

# The world of the Japanese Woodblock Print

U3A Week 1 14 July 2025 Michael Harrington

# Acknowledgement of country

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging. I also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of this community today. I recognize their ongoing connection to the land, waters, and culture of this place.

# Week 1 outline

Class introduction

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Types of woodblocks

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Ukiyo-e

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Sōsaku hanga (“creative print”)

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Shin hanga (“new print”)

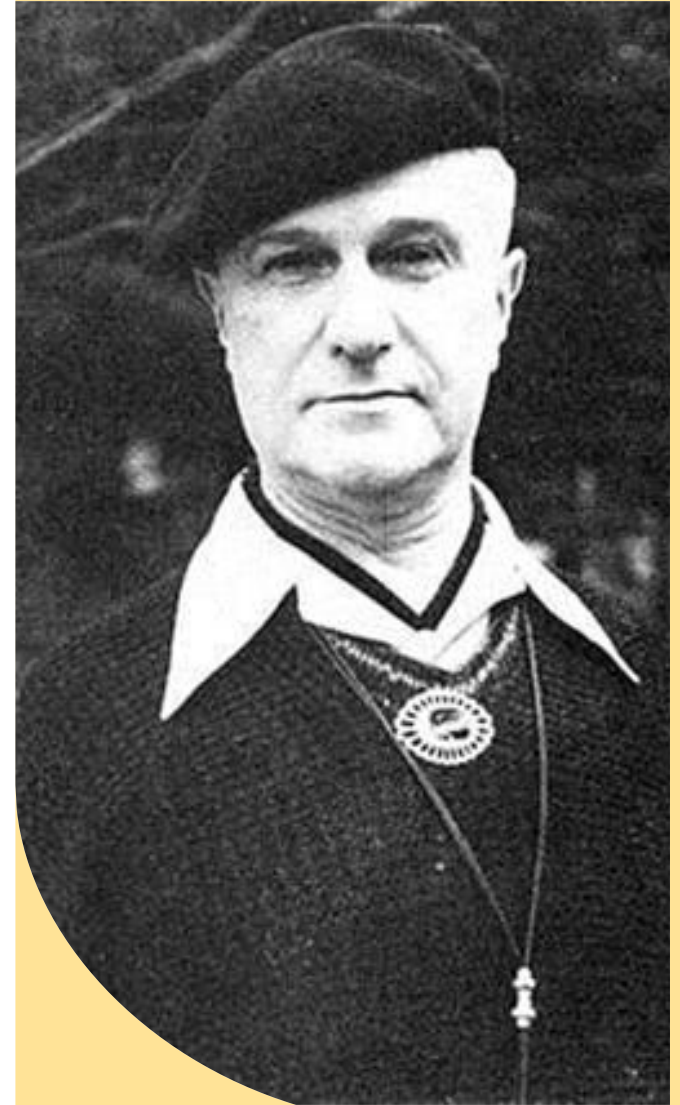
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Traditional woodblock production

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# Class Description

- ➡ This class introduces the world of Japanese woodblock prints through the remarkable life and work of Paul Jacoulet (1896-1960), a French artist who lived in Japan and became a distinctive figure in the modern woodblock tradition.
- ➡ We begin with a brief history of Japanese woodblock printing, including the techniques and traditions that shaped the art form.
- ➡ From there, we explore Jacoulet's extraordinary prints and the stories they tell about his life and art.
- ➡ To culminate the class we will make a trip to the Queensland Art Gallery to view Jacoulet's work in the exhibition *Birds of Passage: Ian Fairweather and Paul Jacoulet*.



# Weekly topics

Week 1 Introduction to the Japanese woodblock print.

