

# art & man

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# J JAPANESE PRINTS

Special Feature on  
HOKUSAI

 SCHOLASTIC





UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI (1798-1861). YADA GOROSAEEMON SUKETAKE FROM PORTRAITS OF THE 47 ROMIN. WOODBLOCK PRINT. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

# A Land of CONTRASTS

**"THESE JAPANESE ARTISTS SHOW US A NEW WORLD."  
— EDGAR DEGAS, FRENCH IMPRESSIONIST PAINTER**

On a gray winter day in Paris in 1856, an artist was waiting to speak to his printer. He was wandering around the dark shop when his eye fell on a colorful little book nearly hidden in a corner. He began leaf-

ing through it and was amazed at what he saw: fierce warriors swinging enormous, gleaming swords; panoramic landscapes with majestic mountains reaching into the mists; delicate plants seen in totally different

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COVER: KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (1760-1849). TWO WOMEN, PRIVATE COLLECTION.



ways — all drawn with sure, flowing lines and the most brilliant and unusual color combinations he had ever seen. These images were far from “realistic,” but they were so alive they seemed to come right off the page. When the printer came in, the excited artist demanded to know where he had gotten the wonderful new book. The printer was puzzled for a minute, then explained that the book he was looking at had come from Japan, in a shipment of porcelain. It had been used as packing material and he was just about to throw it away. The artist took the book and hurried to show it to his colleague, painter Edouard Manet. It was soon evident from their paintings that many other artists working in Paris at the time — Edgar Degas [Da-GA], Mary Cassatt, and a few years later, Paul Gauguin [Go-GAN] and Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh [GO] — had also seen some of these radically new and different Japanese prints.

In 1856, Japanese artists had been creating woodblock prints for more than 200 years. Why was this kind of art such a surprise to French painters? In all this time, hadn't they ever seen a Japanese print before?

Can you find Japan on a map of the world? What is the first thing you notice about it? Are you surprised at its size (a little smaller than the state of California)? Were you also surprised to see that it is made up of islands (four large and about 500 small ones)? From around the year 500 AD on, Japan — ruled by its emperor — went through a period of rich cultural growth. Then around 1200, the country was taken over by military leaders called *shoguns*. The first Europeans (Portuguese) came to Japan in 1542. Seventy years later the Japanese, who had been exploited

**Samurai were Japanese soldiers. “The sword is the soul of the samurai” is an old Japanese proverb. When you look at the samurai featured in the print on the left, what do you think this saying means?**

**In their woodcut prints, Japanese artists sometimes emphasized unusual details. In the print below, can you find the half-chewed leaf and the grasshopper who ate it? How has the artist, Hokusai, stylized nature?**

by their European “visitors,” barred all Westerners. The ports were closed and the country isolated itself. For the next 250 years, Japan continued to develop its distinctive culture which included *haiku* poetry, *Kabuki* theater, and its unique visual art form, the woodblock print. In 1854, fearing the superior technological advances of the West, Japan signed a treaty to open its ports to the rest of the world. And for the first time, Western artists saw what Japanese artists had been creating all these years.

The technique of woodblock printing came to Japan from China in the 8th century. Since many people couldn't read, relatively inexpensive picture books with no text began to be printed. Artists would paint the design, carvers would cut the woodblock, and a printer would make the print. Since ritual and tradition are very important in Japan, prints began to be divided into certain categories: Actors, Warriors, Beautiful Women, Landscapes, Flowers and Birds. But even though the categories were somewhat rigid, each artist approached the subject in a completely different way. Compare the fierce *samurai* (SAM-oo-rye) warrior on the left with the small detail of flowers below. Both prints have **dramatic, asymmetrical (different on each side) compositions based on long, curving diagonal lines**. In the print on the left, the artist Kuniyoshi (koon-e-O-she), who specialized in warriors, has used **thick lines, heavy, bright, flat colors, and sharp contrasts of light and dark** to emphasize the feeling of force and brutality. How has the artist Katsushika Hokusai (Cat-sue-SHE-ka HO-ku-sigh), who specialized in landscapes, flowers, and birds, created a completely different mood with **thin, irregular lines, a horizontal format, and light, transparent color tints?**

In this issue, you'll learn more about Japanese prints and one of the greatest woodblock printmakers — Hokusai. You'll meet some famous artists whose styles were influenced by the innovative Japanese way of seeing, and finally, you'll create your own unique linocut print.





# HOKUSAI



KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (1760-1849). CARICATURES OF PEDESTRIANS IN WIND. FROM THE MANGA, VOL. XII, 1834. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, N.Y.

