

Udo Kaller's Way of the Masters

Ukiyo-e woodblock prints, in particular those by Utagawa Hiroshige, Katsushika Hokusai, and Kitagawa Utamaro, have long provided inspiration to a great number of European artists, starting with the Impressionists. A true homage to the Japanese masters has been paid in our time by the German artist Udo Kaller. This is most conspicuous in his series of excellent works titled *One Hundred Views from One Hundred Views*, painted in reference to the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* created by Utagawa Hiroshige nearly 150 years ago. Both series were exhibited side by side at the Manggha Museum in 2005. Kaller's works in their original form of oil paintings on canvas and in the silkscreen version are not only considerably larger than Hiroshige's prints but also represent an attempt – successful in my opinion – to demonstrate the essence of the originals through the eyes of an artist working in our time. Udo Kaller removed some of the details that he considered less important and creatively experimented with colour. At the same time, he maintained the precision of the lines. In some works, he deliberately transformed a multicoloured woodcut into a monochrome print. Beautiful examples include *The Old 'Sleeping Dragon' Plum Tree* or *Artificial 'Old' Fuji Mound at Meguro*. In the former, the monochrome has been mitigated by the white petals of the plum blossom, while in the latter only white outlines are visible against a blue background. However, there are also multicoloured images, such as *The City of Edo, Decorated for the Tanabata Festival*. Nevertheless, compared to the underlying woodblock print, here the background has been homogenised, the shading abandoned, many details removed and, somewhat amusingly, the colour of the balloon has been changed from yellow to blue. These three examples show how the German artist avoided clichés and diversified his visions stylistically while still being to some extent faithful to the Japanese original, removing certain elements of the composition rather than adding anything new. Interestingly, in his earlier lithographs with views of Germany, such as the 1976 work *Burg*, Udo Kaller uses the same shaded background (very Japanese in expression) that he so carefully omits in the series in question.

Of course, it is also possible to rework Hiroshige's prints in a different, yet still interesting, way, approaching them as a very general inspiration. The works of Mateusz Kołek that have been exhibited at the Manggha Museum this year are a good example of this. Most of them simply allude to the atmosphere of *ukiyo-e*, but there are also literal quotations, such as the bird of prey diving from the top of the painting in the Cracovian artist's work *Black Kite*, vividly resembling the bird in Hiroshige's print *Fukagawa, Susaki and Jūmansubo*. The lower sections of the works, which are separated by more than a century and a half, are nevertheless dramatically different: in the former we have a bustling modern city while the latter shows an idyllic plain.

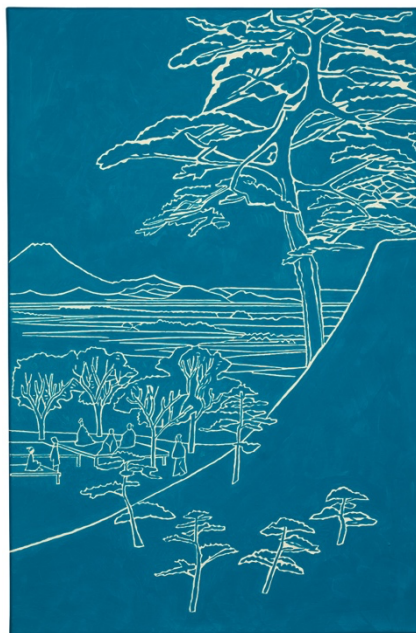
Udo Kaller has also shown his paintings inspired by the woodblock prints of Katsushika Hokusai, another giant of *ukiyo-e*, at the Manggha Museum. His 2012 exhibition entitled *Udo Kaller: Fuji-san* featured creative reworkings of the original Japanese series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. Here, the original prints were also juxtaposed with their contemporary oil interpretations.

Udo Kaller was born in Gleiwitz (Gliwice) in 1943 and moved to West Germany in 1958. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and then in Nuremberg, where he now lives and works. He uses a variety of techniques in his work, including oil on canvas, lithography, silkscreen, drawing, and ceramics. In addition to his fascination with Japanese art, he also creates abstract and semi-abstract works characterised by a confident line reminiscent of printmaking.

Andrzej Jajszczyk, English translation: Jerzy Juruś



The Old 'Sleeping Dragon' Plum Tree
/ *Der alte Pflaumenbaum*
„Schlafender Drache“



'Old' Fuji Mound at Meguro / *Der künstliche „Alte Fuji“ in Meguro*



The City of Edo, Decorated for the Tanabata Festival / *Die Stadt Edo, geschmückt zum Tanabata-Fest*