



# HOKUSAI-INSPIRED OCEAN WAVE

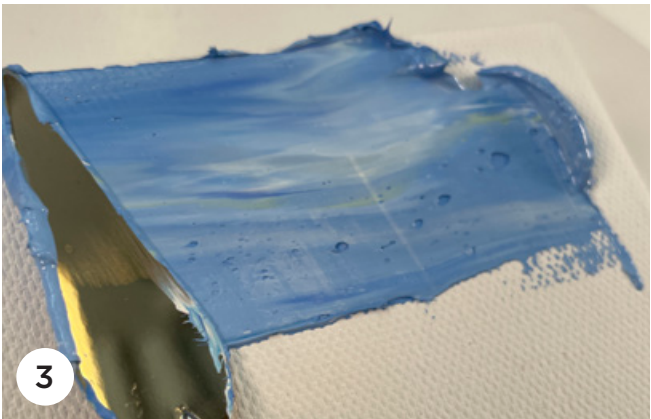
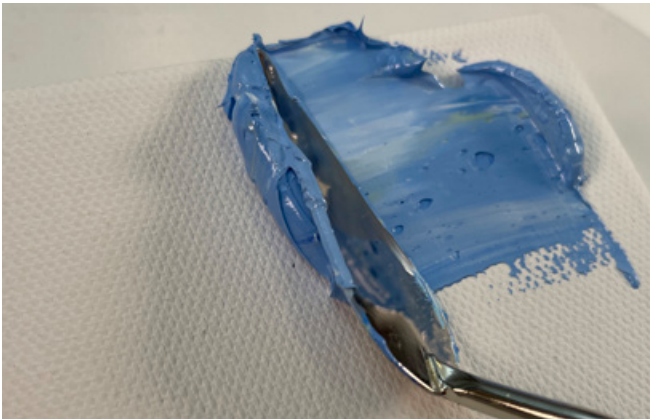
Tools & Materials	Color Palette	Difficulty Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stretched canvas, size 6" x 6" with a 1½-inch depth</li><li>• Palette knife: medium size, teardrop shape with rounded tip</li><li>• Table easel or lazy Susan</li><li>• Palette paper</li><li>• Paper towel or rag for wiping your knife</li></ul>	<div><div></div> Titanium white</div> <div><div></div> Cadmium yellow</div> <div><div></div> Cerulean blue</div> <div><div></div> Prussian blue</div> <div><div></div> French ultramarine or ultramarine blue</div>	<div>2</div> <div>45 mins</div>



## Inspiration

If you are a beginning palette knife painter, I recommend starting with this ocean wave painting. It's an excellent project in which to practice the flow and movement of the palette knife, with a simple palette of blues and white. It is inspired by the famous painting *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai.





## Step-By-Step Instructions

### Step 1: Lay out your colors & mix your blue sky color

- Squeeze out a large blob of white paint, about the size of 3 heaped tablespoons on the top left of your palette. We are going to use a lot of white in this project to build up the texture in the luscious, frothy wave. This extreme texture will also create movement and shadows, which will really give your wave a 3D look and feel to it. Squeeze out about 1 tablespoon each of cerulean blue and ultramarine blue, and about 1 teaspoon of yellow. Again, I like to put them in that

order across the top of my palette from left to right so that I can drag the paint down to mix it with my palette knife, adding to it as I go.

- Drag down about 2 tablespoons of white and about 1 teaspoon size amount each of cerulean blue and ultramarine blue, and mix them all together with your knife. You can go ahead and leave some streaks in your paint here, just by not mixing it entirely. We want this painting to have a beautiful gestural quality and a looseness to the wave.

- So, make a couple of variations in value here, with a slightly darker blue, and drag some more white in to make a lighter blue.



### Step 2: Lay in your blue sky

- Once you've mixed your colors, load your knife with a large tablespoon of your darkest shade of blue, and swipe this right across the top of your canvas from right to left.
- We want to use big flowy sweeps here, like spreading frosting on a cake.
- Reload your knife and repeat this motion from left to right, slightly under your first sweep, blending the two sweeps together as you go. In this painting, we are not trying to blend the sky perfectly, but rather we want some variations and streaks to show through, giving it interest and movement, and an uncontrived look and feel.