## Creating A Dream World

**"I AM AN OLD MAN GONE MAD FOR DRAWING." — KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI**

**"I have drawn things since I was six. All I made before 65 is not worth counting. At 73 I began to understand the true construction of animals, plants, trees, birds, fishes. At 90 I will enter into the secret of things. At 100 I shall have reached a magnificent level; and when I am 110, every dot and every dash will live."**

The Japanese artist Hokusai said this when he was 75 years old. If he had died when he was forty, he would have been forgotten. But he lived 89 years and did the best of his 10,000 woodcuts and 35,000 drawings toward the end of his life. He was born in Tokyo in 1760 (16 years before our Declaration of Independence was signed). His father polished mirrors for a living; Hokusai, although he wanted to study drawing, had to go to work. In his early teens, he cut woodblocks for book publishers and at 18, he got a job in the studio of the artist Shunshō. Hokusai was so impressed by his employer's style, that he also started calling himself Shunshō. He drew well and quickly but was considered "difficult," and since he

fought regularly with the other employees, soon he was fired from this job. He earned his living by doing illustrations, carving wood-engravings for other artists, and designing the Japanese equivalent of greeting cards. In 1798 he took the name of Hokusai and began doing the powerful and dynamic landscape views for which he is best known.

Throughout his life, Hokusai traveled constantly, carrying little more than brushes and his sketchbook. He was always in debt — he changed his name over 30 times and his residence more than 90! He married three times and had many children. But whatever else he was doing, he was always drawing — animals, plants, landscapes, human figures, historical and supernatural subjects. Although Hokusai could draw

**Japanese artists liked to do prints based on nature. What natural elements are featured in each of the two large prints shown on these pages?**

**Would the print on the right be as effective if the artist had made the scene look more "realistic"?**





“realistically” (see the small figure of the archer right), his sketchbooks are filled with fantastic visions and caricatures. On the left is a line drawing of unfortunate pedestrians struggling unsuccessfully with gusts of wind. When Hokusai did a landscape that depicted an actual place (as in *Rainbow at Mitakegura*, below), the effect is more like a **stylized stage set** than a real scene. The bridge in the foreground, seen from the side, forms a **perfect arching curve** while the umbrellas and people going over it make up an **abstract pattern of ovals, cones, and half-circles**. The **horizon-line** above them serves as a **horizontal band** to

move your eye across the picture. The **background and foreground** areas are linked by the **diagonal lines** created by the rain.

Hokusai was considered as something of a “character.” He enjoyed showing his artistic talents in public, creating huge paintings (he once did a 2000-square-foot horse) in front of large crowds at local festivals. At age 68, he began his most famous series of prints based on Japan’s highest mountain peak, Mount Fujiyama (Foo-ji-YA-ma). Twenty-one years later, in 1849, despite appeals to heaven for “yet another decade — even another five years,” the “old man mad for drawing” died.



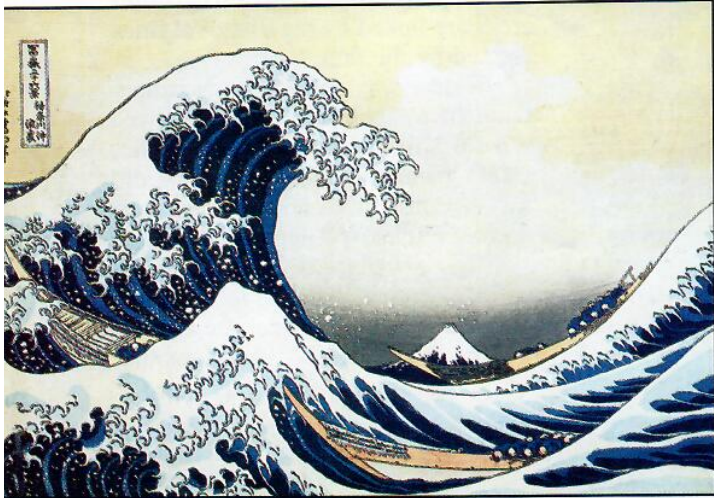
RAINBOW AT MITAKEGURA, 1801. WOODBLOCK PRINT. 7 7/8" X 11 3/4". METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, N.Y.

