



A CONVERSATION WITH ROGER S. KEYES

All photos are courtesy of Roger Keyes and Timothy Clark, unless otherwise noted.

< Katsushika Hokusai. *Fisherman*. Japan. Edo period, 1849. Detail of figure 18 (page 101)

ANY DISCUSSION OF JAPANESE woodblock prints includes the contributions of Roger S. Keyes. *Impressions* asked Timothy Clark, newly retired Head of the Japanese Section, Asia Department, at the British Museum, to take time from his own ukiyo-e projects to ask Roger about his work and his recollections. They sat down together in the Asia Study Room at the British Museum on March 26, 2019.

Although most of us still picture you in the United States, we are having this conversation in England, where you and Elizabeth Coombs, your wife, now live. In fact, since 2010, you have been a Guest Researcher in the Japanese Section at the British Museum. How did you get here?

Elizabeth is English by birth, and after we got married in 1996, we began visiting England together, especially to Yorkshire, where her mother lived at the time. In 2010, we stayed in York for three months to see what living in northern England might be like for us. We didn't want to be in a village, and we didn't want to be in London; we thought, "*Maybe a middle-sized city?*" Two weeks in, we decided, "*This is for us.*" We liked it! So, we sold our house and our car in Rhode Island, packed up and six months later moved into a holiday sublet for a month. In that month we found the place where we now live, a town house built in 1837 directly across the street from the west doors of York Minster, the cathedral presiding over the diocese of York in the Church of England. Because our hope, when living in York, was to be able to see the Minster, this house was ideal for us. I just love the magnificent building and the services. In Rhode Island, Elizabeth and I did a lot of Zen Buddhist retreats, silent meditation with a community, for as much as one hundred days at a time—and that was something I really didn't want to lose. Being across from the Minster meant that I could go to early-morning services, and that's what I do every day. At 7:20, I trundle over to the Minster and descend the seven stone steps to the Zouche Chapel with my walking frame. Morning prayer lasts twenty minutes, followed by communion. Then I pop home for breakfast.

As I go to the Minster every day, liturgy is a welcome form of practice. I'm probably not, strictly speaking, a Christian, as I don't believe in much of the so-called Creed. But I do recite during services, because I find the verses profound and resonant. Worship has been held in this very building daily since the thirteenth century. I find that really humbling and inspiring.

As an American, what do you think of English country life?

We do not own a car, so we don't see much of English country life. But what I *do* see of it I like very much. The first New Year's we were here, soon after we arrived, I heard about a group called the Minster Walkers, so Elizabeth and I showed up ten minutes before they were leaving on a walk. There were only two other people besides us, and I said to Elizabeth, "Oh, well, let's tag along." But twenty or so people suddenly showed up and we had a *wonderful* walk through the English countryside. Then I looked around for other opportunities to walk. The first *long* walk that I did, also with a group, was from Lastingham in North Yorkshire, which is where Elizabeth's mother lived, to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, Northumberland, off the northeast coast of England. It took two weeks, night and day, sleeping in schools and churches. The heather was in bloom and it was breathtakingly moving to me. I'd done a lot of hiking, but to do a systematic, well-organized walk with others who were into scenery and landscape—how special. In Japan, people really adore their landscape. But in America, people are pretty blasé about it—they might visit the national parks in their cars. But this idea of *trekking* through the landscape in a defined way was entirely new to me—as so many other things have been since I moved to England. I jumped in wholeheartedly and took to it like a duck to water.

As an aside, *Impressions* asked Elizabeth Coombs how she came to know Roger. Here is her response:

I was at Harvard at the same time as Izzy Goldman, and, when I was considering a career in paper conservation, he suggested I talk with Keiko Mizushima Keyes, a well-known conservator in California and the wife of Roger Keyes. She actively discouraged me, saying it was hard to make a good living, but I went ahead anyway.

A few years later, I became paper conservator at the Cincinnati Art Museum. They were shipping batches of their Japanese woodblock-print collection to Keiko for conservation. When she heard I'd been hired, she suggested they send me out to her for specialized training, so that I could work on the Japanese collection at the museum rather than send the prints to her.

I went out to Woodacre, north of San Francisco, where she and Roger lived, for the first time in 1988 for two weeks of very intensive training. It was hard work, but really fun, thanks to Keiko being both a great professional and great person. During that time, Roger was very much in the background, but at mealtimes I got to see how wonderful they were as a couple. I had driven out to Woodacre in a rented car and managed to get it stuck in the ditch outside their house as I was parking off the narrow road. Feeling embarrassed and inept, I rang their doorbell. When Roger answered, he was amused by what had happened, and laughingly said something like, "Too bad—and you were probably hoping to make a good impression, too! Don't worry, I'll call AAA."

Keiko asked me to come back for a further two weeks the following summer, 1989. I didn't realize until I arrived that she was already very ill with cancer. I worked some of the time with Keiko between her medical appointments and with another paper conservator, to get as much of her studio backlog completed as possible. Again, I was deeply impressed by how Keiko and Roger were together, and the quality of his concern and care of his beloved wife. She died just three months after I left.

Roger and I talked occasionally on the phone after that for a while. I just felt so sad for him. Then, we fell out of touch until 1996, when a friend told me she'd just heard Roger give the most fantastic talk in San Francisco. I phoned Woodacre, he answered, and we took off from there.

Roger, what are Elizabeth's current interests?

After about twenty-five years as an art conservator, she retired when we moved to England. She just didn't want to do it anymore. She was tired of working on repairing wormholes, patching, and removing stains; she realized that she was much more interested in Zen meditation retreats. Over the years, since we've been in York, she's really immersed herself in *that* world, as she had done when we were living in America. She now teaches Zen meditation and leads meditation retreats in Europe and the U.S. In fact, at the moment, she's in Providence, Rhode Island, leading two weeks of a three-month retreat.

How does Elizabeth find moving back to England after so many years in the United States?

We sometimes talk about it, but from my point of view, I think she had a bit of culture shock. She had been coming regularly to see her Mum, but it was always just for two weeks at a time, nothing sustained. Coming back here, having left when she was in her early twenties, and having had her whole professional life in America, meant that it was a new country for *her*, as well as for me. It was a big change for both of us, but she entered into it wholeheartedly and has no regrets.

Roger, you have devoted a lifetime to the study of Japanese sheet prints and illustrated books. What is engaging you now?

Daily life. What I mean is that with all these years that I've spent looking at things, and collecting things, and focusing on objects, I realized that I've allowed myself to become more open now to everything. I don't have any particular project at the moment in Japanese art or anything else, but I'm completely absorbed in everyday activities as they occur. I'm so grateful to be here in England, in this culture that supports all those things that matter to me and that I care about.

What would you like to undertake if you have the time?

The one Japanese artist whom I adore, and on whom I've never been able to find a way to work, is Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858). I just think he's

the most marvelous artist. Suzuki Jūzō (1919–2010) and I bonded over Hiroshige. Just before I met Suzuki-sensei, he published this massive tome on Hiroshige, and I was just so moved by it. Rand Castile (1938–2017) was the founding director of the Japan House Gallery in New York. After the show and catalogue of Osaka prints that Keiko Mizushima, my late first wife, and I did for the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1973, Rand asked if I would like to do a show at Japan House Gallery. I said, “I’d love to—I’d like to do Hiroshige.” And he said, “We’ll do it!” But then he retired from the gallery, and it never happened. He went on to other pursuits, such as director of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, beginning in 1986.

I still hold Hiroshige as an ideal for a show, but I don’t think I’ll ever do it myself—because as I’ve come to love and learn more about Hiroshige, his life and work, I realize that for me, it’s all about the quality of impressions, the printing of his work. The reason Hiroshige isn’t considered to be one of the greatest of all Japanese artists is because the exhibitions that get thrown up around his name are usually dreadfully late impressions—travesties of his work. In Japan, especially, publishers pump out endless anthologies of Hiroshige’s prints and they always illustrate them in full color, full size with the most abysmal impressions. But I’m not in a position now to scour the world and dig out the best impressions. Nor would anybody be able to afford the insurance and the loan fees and the travel fees for all the people who nowadays have to be covered. What we need is a young scholar with a big budget.

How do you prefer to work? On collaborative projects, on your own or both? Were there particular ones that spoke to you, and how?

Nearly all my Japanese print research and writing I have done on my own, but it wasn’t out of choice—it was out of necessity. There was hardly anyone else around who could help, except the publishers.

