

HOKUSAI | HIROSHIGE | HASUI



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JAPANESE LANDSCAPES IN PRINT

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MFA PUBLICATIONS | MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON



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Hokusai

Katsushika Hokusai was born into the artisan class in the city of Edo. His father's occupation remains unknown, but at an early age he was adopted by his maternal uncle, a maker of bronze mirrors who supplied the traditional luxury objects to the court of the shogun, the military dictator who ruled Japan from Edo in the name of the emperor, who remained in Kyoto. Although he was not a member of the ruling samurai class himself, the boy who would eventually become famous under the art name Hokusai received an excellent education, since he would be expected to associate with the elite when he inherited his uncle's business. As a teenager, however, he left his uncle's household and became involved with the world of popular publishing, which sold affordable printed books and pictures to the newly literate urban middle class of artisans and merchants. Together with samurai and peasants, these groups made up the four social classes of the official Confucian-inspired system of the Edo period, although actual social organization did not always reflect this theoretical hierarchy.

The future Hokusai is said to have worked for two years as a blockcutter, carving wooden printing blocks based on other artists' designs, which would then be turned over to a professional printer to make multiple impressions, published as prints or in books. The finished products were sold in a bookstore owned by the publisher, who controlled the entire process and paid the other members of the production team. At age nineteen, Hokusai became a professional ukiyo-e artist when he joined the studio of Katsukawa Shunshō (1726–1792). He learned the techniques of drawing and painting and began to publish book illustrations and actor prints under the name Katsukawa Shunrō.





HOKUSAI

9

Fine Wind, Clear Weather

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*,
about 1830–31

This famous image, second only to *The Great Wave* in popularity among Hokusai's works, is known in three color variants: the dark red mountain that gives the design its nickname *Red Fuji*; this paler version; and a rare all-blue version. The light pink version shown here is thought to be the earliest of the three. The delicate color represents the first light of dawn on a clear morning after an overnight storm, and suggests Hokusai's hopes for a new beginning in his artistic career.





HOKUSAI

31

Poem by Jitō Tennō

from the series *One Hundred Poems*
Explained by the Nurse, about 1835-36

*Spring has passed, and
summer has arrived, it seems.
Heavenly Mountain Kagu
where, it is said, they dry robes
of the whitest mulberry!*

Many illustrations of this famous poem show the ancient empress Jitō gazing out from her palace toward the white mist on the mountain, which she compares poetically to fine white cloth. Hokusai, however, focuses on hardworking present-day clothmakers, who wash the newly made fabric in the river and carry it back to their village to spread on high drying racks, with the mountain in the background.



HOKUSAI

32

Poem by Yamabe no Akahito

no. 4 from the series *One Hundred Poems*
Explained by the Nurse, about 1835-36

*As I set out on
the beach of Tago, and look,
I see the snow constantly falling
on the high peak of Fuji,
white as mulberry cloth.*

The spectacular view of snowcapped Mount Fuji from Tago Bay had already been illustrated by Hokusai in the Fuji series, where he showed it from the viewpoint of boats at sea (see fig. 15). Here, he shows travelers climbing the steep road up from the beach.



HOKUSAI

33

Poem by Chūnagon Yakamochi
no. 6 from the series *One Hundred Poems*
Explained by the Nurse, about 1835–36

*When I see the whiteness
of frost that lies
on the bridge the magpies spread,
then do I know, indeed,
that the night has deepened.*

Hokusai's choice of a Chinese scene to illustrate this poem may be due to the Chinese origins of the story to which the poem refers, the basis of the Tanabata, or Star, Festival. Two stars, the Herd Boy and the Weaving Girl, fell in love, but were separated by the gods. Once a year, magpies take pity on the couple and build a temporary bridge so they can cross the Milky Way that keeps them apart.



HIROSHIGE

56

**The Moon Reflected in the Paddies
at Sarashina in Shinano Province**

1853

At Sarashina in Shinano Province (modern Chikuma City in Nagano Prefecture), a noted spot for moon viewing, the unusual configuration of the terraced rice paddies in the foothills of Mount Kamuriki (also known as Mount Obasute) allows the reflection of the moon to move from one paddy to the next as the viewer walks along, a phenomenon known as *tagoto-no-tsuki*, or “moon on every field.” Hiroshige, who does not seem to have visited the area, misunderstood this expression to mean the moon was visible in all the fields at once, and created several charming designs of the scene he imagined.





