

Title **Offering Pails of Water**
Artist **Katsushika Hokusai ; Tsutaya**
Ju_zaburo
Date **c. 1790, P78.64.16.4**



The play, *Offering Pails of Water*, centers on a love affair between a young beautiful woman and a much older man. They first meet at Mibudera Temple where the woman comes to offer a pail of water to the deity of the temple. For this print, Hokusai depicted the moment when the man fell in love with the woman. The man's

obvious excitement comically contrasts with the woman's indifference. In 1793, shortly after his teacher's death, Hokusai left the Katsukawa School and joined another studio founded by the painter Tawaraya Sōri. Nevertheless, his association with the Katsukawa School had a profound effect on his development as an artist.

Inscription:

Flirtation is like a wooden pail with a loose top. Once its hoop is taken off, the water spills out from it [corrupting a religious woman], the pail breaks apart [breaking a wife's heart]. This is said in the Mibu's play.

The majority of the buying public during the Edo period did not only enjoy the actor print by looking at it, but by recalling the actors' voices on stage. Actor prints often depict a particular highlight from a play where actors gave a memorably long speech or danced to the accompanying music. To the visual world of the ukiyo-e print that captures an actor's appearance, they add an element of voice and sound. A buyer would enjoy an actor print much more if it recalled familiar experiences he enjoyed.

Main points: Woodblock prints

- Woodblock prints were initially used as early as the eighth century to disseminate texts, especially Buddhist scriptures. The designer and painter Sotatsu (died 1640) originally used wood stamps to paint designs on silk and paper.
- Woodblock prints of the EDO period most typically depicted the seductive courtesans and exciting Kabuki actors of the urban pleasure districts. With time the subject matter expanded to include famous romantic vistas, landscapes beloved by the Japanese and famous historical events (the end of the 19th century). These pictures could be made in great quantity. The first run would be made in quantities of 200 (known as a single work) because this is the average number that could be run off in one day. Thus when a publisher ordered 5 works to be printed, it meant that the printer would run off 1000 prints. Each print required the collaboration of 4 experts: the designer, the engraver, the printer, and the publisher. The publisher chose the theme and determined the quality of the work.
- A woodblock print image is designed by the artist on paper and then transferred to a thin partly transparent paper. Following the lines on the paper now pasted to a wooden block of cherry wood, the carver chisels and cuts to create the design in negative with the lines and areas to be colored raised in relief. Ink is applied to the surface of the woodblock. Rubbing a round pad over the back of the paper, creates the image. Polychrome prints were made using a separate carved block for each color—would number up to 20. (2 cuts were incised into the edge of each block to help with alignment.) (Paper made from mulberry trees was strong enough to hold up to repeated rubbings.)

- Artists did not move brushes with the small muscles of their fingers but with large muscles of arm and shoulder. Nothing touches the paper but the tip of the brush tip that goes and goes driven by the dread of a pause that could drop a blot of ink. Effort was put in the outline with transparent color in between.
- Escaped Greek idealization of the body with focus on the face of the Geisha and actor.
- UKIYO-E- “Pictures of the floating world”. The term ukiyo has a Buddhist origin and in the medieval period meant the condition and the impermanence created by daily life and its desires. It was wise not to be seduced by it and the world of suffering. By the 17th century the word for suffering was changed to the word for floating and also pronounced uki and glorified the world of parties, show business, illicit passions and the fleeting moment-the very passion that the Buddhist beliefs warned against. The houses of pleasure not only confined themselves to providing all manner of delight for those seeking pleasure but also doubled as salons where merchants, actors, literati, artists, publishers and aristocrats could meet.
- The pictures (e) of the floating world made use of the available medium-paintings, screens, illustrated books, greeting cards.
- Within a decade of the death of Hiroshige, (1858), major printmakers disappeared in a major social-political upheaval at which point Japan wanted to modernize along western lines (1868). Ukiyo-e was swept away in a maelstrom that heralded a new age in Japan.

Biography of the artist: Hokusai

- Hokusai had a long career (1760-1849). He was the son of a mirror maker and had very limited education that was normal for a child at that time and station. At 13, he was apprenticed as a woodblock carver and at age 19 came to the attention of Katsukawa Shunsho, the leading ukiyo-e master. He made his debut the following year under the artist’s name of Shunro. The name Katsukawa was given to him at the time of his graduation from training. He produced prints in the narrow print format (*hosoban*) including actor prints (*yakushae*). In 1795, he changed his name from Shunro having broken with his master. Under the Rinpa-school master, he began to produce final preparatory drawings for woodblock prints (*hanshitae*) and for picture calendars (*egoyomi*) and greeting card (*surimono*) which were highly prized and designed for the elite.
- For the next four years, under the name of Sori, he produced highly individualized pictures of beautiful women (*bijinga*) in which the smooth lines and voluptuous forms distinguished him from his contemporaries.

