Hokusai in the Rocks

Brooks Jensen

A Brooks Jensen Arts Folio
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Hokusai (1760-1849) was perhaps Japan’s greatest ukiyo-e artist. His woodblock prints are breathtaking and an inspiration to us even today — a century and a half after his death, and across the cultural divisions far outside his beloved Japan. I never tire of spending time with his art.

Perhaps this is why I found myself wandering the dry and dusty canyons of southern Utah, thinking about Hokusai and his famous print, *The Great Wave*. There it was, up on the canyon wall, that massive wave captured in ancient stone — or so it seemed to my eidetic vision. The more I stared at those ancient rock walls, the more Hokusai images I found — strange to see when one has entered the canyons to make decidedly American landscape photographs of the Desert Southwest. But, that is the power of Hokusai. We are not a 19th century Japanese audience, yet his creative vision still speaks to us — here, now.

It is said that art allows the artist to speak beyond their own mortality. It may have only been a whisper, or perhaps just the desert wind, but I am convinced that I could hear Hokusai speaking to me in the rocks of Capitol Reef. How could I not listen and respond?

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May 2014
Hokusai
in the Rocks

The Great Wave
Hokusai in the Rocks

The Windswept Crag
Hokusai

in the Rocks

The Cataract
Hokusai in the Rocks

The Roiling Sea
Hokusai in the Rocks

Storm Above Lake Biwa
Hokusai in the Rocks

Pool of the Winds
I’ve been inspired by Japanese *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints) for more than 40 years. They offer such a captivating mix of image and graphic design — techniques it seems only natural to marry with images made with a camera. This project is an experiment in doing so.

Woodblock prints often include a border to outline the image; I’ve included this graphic element in these photographs, too. Perhaps more unusual is the presence in *ukiyo-e* of a cartouche — typically a square or long rectangle in which is placed a poem, quote, the print title, or the project name. Many *ukiyo-e* have more than one cartouche. Here again, I’ve followed that convention in this photographic project, including a separate cartouche for the project title and the image title.

Perhaps of most importance, however, is that many *ukiyo-e* artists (including Hokusai) worked in extended series with multiple prints — an approach perfectly appropriate in photography. Hiroshige’s *Fifty-three Stages of the Tokaido* and Yoshitoshi’s *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon* are well-known in the West. Hokusai himself is widely revered for his classics, *One Hundred Views of Edo*, and *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji*. Evidently, “one hundred” views was a popular project size to their contemporaries. I’ve limited myself to a modest 11 images. I can only hope that the great Hokusai would not be disappointed by such a modest homage.

**About This Project**

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