But other people have always been involved in the publications and exhibitions I’ve worked on. I’ve learned immeasurably from others and I’ve enjoyed working with colleagues, collectors, dealers, students and friends. Each group of prints or a collection or a collector spoke in a different voice. In fact, I *allowed* that and *invited* that, whether it was a collector I worked with, like Professor Otto Riese, whose prints sang to me, or the artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892). The more I engaged and got involved, the more it dredged up past associations. By the time I started publishing, I had been working with Japanese prints for twenty years so I had quite a backlog. When I went to Lausanne in 1975 to catalogue the three hundred prints in the Riese collection, all I had with me were just two reference books—a dog-eared copy of Binyon and Sexton’s 1923 *Japanese Colour Prints* and *Kōjien*, which is essentially a fat, one-volume encyclopedia of everything about Japanese culture and language (in Japanese, of course). As a result, everything I wrote about Riese’s prints drew on my own experience and memory. And it was a *thrilling* experience. It was “*Who knew? How did I know that?*” I think I always had a fairly good visual memory and I was



FIG. 1. Roger Keyes at age twenty-six at R. E. Lewis, Inc., San Francisco. July 1968



FIG. 2. Roger's parents, Lynford Keyes and Lorena Start, in Utica, NY. Late 1930s

able to put what I saw in my mind's eye side by side with the thing I was writing about.

What about your family. Please tell us where you were born and grew up. Where are your parents from?

I was born in Utica, upstate New York on April 22, 1942 (fig. 1). My grandparents lived in Remsen, New York, a few miles north, in the foothills of the Adirondacks—my grandmother was a singing teacher. My mother, Lorena, a coloratura soprano, was born in Utica in the 1910s. My father, Lynford, was born in Brockville, Ontario, just across the Saint Lawrence River, also in the 1910s (fig. 2). His first job was teaching physical education in a secondary school near Utica. A year after I was born, we moved to Atlanta, where Father got a job as a swim coach at Georgia Tech University. But in 1948, my parents divorced. Then I lived with my mother and younger sister, Janet (b. 1944), back in Remsen, until 1951.

Around that time, my mother remarried and had two more young kids. So, she shipped me and my sister off to Griffin, Georgia, where my father was then working in the public health department. At the end of our first year with him, he accepted a job in the Philippines with the World Health Organization (WHO) and invited me to go with him. He had remarried by

then. My sister stayed behind in the U.S. She later had a successful career in urban planning in California. Retired now, her main interest is Buddhist meditation.

I was an eager, if unconventional, student, and teachers seemed fond of me, because I was so eager to learn things. In fifth grade, I paged through the twelve-volume *World Book Encyclopedia*. In eighth grade, my math teacher took me prospecting for lead. (We didn't find any.) Meanwhile, my father was training me to be a competitive swimmer.

I finished ninth grade in Manila at age thirteen. My father and stepmother were having problems, so they sent me back to the U.S. to live with my mother for a while. In New York State, you graduate from high school after passing certain state exams. When I was fourteen, the principal of my school asked whether I would take some extra state-wide exams in physics, chemistry, fourth-year Latin (I had had two years of Latin), Math 4 and English 4. I think he wanted to boost the school's ratings. I passed them all, so officially, I had graduated. So what next? My mother, proud of her accidentally precocious son, had me interview for colleges. "*Why not?*," I thought. I got into a five-year program that would give me one degree in humanities, and another in science, from CalTech (California Institute of Technology). In my early teens, I wanted to be an astronomer (my mother told me that the first word I ever said was *star!*)—but by that time, in 1957, I wanted to study physics and unified field theory and become a nuclear physicist. I wrote to my father in Manila to tell him my plans, assuming that he, too, would be delighted. He wasn't. I was far too young to start college in America, he declared, and ordered me back to Manila to live with him. I didn't have much choice, because he had legal custody of me, still a minor. But the situation turned out to have a real silver lining: goodbye physics; I discovered art!

In 1957, I entered the University of the Philippines, Quezon City, the premier school there. All the first-year students were fifteen. Because the Philippines had been a colony, all higher education was in English. My father picked advanced classes for me, like cutting-edge behavioral psychology. The teachers in the philosophy department were interested in advanced logic. "*What fun,*" I thought. And indeed, I loved it. I was also studying symbolic logic and philosophy and political science and creative writing.

What about art? Any focus on art at that school?

Yes, that's when I met the painter Fernando Zobel (1924–1984) (fig. 3). Fernando was an abstract painter, born in Spain, and educated at Harvard. One day, I saw an exhibition of his paintings in the university atrium. It was the first time I had seen an abstract painting. Fernando was giving a talk in an hour in the big auditorium, so I went along and listened to him. He showed a picture by Rubens and then turned it upside down and explained how it was just as good that way, as an abstraction. After the talk I went up to him with stars in my eyes. He invited me to visit him. He had



FIG. 3. Fernando Zobel de Ayala in his garden in Makati, Manila. Late 1950s

a beautifully appointed house with a library and collection of Chinese ceramics and European prints and drawings. He said, “Any time you want, just come out. Borrow any book you want.” I took Fernando at his word and that’s how I educated myself about art.

At the end of the year, Father said, “OK, you’re still too young to go to college in the United States,” adding that I could spend a year at any college in Asia that would take me. Just then, he took a field trip to Japan as part of his job with WHO. One of his colleagues there recommended International Christian University (ICU) in Mitaka, a suburb of Tokyo. John D. (Jay) Rockefeller 4th (b. 1937) was studying there. They were looking for more foreigners to help their Japanese students practice English. I was accepted and spent the last half of 1958 there studying Japanese language, the best such program for foreigners at that time. At ICU, I also took courses in Japanese literature, religion, history and Chinese and Japanese art history. In October, during a break, I went to Kyoto to see the amazing temples, paintings and statues I had been studying. Breathtaking!

When I returned to the ICU campus, some boys were boasting loudly about how they had “stormed” one of the girls’ dormitories the day before. Just then, a girl’s voice behind me interrupted, in English, “It was not like that at all!” I turned around, and there was Keiko, flushed with indignation! I’d heard about Keiko Mizushima, because a couple of teachers in the English-language program said she was the brightest student they’d ever met.

For both of us, this was love at first sight and from then on, we were practically inseparable, going to concerts, theater and exhibitions together,



FIG. 4. Keiko Mizushima at age eighteen at Matsushima, near Sendai, Japan. December 1958

apart from classes. She was eighteen and I was sixteen (fig. 4). How lucky we were to meet! In December 1958, we spent the Christmas holiday together with her family in Sendai, in northern Japan. Her father was a professor of plant genetics at Tōhoku University, where he developed the famous Prince Melon.

How long were you and Keiko at ICU?

Keiko stayed on until she graduated in 1961, but I was kicked out in February 1959.

I had written about Keiko to my father and when my stepmother saw the letter she wrote to the dean of students at ICU to tell him I was a “sex pervert.” Nothing could have been further from the truth, but regardless, at the end of February they expelled me, and I had to return to the Philippines. Was she trying to get revenge for my father’s philandering, punishing him by hurting me? Who knows? My father wasn’t troubled by any of this.

Were you able to continue your art studies?

Back in Manila, my father arranged for me to work on an archeological excavation of early Ming blue-and-white ceramics and Song celadons at Calatagan, a coastal site that proved the Philippines had trade relations with China before the arrival of the Spanish. That was pretty exciting for the staff at the National Museum who were overseeing the work. The excavation was financed by Fernando Zobel (my painter friend)—it was on his property, actually.

In September 1959, I entered Harvard as a freshman in the class of 1963. Fernando had attended Harvard in the 1940s and loved it, so he wrote a letter of recommendation for me. The Harvard application form asked me to list the books I had read in the past year, and to mark the ones I was willing to be tested on. I listed about three hundred books, including *The Tale of Genji*, most of which I marked, except for the art books. For those, I just looked at the pictures, because I honestly couldn’t understand most of the writing. (How ironical that art is the subject of most of my own writing!)

I traveled to Harvard that summer on a round-the-world ticket, stopping in India and then Egypt. In Cairo, I went for a tour of the pyramids, and I was disappointed that the surface of a pyramid was stepped, not smooth—I had been hoping to slide down from the top. My guide, a young Algerian, took me to a painted underground tomb in a remote area at Saqqara. He sent me down a staircase and left me all alone there. The walls were covered with painted reliefs and gold stars shone against the blue vaulted ceiling. Everything was so fresh it looked like it had been painted yesterday. I felt overjoyed. It was one of the most beautiful things I’d ever seen. I must have been quite a sight, coming up out of the ground feeling so radiant. It was a long walk to the bus stop and a long wait for the bus. As we sat there, the guide said to me, “Lucky that you’re not French. I would have killed you.”

“Really!?” I replied, “But why?” “The French killed my entire family,” he replied, “and I swore to get even.” This was at the time of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62).

Arriving in the States, I went first to Cape Cod to live with my mother and her two children. She was teaching at Sea Pines, a girls’ school in East Brewster, but did not have extra space for me, so I slept in her car. I got a summer job as a dishwasher at Chillingsworth restaurant, a premier establishment in Brewster that exists today.

At Harvard that fall, David Riesman, a sociologist, organized freshman seminars in which each student was coached individually by a professor in a year-long course. It was the only course I enrolled in—it was worth multiple course credits—but I also audited a class in art history, taught by Svetlana Alpers.

Meanwhile, my father had gotten a new job with the U.S. government in Taiwan. I spent the summer of 1960 in Taipei with him, being tutored in Chinese three hours every morning. By the end of the summer, I discovered that I was proficient in Chinese. What a surprise! Very cool! I went back to Harvard that fall.

