

ARTS

Making waves

Hokusai wanted to paint everything, says *Laura Freeman*, and at 70 he was only just beginning

The end, whenever it came, was always going to be too soon for Katsushika Hokusai. There was still so much to see. So much he had not painted. On his deathbed, Hokusai, attended by his doctor, said a prayer. 'If heaven will extend my life by ten more years...'. He paused and made a private calculation. 'If heaven will afford me five more years of life, then I'll manage to become a true artist.' He may have been 90, but he wasn't done yet.

In life, Hokusai (1760–1849) painted dragons, creatures of long life, by the dozen. He has them disappear in puffs of inky smoke, then reappear across the page. He painted the phoenix, bird of resurrection. He painted Mount Fuji, immutable, enduring, outlasting all his fellow painters, calligraphers, woodblock-cutters and sellers of coloured books who scrabbled for a living in Edo, modern Tokyo. They were but cherry blossoms, pink for a season, maple leaves washed away by a current.

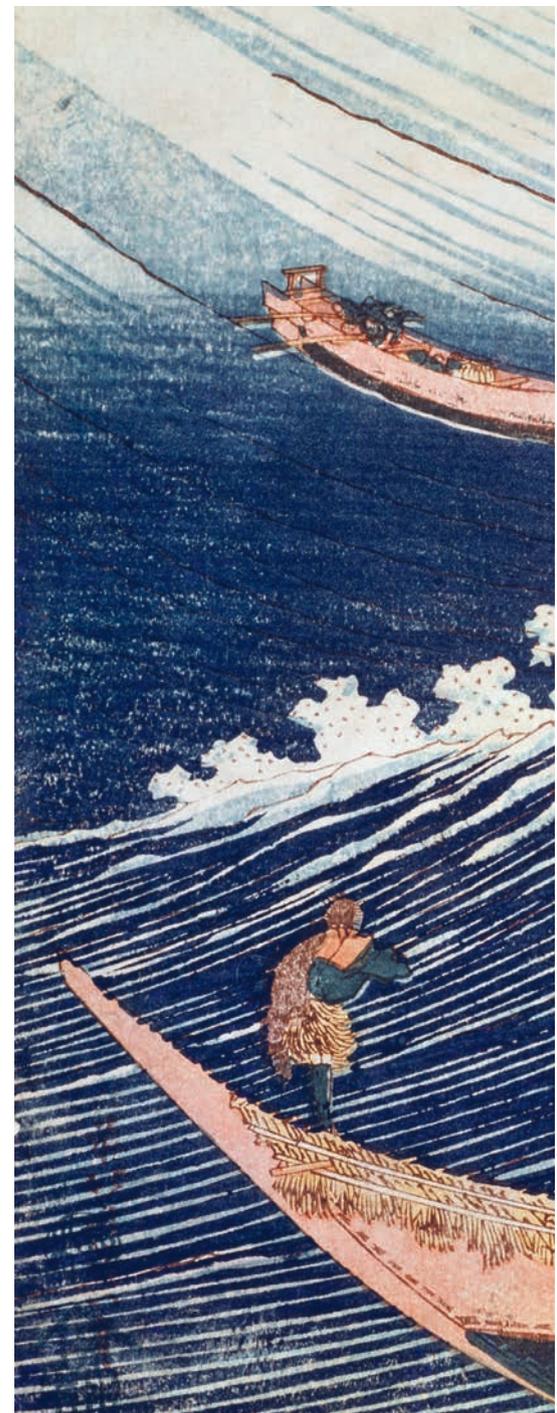
He changed his name more than ten

times in his long life. In his seventies, he was Manji, which meant 'ten thousand things' or 'everything'. That is what he wanted to paint — everything. The 15 volumes of the *Hokusai manga* (1814–1878) went some way towards it: a pictorial encyclopedia of everything under the sun: frogs, snakes, samurai,

He joins Titian and Turner as an artist who became more daring in his dotage

sumo wrestlers, parasols, fish markets, farm ploughs, oceans and tea bowls.

He signed his woodblock series 'One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji' (1849): 'Brush of Manji, old man crazy to paint.' He does look a bit mad in his 1842 'Self-portrait, aged 83' (see p49) — skinny, stooped, his face wrinkled and puckered as a pickled plum, pointing at something he's seen in the distance. Something to sketch? He looks as if he's turning to call to someone, perhaps his daughter Eijo, an artist in her own right, ask-



ing her to bring his brush and ink. Not his glasses, though. He proudly signed his *suri-mono* — luxury print — 'Pine tree and full moon' (1848): 'eye glasses not needed.'