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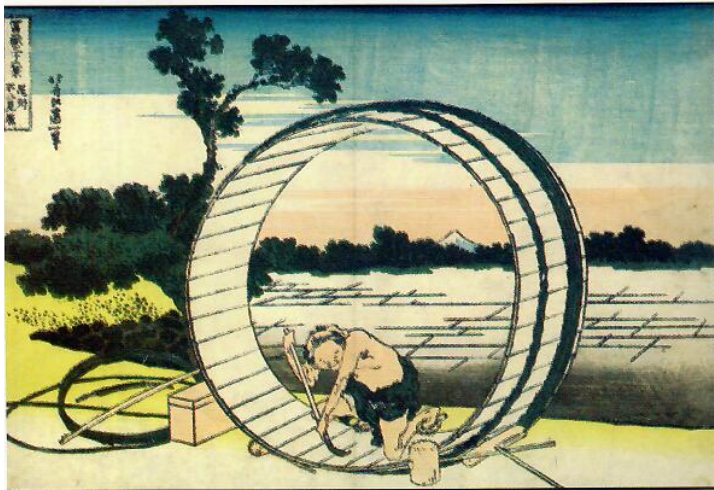
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## Masterpiece of the Month: Preview



THE GREAT WAVE AT KANAGAWA, 1829. 10 7/8" X 14 15/16"



FUJI-VIEW FIELDS IN OWARI, 9 1/2" X 15 5/16"



MISHIMA PASS IN KAI, 1825. 9 3/4" X 14 3/4"

It was the summer of 1828. Hokusai's second wife had just died, and the elderly artist was feeling lonely and sick. The stiffness — sometimes he almost couldn't move at all — seemed much worse today and he found it difficult to get up at dawn as he had always done. He hadn't done much drawing lately either, thanks to the noisy interruptions of his good-for-nothing grandson. He ordinarily worked so hard he didn't notice the hours going by. Perhaps all the things people were saying were right. He was getting too old. He ought to be satisfied with the work he had done. Now it was time to retire and go live with his daughter and that so-called "artist" she had married.

These may have been some of the thoughts running through the mind of the 68-year-old Hokusai the year he began what would turn out to be the best-known Japanese woodblock images ever created. Right around this time, the artist's favorite daughter left her unhappy marriage and returned to her father's house to stay with him until the end of his life. This may have changed Hokusai's outlook, for within the next two years, he had completed his greatest series of prints, known as *The Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*.

You've probably seen at least one of these prints before. *The Great Wave at Kanagawa* (top left and on pages 8-9) has been used on television, in ads, on bookcovers, in magazines, and on record jackets. It has become a symbol for the sea, for strength, and for the awesome power of nature. But the print is really a portrait of Mt. Fuji, as are all the others on these two pages. You've seen on the map that the island nation of Japan is isolated. The Japanese have always been aware of how vulnerable they are to natural forces

# A MAGIC



YOSHIDA ON THE TÔKAIDÔ, 1829. 10 7/8" X 15 1/4"



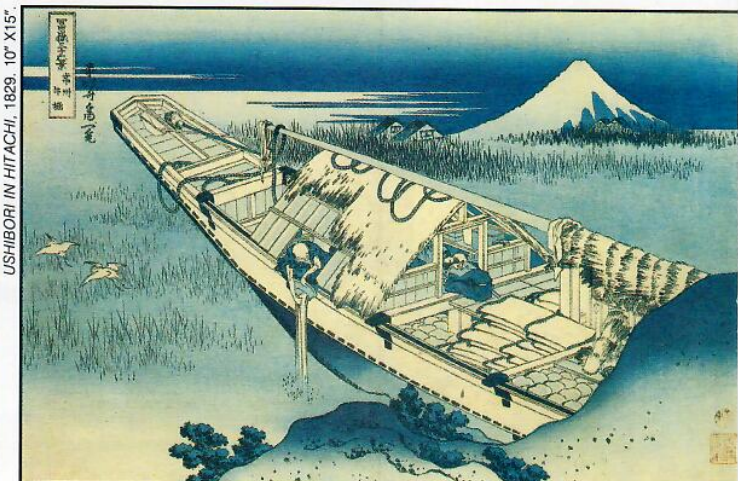
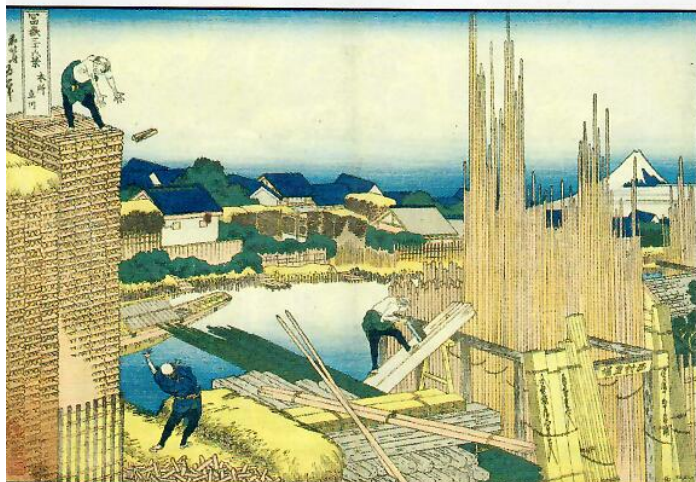
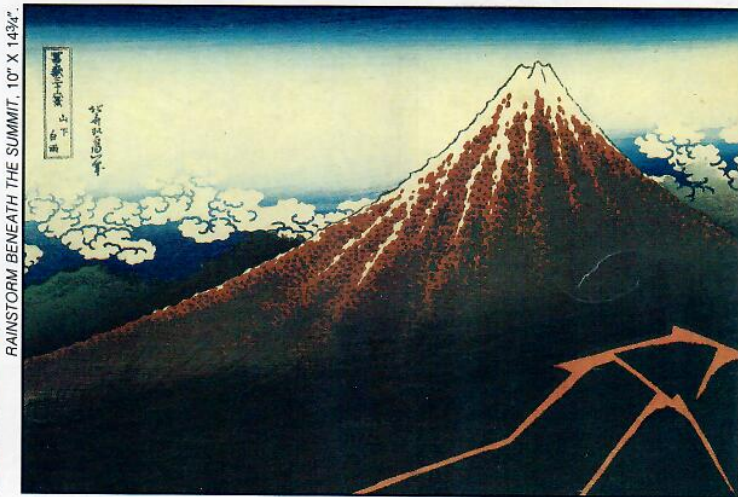
such as earthquakes, typhoons, hurricanes. In Japanese landscape prints, **nature** becomes the main subject. It is **dynamic and restless** — the ocean waves crash, the clouds are moving, the grass is blowing, the trees sway. And tiny human beings are dwarfed by the terrifying forces of nature. Over the years, Japanese artists developed certain visual conventions to show nature's power. Even the way in which they worked gave their art a feeling of freedom and energy. When they did drawings, they moved the brush with the large muscles of the arm and shoulder. They didn't use the small finger muscles that we do. The brush kept moving quickly, emphasizing **basic outlines**, not the inner details or shadows. The resulting images are **large, powerful, simple outlines**.

