

Locating and Relocating Cultural Engagements in a Transnational Age

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Abstract

How do the visual phenomena of Japan live in transnational communities today? How can they embrace international tropes, while retaining the distinctly local sensibilities of *Yamato-e* “Japanese picture”, cursive *kana* calligraphies, or *ukiyo-e* “floating world pictures”? This paper examines the apparent paradox of these questions through the divergent projects of Katsushika Hokusai, Kusama Yayoi, and Masami Teraoka. It examines the ways each has developed their own synthesis of the conventions of local and international cultural currencies. It finds, within Japan's transnational sources and relocations of visual arts, the retention of distinct (and distinctly independent) sensibilities of Yamato pasts. It also argues that the significance of their projects reaches far beyond any Japanese location, finding purchase with viewers across the globe.

Keywords: *Yamato-e*, intercultural learning, creative practice, nationalist art, transnational art worlds

Art Historical Context and Questions

An intimate relation between “national character” and art history was first posited by Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945). In *Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl* (1931), “Wölfflin revisited well-established contrasts between northern and southern [European] cultural traditions, aligning them with innate differences in national character rooted in race” (McWilliam, 2008, p. 416). Since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Anglophone accounts of the arts of Japan have repeatedly considered Yamato visual culture as a cohesive entity, framed in portmanteau constructs of “Japanese art history” or “Japanese art” still current in survey titles today (Stanley-Baker, 2000). In retrospect, Wölfflin’s proposition seems problematic. It provokes multiple questions: is there a singular and homogeneous entity we can recognize as “Japanese art”? Where is Japanese art? When is Japanese art? Who makes it? Who does it belong to? Who or what does it represent? These questions generate more subtle issues: just what is it about any object of aesthetic or cultural significance that that might allow us to classify it as an “artwork of Japan” and how does one define what a “Japanese artist” might be?

More recent perspectives have situated these arts more discretely. Accounts of *ukiyo-e*, for example, situate the phenomenon securely in Edo period¹ *chônin* “townsman” communities, and acknowledge parallel threads of other Kanô and Rinpa studio modes. Also, since the nineteenth century fashion for “Japonisme”, these arts have spread from Japan into international settings, especially in Western Europe and North America. The transnational presence and intercultural significance of the arts of Japan have become increasingly evident in more recent years, as art collections and exhibitions have manifested in public international settings. The outcomes have been richer intercultural appreciations of Japanese sensibilities, and reciprocally, opportunities for artists from Japan to travel and explore border-crossing and culturally hybrid art projects.

Craig Clunas argued that there can be no monolithic phenomenon of “Chinese art” – one might more reasonably refer to fields of “art in China” (Clunas, 1997). The same might be said for the diverse and heterogeneous fields of the arts of Japan. This article challenges the validity and usefulness of Wölfflin’s paradigm, either for identifying psycho-geographic fields of aesthetic identity or character, or for explaining the projects of artists as different as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1869), Kusama Yayoi (b. 1929), or Teraoka Masami (b. 1936). It argues that however these artists and their objects might be associated with Japan or Japanese cultural contexts, each individual’s creative pathway operates within fields too complex to define in such singular, mono-dimensional terms. Their works are more multi-dimensional than narrow categories might suggest; they draw on sources more diverse than those of Yamato traditions alone; and they acknowledge the existence of these aesthetic phenomena in worlds both in, and well beyond, the Japanese archipelago. This article examines three specific questions of its artist case studies: in what ways are their art projects located within Japanese contexts? In what ways do they draw on conventions and sensibilities of more diverse origin? And in what ways have their projects become relocated into international settings today? It suggests that challenges to notions of national homogeneity are located not simply in the aesthetic diversity of arts in Japan but are embedded in the nature of the creative practice itself.

¹ The Japanese historical periods referred to include: Heian period (794-1185CE); Kamakura 1185-1333); Momoyama (1568-1600); Edo (1603-1867); Meiji (1868-1912); Shôwa (1926-1989); and the current Heisei period (1989-present).

Art Object as Transnational Phenomenon: Katsushika Hokusai's Fuji Pictures

Images located in place and time: The “Great Wave” as local emblem

A century before Wölfflin's claim of innately informed national art histories, their validity was belied by the eclectic projects of Katsushika Hokusai. Hokusai's mature work was clearly located within familiar geographic, temporal, and aesthetic settings, sustained both *ukiyo* “floating world” and precedent *Yamato-e* sensibilities, and was immensely popular with Edo viewers of the day. Simultaneously, however, it also drew on traditions from beyond Japanese shores and found broad international approval within 40 years of his death. Today, Hokusai's *Kanagawa-oki nami ura* – Under a wave off Kanagawa – is arguably the world's best-known example of “Japanese art”.

