Wave'

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北齋 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)

Meet the subject:

'Under the Wave off Kanagawa,' also known as 'The Great Wave,' from the series 'Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji' done in 1830–32 by Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北齋), Japanese artist. *"The breathtaking composition of this woodblock print, said to have inspired Debussy's La Mer (The Sea) and Rilke's Der Berg (The Mountain), ensures its reputation as an icon of world art. Hokusai cleverly played with perspective to make Japan's grandest mountain appear as a small triangular mound within the hollow of the cresting wave. The artist became famous for his landscapes created using a palette of indigo and imported Prussian blue... As historian Richard Lane concludes, 'Indeed, if there is one work that made Hokusai's name, both in Japan and abroad, it must be this monumental print-series...' While Hokusai's work prior to this series is certainly important, it was not until this series that he gained broad recognition and left a lasting impact on the art world. It was The Great Wave print that initially received, and continues to receive, acclaim and popularity in the Western world."*

~ From an introduction to the print, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City)

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/45434>

The Artist:

Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北齋) (1760–1849), was a prolific Japanese artist, ukiyo-e painter and printmaker of the Edo period. From Edo (now Tokyo), at 14 he became an apprentice to a wood-carver. At 18, he was accepted into the studio of Katsukawa Shunshō, artist of ukiyo-e, a style of wood block prints and paintings. "What really motivated the development of my artistic style was the embarrassment I suffered at Shunkō's hands," Hokusai is quoted regarding his expulsion from Shunkō's school for attending a rival school. The art of ukiyo-e focused on images of the courtesans and Kabuki actors. Eventually, Hokusai would change the subjects to landscapes and images of the daily life of Japanese people from a variety of social levels. This change of subject was a breakthrough in ukiyo-e and in Hokusai's career. His landscape and nature prints became very popular.

His humor took flight as he aged and his first book of 'Manga,' published in 1814, was all humorous sketches or caricatures which have influenced the modern form of comics known by the same name. In one translation, Manga means "irresponsible drawings." He later published a 15-volume set of Manga (see samples below, of his work and a modern rendition). For more on Hokusai's possible influences on manga, read a blog from the British Museum, **Hokusai: the father of manga?**

Link: <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/hokusai-the-father-of-manga/>

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)



Manga print by Hokusai

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)



Manga print by Hokusai

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)



An example of modern Japanese Manga

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)

Insider notes on modern pop culture from Japan:

Manga and Anime - Anime is art animation for TV and movies; manga is the visual art in comic books and graphic novels. The styles are very similar, often manga becomes the basis for anime.

Curious fact:

Hokusai was known by at least 30 names during his lifetime.

[Although the use of multiple names was a common practice of Japanese artists of the time, the numbers of names he used far exceeds that of any other major Japanese artist; each name reflected a change in his art style, accomplishments or his status in society.]

More info-bites:

- In 1804, he created a portrait 600 feet long using a broom and buckets full of ink.
- A quote from the artist: *"Nothing I did before the age of seventy was worthy of attention."*
- Four years after Hokusai's death, an American fleet led by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, sailed into Tokyo Bay and forced Japan to open its ports to the Western world.

How was the prints were done:

Woodblock printing in Japan is a technique best known for its use in the ukiyo-e artistic genre of single sheets. Developed during the Edo period (1603–1868), the technique uses water-based inks with a wide range of vivid colors, glazes, and transparency. The steps are simple:

- 1) The text or image was first drawn onto thin washi (Japanese paper)
- 2) The washi is glued face-down onto a plank of close-grained wood (like cherry)
- 3) Oil is rubbed on top to make the lines of the image more visible
- 4) A fine-bladed knife is used to make incisions along both sides of each line or area
- 5) Wood is then chiseled away, based on the drawn outlines
- 6) The block is inked using a brush or brushes
- 7) A flat hand-held tool called a baren is used to press the paper against the inked woodblock and thus apply the ink to the paper
- 8) Once the ink is adhered, the paper is peeled away to reveal the print
- 9) A single print can go through multiple colored inking, from different wood blocks, each with different details carved to add to the original design in layers

Ukiyo-e Painter 葛飾北斎 Makes Waves

The 'Father' of Manga (continued)

Want to learn more?

Watch these videos on YouTube:

Ukiyo-e woodblock printmaking with Keizaburo Matsuzaki (9 minutes)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8uF3PZ3KGQ>

How Did Hokusai Create the Great Wave? | Christie's

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEubj3c2How>

Step inside Hokusai's Woodblock Prints | Christie's (1 minute)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uq3jaY8gNc>

Manga show at the British Museum (3 minutes)

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0vavaMNa0w&feature=emb_logo

History of Manga with mention of Hokusai's original Manga (4 minutes)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=webvzMB4L-8>