

# The Great Wave: Hokusai

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But we will take the problem in its most obscure manifestation, and suppose that our spectator is an average Englishman. A trained observer, carefully hidden behind a screen, might notice a dilation in his eyes, even an intake of his breath, perhaps a grunt. (Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*)

It is because the sea is blue,  
Because Fuji is blue, because the bent blue  
Men have white faces, like the snow  
On Fuji, like the crest of the wave in the sky the color of their  
5 Boats. It is because the air  
Is full of writing, because the wave is still: that nothing  
Will harm these frail strangers,  
That high over Fuji in an earthcolored sky the fingers  
Will not fall; and the blue men  
10 Lean on the sea like snow, and the wave like a mountain leans  
Against the sky.

In the painter's sea  
All fishermen are safe. All anger bends under his unity.  
But the innocent bystander, he merely  
15 'Walks round a corner, thinking of nothing': hidden  
Behind a screen we hear his cry.  
He stands half in and half out of the world; he is the men,  
But he cannot see below Fuji  
The shore the color of sky; he is the wave, he stretches  
20 His claws against strangers. He is  
Not safe, not even from himself. His world is flat.  
He fishes a sea full of serpents, he rides his boat  
Blindly from wave to wave toward Ararat.



*The Great Wave at Kamagawa*

Katsushika Hokusai, 1831

woodblock print