Let’s start at the beginning: When did you first encounter Japanese prints and what were the circumstances?

The first Japanese prints I saw were in shops in and around the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo in the winter of 1957–58. They were dreadful! I think it was Sakai Tōkichi’s gallery in the basement of the hotel. They were faded, dog-eared and stained. I just couldn’t stand them, so they made little impression on me, except for their filth. At that time, I preferred early Buddhist sculpture—those brooding Asuka-period National Treasures. This late stuff was not for me. But in February 1959, when I returned to Manila after living in Japan, I met up again with my friend and mentor, the painter Fernando Zobel. He said, “You’ve been in Japan and you’ve looked at all this Japanese art. Take a look at these.” And he pulled out a folder that had three unmatted Japanese prints. One of them was a Suzuki Harunobu (1725?–1770) *hosoban* from the Seven Komachi series—the little child holding the hand of the mother. And he said, “Just look at that! That’s as good as the best of the Greek vase paintings.” Very few artists could hold a candle to the Greek vase painters, as far as he was concerned. The next one he showed me was a Katsukawa Shunshō (d. 1792) double portrait of two actors from about 1768. It wasn’t anywhere near as simple and elegant as the Harunobu, but it was so powerful it just grabbed me. The last one was Yoshitoshi’s triptych of Yoshitsune rescuing Kenreimon’in at sea during the Battle of Dannoura—she’s just so frightened and everything was whirling around. I’d never seen anything like it in my life. “This is the apotheosis of the aniline dye,” Fernando said, with a flourish. I’d never heard of an aniline dye, but I *got* it. It made an indelible impression on me. When Fernando showed me those three prints, I was riveted. I could actually touch them and hold them in my hands. It was love at first sight! I studied and wrote about each of those artists later.

When and why did you move to Northern California?

I moved to northern California, thanks to Fernando. “Where,” I asked, “could I see more prints like the three he had shown me?” “Well,” he replied, “I bought them in the 1940s from Ray Lewis, who was then at Childs Gallery on Newbury Street in Boston. If you’re ever in San Francisco, visit Ray Lewis. He has Japanese prints. And he has a great eye.” At the end of my summer in Taiwan in 1960, I visited Ray in San Francisco, where I bought an early Hiroshige from his first Tōkaidō series. It cost thirty dollars.

In the summer of my second year at Harvard, 1961, my stepfather, John Reynolds, a chef who traveled a lot to find work, died. At his death, my mother was panicked over how she would support herself and my step-siblings. I was supposed to go back to Harvard in the fall, but I wanted to help my mother and thought of Ray Lewis.

Ray had given me a stack of Japanese books, the black-and-white edition of the *Kabuki nendaiki* (1811), illustrated by Shun’ei and Toyokuni, and he said, “You’re going back to Harvard. You’re going to be studying Japanese, and at some point, you’ll be able to read these books. And when you can, let me know, because there’s always a job waiting for you.” In 1961, I wrote him, “Dear Mr. Lewis, I still can’t read them, but I can type. Do you need someone to type? I’d love to come and work for you.” I couldn’t come up with an alternative to raise money. I didn’t know anything about work for pay. He was tickled. “Just come out and I’ll give you forty-five dollars a week.” So, Ray took me in. I would take my check to the bank every week and get forty-five silver dollars for shopping. My father knew Marie Rexroth, former wife of the poet Kenneth Rexroth, and I lived at her place for a while.

I asked Ray if I could stay on and he said, “Sure.” About a month into the fall, he said “When are you going back to college?” I answered, “Oh, no. I’m not going back. I’ve got a job here.” He replied, “Well, if you don’t go back to college, you won’t be working with *me*.” So, I went to UC Berkeley and took English literature as a major. I graduated in 1964.

When did you and Keiko get back together?

When Keiko finished four years at ICU (she excavated a Jōmon site there with Professor Kidder), she went to Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York, on a scholarship. She had also been accepted at Radcliffe, but she wanted to “have her own experience,” separate from me at Harvard College. She was happy as a clam there. (Yoko Ono attended there for a year in 1953 as the first Japanese student at Sarah Lawrence.) Then, finally, Keiko and I got married in Connecticut in 1962.

What were your earliest jobs?

Soon after I graduated from Berkeley, Ray Lewis made plans to move to Europe with his wife and three daughters, leaving me in charge of his business (fig. 5). Just at that time, we discovered Keiko was pregnant. We didn’t tell Ray—I was afraid he might not go. We looked after his business



FIG. 5. Ray and Lois M. ("Mike") Lewis (second from right and far right) bidding at auction at Kornfeld & Klipstein, Bern, Switzerland. June 1973. Photo: Kurt Blum fotograf swb bern, Courtesy of Jan Lewis Slavid

for two years. It thrived. Apparently, I was so enthusiastic about the prints that people couldn't help but want to buy them. Ray kept replenishing our stock and told me how to price things. He had fantastic taste and clarity about prints.

Ray was a phenomenon. Fernando thought he had the most perfect eye of anyone he had ever met, by which he meant that Ray had universal taste. He could perceive the quality of things he was seeing for the first time. As a dealer, he was impeccable. He would choose just the best impressions of Dürer and Rembrandt that were on offer. And the same thing for Indian miniatures; he had a real passion for Rajput paintings, as he had for Japanese prints. Every print he had was exceptional in some way. It wasn't that they were by famous artists, necessarily, but they were really, really good. That was the exceptional dealer he was. When he was in the States, he would travel—perhaps to Los Angeles, stopping off with prints to sell in places like Santa Barbara, where there were collectors. I visited Los Angeles once or twice a year on selling trips with Ray, between the 1960s and 1975. We had a presence in Los Angeles for about a week every year.

I worked with Ray through 1975. He was away a lot, but when he was on site, there really wasn't enough work for the two of us. I decided to strike out on my own, focusing more on scholarship. Word had spread that I was available for cataloguing, and in 1975, I went to Lausanne to work on Otto Riese's print collection. That led to many more such projects.

My father, the health educator, died in 1975, and because of him I taught a "health education" class every morning as a volunteer at my daughter's

elementary school. The students were mostly ranchers' children, and they were worried their animals would die in the severe drought. "Could we do a rain dance, Mr. Keyes?" they asked. Of course, I replied, not really knowing what to do, but the kids figured something out; we did a ceremony, and that night I got a call from one of the most skeptical kids. "Mr. Keyes," he began, "Mr. Keyes, it's *snowing!!!*" Most of the kids had never seen snow. When I drove up to the school the next morning, the minute I stopped the car, kids started running up and over the snow-covered top of the roof, laughing like crazy. They were ecstatic! So was I, for that matter.

Keiko and I lived in northern California for nearly thirty years, until her death in 1989.

Roger, did you choose Japanese prints or did they choose you?

A bit of both, I suppose.

Did Aenea, your daughter with Keiko Keyes, follow in your footsteps or hers?

Our daughter, Aenea, takes after both of us. She is a violinist, fluent in Japanese and visits Japan regularly, although she is not at all interested in prints. I remember taking her as an infant in a little wooden box to Ray's gallery at 555 Sutter Street when he was away on a trip. People who came to the gallery to buy prints would always want to see the "baby in the box." When she was a little older, I used to carry her around on my shoulder. It was a great time.

Aenea was in Japan for her fifth birthday. Her godfather, Fernando, was there too, and he asked her what she wanted for her birthday, thinking she would probably want a dress or a doll. She said, "I think I'd like a violin." He said, "OK, kid, you got yourself a violin!"—and they went down to Yamaha on the Ginza and got the smallest one made. From the time Aenea was born until the time she got that first violin, she never heard her mother, Keiko, play *her* own violin. Keiko had it under the bed in a case. As far as I know, Aenea never even saw it. But then she started taking lessons with the Suzuki method, and showed real ability and talent, so she started taking lessons from a manic Rumanian teacher named Serban Rusu. He was an awful bully, but he pushed her a lot and she got better and better. Then she took a year at the conservatory for music in San Francisco and decided that she should have a college degree. Keiko recommended her alma mater, Sarah Lawrence, where the violin teacher was the legendary Dorothy DeLay (1917–2002)—the best violin teacher in America at that time. Aenea had once-a-week private lessons with Dorothy DeLay and is now a successful professional.

Who influenced you profoundly as a young man?

Fernando Zobel, Dorothy Lee, Ray Lewis and Helen Palmer.

When I got to Harvard, they had just started a freshman seminar program, the idea of David Riesman, the sociologist I mentioned earlier. I enrolled in

this program and my section was taught by Dorothy Lee, an anthropologist, whose specialty was Southwest Indian tribes. She was a linguist, a writer and a devoted, charismatic teacher. She befriended me and when she went on sabbatical, she had me house sit. That's when I heard Vivaldi's "Gloria" for the first time, and I was so ecstatic that when it finished, I flung open the front door. In front of me was a huge old maple tree—I just went out and hugged it! Also a big influence: Helen Palmer was my teacher in Berkeley and I have more to say about her below.

