HOKUSAI
PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS
IN THE
FREER GALLERY OF ART

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Freer Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.
FOREWORD

In connection with the celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Townsend Harris treaty with Japan, the Freer Gallery of Art is holding a special exhibition of paintings by the famous ukiyoe master Hokusai, who lived from 1760 to 1849. In the present booklet, well illustrated with paintings and drawings, you will find an excellent short account of Hokusai's life. This exhibition comes from the remarkably large holdings of this artist's work owned by the Freer Gallery of Art.

A. G. Wenley,  
Director.

Freer Gallery of Art  
April 1960.
HOKUSAI

Two hundred years ago, in the ninth month of the tenth year of the Hōreki era, during the reign of the one hundred sixteenth Emperor of Japan, Tōhito, and the rule of the tenth Tokugawa Šōgun, Ieharu, a child was born in Edo, present-day Tokyo, who was destined to become one of the great artists of Japan. He is popularly known by the name Hokusai, although during his life he made use of approximately fifty pseudonyms. His fame rests more upon his acceptance abroad than in his homeland, for he was an artist of the ukiyoe or so-called “floating world” popular genre school of painting, which until recently was frowned upon by the traditional connoisseurs of Japan. The collectors of the western world, however, embraced the production of this school with intensity and sought Hokusai’s work. Time has passed and the output of his brush, which was never at rest, has been spread throughout the world and has served as a source of inspiration to many artists.

One often enjoys reflecting on the life and times of a man who was so able to fire the imagination of others. A complete study of Hokusai’s work is impossible in any single collection, for it comprises paintings, sketches, prints, books, and even some attempts at textile designs. The Freer Gallery of Art, however, is extremely fortunate in being the repository of the largest collection of paintings and drawings produced by Hokusai. It is only in this collection, or that of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts, that his development of an individual style and his skill in handling his brush can be carefully traced.

Who was Hokusai? These were the words that echoed on the lips of many of the artists on the Continent shortly after the discovery of a volume of Hokusai’s Manga (printed Sketch Books) by the French engraver Bracquemond in 1856 in the shop of Delâtre, his
printer. The story is often related that pages of these books had been used as packing material in a shipment of ceramics from Japan to France. It is impossible to trace the veracity of the story; however, the desire for things Japanese rapidly caught hold, and by 1867 there already existed La Société Japonaise du Jinglar, composed of artists in France.

Hokusai was born into the Kawamura family in the area of Edo known as Honjo Warigesui, which was part of Katsushika District, in 1760. It is from this latter site that he selected one of the names he was to use. As often happened in Japan, when he was but four or five years old he was adopted into a family more able to provide for him in the future. This was the Nakajima family, and his new father, Ise, was a maker of mirrors. Japan at that time was experiencing an era of expanding prosperity and relative peace. The country had been united under the Tōkugawa Shogunate, and, although it was an enforced rather than natural peace, it did permit the economic and social development of Japan. The craftsmen had found a place in society, and there was an ever-increasing demand for works of art to be supplied to the homes of the nouveaux riches and the travelers. The townsmen who could now afford art were interested in having the artists of the period portray the scenes familiar to them, such as those which occurred in everyday life, and especially desired representations of their favorite pleasures, the theatre and the courtesans. Thus ukiyoe painting came to flourish in the cities of Japan from the late seventeenth century on. Many great artists had preceded Hokusai, and he can almost be said to mark the last significant flowering of this style of painting prior to its demise.

The training that Hokusai underwent while a child in the household of the mirror maker proved valuable, for it put him in contact with the world of design and craftsmanship. When he was about fourteen, his education took another step forward and he was apprenticed to an unknown engraver. He was thus permitted to study the technique of carving wood blocks for prints. This gave him an advantage
over his colleagues in later life, for few of them had been privileged to work in and understand the principal technique by which their artistic production would be reproduced. Hokusai’s skill in handling line reflects that he was an apt pupil.

