

November 18, 2025

Exhibition

“Exploring with Hokusai! The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Ukiyo-e Prints”



The Sumida Hokusai Museum (Sumida City, Tokyo) holds Exhibition “Exploring with Hokusai! The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Ukiyo-e Prints” from December 11, 2025 to February 23, 2026. Each brush-drawn painting is a unique work. In contrast, *ukiyo-e* prints were mass produced and sold commercially. Since people visiting Edo would purchase prints to take home as souvenirs, they circulated widely. Today, *ukiyo-e* prints, including, of course, Hokusai’s *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, are known throughout the world. Those mass-produced works have been scattered here and there, giving many people opportunities to see them.

Ukiyo-e prints were also a medium for communicating information. And still are: these prints give us glimpses of the everyday lives of people in Edo. In this exhibition, we focus on *ukiyo-e* prints, exploring their history, the techniques used, and their themes. Please enjoy the wide-ranging appeal of *ukiyo-e* prints.

Highlights of the Exhibition

① The evolution and technological innovation of *ukiyo-e* prints

From “*sumizuri-e*” printed in a single color, *sumi* black to “*nishiki-e*”, polychrome prints. We introduce the printing techniques and ingenuity developed by Edo artisans, including the invention of the registration mark, *kentō*.

② The elaborated beauty by division work of painter, carver and printer

Ukiyo-e prints are completed through collaboration between painters, carvers, and printers, with the publisher at the center. This exhibition focuses the ultimate beauty born from this division of work, including the delicate carving and ingenuity of the printing process.

③ “Media in Edo” reflecting the lives and times of people living in Edo

Ukiyo-e prints were also a medium that reflected the lives and customs of ordinary people. Through a variety of works, such as pictures of actors or famous places, fans, and advertisements, we can see the culture of Edo and the changes over time.

Exhibition Composition and Main Works

Section 1 Japan's Woodblock Prints: The Beginnings



Hokusai's world-famous *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* series consists of woodblock prints printed with multiple color blocks. Originally, *ukiyo-e* prints were printed in a single color, *sumi* black. The history through which the polychrome prints known as *nishiki-e*, brocade prints, is quite extensive. Let's begin exploring by looking at woodblock prints as they existed before the Edo period.

1-1 Transmitting Peoples' Prayers

The origins of woodblock techniques in Japan have a deep connection with the spread of Buddhism, which was introduced from China in the Asuka period (593-710). In the Heian period (794-1192), to produce them in large volumes, Buddhist sutras were printed using woodblocks.

Unknown, *Inbutsu of a seated image of Amida*,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)

1-2 Invention of the Registration Mark, *Kentō*: From Monochrome to Polychrome

In the Edo period, *ukiyo-e* prints in a single *sumi* black color (*sumizuri-e*) appeared in the Enpō era (1673-81). Colors were sometimes brushed onto them. In the Kanpō era (1741-44), however, it became possible to produce prints by layering multiple colors. That came about due to the invention of the registration mark (*kentō*), carved on each block, to keep the colors aligned properly. Although the number of colors was limited, such as red, green, and yellow, it was a major step forward.

Section 2 Exploring *Ukiyo-e* Prints

In Meiwa 2 (1765), a craze swept through aficionados for picture calendar exchange gatherings, with participants competing over designs for what were called *daishō* ("large and small") calendars. Their popularity led to rapid improvements in the production techniques for polychrome woodblock prints.

2-1 Printing, Color by Color: How to Produce *Ukiyo-e* Prints

Let's take a look at the process for creating *ukiyo-e* prints in multiple colors. It uses the key block, in which the carver outlines the lines on the master drawing, then carves away around them and carves a color block for each color being used.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi,
Tsurigane Yazaemon, from the
series *A Contest of Fashionable
Men*: Main block,
National Museum of Japanese
History (all terms)



Utagawa Kuniyoshi,
Tsurigane Yazaemon, from the
series *A Contest of Fashionable
Men*: Color block, pale red,
National Museum of Japanese
History (2nd term)



Utagawa Kuniyoshi,
Tsurigane Yazaemon, from the
series *A Contest of Fashionable
Men*: Color block, indigo blue,
National Museum of Japanese
History (1st term)



Utagawa Kuniyoshi,
Tsurigane Yazaemon, from the
series *A Contest of Fashionable
Men*,
Hara Shobo (all terms)

2-2 Don't Waste Paper! Variations in Paper Size

Ukiyo-e prints were commercial products planned by the publisher. As is always the case in a business, both cost performance and time performance are vitally important. For example, the sizes of *ukiyo-e* are based on half of the full sheet of paper, then cut in half again, so that no paper is wasted.

*The dimensions of paper vary with the period and place where it was produced. There are many unknown points about the paper used for printing *ukiyo-e*.

2-3 Expressive techniques in *Ukiyo-e* prints: The craftsman's skills are in the details

Ukiyo-e prints demonstrate the carving and printing techniques possible with woodblock prints. The craftsmen's competition honed their many skills, which added to *ukiyo-e* prints' fascination.



Katsushika Hokusai,
Pilgrims at a Temple,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (2nd term)



Katsushika Hokusai,
Snow at the Sumida River, from the
series *Snow, Moon and Flowers*,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)



Katsushika Hokusai,
Snow at the Sumida River, from the series
Snow, Moon and Flowers,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)



Katsushika Hokusai, *Remaining Snow for Azuma Yōgorō/Evening Glow for Date no Yosaku and Sekino Kōman*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (2nd term)



Katsushika Hokusai, *Urashima Tarō Enters the Dragon Palace*, from the series *Newly Published Perspective Pictures*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (2nd term)

Section 3 *Ukiyo-e* Prints in Daily Life

Ukiyo-e prints were also a medium for sending out information. These prints, so familiar to the people of Edo, were also useful daily necessities.

