KATSUSHIKA EI(JO) (KATSUSHIKA ŌI)

Katsushika Eijo (Ōi, art name) was a woman painter and woodblock print illustrator from Edo (present-day Tokyo), Japan, who worked in the ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World) style.

Eijo is thought to have been born in 1800 as the third daughter of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), a renown woodblock print artist, and his second wife, Kotome. She and her sisters Miyo, Tatsu, and Nao, were brought up assisting Hokusai in his studio, along with other apprentices both male and female. She was one of fifteen students who assisted Hokusai in illustrating the woodblock printed poem anthology *Mad Verse of Selected Provinces*, which was published in 1810 when she would have been ten years old.



Close-up of Ōi when she and her father (age 84) lived in a small, rented room in Hannokibaba in Sumida-ward. Tsuyuki Kōshō (Iitsu III, died after 1893), Hokusai and Eijo in their lodgings. Ink on paper, before 1893 or circa 1842-43. National Diet Library, Tokyo.

Eijo left Hokusai's studio in 1824 when she married one of his students, Tsutsumi Tōmei. The marriage didn't work out, lasting only three years after which they got a divorce. The rumor is that the couple had a falling out when Eijo was critical of Tōmei's painting skills. Eijo moved back into her parent's home and became the caretaker of Hokusai after her mother died in 1828.

By 1833 Eijo was a known professional artist in her own right using the artist name Katsushika Ōi (応為). This was a nod to her father's art name at that time, Katsushika Iitsu (為一). Her own skill at drawing merited her "reputation as a talented painter," according to her contemporary ukiyo-e artist, Keisai Eisen (1790-1848). (Kobayashi, 93) There is record of her receiving a commission in 1835 for an illustrated book.

Ōi excelled at painting *bijin* (beautiful women). According to Iijima Kyoshin (1841-1901) "She is said to be particularly skilled at *bijinga* and produced ghost pictures of Hokusai's paintings of *bijin*. . . . Hokusai reportedly remarked that 'When it comes to painting *bijin*, Ōi is unrivaled. She paints skillfully, and her painting style matches the correct methods of painting.'" (Iijima, 62b) She is also known for her use of light and shadow as exemplified in her painting *Night Scene in Yoshiwara*.



Katsushika Ōi (about 1800–after 1857). *Display Room in Yoshiwara at Night*. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper. 1840s. Ōta Memorial Museum of Art.

Ōi and Hokusai were so focused on work, that Ōi bought prepared food rather than cooked and did not keep house or sew. Whenever their lodging became too dirty and cluttered to tolerate, she and Hokusai would move. One time in 1839, a move was due to a fire in which they lost all of their sketches, supplies, and reference materials. Sometimes they moved out of Edo. They spent time on and off from 1834 to 1836 in Uraga on the bay south of Edo. Beginning in 1835, she travelled with Hokusai on short trips to the mountain town of Obuse (Nagano prefecture) and they made longer visits in 1844 and 1845.

When her father passed away in 1849, Ōi would have been around 50 years old. Sources differ on her final years of painting and living with family members and students, and little is known about her death around 1866.

Around 1848, an Edo city administrator Saitō Gesshin wrote that Ōi "paints and has done many designs for woodblock prints published under the name Iitsu." (Carpenter, 160) This raises questions among art historians about the extent of Ōi's collaboration and "ghost brushing" for her father's prolific repertoire. No single sheet woodblock prints with Ōi's name have been discovered. Only seven paintings and illustrations in three illustrated books are signed by Ōi.

Sources:
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