

PAT STEIR: AFTER HOKUSAI, AFTER HIROSHIGE

Anderson Gallery of Graphic Art
July 17, 2010–January 30, 2011



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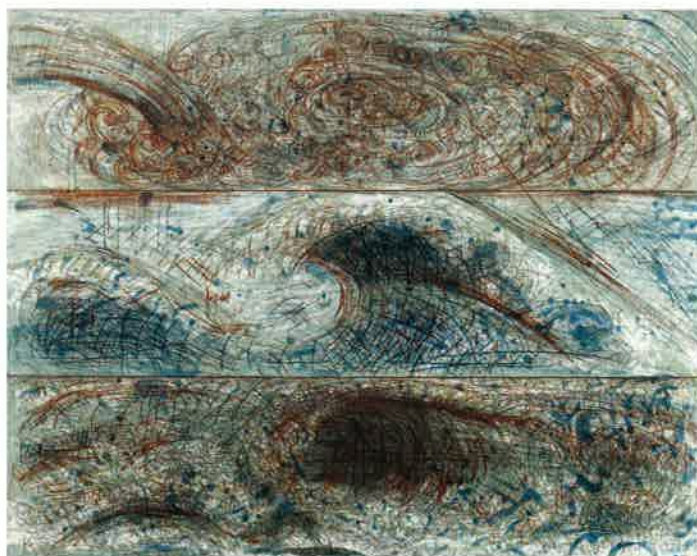
American painter, printmaker and conceptual artist Pat Steir (b. 1940) began making prints in the early 1960s during her student years at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. Her professional foray into intaglio printing was briefly begun when working with Jack Lemon at Chicago's Landfall Press in the early 1970s, but her experimentation with the process took off later in the decade, when, in 1978, she began making prints at Crown Point Press in Oakland. The artist has worked regularly at Crown Point since this time, and she acknowledges that printmaking is central to her creative process: "For years I didn't draw at all, but I would go every year to Crown Point and make one or two etchings in which there would always be the idea for the work I was going to do. Often I go with an idea or a half-formed idea of what I would like to be working on in general for the next year. I form it in the etching, and then later take it farther in painting."¹

Steir's prints in the exhibition are all from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco's Crown Point Press Archive. In addition to a selection of editioned prints that expose the artist's interest in the Japanese aesthetic, the exhibition includes numerous working proofs that illuminate central aspects of Steir's artistic process. (However, in most cases the working proofs were numbered subsequent to printing the edition and are therefore not infallible as a record of the specific printing process.)

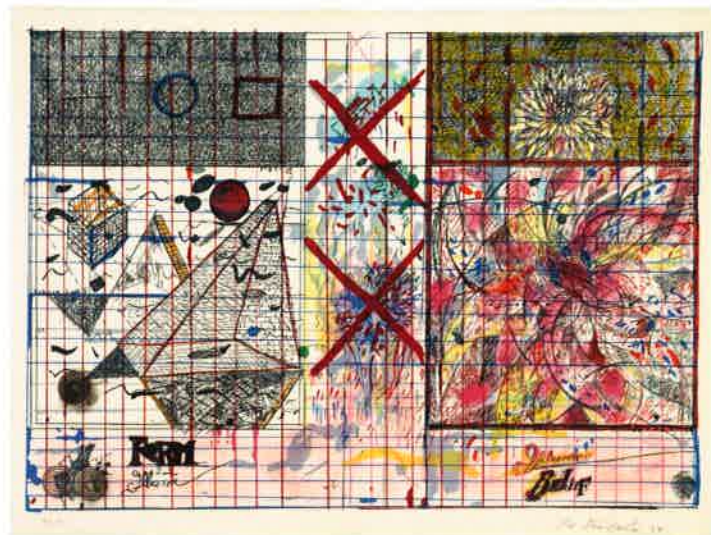
In 1982, Crown Point Press founder and director Kathan Brown selected Steir as one of the first artists to travel to Japan to make a color woodcut for Crown Point Press's groundbreaking printmaking program in Kyoto. There, Steir had the opportunity to work closely with artisans trained in the traditional methods of Japanese woodblock printing, making *Kyoto Chrysanthemum*



Katsushika Hokusai, *Cresting Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa* (*The Great Wave*), ca. 1830–1832



The Wave—From the Sea—After Leonardo, Hokusai, and Courbet, 1985



Kyoto Chrysanthemum, 1982

(1982). While in Japan, she immersed herself in the Japanese aesthetic, internalizing it to such a degree that references to the artistic legacies of *ukiyo-e* masters like Utagawa Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai continue to appear in many of the artist's prints and paintings to the present day.