3-1 Draw anything! Life in Edo provides countless themes

Ukiyo-e are pictures of the *ukiyo*, the world of today. Anything and everything in the lives of ordinary people can be the subject of these works. Kabuki, theater that the people of Edo enjoyed, large portraits of favorite actors, pictures of famous places that visitors from other regions could take home as souvenirs—the themes are boundless.



Katsushika Hokusai,
Umezawa Manor in Sagami Province, from the
series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (2nd term)



Katsushika Hokusai,
Poppies,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)

3-2 This, too, is an *Ukiyo-e* print—everyday printed matter, almost too familiar

Woodblock prints utilize a printing technique used in many ways. *Ukiyo-e* artists' depictions of ordinary things that people used in their daily lives were woodblock printed. Fans, flyers advertising products, bags to hold sweets—all could be made as *ukiyo-e* prints. Toys, works providing updates with the latest news about celebrities—anything is possible!



Katsushika Hokusai,
The Nori Seaweed Shop Patronized by Tōeizan Temple,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)



Katsushika Hokusai,
Peepshow Box,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (all terms)
*The work will be replaced with different print of the same
title during the period.

Section 4 *Ukiyo-e* Prints Change with the Times

In the Meiji period, modernization meant that *ukiyo-e*, which had provided ordinary people with all sorts of information, gradually handed over that role to new media, including photographs and newspapers. Voices were, however, raised mourning the disappearing face of Edo and the woodblock print techniques dying out, and a trend of recollecting Edo developed.

4-1 Information in *Ukiyo-e* Prints: Communicating the “Now” of Japan

In the Meiji period, new products, new ideas, and new values poured in. *Ukiyo-e* prints also appeared that captured the changing cityscapes—and the changing times.



Toyohara Kunichika,
Photographs, from the series *A Mirror of Modern and Customs*,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)



Utagawa Yoshimori,
Portrait of a British man seated on a bench, a rectangle reserve with a view of Oji, from the *Famous Places of the Eastern Capital*,
Hara Shobo (2nd term)

4-2 New Developments in *Ukiyo-e*: From Mass Media to Art

Ukiyo-e prints' roles had also included news coverage, but were replaced, in that role, by photography and newspapers, which could capture facts as is and deliver the news promptly. Meanwhile, expressive woodblock print techniques that express subtle qualities impossible to capture in photographs also emerged, ushering a new age in *ukiyo-e* prints.



Kobayashi Kiyochika,
Shimbashi Station, from the *Famous Places of Tokyo*,
Hara Shobo (2nd term)



Yoshida Hiroshi,
Yatsugatake after Rain Seen from Ishimuro, Komagatake, from the series *Southern Japan Alps*,
The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)

Exhibition Information

Exhibition	"Exploring with Hokusai! The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Ukiyo-e Prints"
Term	Thursday, December 11, 2025 to Monday, February 23, 2026 *Some exhibits will be changed during the period. 1st term : December 11, 2025 to January 18, 2026 2nd term : January 21 to February 23, 2026
Closed	Mondays (except January 12, February 23), December 29, 2025 to January 2 and 13, 2026 *Closed on January 20 due to the exhibit change.
Venue	3rd floor Exhibition Room in The Sumida Hokusai Museum
Hours	9:30 am - 5:30 pm (last entry 5:00 pm)
Organizers	Sumida City, The Sumida Hokusai Museum
Admission	Adults ¥1,000, Students (high school and university), 65 and over ¥700, Students (middle school) ¥300, Visitors with disabilities ¥300, Children in primary school and younger Free
Website	https://hokusai-museum.jp/encyclopediaEN/
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/hokusai_museum/



- Visitors can also enter all exhibitions on the same day with the exhibition ticket.
- Identification card is necessary to get a discount ticket.
- Admission for visitors with disabilities is also available for one accompanying person with a visitor with disabilities.
- Please see the latest information about the starting date of ticket sales and the way of purchase for same-day tickets and other discount tickets on our website.

Exhibition

“Exploring with Hokusai! The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Ukiyo-e Prints”

Request Form to Use Press Images

Please read the following notes before requesting the images. All points are required for use.

<< the important points of using the images from the museum >>

- Please credit the images by noting artist's name, title, proprietary, and term of the exhibit.
- Please use the images only for presentation of the exhibition.
Other purposes such as use and reprint for publications and videos not related to publicizing the exhibition and commercial use are not permitted.
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- Please use the images as the whole image. Partial use is not permitted.
- Please delete the data after use.
- Some exhibits might be changed for some reason.

Please check a box to request the image and complete the following form.

- ☐ “Exploring with Hokusai! The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Ukiyo-e Prints” flyer front page
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- ☐ “Exploring with Hokusai! The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Ukiyo-e Prints” square visual (1080px×1080px)
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- ☐ 1. Katsushika Hokusai, *Snow at the Sumida River, from the series Snow, Moon and Flowers*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)
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- ☐ 2. Katsushika Hokusai, *Remaining Snow for Azuma Yōgorō/Evening Glow for Date no Yosaku and Sekino Koman*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (2nd term)
-
- ☐ 3. Katsushika Hokusai, *Urashima Tarō Enters the Dragon Palace, from the series Newly Published Perspective Pictures*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (2nd term)
-
- ☐ 4. Katsushika Hokusai, *Peepshow Box*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (all terms) *The work will be replaced with different print of the same title during the period.
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- ☐ 5. Katsushika Hokusai, *The Nori Seaweed Shop Patronized by Tōeizan Temple*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)
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- ☐ 6. Toyohara Kunichika, *Photographs, from the series A Mirror of Modern and Customs*, The Sumida Hokusai Museum (1st term)
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