All the prints on these two pages have **assymetrical compositions; simplified shapes; bold, flat colors; contrast between large, simple spaces and areas of complex patterns and textures; contrast between curved and straight lines; and unusual points of view**. Each shows Mt. Fuji from a different location such as a field where a man is making a barrel; from behind a tree; a teahouse; a lumberyard; a fishing boat; and even from a rooftop.

Can you find the mountain in each of these prints? In which prints does it **dominate** the entire image? In which can you hardly find it because it is completely **overshadowed** by the activity in front? In which scene does a **triangular foreground shape echo and repeat** that of the mountain? In which prints is the mountain **framed by the foreground**? And in which prints does Mt. Fuji seem to blend in, becoming simply an almost unnoticeable **part of nature**?

# MOUNTAIN

**CAN YOU FIND  
JAPAN'S "SACRED MOUNTAIN"  
IN EACH OF  
THESE PRINTS?**



TATEKAWA AT HONJO, 1829. 9 3/4" X 14 1/8".





# The Great Wave

By **KATSUSHI**

"THE FIRST TIME I SAW MOUNT FUJI, IT WAS WHITE, OVERCAST."  
— AMERICAN PAINTER

MASTERPIECE OF THE





KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (1760-1849). THE GREAT WAVE AT KANAGAWA. 1829. WOODBLOCK PRINT. 10 7/8" X 14 15/16". METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

# at Kanagawa

## KA HOKUSAI

R WATER — CALM AND POWERFUL. IT WAS GLORIOUS!"  
GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