For Hokusai's Edo public, his popular *Fugaku sanjūrokkei* – Thirty-six views of Fuji (c. 1830-1832), to which the Kanagawa composition belongs – were primarily representations of place. They were captivated by the convincing sense of “here and nowness” of these diverse views of the mountain. In fact, each composition fixed its view on two locations: the ubiquitous profile of Mt Fuji, and the geographic locality from which it is viewed. The work's title tells us we are viewing the mountain from a point just above the waters of the Sagami-nada Sea, looking north across Sagami Bay toward Kanagawa ken – Kanagawa Prefecture, located in the Kantō region south of Tokyo. The Sagami-nada Sea was a busy route and a rich fishing ground, and for Hokusai's Edo viewers, a constant reminder of the precarious relationship between the mainland coast and the open waters. Hokusai's public could situate the vista between the well-known towns of Kamakura to the east and Hakone to the south-west, both posting stations on the Tōkaidō highway between Edo and Heian-kyō (now Kyōtō), and popular subjects in the *ukiyo-e* art of the day. Hakone was celebrated for its *onsen* hot pools and clear views of Lake Ashi and Fuji; Kamakura was famous for its temples and shrines and historical associations. Both places evoked spiritual allusions and nostalgic social or historical associations in the popular Edo imaginary.

These Fuji compositions were *meisho-e* – pictures of famous places. Each composition was both temporally and geographically fixed (albeit shaped with a little artistic license) against both the distant mountain profile, and the viewer's own Edo world. Each work depicted iconographies, landmarks, or activities of the Edo hinterlands. The wave itself was a reasonably common pictorial subject – familiar on *ariso byōbu* “rough seas screen” paintings. In Hokusai's case its convincing majesty was enhanced by the many detailed studies of water movement that viewers could see in his popular *manga* sketchbooks. His viewers' attentions would have been sustained also by the *asobi* “play” of his inventive skills: the curving face of the wave and the stressed hulls of the sea-craft echo the smooth curve of the distant slopes of Fuji, and the shape and snow-capped peak of the mountain are repeated almost literally in the smaller wave at foreground left. Hokusai sustained that visual play between mountain and foreground forms in all but two of the forty-six views of the series. His public would have delighted at the way this lightness of wit acted against the obvious gravity of the scene. More importantly though, they would have celebrated them as recognisable emblems of a Yamato world in the early nineteenth century.

The Fuji compositions as intercultural phenomena: Hokusai and his cultural and artistic roots

In the past, psycho-geographic perspectives might have explained the nature of these works in arguments for regionalist causality that posited that geographic locations impacted on the psyche of artists and their publics in ways that informed geographically conditioned outcomes.

Hokusai's project is more complex than these determinist explanations might suggest. First, he was the most relentlessly independent, versatile and inventive of artists, and it was his innovative powers that appealed to his public, not his capitulation to geomorphic forces. Second, everything in the "Great Wave" composition, even the actions of the waves, is a construct, from its hovering viewpoint over the sea to its diminution of overlapping forms. Hokusai's many other representations of water, including "great wave" motifs in his earliest coastal landscapes, suggest that the artist was acting on his rich knowledge of coastal phenomena, and capitalizing on their potentials for inventive re-combination into a range of pictorial outcomes.

Besides drawing on the conventional subjects and devices of his own Edo art communities (Katsukawa studio figure constructions and Rinpa school rhythm, for example), Hokusai also embraced sources from earlier Japanese traditions. His closely observed genre scenes of ordinary people at work or play drew on *Yamato-e* practices established as early as the Heian era. His bucolic representations of the Edo hinterlands in the Fuji views maintain an air of nostalgia resonating the Imperial collections of verse that were to inspire his final, unfinished, series, the *Hyakunin issu* – literally, "one hundred people, one poem each" (Bell, 2017a). In doing this, Hokusai was sustaining poetic allusions to sensibilities of *mono no aware* pathos still valued by his educated Edo patrons. These allusions sustained memories of rural life and values that, for many Edokko, were firmly established in their imaginary, rather than in daily urban experience. They juxtaposed poignant motifs of the fragile transience of life against the imposing fixedness, permanence, and unavoidably locating status of Fuji, a landmark associated with legends of immortality and timelessness.

While maintaining timeless themes from Japanese locations, each of Hokusai's Fuji views also embraced conventions of Chinese or European origin. From much respected Chinese precedents Hokusai adopted transparent tonal veils, corner-directed asymmetries, and stacked spatial devices interspersed by hazy layers of mist. The atmospheric suggestion of his monochrome compositions was much enhanced by his enthusiasm for Western technology in the adoption of *Berorin* (Berlin) Prussian Blue pigment. From his study of European landscape prints he also embraced a taste for the empirical perspective devices of diminution of scale and linear and aerial perspectives for constructing deep space pictorial projections, or for juxtaposing with the Chinese stacked devices to emphasise a tensional relation between suggestions of depth and the flat picture plane. Viewers from Hokusai's own world enjoyed the playful integrations of conventional devices, atmospheric allusions and representational potentials afforded by his assimilation of media devices from other worlds. This relocation of representational tropes of other cultures into his own multi-referential invention offered viewers in Hokusai's own milieu new insights into their own local settings, and enhanced their imagined engagements with more bucolic pasts.