If a work wasn't up to snuff, he excused it with the note: 'painted while drunk.' He would sooner admit to inebriation than infirmity. In his last years, he stamped a 'one hundred' seal on his paintings — a statement of intent to reach his century. Only then could he call himself a true artist.

'From the age of six,' he said, 'I had a



'Choshi in Soshu province', woodblock print from *A Thousand Pictures of the Sea*, c.1833, by Hokusai

penchant for copying the form of things, and from about 50, my pictures were frequently published; but until the age of 70, nothing I drew was worthy of notice... Thus when I reach 80 years, I hope to have made increasing progress, and at 90 to see further into the underlying principles of things, so that at 100 years I will have achieved a divine state in my art, and at 110, every dot and every stroke will be as though alive.'

The British Museum dedicates its summer exhibition *Hokusai: Beyond the Great*

Wave to the Hokusai who at 70 was just beginning. He joins Titian, Rembrandt and Turner as an artist who became more inventive, restless, curious and daring in his dotage. Like his near-contemporary J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) he was mesmerised by water in all its moods. How to catch its movement, light and colours. *Beyond the Great Wave* asks us to see more of Hokusai than his much-reproduced 'Great Wave', properly: 'Under the Wave Off Kanagawa' (1831). You could drown in 'Great Wave' souvenir

socks, scarves, key rings, duvets and tea towels. There's even a 'Great Wave' emoji.

While there is more to Hokusai than the tsunami wave that curls like a dragon's claw above a Mount Fuji no higher than a molehill, waves and water do swell and roil through his work. One of his earliest woodblock prints was of the 'Kabuki actor Segawa Kikunojo III as Oren' (1779), made when Hokusai was 20 and working in the workshop of Edo print-master Katsukawa Shunsho. The screen behind the actor

is painted with the very first of Hokusai's 'angry waves'. It threatens to crash out of the painted surface, soaking the actor as he preens in his kimono.

Shunsho was the leading producer of *ukiyo-e* — 'floating world' — woodblock prints. The 'floating world' was Edo's pleasure quarter. A place of geishas and kabuki theatres, transgressive and unregulated. 'Uki' means floating, frivolous or carefree.

The *ukiyo-e* prints of beautiful courtesans (*bijin-ga*), portraits of actors (*yakusha-e*) and erotic couplings (*shunga*), found a keen, literate audience. A merchant or artisan could buy a print of Hokusai's 'Beauty with an umbrella under a willow' (c.1801–4) for the price of a helping of noodles. The most successful prints could sell in their thousands. Hokusai's later landscape prints such as the *Views of Mt Fuji*, among them 'Under the Wave Off Kanagawa', may have run to 8,000 impressions.

Views of Mt Fuji was printed with Prussian blue mixed with traditional Japanese indigo. This pigment — *aizuri ichimai* — newly arrived from Europe gave an extraordinary, deep, saturated colour. Hokusai,

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steeped in blue, paints waves, waterfalls and whirlpools, eddies and seasick swirls. Waterwheels turn and tip; a fisherman strains against his lines; porters wade across the river Oi with pilgrims on their shoulders; skiffs battle the current. Carp swim against rapids; plovers skim the surf; and ducks dive for pondweed, up tails all.

He amused the shogun Tokugawa (1760–86) with his chicken trick. He painted a broad band of blue on a long sheet of paper. Then, pulling a live chicken from a bag, he dipped the bird's feet in red ink and had it run across the sheet. He called it 'Autumn leaves on the Tatsuta River'.

He liked to show the wind whipping the spray or, in mischievous spirit, lifting skirts, stealing hats and carrying off umbrellas. In the woodblock print 'Ejiri, Suruga province' (1831) a straw hat is blown off and soars upside-down like a flying saucer. In other prints, snow settles on the peaks of pointed hats, and climbers of sacred mountains lift their brims to see the way. He drew 'Fuji with a hat' (c.1834) showing the top of the mountain wearing a *kasa-gumo* — a cap of cloud.