HIROSHIGE

59

Kogane Plain in Shimōsa Province

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, 1858

Shimōsa Province is now the northern part of Chiba Prefecture, across the bay from Tokyo. The Shimōsa Sakura Aburada Pasture, where horses were raised for the shogun's cavalry, was designated a National Historic Site in 2007. Herds of wild horses once roamed free on the lush plains, with a roundup once a year to capture animals that would either be trained for the use of the military or sold to commoners for use as packhorses.

HIROSHIGE

60

The Seacoast at Hota in Awa Province

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, 1858

Awa Province, at the tip of the Bōsō Peninsula, is now the southern part of Chiba Prefecture, and the town of Hota was incorporated into the larger town of Kyonan in 1959. The rugged coastline, known for rich fishing, faces the Uraga Channel leading into Edo (Tokyo) Bay. The road around Cape Myōgane, to the right, was notoriously difficult to travel but also strategically important because of its location. The cape marks the beginning of Mount Nokogiri (Sawtooth), an important stone quarry in the Edo period.







HIROSHIGE

65

Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi Bridge and Atake

from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, 1857

The most admired print in the entire series, this masterful evocation of heavy rain was later copied in oil by van Gogh. Seen from a high, bird's-eye view, pedestrians hurry to escape a downpour, shielding themselves with umbrellas, a rain hat, and a straw raincoat pulled over the head, while a solitary boatman poling his raft is protected by both a hat and a raincoat. Barely visible on the far bank are three of the shogun's boathouses, with pale triangular gables. The Shin-Ōhashi Bridge (literally "new great bridge") was downstream from the older Great Bridge, better known as Ryōgoku Bridge.

HIROSHIGE

66

Bamboo Yards, Kyōbashi Bridge

from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, 1857

After setting off from Nihonbashi Bridge on the Tokaido Road, the next bridge travelers would encounter on their way out of town was Kyōbashi. Tall bamboo poles in the lumberyards along the Kyōbashi River recede toward the east, where the river flows under two more bridges and eventually empties into the Sumida River. Hiroshige's own house was located just a few blocks away. The powerful juxtaposition of vertical and horizontal lines and the soft glow of the moonlit night were emulated by Western artists in compositions such as James McNeill Whistler's (1834-1903) *Nocturnes* of the 1870s.



Hasui

Kawase Hasui, born Kawase Bunjirō, grew up in the new, rapidly modernizing Japan of the Meiji era, when intellectuals debated how best to enjoy the benefits of Western technology while maintaining distinctive Japanese values. Soon after he became a legal adult, Japan was recognized as one of the leading world powers of the twentieth century, a result of their victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. In the sphere of pictorial art, two types of painting had developed in the late nineteenth century and received equal attention in art schools: *yōga*, or “Western painting,” primarily oil painting, now taught in Japan by Japanese artists who had studied in Europe; and *nihonga*, or “Japanese painting,” which used traditional materials and formats but employed a new, somewhat Western-influenced style. Hasui began his art career as a painter and studied both *yōga* and *nihonga*.

The father of young Hasui sold ornamental braiding that was in demand not only for traditional Japanese garments but for Western-style military uniforms and formal costumes of court officials. From an early age, the budding artist loved to draw, but his parents wanted him to run the family store. Eventually, however, he was able to turn over the business to the husband of his older sister and devote himself entirely to art. He initially studied Western-style painting and drawing in the studio of the Hakubakai (White Horse Society) and later became one of the students of the prominent *nihonga* painter Kaburaki Kiyokata (1878–1973). In 1912, Kiyokata awarded him the art name Hasui, and from 1913 to 1923 he worked as a commercial artist, designing advertisements, magazine covers, and book illustrations.

Meanwhile, the woodblock printmaking tradition was being reinvented by the publisher Watanabe Shōzaburō (1885–1962).



