

# The Importance of Being Hokusai

## — Hokusai and European Art before 1900

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### I The Wave and the Mountain

There are some artworks that are simply part of our lives. We can't imagine being without them. These artworks fascinate, are seemingly easy to understand. The themes are always whittled down to the essentials — like a logo! “The Wave” is one of them.

“Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa” (H-7) from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku Sanjūrokkei)* by Katsushika Hokusai is one of the most famous artworks in the world. It belongs to the whole world; it transcends place and time. We feel no initial need to categorize or explain.

Why does Hokusai concentrate on this gigantic wave crashing down, seemingly devouring everything? Is the overpowering force of nature alone the aspects he wishes to convey to us? This is one possibility perhaps for understanding the picture: a sudden, precipitous force of nature, and we — symbolized by the people in the boats — are helplessly exposed to it. It is not only the clarity of the composition, but also our possible involvement, which makes us think we understand this picture.

The mood of the *36 Views* is actually one of tranquility. We roam through a quiet, well-cultivated country, watch craftsmen at work, observe animals, drink tea with pilgrims, laugh at jokes and amusing situations. Only a few sheets present the mountain and its landscape to us as dangerous, even threatening. When lightning flashes around the summit, would any of us like the idea of being up there? When Fuji glows and vibrates, ruddy with heat, we're surely glad to be seated at its foot. And when the waves tower up so high that they threaten to devour the mountain of mountains, we have no desire even to watch from a distance: fortunately, it's only a picture!

When studying the work of Katsushika Hokusai, we see that he is not only a great master of pictorial composition that captivates the viewer, but he always lets several themes resonate in parallel in one picture. However much his biography and his extensive oeuvre give us the impression of a lone wolf and eccentric who defied all conventions, Hokusai was first and foremost a highly educated artist who was most intimate with the history of art and literature and invested this in his art. So we are quite justified in asking what is connoted in his “Wave” apart from the representation of the overpowering force of nature.

The observer sees in the foreground the waves of the sea and, far away in the distance, slightly off center, the snow-covered Fuji — as an unattainable island in a turbulent sea!

In her essay of 1992, “Realm of the Immortals: Paintings Decorating the Jade Hall of the Northern Song,”<sup>1)</sup> Scarlett Jang ventured on a reconstruction of the decoration of the part of the imperial palace in Kaifeng where the ruler met celebrated scholars and poets (fig. 1). Like the palace of the Daoist Immortals on the Island in the Bohai Sea, the hall was called “Jade Hall.” Great poets were deemed to be immortals, thus the encounter with the emperor imitated the gathering of the Immortals. The wall decoration was designed correspondingly: far-reaching depictions of the sea on both sides of the ruler's throne, but behind, in a setting of waves like a solitaire, the three islands in the Bohai Sea.

This picture resonates with one of the main themes of East Asian

painting — the idealized landscape that, in its reduction to a few elements, surpasses the reality of what is seen. A second aspect fits into this form of landscape interpretation: the ruler was not only the central figure in the scenario of the meeting of the Immortals in the Jade Hall, but, as intermediary between heaven and earth, he was able to assume the function of the celestial axis as well.

Since the seventeenth century, the motif of waves surging high and breaking on the peaked Cosmic Mountain had been part of the standard repertoire of decoration on imperial dragon robes. Differently titled landscape pictures mostly vary the theme of the ideal landscape, which stands for the paradise of immortals, unattainable to mortals.

Pen-and-ink pictures transported and popularized this theme; copied countless times, this refined interpretation also reached Japan via Chan / Zen Buddhism and, in a diversity of forms, took on a typical Japanese characteristic. On the one hand, the wave-mountain motif lived on in pen-and-ink painting; on the other, it was also interpreted in the rock gardens that became the vogue around 1500.

The iconographic interpretations of these gardens are many, but one that is very widespread is that of the Isle of the Immortals. The rocks lie in the middle of a sea of gravel, calm or turbulent, depending on the garden design. We, the mortal observers, have no access and are confined to seeing, to meditation. This is now an apt moment to explain the story of Mount *Horai* in Japan as it was and is widely known. Named *Penglai* in China, this *Horai* is situated on one of the islands in the Bohai Sea inhabited by the Eight Immortals — we see the old theme cropping up again that we encountered in the “Jade Hall.”