At the beginning of 1974, I had a house painter who was helping us with the home we had just bought in Woodacre. One day he asked, "Have you ever thought of doing Transcendental Meditation?"—adding he would be happy to "initiate" me. He did teach me meditation. It made all the difference to me when it came time for acting on behalf of clients at auctions and such.

At the end of March 1974, the first auction of the famous Henri Vever Collection of Japanese prints took place at Sotheby's in London. Ray and I bought many prints in the sale. Some purchases were for ourselves, and we were also acting for some twenty-five collectors and dealers in America, Europe and Japan. Everybody who couldn't be at the sale trusted us to act for them. Looking back on it, it just seems astonishing that we managed that amount of pressure and activity—examining each print for each client, executing bids and arranging payments and shipments. If I said I already had a bid on something, others wouldn't pursue it. Our only real competitor was the Tokyo dealer Nishi Saijū (1927–1995). That sale was a turning point for me. The next year, I left the print business and gave myself over to teaching, writing and research.

You've always been interested in intuitive aspects of your work. Tell us a bit more about that.

After the Vever experience, my interest grew in meditation practices. I befriended Helen Palmer, a trained psychologist, and studied intuition with her for several years, applying it in my daily life and also to my studies of art.

When I was working on Utagawa Kunimasa (1773–1810), I had many photographs from museums and collectors. I sorted them in piles, dated them and put them in order. Suddenly, I heard what sounded like a voice saying, "*I wonder why I'm sad? I miss the snow.*" It was as if I were hearing the voice of Kunimasa, who was from Aizu in northern Japan, and he was talking about what it was like for him, being an artist in the far-away city of Edo (modern Tokyo). That was a breakthrough point for me, feeling that I was in contact with something that I could become conscious of. My checklist of Kunimasa's paintings and prints in Japanese was published in *Ukiyo-e shūka* (Collection of ukiyo-e masterpieces; Tokyo: Shōgakkan, vol. 9, 1981).

That directly connected with Helen Palmer, who was encouraging students, as I mentioned earlier, to take intuition, trust it and fold it into our lives. I don't think I talked with her about my interest in Japanese art, but we met every week for a couple of years and did psychic readings. One student would say, "Tell me about my relationship with my father when I was a

child.” Then everybody would “go inside” and visualize. It was astonishing how we all agreed with one another. Helen herself was a breathtakingly accurate psychic reader. Through this intuition training, I developed my ability to trust what came to me in that way. When I got around to Kunimasa, it never occurred to me that what I felt or what I wrote was a projection or anything else. It was just another “reading.” (I published “Kunimasa: A Fictional Memoir” in *Impressions* 19 [1997].)

What was the Japanese print scene like when you started out?

Actually, there was nothing like a Japanese print “scene” in the U.S. or Europe in 1961, when I started working for Ray Lewis in San Francisco. There were a few other Asian art dealers who had prints: Janette Ostier (1921–2014) and Huguette Berès (1913–1999), in Paris; Robert Sawers (b. 1934), a bookseller in London; Doris Meltzer, in New York; O. P. Reed Jr. (1921–2013), in Los Angeles; also, Dawson’s Bookshop in Los Angeles. I always made the rounds when I came to England to sell prints for Ray, so I met them all. Later, in 1973, the New Yorkers Bill Green (1915–2005) and Anne van Biema (1915–2004) founded the Ukiyo-e Society of America (now known as JASA, publisher of *Impressions*). There were people in New York who were buying prints.

Can you describe Dawson’s Book Shop in Los Angeles for us?

It was a modest shop. Dawson had a selection of Japanese prints in mats tacked up on a wall. I remember an impression of Hokusai’s “Red Fuji” for one hundred dollars. It was a late impression, and regretfully, I didn’t buy it. Muir Dawson handled consignments from the American collector Richard Lane (1925–2002) in Japan, but those were mostly paintings (fig. 6). I first met Lane at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo in the 1960s, on my first selling trip to Japan as a dealer. (In Tokyo, I also met people in the circles of the print publishers Watanabe and Adachi.) Lane, an active dealer, was flogging his own things, which were mostly in terrible condition. But the

etiquette I had learned from Ray Lewis was that if you visited a dealer, you had to buy something, just to be copacetic—so, as Lane had a really nice Osaka actor print, I bought it for myself, and I still have it. He didn’t make any particular impression on me in person, and we never had much contact afterward. He was certainly a troublemaker, even then. Let me explain why.

Some years later, I was visiting the Achenbach Foundation in San Francisco cataloguing the Japanese prints in that collection. The curator showed me a handwritten letter that Lane had sent

FIG. 6. Richard Lane and Chiyeko Okawa Lane. c. 1960. Richard Lane Collection, Honolulu Museum of Art Archives

At the time of their marriage in 1960, Lane, who had completed his PhD in Japanese literature at Columbia University, was teaching Japanese language at the University of Maryland Center in Tokyo, and Chiyeko Lane was Staff Physician and Chief of Laboratory at St. Luke’s International Hospital in Tokyo



him shortly after my visit to Japan, which started something like, “Roger Keyes had come to Japan recently and was selling fake Japanese prints, especially one by Sharaku.” I *did* have a late impression of a close-up actor portrait by Tōshūsai Sharaku (act. 1794–95). Of course, Ray and I were so scrupulous about authenticity that we always checked out everything carefully and compared each print to those published by Henderson and Ledoux, which was the reference for Sharaku. All the block defects checked out exactly. When Lane wrote that I was selling fakes, I was mortified. Ray Lewis kept a copy of the letter and held onto it in case at some point in the future we needed to use it. But we never did.

FIG. 7. Roger Keyes and Peter Morse at a Tokyo eel restaurant. May 1987

FIG. 8. Left to right: Peter Morse, Roger, Haruko Iwasaki, Kobayashi Tadashi and Tim Clark in Japan. May 1987

Haruko Iwasaki is Emerita Professor in East Asian Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara.

FIG. 9. After returning from Japan, Peter Morse was featured in the *Honolulu Advertiser* on June 11, 1987.

Did you ever meet Richard Lane again?

Yes. It was when my friend Peter Morse (1935–1993) came to Japan with me in 1987 (figs. 7–9). Lane, who respected Peter for his Hokusai collecting, had both of us to his Tokyo house in Kokubunji for dinner. It turned out that Lane’s wife, a doctor, worked in the clinic at ICU when Keiko and I



The Arts

Tracking down the thousands of prints of Hokusai

The Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, born in 1760, started drawing at the age of 5. He published his first print at 19. By the time he died, in 1849, he had finished over 2,500 — perhaps as many as 3,000 — images. Some of them are quite famous. The “Great Wave Off Kanagawa,” for example, is one of the undisputed masterpieces of the woodblock-print medium. Nearly as well-known are his prints “Red Fox” and “Thunderstorm Below the Mountain.” All are from his famous series, “Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji.” In addition to his prints the prolific Hokusai produced a number of published sketches, books, illustrations, and paintings. On his deathbed, at the age of 89, he is supposed to have said: “If Heaven will give me five more years of life, I will become a real painter.” With a little more time Hokusai hoped to make his art indistinguishable from life itself. “As it is,” says Peter Morse, “Hokusai is remembered today as an artist who produced a vast amount of information that the curator at the Foundation had recently discovered in an old box labeled “Small Japanese Pictures.” I went down to take a look and found 700 to 800 surimono or greeting card prints. About 150 were by Hokusai. No scholars had known of their existence.” Keyes says the project’s funding ran out in June 1988 and their work may take then until the end of next year. The finished catalog may run to six individual books with the prints arranged in chronological sequence. Keyes has already been commissioned to write a separate biography.

Arts Scene
By Ronn Roock
Arts Writer

the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Scottsdale, Ariz. “Wright was well-known for his interest in Japan,” Morse explains, “but all of his prints were sold at auctions in 1927 and 1969. Or — at least we thought so until one of my query letters came back with information that the curator at the Foundation had recently discovered in an old box labeled “Small Japanese Pictures.” I went down to take a look and found 700 to 800 surimono or greeting card prints. About 150 were by Hokusai. No scholars had known of their existence.”

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IN·WEAR

were there in 1958; small world department! And Lane showed me one wonderful thing: an orange-bound booklet of drawings of actors by Katsukawa Shunkō (act. c. 1790s–1800s). It was fantastic. I'd never seen any drawings by him, and he was one of my favorite artists. I was so glad Pater and I had gone out there—and I remember we ate a massive amount of sushi. But I never discussed Hokusai with Lane and didn't spend time on his articles or books.

Did you think you would grow to specialize in Japanese prints, especially the work of Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)?

By the middle of the 1960s, I was visiting every public collection and a lot of private ones in Europe and North America and compiling illustrated inventories of prints by Harunobu, Katsukawa artists, Kunimasa and others. But Hokusai was at the bottom of my list; I had no rapport with him at that time. I thought he was overrated, so I sidestepped him until I started my Center for the Study of Japanese Woodblock Prints in Woodacre, in 1983.

