

Hokusai: Artistic Legend

by Rose Dreisbach

Hokusai should be remembered as a true artistic legend. Born in 1760, Hokusai attributes the beginning of his interest in art to the very young age of five. About ten years later, he began working with woodcutting. When he was eighteen, he took the name of his teacher, Katsukawa Shunsho, the first of many name changes. Hokusai's first prints were portraits of actors, which were inspired by his teacher Katsukawa Shunsho. Hokusai associated with Katsukawa Shunsho's art school for about fourteen years, after which he began to study under Yusen, who worked at the Kano school. The prints Hokusai ran during this time showed his interest in perspective, which was evident in Western paintings at the time.

In 1779 Hokusai began his career as a professional artist, but his artistic peak didn't occur until well into his seventies. Hokusai excelled as a painter, printmaker, and illustrator. He was also a master Ukiyo-e artist, creating over 30,000 prints during his lifetime. *A Journey to the Waterfalls*, also known as *Shokoku Taki Meguri*, was a series of landscape prints done by Hokusai. He also illustrated fifteen *Manga* sketchbooks, which portrayed a large range of subjects and emotions.

While Hokusai produced a vast amount of excellent prints, the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* are the most widely known, and possibly his finest works. The *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* were published around 1830, nearly ten years after Hokusai began working on them. It's ironic that this series was titled the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, as there were really forty-six print plans. Hokusai's single most famous work is *The Great Wave*, the first of the prints of the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. The piece shows a huge wave endangering small fishing boats, and dwarfing even Mount Fuji itself. The illustrations of the *100 Poems as Seen by an Old Nurse* were another set of Hokusai's final works. They were a series of color wood block prints that were published in the 1830's.

Hokusai was known as a 'restless' soul. He moved homes, and changed his name an exhausting number of times throughout his life. Hokusai's family story is a sad one. His first wife died in 1793. Four years later he remarried, but in 1828 his second wife also died. Hokusai's son passed away at the turn of the 19th century, and his two daughters moved back home after failed marriages. Although, Hokusai's family life was tragic, his artwork is remembered as truly historic. In Strange's book, *Hokusai*, he quotes Hokusai's last words in 1849, "If only heaven could have lent me ten more years. If heaven had lent me but five years more, I should have become a true painter."



The Great Wave

(Recarved Edition)

Hokusai Katsushika, 1790-1849

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