The next major development in the life of Hokusai was his entrance in 1778, at the age of eighteen, into the studio of the already established ukiyoe master Katsukawa Shunshō. It had always been a practice for a recognized artist to surround himself with students. If he found them acceptable, he would assign names to them and they would continue to work as his representatives. The name Shunshō gave to Hokusai was Shunro, and he produced many prints in the style of his master. It is likely that, while in Shunshō’s studio, he turned out the painting attributed to him of the Courtesan Writing (Fig. 2). It is almost a direct copy of a painting by his teacher, save for the addition of poetry and the deletion of two palanquin carriers. Hokusai’s stay in the studio of Shunshō was not destined to last long, for an altercation occurred and in 1785 he left the protecting wing of the elder artist and changed his name to Sō Shunrō. It is from this period on that he began to develop an individual style.

Shortly after Hokusai set forth on his own, he took to using many pseudonyms in varying combinations. The one most commonly relied upon during his late twenties and through his thirties was that of Sōri. He had tired somewhat of the ukiyoe style and had gone out to learn more about traditional Japanese painting. He is reported to have studied with a Kanō master and certainly was acquainted with the Tosa style. The painting technique that most fascinated him during this period, however, was that of the Rimpa school, named after Kōrin, the great master of a decorative style of painting. Painters of this school relied upon the use of washes and also signed their compositions with large round seal marks. Hokusai was so influenced by this group that he elected to be the fourth generation Sōri and copied the seal and techniques of this school. The Six Master Poets (Fig. 4) was painted in that style; however, Hokusai was never able
to divorce himself completely from *ukiyo*e. The influence of the print masters Shunshō, Utamarō, and Kiyonaga can be seen in a number of his paintings that bear the Sōri signature.

Prior to the year 1798, the artist had not made use of the name Hokusai. In that year it appeared on some illustrations for the book *Dan to ka* and became his most often used name, and the one by which he is known today. The pair of paintings of courtesans performing New Year’s Rituals (Figs. 5, 6) bear the simple Hokusai signature and are in all likelihood products of his late thirties or early forties. He had forsaken the preceding style and had returned to the brilliant, opaque palette of the *ukiyo*e masters. He also had developed a canon for the female form. His girls all resemble each other in their features, and one speculates as to whether he used a model. They have rather stylized, long, squarish faces, and, on viewing them, one has the feeling that they are detached from reality and are truly of a “floating world.” It is at this point of his development that he evidenced a growing concern for realism, such as in his handling of textiles. A mannerism began to appear in the musculature and in his articulation of the movements of figures.

Hokusai was a very prolific artist, and the demands upon him were great. He never permitted his art to stagnate, however, and often turned to experimentation and the creation of *tours de force*. In 1804 he executed a painting, some eighteen yards long and eleven yards wide, of the Patriarch Saint of Zen Buddhism, Daruma, in the compound of the Otowa Gorokuji Temple in Edo, and repeated the feat in Nagoya thirteen years later. The story is reported of his great success in a painting competition with the very popular artist Tani Bunchō (1764-1840), done on the command of the Shōgun Ienari. Hokusai’s painting was titled *Maple Leaves Floating on the Tatsuta River*. To produce it, he took a long sheet of paper and with a broad brush painted a line to symbolize the river. After this was finished, he took a rooster and dipped its feet in red paint and let it walk across the painting. The shape of the rooster’s tracks corresponded with
those of maple leaves, and Ienari was startled by Hokusai's originality.

The same feminine ideal that so fascinated Hokusai when he was forty continued to occupy his mind during his fifties and sixties, as can be seen in his painting *Courtesan Making a New Year's Visit* (Fig. 5). His daughter, Oei, was very kind and of great solace to him in his later years. After her divorce from Yanagigawa Shigenobu, her father's pupil, she returned to her family home and cared for him. There has even been some speculation as to whether she served as his model. He had turned to using the names Taito and Iitsu in 1811, and there appeared an increasing tension and almost explosive nervousness about his line. This was especially noticeable in his portrayal of fabrics made of crepe. It almost served as a warning indication of the severe attack of palsy which was to strike the painter in 1829. But even this did not slacken his stubborn devotion to his art; he cured himself and continued to paint for another two decades.

