

UKIYO-E



definition

Ukiyo-e means 'image of the floating world'. It is based on the Buddhist idea of the evanescence of human life. This resulted in illustrating purely moments of life. The illustrations showed scenes of culture, fashion, lifestyle and also from normal everyday life (there was almost no taboo topic of human existence left out).

Ukiyo-e were reproduced as **woodblock prints**. The affordable prints were mass produced. It was more seen as craftsmanship than art. The market determines the product. The prints of actors, courtesans or famous places etc. were like a forerunner of trading cards.

history

Ukiyo-e woodblock prints flourished from the **17th to the early 19th centuries** parallel to the Edo period (Edo is modern-day Tokyo). This was a time when Japan was completely isolated from the outside world. They had a status system with strict social rules. The long-lasting peace brought prosperity and as a result culture and entertainment boomed. In 1867, Ukiyo-e was presented at the World's Fair in Paris and this was followed by the Japonisme movement, which influenced many impressionists e.g. van Gogh.

style

Fine outlines, filled with flat colored shapes, sometimes with a gradient, are determined by the printing process. The key block contains the fine outlines, which are first printed in black. The lines are partly carved on 1 mm fine bars made of hard cherry wood. With further blocks for each color it is printed from light to dark. The number of colors is therefore limited. A figure is usually shown in front of an elaborate background. At the edge of the print was the artist's signature, the publisher and the title. The ancient representations are real contemporary witnesses and robes, patterns and hairstyles provide information about the status and rank of a person. The environment was not shown in real perspective in the early days, but there is a distance effect. Ukiyo-e has a very long period of time, so the prints evolved with the zeitgeist and fashion.

artists

Hishikawa Moronobu
Kitagawa Utamaro
Tōshūsai Sharaku
Katsushika Hokusai
Utagawa Hiroshige
Toyokuni Utagawa
Goyō Hashiguchi
Torii Kotondo

female artists:

Girls were just models,
Helen Hyde (Japonisme)

helpful links

video

[printing process](#)

[a closer look at Hokusai's Wave](#)

images

[Utamaro - Girl blowing a Whistle](#)

[Hokusai - The big Wave of Kanagawa](#)

Bijinga*



Utamaro - 'girl blowing a whistle'

1. oval, elongated face with small lips, long nose, high eye section
2. Shimada hairstyle
3. detailed, elaborate kimono
4. the square pattern shows the flow of the fabric

The faces of women and men are stylized in the same way.

*Image of beautiful women

late Ukiyo-e

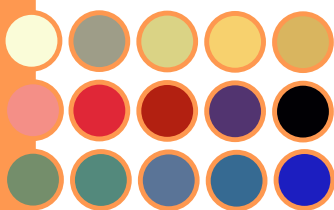


Hokusai - 'The big Wave of Kanagawa'

1. spiral composition
2. wave like claws
3. gout falls like snow on Mount Fuji, low horizon
4. the ships break against the spiral
5. For all right-left readers: by mirroring the image, the barrier of the wave to the ships becomes more visible



colors



A shimmering effect was created by using mica powder.

The Prussian Blue Hokusai used was not invented until the early 18th century.

White is negative space and shows the paper color.