- He was by far one of the most famous Japanese artists and owes his fame largely to landscapes and his *MANGA*, (15 volumes, a sort of survey of the style, life and traditions of the Japanese) which became popular in France in the late 19th century.
- He is believed to be the first Japanese artist to use Prussian blue which is permanent. (Use of this vivid blue by Hiroshige in his landscape prints at a time when the sale of ukiyo-e prints was diminishing-now on view in the print gallery)
- He was credited with 10,000 woodcuts, 30-40,000 drawings and responsible for the single most celebrated work in all oriental art, The (Great) Wave off Kanagawa.
- He was the only printmaker who threw himself into the turmoil of the slums.
- Died in 1849, 4 years before Commander Perry introduced foreigners to Japanese art. Japanese ports opened to trade with the West in 1853.
- Only printmaker who threw himself into the turmoil of the slums.
- Adopted over 30 different names and had 93 different residences moving with little more than his paints and brushes. He spent most of his life in poverty.

Prints:

Hokusai's female figures reflect the profound transformations his paintings underwent in the nearly 70 years of his career. He absorbed nearly every style he saw. During the latter part of his career, women's bodies became slimmer and their expressions and movements developed an almost austere, anti-erotic and ethereal quality and a "melon seed" outline-an oval face with a pointed chin. His beauties radiate a delicate, pensive wistfulness as if lost in a daydream. His works bore the unmistakable signs of his genius.

Influence on Western Art:

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In 1853, Japanese ports opened trade to the west. In 1868, Japan focused on modernization and viewed prints as cheap export items. Simple, everyday subjects from the floating world could be presented in decorative ways.

(However, Gian Carza states that a Swedish naturalist, Carl Peter Thunberg, traveled to Japan in 1775 and returned with prints. Philipp Franz von Siebold, a doctor who served at the Dutch trading post returned to Holland in 1828 with a large collection of prints. He is believed to have met Hokusai when he traveled to Japan as part of an official delegation. These collectors apparently did not know what to make of ukiyo-e!)

Impressionists and post impressionists were attracted by the genre themes, bright colors, flattened shapes, unconventional spatial effects, and asymmetrical compositions, elongated pictorial formats, aerial perspective and release from the formal view of perspective, spaces emptied of all but

abstract elements of color and line and a focus on singularly decorative motifs.

Manet and Whistler (discovered prints in a tearoom by the London bridge) were among the first generation of artists to be stimulated by ukiyo-e. Manet's picture of Zola included a folding screen and a sumo wrestler. Degas was among the earliest collectors of Japanese art in France. Mary Cassatt who declared that she "hated conventional art" found in Japanese prints a fresh approach to the depiction of everyday events on women's lives. Toulouse Lautrec adopted the exaggerated color, contours and facial expressions in the Kabuki theater. Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard (Nabis) relied on the new perspectives and unusual viewpoints of the printmakers. Paul Gauguin adapted Japanese woodcut techniques to his own expression of art. Van Gogh appreciated the expressiveness of its simple, smoothly curved outlines. (Particularly apparent in the Olive Trees.) Van Gogh was an avid collector and actually gave an exhibition of his prints in Paris in 1888. He used prints as background for many of his portraits as well as copying them to learn technique.

Monet was so influenced by Hiroshige's 100 views of Edo that it is believed it helped influence his repeated subject matter of the Haystacks and the Cathedral of Rouen. He was first introduced to prints having found his newly purchased tea in Holland wrapped in Japanese prints!

John Twachtman viewed Hokusai's prints at a dinner party in Boston in 1893 and painted the White Bridge hanging in our gallery two years later. Note the influence.

Frank Lloyd Wright, an avid collector said, "The prints choose whom to love and then the only salvation is surrender."

QUESTIONS:

1. What words would you use to describe this print? What makes you say that?
2. How would you describe the subject of these two prints?
3. What else do you notice about this print?
4. What aspects of these prints might have inspired artists such as the impressionists and post expressionists?

Submitted by Jean London