From local to global icon – the "Great Wave" today

Today, Hokusai's ubiquitous wave has become an international phenomenon, its status transformed from "local to global icon" (Clark, 2011, p. 50). It is recognized by viewers in Paris, France, New York, or the Antipodes. It appears in cartoons and high art images alike, and in contexts as disparate as Fiji currency or Dutch porcelain designs. It is the only fine art work to have attained *emoji* status. The "Great Wave" was selected by the BBC and the British Museum as one of the 100 most significant objects in two million years of human history (MacGregor, 2010). Its composition has become something of a "readymade" motif (Guth, 2015, p. 180), the adopted subject of street art murals in Camberwell in London, Newtown in Australia, or Georgetown, Washington DC. The wave's flying foam lacework transforms into

a flock of 230 gulls in the TWA Flight 800 tragedy memorial at Stony Point Beach, New York (Guth, 2015 p. 195). Its global icon status is secured in guest appearances in popular media – towering over Herge’s Tintin in a scene from *Les Cigares de Pharaon* (1934, Clark, 2011, p. 56) for example, or re-appropriated back into a Japanese context in Nara Yoshimoto’s 1999 *Slash with a Knife* (Clark, 2011, p. 61).

Each of these “reconstructions” resituates Hokusai’s wave into a new pictorial and socio-cultural location, imbuing it with new relevance to its different context. Simultaneously, each manifests sensibilities or culturally conditioned values that lay at the heart of Hokusai’s own world, sustaining enduring reminders of the fragility of human achievement in the face of the overwhelming presence of natural forces. In Herge’s composition, Tintin’s cry of “Nous sommes perdu, Milou!” (“We are Lost, Snowy!”), and juxtaposition of fragile wooden craft against ominously rolling waves, echo Hokusai’s theme, “that man is dwarfed by the elemental power of the sea” (Clark, 2011, p. 50). The sentiment is echoed in the words of Dominic Sword, resident and painter of the “apocalyptic mural” in Camberwell: the “Great Wave” is “something very primordial, something very powerful, something that just rises up from nature and wipes everything else away. And yet is just made of water...its here and then its gone” (Clark, 2011, p. 56). Hokusai would have appreciated the subtle irony of Sword’s observation.

Nara’s work explores triple layers of irony. Elements of Hokusai’s original motif persist, re-inventing themselves into the falling locks of hair of Nara’s threatening killer. Nara’s re-appropriation of Hokusai’s wave into the portrayal of his anonymous character employed American Xerox technology; subsequently, the series was copied into an edition of Fujifilm prints, and impressions of this reworked wave can now be seen in London’s British Museum. Most recently, in January 2013, the global American Xerox Corporation was acquired by the Tokyo (formerly Edo) based Fujifilm corporation. The *kijin* “eccentric” Hokusai himself would have enjoyed the turn of events. In its synthesis of old and new worlds, the work retains a pictorial echo of Japan, though Nara’s collection of original works is housed in in Santa Monica, California (Clark, 2011, p. 60).

The TWA memorial is perhaps the wave’s most deeply affecting appropriation; the one that most fully relocates Hokusai’s original sensibilities into a new context. For Hokusai’s middle-class Edo public, the conflation of *uki* “floating” and *yo* “world” into *ukiyo* resonated a lightness of spirit, a careless attitude to the material matters of mundane life; in its earlier Buddhist context, *ukiyo* referred to a “fleeting, sad and sorrowful world” in this life. That sense of pathos, maintained elsewhere in the Japanese sensibility of *mono no aware*, a “sensitivity to the pathos of things”, underpins the wave’s transposition to the memorial. Its imposing granite wall is located on the coast, between John K. Fitzgerald airport and the Atlantic waters in which the aircraft was lost. Each of its rising gulls reminds viewers of the 230 passengers and crew members who died. Their bodies were never recovered. The granite wall stands as a permanent reminder of each ephemeral life: it “creates a visual and verbal narrative by a site-specific mapping that reflects the bereaved families’ national backgrounds, perceptions of the event, its significance, and their own role as its guardians” (Guth, 2015, p. 198).

Beyond its spiritual, social, or cultural relationships with Fuji or the Japanese coast, the wave image is as likely to be seen on gallery walls in New Zealand, Australia, Boston or London as in Tokyo. The 2017 Hokusai blockbuster exhibition at National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne drew daily queues of viewers lining out of the museum onto the street and enjoyed an extended season. The transnational presence of Hokusai and the wave is sustained in a near constant flow of publications on his work. One way or another, it has found its way to almost

every corner of the globe. In most instances, its identity has become melded into its new context, conditioned by the agendas, values or sensibilities of new viewers. But in almost every instance, its transpositions have sustained some quality of Hokusai's original concept, and some aspect of the work's original appeal. In their *asobi* playfulness or their humble gravity, each reconstruction carries traces of its original conception forward to engage new viewers as it did its Edo public in 1832. The "Great Wave" has become an object of global, cross-cultural, significance.