The story of the *Penglai / Horai* and its connection to Japan and Mount Fuji goes back a long way: the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, sent his courtier Xi Fu in 219 BC on a quest to find the secret of the Immortals and the elixir of long life. Accompanied by a great retinue, he is said to have finally landed in Japan — the Isles of the Immortals — and recognized Mount Fuji as the mountain *Penglai / Horai*. This story had been known since time immemorial and it retained its vitality.<sup>2)</sup>



fig. 1  
Painted Decoration of the Jade Hall in the Imperial Palace in Kaifeng, China, Song Dynasty, pre – 1082, Reconstruction: Scarlett Jang, “Realm of the Immortals: Painting Decorating the Jade Hall of the Northern Song,” *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1992)

In her work *Sōtatsu und der Sōtatsu-Stil: Untersuchungen zu Repertoire, Ikonographie und Ästhetik der Malerei des Tawaraya Sōtatsu (um 1600–1640) (Sōtatsu and the Sōtatsu School: Study of the Repertory, Iconography and Aesthetic of Tawaraya Sōtatsu's Paintings)* Doris Croissant devoted a chapter to the so-called “Marine Landscapes” on folding screens of the early Edo Period.<sup>3)</sup>

During the course of the seventeenth century quite a few screens were produced showing variations on the theme of “Island in Turbulent Sea”. In this context, they demonstrate the connections to Chinese art and iconography and, associated with this, the influence of Zen Buddhism on culture and the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere surrounding the nobility in Kyoto. Folding Screens with a spaciouly conceived composition manage their effect with relatively few set-piece-type elements: waves, rocks and cliffs, pine trees, sometimes boats too. The evergreen pine is one of the symbols of long life, thus ideally fitted to the theme of the Isles of the Immortals. The fishing boats struggling in troubled waters: doesn't this relate to us, mortals, to whom access is denied?

Thus two representational forms exist — especially in Kyoto — for the Isle of the Immortals surrounded by waves: in garden landscaping and in painting (fig. 2).

The work of an artist important for the further development of the style and content of Japanese painting, Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716), shows both variants of wave interpretations: we can see ornamentally elaborated wave pictures in the pair of screens “Red and White Plum Blossom,” while the turbulent sea is the theme of the screen “Rough Waves” (fig. 3, 4).

Two themes that could not be more different, and two waves interpreted through two iconographies that also could not be more different!

The graphic works of Katsushika Hokusai vary the theme of the wave several times, but always differently. Like the aforementioned artist, he knows exactly how to differentiate according to theme: in designs and template works — e.g. *Manga* — he visualizes for us subtly variegated pictures of a calm and of a turbulent sea. He has already depicted the Great Wave off Kanagawa in a European-oriented woodcut, but without integrating Mount Fuji (fig. 5). His attempts to realistically render Western spatial perspective and shading make the motif seem “frozen.” The waves tower up like solid walls, with seemingly harmless crowns of foam. In comparison, the wave from the Fuji series impresses as an ingenious masterstroke, which links up with the sketched history of the iconography, but without rounding it off.

So Hokusai knew all about the form of the wave as a vehicle of meaning: harmless and flat, it belongs to the random landscape

repertoire. Turbulent, towering up, and dangerous, crashing against rocks and cliffs, devouring boats, it is reserved for the mythological theme, in effect a threatening monster between two worlds.

“The Wave” led the way — worldwide. The eccentric interpretation of the thousand-year history of Mount *Penglai / Horai* becomes the sole, valid rendition of dramatic marine scenes. And with such force that we forget all other probably just as fascinating wave compositions of the past millennia.<sup>4)</sup>

## II The West — Impressionism

As of the early nineteenth century, Hokusai was not unknown in Europe. For one thing, he produced works commissioned by the East India Company, which could be seen in the Netherlands at the latest from 1830. Many people will probably not have seen these works.