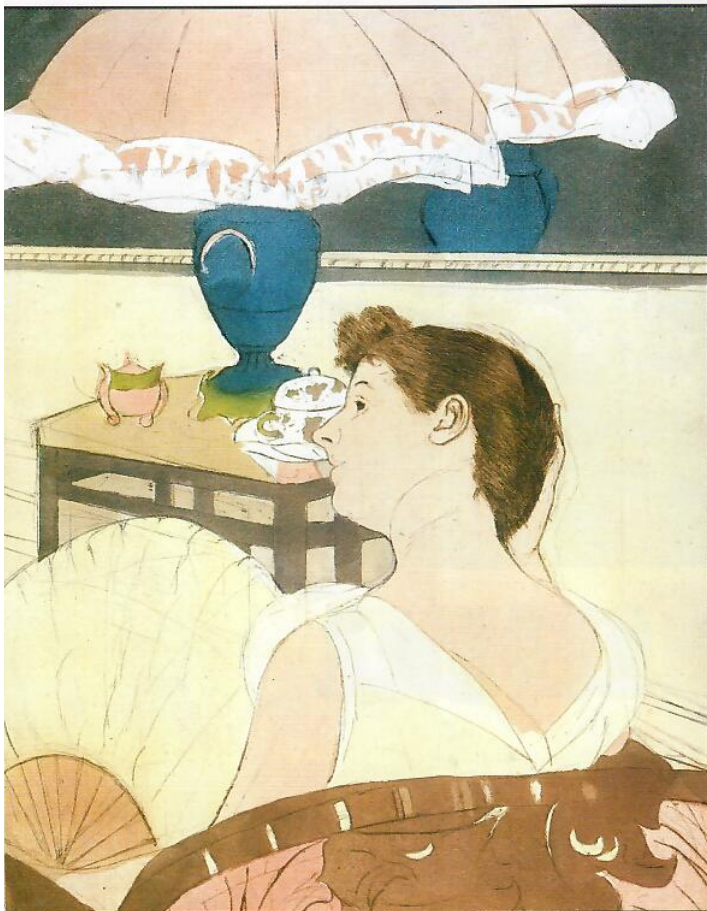
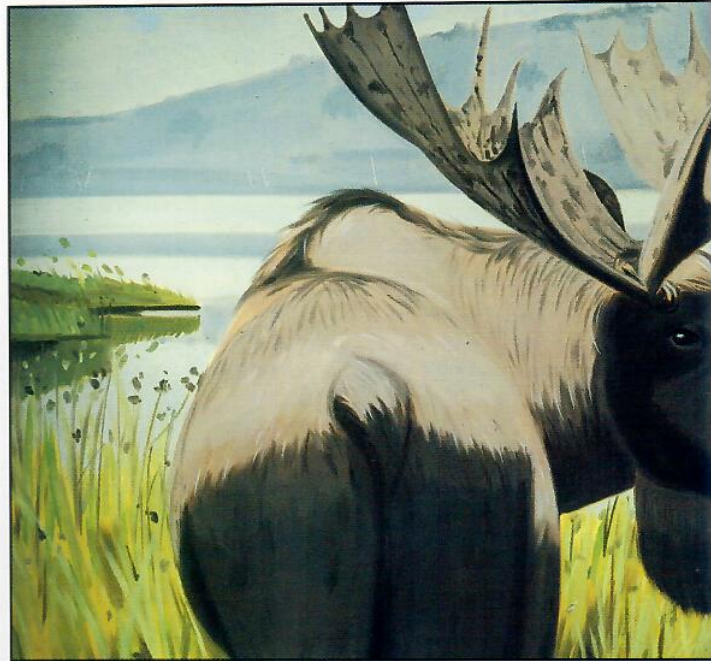
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# THE JAPANESE LEGACY

Can you see how Japanese prints influenced the work of these three American artists?

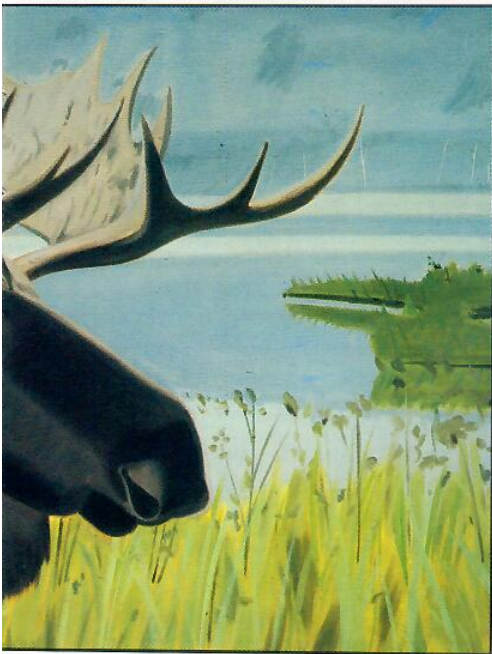


## SLICES OF LIFE

Look at the print on the left by 19th-century Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt. Where do you think the viewer is supposed to be standing — in the room, peering in from another room, or perhaps even looking through the keyhole? Does the woman seem aware of anyone else, or is she lost in her own thoughts? For Cassatt (an American who lived in France) and other painters in France at the time, the discovery of Japanese prints was a revelation that changed the way they saw the world. In the first half of the 19th century, most paintings were large, dark, formal, highly detailed, and elaborate. These paintings featured grand subjects based on historical scenes and biblical episodes. Japanese prints usually focused on **small, uneventful scenes** such as a bird flying over a pond, people walking in the rain, or a woman fanning herself. The **unusual point of view** (the woman is seen from behind); the **tight cropping**; the **simplified shapes** that contrast with the **areas of pattern**; the **bright, flat colors**; and the **asymmetrical composition** (the elements on each side are different, yet appear visually equal) in this work are all features Mary Cassatt borrowed from Japanese prints.