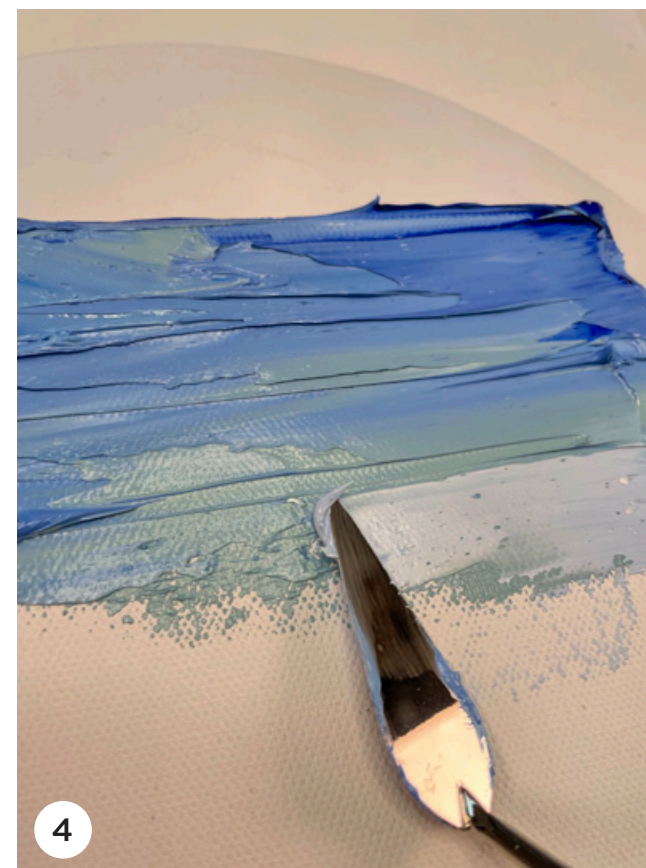
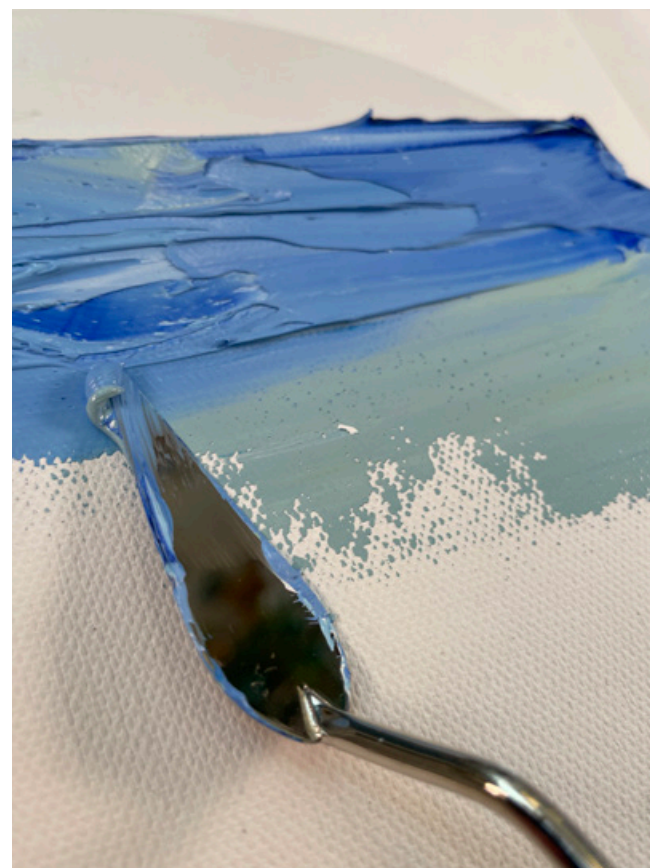
### Step 3: Painting off the edges

- One of my signature moves is to use thick paint protruding from the edges. This is a super fun technique that adds interest and a really dynamic flair, making your painting just leap off the canvas.
- Load your knife again with another tablespoon of slightly lighter blue this time. Start with your knife positioned slightly off the canvas, but with the paint touching the canvas lightly. Do not press too hard here. We are just gently placing and swiping the paint, leaving a smoothed-out blob protruding from the edge. If you press too hard, it will squish the paint over the edge, and then it will droop down the side. We want to leverage

the natural firmness of the paint to create a 3D dynamic, but paint has its limits, so there is a sweet spot here with the texture. Too much and it becomes heavy and unpainterly.

- You also can go back and add a little more texture off the edges if you have not progressed too far into your painting. I decided this piece would look more interesting if I added some off-the-edge texture on the left. I usually put some on both sides for compositional balance.
- Using the darker blue with streaks that I had on my palette, I went back and added a swipe straight over the top of the original one. Starting





with a tablespoon-sized blob on the left, I gently pressed the blob down and across from left to right, leaving the texture protruding slightly. This gives it a nice, natural border too.