In 1831 Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) mentioned Hokusai very briefly in his travel report *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan* (Archive for the Description of Japan) (cat. 1) in a passage describing the giant coltsfoot: “[...] the Japanese painter Hokusai includes a sketch in his illustrated book on how country people protect themselves against the rain under the huge leaves of this plant. (16 February).”<sup>5)</sup> He thus refers quite precisely to an illustration in the 7th number of *Manga* (published in 1817).

However, Katsushika Hokusai was recognized in France as one of the very great artists of the nineteenth century.

In 1866 Philippe Burty (1830–1890), art critic of the art magazine *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* founded in 1859, published a guide book of the decorative arts, *Chefs-d'œuvre des arts industriels: céramique, verrerie et vitraux, émaux, métaux, orfèvrerie et bijouterie, tapisserie* (Masterworks of art industries: ceramic, glass and stained glass, enamels, metals, goldsmith and jewelry, tapestry), in which he also slipped in his first, precise knowledge about the art of China and Japan. In a medium-length paragraph, he gives free rein to his enthusiasm for Hokusai:

But the most remarkable series is that of the twenty-eight books of illustrations of the famous Hok-Sai — examples from natural history, everyday scenes, caricatures, instructions for stick — and sword fighting, and of course also pilgrimages to the holy volcano Fou-sy. The sketches unite the grace of a Watteau, the energy of Daumier, the imagination of Goya and the dynamic vitality of Eugène Delacroix [...] <sup>6)</sup>



fig. 2  
Tawaraya Sōtatsu, *Waves at Matsushima*, Japan, Kyoto, Edo Period (17C.), ink, color and gold leaf on paper, pair of six-panel folding screens, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1906.231-232

fig. 3  
Ogata Kōrin, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, Japan, Edo Period (18C.), ink, color and gold leaf on paper, pair of two-panel folding screens, MOA Museum of Art, Atami, Japan



Hokusai is being mentioned here in the same breath as the founding fathers of Modernism. Thus seen, his work is given even deeper significance for the development of Impressionism, which was just emerging, its beginnings occurring exactly around this time. Philippe Burty is therefore a mouthpiece also for the enthusiasm of young artists.

Would Claude Monet's (1840–1926) landscape painting be conceivable without Hokusai's views of Fuji? The dissolution of the landscape in stripes of color, which stretch, richly nuanced, from the ground to the sky, the interest in light — not in shade! — and how light can change the colors, and the interest in the single object — all this shows great affinity to Hokusai. Often stand-alone forms like a rock or a haystack are the main motif in the pictures. We are immediately reminded of the two monolithic Fuji pictures “South Wind, Clear Dawn” (H-8) and “Thunderstorm Below the Summit” (H-9).

Something else that must have fascinated him was the idea of working on one and the same motif in several variations. Hokusai encircles Mount Fuji in countless representations; time and again he finds another viewpoint, mood, mode of observation: time and again a different ambience. Whether “Cliffs at Étretat” (from 1883 on), the series of his “Haystacks” (studies as of 1888), and also

“Rouen Cathedral” (1892–94), and, last but not least, and most obviously in the “Japanese manner,” the water-lily garden, the main motif of his oeuvre as of around 1900.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) seizes on the series idea, leading us to see parallels to Hokusai's Fuji series, for instance, in the motif of Mont Sainte-Victoire. The famous pictures in the “Views of Mont Sainte-Victoire” series were not produced until after 1900, but there exists a large group of graphics and paintings revealing Cézanne's interest and artistic confrontation with Hokusai. Since the 1880s, he seems to have been interested in the opposition between dominant foreground and far-flung landscape.

Hokusai had already demonstrated his mastery in this manner of composition in the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, for instance in the sheet “Ejiri in the Province of Suruga” (*Sunshū Ejiri*) (H-14), created ca. 1830, although we may also mention two pictures, “Mount Fuji behind Pine Trees” (*Matsugoshi no Fuji*) (cat. 1) and “Mount Fuji of the Bamboo Grove” (*Chikurin no Fuji*) (cat. 2) in the second volume of *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku hyakkei*), published in 1835.