Between 1984 and 1985, Steir—heavily involved in exploring postmodern ideas associated with the passage of time—experimented at Crown Point Press with the concept of “quotation,” in which she worked with the familiar subjects and compositions of such artists as Hiroshige, Hokusai, Leonardo da Vinci, and Gustave Courbet. When Steir began her practice of quotation, it was in an effort to test the very concept of the postmodern, retreating from the historical idea that the passage of time facilitates progress. In an interview with the German art historian Doris von Drathen, the artist explained, “My idea was to see if there was such a thing as postmodernism, and the idea of postmodernism being that time is flattened out. There's no time. No history. You can use any historical images. There is no progress, no past, no future, no time. All is now.”² Through the individual particularities of mark-making, Steir's quotation work remains quintessentially her own and of her time. Steir has looked to Dutch artists for inspiration on a number of occasions, and it can be no coincidence that two of the Hiroshige prints that Steir quoted were subjects copied in oil a century earlier by Vincent van Gogh.

When Steir quotes direct passages from an earlier artist's composition, her artwork brings a new perspective to the page, as can be seen in prints like *The Tree after Hiroshige* (1984) and *The Wave—From the Sea—After Leonardo, Hokusai, and Courbet* (1985). The wave that Steir quotes from Hokusai is that featured in *Cresting Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa (The Great Wave)*, from the artist's influential series *Thirty-Six Views of*

Mount Fuji (ca. 1830–1832), while her tree is derived from Hiroshige's *The Plum Orchard at Kameido*, a woodcut that is part of the series *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo* (1857). In her work, Steir is also part of a distinguished roster of artists influenced by the recognized Japanese masters of *ukiyo-e* prints. The artist's monotype *Yellow Bridge in the Rain, after Van Gogh, after Hiroshige* (1985) makes reference to this fact by looking to Vincent van Gogh's oil painting *The Bridge in the Rain* (1887), which is itself after the same Hiroshige woodcut of 1857.

The Hiroshige and Hokusai prints that inspired Steir are on view at the Legion of Honor, October 16, 2010, to January 9, 2011, in *Japanesque: The Japanese Print in the Era of Impressionism*, a special exhibition that investigates the significance of Japanese prints in the art of the 19th-century Impressionists and their artistic successors.

Colleen Terry, Curatorial Assistant
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts

¹ Kathan Brown, *Ink, Paper, Metal, Wood: Painters and Sculptors at Crown Point Press* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 96.

² Studio Conversations: Pat Steir and Doris von Drathen, “What do I see—What can I see?” in Pat Steir and Doris von Drathen, *Pat Steir: Paintings* (Milano: Charta, 2007), 37.

Far left
Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, 1760–1849), *Cresting Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa (The Great Wave)*, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, ca. 1830–1832. Color woodcut. Museum purchase, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts Endowment Fund, 1969.32.6

Back panel
Utagawa Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797–1858), *Evening Rain at Atake on the Great Bridge*, 1857, no. 52 from the series *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, 1856–1858. Color woodcut with mica. Gift of Patricia Brown McNamara, Jane Brown Dunaway, and Helen Brown Jarman in memory of Mary Wattis Brown, 64.47.53

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST:

Sheet measurements for prints are in inches, height preceding width. All prints in the exhibition are in the collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press.

Kyoto Chrysanthemum, 1982
Color woodcut
16 1/4 x 21 5/8 in.
Printed by Tadashi Toda
Published by Crown Point Press, Oakland
1992.167.415

Working proof 2 for
Kyoto Chrysanthemum, 1982
Woodcut
16 1/8 x 21 1/2 in.
Printed by Tadashi Toda
1992.167.413

Working proof 4 for
Kyoto Chrysanthemum, 1982
Color woodcut
15 15/16 x 21 7/16 in.
Printed by Tadashi Toda
1992.167.411

The Tree after Hiroshige, 1984
Color aquatint, etching, soft-ground
etching, and drypoint, W. 20
32 x 42 in.
Printed by Peter Pettengill,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme
Published by Crown Point Press, Oakland
1991.28.67.1

Working proof 1 for
The Tree after Hiroshige, 1984
Color sugar-lift aquatint, etching,
and crayon
32 3/8 x 42 5/16 in.
Printed by Peter Pettengill,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme
1991.28.67.2

Working proof 4 for
The Tree after Hiroshige, 1984
Color spit-bite aquatint,
drypoint, and etching
29 15/16 x 41 3/16 in.
Printed by Peter Pettengill,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme
1991.28.67.5

Working proof 8 for
The Tree after Hiroshige, 1984
Color spit-bite aquatint, drypoint,
etching, and soft-ground etching
32 5/16 x 41 1/2 in.
Printed by Peter Pettengill,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme
1991.28.67.9