- With my paintings, I am always trying to marry good technique and painterly details with texture, interest, and movement. Finding your balance here is a personal journey, with many hours of practice leading you to your own sweet spot.
- Repeat the motion of laying it on from right to left, sweeping it right across the canvas. Load your knife again with lighter blue and sweep it across from left to right, slightly under your previous swipe. By now you should have most of the top of your blue sky filled in.

- Now we are going to lighten the sky up a little around the horizon line. This creates depth and recession. With a clean knife, go ahead and drag down around 1 teaspoon of white, and a half a pea-sized amount of yellow. We're going to add these to the blue you have already mixed to lighten it up a bit. Do not add too much yellow; start with just a dab and add to it if you need more. We're aiming for a lovely aquamarine or very light turquoise color here.
- Repeating the steps with the first sweeps of blue, slightly under your last sweep, go ahead and add a long, flowy sweep of your lighter blue from right to left, as far across the canvas as you can go,

using all the paint. Repeat the action with a loaded knife from left to right to end up with a complete lighter blue swipe across the canvas.

#### Step 4: Creating your horizon line & blending your sky

- Now we want to lighten up our horizon line a little more, which will also create a focal point for the portion of the wave interior curve that peeks through.
- Go ahead and drag down about 1 teaspoon of white to your lightest blue and mix so that you have a very light blue, but more white than blue. Load your knife with about 1 teaspoon of the white-blue by scooping with the right edge. Then sweep all the way across as far as you can go.

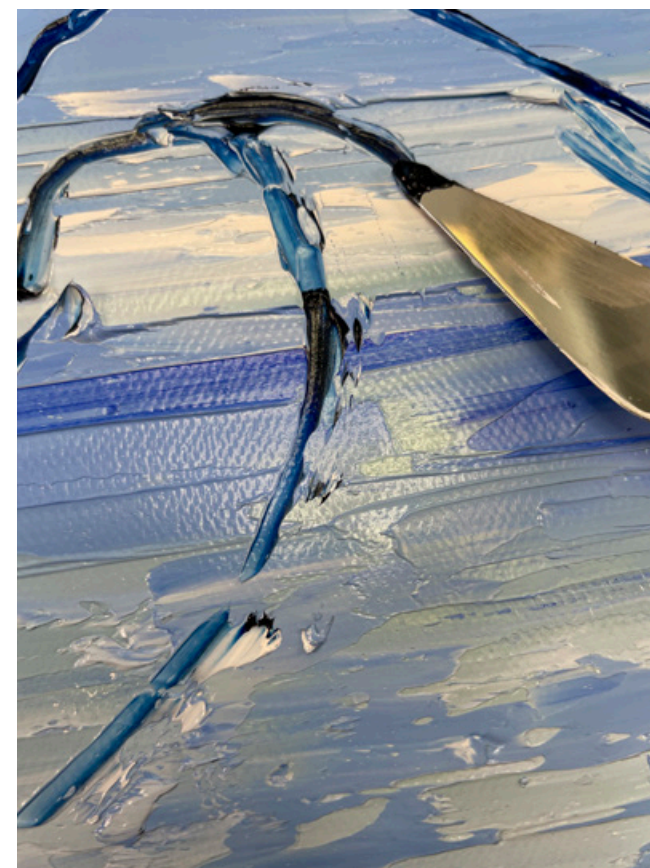
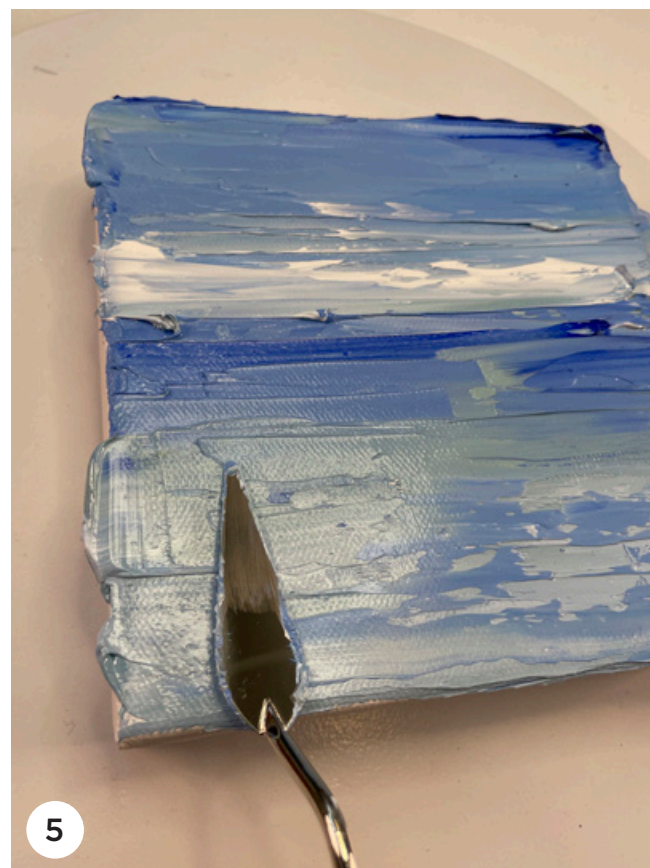
- I decided that the composition needed a more prominent white portion, so I went ahead and repeated this step using a clean knife, and about 1 teaspoon of pure white, more toward the tip of the knife (but not on the actual tip, remember no dabbing!).
- Now all the stripes in the sky need blending so that there are fewer visible lines. Go ahead and blend them by using side-to-side sweeping motions with the flat portion of your knife. Make sure you don't blend away your crisper white horizon line.