We can make a self-explanatory comparison of these woodcuts and the view “Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from Montbriand” (*La Montagne Sainte-Victoire vue de Montbriand*, private collection,



fig. 4  
Ogata Kōrin, *Rough Waves*, Japan, Edo Period, c. 1704–09, ink, color and gold leaf on paper, two-panel folding screen, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1926



fig. 5  
Katsushika Hokusai, *A View of Honmoku off Kanagawa*, Japan, Edo Period, c. 1800–05, color woodcut print, The Sumida Hokusai Museum

Argentina), already produced in 1882: a grid-like structure that commands the landscape just as forcefully in “Chestnut Trees at the Jas de Bouffan” (*Les Marronniers du Jas de Bouffan en hiver*, 1885–86, Minneapolis Institute of Arts).

In the course of his work Cézanne shifts the mountain more and more into the center of his vedutas and opens up a free sightline into the distance. Not only must the pictorial composition be of interest to us but also his painting style and the layering of colors and lines.

“Mont Sainte-Victoire” (*La Montagne Sainte-Victoire*, ca. 1888, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) is as frugal in its use of color as the prints of Hokusai’s *36 Views*. The depth is structured in layers upwards to the top; in both Hokusai and Cézanne, painted lines separate the individual, finely, and reciprocally gradated areas of color — Hokusai doesn’t use black, as is usual in the Japanese woodcut. In order to underline the mountain’s special quality, it towers up into the blue sky, an intermediate tone between earth and sky being used for the coloring, as if he wanted to stress its “function as intermediary.”

In 1882, Théodore Duret (1838–1927) published a two-part essay in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*: “L’art japonais. Les livres illustrés — les albums imprimés — Hokusai,” (Japanese Art. Illustrated Books — Printed Albums — Hokusai)<sup>7)</sup> in which Hokusai was praised as the most important artist ever to come out of Japan; the essay also contains the first attempt to write a biography of Hokusai.<sup>8)</sup>

French Impressionism was avant-garde also because the potential of landscape painting as a means of expression was recognized relatively late, and the landscape interpretations of a Hokusai were able to point the way.

To demonstrate how much the young Impressionists studied their Hokusai, we must turn to a comparison with Gustave Courbet (1819–1877). He had already painted series of landscape views, very frequently sea waves, but also the motif that was so very popular with French artists, the cliffs at Étretat. Courbet said of himself he was a Realist and only put in his pictures what he actually saw; but he doesn’t let the observer into his pictures — we are allowed to be onlookers but not wander into them in our imagination.

Monet, on the other hand, leads the viewer’s eye into the picture’s depth; we are drawn in, the observer has to conquer the picture for himself, by looking — exactly the same as with the views of Fuji by Hokusai. The pictures radiate serenity; we cannot resist joining in the many little stories that are told round about Mount Fuji. The dynamic of Impressionist painting certainly owes a major part of its power to Hokusai.

England and Germany had protagonists of Romanticism very early on who were interested in light and mood. William Turner (1775–1851) and Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) were dazzling artist-personalities who had a profound formative influence on subsequent decades. Thus artists were needed in both countries who looked to France and sought contact with their French fellow artists.

First and foremost to be mentioned is the Berlin painter Max Liebermann (1847–1935), who in 1873, at the age of twenty-seven, went to Paris for two years. His interest thereafter was dominated by French Impressionism; he himself was called the “German Impressionist” and as time went by he gathered together one of the most extensive collections of French modern art. Japanese art — or that of Hokusai — played no more than a subordinate role in his work, and, to the extent that it did, only indirectly through

his fellow painters in France.

