

An album of woodcuts “One hundred views of Mount Fuji by Hokusai”, the 2nd volume



- Author Katsushika Hokusai
- Performed by publisher and owner of woodcut boards: Yoshikawa Hanshichi
- Date of production 1877
- Place of creation Tokyo, Japan
- Dimensions height: 24 cm, width: 16 cm, thickness: 0,8 cm, jap. format hanshibon, diameter: grubość: 0,8 cm (jap. format hanshibon)
- Number of cards 26 cards + covers
- Author's designation Katsushika Hokusai kojim ???? (?), Japanese: “deceased Katsushika Hokusai”
- ID no. MSITJM1315/2
- Museum [The Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology](#)
- Subjects [daily life](#), [mountain](#), [nature](#)
- Technique [woodcut](#), [sewing](#)
- Material [paper](#)

- Acquired date 1996, donated by an unknown person
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- Tags [Japonia](#), [3D](#), [natura](#), [grafika](#), [pejzaż](#), [góry](#), [WMM Plus](#), [domena publiczna](#)

In the collection of the Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology, there is an edition of the work *100 views of Mount Fuji* by Katsushiki Hokusai. Hokusai was one of the most famous Japanese artists and he created old *ukiyo-e* woodcuts (Japanese: “a view of the world that passes away”). This book of three volumes was made with the use of a traditional method. Each volume consists of pages printed on Japanese paper with the use of the woodcut technique, folded in half and trimmed with a very thin string along outer edges. There is no colophon (publishing certificate) at the end of the 1st and 2nd volume. The middle column, along which the pages are folded (the so-called *hashira*, literally “post, pillar”) bears the title of the work, the volume number, as well as a dividing line and a *folio* number at the bottom. Each volume has covers of thick black paper. They are covered with a gleaming pattern resembling motifs of clouds (in the original, the clouds were pink and salmon-pink). On the outside of each volume, there is a rectangular label of white paper with a red inscription including the title of the work and volume number, placed in a double red cartouche. The number of illustrations is different for each volume. A composition sometimes covers one page, and at other times, it covers two neighbouring pages. The 2nd volume is of special interest due to its close connection with the series of single woodcuts, *36 views of Mount Fuji*. Three volumes of *100 views of Mount Fuji* are commonly regarded as the highest achievement in the field of illustrated books in Japan, although the first two volumes were of a higher quality than the 3rd one, which was published by another publisher a year later. Together with the volumes of *Hokusai manga*, they had the strongest influence on the art of the West.

When showing Mount Fuji in many different circumstances, Hokusai depicts its unremitting and universal presence in Japanese culture and he pays tribute to this holy mountain.

Thanks to his inexhaustible originality in presenting the topic, the artist transforms ordinary and typical views of Mount Fuji into something fascinating and unforgettable, delicate and ethereal. He uses traditional subjects and elements of the view and arranges them freely, while keeping the regular, natural features of the landscape. He takes quite a surprising observation point, yet the viewer has the impression that it was the only possible view. Therefore, both the landscape and the uniqueness of the work inspire admiration.

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Hokusai's phenomenon

Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) was an unusual and versatile artist whose artistic work seemed to have no limits, neither in respect of style nor subjects. He was one of the greatest Japanese masters of woodcuts and the first one to become so famous and gain recognition abroad. He is even placed in the circle of the most outstanding artists in the history of the world's art.

Hokusai's life was very active. He moved ninety three times, travelled frequently, was married twice and had a few children. His life's work consists of thirty thousand pictures, as well as illustrations to more than 500 books. He used more than thirty artistic names, including Shunrō, Sōri, and Iitsu, but his most famous artistic names are Hokusai, Gakyōrōjin, Katsushika, Taitō. He sometimes used one particular name for a year, two years, or even many years. His works are signed with various signatures.

He created both woodcuts and paintings with the same ease. He received considerable recognition during his life but spent many years in poverty. He played a fundamental role in the development of painting and *ukiyo-e* woodcutting, as well as the art of ornamentation (decorating objects of everyday use). His charismatic, artistic personality still has an influence on both the art and culture of Japan.

For many decades, the *ukiyo-e* trend, which had been developing from the 17th century, mainly presented the life of bourgeois culture – entertainment districts in towns, portraits of geishas, courtesans, and actors. Events occurring in houses of pleasure, tea houses, restaurants and kabuki theatres, as well as circles of actors became common themes of such paintings; hence their enormous popularity among members of the middle class, especially in towns. They were mainly created in the form of single woodcut cards of different sizes, illustrated books published with the use of this method and even paintings.