Then in 1984, at the urging of Peter Morse, I began studying Hokusai. It was the first project of my new Center. Peter was a distinguished composer who collected both Western and Japanese prints and was the great-grandson of the brother of the zoologist and ethnologist Edward Sylvester Morse (1838–1925). Peter was a very enthusiastic collector in many areas and particularly loved Hokusai's prints. Because he couldn't read Japanese, he leaned on me a lot for help in translating and transliterating inscriptions and references.

As a young man, Peter Morse had worked for the print curator Jacob Kainen at the Smithsonian's American Art Museum, which started Peter's interest in prints. Peter lived in Santa Barbara, where he had inherited his wealth from his mother. He opened a record shop and had his own collection of thousands of records at home. In the 1960s, he began buying prints at auction in London. He also bought a large number of ukiyo-e from Bob Sawers and Ray Lewis. He had a very fine impression of Rembrandt's etched masterpiece, *Three Crosses* and fine Picasso and Daumier works. He sold his Western prints to pay for his divorce, but kept the ukiyo-e, especially his Hokusai.

When Peter came up to San Francisco to buy prints, we became very friendly. He was a big catalogue raisonné guy and said he would help me if I did one of Hokusai. By then, with my Center up and running, I was in the position of having a nonprofit organization and could apply for grants, which I did. Peter and I traveled to Japan and many other countries together. He took photographs of every single Hokusai he ever saw, aiming to produce a catalogue raisonné of the artist's single-sheet prints. In 1989, George Braziller published Peter's lavishly illustrated book, *Hokusai: One Hundred Poets*.

Peter and the late Nagata Seiji (1951–2018), the curator of the Ōta Memorial Museum of ukiyo-e in Tokyo, had a wonderful rapport. They were both

passionate collectors of Hokusai. Nagata, having seen photos of Peter's collection, said, "Look, have a show at the Ōta Museum of your Hokusai prints and we'll publicize it and publish a catalogue." Peter loved that idea and made all the arrangements, got everything framed and put up in the museum. Sadly, Peter died of a heart attack in Tokyo on January 3, 1993, the night before the show opened. I never asked Nagata whether Peter was able to see the show before it opened. Peter's family sold his collection to the Sumida Hokusai Museum, Tokyo. Nagata at the time had a Hokusai Museum of his own in the remote village of Tsubano in Shimane Prefecture. After he died, his own collection of some two thousand works by Hokusai and his followers was left to the Shimane Art Museum in his home prefecture of Shimane.

FIG. 10. Roger with Elizabeth Coombs in the Japanese Section offices, British Museum, with part of the ninety-volume typescript of Roger's catalogue raisonné of the surviving single-sheet prints of Katsushika Hokusai (with 5,000 illustrations), compiled together with Peter Morse. February 2017

This material now belongs to the Archive of the Japanese Section, Department of Asia. It is entirely digitized, currently available to scholars by application to the Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto. A limited public version is currently available via this portal: <<https://www.latehokusai.org/catalogue-link-and-disclaimer>>.



Peter had said he would make a database and do all the work on various states and impressions of Hokusai's prints. After he died, I went to Honolulu, where he had been working as a volunteer research associate in the Graphic Arts department at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, to see what he had. He really hadn't done anything about organizing the material. With my help, he had compiled a database of titles, signatures and a four-thousand-item bibliography of Hokusai in many languages—but that was about it. He also had shoeboxes full of fifteen thousand photographs. Over many years, we had visited over one hundred museums together. All of those photos and notes are now in binders at the British Museum, along with my typed summary of everything (fig. 10). Happily, this is all digitized now.

You are so well known as a cataloguer of, and advisor to, collections. Have you been a collector yourself?

I *have* been involved with collectors for years, probably because I felt such rapport with them, having been an avid collector myself from an early age.

When I was very, very young, my mother remarried and her second husband loved postage stamps. We collected side by side. In those days, you could send away for a thousand stamps for three dollars. Later, at age nine, I began to buy match covers and match boxes. Specialist dealers would send me huge numbers of them for a pittance. Meanwhile, my dad would bring back from his travels coins from different countries, so I started collecting those.

In addition to those things, I also collected specimens of seashells from all over the world and historical, nineteenth-century American quilts. Some of those quilts were so staggeringly beautiful that I paid for a year of my daughter's education at Sarah Lawrence by selling just one of them. And then, of course, Japanese prints, and books of all sorts. I kept about four thousand reference books in my San Rafael office—Keiko didn't want me working at home,

where she had her studio. Later, I sold my library to the Sumida Hokusai Museum. Finally, and ongoing, I have always collected friends, information, memories, experiences.

In 2015, Roger, you contributed to *Impressions* 36 “‘Chance Favors the Prepared Mind’: Memories of Arthur (1922–2012) and Charlotte (1924–2000) Vershbow.” They assembled serious collections of prints, Western illustrated books and Japanese printed books, the latter now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. How did your collaboration with them start and transpire?

The Vershbows had been friends of Ray Lewis in Boston in the 1950s when he worked for Charlie Childs; they would attend print-viewing sessions there every Saturday afternoon. I visited Arthur and Charlotte from the 1960s, when I started working for Ray, offering prints; I would sometimes stay with them in Newton, just outside Boston. But in 1996, after I moved to Cranston, Rhode Island, where Elizabeth lived, we became quite good friends. That’s when I really encouraged them to strengthen their holdings of early modern (seventeenth century on) Japanese *ehon* (block-printed picture books) and advised them on purchases (figs. 11a, b).

What was it like to be guest curator of the great exhibition of Japanese books “Ehon” for the New York Public Library? How long did that take to organize?

I just loved it. Anne van Biema gave ten or fifteen thousand dollars to Robert (Bobby) Rainwater (1943–2018), the long-time curator of prints at the library, to do something with their Japanese books. She may have suggested my name to him. In the summer of 2001—the summer before

FIGS. 11a, b. In 2013, the New York philanthropist Mary Wallach funded the purchase of over 400 volumes of *ehon* from the Vershbow Collection for the Metropolitan Museum. On March 18, 2014, Roger Keyes spoke about the books in storage at the Metropolitan Museum. His audience included (left to right) Anita Beenk (seated), Mike Hearn, Ed Freis, Mindy Dubonsky, Judy Blum, Ellen Gibbs; Sakai Kōmei and Ben Vershbow, the grandson of Arthur and Charlotte Vershbow. Photos: Julia Meech



OPPOSITE

FIG. 12. Dust jacket of *Ehon: The Artist and the Book in Japan*

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のまらぬ月さ
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年代を契入聲

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か

ROGER S. KEYES

EHON THE ARTIST AND THE BOOK IN JAPAN



FIG. 13. Otto Riese. From Rose Hempel, *Meisterwerke des Japanische Farbholzschnitte: Die Sammlung Otto Riese* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1993), 8

On May 31, 1978, a year after Riese's death, fifty-two Japanese prints from his collection were sold at a Sotheby's, London, auction.

Sebastian Izzard recalls that Riese's niece, "whose name I have forgotten, was left the collection. She looked after him and he was very fond of her. I went to see her on a number of occasions in Lausanne (I think), when I worked for Christie's. She would sit you down, give you a glass of schnapps and then it would be on to print viewing. Hempel persuaded her to lend the collection to the museum in Cologne in 1995, which was a shame. I was trying to get the prints for Christie's. I got the Scheiwe Collection instead."

The Riese Collection was on long-term loan at the Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne. Several years ago, the collection was purchased by the Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt.



9/II—Bobby invited me to spend two months in New York going through all the books with him. I had been the one who got the library's Spencer Collection to buy the Charles Mitchell Collection of printed, illustrated Japanese books—about a thousand of them. No one had ever looked at them. Charlie Mitchell himself hadn't had the time—he stored them separately. Bobby didn't know anything about the Japanese material; maybe that was why Anne gave him that money. He had me work on those items with the idea of mounting an exhibition. I started that summer. Bobby and I had lunch together almost every day in Bryant Park, a large, lovely space for sitting and strolling behind the library.

Then came the process of getting the exhibition catalogue published. By the time the show opened five years later, in 2006, the book was out (*Ehon: The Artist and the Book in Japan* [University of Washington Press, Seattle, and New York Public Library, 2006]) (fig. 12). It was the most satisfying exhibition, among several dozen that I've ever worked on, to this day.

What do you consider the characteristics of a great collector?

Responsiveness, curiosity, intelligence, a good eye, sensitive acquisitiveness.

But is there such a thing as a *great* collector? Each collector is an individual, so how can you clump them together? Mary Ainsworth, a woman, collected pictures of warriors, whereas many of the male collectors went for pictures of beautiful women. It's a matter of personal taste.

I think that the mark of great collectors is that they are so *open* to what they are looking at, whether they intend to buy or not. I suppose that's what they liked in me, as well. Respect and cultivated intelligence underlie everything; it isn't IQ or book learning. If you see something and you respond to it, that's what counts.