In England, we may name Alfred East (1844–1913), who went to Japan in 1889 for six months and even became an honorary member of “Meiji Fine Arts Society” (*Meiji Bijutsu-kai*), founded that very year. Thus he had the opportunity to study Hokusai’s personal vision in situ, which is reflected both in his Japanese and, after his sojourn there, also his European landscapes.<sup>9)</sup>

### III The West — Symbolism

Katsushika Hokusai became known throughout Europe most of all through S. Bing’s art magazine *Le Japon artistique* (*Der Japanische Formenschatz, Artistic Japan*), which was published simultaneously in three languages (1888–1891, 6 volumes each with 6 numbers [English edition]). Justus Brinkmann (1843–1915) was engaged as partner for the German edition; he was director of the Hamburg Museum for Art and Industry and became great devotee of Japan.

The magazine contains very many illustrations, acquainting artists and those interested in art with Japanese art, frequently for the first time. Small vignettes stemmed from book illustrations; in particular, the sketches from *Manga* by Hokusai were frequently used, but also other illustrations of his. The colored covers provided an impression — rough and often falsified unfortunately — of the color quality of the sheets from the series of ~~the~~ *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*.

In vol. 2, no. 7 there is an essay by Théodore Duret “The Art of Engraving in Japan,” a whole six years after his article in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, with nearly all illustrations by Hokusai<sup>10)</sup>.

The main feature of the next issues — vol. 2, nos. 8 and 9 — was devoted to Hokusai’s *Manga*<sup>11)</sup>. The author was Ary Renan (1857–1900), himself an artist but by no means an Impressionist, known if only through reproductions of his widely circulated painting “The Voice of the Sea” (*Les voix de la mer*) (1899) — influenced in its style by Hokusai’s Wave. Both in his pictures and text he employs a symbolic idiom.

Gustave Geffroy (1855–1926), French cultural critic and friend of Monet, wrote an article for S. Bing’s *Artistic Japan* (vol. 6, nos. 32/33, 1891) on Japanese landscape painting<sup>12)</sup> describing Hokusai as an extraordinary phenomenon, whose work, above all in the Fuji series, represents the summit of Japanese landscape painting:

Hokusai is a poet of a very different calibre. Unrivalled as a painter of manners and customs, [...] he is [...] a forcible and refined draughtsman. He is a realist in this sense that he paints scrupulously the landscapes which he has seen, effects which he has noted as they passed, but he always goes further, higher, and he never wearies of affirming the essence of things, the force of phenomena. His waves swell, rise, fall, and make one think of the whole ocean, of all the rhythm of the universe. Everywhere in the views of Fujiyama, in the *Man-gwa*, he knows the smallest details and marks out the spaces. [...] He paints scenery which cannot be moved, changeless rocks, eternal mountains, — he enumerates all their changing aspects under the influence of lights and shadows. He possesses in the highest degree the Japanese talent for rendering the movement of beings and things; [...]

He is the truly extraordinary landscape painter; he sets forth the seasons from flowery spring to black winter, draws up a map of the fields, orchards, and woods, traces the course of meandering rivers, makes the sea swell in foam like muslin and in waves all claws; he casts the breaker over the rock,

twists it into languid volutes on the sand; and again, when the panorama of the world he lives in is no longer enough for him, the eye of his imagination returns to former epochs or foresees future catalyses — he gives the world a shake and invents chaos.<sup>13)</sup>

The complicated network / interaction of artists, exhibition management and criticism is also reflected in publications by prominent art historians; outstanding among them in the German-speaking regions was their doyen Alois Riegl (1858–1905). He was himself curator for many years at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry. His pet area of research was non-Classical art, and so he contributed to the understanding and acceptance of contemporary art.

In a short essay in the magazine *Die Graphische Künste*, he focuses on the theme “Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst” (Atmosphere as Content of Modern Art).<sup>14)</sup> Riegl bases his view on the fact that art had had different agendas in different epochs. Contemporary art — i.e. towards the end of the nineteenth century — has to offer people what they miss in real life: “an endless struggle,” namely “atmosphere.” He defines this as thoroughly positive. Harmony and justice triumph over conflict and chaos: “[...] what seems to be a merciless struggle close up, seems from a distance to be peaceful co-existence, concord and harmony.”<sup>15)</sup> The intimation that order, harmony, and peace conquer chaos, dissonances, and movement, “[...] we call atmosphere, its elements are peace and distant vision. [...]”<sup>16)</sup> The logical conclusion from this is that only peace-filled landscape painting based on a faraway perspective can be contemporary, modern art: “What nature grants to man only in rare moments should be conjured up for him by art, any time he wishes.”<sup>17)</sup> “No one can doubt that we are living in a time of profound intellectual and spiritual unrest. [...] Thus our artists are the ones to draw the last, highest profit from modern knowledge and so bring relief, if not redemption, to those needing consolation.”<sup>18)</sup>