Week 2 The golden age of ukiyo-e

Week 3 Modern Japanese woodblock prints - 20th century onwards

Week 4 Introduction to the life and art of Paul Jacoulet

Week 5 Travels in the South Seas - In the footsteps of Gauguin

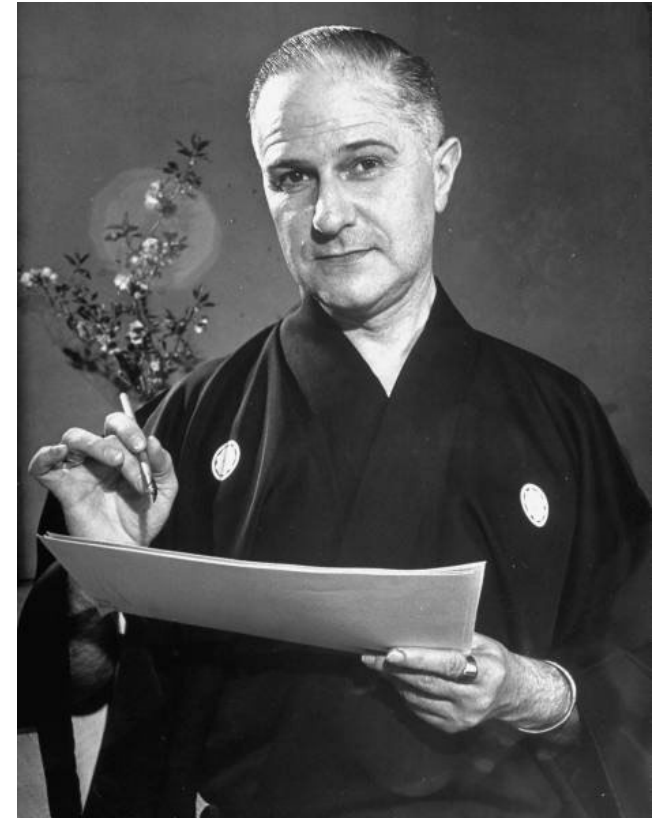
Week 6 Emergence as a woodblock print artist

Week 7 Travels in the Japanese empire - Japan, Korea and Manchuria

Week 8 WWII and beyond - final years in Karuizawa

Week 9 Jacoulet's legacy today in Japan and abroad

Week 10 View Jacoulet's work in the QAG exhibition *Birds of Passage: Ian Fairweather & Paul Jacoulet*



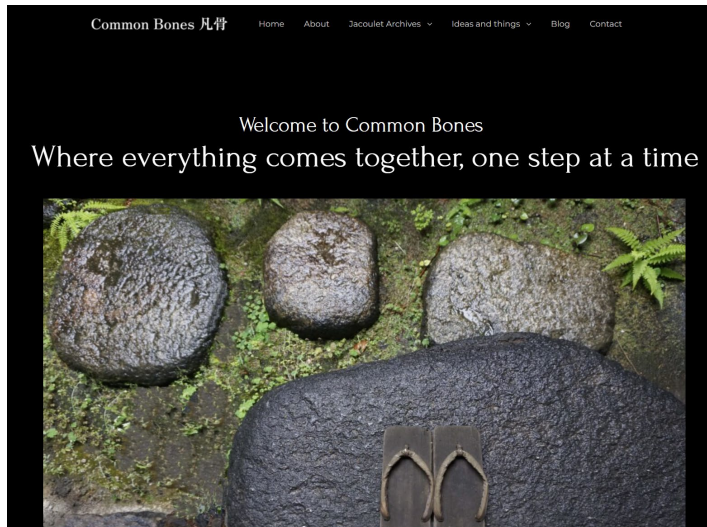
# Learning resources

There is no definitive biography of Jacoulet's life. What is known about his life and art is mostly from biographies in exhibition catalogs and on art dealer websites. These vary greatly in length and accuracy.

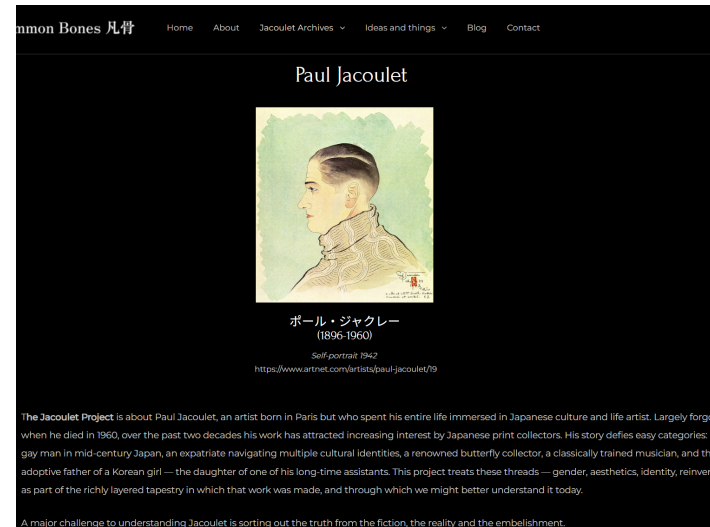
I am in the process of collecting these materials in the Jacoulet Archives on my website, <https://commonbones.org>

The archives contain text, images and photos of his life and art. It includes links to art dealers, museums and other sources.