MARY CASSATT (1844-1926), THE LAMP, 1891. 34.610" X 22.710". WORCESTER ART MUSEUM, MA.





### VISIONS OF NATURE

How many times have you seen postcards featuring a moose or a deer standing on a hill or in a park? Do these views seem a little sentimental or ordinary? And even though it contains a moose in a park, does the image on the left look at all ordinary?

Contemporary American artist Alex Katz depicts nature in much the same way as the Japanese printmakers did. The **long, horizontal format** in this print is almost completely filled by a portion of an animal seen from an **unusual viewpoint**. The artist has so **enlarged and cropped** this **foreground detail** that we can see only glimpses of the vast natural setting in the background. Can you find any people in this landscape? Japanese printmakers were among the first artists to show landscapes without including at least one person in them. Like the Japanese, Alex Katz considers human beings one small — sometimes not very important — part of nature.

ALEX KATZ (B.1927), MOOSE HORN STATE PARK, 1975.  
COURTESY MARLBOROUGH GALLERY, INC.

### DYNAMIC VIEWPOINTS

If you were watching the race shown on the right, where do you think you would be standing? Would you be **above** the runners, or would you be looking at them **from the side**? Contemporary American artist Jacob Lawrence — like many of the Japanese printmakers whose work we have been looking at in this issue — has shown this scene from **several points of view**. This creates a feeling of **tilted, plunging space**. The combined **angles of vision** along with the **dynamic curves and diagonals** used, gives this silk-screen print a feeling of **speed and motion**. The **stylized shapes; strong, flat colors; heavy, black lines; and hard, sharp edges** give the image the **abstract quality** of a Japanese print. This is not a picture of a specific race run at a particular time. Lawrence is communicating a more universal message, capturing the feeling of every race ever run.



JACOB LAWRENCE (B.1917), STUDY FOR THE MUNICH OLYMPIC GAMES POSTER, 1972. GOUACHE, 35½" X 27".  
SEATTLE ART MUSEUM.



ARTIST OF THE MONTH

# JEFF SCHARF PRINTMAKER



**I**magine finding an image you liked so much you couldn't stop printing it. That's what happened to 18-year-old Jeffrey Scharf. Last summer, after teaching himself silk-screen printing, he came across a picture of an odd-looking prehistoric fish. It became an "obsession" for him to make

this fish as expressive as he could. He continued to work on the fish during his senior year at West Geauga School in Chesterland, Ohio. And now, as a freshman at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, he's still working with the same image. In this interview you'll find out why.

**Can you remember when you first got interested in art?**

I remember drawing when I was a kid. I drew whatever I felt like. It was a complete release. I didn't worry at all about technical considerations.

In high school, I got interested in life drawing and drawing from my environment. I toned down my art from wild, imaginative stuff to more realistic work. And high school helped me develop technical skills. The classes I took also helped me work with a lot of different materials.

**How did you get involved in doing silk-screen prints?**

It was a process I had been wanting to try. This particular piece (see Jeffrey's Scholastic Art Award-winning print on the right) was the first one to incorporate more than one color. I think I happened to do a fish because of a painting I had just seen. It was a still life with a fish, and I liked the way the artist used real objects and

abstracted them. You could tell what they were, but you saw them in a new way.

So I started searching for a fish. I hit the books. I just happened on a coelacanth and thought, that's the fish for me. It's a prehistoric fish, thought to be extinct, but they found a live one recently.

**How did you begin?**

I made a drawing from the photo, and then I had to figure out how to split it up into layers of color for printing. After that, I had to pick the colors. I tried all kinds of combinations, working them in different ways. But it was the first set I happened on — blue, turquoise, and yellow — that I felt most comfortable with.

Then I had to decide on my background colors. Gray worked well, but I also wanted to use a very brilliant color. I found "Chinese red" could really distort the image from a distance. It seemed to throw an "aura" of red. But it didn't work using the same three

colors for both fish. It seemed to flatten the picture too much — the colors all seemed to be on the same plane. So I used white instead of yellow, and reversed the blue and the turquoise.

**With all this experimentation going on with the colors, what was happening to the fish?**

I found the more I worked with this image, the more I wanted to know about the actual fish. It seemed to be acting on me subconsciously. And as the fish became more personal, it made me more careful with the image. As I tore it apart with color layers, I didn't want it to lose its personality.

By this time, I had been doing the fish so much, I was becoming associated with it at school. People started to label me as the kid who does the fish.

**What about the "personality" of the fish — how would you describe it?**

Well, for me, it was the idea of something that was so unchang-



ing — a prehistoric fish that rose out of extinction. Through millions of years, it hadn't evolved — it was still the same fish. While the piece itself was going through all those color changes, it was staying the same fish. It was still distinctively a coelacanth.