Kusama Yayoi: Artist as Transnational Identity

Locating Kusama in Japan

Like Hokusai, contemporary artist Kusama Yayoi is generally located as a Japanese artist by birth, by art education, and by early aesthetic inclination. Her early enthusiasms for the visual arts emerged during her childhood in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture. She studied *Nihonga* ("Japanese painting" drawing on conventional Japanese artistic devices, processes and media) at the Kyoto Municipal School of Arts and Crafts in 1948, then immersed herself into independent explorations of its affordances. Today, she is best known for colourful polka dot and architectural installations that find precedent in Japanese tastes for *kazari-e* decoration and Kamakura and Momoyama period ornamented interiors. These "Japanese-style" qualities are underpinned by an intensely self-reflective auto-ethnographic process informing sustained habits of artistic reinvention (Bell, 2017b, p. 11).

Kusama's Matsumoto works found early appeal with local collectors (Bell, 2017b, p. 10), and attracted the critical attentions of Japanese surrealist poet-artist Takiguchi Shûzô (1903-1979) and painter-photographer Abe Nobuya (1913-1971) (Bell, 2017b, p. 11). These explorations capitalized on the potentials of Japanese notions of *asobi* "play" and disinterested exploration "within the affordances and constraints of the media of painting, sculpture and performance" (Bell, 2017b, p. 13). Even in her New York years, Kusama's apparent unconventionality found sympathetic parallels in Japanese notions of *ki* "eccentricity" or *suki* "refined non-conformity". The obsessively repetitive, self-immersive, nature of her working process finds precedent in the meditation practices of Zen Buddhism. Like Hokusai, Kusama also sustains distinctly local sensibilities of earlier Heian period taste. A repeated titular theme in her mirror room works is the firefly. The motif finds rich precedent in Yamato pictorial arts, verse, and prose – most notably in Murasaki Shikibu's (c. 978 – c. 1016) Heian period court novel *Genji monogatari* "The Tale of Genji". Its brief but glowing existence provided a metaphor for the ephemerality of beauty, pleasure, and life that echoed Buddhist sensibilities consistent with Kusama's own poignant detachment (Bell, 2017b, p. 14).

Re-locating Kusama in the world

If Kusama's early projects were located within Japanese contexts, she has been even more widely appreciated in international circles. Her departure from Japan in 1957 was marked by her vocal rejection of her Japanese world as "too small, too servile, too feudalistic, too scornful of women" (Frank, 2017). From 1958 she immersed herself in the fertile, and surprisingly diverse, creative fabric of New York. She found a sympathetic world in New York modernism, in Greenberg's preoccupations with the painter's medium and the flatness of the canvas, and Rosenbergian tendencies to the theatrical alike. These tropes offered ways of capitalising on her *Nihonga* background and obsessive, immersive work habits to explore new directions in the construction of pictorial space and surface, scale, and mark-making. Kusama located supportive partnerships in New York – with the critic and minimalist artist Donald Judd, for example, and, on a more personal level, with the surrealist Joseph Cornell. The art-world

accommodated her shift to sprawling accumulations of gestural mark and paint executed on a huge scale. Many of the *Infinity Net* paintings covered entire walls. The endlessly repetitive surfaces of rhythmic networks emerging from her obsessive immersion in her practice offered viewers something of a parallel experience of hypnotic absorption in North America and Europe alike. As her successes blossomed she explored the self-refining potentials of modernist reductionism and minimalism, embraced increasingly overt feminist themes, and made excursions into the surreal, theatrical, and self-promotional. The works rapidly found a place in the New York, and subsequently European, art markets. To all intents, Kusama had self-consciously relocated into the New York, and the world, stages.

An artist in the interstices: Kusama, Tokyo and the world

From 1973, Kusama's health and career became increasingly fragile. Subsequently, her locational presence became more ambiguous. From 1977 she has resided in the Seiwa Hospital for the Mentally Ill in Shinjuku, Tokyo. After an apparent hiatus of several years, Kusama recommitted to her art practice with renewed energies from the 1980s, experiencing something of a creative rebirth and transnational "phenomenon" status. Though her workplace was situated in a local Tokyo studio, her work has become most publicly located in the theatre of the international art-world. She maintains management representation in London (Victoria Miro Gallery) and New York (David Zwirner Gallery) as well as with Ota Fine Arts in Tokyo. Through these corporate channels she maintains a close supervision of the public face of the Kusama identity in the public media and in her exhibitions and publications. The last three decades have seen a procession of international retrospective exhibitions from the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, to Gagosian, Robert Miller, and David Zwirner Galleries in New York, Austria's Kunsthalle Wien, Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Kusama's international exhibitions profile has been complemented by a growing number of international public commissions, each of which has enhanced a more permanent public presence for her art in centres beyond Japan itself. Permanent *Infinity Room* installations can be visited at the Mattress Factory, Pennsylvania, Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona, HUMLEBÆK in Denmark, The Broad in Los Angeles, and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, in Rotterdam. Her works feature in public collections all over the world, in The Museum of Modern Art (New York), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Walker Art Centre Minneapolis, Tate Modern, Stedelijk Museum, Centre Pompidou, and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