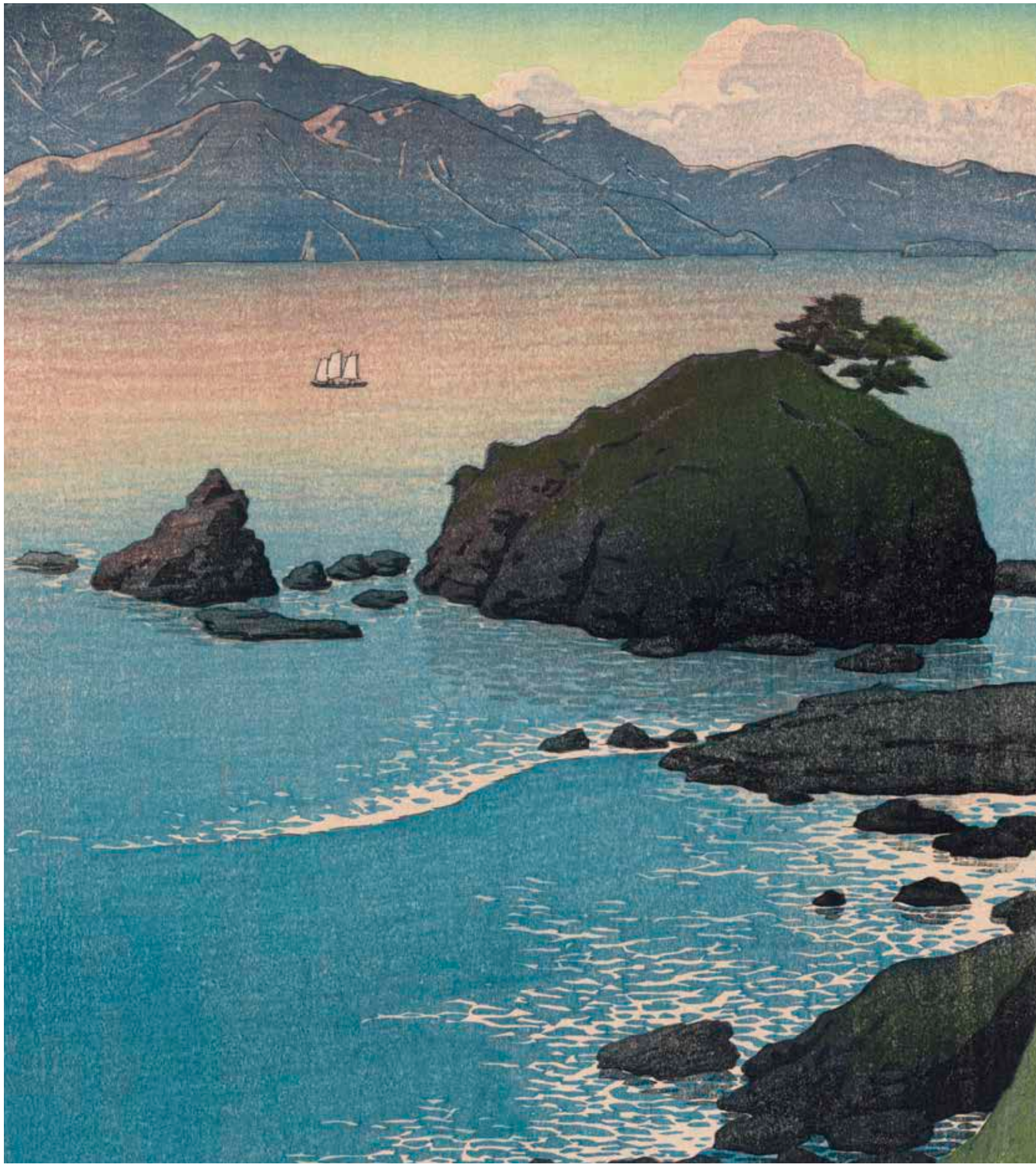


HASUI

80

Autumn in the Koshiji Region
from the series *Souvenirs of Travel I*, 1920

The artist was struck by the contrasting primary colors he observed at harvesttime in rural Koshiji in Niigata Prefecture: the yellow of the bundles of harvested rice stalks hung up to dry on high racks, the blue of the nearby water, and the red of the beans spread out on straw mats. An elderly woman bends over the beans to remove a piece of debris, carefully tending to the preparation of the food that will see her family through the coming winter.





HASUI

86

Tsukumojima, Shimabara

from the series *Selected Views of Japan*, 1922

The name Tsukumojima, meaning literally “ninety-nine islands,” refers to a group of small islands in the bay near Shimabara City in southeastern Nagasaki Prefecture, a body of water called either Shimabara Bay or the Ariake Sea. (They are not to be confused with another group of islands in northern Nagasaki Prefecture, Kujūkushima, whose name is spelled the same way in Japanese but pronounced differently.) The islands were created by a disastrous volcanic eruption in 1792, but their violent origins are forgotten in Hasui’s idyllic scene of pink clouds and a tiny Shinto shrine on one island.

