

Hokusai's Masterworks On View At Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

By James D. Balestrieri



Previous Page; "Newly Published Cut-Out Lantern Pictures: Dance of the Gods at the Heavenly Cave," about 1808–13, woodblock print, ink and color on paper.

BOSTON, MASS. — Michelangelo's "David." Munch's "The Scream." Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa." Leutze's "Washington Crossing the Delaware." The "Venus de Milo." Van Gogh's "Starry Night" — artworks that instantly call their images to mind. They are copied, appropriated, parodied, mashed up and sampled with such frequency that we barely notice them.

"Actor Sakata Hangorô III as a Traveling Priest, Actually Minamoto Chinzei Hachirô Tametomo," 1791, woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 12 3/8 by 5 9/16 inches.





"The Mansion of the Plates (Sara yashiki)," from the series "One Hundred Ghost Stories (Hyaku monogatari)," Edo period, about 1831–32 (Tenpō 2–3), woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 10³/₄ by 7 ⁵/₈ inches.

Their creators — rightly or wrongly — seem to possess that mixture of genius and madness that places them outside what Nathaniel Hawthorne called “the realm of ordinary experience.” That, or they are one-hit wonders, like Leutze or, perhaps, the sculptor of the Venus, who had enough talent and an ability to recognize and seize a particular moment in history. Now



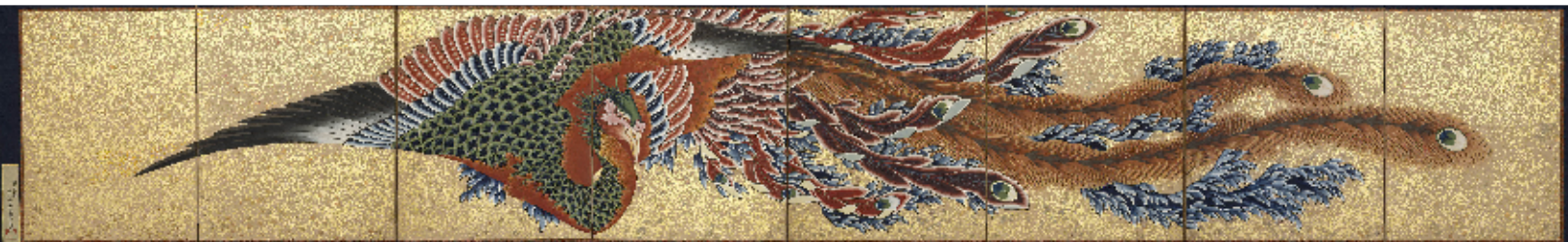
"Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa-oki nami-ura)," also known as "The Great Wave," from the series "Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjûrokkei)," about 1830–31 (Tenpô 1–2), woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 9 15/16 by 14 13/16 inches.

add Hokusai's masterwork "The Great Wave" (originally titled "Under the Wave off Kanagawa") and our nascent theory breaks down. Hokusai was a genius, no doubt about that.

And, by his own admission, he was a bit mad. Indeed, later in his life he signed his work "Gakyo Rojin Manji" (Old Man Mad About Art).

And he was a product of his times who took advantage of, and pushed against, the severe circumscriptions

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, amply demonstrates — Hokusai is seen as a working artist, commercial artist,



Above; "Phoenix," 1835, (Tenpō 6), eight-panel folding screen; ink, color, cut gold-leaf and sprinkled gold on paper, 14 1/8 by 91 13/16 inches.

of Edo Japan. But by today's standards, he was something else, something more. Today — as "Hokusai," the excellent and comprehensive new exhibition at the

illustrator, teacher, promoter, showman. More fruitful comparisons to American artists might be made between Hokusai and, say, Rockwell Kent or N.C. Wyeth.



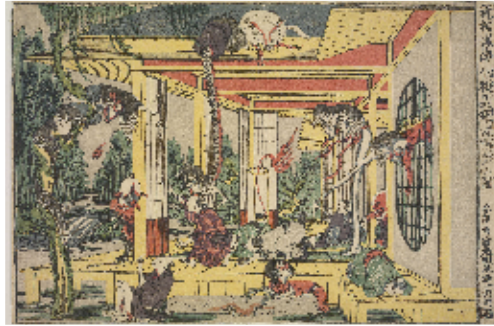
"Poppies," from an untitled series known as Large Flowers, Edo period, about 1833–34 (Tenpō 4–5), woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 10 5/16 by 15 1/8 inches.

But when you add “The Great Wave” to the list of the world’s most instantly recognizable works of art, you are adding a work of art that is

not a painting, or sculpture or any unique, singular work of solitary genius. “The Great Wave” is a woodblock print, issued as one of

"Newly Published Perspective ►

Picture: *One Hundred Ghost Stories in a Haunted House*, "Edo Period, about 1790, woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9 5/16 by 13 15/16 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, gift of C. Adrian Rübel..



"Watanabe no Gengo ►

Tsuna and Inokuma Nyudo Raiun," about 1833–35 (Tenpō 4–6), from an untitled series of warriors in combat, 1833–35, woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 14 3/4 by 10 7/16 inches.



◄ "The Falling Mist Waterfall at Mount Kurokami in Shimotsuke Province (*Shimotsuke Kurokamiyama Kirifuri no taki*)," from the series "A Tour of Waterfalls in Various Provinces (*Shokoku taki meguri*)," about 1832 (Tenpō 3), woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 14 15/16 by 10 1/8 inches

a series, the famous “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji,” produced in multiples between 1823 and 1829. Hokusai did the drawing, then turned it over to a woodblock carver in his

studio who transferred the drawing to blocks, one for each color, and carved them. ([Continued on page 12C inside the E-edition](#))

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