

Japanese Prints

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Japanese prints. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the influence of Japanese prints on Western artwork, and identify examples of Japanese prints. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

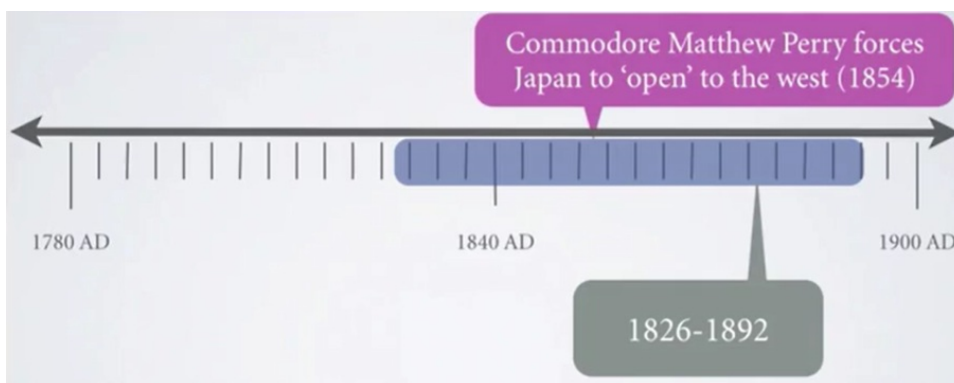


BIG IDEA

In the late 19th century, Japan opened up to the West for the first time in 200 years, exposing the West to the Japanese culture and artistic style that had been cultivated during that time.

1. Period and Location: Japanese Prints

The artwork you will be looking at today covers the period from 1826 to 1892 and focuses geographically on Edo, or modern-day Tokyo, in Japan.



2. Japanese Prints: Historical Context

In 1868, courtesy of United States Commodore Matthew Perry, Japan opened itself to exposure from the West for the first time in 200 years. This was a dramatic development—imagine a society completely isolating itself, more or less, for two centuries, and then, within a matter of years, completely exposing itself to outside influence. As you can imagine, there would be a certain degree of culture shock on both sides, Eastern and Western.

During the late 19th century, **Japanese woodblock** prints flooded the European market. Their easy availability and abundance meant that they weren't necessarily looked at as particularly important or special but rather

viewed as more analogous to the modern-day flyer or pamphlet.



DID YOU KNOW

The artist Monet recalled purchasing cheese that had been wrapped in a Japanese print. Also, Japanese prints were actually sometimes used as ballast on ships.

However, Japanese artwork eventually became extremely popular in Europe, developing into a trend called **japonisme**.



TERMS TO KNOW

Japanese Woodblock

A technique of printing where wood planks were cut from the grain of cherry wood and water-based inks were applied.

Japonisme

A French style describing the period in which Japanese art, especially woodcut prints, influenced Western art from the 19th-century.

3. Japanese Influence on European Art

Despite the lack of importance placed on these Japanese prints that flooded the European market, the Japanese influence spread throughout Europe, becoming a major trend in European culture. Many artists, such as Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, incorporated Japanese themes and stylistic elements into their work. Van Gogh himself actually directly copied numerous prints, including this original by the artist Hiroshige:



Flowering Plum Tree by Hiroshige

1856-1859

Color woodblock print

The print below may look familiar to you. It's by the artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and it's another example of the Japanese influence on European art, specifically the flattening of forms, the use of unnaturalistic colors—such as the yellow background—and the use of a **diagonal axis**.



La Reine de Joie by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

1892

Chromolithograph (print)



TERM TO KNOW

Diagonal Axis

A central line that divides a composition at an angle rather than a vertical.

4. Examples of Japanese Prints

The opening of Japan witnessed the rise of Japanese merchants. However, they were common and considered “non-people” by the Shogunate, the ruling militaristic clan that existed at the time in Japan. These merchants were limited to the Yoshiwara district of Edo, where they could actually spend their money.

This influx of money created a demand for certain kinds of performers, such as actors, wrestlers, courtesans, and geisha. These entertainers and other fleeting pleasures of life, as well as landscapes, became major subjects of the artwork of the time. These are all examples of the so-called “floating world,” depictions of the urban culture and entertainment of Edo in a genre of art that became known as **Ukiyo-e**.



HINT

Ukiyo-e was essentially art of the common person.

One of the most famous examples of this genre is the artist Hokusai's 36 views of Mount Fuji, one of which is shown below. This is the famous image called "The Great Wave." Though sometimes mistakenly referred to as a tsunami, it's more likely an open water wave that's causing trouble for the boats and fishermen off the coast of the Kanagawa prefecture, or county, which is close to Edo.



The Great Wave by Katsushika Hokusai

1826-1833

Color woodblock print



TERMS TO KNOW

Ukiyo-e

A genre of art by artists of the Ukiyo-e School, known as the "floating world," a hedonistic and transient group, who created seductive scenes of urban culture and entertainment during the Edo (1615-1868) and early Meiji (1868-1912) periods in Japan.



SUMMARY

In today's lesson about **Japanese prints**, you learned how to identify and define today's key terms and describe the **Japanese influence on European art**. You also learned how to identify **examples of Japanese prints**.



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