#### Step 5: Laying in your water

- Now we'll finish the rest of the underpainting before placing our delicious big wave on top. For this portion, we're mostly just laying in paint as the base portion of the wet-into-wet technique. If we go ahead and paint the wave in now, without the base paint underneath, it will be harder to carve out a natural flow.
- Mixing some of the darker blue you already have on your palette, load your knife with about a tablespoon of it, and repeat the side-to-side motion straight across the canvas from right to left. Line up the tip of the knife to where you want your horizon line to be. Remember not to put it directly in the halfway point of your painting. This is a compositional no-no.

- Also, be careful not to scrape off too much of your white right at the horizon line as you draw your knife across the canvas. Try to do this nice and steady and straight, and all the way across the canvas. It doesn't have to be perfect; straightish is fine. Do not go back in and fuss with it, as the dabbing will ruin the gestural look. Remember, if you need a do-over, you can just apply more white, and then do the horizon line again.
- So far it's looking good. We have a nice gradient in the sky, and the light blue and white has organically blended to look like clouds or fog, perfect for a coastal-inspired scene.





- Now we'll finish the under-painting by using up our blue and lightening things up as we bring the water forward. Drag down some white and a tiny dab of yellow to mix the light aqua blue. Load your knife and continue the side-to-side motion across the canvas. Add a little more white as you go to make it lightest at the front edge of the canvas. I decided to also paint off the edges again for interest.

#### Step 6: Sketching in the wave

- Now we're headed into the fun part! It's so much fun piling on the paint here to create an incredible, thick 3D wave, so let's dive on in!

- We're going to be sketching in the basic outline of where we want our wave to dance across our canvas.
- Drag down a small amount, about 1 teaspoon, of Prussian blue. Using a clean knife, mix the paint so that it is nice and pliable. With this portion of sketching, we are not building up texture, but dancing the tip of the knife along the surface of the paint underneath to "sketch."
- Load your knife with about a pea-sized amount of paint on the tip and on the bottom portion of the blade.
- Starting at the top left of the wave crest, start gently sketching with the tip, using

long strokes. Create an arc shape, ending with your knife pulling off the canvas on the right. When you run out of paint, load more on your knife and repeat.

- Next, we'll create the underneath portion of the wave, including the little keyhole through which the ocean will peek through. It's OK to go slow here and take your time.
- Load your knife again with a pea-sized amount of Prussian blue, and sketch in the underneath line, starting on the left and moving up and over, then downward and back toward the bottom left of your painting, leaving enough space for the keyhole. Try to use long, loose strokes here,

and remember, if you really don't like the shape of your wave, you can always scrape off the Prussian blue line with the clean tip of your knife, and then blend your underpainting, and then start over.

- Continuing on from the crest of the wave, we now want to create a line showing the underneath turquoise portion of the wave, and to separate the front from the back. Sketch a line all the way down to the bottom, following the curve and widening as you go down.
- Now fill in the tip of the wave, making it a little fluffy and voluminous. Waves are unpredictable and inconsistent, so we want to reflect that in our composition. The tighter and

more perfect it is, the less gestural it will look, and it quickly loses its playful appeal. We don't want our wave to look contrived or fiddled with. I use several smaller strokes to fill in the tip of the wave.