Working proof 12 for
The Tree after Hiroshige, 1984
Etching, drypoint, and crayon
30 1/16 x 43 15/16 in.
Printed by Peter Pettengill,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme
1991.28.67.13

Working proof 15 for
The Tree after Hiroshige, 1984
Spit-bite aquatint, drypoint, and etching
30 x 43 7/8 in.
Printed by Peter Pettengill,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme
1991.28.67.16

*The Wave—From the Sea—
After Leonardo, Hokusai,
and Courbet*, 1985
Color aquatint, etching, soft-ground
etching, drypoint, and soap-ground
aquatint, W. 29
42 1/8 x 52 7/16 in.
Printed by Hidekatsu Takada,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme,
Lawrence Hamlin, and Renée Bott
Published by Crown Point Press, Oakland
1991.28.1361

Working proof 4 for *The Wave—
From the Sea—After Leonardo,
Hokusai, and Courbet*, 1985
Color soap-ground aquatint
39 5/16 x 49 in.
Printed by Hidekatsu Takada,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme,
Lawrence Hamlin, and Renée Bott
1991.28.1365

Working proof 5 for *The Wave—
From the Sea—After Leonardo, Hokusai,
and Courbet*, 1985
Soft-ground etching
39 5/16 x 49 in.
Printed by Hidekatsu Takada,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme,
Lawrence Hamlin, and Renée Bott
1991.28.1366

Working proof 13 for *The Wave—
From the Sea—After Leonardo, Hokusai,
and Courbet*, 1985
Color soap-ground aquatint, soft-ground
etching, etching, and drypoint
39 7/16 x 49 1/16 in.
Printed by Hidekatsu Takada,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme,
Lawrence Hamlin, and Renée Bott
1991.28.1369

Working proof 15 for *The Wave—
From the Sea—After Leonardo, Hokusai,
and Courbet*, 1985
Soft-ground lift drawing
35 7/8 x 45 in.
Printed by Hidekatsu Takada,
assisted by Marcia Bartholme,
Lawrence Hamlin, and Renée Bott
1991.28.1373

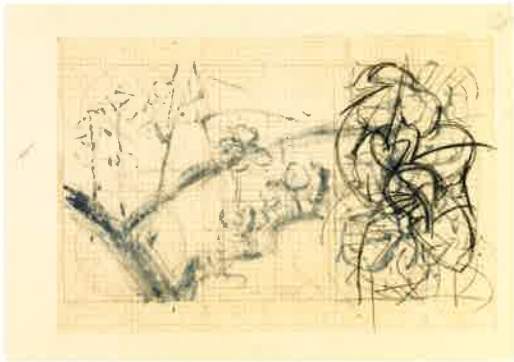
*Yellow Bridge in the Rain, after Van Gogh,
after Hiroshige*, 1985
Color monotype with spit-bite
aquatint and etching
41 7/8 x 30 13/16 in.
Printed by Hidekatsu Takada,
assisted by Peter Pettengill
Published by Crown Point Press, Oakland
1992.167.444

References

W. Willi, Juliane, et al. *Pat Steir,
Gravures—Prints 1976–1988*.
Geneva: Cabinet des Estampes;
London: Tate Gallery, 1988.



Utagawa Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797–1858), *The Plum Orchard at Kameido*, 1857, no. 30 from the series *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, 1856–1858. Color woodcut with mica. Gift of Miss Carlotta Mabury, 54755.752



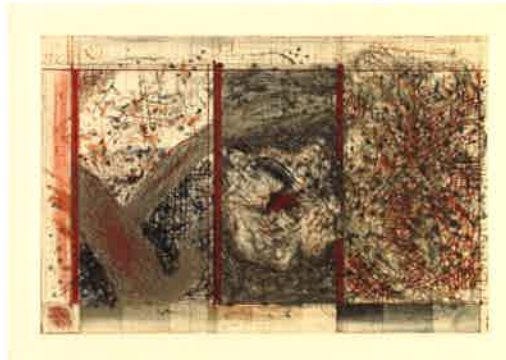
Working proof 1 for *The Tree after Hiroshige*, 1984



Working proof 12 for *The Tree after Hiroshige*, 1984



Working proof 8 for *The Tree after Hiroshige*, 1984



Working proof 4 for *The Tree after Hiroshige*, 1984



The Tree After Hiroshige, 1984

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Anderson Gallery of Graphic Art
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Utagawa Hiroshige, *Evening Rain at Atake on the Great Bridge*, 1857

de Young

Fine Arts Museums
of San Francisco

Cover image:

Yellow Bridge in the Rain, after Van Gogh, after Hiroshige, 1985