Looking back at the history of European painting he sketches a picture of duality in art. Atmospheric art had existed once before, in the (Protestant, therefore enlightened) Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, in which peace and the distant view dominate. Simultaneously, in the Catholic Netherlands, the state and Catholicism had ~~(might/should have?)~~ assigned a different task to art: representing the world order guaranteed by the empire and the Roman Catholic Church, full of life and movement, viewed from close up.

Continuing to around 1900, we might compare Impressionist landscape painting with Symbolism, which exploited the dynamic close-up angle as one of its stylistic ploys. Symbolism also disrupts the logic of landscape painting; it is the art of indirect suggestion.

Besides “landscapes with a distant perspective,” Hokusai’s 36 Views also include two sheets in which the motif of the mountain dominates the foreground. Together with the Wave, these three prints can be assigned to Symbolist art.

Thus both Western styles could “help themselves” from Hokusai. While Impressionism varies the Japanese models in a freer and more autonomous way, Symbolism — and with it the applied arts — shows repetitions of the motifs. “The Wave” as “movement of nature / in the realm of nature” came to be a popular decorative motif. Also the close-up view of Fuji, glorifying the mountain’s harmonious form, was optimally suitable for adorning objects.

Vienna was the artistic center of the Habsburg Empire, but always hesitant as regards international contacts. It was the last

of the European states to venture on diplomatic and economic contacts with the countries of East Asia; impulses triggered by international participations in the Vienna World Exhibition of 1873 were not exploited.

It needed an artistic revolt to direct the view across national boundaries, which eventually led to the founding of the Vienna Secession — but only in 1897 (1898, first exhibition and publication of the art magazine *Ver Sacrum*). Furthermore, in 1897 Arthur von Scala (1845–1909) became director of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, which meant that a pronounced lover of English, French, and Japanese art was to change the museum landscape. Thus Secession, museum, and School of Applied Arts were often bound up together with the common aim of helping the “new art” to its breakthrough.

As in France, regular exhibitions proved to be the means of achieving this. Three are of great significance in our context. The VI Secession Exhibition of 1900 brought together around 700 Japanese artworks from the Fischer Collection.<sup>19)</sup> The largest exhibition ever of Hokusai’s works was put on in 1901 by the Museum of Art and Industry,<sup>20)</sup> with 630 works were on show and also on sale. A driving force behind this major exhibition was, yet again, S. Bing, who made many printed works available. The XVI Vienna Secession exhibition “Development of Impressionism in Painting and Sculpture” (*Entwicklung des Impressionismus in Malerei und Plastik*), held from January to February 1903, even devoted a special chapter to the Japanese woodcut, which is elucidated in the foreword:

[...] Now we come to the latest generation. Realism has done its best. Decorative aspirations are becoming accepted; there is a yearning for simplicity and — style. Here the Japanese are once more building the bridge — they were already a cathartic support for the great Impressionists with regard to the use of color. After deliberate initial borrowing, this is finally leading to free and individual creativity in simplifying the impression of nature. Like the great forefathers of Impressionism on our continent we are also bringing the great forefathers of the Japanese: Hokusai, Utamaro. Linking up with them are Odilon Redon and the youngest generation in France: Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Vuillard, Maurice Denis, Bonnard, Roussel, Vallotton and the Dutchman Van Gogh. [...]”<sup>21)</sup>

Such an integration of Japanese art into Western art history had been unheard of until then and did not occur again for a long time afterwards. All these endeavors had not missed their mark on the art scene.