## Homepage



## Start here



## Jacoulet's life



# Quick guide to pronouncing Japanese.

a = ah - “a” in “father”     *hanga* (woodblock print)   *obasan* (aunt)

i = ee - “ee” in “feet”     *ichiban* (number one) *nigai* (bitter)

u = oo - “oo” in “food”     *ukiyo-e* (ukiyo-e)   *bunka* (culture)

e = eh - “e” in “pet”     *Edo* (Edo – old Tokyo)   *ramen* (ramen)

o = oh - “o” in “oak”     *ojisan* (uncle)   *koko* (here)

★ Similar to Spanish

# Vowel lengthening

The length of the vowel is important in Japanese. The short and long occurrence of a vowel mean something different. Lengthening is represented in various ways for the different vowels in the written language.

It can be particularly complicated when Japanese is written in the Latin alphabet (*romaji*)

Long ‘a’ or ‘i’ are simply repeated: *obaasan* (grandmother) versus *obasan* (aunt)  
*Niigata* (Niigata prefecture) versus *nigai* (bitter)

Long “o” can be rendered several ways:

Add a “u”, as in *koukou* (high school) versus *koko* (here)

Using a macron, as in *sōkō* (travelling) versus *soko* (there) (nb *sōsaku hanga*)

Repeating the vowel, as in *Oosaka* (Osaka City)



It is common in English texts for vowel lengthening to be ignored  
- especially for “o”



# Spot Quiz

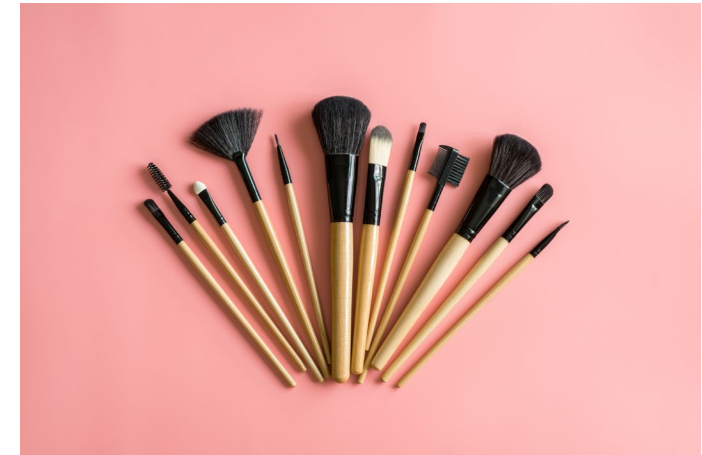
Read each word aloud

1. **bijinga** →
2. **kindai** (*modern*)
3. **ukiyo-e**
4. **baren** →
5. **sōsaku hanga**
6. **fude** →
7. **doumo arigatou gozaimasu / dōmo arigatō gozaimasu**

“domo arigato” very common > “Domo arigato, Mr. Roboto”



Uemura Shoen (1875-1949)



# Types of Japanese woodblock prints

- 》 Ukiyo-e      浮世絵  
Edo Period   Early 17<sup>th</sup>–  
mid 19<sup>th</sup> century
- 》 Sōsaku Hanga   創作版画  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- 》 Shin Hanga      新版画  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century



The Great Wave off Kanagawa  
by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)

# Types of Japanese Woodblocks – *Ukiyo-e*

- Popular during the Edo period (1603–1868)
- Subjects: kabuki actors, courtesans, landscapes
- Mass-produced for townspeople



Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825)



# Noted *Ukiyo-e* artists

Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825),



Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806)