Do you have an exemplar?

Yes. I remember visiting Professor Otto Riese (1894–1977), when he was in his early eighties. He had retired from the World Court and had invited me to Lausanne to write about his modestly sized collection of three hundred choice prints (fig. 13). I arrived with two reference books and began to look at his prints in chronological order, as Dr. Rose Hempel had numbered them, and I remember spending a whole morning working on only *one print*. I left what I had written behind for him to read. When I returned after lunch at two o'clock, Professor Riese jerked the front door open and bellowed, "Rogerrrr!" I trembled. Wasn't it good enough? Then he continued, "Roger! This is wonderful!!" And that inspired me. If *he* could be that open and encouraging, then I could rise to the occasion and do my very best, too.



FIG. 14. Suzuki Jūzō and Roger in Milwaukee, while traveling across the United States together visiting museums in 1972

Riese smoked cigars while he viewed prints. On an earlier visit, when I was selling prints, I showed him a superb Kuniyoshi landscape. “But what about this hole?” he asked. I replied, “It wasn’t there before you started looking at it.” That was true; he bought it.

Can you cite other impressive collectors?

Suzuki Jūzō collected very special things (fig. 14). He was passionate about Kuniyoshi and wrote a book about him—I think every item in that book belonged to Suzuki. I remember going with Elizabeth to visit him. He showed us an eighteenth-century print of a horseman standing on a Go board, and Kuniyoshi’s adaptation. He also showed us some fine Hokusai *yomihon* (“books for reading”). He was especially proud of them. Suzuki-sensei was one of the fastest and most articulate talkers I ever met. Once he got started, there was no stopping him.

There were two San Francisco collectors who impressed me. Edwin Grabhorn (1889–1968) was a successful printer and book collector who published a lot of books in limited editions. His absolute passion was for Japanese prints. He started collecting during the Depression when he came across an album of color prints at a time when great holdings, like the Hamilton Easter Field Collection, were being dispersed. He loved to boast about the low prices he paid when he started to collect. For example, he bought a large Kaigetsudō courtesan print for eight hundred dollars. That seemed an enormous sum to me in the 1960s, but it might cost a hundred times that now. He had an amazingly comprehensive eye. He didn’t scorn anything, but he wasn’t indiscriminate. He was very fastidious in his taste, especially about condition.

A memorable experience is when Keiko and I lived with Ed Grabhorn for two months in 1963, after his second wife, Marjorie, died. He was just lost and bereaved. He would take us to the attic room where he had all of his prints in boxes. Once he pulled out two impressions of Hiroshige’s *Fireworks at Ryōgoku Bridge* and showed me the differences (fig. 15). It was the first time I’d seen the first edition of that print and it was a staggering sight. That was one of the main ways I learned. People who really knew and cared pointed things out to me.

Hans Popper, who died in 1971 at age sixty-six, salvaged scrap metal in the Pacific after World War II and founded the Western Steel and Metal Corporation in San Francisco. A talented violinist, he sponsored young musicians. He collected Chinese ceramics, Japanese prints and Emil Nolde watercolors. The view of the Golden Gate Bridge from his window reminded him of Hiroshige’s *Whirlpools* triptych, which he owned. His Japanese prints were sold in 1972 by Sotheby’s, New York.





< FIG. 15. Utagawa Hiroshige. *Fireworks at Ryōgoku Bridge*, from the series *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*. Japan. Edo period, 1858. Color woodblock print; 37.5 x 25.4 cm. Lee E. Dirks Collection
This is the print, an early impression of *Fireworks*, formerly in the Grabhorn Collection, that impressed Roger.

FIG. 16. Katsushika Hokusai. *Clear Weather, Southern Breeze*, also known as “Red Fuji,” from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. Japan. Edo period, c. 1831. Color woodblock print. 26 x 38.7 cm. Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Barker (Margaret Clark Rankin, class of 1908), The Margaret Rankin Barker-Isaac Ogden Rankin Collection of Oriental Art, sc 1968.245

Roger points out that this is an impression from the first of three printings in the first of eleven states of the print. It is the print Hokusai saw, as the artist wanted us to see it, but it might look strange, because nearly all the impressions we have seen in books, auctions and exhibitions are later.

Werner Schindler (1905–1986), an architect in Biel, Switzerland, formed an important collection of Japanese landscape prints. I showed him a complete set with its original printed paper covers of Gakutei's views of Mount Tenpō in Osaka. I had always thought the opening sheet was dull and uninteresting, but it came to life in my eyes as he looked at it. That was the first time I discovered that seeing is contagious.

Dr. Walter Wehrli, a chemist in Basel, had a small collection of prints, including the earliest impression that I had ever seen until then of Hokusai's famous "Red Fuji." He had bought it for one hundred dollars at Childs Gallery in Boston; the gallery had owned it for years, but couldn't sell it because it was "so faded." Actually, it was perfect, like the "Pink Fuji" in the Smith College Museum of Art that I published in *Impressions* 29 in 2007 (fig. 16).

What is the makeup of your nightmare collector?

I don't think I've ever met one.

Did you have a mentor in the Japanese field?

Jack Hillier (1913–1995) became a really close, personal friend to me and Keiko. The Hilliers, Keiko and I spent time cataloguing and conserving the seven thousand prints in the Cinquantenaire, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels. Jack wrote the catalogues for Sotheby's auctions for twenty-five years, including for the Vever Collection, which had kept Ray Lewis and me so busy. I would go to see him in Redhill, Surrey, about an hour by train from Victoria Station. At that time, by the 1970s, I was only interested in prints and he was only interested in Japanese illustrated books, so it was kind of a mismatch. But Jack was *so enthusiastic* about his books, and he was also fastidious about their printing and condition. The books were often enchanting, and his response to them brought them alive for me. "This is the earliest impression of this book in the world," he might exclaim. That was a model for me—his enthusiasm. Jack had prodigiously wide-ranging interests. In the 1940s, he visited watermills in Surrey, the subject of his first book. Also, he was self-taught, as am I, and had no pretense or embarrassment about having been an insurance agent to earn a living.

He found a way to build a foundation for his real passion, collecting. He collected Japanese prints, but then sold them all to collect more illustrated, printed books, which were sold to the British Museum in 1979. He was in correspondence continually with Charlie Mitchell in Tokyo to exchange things. He was deeply engaged with songs by the nineteenth-century Austrian composer Hugo Wolf. He would sit at the piano and sing Wolf *lieder*. It was just another thing that he really loved.

Have you mentored anyone?

I once gave a talk at Harvard when Izzy (Israel) Goldman was in his junior year there. He came up to me afterward, enthralled, and asked if he could study with me, so I invited him to spend the summer in California, and

I encouraged him to put that time to good use. I got him to write about Utamaro “big heads.” Heinz Kaempfer published his findings. Then he and Cynthea Bogel published a book about the bird-and-flower prints by Hiroshige at the RISD Museum. He shows his experience and taste in the catalogues he publishes regularly as a dealer based in London. I don’t know if Izzy would say that I was one of his mentors.

As an aside, *Impressions* approached Izzy Goldman, who responded:

I first met Roger in the spring of 1980, during my junior year at Harvard, after attending his introductory lecture on Japanese prints at the Fogg Art Museum. I owned a few prints that I had bought in London when I was eleven and had read quite a bit about them in my art history studies, but I had never heard anyone speak with such passion, knowledge and insight on ukiyo-e. I approached Roger afterward to thank him and he took an immediate interest in me, for which I’m forever grateful. I wound up spending that summer with him in California doing research on Utamaro for my senior honors thesis and discussing all manner of things relating to art, life and philosophy.

Before becoming a full-time scholar, Roger had been making a name for himself as a print specialist, working with Ray Lewis—they purchased many of the finest masterpieces in the first Vever auction at Sotheby’s, London, in 1974—and Roger warmly endorsed my own initial interest in joining the trade. There is no school for art dealers, but Roger did his best to instill in me the ethics passed on by Ray Lewis, his own mentor.

After graduating, I moved to London to begin my career and Roger was always available to offer advice and encouragement. I’m sure that if I had not met him, my life would have taken a very different and less fortuitous direction.

Roger, in my Harvard days, when you came and talked to us graduate students, I had never seen anyone look so carefully, comparing two impressions of the same print. You would teach us to look for the breaks in the lines, and for how well it was printed. All those incredible connoisseurship things. And because you were also a specialist in *surimono*, we looked at the wonderful Duell Collection of *surimono* in the Fogg Art Museum. We took them out, one by one, and you made us take the time to look at every one of them and think about their literary meaning and the context. And then, more recently, the Late Hokusai project at the British Museum that is just coming to an end, would never have been the success that it has if *you* had not been my mentor.

Thank you for that—but I wouldn’t presume to think that I had mentored you, because you were always the way I see you now.