**How is art school? Are you planning a fine-arts career when you finish?**

School's okay. As long as I'm doing art, I'm happy. But fine arts as your life is a scary thing to think about. I'll have to see what I can do. For now it's just something there in front of me.

One of my high school teachers told me, "Jeff, don't go into any profession for the money. Do something that you love, that you'll be happy doing." That really hit me. I think I've come to that conclusion, too.

**What appeals to you about art?**

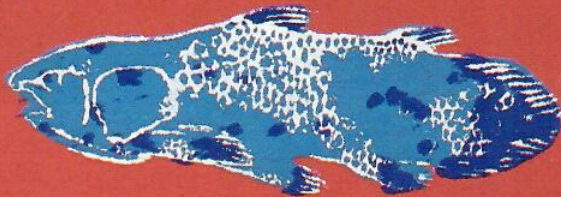
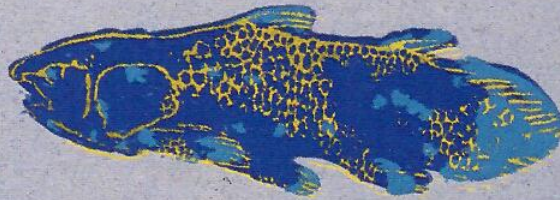
It seems to be a form of expression that's unlimited. It's emotion, a kind of contemplation. For me, it's going beyond physical and mental boundaries. It's a tool to go one step further into something else. What, I don't know.

**Is there any advice you would give to a beginner in art?**

I'm really not an advice-giver; each person has to experience his or her own life.

You have to walk through it yourself. And there's no map. What I did was to read as much as I could about art and then to try to ignore it. But that was *my* route. Basically it's "do your own thing."

Would you like to see your own work featured on these pages? We select our Artist of the Month from students who have won medals in the Scholastic Art Awards Program. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art Awards, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 for entry deadline and rules book.



**I found the more I worked with this image, the more I wanted to know about the actual fish. It seemed to be acting on me subconsciously. And as the fish became more personal, it made me more careful with the image. As I tore it apart with color layers, I didn't want it to lose its personality.**



# NATURE PRINTS

Create a striking graphic design based on an ordinary fish.

As you've seen in this issue, nature was very important to Japanese printmakers. Animals, birds, flowers, and fish (see the catfish print on the left) were among their favorite subjects. And although Hokusai and the Japanese woodblock artists whose prints we've seen

lived and worked hundreds of years ago, their dynamic, stylized designs look very modern. In this workshop, you will use an ordinary fish-shape as the basis for an original linoleum print. You will then transform your print into a completely new design which can be made into a folding screen.

UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI (1798-1861). CATFISH. PRIVATE COLLECTION.



"A fish leaps high —  
below him, in the river bottom,  
clouds flow by."

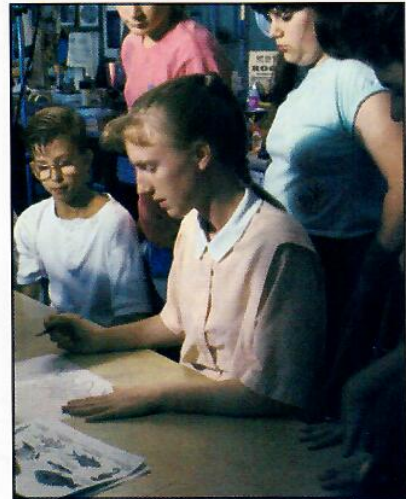
*Haiku*  
by 18th-century poet Onitsura

## MATERIALS

- 12" x 18" white newsprint
- 12" x 18" tracing paper
- Ebony pencil
- Vinyl eraser
- 8½" x 5½" linoleum
- Large spoons (for burnishing)
- Surface to roll out ink
- Masking tape
- Linoleum cutting tools
- Solvent block-print ink
- Turpentine (for solvent ink)
- Toilet paper for clean-up
- Assortment of paper
- Brayers
- Brushes

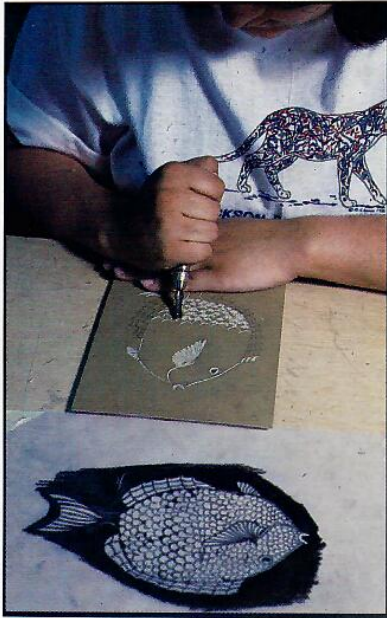
## STARTING OUT

1 Beginning with photocopies of tropical fish, use tracing paper to develop a **stylized** drawing. Will you use **lines**