Kusama's transnational presence has been enhanced even more profoundly by a carefully programmed representation of her work in print. Exhibitions are accompanied by beautifully presented catalogues, their content ranging from retrospective evaluation, through critical commentaries, to comprehensive pictorial representations. At time of writing, her New York distributor and publisher David Zwirner listed 29 separate publications about Kusama and her work (Zwirner, 2018). These high quality volumes offer specialist accounts of the mirror works, or the sculptures, for example, works by and about Kusama for children, autobiographies, or coffee-table picture books. Like Hokusai's wave, Kusama's networks, polka dot confections, and mirrored infinity rooms have attained a ubiquitous international presence, recognizable and accessible all over the globe. Her work is celebrated by critics in New York, Melbourne or London, and as enthusiastically by 4-year-old children in a small town New Zealand preschool (Bell et al., 2016). In her late 80s, Kusama's work remains transnationally popular.

Kusama's artistic presence is also maintained in Japan itself. Her achievements were celebrated in the awards of the Asahi Prize in 2001, Order of the Rising Sun in 2006, the Praemium Imperiale in 2006, and Person of Cultural Merit in 2009. She enjoyed a 2016 "homecoming" in the *Yayoi Kusama: The Place for My Soul* exhibit at Matsumoto City Museum of Art. In an even more substantial "repatriation", Kusama's life work, more poetically, her "eternal soul" (Betts, 2017), has found a home in a dedicated 5 story museum in Shinjuku, Tokyo, operated by the Yayoi Kusama Foundation. Even these phenomena reflect her transnational currency, however: the Matsumoto show was curated by Kusama's London dealer Victoria Miro, and media share these events with international audiences to cement her presence in the wider world. Kusama's work thus occupies transnational localities. It is enjoyed by global audiences, and, like Hokusai's wave, evokes sensibilities beyond those of their Japanese precedents. The works of both artists have made a major transition from the local to the global that challenges any representation of, or monolithic classification as, "Japanese art".

Inside Masami-za: Teraoka Masami and the Artist as Transnational Actor

Locating the artist in Japan

Teraoka Masami's heritage is Japanese. He was born in Onomichi, in Hiroshima Prefecture. At age 9 he witnessed the explosion of the atomic bomb in the skies over Hiroshima (Charisma, 2017), and subsequently experienced the presence of American and New Zealand occupation forces in the south. Though his early serial projects were completed after his arrival in Los Angeles in 1961, he consciously situated their themes and pictorial constructions within a Japanese context:

My McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan and 31 Flavors Invading Japan Series in the 1970's and AIDS Series in the 1980's reflect my cultural heritage from Japan. The Ukiyo-e or wood block print tradition represents my cultural identity. Geisha and samurai images I use are a way to depict traditional-thinking Japanese people. (Teraoka & Hess, 2018)

For Teraoka, these *ukiyo-e* conventions represented a pictorial "format of my national identity" (Teraoka, in Charisma, 2017). For Japanese and American viewers alike, they firmly located his constructions in Japanese settings. In Teraoka's mind, he was drawing on resources familiar to him: the iconographies and pictorial devices of print conventions were local territory. If the motifs of kimono, *geta*, *shimada* coiffures, *kabuki* poses and *nirami* "crossed-eye" expressions in his *31 Flavours in Japan* and *McDonalds Hamburgers Invading Japan* seem clichéd, these works did deal specifically with issues of concern to Japanese communities: culture shock and the invasion of Western multi-national commercial institutions. How, for example, did one eat a hamburger with chopsticks? Or with one's hands? And what was the impact of changing consumption on the etiquettes, diets, and traditional ways of life? These were locally significant questions.

By the time Teraoka had arrived at his major HIV AIDS series, the issues transcended Japanese locations and assumed a more universal significance, but the pictorial locations in Edo period conventions had become even more fixed. Each of his large watercolour paintings assumed the compositional asymmetries, *bokashi* colour-fields, patterns and rhythmic linearity, figure-ground relations, or flowing fields of calligraphy of their woodblock precursors. Each adopted the seals and cartouche signatures, labels, and titles precisely as they appeared in the print medium. His subjects sustained Edo-period iconographies: languid *yūjo* "prostitutes", *kabuki* actors, or the "vehicles of the supernatural" (Kajiya, 2001, p. 86) of clouds, dreams, *yūrei* "faint

spirits”, or *obake* “ghosts”. Teraoka’s adoptions displayed strong affinities with the theatrical style of Utagawa Kunisada I (1786-1865). His emblematic images of *bijin-ga* “beautiful woman pictures”, *obake*, or *kabuki* actors locked in frozen *mie* poses suggested parallel themes between Edo period decadence and the apocalyptic narratives of HIV.

Significantly, in employing profoundly affective motifs of the gruesomely scarred Oiwa,² *mononoke* “avenging spirits”, or the skeleton spectres of AIDS victims, Teraoka translated the Yamato themes and sensibilities of earlier eras into his own time, and for new audiences (Bell, 2014a, p. 12). He drew clear parallels between immediate transnational issues (international consumerism, loss of cultural integrity, or decadent hedonism and moral decay) and the provocative display of *kabuki* and resigned melancholy of brothel themes located in floating world sensibilities, reaching even deeper towards the “Buddhist notion of a final age of *mappô*, a lawless time of degeneracy and corruption” (Bell, 2014a, p. 14).

Relocating the artist in liminal territories

Alison Bing describes the underpinning sensibilities of these allusive vehicles in *kabuki* theatre terms, as *Masami-za*, the narrative art-theatre of Teraoka Masami (Bing, 2006, p. 22). Yet even in his student years, Teraoka’s sensibilities had embraced broader Western conceptual frameworks. His early art education at Kwansai Gakuin University in Nishinomiya had focused on Western art history and Christianity. He left Japan in 1961 to live in Los Angeles and studied for BA and MFA degrees at the Otis Art Institute between 1964 and 1968. From 1980 he has worked in Oahu in Hawai’i. Today he defines himself as “Japanese-American”, or more specifically, “Japanese by birth, a US citizen by decision, and international by inclination” (Bing, 2006, p. 25). This liminal status reflects in recurrent themes of outsider or alien status in his works. His preoccupations with those outsider figures of the floating world – prostitutes, actors, *rônin* “masterless samurai”, or voyeurs – and self-representations of the artist as displaced person echo themes of alienation in the modern world explored also in the contemporary literature of writers like Haruki Murakami (Bell, 2014a, p. 12). These pictorial characters repeatedly reflect the liminality of his own status: “like the *ronin*, or masterless samurai, of post-feudal Japan, Teraoka seems to be out of sync with his place and time. One cannot imagine a more disparate juxtaposition of cultures than that presented by Japan and Los Angeles” (Kadvany, 1980, p. 26).

Despite their *ukiyo-e* guise, Teraoka’s pictorial themes are globally situated rather than uniquely Japanese. Ironically, he employs the popular Edo device of *mitate* – loosely, “parody”, or “thought-provoking metaphor” – to re-situate earlier Japanese motifs against these contemporary, and transnational, issues. Today, his observations on the “invasions” of McDonalds and Rocky Road on Japan describe broader themes of over a century of Western incursions into Japanese affairs, and of a reciprocal impact of Japan on the West, evident in the nineteenth century rage for “Japonisme”, or in the Californian craze for sushi as a representative flavour of Japanese taste. His early critiques of the cultural impacts of globalization, consumerism, and the HIV crisis were underpinned by universal themes: timeless issues of the consequences and rewards of freedom and desire, of responsibility, action, and consequence (Bell, 2014a, p. 12). Through the 1990s, Teraoka’s pictorial encounters between Caucasian and Japanese phenomena have become more densely layered, embracing emergent themes like the intrusions of digital technology into intercultural

² Oiwa is the central character in Tsuruya Nanboku IV’s tragic 1925 *kabuki* drama *Yotsuya kaidan*, “ghost story of Yotsuya”. Oiwa, wronged by her husband Tamiya Iemon, her face disfigured by a poisoned facial cream, dies a painful death. She returns as an *onryô* vengeful ghost to wreak painful retribution on her husband and his lover’s family. (Sorgenfrei, 2015)

encounters. His work of the 1990s enhances Japanese sources with the sensibilities of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Picassos *Guernica*, or Goya's *Caprichos*, melded into a subversive "grim pageantry of the Inquisition" (Heartney, 2006, p. 157). In extending from *ukiyo-e* formats to Italian quattrocento altarpiece formats, Teraoka has also embraced a more densely packed syntheses of multi-cultural themes in the construction of Hieronymus Bosch inspired "dichronistic palimpsests" of the extremes of Christian and Buddhist hells revealed in layered motifs of war in the Middle East, burqa, Teraoka's "virtual inquisition" (Heartney, 2006, p. 181), the Buddhist "Chicken Torture", or spiritual or political corruption, in paintings conceived as "mirrors to society – and to ourselves" (Clark, 2006, p. 9). Increasingly, these complex compositions represent narratives of timeless significance in the actions and characters of the present. Motifs of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky offer apposite counterpoints to the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve and construct of original sin (Bing, 2006, p. 146). Dante's purgatory is an appropriate setting for motifs of the "perversion of faith" of clerical abuse, human cloning, or pharmaceutical dependencies of the modern world (Bing, 2006, p. 150). Teraoka may use age-old conventions, but his art is very firmly in the present: his compositions serve to filter "a contemporary image stream through various past styles and approaches" as socially corrosive media of "astute satire" (Miles, 2008, p. 470). His discomfiting phenomena provide hybrid signposts that have been able to sustain and transfer "the unconscious collective memories" (Assmann, 2011, p. 220) of metaphors, sensibilities and values deep within the Japanese cultural consciousness for new and globally situated viewers today.

The contrived realism of the *kabuki* popular stage has provided Teraoka with an appropriate setting for unpalatable narratives of moral chaos and sexual abuse (Bing, 2006, p. 20). It holds a theatrical mirror to pictorial constructions in which "the timeless themes of kabuki – insatiable desires, identity crises, unnatural disasters, and unchecked power – seem timely all over again" (Bing, 2006, p. 25). The spatial contrivance of the stage, its expressive *mie* "frozen pose" conventions and dramatic narratives provide appropriate settings for Teraoka's pictorial parodies, poignant reflections on appetite, desire, hedonism and the pervasive sorrow of the world, questions of intercultural understanding, moral degeneration, or *mono no aware* pathos and *sabi* reflections on impermanence and transience. The exaggerated gestures and wild-eyed stares of Teraoka's actors emphasise their detachment from real life. That detachment positions Teraoka's characters within the confusions, ambiguities, and compromises of the "permeable borders between East and West", reflecting Teraoka's own sense of the "inbetweenness" of "existing between and within American and Japanese cultures" (Inefuki 2007). Teraoka's childhood experience of occupied Japan is made more universally tangible for the present time in which the "anxiety of enjoining the global and the local, the dilemma of projecting an international space on the trace of a de-centred, fragmented subject, cultural globality is situated in the *in-between* spaces of double frames" (Bhabha, 2004, p. 309).

Perhaps the most remarkable quality emerging through Teraoka's project is the self-consciousness of his engagements with art historical traditions and their implications for the way viewers appreciate questions of cultural identity. He "is an artist who is inherently compelled to break barriers and push beyond borders – both through his medium and artistic style, as well as the heady subject matter" (Hughes, 2015). That risk-taking élan seems to fire his curiosities and inform the freedoms he brings to melding the threads of otherwise discordant art histories and cultural traditions into new, provocative, and "enticing historic aesthetic vocabularies" (Hughes, 2015). Those vocabularies inform the ways he has addressed new ways of recognizing, not a singular national character of a phenomenon of "Japanese art" so much

as a fluid, changing, “collectivity of cultures involved in a process of exchange and difference” (Sussman, 1993, p. 15) and reciprocal engagements with international art histories.

Conclusion

In retrospect, Wölfflin’s argument for an innately informed national art historical character seems problematic for Japanese contexts. Certainly, each of these artists had lived and learnt in Japanese locations, and had intimate knowledge of the traditions of *Yamato-e*, *Nihonga*, Buddhism, *kazari-e*, or *ukiyo-e*. For all three, however, internationally located resources of Chinese, Dutch, New York, or Italian Renaissance origin inform their projects consistently enough to generate new, multi-dimensional, hybrid projects. For each, this synthesis of local and global means has generated aesthetic engagements that find meaningful purchase in communities across the globe. Thus, while embracing narrative themes and sensibilities of *Yamato-e*, Hokusai’s resource to Chinese and European conventions melded new devices into his repertoire, and informed his syntheses of novel, complex, compositions. He was not unique in this. Chinese precedents had been much respected in Japan for over a millennium. By Hokusai’s time, the Western devices of linear and aerial perspective and chiaroscuro were widely available (if not universally adopted) for *ukiyo-e* designers. Hokusai’s compositions were not simply “Japanese” in character but hybrid syntheses of conventions of diverse cultural traditions. Within 40 years of their manufacture, his unique visions of his own world had found rapid popularity amongst West European collectors. Though today he is arguably the best-known of Edo *ukiyo-e* artists, his appeal seems universal, and even beyond the ubiquitous “Great Wave”, his achievements enjoy global currency.

In a similar way, while Kusama Yayoi has built on elements of *Nihonga* and *kazari-e* decoration, her broader project depends more on its synthesis of New York School “all-over-painting”, minimalist refinement, or surrealist allusion, and while her art has regained its place in Matsumoto and Tokyo alike, it obtains astonishing audience engagements all over the world. In Teraoka Masami’s case the artist’s personal and creative lives became completely embedded in the West. His assumptions of Edo period conventions have, exclusively since the 1980s, confronted universally significant questions of morality, decadence, and consequence. The artist occupies a liminal territory, between the culture of his early heritage, and that of his adoption. Each one of these artist’s projects thus finds some common ground in the sustenance of culturally significant pictorial themes, conventions and iconographies of Yamato origin, relocated into their own or more distant worlds. Each also melds these qualities together with sources from diverse other cultural contexts, and each artist’s oeuvre has found purchase with viewers in diverse global settings, building transnational appreciations of themes of Yamato origin, and finding new significance with viewers in new worlds.

The eclectic pathways of these artists have important implications for thinking about the perspectives of art history. Most clearly, the distinct differences between each artist’s projects and the coherence of their syntheses of diverse conventions challenge Wölfflin’s assertion of an innate national aesthetic character. More specifically, their diversities challenge any notion of a singular, mono-dimensional, or homogeneous field that might be conceived or categorized as “Japanese art”. They challenge the essentialist foundations of a national art character. Beyond acknowledging a broader notion of “*Yamato art*” (an established category *within* the arts practices of Japan) they challenge any notion that artists and their activities might be defined or conditioned by some kind of psycho-geographic aesthetic force. Rather, they recognise the transnational currency of artistic phenomena, the temporal and geographic

border-crossing mobility of culturally significant media, and the ways both art works and their artists can exist in wider worlds than those of their birth.

These studies also have implications for thinking about questions of creative practice. First, each of these artists works through independently forged iterative processes of extended regenerative pathways. Within those pathways, each artist's individual moments of resolution and departure reflect the changing fabric of broad journeys, and a synthesis of ideas, motifs, themes, narratives, values and sensibilities from the past and present of each. Each artist has sustained culturally rich tropes from Yamato traditions – Hokusai's sensibilities of *mono no aware* sobriety and bucolic nostalgia, Kusama's *kazari-e* decoration or *kijin* eccentricity, or Teraoka's visions of Buddhist hells or *mappô*. For each, these local traditions and sensibilities manifested culturally significant artifacts of cultural memory (Shirane, 1998, p. 2). Their amalgamations of culturally charged iconographic, sensible, technical, or thematic "media of memory" (Assmann, 2011, p. 137) informed the crystallisations of art works that could mediate between aesthetic memory, cultural identity and taste in ways that could relocate these memories into new times and settings (Assmann, 2011, p. 119). Most importantly though, all three artists were melding these threads of the past into the fabric of their active investigations into the pictorial practices and morés of other culturally conditioned contexts. In synthesizing conventional Yamato media together with more diverse resources they empowered their own inventive capacities for transforming transcultural conventions into new, hybrid, pictorial outcomes for new audiences.

However pervasive the conditioning factors of sociocultural traditions, the differences between these three artist projects confirm that each is the product of the inventive disposition of an individual. None of them has simply, or unconsciously, absorbed the conventions that informed their works. They learned their trades in schools, and *acted* on their experiences, drawing from them, selecting, adopting, adapting, combining, reconnecting, rearranging, recontextualising, reconstructing or deploying them, to meld them into their own, individually conceived and fashioned, aesthetic enquiries (Bell, 2014b). In doing so, they were exercising what Michael Baxandall described as the *agency* of artists as active learners and independent constructors of pictorial projects *acting on* their cognitive stock and culturally conditioned sensibilities (1985, p. 59). That sense of *agency* explains how artists can sustain culturally significant, and often apparently incompatible, conventions while simultaneously forging new inventive pathways that can reach farther beyond their own traditions into new investigations. It also challenges the essentialist or causal assumptions of cultural or psycho-geographic determinist arguments for engagements in the visual arts, or the creative arts in general. For the viewers who engage with these works – in Japanese or more diverse settings – understanding this sense of creative agency may offer insights into the intellectual, sensate, and active dispositions to independent, innovative action as they inform the pervasive force of any artist's temperamental, intellectual, neurological, psychological, aesthetic dispositions as they inform and condition their artistic engagements.

The inventive projects of all three of these artists thus contribute to broader appreciations of how creatives practice can operate. They each reveal how artist's projects can be informed, inflected, or invigorated by their active response and selective resource to the significant values, practices, and pictorial precedents of their own historical, social, physical and aesthetic worlds. They also reveal the innovative power of connection-making, evident in the ways artists are able to meld the resources of diverse contexts to inform the conception of innovative practices.

As viewers encounter these projects in their pan-national settings, separated from their original socio-cultural contexts, they can embrace their own diverse viewpoints into appreciating the technical, auto-ethnographic, intercultural or socially conditioned art-worlds of each artist in ways that open insights into richer encounters with these works – how they are conceived, generated, developed, refined, regenerated, or changed, reframed, redirected or even terminated. They can better appreciate where they come from, why and how they come to be, and, most importantly, what their reshaped, or even new, significance might be for viewers in today's Japan, or elsewhere in the world. They have the opportunity to see a composition like Hokusai's "Great Wave" not just as a product of its geographic urban, social, or temporal worlds but as an active realization of Hokusai's own feelings, responses to, perceptions of, and interpretations of these worlds, and the intellectual, literary, and artistic phenomena he encountered within them. For transnational publics, understanding the significance of intercultural exchange itself can embrace new and more divergent nuances of response and appreciation of previously localized aesthetic phenomena in distant settings.

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