

## ***Graphic Heroes, Magic Monsters: Japanese Prints by Utagawa Kuniyoshi from the Arthur R. Miller Collection*** **Japanese Woodblock Print-Making Technical Information**

In the Edo period, print-making was a collaborative process, with teams of artisans contributing different specialized skills to the production of a print.

### **Below is the process in general terms:**

- An artist was commissioned by a publisher to produce a print design.
- The artist made preparatory sumi-ink drawings and then a final drawing for the wood-block carver on thin paper.
- The carver pasted the drawing face down onto the printing block—called the key-block. The blocks were made of smooth, hard mountain cherry wood cut vertically along the grain.
- The wood-block carvers used a variety of chisels, gouges and knives to cut through the back of the drawing, carving away the areas of design not to be printed and leaving fine raised areas of wood to print the outlines.
- A separate wood block was created for each individual color.
- Registration marks (a right-angled mark in one corner and a long mark near the top of one edge) allowed for consistent correspondence in the overall print design.
- During printing, the corner of the paper was positioned inside the right-angled mark and the edge of the paper was aligned with the long mark.
- A set of proof impressions was made from the key block for the artist to note where each color should be printed. Notes on patterns or print effects were also included.
- The carver team would then create a set of color blocks.
- All the blocks were then transferred to the print team.
- For each colored area of the print, a member of the print team applied color with rice-paste binder to the required areas of the block with a brush.
- Moistened handmade paper was placed on the block and the printer rubbed a *baren* (a flat disc-shaped tool with a handle) across the back of the paper and removed the print from the block.
- Impressions were produced to meet demand. Typically, several hundred prints would be made from one block, but in the case of especially popular prints sometimes several thousand impressions were made.

### **References**

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