When Japan opened to the west after 1854, prints by Hokusai and his contemporaries Ando Hiroshige and Kitagawa Utamaro flooded European art markets. Hokusai's prints were bought by Van Gogh and Gauguin. The flat modelling of *ukiyo-e* style was taken up by Manet, Whistler, the impressionists and les nabis. Calligraphic black lines in *sumi* — Chinese ink

— inspired Bonnard, Degas and Aubrey Beardsley. The brocade richness of colour and patterning influenced the Pre-Raphaelites, the arts and crafts movement and Tiffany. Hokusai's delight in the littleness of everyday life — a geisha's toothpowder, a kitten pulling its leash — thrilled Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life* crowd. Modernism begins with Hokusai.

Today, the smartphone apps Prisma and Moku Hanga turn your holiday snaps into *ukiyo-e* prints. I am in Tokyo as I write, Hokusai-ing my photos and playing spot-the-hat at the Sumida Hokusai Museum. We have arrived, everyone tells us, just late for the cherry blossom. Too short a season.

Hokusai: Beyond the Great Wave is at the British Museum until 13 August and is supported by the Mitsubishi Corporation.

Television

The great rock'n'roll swindles

James Delingpole

Birds have been giving me a lot of grief of late. There's Tappy — the blue tit who has built his nest just underneath my bedroom window and makes rat-like scuffling noises that bother me at night and wake me early in the morning. And Hoppy, a mistle thrush fledgling who can't quite fly yet, which means we have to keep the cat indoors, which means I have to deal with its horrible shit in the litter tray every day before breakfast. And the rookery in the big ash, whose inhabitants are very vocal, especially when one of their babies falls out of the nest and gets devoured by the dog.

I may be only a couple of dawn choruses away from losing it altogether, as my fellow Brummie Ozzy Osbourne once famously did with a pair of white doves. He had brought the doves into the offices of his record company, supposedly as a peace gesture to show that there was still life in his career now that he had left Black Sabbath.

The story — Osbourne gets drunk and, bored, bites birds' heads off — is usually told to indicate just how dangerous, unhinged and metal Ozzy is. But actually, it tells us much more about the dark, calculating genius of his manager (and now wife) Sharon. Instead of trying to suppress the ugly story, which threatened to finish what was left of Osbourne's career, she promoted it everywhere. His album, *Blizzard of Ozz*, went on to sell millions.

Sharon was an interesting choice to present *Rock 'n' Roll's Dodgiest Deals* (BBC4, Friday) on how rock stars are ripped off and exploited, given that that's largely what her dad Don Arden — also a manager — did

to bands such as the Small Faces. After the boys had had a string of hits, their parents went round to confront Arden, asking why their kids still had so little money. 'They've spent it all on drugs,' lied Arden.

But at least they had pocket money, accounts at Lord John of Carnaby Street, and a nice flat rented for them in Pimlico next to Honor Blackman's. The Animals, who clearly would have been better off with a manager like Arden, got almost nothing for their 'House of the Rising Sun'. According to singer Eric Burdon, when they went out to the Bahamas, where the \$4 million they'd made was being held for their safekeeping, the holding bank — if it ever existed — had disappeared.

How accurate were these stories? Hard to say given that this was more an exercise in nostalgia than a properly forensic examination of how rock stars make their money. What's clear is that the music industry's reputation for swarming with bloodsucking parasites has not been overdone — and that bands really do need their Ardens, their Peter (Led Zeppelin) Grants and their Miles Copelands if they're not to end up in penury.

Copeland made his brother Stewart's band the Police rich by paying for their own initial recording costs. This meant that when he approached A&M with the fin-

'Yesterday' alone was covered 450 times in the first 18 months after its release

ished product — including a promising-sounding single called 'Roxanne' — he would demand the highest possible royalty rate (a then almost unheard of 18 per cent). If the record tanked, A&M had no sunk costs to recover.

The other clever thing Copeland did — really, in this game, you need an accountant more than you need talent — was to ensure that after seven years all the Police's publishing rights reverted.

Unlike those of the Beatles, Lennon and McCartney at first thought they were very canny, setting up their own songwriting publisher — Northern Songs — with Dick James (the man who'd once sung 'Rarbin Hood, Rarbin Hood riding through the glen...'). It meant they'd get royalties not just from their own performances but also from covers such as the version of 'All My Loving' that a band of cartoon monkeys did in squeaky voices like Pinky and Perky. 'Yesterday' alone was covered 450 times in the first 18 months after its release.

But they made the mistake of dissing Dick James (calling him 'a pig'), who sold their publishing company to Lew Grade's ATV, which in turn sold it to Michael Jackson and thence to Sony. According to the programme, their publishing catalogue is now worth \$500 million, which sounds like an underestimate to me.