Debt constantly plagued Hokusai, and as a result he was always on the move. In the eighty-nine years that he lived, he is reported to have changed his residence at least ninety-three times. He was quite obviously concerned about his family and their offspring. One grandson in particular was a cause of great sorrow, and Hokusai spent much of his earnings in assisting him out of debt. A more important reason for the artist's continuous financial embarrassment was his complete lack of interest in money. He loved and was married to his art; economics was not permitted to intrude or dampen his zeal. If it threatened, he just moved on.

As an artist, Hokusai recorded all that passed before his eyes and through his mind. In 1814 the first of his *Manga* (Sketch Books) appeared, and his paintings, prints, and sketches followed suit in representing every facet of life. He produced handscrolls such as the *Miscellaneous Studies* (Fig. 9) in which he skillfully portrayed the variety of sea life that abounds in the waters off Japan, as well as many of the legends of the land. He also commenced producing screens such as *The Twelve Months, Six Views of the Tama River,*
and Country Scenes. These provided him with a larger format on which to represent nature as he saw it. It was during his late seventies and eighties that he became extremely conscious and justly proud of his venerable age. Most of the paintings he produced from the mid-1830's were inscribed with his age, such as his A Wood Gatherer (Fig. 8), which was produced in the last year of his life, 1849. He now also often signed himself Gakūdō Rōjin (The Old Man Mad about Painting). The majority of his sketches and drawings, including the eighty-nine designs now known of the series One Hundred Poems of the Master Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse (Figs. 26-29) date from these later years. The hundreds that he produced lead one to conclude that he felt an urgency to transfer everything to paper before his years on earth ran out.

The mark Hokusai left on the world was great and lives on until today. One of the finest summaries is his evaluation of his own work which can be found in his note written at the end of the Fugaku Hyakkei (One Hundred Views of Fuji). He wrote:

"Ever since the age of six, I have had a mania for drawing the forms of objects. Towards the age of fifty I published a very large number of drawings, but I am dissatisfied with everything which I produced before the age of seventy. It was at the age of seventy-three that I nearly mastered the real nature and form of birds, fish, plants, etc. Consequently, at the age of eighty, I shall have got to the bottom of things; at one hundred I shall have attained a decidedly higher level which I cannot define, and at the age of one hundred and ten every dot and every line from my brush will be alive. I call on those who may live as long as I to see if I keep my word. Signed, formerly Hokusai, now Gakūdō Rōjin (The Old Man Mad about Painting)."

This great master died in the year 1849 on the eighteenth day of the fourth month and, although he physically did not achieve his goal of one hundred and ten years of life, his work has survived, and every dot and every line from his brush remain alive in testimony of his skill as one of the master draftsmen of all time.
CHRONOLOGY

1760 Born in the ninth month at Honjo, Warigesui, in Edo into the Kawamura family.

c. 1763 Adopted into the family of Nakajima Ise, a maker of mirrors.
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1800 Used the name Gakyōjin (The Man Mad about Painting). Published many prints.
1804 Painted large picture of Daruma at the Otowa Gorokuji Temple in Edo.
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1807 Quarreled with the noted novelist Bakin.
1811 Used the name Taito.
1812 Visited the Kyoto region.
1814 First volume of the fifteen-volume set of Manga (Sketch Books) published.
1817 Revisited the Kyoto region and stopped at Nagoya to paint large picture of Daruma.
1820 Used the name Iitsu.
1823 Began work on the noted Thirty-six Views of Fuji print series.
1829 Suffered a severe attack of palsy.
1833 Commenced placing his age on his paintings.
1839 The print series titled One Hundred Poems of the Master Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse begun.
1849 Died on the eighteenth day of the fourth month. His tomb is located in Tokyo at Seikyōji Temple in Asakusa, Nagayumi Chō.
2. Courtesan Writing
5. Courtesan Making a New Year's Visit

6. New Year's Ritual
13. The Lion Dance

04.234
20. Shōjō—A Drunkard Proving His Strength
26. Junih Ietaka

27. Shikishi Naishinnō

One Hundred Poems of the Master
Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse
32-33. Six Views of the Tama River
36. THE CALLIGRAPHER
IN HONOR OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BIRTH OF HOKUSAI
AND THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF
UNITED STATES-JAPANESE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