Landscapes were also present in *ukiyo-e* from the very beginning. They were used as a background to figures placed in the open-air, or a topographical background applied to emphasise a particular depiction. They were somewhat general pictures of mountains, streams, and so-called famous places described in the literature, known more for their religious and cultural reasons than for their own natural beauty. Therefore, at first, the landscape was not a typical subject of *ukiyo-e* and artists seldom took interest in it. But Hokusai, unrelenting in his search for new ideas and subjects, was interested in landscape. In his early works, he tried to use *uki-e* (“perspective picture“, a type of composition applying European rules of linear perspective) and analysed the western linear perspective, foreshortening, and chiaroscuro by studying Dutch copperplates. Gradually, scenes of road Tōkaidō and traditional views of Edo created by Hokusai became present in single woodcuts, series of a few cards, illustrated books, and *kyōka* poem collections from the beginning of the 19th century, as well as in volumes of sketches titled *Hokusai manga* (literally “Diverse sketches by Hokusai“), published irregularly since the beginning of the 19th century.

It was Hokusai who, due to his achievements, elevated the woodcut landscape to the status of an independent genre. His works were unique due to the perspective he applied, his manner of drawing lines, and original combinations of colours. His subjects and elements of composition were always well thought out.

It was Hokusai’s achievements that also gave the landscape in woodcuts the status of an independent genre. The originality of his works resulted from his use of perspective, his way of applying lines and the specific combination of colours used. The composition’s theme and components were invariably well thought-out.

Classical Japanese landscape paintings of earlier periods presented an idealised image of natural forms: mountains, rocks, rivers, clouds and trees in order to outline some philosophical ideas. This new style of depicting landscapes where the author very skilfully combines elements of the east and west, was highly appreciated by Japanese audiences, and it also fascinated the West. Hokusai’s style was even imitated by the Impressionist painters.

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Mount Fuji in woodcuts by Hokusai

Mount Fuji volcano, a magnificent, enormous creation of nature, is the highest mountain in Japan (3,776 m above sea level). It is the favourite mountain of the Japanese, venerated and deemed to be holy. The distinctive cone of Mount Fuji, regarded as the most perfect mountain shape, with its peak covered with snow for several months a year, has attracted the attention of Japanese artists, sensitive to the excellence of its form, through the ages. Mount Fuji has been mentioned repeatedly in works of literature and it has been the subject of many poems and depictions in paintings. Subsequent generations of artists have immortalised Fuji in countless woodcuts, as well as in photography.

It would be difficult to find a better subject for a landscape. For this holy mountain, venerated by the Japanese through ages, Hokusai dedicated a series of single woodcuts *Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), and then an illustrated book of three volumes *One hundred views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku hyakkei*). These works brought the artist everlasting fame, both in Japan and throughout the world. He created them late in life. He started the work on the series of single cards when he was sixty years old, and when the first volume of the illustrated book was published, he was in his seventies.

In 1834, Nishimura Yohachi, one of the most well-known woodcut publishers of old Japan, publishing woodcuts in a single form or in the form of series or books, published the first of three volumes of *One hundred views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku hyakkei)*.

The publication was prepared with the utmost of care. Printing boards were cut by the most outstanding woodcut makers of that time, and due to their work, all the characteristic features of Hokusai's style were reconstructed with an extraordinary accuracy, that is the rhythm, the sharpness of its lines, and the refinement of even the smallest details. The second volume was published in 1835. Printing was interrupted by the economic hardship of the Tenpō crisis period (1830–1844). Cultural life, including publishing activities, almost completely ceased. Even the largest publishing houses with a consolidated position such as Nishimura-ya Yohachi faced bankruptcy. Having printed two volumes, the publisher had to sell all the woodcut boards, including those prepared for the third volume (which probably were prepared much earlier). The woodcut blocks were bought by Eirakuya Tōshirō, the publisher of the volumes of *Hokusai manga*, who obtained the right to print the last volume and subsequent editions of the first two volumes. Subsequently, the boards were owned by Tōheki-dō of Nagoi, co-publisher of *Hokusai manga*. The third volume was not published until 1847/1849 (there are differing opinions of researchers on the publication date of the third volume).