You are well known for your remarkable public lectures. Joan B. Mirviss, a New York art dealer, told us about one such event; here is her account:

It was a warm and humid day in late April 1983 when I arrived at the Cleveland Museum of Art to see the final exhibition organized by the



Fig. 17. Matsudaira Susumu and his wife, Yoko, at their home in Kobe. May 1987

Roger remembers, “Matsudaira Susumu lived in Kobe and was the first postwar Japanese scholar of Osaka Kabuki actor portraits. His dated checklists of the six important Osaka print artists of the 1820s were very helpful in our own research, and he arranged access to study the large and important collection of Osaka prints at Ikeda Bunko near Osaka. We met in London in 1970 and remained friends until his death.”

retiring director, Sherman Lee, “Reflections of Reality in Japanese Art.” Conjoint with this brilliant, conceptually focused show, was a refined selection of related ukiyo-e prints. My motivation for being there at that time was to hear a lecture by Roger Keyes that late afternoon. I sat next to fellow-dealer Gary Levine in the jam-packed auditorium as Roger took the stage and the first slides came up. Suddenly, as we heard loud claps of thunder, the power in the entire room went out and only the “Exit” signs were illuminated. Roger calmly asked those in the front row if anyone had a flashlight, and one woman graciously complied. Holding the flashlight beneath his chin, giving us something to focus on, he then proceeded to deliver an insightful, unforgettable lecture and a virtual walking tour through the

exhibition with neither notes nor images. All these years later, this remains my benchmark of performance by an art historian.

Are there Japanese scholars with whom you have worked over the years?

Matsudaira Susumu (1933–2000) was working on Osaka prints at the same time that Keiko and I were, but in an entirely different manner—making lists, dating things (fig. 17). His articles on the six great Osaka actor portraitists of the 1820s–30s were an enormous benefit to us. And I could not have transcribed and translated the verse in my *surimono* books without his inestimable and immeasurable help. Matsudaira was systematic and methodical and truly understood the dynamic of scholarship. He had great integrity, and his work set a benchmark for Japanese scholars of his generation.

Suzuki Jūzō is *sui generis*, as I discussed earlier. He originally went into literature, graduating from Tokyo University. They wanted to take him on as a professor, but he also had an offer from the National Diet Library, which he accepted. The pay was less, but he had the opportunity to study material he would otherwise not have had access to. Nowadays, with everything digital, it’s different. But in those days, you didn’t have access to collections held in libraries. He had an amazing visual memory and rapport with artists and writers. He was one of the first scholars to appreciate and focus on *ehon*, or picture books. Now there are others, like Robert Campbell, Director-General of the National Institute of Japanese Literature (NIJL), Tokyo, who carry on that type of work.

And there was Yoshida Teruji (1901–1972), whom I admired for his enthusiasm and minutely detailed meticulous scholarship about actor prints. Before I ever met Richard Lane, his book on the Honolulu Academy of Art prints came out. I read Lane’s entries on the actor prints, a subject that always fascinated me. And here was this man, Lane, who came up with these fantastic datings, and they were *right*. I thought he was a great scholar. But eventually, I learned that the information was based on research already undertaken by Yoshida Teruji. Yoshida had an office for himself in the Kabukiza, the Kabuki theater at Higashi-Ginza in Tokyo. I would visit him there. He knew everything about Kabuki and knew all the leading actors, but he was very modest.

What do you think of Richard Lane’s opinion that Hokusai was a modernist forerunner of Cézanne (Cézanne’s grumblings about Japanese prints notwithstanding)?

Meaningless.

What do you see in their respective approaches to Mount Fuji and Mont Ste. Victoire?

A world of difference.

Has the world of Japanese prints changed since you first entered the field?

There are far more collectors, scholars, exhibitions, publications and dealers, plus more interest in prints by a greater range of people. As a result, so much more has become known about prints from myriad points of view. Generally, people are far more appreciative of Japanese prints.

When I wrote the prospectus for my Japanese Print Center in the early 1980s, I said there were two things this center could do. First, gather information on all those Japanese prints and eventually get them published, and that’s what happened. I thought that by combining all the information with photographs, I could generate a database. The database idea was the basis for the ninety-volume typescript for the catalogue raisonné of Hokusai’s single-sheet prints (and the prints, mostly *surimono*, of his main pupils) now donated to the British Museum (see figure 10).

In addition to the factual material in the binders, I have also written an illustrated introduction to the catalogue describing its background and our method, and two collections of unpublished fiction: “Hokusai as We Knew Him” (over forty stories written in the voices of people who actually worked with or knew Hokusai during his lifetime, mostly based on contemporary published sources), and “The Reasons I Draw” (a dozen pieces written, as it were, in Hokusai’s own voice at the end of his life). I should also mention my poem “Hokusai Says” (Venice, 1990), accessed by many people on the internet.

This multiplicity of response and engagement is one of the ways that my writing about Hokusai reminds me of a cathedral. In spring 1959, before I

got to Harvard as a freshman, I read Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, and that summer I spent several days at the great cathedral in Chartres. Those things were so comprehensive—and that's what struck me in the three or four days I spent at Chartres, realizing that everything was related to everything else—the programs of the carvings were all related to one another. Looking back on my study of Hokusai, I realized *that* was what I had done—bringing everything together to create a structure that people could use any way they wanted to. Those became touchstones for me, and they were the standard I aspired to from the early 1970s until today, in my own work.

The second thing was to come to terms with what's at the heart of the experience of Japanese prints—the subject for a future essay.

Are you optimistic about the future of this field?

Yes, *very* optimistic!

Are there other fields of art, or another discipline, that you would have cared to pursue?

Yes, early Sieneese painting; fifteenth-to-early-twentieth-century Western prints; Tang, Song and Ming Chinese calligraphy, painting and ceramics; archeology; Greek and Roman coins; Romanesque and Gothic architecture; astronomy; and more poetry. You name it!

At Harvard, one of my real passions was early Sieneese painting. As I discussed earlier, Fernando Zobel had gone to Harvard, so he knew Benjamin Rowland Jr. (1904–1972), the professor of Indian art who also had a passion for medieval Tuscan painting. In my second year, I went to his office and said, “What about Sieneese painting?” He replied, “You know, I've been thinking about giving such a course—I haven't done so in twenty years.” He had a wonderful knack of lecturing, speaking off the cuff, not from memory. But he always finished just seconds before the bell rang for the next class, which amazed me.

Thanks to Fernando, I got interested in Chinese art—especially calligraphy and ceramics—also Chinese bronze mirrors—I put together a collection of those, too, plus Greek and Roman coins. When I got to New York for a couple of days in the summer before I started at Harvard, Fernando took me to see Hans M. F. Schulman (1913–1990), a dealer in coins. I had many marvelous large eighteenth-century Spanish silver coins that I had brought from the Philippines and I swapped them all for one large Greek tetradrachm from Gela in Sicily, in perfect condition. I never regretted that.

In terms of other interests, I've written poetry since I was very young, but I began doing it seriously when I was caring for our two-year-old daughter. Keiko and I were living in Kyoto while she was doing her internship with Oka Iwatarō, the paper conservator, and I was looking after Aenea. I had Japanese-language lessons in the morning, then studied later at home, with Aenea in the room. When Aenea was in the playground, I would be out

there with her writing haiku. I still have those notebooks filled with poetry, and I continue that interest to this day.

May we talk a bit about your relationship with Katsushika Hokusai? You are known as one of the most sensitive interpreters of Hokusai's art. What has he told you?

Persevere, experiment, explore; never give up, value everything, have patience. Those are qualities I see in him, admire in him and that inspire me. Hokusai *embodies* those qualities and they become part of his art. That's the puzzle. How can a person's entire life experience be preserved and communicated through a picture? It's a great mystery to me. But if you're a practicing artist, that's the deal. I'm going to be seventy-seven next month, and that was a good age for Hokusai. He didn't design any prints the last few years of his life; I think he was reflecting on what he *had* accomplished. He probably came to some similar insight. These are obviously very Western words and categories, but behind them are experiences he reveals and helped catalyze and perpetuate in the world today.

How do you believe Hokusai would react to the ubiquity of his "Great Wave"?

Surprise? Curiosity? Delight? Bewilderment? Disinterest? These are all question marks.

Probably all of the above. He moved on and wanted to live to be a hundred or a hundred and ten. He thought about the long run or the long haul. All is *not* over at a hundred and ten. He had that kind of appetite for life, and I think that's admirable. I'm sure he moved on. Keep going!

What about Hokusai's spiritual nature?

He was definitely a Buddhist practitioner. Single-pointed concentration was one of his main spiritual practices and the foundation of his drawing and design skill. The mantra he chanted late in his life was part of a passage in the last chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, the foundation text of Nichiren Buddhism.