THE FREER GALLERY OF ART
OF
THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
PRESENTS
SELECTED WORKS BY
KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI
(1760-1849)

WASHINGTON
1960
GALLERY IV

Paintings

04.135 Fushi
Ink and color on paper
12" x 17 1/2"

04.142 Legendary Figures
Ink, color, and gold on silk
13 1/2" x 8 1/2"

04.177 A Shinto Ritual
Color, ink, and gold on paper
Two-fold screen
64" x 65 1/2"

04.180 Miscellaneous Scenes
Ink and color on paper
Two-fold screen
- (Each half) 27" x 31 1/2"

04.181 A Fisherman
Ink and color on paper
44" x 21 3/4"

04.182 A Wood Gatherer
Color, ink, and gold on paper
44" x 13 3/4"

04.184 Court Ladies
Ink and color on silk
40 1/2" x 13 3/4"

04.189 The Six Master Poets
Ink and color on paper
12 1/2" x 22 1/2"

05.276 Waves
Ink and color on paper
69" x 20 1/2"

04.199 Courtesan Making a New Year Visit
Ink, color, and gold on silk
40" x 18 1/2"

GALLERY V

Screens

04.48 Country Screen
Ink, color, and gold on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.49
66" x 12 1/2"

04.50 Country Scenes
Ink, color, and gold on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.49
66" x 12 1/2"

04.179 The Twelve Months
Ink and color on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.180
71 1/2" x 17 3/4"

04.180 The Twelve Months
Ink and color on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.179
70 3/4" x 17 3/4"

04.182 The Twelve Months
Ink and color on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.49
66" x 12 1/2"

04.174 A Picnic Party
Ink and color on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.144
59 1/2" x 92 1/2"

04.144 A Picnic Party
Ink and color on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.143
59 1/2" x 92 1/2"

04.137 Landscapes: Mount Fuji and Eroshimas
Ink and color on paper
Two-fold screen, pair with 04.176
64" x 62 1/2"

04.176 Landscapes: Mount Fuji and Eroshimas
Ink and color on paper
Two-fold screen, pair with 04.175
64" x 62 1/2"

04.234 Landscapes of the Four Seasons
Ink, color, and gold on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.233
71 1/2" x 15 3/4"

04.233 Landscapes of the Four Seasons
Ink, color, and gold on paper
Six-fold screen, pair with 04.234
71 1/2" x 15 3/4"

Drawings

04.240 Portrait of Noble
Ink and color on paper
15" x 11 1/4"

04.245 Man's Strength
Ink on paper
12 1/2" x 9"

04.248 A Maid Preparing to Dust
Ink on paper
11 7/8" x 9 3/4"

04.251 A Sake Drum
Ink on paper
10 1/2" x 14"

04.254 Boy with a Flower
Ink on paper
10 1/8" x 6 1/2"

04.235 Shinto-A Deki/Deki Proving his Strength
Ink and color on paper
12" x 6 1/2"

04.256 Girl and Cat
Ink on paper
9 3/4" x 7 3/4"

04.257 Horses
Ink on paper
14 1/2" x 10 1/2"

04.261 Two Women
Ink on paper
11 3/8" x 7 3/4"

04.268 Various Studies including a Self-Portrait
Ink on paper
12 1/2" x 9 3/4"

04.269 Summer Lake Sippers
Ink on paper
9 3/4" x 13"
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawings</th>
<th>Drawings</th>
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<tr>
<td>04.273 Travelers</td>
<td>07.553 The Poems of One Hundred Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse—</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ink on paper</em></td>
<td>Ki no Tomonori</td>
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<td><em>Ink on paper</em></td>
<td>Ekei Hōshi</td>
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<td>04.277 Summer Relaxation</td>
<td>07.572 The Poems of One Hundred Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse—</td>
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<td>04.278 Woodsmen</td>
<td>07.574 The Poems of One Hundred Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse—</td>
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<td>07.575 The Poems of One Hundred Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse—</td>
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<td>07.579 The Poems of One Hundred Poets as Related by a Wet-nurse—</td>
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<td><em>Ink on paper</em></td>
<td>Junii Ietaka</td>
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