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"Hokusai's Great Wave Enters the Anthropocene"

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Katsushika Hokusai's 1829 woodblock print, "Under the Wave off Kanagawa," is the world's most iconic portrait of ocean waves. It has been reproduced, quoted, and repurposed over the last two centuries in a widening circle of representations of the unruly, powerful sea. Today's reimaginings of this storied Japanese image often remark upon the dangerous, damaged state of the contemporary ocean. Such commentaries sometimes refer directly to the 2011 tsunami and to its associated Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster. But adaptations of Hokusai's Wave these days also increasingly point to more general anxieties about catastrophic climate change and to worries about ocean pollution, acidification, and plastification. In such usages, the Wave operates as a synecdoche for, a symbolic capture of, the difficult-to-apprehend vastness of the ever-moving, interconnecting, and possibly threatening sea. (Text from author)

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