He worshipped the North Star. The "Hoku" in his name "Hokusai" means "north" and deliberately linked him with the star, although this may not have been widely known at the end of 1795, when he adopted the name. It is clear from his work that he had an extremely rich inner life. Hokusai must have been a pantheist, because it wasn't just his worship of the North Star that we've known about. The thing that strikes me now is how *secretive* he was about it. Nowadays, we know that Hokusai means "North [Star] Studio," which means he worshipped the North Star, but nobody else would have known that at the time. There were clues in his names, like "Taito" (Receiving the North Star), a name he took when he gave up "Hokusai"—but those were personal matters not known to the people who bought his prints during his lifetime. His nature was probably enigmatic then. Now

OPPOSITE

FIG. 18. Katsushika Hokusai. *Fisherman*. Japan. Edo period, 1849. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk. 113.7 x 39.6 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1904.181

This is one of the artist's last paintings, after he had reached the age of ninety. It is likely a self-portrait. Unusually introspective and contemplative, it may allude to the legend of the feather cloak (*hagoromo*), which was the subject of a famous Noh play about a fisherman who finds a beautiful robe on a tree near the shore; Hokusai included brilliant feathers in the fisherman's basket. The robe belongs to a heavenly being who promises to perform a dance never seen by mortals if he returns it to her. How can I trust you?" he asks. "Immortals never lie," she replies.

we've gotten used to all these Hokusai names (and there are many, many more), but I think when he first put them out there, he didn't expect that people would know what he meant.

First it's North Star, or Polaris, and then it's Fuji—two things that never move. His relationship with Mount Fuji grew in the course of his career, particularly toward the end. He first drew Mount Fuji in 1796, and that's pretty much when he started using "Hokusai Sōri" as his name. There's that *surimono* of people walking along the Sumida River looking west and seeing Mount Fuji on the horizon. It's at least a coincidence that right at the time he was choosing the name Hokusai, he was also *drawing* Mount Fuji. He might not have been conscious of it or meant anything by it, but there were these two touchstones—the North Star and Mount Fuji—and they aligned in the first month of 1796 (or the last month of 1795), when he changed his name.

The way it developed, he used all those different seals and names, but, really, I don't think that before the 1830s and the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* series he had much preoccupation with Fuji itself. I don't think he was previously obsessed or absorbed by it. It was just circumstantial. It happens that he got a commission to do the blue series (*aizuri*) of the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. I think he and his publisher Eijudō cooked up that number and decided that would be a good starting point. He did all those images in different shades of blue. Then he added one color, then he added another color, and then, by the time he's gotten far along, a year or two later, he's using *many* colors—brown, yellow, red and so forth, as well as blue.

May we ask if you have a spiritual sympathy with him or have guiding principles in your own life?

Guiding principles: love, respect, integrity, diligence, perseverance, kindness.

In 1974, before the first Vever sale, I was practicing Transcendental Meditation. I took Buddhist precepts with the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn in 1989, just before Keiko died, and he gave dharma talks about marriage and such. It was so moving, because I didn't know Keiko was dying at that point. That was the year my book *The Male Journey in Japanese Prints* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) came out and the year I taught a course on Buddhism and creativity at the San Francisco Art Institute. All these things set me going forward. I became a dharma teacher in the 1990s. Dharma teaching is the guiding principle of the Korean Zen meditation that Elizabeth and I now practice. In a way, it's just words, but you get the depth and what is at the core of the thing. That's what I value in my life.

It is probably natural that I would recognize and value manifestations of Hokusai's inner life in *his* work. Thanks to Hokusai's encouraging example, I started making my own pictures from the 1980s onward.



名士去
七年
百

You contributed the essay “Hokusai: The Final Years” to the catalogue of the 2017 exhibition “Hokusai: Beyond the Great Wave” that I curated for the British Museum. We’ve been working together on the Hokusai project for five years, and it is coming to an end in a few weeks. What did it mean to you?

Before I moved to England, you and I were both at the Freer|Sackler Gallery in Washington in 2006 for Ann Yonemura’s “Hokusai” exhibition. We had just seen a very late Hokusai painting, a fisherman looking out to sea—probably a self-portrait—and we each reacted to it spontaneously: We both burst into tears (fig. 18). To me, that was the genesis of our Hokusai project.

In 2014, when I saw myself as more and more involved in the Hokusai exhibition project, I came down with a brain tumor. I was shocked. Now I have to take medication that makes me very sleepy and puts me out of commission for a couple of weeks out of the month. By the time I get back to my so-called self, it’s time for another dose of the medicine and I’m again foggy and vague, sleeping a lot. It can’t be helped. The medication is keeping me alive.

I ended up writing the preface to the BM Hokusai catalogue, and you, Tim Clark, were kind enough to put my notes on the “Thirty-six Views” into the catalogue, for which I am indebted to you. The degree to which I could participate wasn’t what I expected or what I wanted. Maybe it was all for the best, because everyone else got to do what he or she wanted, instead of my hogging it all for myself. It was really an altogether different experience from what I had expected. I then got to see the show almost as a stranger—as a discovery. There were so many interesting items that might not have been there if I had been more actively involved. But still, it would have been fun.

We did get to make a film about Hokusai together—it will stand as a wonderful record of how we both approach and have come to see his life and work.

In the lead-up to the exhibition in 2017, I wrote around forty short, imaginative essays in the voices of people who knew Hokusai in his lifetime, and “The Reasons I Draw,” another dozen or so essays in what I imagine to be Hokusai’s own voice. These pieces showed me a different insight into Hokusai, and—*mutatis mutandis*—about “myself.”

If you hadn’t been a specialist in the Japanese graphic arts, what occupation do you think you’d have been good at?

I might have been good at whatever I did. Life keeps presenting opportunities. I’m just so grateful to have had the opportunity to sit down with you and put everything out (fig. 19). You, as a wonderful listener, allowed me to expand. Thank you so much, Tim. Onward to one hundred and ten! 🍀

FIG. 19. Roger at Queen's Centre for Oncology and Haematology at Castle Hill Hospital, Cottingham. Poppy Day, November 11, late 2010s



EDITOR'S NOTE

For O. P. Reed Jr., see *Impressions* 24 (2002)

For Edwin Grabhorn, see *Impressions* 25 (2003)

For Robert Sawers, see *Impressions* 25 (2003)

For Richard Lane, see *Impressions* 26 (2004)

For William Green and Anne van Biema, see *Impressions* 27 (2005)

For Rand Castile, see *Impressions* 28 (2006)

For Vershbow, see *Impressions* 36 (2015)

For William Green, see also *Impressions* 39 (2018)

Part Two of a Double Issue

Following Tim Clark's initial conversation with Roger on March 26, 2019, *Impressions* expanded this article with supplemental material generously provided by Roger and others.

ROGER & FRIENDS



A. Matthi Forrer and Roger at Matthi's apartment, Amsterdam. 1970s

Matthi was studying Hokusai prints at the museum in Brussels when Jack Hillier and I made our first visit there in the late 1960s or early 1970s. We had many common interests in Japanese prints and together wrote an article on Hokusai's set of thirty-six *surimono* on the theme of Shells. I often visited Matthi on my visits to Amsterdam.

B. Kneeland ('Ding') McNulty, Curator of Works on Paper, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Munakata Shikō and Mary Baskett at Munakata's Tokyo studio. October 1973

C. (above) Roger and Tim Clark at Kegon Waterfall, Nikkō. August 1985

D. The artist Masami Teraoka with his partner, Lynda Hess, and Keiko and Roger in Woodacre, CA. June 1989

Keiko made the folding screen during her 1968–69 apprenticeship with Oka Iwatarō at Bokkōdō, Kyoto.



E. (top) Roger, teaching at Allen Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH. June 1989

F. (top right) Keiko and Roger with *impatiens* flowers Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH. June 1989

G. (center left) Aenea Keyes, Roger, Mizushima Usaburō (Keiko's father) and Nishiyama Kōsen at the memorial service for Keiko, Daiman-ji Temple, Sendai, Japan. December 1989 or January 1990

H. (bottom left) David Caplan and Roger in Venice. May 1990
David Caplan arrived in Japan to sell Australian opals in the late 1960s. He bought his first Japanese print, a mica-ground Sharaku actor portrait, from Bob Sawers at International House in Tokyo. He eventually settled in Tokyo and opened Mita Arts, a gallery in the Kanda District, now managed by his son, Ken.

I. (bottom right) Ed Freis, Roger and Henk Herwig, looking at Yoshitoshi prints at Henk's home in Aerdenhout, Netherlands. 1990s



J. Roger in his study, Cranston, RI. Late 1990s

K. Tim Clark and Roger in a viewing session in the Japanese study room, British Museum. July 27, 2011

The scroll is an *ensō* by the Japanese Rinzai Zen monk Ranzan Shōryū (1713–1792), given to the museum in honor of Roger Keyes and Elizabeth Coombs by their friend Belinda Sweet (2015,3049.1).

L. Roger's seventieth birthday party, April 2012. Left to right: Aenea Keyes, Roger, Izzy Goldman and Elizabeth Coombs

M. A viewing session in the Japanese study room, British Museum. July 2015. Elizabeth Coombs; Alfred Haft; Ryōko Matsuba; Roger Keyes; Angus Lockyer and Izzy Goldman



N. Roger and Elizabeth, larking about in the courtyard of an inn at Loch Tay, Scotland. September 2016