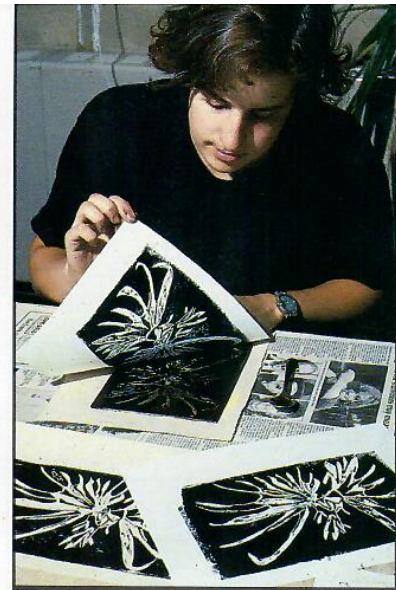


(**thick/thin; straight/wavy; short/long**), shapes (**large/small; same one repeated; different ones in patterns**), dots, or textures? Transfer your final drawing to the linoleum block.





**2** Cut design into the block. Remember your image will be reversed and the areas you cut out will be white. Roll ink evenly, pull a **proof print**, correct, then make at least 15 prints. Vary color of ink, type of paper, color of paper.



**3** Use prints in a new way. Cut up into strips or shapes and rearrange into a new pattern. Use different colors, combine different parts, weave pieces of prints together.

#### SOME SOLUTIONS

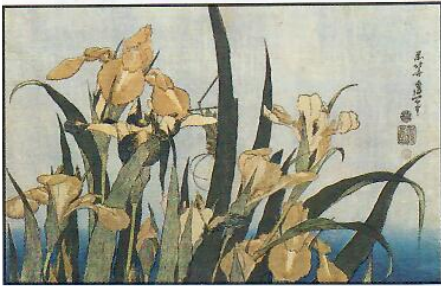
Each artist has stylized a different kind of water creature. Can you tell what each original print looked like? In these “folding screen” designs, which artists reworked original designs by using square shapes; varying rectangles; vertical strips; diagonal strips; positive/negative versions; repetition; “white” space; change of direction, size, color? Which of the final designs captures the feeling of: rippling currents of water; the lighting and shape of an aquarium; dark/light contrasts of a stream; rolling ocean waves?





## ARTS ALIVE

These two artists were inspired by Japanese prints in very different ways.



KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI (1760-1849), IRISES.

### A RECORD-SETTING "JAPANESE" PAINTING

Does the painting on the right look familiar? It was on television and made headlines in nearly every newspaper in the world a year ago when it sold for nearly \$54 million — the highest price ever paid for a painting at auction. Does this painting by late 19th-century Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh resemble Hokusai's *Irises* (above and on page 3)? Both are **close-up views** of irises and both artists used **curves, stylized shapes, and black outlines**. If you find the two works too similar to be just a coincidence, you are right — Van Gogh was directly influenced by Hokusai's work. From the moment he first saw them, Van Gogh loved Japanese woodblock



VINCENT VAN GOGH (1853-1890), IRISES. PRIVATE COLLECTION

prints and he used their **bright colors, black outlines, and flat shapes** in his work. But he also added his own personality. His version of *Irises*, with its **thick, swirling strokes and brilliant, clashing colors**, is much more emotional than Hokusai's.

### A SAMURAI OF TODAY

Take a close look at what appears to be a traditional Japanese print of a samurai warrior (right). Do you notice anything strange? This samurai wears traditional Japanese dress, but he is armed with a golf club instead of a sword. He also sports a digital watch, a calculator, a camera, and a briefcase. Japanese-born artist Masami Teraoka does his watercolors in the style of 18th- and 19th-century Japanese woodblock prints. Though the style belongs to the past, the artist is com-  
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menting on the mixing of contemporary Japanese and American cultures. To compete in the modern world, today's "samurai" must be armed with advanced technology and modern gadgets, rather than with swords and arrows. Teraoka has carefully planned his **composition**. The **diagonal lines** of the umbrella, handle, arm, and golf club lead to the **focal point** of the work, the face. In keeping with the traditional style of Japanese prints done hundreds of years ago, Teraoka uses **heavy lines, stylized shapes, and flat colors**. —S. B.

MASAMI TERAOKA (B.1936), SAMURAI BUSINESSMAN GOING HOME II. WATERCOLOR, SPACE GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.