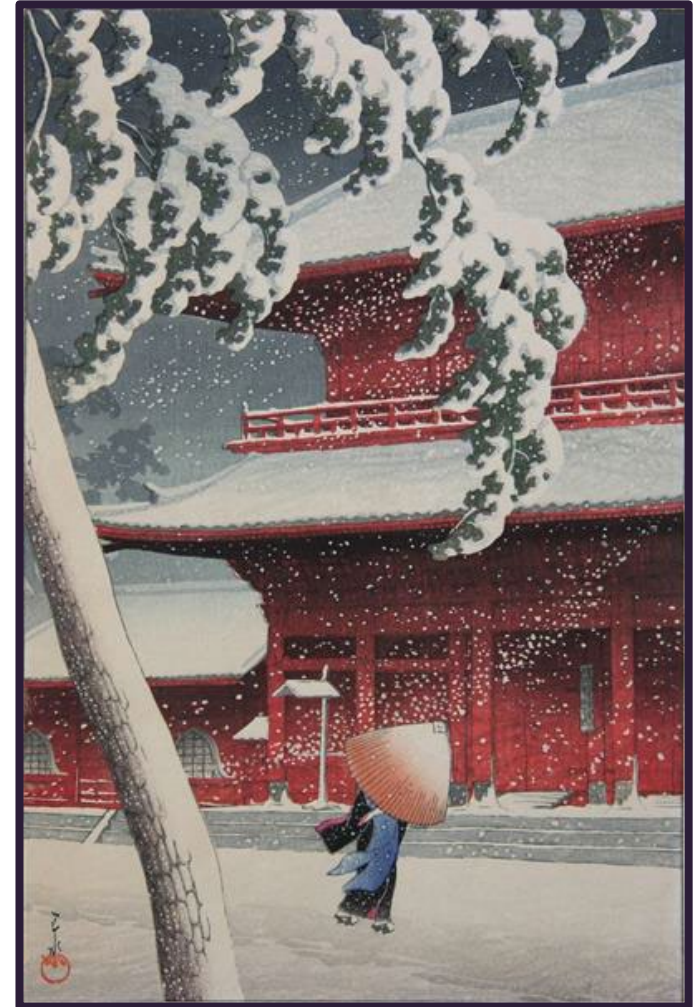


Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)



# Types of Japanese Woodblocks – *Shin Hanga*

- Revival movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Collaboration between artist, carver, printer, and publisher
- Themes: romantic landscapes, beautiful women, birds and flowers
- Western influence on theme and perspective

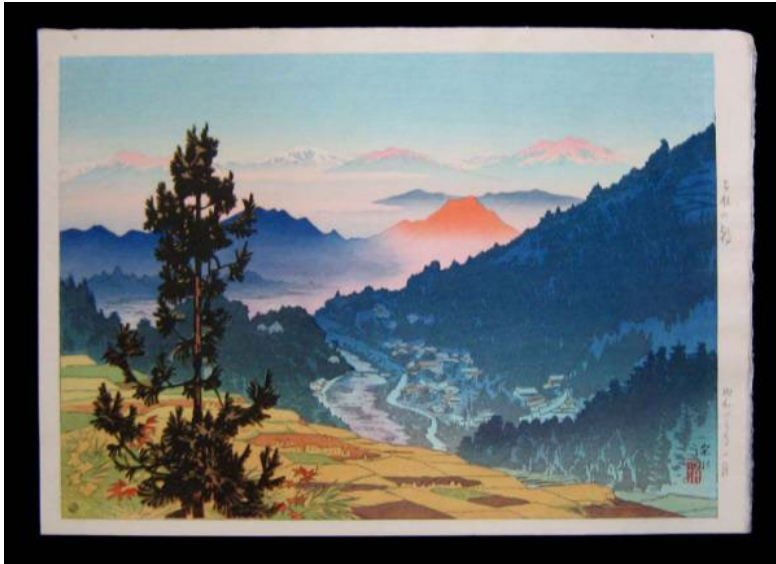


Kawase Hasui (1883–1957)



# Noted *Shin Hanga* artists

Itō Shinsui (1898–1972)



Hashiguchi Goyō (1880–1921)



Ohara Koson (1877-1945)



# Types of Japanese Woodblocks – *Sōsaku Hanga*



Yamamoto Kanae (1882-1946)