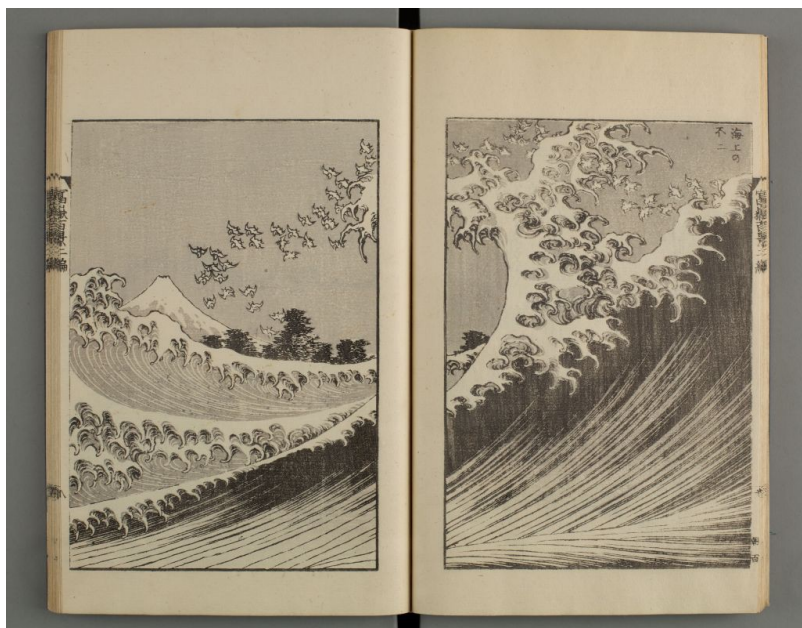
Illustrations of the first edition, characterised by very delicate black outlines and excellent techniques of gradation of grey colours, were published with the use of boards which had been created in the workshop of the woodcut master Egawa Tomekichi. It affected favourably the quality of the work.

The signature placed in the first edition reads as follows: *saki no (zen) Hokusai Iitsu aratame Gakyō rōjin Manji hitsu*, which literally means “drawn/painted by the former Hokusai Iitsu, changing his name to Gakyō rōjin [an old man crazy about drawing] Manji”. In this inscription, Hokusai revealed something about his personality: very few artists can boast of so many created works, and this is still said, for good reason, he painted constantly. In the case of the edition in the collection of the Manggha Museum, the inscription referred to above has been replaced by information stating that the work was created by an author who is now deceased.

In *One hundred views of Mount Fuji*, Hokusai brilliantly displayed his virtuosity in drawing and creating an unusually slick and innovative composition by using mere outlines, which were often very delicate, and flat patches of greys of various shades. The artist depicted the elegant and simple shape of Fuji in numerous well-thought-out contexts, taking into consideration all possible points of view: different times of a day (at dawn, sunset, dusk), in various weather conditions (in beautiful weather, stormy weather, bright sunlight and mist), from different sides, both from near and far. The mountain frequently consists of a dominant feature, but in other cases it is reduced to a small patch in the distance and one needs to look closely for it among other details. On some occasions, Mount Fuji constituted only a noble pretext for Hokusai that allowed him to concentrate on a subject that was of more interest to him: everyday occupations of ordinary people shown against a background of a landscape, displaying the harmony between man and nature. The mountain rises up quietly and appears unshakeable, irrespective of things happening around it, both in nature and among the people. This juxtaposition of permanence and changeability has been intriguing audiences to this day.

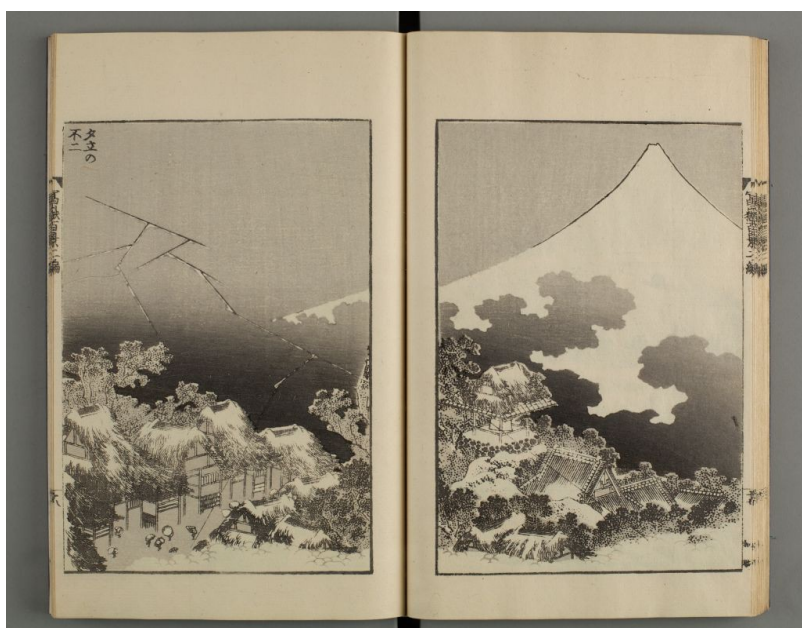
The collection included in the first volume opens with a composition depicting the goddess Konohanasakuya hime, whose cult is connected with the mountain. It is followed by images presenting views of the mountain, including those where the artist used the stylised shape of Fuji in other compositional ideas. Hokusai introduced the subject of history in presentations; for example, he showed the famous climb of En no Gyōji, the half-legendary magician of the end of the 7th century, creator of the Buddhist movement Shugendō, and the volcano eruption which occurred at the beginning of the 18th century, in the Hōei period. In some pictures he returned to the motifs which had previously attracted his attention. In the series *The Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, there were three woodcuts regarded as masterpieces not only of that series, but also in the history of Japanese woodcutting *ukiyo-e*, and also in world art. These are: *Kanagawa oki nami ura/Under a huge wave in Kanagawa* (depicting Fuji as the eternal and divine power able to oppose the power of nature), *Gaifū kaisei/The delicate wind, a beautiful morning* (sometimes titled *Beautiful weather in the southern wind*; displaying the mountain's might with its noble beauty – the simplest and, at the same time, one of the most outstanding works), and *Sanka hakuu/The storm beneath the top* (presenting the mountain's magnitude and severity). They show the power of nature in a simple