Most notably, the Secession magazine *Ver Sacrum* became the platform for book illustration, art prints, and photography, with a tendency towards abstraction becoming notable. They no doubt closely studied the layering of landscape forms and reciprocally attuned colors in ~~the~~ *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. Adolf M. Böhm (1861–1927) transposed these layers into sundry materials: painting, illustrative graphics, large-format glass windows. Rudolf Bacher (1862–1945), also co-founder of the Secession, was inspired in his few landscape graphics by the serene expanse of Hokusai’s vision.

Motif borrowings cropped up in the applied arts — evidently object decoration was closer to the spirit of Symbolism rather than Impressionism. But it must be noted that East Asian motifs have a long tradition in European applied arts; thus it seems only logical in the wake of the enthusiasm for things Japanese that Hokusai motifs are used — seldom, but still — as decoration on vases and

plates.

For the 1878 Paris World Exhibition, the manufacturer Baccarat Crystal produced vases with decorative motifs after Hokusai. Best known is the vase “Bambous” (Bamboo) (cat. 150), for which the double-sheet “Mount Fuji of the Bamboo Grove” from the *100 Views* was used as source.<sup>22</sup> And the glass-metal sculpture “La Vague” (The Wave) appeared at the late date of 1909.

In this context, we may take a sidelong look at Claude Debussy’s symphonic sketches “La Mer” (The Sea) of 1905. He was inspired by “Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa,” which adorns the cover of his score (cat. 200).

The Wave motif is associated with the uncanny, even the threatening, whether in book illustrations such as the incalculable “Electricity” — thus the title of an allegory by Leopold Widlizka of 1896 (cat. 196) — or the depiction of the “Wind in the Waves of the Cornfield (Air before Shower)” by Ferdinand Andri in an illustration in *Ver Sacrum*.<sup>23</sup> In a large cloisonné-plate the Viennese artist Hermine Ostersetzer (1874–1909) links the Wave with “Nereid and Triton” (1900, MAK-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna), ancient mythological divinities who save the shipwrecked from a sure death.

Wacław Szymanowski (1859–1930), a Polish sculptor who lived in Paris for a longer period, subjected his dynamic oeuvre to the Wave motif, once as the gloating “The Laughing Wave”<sup>24</sup>, another time as the bronze sculpture “Wave” (before 1903, National Museum, Warsaw), in which figures with terrified facial expressions and a tree in wave form, suggesting a mighty wind, simultaneously safeguard the composer on the Chopin monument in Łazienki Park in Warsaw.

It is truly astonishing that Katsushika Hokusai, and pre-eminently his Fuji series, was so highly esteemed in Europe. Alfred East comes to the incontestable conclusion in his aforementioned lecture:

Nothing proves to me his wonderful mastery of composition so much as his landscapes, which although decorative in the best sense, are not stilted, but breathe with the very breath of genius and courage. [...]

His observation was incisive and analytical, yet he never at his best period sacrificed his essential facts for those that were non-essential. He at once took you into his confidence and told you what to look for. There was no hesitation, no doubt. The story was told plainly and directly.<sup>25</sup>

(Translated from German to English by XXXX XXXXX)

#### Notes:

- 1) Scarlett Jang, “Realm of the Immortals: Painting Decorating the Jade Hall of the Northern Song,” in *Ars Orientalis*, 22 (1992), pp. 81–96.
- 2) For further diverse religious ideas about Mount Fuji, see: Josef Kreiner, “Heilige Berge Japans: Miwa und Fuji,” in Karl Gratzl (ed.), *Die Heiligsten Berge der Welt*, Graz: Verlag für Sammler, 1990, pp. 143–152; Johannes Wieninger, *Fuji — der Berg, den es nur einmal gibt*, mit einem Beitrag von Josef Kreiner, CD-Katalog, Wien: MAK, 2001; Susanne Formanek, “Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Fuji-Kults,” in *Minikomi*, 2 (2000), Wien: Institut für Japanologie der Universität Wien, pp. 5–12. Most notably: the Fuji cult in the late Edo Period arising under the influence of the Nichiren sects.
- 3) Doris Croissant, *Sōtatsu und der Sōtatsu-Stil: Untersuchungen zu Repertoire, Ikonographie und Ästhetik der Malerei des Tawaraya Sōtatsu (um 1600–1640)*, Münchner ostasiatische Studien: Sonderheft 3., Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978.
- 4) For Hokusai’s Wave see: Fritz Alexander Kauffmann, *Die Woge des Hokusai: Eine Bildbetrachtung*, Berlin: Verlag Herbig, 1938. The analytical work deals with an early structuralist monograph on this sheet.
- 5) Philipp Franz von Siebold, *Nippon. Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan und*