HASUI

87

Uchisange in Okayama

from the series *Selected Views of Japan*, 1923

This print was the first of Hasui’s designs to be published after the disastrous Tokyo earthquake of September 1923 destroyed almost all his earlier work. The Uchisange neighborhood of Okayama City is the area closest to Okayama Castle; the building shown here, with its massive stone foundations, plaster walls, tile roofs, and small barred windows, seems to be one of the gateways into the castle complex, which was completed in 1597. Two of the castle watchtowers have survived and are now Important Cultural Properties (*jūyō bunkazai*), while the donjon, or main tower, was destroyed by bombing in 1945 and reconstructed in concrete in 1966.



HASUI

88

Cloudy Day at Matsue in Izumo Province
from the series *Souvenirs of Travel III*, 1924

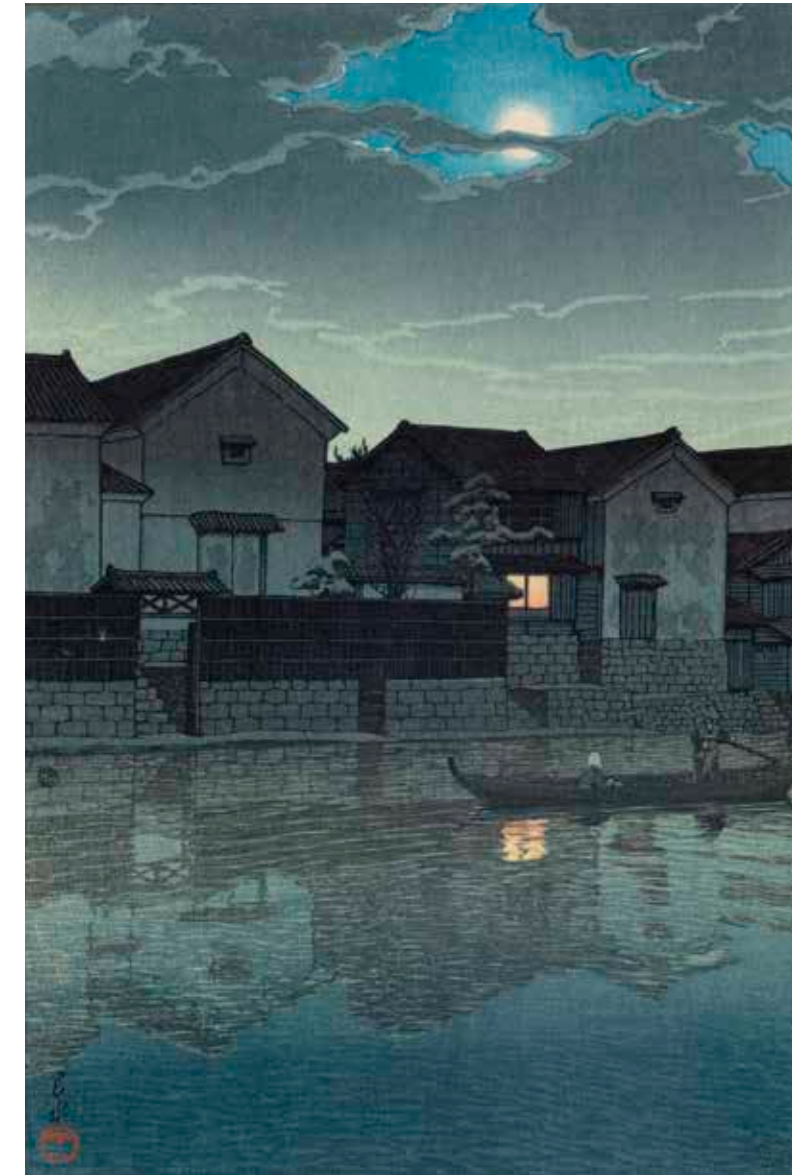
89

Crescent Moon at Matsue in Izumo Province
from the series *Souvenirs of Travel III*, 1924

90

Misty Moonlight at Matsue in Izumo Province
from the series *Souvenirs of Travel III*, 1924

Shin hanga landscape artists such as Hasui and his contemporary Yoshida Hiroshi sometimes enjoyed experimenting with prints made from the same woodblocks but using different colors to express varying seasons or times of day. Matsue, the capital city of Shimane Prefecture (formerly Izumo Province), was an ideal subject for Hasui, who loved depicting water. Known as the City of Water, Matsue is crossed by many canals flowing into the Ōhashi River, which runs through the center of town and is bordered by two lakes and the Sea of Japan. In Hasui's depictions of the same view at three different times, residences and storehouses are reflected in the moonlit water along a stone-lined embankment.



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