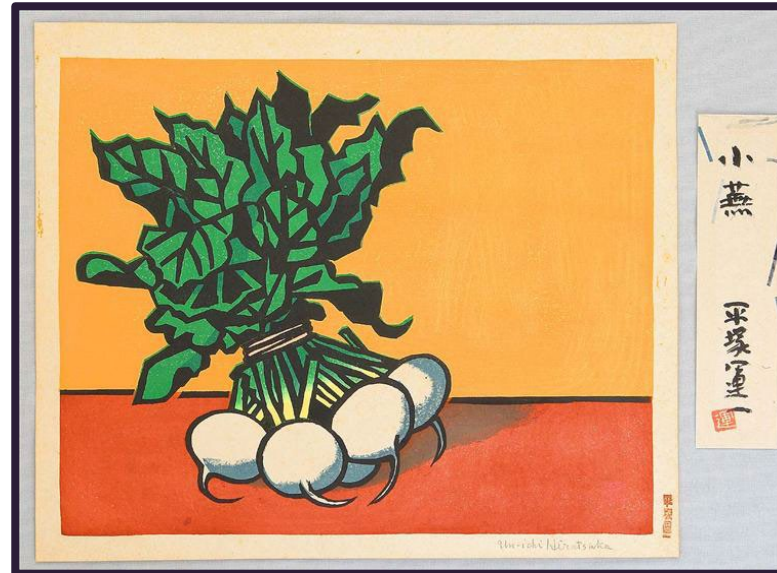
- Early 20th-century 'creative prints' movement
- Artists carved, inked, and printed their own works
- Focus on individual expression

## Noted *Sōsaku Hanga* artists

Onchi Kōshirō (1891–1955)



Hiratsuka Un'ichi (1895–1997)



Maekawa Senpan (1888–1960)





# Traditional Woodblock Process

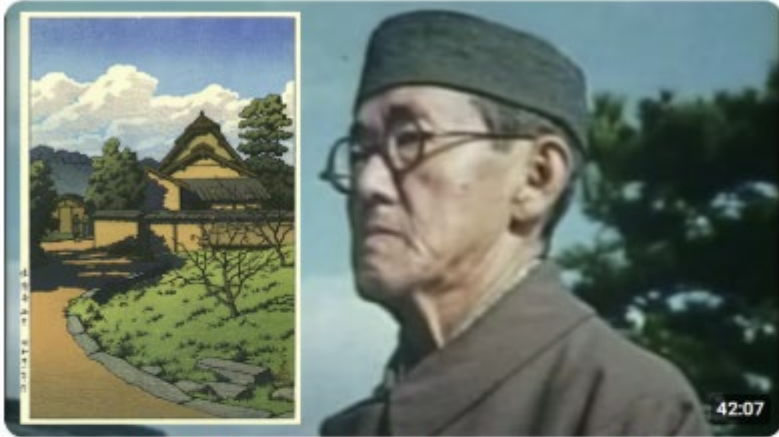
Publisher <<<< Printer <<<< Carver <<<< Artist (< publisher)



Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865)



# Hasui Kawase: Creating a Woodblock Print (Video)



"A Life in Prints: Kawase Hasui"

A 1956 doco showing the legendary *shin hanga* artist Kawase Hasui creating a woodblock print.

Featuring the carver Kentaro Maeda, who also worked closely with Jacoulet.

42 minutes, English narration.

[Click here to watch on YouTube](#)

We will look at selected segments during class.

00:00 Hasui Kawase  
07:15 rough sketch  
09:43 pencil drawing  
10:25 brushwork for keyblock hanshita  
  
12:00 Kentaro Maeda  
12:17 pasting hanshita  
13:30 sharpening hangito tool  
14:40 carving and clearing keyblock  
  
19:50 color separations  
21:39 Hasui coloring with cinnabar (toxic!)  
23:26 Mr Maeda pasting color separations  
25:15 carving and clearing color blocks  
  
28:23 Gintaro Ono wrapping a baren  
31:16 moistening paper  
31:58 pigments  
32:40 keyblock impression  
33:35 colour impressions  
33:50 adjusting registration  
38:14 final print

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQmF3HHyWwl>

## Week 1 Session wrap up