*dessen Neben- und Schutzländern: Jezo mit den Südlichen Kurilen, Krafio, Koorai und den Liukiu-Inseln*, 7 vols., Leiden, 1832–1852.

- 6) Philippe Burty, *Chefs-d’oeuvre des arts industriels: céramique, verrerie et vitraux, émaux, métaux, orfèverie et bijouterie, tapisserie*, Paris: P. Ducrocq, 1866, p. 206.
- 7) Théodore Duret, “L’Art japonais, les livres illustrés, les albums imprimés, Hokusai,” in *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, XXVI, 1882, pp. 113–131, 300–318.
- 8) The first autonomous biography we owe to Edmond de Goncourt, *Hokusai. L’art japonais au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: Flammarion, 1896, after the Japanese biography by Iijima Kyoshin, *Katsushika Hokusai den* [Biography of Katsushika Hokusai], Tokyo: Hōsū-kaku, 1893.
- 9) Also see: Alfred East, “Some aspects of the art of Hokusai,” Japan Society, London, Fortieth Ordinary Meeting, May 24th, 1899, pp. 96–113.
- 10) Théodore Duret, “The Art of Engraving in Japan,” in *Artistic Japan: A Monthly Illustrated Journal of Arts and Industries*, vol. 2, no. 7, London: S. Low, Marson, Searle & Rivington, 1889, pp. 73–79.
- 11) Ary Renan, “Hokusai’s ‘MAN-GWA,’” in *Artistic Japan: A Monthly Illustrated Journal of Arts and Industries*, vol. 2, nos. 8 and 9, London: S. Low, Marson, Searle & Rivington, 1889, pp. 83–90, 99–104.
- 12) Gustave Geffroy, “Japanese Landscape Paintings I and II,” in *Artistic Japan: A Monthly Illustrated Journal for Arts and Industries*, vol. 6, nos. 32 and 33, London: S. Low, Searle & Rivington, 1891, pp. 401–415, 419–427.
- 13) Gustave Geffroy, “Japanese Landscape Paintings II,” in *Artistic Japan*, vol. 6, no. 33, pp. 426–427.
- 14) Alois Riegl, “Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst,” in Gesellschaft für Vervielfältigende Kunst (ed.), *Die Graphische Künste*, Wien, 1899, 22. Jg., pp. 47–56.
- 15) *ibid.*, p. 48.
- 16) *ibid.*
- 17) *ibid.*, p. 49.
- 18) *ibid.*, p. 56.
- 19) *Katalog der VI. Ausstellung, Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession*, Wien: Verlag der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession, 1900.
- 20) *Werke Hokusai’s: ausgestellt im K.K. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie*, Wien, Februar — März 1901, Wien: E. Hirsher & Co., 1901.
- 21) Der Arbeitsausschuss, “Vorwort,” in *Entwicklung des Impressionismus in Malerei und Plastik, XVI. Ausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession Wien*, 1903, p. 18.
- 22) Two designs — a further one with Wave motif — are in the Musée Baccarat. For illustrations see: *Japonisme in Decorative Arts*, exh. cat., Tokyo: NHK, NHK Promotions, 1998, Cat. No. 161.
- 23) Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs (ed.), *Ver Sacrum, Mitteilungen der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs*, vol. 4, 1901, p. 16.
- 24) Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs (ed.), *Ver Sacrum: Mitteilungen der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs*, vol. 5, no. 23, 1902, p. 327.
- 25) Alfred East, *ibid.*