way and inspire contemplation over man's attitude towards this power. In the three-volume work created in the form of an illustrated book, the most obvious continuation of the artist's thoughts and interpretations on Mount Fuji can be found in the second volume. These are: Composition 40 *Kaijō no Fuji / The view of Fuji from the sea*.



The view of Fuji from the sea, object from The Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology, © all rights reserved, digitalisation: RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museums Plus project

Oarsmen do not battle the elements here, as in the famous *Huge wave in Kanagawa*; nature is a uniform entirety – the foam on the upper part of the breaking wave looks like a flock of plovers, and the birds flying in the air resemble splashing sea foam. Composition 52: *Yūdachi no Fuji / Fuji in the storm* A striking, branched zigzag in the left part of the image evokes the card *The storm beneath the top* and the confrontation of a short flash of lightning with the eternity. Hokusai enriched the composition with fragments of village buildings. The gradation of black separates the village from the white, impeccable and motionless top of the mountain.



Fuji in the storm, object from The Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology, © all rights reserved, digitalisation: RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museums Plus project

We can find easily the idea of the composition of the card *Beautiful weather in the southern wind* in many images of the collection *One hundred views of Mount Fuji*, with numerous metamorphoses presented by

the artist.

Hokusai emphasises his presence in the process of creating the image, he underlines the individual elements of composition, creates characteristic dramatic tension and dynamism while confronting the various elements of composition, and surprises the viewer constantly.

In contrast with the series of single cards *The Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, in which places are depicted which could be easily linked with actual locations, whereas in the collection *One hundred views of Mount Fuji* there are very few such places. Although the images are provided with geographical names, they do not necessarily refer to actual locations. Those names are rather evocations or suggestions of these locations. Presumably, it was the deliberate intention of the artist, who wanted to present some universal truths, and for that purpose images lack the real identification of places.

Since its 1st edition in the thirties and forties of the 19th century, the work *One hundred views of Mount Fuji* has enjoyed great interest and popularity, and has continuously been reissued by other, subsequent publishers. According to the old custom, the publisher who owned the printing boards, was, at the same time, the owner of the copyrights on the work. The edition in the collection of the Manggha Museum was published by Yoshikawa Hanshichi. The collection also comprises eight volumes of other illustrated books by Hokusai and ten volumes of the *Hokusai manga* sketches, published by the same publisher. Due to his fascination with Hokusai's works, Feliks Jasieński, the greatest Polish collector and promoter of the Japanese art, has gathered 13 volumes of *Hokusai manga* (some of them double). These sketches, printed with woodcutting techniques, show the artistry of the master and his extraordinary skills: small scenes, depictions of various actual figures, and those coming from myths and legends, objects of everyday use, architectural details, depictions of fauna and flora, landscapes signifying the future famous compositions of the artist, for example, those dedicated to Mount Fuji. All of them have been recognised as masterpieces and they delighted the collector immensely. The Japanese name for those sketches has become the inspiration for the collector's pseudonym, *Manggha* (written in a French transcription of the 19th century). It has also become the name adopted by the Centre of Japanese Art and Technology in Kraków, where, currently, the Japanese collection of Feliks Jasieński is kept, on behalf of the National Museum in Kraków.

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