#### Step 7: Adding the turquoise underside of the wave

- Drag down around 2 teaspoons of cerulean blue and a pea-sized portion of yellow and mix them well until you get a rich, saturated turquoise color. Load your clean knife with about 1 tablespoon of this turquoise color, and starting at the underneath the crest portion, lay in a long swoop all the way off the edge of the canvas to the left. Try to keep it large, and do it all in one go. Remember, the less fussing, the better.

#### Step 8: Adding the white foam

- This is my favorite part! It's so much fun adding huge swaths of paint to create the movement of a wave here.
- Squeeze out about 3 large tablespoons of white. Make sure you're using a clean area of your palette and that your knife is clean. Squeeze out about a pea-sized amount of yellow and mix it loosely into the white. We want a few streaks here and there, so don't mix it thoroughly.
- Load your knife with 1 large tablespoon of white, and starting at the tip of the wave, place your knife gently on the canvas, and then run your knife up and toward the right in a long, flowy swoop,





applying pressure, but not smooshing the paint into the canvas. Follow the dark blue outline as you go, gently swiveling the knife to create the curve. Continue all the way, curving down until you run the tip of the knife off the edge of the canvas.

- \* It's a good idea to practice this first on your palette with pure white paint. That way you're getting comfortable with the movement, and you're not wasting any paint.
- Wipe your knife and reload with another large tablespoon. Repeat the sweep starting slightly below the tip of the wave and under your first sweep and slightly touching. Follow the curve of the dark blue, being careful to taper and

not go over your keyhole. The keyhole is important. It's a focal point of your painting, and the eye is naturally drawn there, so make sure you don't accidentally cover it up. Pull your knife up after you've put in the sweep on the tip of the wave.

- Now reload your clean knife with another large tablespoon of white, and continue with a large sweep down the right side of the wave, following the movement toward the right. We want the bottom portion to have specks of blue showing through to suggest foam and movement, and the palette knife has organically achieved this. One of the reasons why I love knife painting so much is the way you can achieve these striking effects quickly, and without a ton of work.

- Now we're going to finish off the front of the wave with some foam. With a clean knife, load 1 tablespoon of white, and starting at the bottom left and protruding slightly off the edge of the canvas, run a sweep from left to right, up the front of the wave but not all the way up.

**Step 9: Touch-ups**

- To complete this project, we're going to add some subtle highlights and details.
- Breaking up the large area of white foam on the bottom left, I add a sweep of turquoise very lightly over the top so that the blue is peeking through the white.

- Using some of the lighter blue left on my palette, I sweep my knife gently over the white paint on the bottom right portion to break up the large expanse of white. I add small highlights by skimming my knife right over the top.
- Next, load your clean knife with a pea-sized amount of Prussian blue, and sketch it carefully and subtly right on the edge of the white to create a dark ridge on the edge of the white. Run your knife using the tip and the top portion of the blade, all the way down the edge of the wave, keeping it inconsistent and natural, and without pressing too hard.

- Also create some rivulets and specks on the bottom portion by gently running the knife tip over the top of the white paint, being careful not to press too hard.

**Step 10: Sign your painting & paint the edges (optional)**

- Go ahead and sign your painting, either on the front or on the painted edge if you've run out of space, or if you feel more comfortable with it. I signed mine on the front, as I decided I had space.

- Again, with these little canvases, it's sometimes easier to just pick them up to paint the sides, swiveling them around on your fingers as you go. You don't have to be particular here, with no need to exactly match up the pattern. It's more of just a continuation of the colors, and getting rid of the white canvas. When you've filled in every portion with the blue paint that was left on your palette, you can go ahead and set it down to dry on a shelf, away from dust and other objects.





#### SUMMARY:

*Are You Getting the Flow of It?*



This painting is harder than it looks! The swoop of wave with huge movement behind it is best executed with large, flowing, and curved strokes of the knife. Easier said than done, I know.

It's a good idea to practice a little with pure titanium white on your palette before you attempt this, and remember, if you have to scrape it off, you can always mix blue into it and use it to paint your sides later. I like to use up all the paint when possible, so always keep the leftovers.

Striking a balance between good technique and the natural abandon that makes your knife painting visually exciting is a never-ending journey. I am always aiming for that sweet spot myself, and sometimes it works out and becomes a great, awesome, fabulous painting, and other times it's less exciting. Nonetheless, the practice will enhance your skill set and make you a better painter, so it's a win-win. By the way, when you finish your painting, always take a moment to pause, look at all the colors and shapes, and the emotion you conveyed in the piece, and really enjoy the feeling of productivity and creation. Creating is hard. Kudos to you!

*"If heaven had granted me five more years,  
I could have become a real painter."*

—KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI