

Art across Borders: Japanese Artists in the United States, 1895-1955

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ABSTRACT

Art across Borders: Japanese Artists in the United States, 1895-1955

From the 1880s to the early 1920s, hundreds of artists left Japan for the United States. The length of their stays varied from several months to several decades. Some had studied art in Tokyo, but others became interested in art after working in California. Some became successful in the American art world, some in the Japanese art world, and some in both. They used oil paints on canvas, *sumi* ink on silk, and Leica cameras. They created images of Buddhist deities, labor protests, farmers harvesting rice, cabaret dancers, and the K.K.K. They saw themselves and were seen by others as Japanese nationals, but whether what they created should be called Japanese art proved a difficult and personal question.

The case of Japanese artists in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates that there is a national art – a Japanese art and an American art – but that the category is not fixed. A painting can be classified in the 1910s as Japanese, but the same painting can be included in a show of American art a few decades later. An artist can proclaim himself to be American, but can then be exhibited as a Japanese artist after his death. National constructions of art and artists serve the art market's purpose of selling a work. Categories set along national lines also reinforce the state's projection of a distinct, homogeneous culture to the international community. For non-Western artists, assigning themselves with a national aesthetic allows for easy identification.

But for modern Japanese artists like Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Ishigaki Eitarô, and Shimizu Toshi and others, national categories often posed barriers to creativity and to their success in the art world. Shimizu Toshi was awarded for painting a night scene of Yokohama, but his award was rescinded because he was Japanese. Savvy artists like Yoshida Hiroshi and Obata Chiura

worked within national aesthetic categories to better market his work. Kuniyoshi Yasuo remained enigmatic, willing to fall into any category that a critic or dealer might determine they should be cast in, while Ishigaki Eitarô associated himself with international leftist politics that precluded notions of Japanese art.

Exploring their histories brings several themes to the fore. First, any attempt to use a single, or hyphenated, national category to describe them or their art is problematic and misleading. An artist's "Japaneseness" was not a fixed characteristic: at different points in his career, he might be classified as Japanese, American, or even a proletarian artist.<sup>1</sup> Artists could sometimes choose to align themselves with one national culture or eschew both, but the denizens of the art world – critics, museum and gallery curators, schools, and other artists – as well as the public nearly always ascribed a national, or at best hybrid, aesthetic character to their work.

During the 1910s and 1920s, when Japanese art had fallen out of fashion and modernism was the vanguard, Japanese artists were freer to transcend the preconceptions of what had become by then conventionally defined as a "Japanese aesthetic," which was based in good part on the works of *Japanaiserie* of earlier years. Artists of many nationalities strove to be "modern" by consciously rejecting "tradition," which for Japanese artists meant the styles and techniques of traditional Japanese painting. Many of the artists from Japan who wanted to make modern art had little practice in traditional art in any case, since they had received their artistic training in the United States. Indeed, it was their American mentors who taught them what Japanese art was supposed to look like. Modern art did not just set itself against the artistic conventions of the past; it also sought to comment on, and intervene in, the rapidly changing ways of modern life. Japanese artists in New York and Los Angeles joined their colleagues in turning to city streets

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and everyday life for their subjects, rather than reflecting on a safely imagined past. Portraying the streets they walked, in the techniques they learned in American art schools, came more naturally to them than making a woodblock print of a *geisha* strolling in a Kyoto garden. They used oils to paint flappers they saw on Fourteenth Street, but had no experience with woodblock printing, *geisha*, or the gardens of Kyoto.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother, Jane Handel.

## **Art Across Borders: Japanese Artists in the United States, 1890-1955**

### Introduction

From the 1880s to the early 1920s, hundreds of artists left Japan for the United States. The length of their stays varied from several months to several decades. Some had studied art in Tokyo, but others became interested in art after working in California. Some became successful in the American art world, some in the Japanese art world, and some in both. They used oil paints on canvas, *sumi* ink on silk, and Leica cameras. They created images of Buddhist deities, labor protests, farmers harvesting rice, cabaret dancers, and the K.K.K. They saw themselves and were seen by others as Japanese nationals, but whether what they created should be called Japanese art proved a difficult and personal question.

How to categorize nationality if an artist was born in Wakayama Prefecture, spoke most comfortably in Japanese, and painted the Cuban revolution in his downtown Manhattan studio? Was an artist born and raised in a small town in Tochigi prefecture, who studied and painted for most of his adult life in Seattle, New York, and Paris, creating Japanese art? If such questions seem irrelevant now, they were absolutely central to the experience of Japanese artists abroad in the twentieth century. Even today, their successors living their full professional lives in Europe or North America frequently find their work identified as somehow, subtly, diaphanously but categorically “Japanese.” What does it mean to ascribe nationality to art, and how does this ascription arise and change over time?

Art has a nationality: there is a Japanese art, American art, Mexican art, and Congolese art. What this study aims to demonstrate, however, is that national categories assigned to art are not fixed, but fluid. A painting included in an exhibition of American art can fifty years later be

included in a Japanese art show. An artist can proclaim himself to be American making American art, but a museum curator will include his work in a show of Japanese works. A dealer in the 1910s might promote an artist's works as being authentically Japanese when Japanese art is popular. But when Japanese art is out of vogue, that same dealer might extol its modernist qualities instead. National categories are determined by many factors, often external to the artist's self-identification.

When it comes to styles of art – the various “isms” – national categories seem to be less significant. If we enter a gallery featuring Impressionist paintings, we approach a particular canvas that invites us to look at it more closely. We might examine the artist's techniques, materials, and color choices, while understanding something of the era when it was created. This can change in an instant, however, if we notice that the artist's name is Yoshida Hiroshi. When we reexamine the work, we might wonder which elements are Japanese. This reassessment of a work along national lines does not occur if we see that the artist's name is Claude Monet, because we do not necessarily look for traces of France. Western artists have access to the “isms” as nation-less styles. Non-Western artists, however, cannot remove their ethnic heritage or national identification from how their work is interpreted. As soon as we identify the artist as being Japanese, we look at the painting with a completely different set of parameters.

The case of Japanese artists during the first half of the twentieth century presents an optimal example of how complex the assigning of national categories to art can be. Part of the difficulty is based on the West's calcified understanding of what Japanese art was supposed to look like. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Japanese government, academics, and dealers purveyed its cultural objects in terms of their aesthetic qualities based on a rigid formula. The American consumer became attached to this particular aesthetic and came to expect certain

qualities from Japan and its art that persist to the present. Both Japanese producers and Western consumers constructed a homogeneous version of Japan's national aesthetic.

But these expectations of what Japanese art should look like often posed as barriers to the modern Japanese artist. In a 1935 article for *Parnassus* magazine, the critic Ruth Benjamin asked, "What has come of the Japanese artist, who comes to America, lives among us, modifies our art, and is himself influenced by Western traditions?" Benjamin concluded that Kuniyoshi Yasuo's flower mural in the women's powder room at the Radio City Music Hall were "characteristic of Japanese art," though she did not explain which of its aspects were so clearly Japanese. In Kuniyoshi's case, the circumstances were slightly different: he did not come to the U.S. as a "Japanese artist" influenced by Western traditions. Kuniyoshi Yasuo came as an immigrant and, after a hardscrabble life working at odd jobs, turned to art and became famous enough to be included in a 1929 Museum of Modern Art exhibit of "Nineteen American Artists." Was his art still Japanese? (Figure 1)

Exploring the histories of Japanese artists in the United States brings several themes to the fore. First, any attempt to use a single, or hyphenated, national category to describe them or their art is problematic and misleading. An artist's "Japaneseness" was not a fixed characteristic: at different points in his career, he might be classified as a Japanese, American, or even a proletarian artist.<sup>2</sup> Artists could sometimes choose to align themselves with one national culture or eschew both, but the denizens of the art world – critics, museum and gallery curators, schools, and other artists – as well as the public nearly always ascribed a national, or at best hybrid, aesthetic character to their work.

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<sup>2</sup> Classifying an artist as "Asian American" did not occur until after World War II and often long past the artist's death. Many artists who were in the United States for long periods, but did not die in the U.S., are not classified as Asian American.

In twentieth-century Japan and the United States, for reasons both common and distinctive, art was often considered in national terms. Japanese, having recently established a modern nation-state, tended to view all aspects of Japanese life, including arts and culture, in national terms. In the United States, the national imperative arose out of the felt need to develop an “American” art that could stand against the cultural superiority of Europe. Japan and the United States were not alone in casting art in national terms, but these two countries did exhibit particularly strong versions of national assertion during the early twentieth century. Artists were thought to carry national culture with them wherever they went, and it was assumed that their native culture would somehow permeate their art. Such expectations often determined an artist’s choices, consciously or not. American critics scoured art works for traces of Japan and were disappointed, and punishing, if they could not find them, often consigning the work in question to the ranks of mere imitation of the West. When an artist returned to Japan, the art world there never even posed the question. The artists simply *were* Japanese, no matter how many decades they had spent abroad or whether they thought of themselves as members of the American art scene.

That Japanese artists were viewed as extensions of a national aesthetic is not a surprising discovery. More interesting are the instances in which the artists’ works were *released* from identification as Japanese. Indeed, from the late 1910s through the 1930s, in the historical context of gathering economic and political crisis, the urban art world in many places seemed to care far less about an artist’s national identity. Thus Kuniyoshi, and artists from other countries, could be included in the 1929 show of “American” Artists arousing minimal protest among critics or patrons. *New York Times* art critics discussed Ishigaki Eitarô’s 1925 painting of a figure on horseback whipping protestors on the ground beside him without mentioning that the artist

was Japanese. Japanese artists who worked in the United States were at times bound to national culture, but could at other times escape such tethers, depending on the inclinations of the artist, the priorities of the art world and the public, and the political and cultural context of the times. The challenge here is to identify these different patterns in order to address the larger question of “nationality in art.”

Some historical contexts appear quite clearly. When *Japanaiserie* was the fashion among elite Western consumers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Japanese artists came to the United States and dressed in kimono to sell their watercolors of temples and other Japanese scenes. These artists were motivated by potential commercial gains and made their artistic choices based on consumer demand. They had no intention of staying in the U.S. for an extended period of time, nor did they engage with anyone in the American art world besides dealers and potential buyers. They were happy to use nationality in their art and in their person to heighten the commercial success of their work.

During the 1910s and 1920s, when Japanese art had fallen out of fashion and modernism was the vanguard, Japanese artists were freer to transcend the preconceptions of what had become by then conventionally defined as a “Japanese aesthetic,” which was based in good part on the works of *Japanaiserie* of earlier years. Artists of many nationalities strove to be “modern” by consciously rejecting “tradition,” which for Japanese artists meant the styles and techniques of traditional Japanese painting. Many of the artists from Japan who wanted to make modern art had little practice in traditional art in any case, since they had received their artistic training in the United States. Indeed, it was their American mentors who taught them what Japanese art was supposed to look like. Modern art did not just set itself against the artistic conventions of the past; it also sought to comment on, and intervene in, the rapidly changing ways of modern life.

Japanese artists in New York and Los Angeles joined their colleagues in turning to city streets and everyday life for their subjects, rather than reflecting on a safely imagined past. Portraying the streets they walked, in the techniques they learned in American art schools, came more naturally to them than making a woodblock print of a *geisha* strolling in a Kyoto garden. They used oils to paint flappers they saw on Fourteenth Street, but had no experience with woodblock printing, *geisha*, or the gardens of Kyoto.

The experience of Japanese artists in the United States differed greatly depending on whether they were based in New York or on the West coast in Seattle and California. In New York, where there was never a large Japanese community, artists easily joined an international coterie of artists, especially in the years after the First World War. Kuniyoshi Yasuo drew on various styles and techniques, including American folk art, social realism, Precisionism, and others. Artists on the West Coast, where there was a larger Japanese population living in the midst of expressed racial hostility and legally restricted covenant zones, tended to join the national group that clustered in relatively insular Japanese communities: Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and Japantown in San Francisco. Obata Chiura visited Yosemite National Park and painted the Sierra Nevada Mountains in a mixed genre of watercolors and *sumi* inks imported from Japan. . No surprise then that a “Japanese aesthetic” remained more prominent among artists in California than among their counterparts in New York.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Just as location in the United States determined the artists’ careers and art works, their residence in Japan affected their creative choices as well. For example, rather than embracing the countryside as Shimizu Toshi did, Nakayama Iwata left New York and Paris for the international port city of Kobe, where he photographed Russian dancers and department store mannequins. Both Nakayama and Shimizu returned in Japan, but their work revealed that as many “Japans” co-existed as there were “Americas.”

During the 1930s, when the international socialist movement inspired artists to form a united cultural front, political viewpoints often became more important than nationality. In New York City, Japanese artists joined political organizations and created art with political subjects, including race and poverty in America. Noda Hideo assisted Diego Rivera in 1932 in creating his famous and controversial mural in Rockefeller Center. International groups of artists and writers banded together to support one another in the face of economic crisis. During the early years of the Depression, Works Progress Administration projects brought together artists of many nationalities on the West Coast and the East Coast in joint efforts to make socially relevant art. When fear of the Left and international conflict accelerated in the late 1930s, Japanese artists were dropped from these federally funded programs. Yet, for a few years at least, being Japanese was less prominent a marker, and artists like Ishigaki Eitarô painted murals of Civil War scenes in a Harlem Courthouse, while Terada Takeo painted sports scenes in San Francisco's Coit Tower.

Meanwhile, in Japan, an increasingly ultra-nationalist government suppressed the socialists and others on the Left in the early 1930s. While groups in New York, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Paris sought ways to unify in opposition to fascism, some of the artists who had returned to Japan exchanged international forums for Japanese solipsism. Shimizu Toshi left New York's Greenwich Village and Paris' *Le Chat Noir* to rediscover the "earth from which he was born" in the Tochigi countryside. Peasant families in rice fields, rather than flappers and Catholic priests, were now his subjects, and he spent much of the 1930s as an artist traveling in the employ of the Imperial Japanese Army. Not all artists who returned to Japan raised the imperial flag as high as Shimizu did. Nakayama Iwata stayed away from the nationalist frenzy,



photographing fantastical still-lives of butterflies and cabaret dancers in Kobe, but for him, too, his earlier connections to the American and European art worlds ended after his return to Japan.

Nearly every Japanese artist who worked in the West eventually found his way back to Japan, but when they did, they had to contend with the Japanese art world's preference for artists trained in European capitals. While training in Europe added to an artist's stature, an American sojourn did not carry the same merit. In most cases, if an artist had trained at Japanese art schools and developed a position in the Japanese art world (*gadan*) before leaving for the West, it was easier for him to reenter it when he came back. If an artist wanted to maintain his standing in the *gadan* while abroad, he had to work to stay abreast of Japanese art trends and maintain contacts among Japanese networks abroad. The competition between *yōga* (Western-style art) and *nihonga* (Japanese-style art) – itself a modern distinction -- produced divisions among artists educated in the late nineteenth century. Although this tension eased in the 1910s and 1920s, an artist who worked abroad was inevitably assigned to the *yōga*, or Western, camp, which required the credentials of some experience in Europe.

Obata Chiura, who never went to Europe, was an exception. He had been trained as a *nihonga* artist in Sendai and Tokyo and was able to reenter that milieu when he returned to Japan for a few years in the late 1920s. Kuniyoshi Yasuo, in contrast, spent his time on his trip back to Japan in 1931 trying to justify American modern art as distinct from European and to defend his training at American art schools. He was a curiosity in the media, but unsuccessful with buyers and he traveled back to New York, never to return to Japan again.

As a result of the preeminent position of European art, an artist might not be able to exhibit work in Japan that he had produced during an eight-year period while in New York, but was able to promote works derived from a two-week trip to Paris or Madrid. The Japanese *gadan*

even treated works of artists established as American scene painters, such as Shimizu, as products of an American phase, even though he had lived and worked in the U.S. for twenty years. For artists who had no connections with the *gadan* before they left Japan, they often found the barriers to later entry insurmountable. Neither Kuniyoshi Yasuo nor Ishigaki Eitarô, both successful and established figures in New York's art scene, found any success in Japan during their lifetimes. For them and many others, border crossing was central to their career, and as they moved, they responded to different influences in their work. They left New York for Mexico City or Paris or Madrid, and then sometimes returned to Tokyo, if briefly. They were artists who did not think they were living *beyond* borders or *between* worlds but instead considered themselves to be Japanese nationals participating in an international space shared by other artists with similar aesthetic and social missions.

Despite the individual distinctions among the artists, the group as a whole can be divided into different types according to their artistic choices, legacies, and the role nationality played in their lives and work. First, location was important in determining the career of an artist: where they trained, where they enjoyed the most success, which coast they lived on in the U.S., and whether they studied in Europe were all factors that affected an artist's stylistic choices and the course of his career. Time was equally important: when they left Japan, how long they stayed away, and when they went back impelled artists to adjust their careers and their styles to the era in which they worked. Artists, like everyone else, are not independent actors who work in isolation from the context in which they live.

Politics also shaped their choices and their artworks. Politically marginalized artists in California who faced racial violence and covenant laws were defined first by their Japanese citizenship and ethnic characteristics. Viewed as Japanese – never as American -- they tended to

make Japanese art. Japanese artists on the East Coast were freer to immerse themselves in American modern art circles. It can indeed be said that they made American art. In addition, Japanese in New York were able to join political movements that were not interested in nationality, only in political point of view. What emerges from this study is not a homogeneous category of the Japanese artist in the U.S., but multiple categories that can be understood in terms of a set of identifiable factors.

## Chapter 1: The First Wave of Japanese Artists

### *Introduction*

In 1899, friends and fellow art students, Yoshida Hiroshi 吉田博 (1876-1950) and Nakagawa Hachirô 中川八郎 (1877-1923), left Japan to sell their paintings in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The American art collector, Charles L. Freer, had purchased one of Yoshida's watercolors in a Yokohama shop the year before and had expressed a desire to meet the artist if he were to visit. Yoshida and Nakagawa first headed to Detroit, where they hoped to convince Freer to exhibit their works at his gallery. The collector was away when they arrived, but the curator at the Detroit Art Gallery mounted an exhibition of their work in his stead. Using the sales from the show, the artists traveled to Boston, Providence, and Washington D.C. to sell more paintings.<sup>5</sup> Wearing *kimono* and serving tea at their salons, Yoshida and Nakagawa succeeded in selling enough watercolors of the Japanese landscape to finance their trips to Europe.

Yoshida and Nakagawa were part of a wave of Japanese artists who arrived in the United States between 1890 and 1910. Some left Japan to sell their work in the market for Japanese art that had developed at the turn of the century. After studying in Tokyo art schools newly established during the Meiji era (1868-1912), others went abroad to continue studying at American art academies in San Francisco, Philadelphia, and New York. All members of this first

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<sup>4</sup> **Yoshida Hiroshi.** 吉田博 (1876-1950) Born in Kyushu. Adopted by a public school art instructor. Studied with Tamura Shoryu in Kyoto and then moved to Tokyo to study with Koyama Shôtarô for three years. Traveled to the US with Nakagawa Hachirô in 1899. Traveled to Detroit, Boston, Providence, and New York City hosting exhibitions of his work. Stayed for three years and returned to Japan with Nakagawa. Participated in the reformation of the Meiji Bijutsukai into the Taiheiyô-gakai group. Became interested in woodblocks after his return to Japan. Traveled again to the US and the UK in 1920 to sell his woodblock prints. Formed his own woodblock studio for artists and carvers in Tokyo in 1925. In 1931, published a group of prints that he did in India, Pakistan, and Singapore. Worked as an illustrator for imperial army 1938.

<sup>5</sup> While in Boston, Yoshida's connections with the Matsuki family of art dealers, who had a gallery in the city, led them to other collectors as well.

wave of Japanese artists had trained in art academies in Tokyo and Kyoto before their arrival on American shores, but none of them intended to stay in the United States. Their goal was Paris, where they hoped to enter art academies, study with the masters, and see artworks in person that they had seen only in reproductions. Selling watercolors to the Boston bourgeoisie and studying in Philadelphia's art academies were mere way stations to facilitate their reaching Paris.

The first wave of Japanese artists shared many characteristics. They came from elite families. They had lived and studied art in Tokyo and were accustomed to urban life, so to them California and Washington State represented the American frontier. These individuals were products of the new art discourse that circulated in late-nineteenth-century Japan: Western versus Japanese art, traditional versus modern, East versus West. The first wave painted in a variety of styles and techniques: oil painting, watercolors, and brush painting (*sumi-e*). Their technical flexibility allowed them to adapt their style to Western and Japanese art market trends. Their artistic "travels" (*ryokô*) determined the nature of their artwork and also the art networks in which they participated.

After European and American gunboats thrust open Japan's doors in the mid-nineteenth century, Japanese artworks became available in continental Europe and the United States even as books of Western oil paintings began to circulate in Japan. Japanese art charmed Westerners; Japan appeared as a foreign land free of machines, soot, and other evidence of industrialization. Madame Butterfly would wait in kimono under a flowery tree, but she would never alter or age. For Japanese of the 1880s, Western art seemed realistic, even scientific, and there was a perception that its utility could serve industrialization. And so commenced an exchange of visual culture between Japan and the West that would create a fusion of styles and techniques that became difficult to identify in purely national terms.

One way Japanese art entered the United States was through international expositions. Crossing national borders became easier and cheaper in the late nineteenth century both for people and for objects. International expositions in Paris, London, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis were similar to late twentieth century malls: concentrated locations with wealth on display for consumers who were beginning to see shopping as entertainment.<sup>6</sup> Entering the Japanese Pavilion and purchasing one of the vases on display, a St. Louis resident could own a piece of Japan even without going there. The display of goods from abroad provided new *access* to exotic locales.

The experience of the first wave of Japanese painters in the United States affected the nature of their art, not least because of the expectations American consumers had of what Japanese art ought to look like. Arriving during the “Japan craze” of the 1890s and 1900s, they felt compelled to paint pictures that alluded to their homeland either in style or subject.<sup>7</sup> Although trained in Western oil painting, they produced works to appeal to American preconceptions of what Japanese art should look like. Artists often attended the expositions, hoping to take advantage of the market for their art works. They observed firsthand which pieces sold and which critics discounted as “too mimetic” of Western painting. The first wave, in short, could scarcely escape painting their national identity into their work.

The first wave remained tied to the Japanese art world (*gadan*). As art students, they had developed networks of like-minded artists and patrons who supported them throughout their

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<sup>6</sup> Gabriel P. Weisberg, “Japonisme: The Commercialization of an Opportunity,” [Japonisme Comes to America: The Japanese Impact on the Graphic Arts 1876-1925](#) (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. 1990) The Japanese Pavilion at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago presented one of the most popular attractions: the catalog compared the experience of entering the Pavilion to a future date when the exhibition audience could view displays made by Martians.

<sup>7</sup> *Japonisme*, a term coined by the French art critic Philippe Burty in 1872, described the absorption of Japanese aesthetics by European artists. The term took on a broader meaning a blending of Japanese and Western stylistic techniques and subject matter. The popularity of the *Japonisme* aesthetic spread to the United States, where it influenced consumer demand for Japanese arts and crafts.

subsequent careers. Access to elite art circles was eased by the camaraderie formed with other artists while they were abroad.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, rising in status in the *gadan* seemed to require that an artist travel abroad for training.<sup>9</sup> Artists returned to Japan with a stamp of authenticity that brought sales, art jury appointments, and teaching posts. As artists originally trained in Japan, they had become accustomed to the link between art and state support, which they knew to balance with their creative inclinations.

While abroad, the first wave painters tended to associate with other Japanese, and their relationship with Western artists was primarily that of teacher and student. The racial hostility experienced by Chinese immigrants who had arrived earlier, heightened their marginalization in American society. Their peripheral status was often fraught with loneliness and alienation and first wave artists never imagined themselves as anything but thoroughly Japanese.

### *Defining Tradition*

"There is no longer a single artist who blindly continues to practice his art according to the principles of the Tosa, Kanô, Nanga, Shijô schools or of the *ukiyo-e* print...Since we (Japanese artists) all receive a mostly European education and because we take European works as our models, we would be going against the nature of things if we did not conform to that influence...Some Europeans believe that imitation is the driving force among us Japanese artists who paint in oils...I must say that this is an erroneous opinion. Contemporary Japanese artists receive their impressions of nature just as Europeans do. And like Europeans, they find

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<sup>8</sup> American artists were also flocking to Paris to study art; only a few at the turn of the century argued that the U.S. possessed its own distinct art separate from Europe. They, too, looked to Europe as the fount of art and culture. European culture, whether imagined or real, mediated between Japanese artists and their American experience.

<sup>9</sup> One way of achieving such success, as promoted by popular magazines like *Seikô* – "Success", was to sojourn in the United States, to acquire technical knowledge, study English, or reap America's imagined material bounty. Tokyo youth read articles about the "secrets of great Americans," which would not only earn them riches, but would also benefit them once they returned to Japan. For the national "enrichment of Japan," prominent intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote essays with titles like "Leave Your Homeland at Once," encouraging young men to seek opportunities in the United States and Europe. Fukuzawa had traveled to the United States twice in 1860 and 1867 and sent his two sons to the U.S. during the 1880s. Mitziko Sawada, *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890-1924* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 118-119

a way to express themselves directly through oil painting. Of course, (Japanese) lack experience in that tradition of European art, which inevitably leads to defects in the drawing, the coloring, and even in the material practice of their art. I cannot deny this.”<sup>10</sup> (Ishii Hakutei, 1923)

Trained professional artists who traveled abroad had to contend with notions of Japanese art from the past. Their studies had instilled in them ideas of a Japanese cultural heritage, a heritage that was in the process of being reformulated in national terms as part of the establishment of a modern-nation state in the decades following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Defined in the context of the nation’s embrace of modernity and refuting of Japanese tradition was located in a cultural legacy of arts and crafts of the past. However varied in medium, region, era, and technique, these works gave rise to what came to be known as a canonical “Japanese aesthetic.” Such redefinition was not unique to Japan. In Pascale Casanova’s words, any artist who entered the international arena was “armed with his past”: heir to the entire national and international history that had made him what he is – whether he was fully conscious of the legacy or not.<sup>11</sup> Schools, government programs, and cultural critics created and maintained ideas of a national heritage and took steps to project that image to the rest of the world.

The process of formulating a “Japanese” art engaged Japanese intellectuals as well as Westerners whom the artists encountered and who had their own notions of what constituted a Japanese aesthetic. In other words, tradition was manifested in interior as well as in external reflections. As Casanova explains it, an artist’s heritage becomes his “destiny,” whereby an artist who crosses borders would still be defined by the national space from which he comes. These

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<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Birnbaum, Glory in a Line: A Life of Foujita, the Artist Caught Between East & West (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 77

<sup>11</sup> Pascale Casanova, Translated by M. B. Debevoise. The World Republic of Letters (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 40.



expectations were formulated both by the artist's conception of himself and by how the host country perceived him. The effect was something like a pinball machine, in which Western Orientalist interpretations of Japanese art would be appropriated in Japan, only to ricochet back to inform the West again.

The boundary between the traditional and modern was reciprocal, given that both were codified in Japan at the same time. The same was true of Meiji distinctions between East and West, Japanese and foreign. Despite the rhetorical polarities, an area of synthesis where the extremes overlapped reveals how each informed and transformed the other. Rather than a pole with East and West at opposing ends, a grid, or matrix better describes the relationship between the two.<sup>12</sup> East permeates the West, and West permeates the East. Asai Chû 浅井忠 (1856-1907), for example, was inspired by the Art Nouveau movement he observed while studying in Paris and his designs for earthenware, furniture, and vases reveal what art historian Alicia Volk refers to as “reverse *Japonisme*.”<sup>13</sup> Art Nouveau had itself appropriated stylistic elements from Japanese ceramics, *ukiyo-e*, lacquer ware, and other items introduced by dealers like Samuel Bing (1838-1905) in Paris during the 1880s and during the following decade in the United States. Asai's designs for ceramics and furniture, with their decorative elements, flat perspective, and swirling lilies and phoenixes, reveal how Western versions of “native” Japan influenced Japanese artists. When Asai, Yoshida Hiroshi, and others incorporated *Japonisme* into their artwork, they imported a Western idea of Japanese aesthetics back into Japan.

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<sup>12</sup> In his introduction to [The Modernist Papers](#), Frederic Jameson discussed the duality of form and content, suggesting instead a “series of partial syntheses.” Frederic Jameson, [The Modernist Papers](#) (London, New York: Verso, 2007), p. xiii – xv.

<sup>13</sup> Alicia Volk, “Reverse Japonisme and the Structure of Modern Art in Japan,” [In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugoro and Japanese Modern Art](#) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010)

Tradition is an ideologically motivated invention. To divide Japanese art history into two parts - the arrival of Western art and everything that came before it as “traditional” Japan – is to confuse cultural objects with an underlying ideology. Those who characterized works as traditional were laying claim to the past for their own purposes, often to declare and enclose a homogeneous community. Works that evoke “traditions,” seem to reach back to draw from the static, self-contained well of the past. Meiji Japanese fostered ideas of a Japanese tradition tied to an unchanging past that could be maintained in the turbulence of the present. Tradition became like a Rock of Ages, to be clung to, protected, and held up against outside encroachment. Meiji visual culture exemplified this phenomenon.

In the late-nineteenth-century, oil painting in the West was undergoing a transformation of its own as realism began to give way to expressive rendering. A Japanese artist who hoped to learn Western techniques might find that they differed depending on the city or school he encountered. The impressionists and the post-impressionists created works that confounded conventional expectations. As writer and art historian John Berger suggests, oil painting was more than a technique. It defined an art form and genre that suited high society and the advent of commodity culture.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, photography began to fill a demand for exact representations of objects, family members, and landscapes. The artist’s individual *impression* of a scene or object became more important than the object itself. When cubism emerged in the early years of the twentieth century, the vanguard of oil painting changed again. Japan’s importation of Western techniques thus took place amid its own rapidly changing fashions in artistic technique, media, and content.

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<sup>14</sup> John Berger, Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series with John Berger (London: British Broadcasting Company; New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 83-112

Notions of traditional versus modern dogged artists of the first wave and would plague their successors as well. From the outset, the modern was conflated with the West. Since it was often assumed, as Karatani Kôjin has written, that the origin of modernity is Western, non-Western arts and literature could never claim to be fully modern. An artwork created by a Japanese, no matter when or where he did so, was haunted by traces of the traditional, or the anti-modern. To be otherwise was merely to imitate the West.<sup>15</sup> Westerners looked to Japan, and to Latin America and Africa, for artifacts of traditional culture, evidence of a pre-modern past observable in the modern present. Japanese art was viewed as having unique and identifiable characteristics: graphic line drawing, vivid color, a calligraphic touch and other elements that came to be associated with the Japanese aesthetic. Westerners also considered Japanese art to be “decorative”; pretty embellishments on everyday objects. Both the Japanese and Western art establishments struggled to identify a Japanese “art” that could qualify for display in fine arts museums of the time.<sup>16</sup>

That Japan, as well as other nations, was modernizing contemporaneously with the West and was creating its own modern art, was (and is) a difficult notion for many to accept. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century expositions in Europe and the United States took place

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Alexandra Munroe, Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), pp. 21-22.

<sup>16</sup> Modern art also required a modern art language, which brought new additions to the Japanese lexicon. Following the 1873 international exposition in Vienna, exhibitors created the neologism *bijutsu* to distinguish “fine art” from *geijutsu*, which included decorative arts and crafts. There had been no distinction of this sort between “art” and “craft” before the Meiji era. It was Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), as self-elected champion of Japanese tradition, who introduced the point of view that Japanese art was, in fact, art. To identify these works as “art,” required a new discursive position that Fenollosa and his pupil, Okakura Kakuzô 岡倉 覚三 (1862-1913) hoped to establish in both Japanese and foreign public opinion. Participation in international exhibitions also required new categories based on administrators’ and visitors’ expectations. Displays needed to be periodized, historical eras defined. Japanese tradition was meant to bolster Japan’s national image in the international scene. Yet, museum display required framed paintings hung on walls, so that traditional lacquer boxes, pottery, screens, hand scrolls seemed ill suited for modern exhibitions. Karatani Kôjin, “Japan as Museum: Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa.” Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky. (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), pp. 33-38.

just as the export market for Japanese crafts was blossoming. Furthermore, and perhaps most important, this market existed only for “traditional” Japanese arts and crafts, partly because of the assumption that nothing new, or *modern*, could be created in Japan. The Japanese government found this to be true when its “modern” artists who painted in the Western-style (*yōga*), were ignored at international exhibitions.

In an article written in April 1893, an American journalist reported to the public about the Japanese exhibit at the Chicago World’s Fair. The writer agreed with the Japanese government’s decision not to include any oil paintings. “Instead of confining their efforts to fields in which they command distinction, they too often wander beyond their limitations and aim at rivalry with Western methods.”<sup>17</sup> The writer went on to say that when an artist “disfigured” the Japanese landscape with colors that were common to European painters, “the consequences were evil.” Art works that seemed to embrace foreign techniques were thus suspect.<sup>18</sup> Works that did not support the expectations of national identity were marginalized as “derivative” of foreign sources.<sup>19</sup>

The *fin-de-siècle* notion of a traditional Japanese aesthetic soon froze in the Western imagination. When Yoshida Hiroshi, Nakagawa Hachirō, and others donned kimono and served tea to sell their works in 1899, they purveyed an image consistent with American beliefs that Japan was an aesthetic realm as much, (or perhaps more), as it was a nation. Oscar Wilde

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<sup>17</sup> “Japanese Art at Chicago,” New York Times (April 23, 1893)

<sup>18</sup> Citing Okakura’s *Ideals of the East*, art critic Charles H. Caffin echoed this sentiment when he wrote about the Japanese “spirit” in terms of its art. Although the Japanese had become versed in Western literature, music, and painting, they had “produced no development of importance.” Caffin concluded that the capacity to successfully adopt certain artistic methods was not a virtue of the methods; it must result from the brain of the race. In other words, the Japanese could not produce works using Western methods, no matter what they did.

<sup>19</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), pp. 6-11.

commented that there was no such thing as Japan; it was an invention – a pure aesthetic fantasy.<sup>20</sup> In their paintings of gardens, flowers, and rivers, French impressionists turned to Japanese woodblocks and decorative motifs to transform their sense of composition, color, and form. They re-imagined their landscape in “Japanese” style. Until its army defeated Russia in 1905, Japan’s image in the West was consistent with a soft, feminine, aesthetic that posed no threat. After the Russo-Japanese War, however, ideas of Japan as a modern nation, rather than an artistic Flowery Kingdom, took hold quickly.<sup>21</sup>

### *Yôga and Nihonga*

Western-style painting (*yôga*) was first defined in the context of state encouragement of artists to adopt new styles, materials, and techniques from Europe and America in the late-nineteenth century. Educators incorporated pencil drawing into the curriculum of compulsory primary education after 1872, and also as part of the training for primary school teachers.<sup>22</sup> Western painters were hired as instructors in such newly established art schools as the Technological Fine Arts School (Kobu Bijutsu Gakko) in 1876. Their pupils traveled to the West to receive instruction at the source. Kuroda Seiki 黒田清輝 (1866-1924) and others sought out artists, instructors, and schools in Europe where they could hone their skills. Most had seen French and Italian paintings only in reproductions and wanted to view the masterpieces in person. Hoping to receive appointments as art instructors in *yôga* techniques after they returned, some of

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<sup>20</sup> Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of the Living: An Observation,” *Intentions* (1891)

<sup>21</sup> The Japanese state promoted traditional culture to dispel images of the nation as either a commercial rival or military threat – a strategy that would be used again after World War II.

<sup>22</sup> John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), p. 159.

these artists returned to Japan with oil paintings of haystacks and dairymaids from the French countryside.<sup>23</sup>

Enthusiasm for *yôga* waned in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Campaigns against the teaching of Western art in Japanese schools arose in the context of the rising nationalism of the 1880s and 1890s. Conservative intellectuals began to suggest that the wholesale adoption of Western techniques would lead to the loss of Japanese traditions, as if Japan's aesthetic heritage was about to vanish in the hands of a generation of Western-style *yôga* painters. One way to halt the tide of Western-style art was to encourage something they called *nihonga*, or, Japanese-style oil painting, which fused Western techniques with Japanese themes. By framing the genre as "Japanese-style," the *nihonga* compromise brought Japanese tradition into the realm of modern art.

Although *nihonga* was a modern creation, defined in opposition to *yôga*, its associations with a national aesthetic and the champions of tradition limited the genre. Artists who used traditional brushwork elements in their work were considered to be in the *nihonga* camp, while those artists who painted still-lives of foreign fruit were labeled *yôga* artists. *Nihonga* paintings ranged from Kawabata Gyokushô's hanging scroll of the Sumida River painted on silk to Kano Hogan's paintings of Buddhist iconography, which incorporated chiaroscuro. *Nihonga* also included oils on canvas of Japanese women clad in *yukata*, reading newspapers while lounging on *tatami* mats: fusing the modern (newspaper, oil painting) with tradition (*yukata*, *tatami*).<sup>24</sup> It became increasingly difficult to create a clear divide between the two genres.

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<sup>23</sup> As they began to adapt their subjects for a Japanese audience, rice farmers replaced dairymaids.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Wada Eisaku's "Young Girl Reading a Newspaper," oil on canvas, 1901. Tôkyô University of Art.

Two of the most influential voices in the movement to preserve Japanese aesthetic traditions were the American educator Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) and his pupil, Okakura Kakuzô (1862-1913). A graduate of Harvard University, Fenollosa went to Japan in 1878 as a professor of philosophy and political economy at Tokyo Imperial University. He became absorbed in studying – and amassing large collections of - Japanese art and antiquities. Okakura had a grasp of English and served as his teacher’s translator, guide, and collaborator. During the height of the backlash against *yôga*, in 1887, Fenollosa helped to found the Tokyo Fine Arts School.<sup>25</sup> Japanese art schools, Fenollosa argued, should preserve indigenous techniques and traditions before they disappeared. American museums like the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where Fenollosa sent his collection to be housed and displayed, were assigned with protecting those treasures from the threat of disappearance.<sup>26</sup>

Fenollosa and Okakura’s influence was immediately felt, as Western-style painting was excluded from the curriculum of other schools. In response to nationalist pressure, the government retracted its support for *yôga* artists. Without support at home and no foreign market, *yôga* paintings did not appear in Japanese pavilions at international expositions after 1882. Whereas intellectuals like Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) encouraged Japanese to move away from Asia, Okakura wrote in *Ideals of the East*, written in English in 1904, that Asian civilization was a complement to Western civilization. Over hundreds of years, Okakura asserted, Asian art had traveled from India to China, culminating in its ultimate expression in Japan, in a

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<sup>25</sup> Okakura served as the school’s director between 1890 and 1898.

<sup>26</sup> In their leadership positions at the Tokyo Fine Arts School, Fenollosa and Okakura promoted *Nihonga* as an alternative to *yôga*. Japanese oil painters who returned from studying in the West during the last years of the nineteenth century confronted a flat market for their works among Japanese as well. In 1904, Okakura accompanied favored *nihonga* artists Yokoyama Taikan 横山大観 (1868-1958) and Hishida Shunsô 菱田春草 (1874-1916) to Boston and New York, where the artists exhibited their work.

progression similar to that of Greco-Roman art in Western culture.<sup>27</sup> Denying that only Western artists produced the early masterpieces or that Western “realism” was any closer to nature than paintings by Song dynasty artists, Okakura advocated for the legitimacy of Asian art and culture.<sup>28</sup> Because of these efforts by Fenollosa and Okakura to champion Japanese art in the United States, and bolstered by the popularity of Japanese objects at international exhibitions, Japan became synonymous with Eastern art and aesthetics in American eyes.<sup>29</sup>

*Yôga in the United States: Takahashi Katsuzô*

When Kuroda Seiki returned to Tokyo from Paris in 1893, a revival of interest and support for *yôga* was underway. In 1894, the Tokyo School of Fine Arts once again included *yôga* in its curriculum after having removed it in 1887. Kuroda became the head of *yôga* training in the school two years later. Because of his family’s high political standing and influence, Kuroda lent credibility to painting as a legitimate activity for members of the elite classes.<sup>30</sup> Despite Kuroda’s classification as an *yôga* artist, the nature of his works pointed to the overlap between *yôga* and *nihonga*. Upon his return from France, Kuroda made paintings that featured Japanese scenes: Japanese women in *yukata* holding fans replaced images of blonde-haired maidens knitting by cottage window seats. He did not, however, paint urban settings like Tokyo,

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<sup>27</sup> Okakura Tenshin, The Ideals of the East, With Special Reference to the Art of Japan (Rutland, VT: C. E. Tuttle Company, 1970)

<sup>28</sup> Okakura Tenshin, “Modern Art from a Japanese Point of View,” The International Quarterly, 11. (New York: Fox, Duffield, and Company, 1905)

<sup>29</sup> Karatani Kôjin, *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde 1905-1931 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 17.



where he lived and worked, or its inhabitants. Rather, his pastoral genre scenes romanticized the Japanese countryside.<sup>31</sup>

Takahashi Katsuzô (1860-1917) also returned to Tokyo in 1893, but from California instead of Paris.<sup>32</sup> Takahashi lived in the United States for eight years, where he had studied, exhibited, and won awards for his paintings. Before going to the United States, Takahashi had studied brush painting in Tokyo for several years. He then moved to Yokohama, where he designed handkerchiefs, shawls, and other goods for the export market during the 1880s. Yokohama had been open to foreign trade and residence since 1858 and a market for traditional Japanese crafts catering to foreign tastes developed early in the treaty port.<sup>33</sup> American businessman Charles Fletcher recruited Takahashi in 1885 to come and work at his store in San Francisco. When the store failed, Takahashi entered the California School of Design, where he began to study oil painting for the first time. Exhibiting his works throughout San Francisco, Takahashi received numerous awards, including the Avery Gold Medal for oil painting in 1891.

Takahashi left for Chicago in 1893 to attend the Columbian Exposition, where he displayed four works in the California Art Gallery: “In the Woods,” “Sonoma County

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<sup>31</sup> Weisenfeld, *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Takahashi Katsuzô 高橋勝蔵 (1860-1917) Born in Miyagi Prefecture. Conscripted into the Japanese military during the Seinan (Satsuma Rebellion) War in 1877. Moved to Tokyo in 1879 and then to San Francisco in 1885 after he was recruited by an American businessman who saw his designs for handkerchiefs and shawls in Yokohama. Takahashi began to study oil painting in San Francisco. Exhibited works at state fairs, SF Art Association, World Expo in Chicago, and others. Returned to Tokyo in 1893. Received awards for paintings in the U.S. and in Japan. Member of the Meiji Bijutsu-kai and the subsequent Taiheiyô Gakai. Died in Tokyo in 1917.

<sup>33</sup> European and American businessmen sought out artisans to create Japanese goods to be sold in the West. Both Kuroda Seiki and Okakura Kakuzô dismissed the “art for export” market as inauthentic, and unsuitable for a connoisseur of Japanese art. The Japanese government also took pains to distinguish goods on display at international expositions from what were thought to be cheap and inferior goods made for export. Yokohama’s “art for export” trade was, nonetheless, a common way of entering the art world for people who could not afford to go to art schools. Many left Japan to sell their goods in the West. Sawatari Kiyoko cites Takahashi Katsuzô as one of these artists, who began their careers in the Yokohama export market. Sawatari Kiyoko, “Innovational Adaptations: Contacts Between Japanese and Western Artists in Yokohama, 1859-1899,” Ellen P. Conant, editor. Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese Art (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 91.

Landscape,” “Scene in Marin County,” and “Still Life Study.”<sup>34</sup> While San Francisco painter Theodore Wores exhibited paintings based on his travels to Japan, such as “Dancing Girls of Kiota (sic) Japan” and “Temple of Sheba (sic), Tokio (sic), Japan,” Takahashi’s submissions depicted a northern California landscape where he had lived and worked. Takahashi was the only painter of Japanese descent included in the California art gallery, and he made no implicit reference to Japan in his work.

Takahashi’s “Still Life Study” won a medal at the exposition. Painted in dark, brown tones the piece depicted a watering vase, bowl, and a dead dove propped against a jug.<sup>35</sup> The painting is a study in light: a soft, single light source illuminates the three objects from the left, creating a theatrical, dramatic effect. The work was a showcase for Takahashi to exhibit his technical skill at capturing the gentle light hitting the surface of the metal jug and the white feathers of the dove.<sup>36</sup> After winning the gold medal in Chicago, Takahashi decided to return to Tokyo. In 1894, he joined the influential Meiji Art Society (Meiji Bijutsu-kai), which included other Western-style artists, and received recognition for his watercolors as well as his oil paintings.<sup>37</sup> (Figure 2)

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<sup>34</sup> Final Report of the California World’s Fair Commission: including a description of all exhibits from the State of California, collected and maintained under legislative enactments, at the World’s Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893. (Sacramento, 1894)

<sup>35</sup> Although some sources cite the 1891 painting as “Still Life with Swan,” the painting is of a dove and is housed at the Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku.

<sup>36</sup> Takahashi’s interests were not limited to painting: while in Chicago, Takahashi also became involved in theater set design, which he continued after his return to Japan. His achievements in Chicago and San Francisco portended a successful return to Japan later that year.

<sup>37</sup> Like Takahashi Katsuzô, many artists who returned to Japan after studying abroad joined the Meiji Bijutsu-kai, which exerted great influence in the Japanese art world. Koyama Shôtarô 小山正太郎 (1857-1916), Asai Chû, and other artists who had studied under Italian painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882) in Tokyo, formed the art society in 1889 to provide support for *yôga* artists. Fontanesi’s disciples, who became teachers themselves, were forced out of the newly founded art schools when Western-style oil painting fell out of favor with the government and nationalist intellectuals in 1887. Fired from his post at the Tokyo Normal School in 1890, Koyama Shôtarô established a private studio, Fudôsha, in Tokyo, where he continued to instruct students in the *yôga* style. Asai followed Koyama to the Fudôsha and was instrumental in

Upon his return, the Japanese art world welcomed Takahashi, and the Meiji Bijutsu-kai hosted one of his first exhibitions. The show consisted of over twenty oil paintings created in San Francisco as well as watercolors, including California scenes such as those he exhibited in Chicago. Although oil paintings were the preferred medium in *yōga* circles, Takahashi's watercolors also earned him critical praise. After seeing his watercolors displayed in Meiji art salons, other Japanese artists felt encouraged to pursue the medium. California landscapes were rare in Japan at the time, and they attracted attention among art viewers.

Takahashi's return was not as triumphant as he had hoped, however. Because he had never studied in Europe, he struggled in Meiji art circles more than his contemporaries who returned from France. Art historians agree that Kuroda's influence and success overshadowed Takahashi's. Studying in the cultural capital of Paris proved more impressive than awards received in San Francisco or Chicago. In order to attract a Japanese audience for his work, Takahashi changed to Japanese subjects using oil painting techniques.<sup>38</sup> After police censored Takahashi's painting of a nude at a 1902 art exhibition in Tokyo, he exhibited his works in independent shows and avoided established art circles sponsored by the Japanese government.

Although Takahashi did not wield the same influence as Kuroda in Meiji art circles, he convinced other artists to travel to the United States for study. One of these artists was Miyake

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forming the Meiji Bijutsu-kai, which held lectures and exhibitions for members. Although Koyama was reinstated in his position in 1899 after the debate subsided and *yōga* and *nihonga* began to coexist, Koyama's Fudōsha studio and the Meiji Bijutsu-kai continued to provide a base of support for Western-style artists working in Tokyo during the late nineteenth century.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Takahashi painted the "Enlightenment of Eshun," (1905) that depicted the story of a Buddhist nun who shaved her head and removed her clothes, hoping that her fellow monks would stop seeing her as a sexual being, but as a devotee of Buddha's teachings.

(Katsumi) Kokki 三宅克己 (1874-1954), who, in turn, influenced other young artists.<sup>39</sup> After conscription in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Miyake returned to art in Tokyo. Based on the purchase of some of his works by Westerners, Miyake resolved to go to the United States to study art at Yale University. At Takahashi's urging, Miyake stopped in San Francisco in 1897 on his way to the east coast. Takahashi recommended that he take a walking tour of the California city, encouraging him to visit the art museums in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.<sup>40</sup> His visit to San Francisco's art museums was Miyake's first direct exposure to Western paintings outside the exhibitions he had seen in Tokyo. He later recalled that the experience left a deep impression on him.<sup>41</sup> He realized for the first time that he did not have to go to Paris to see the masters.<sup>42</sup> Returning to Japan at the height of the revival of *yōga* painting, Takahashi Katsuzō's experience in the U.S. expanded Western art beyond a strictly European model to one that included San Francisco and Chicago.

### *Watercolors and Yoshida Hiroshi*

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<sup>39</sup> **Miyake (Katsumi) Kokki.** 三宅克己 (1874-1954) Born in Tokushima. Family moved to Tokyo, where Miyake became interested in studying art with Takahashi Yuichi. Fought in the Sino-Japanese War during 1895. Traveled to US in 1897 via San Francisco to New York. Met painter Makino Yoshio in SF. Studied at Yale University. Continued on to UK and France in 1898 and returned to Japan. Became a member of the Hakubakai art society. Inaugurated into the Bunten in 1907. Wrote about photography during the Showa era. Traveled to California and Europe again in 1927.

<sup>40</sup> Miyake Kokki, *Omoizuru mama: Miyake Katsumi jiden* (Tokyo: Kōdaisha, 1938)

<sup>41</sup> Kokki Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Miyake continued to travel throughout his career, in China, Europe and again in California in 1927, while writing about the art scene he observed abroad for art periodicals like *Mizue*. Unlike most art writers at the time who focused exclusively on European trends, Miyake included the American scene. Miyake exhibited sketches he had made during trips to Europe and the United States. During the height of World War II, he wrote in a 1942 exhibition catalog, "There are no national frontiers in art, where neither allies nor enemies should be expected."

“True art is cosmopolitan and the result therefore of external influences as well as the inherent vitality and life of the different nations.” Yoshida Hiroshi<sup>43</sup>

Japanese artists of the first wave were adept at painting works that appealed to a particular audience whose favor they courted. They had great success selling watercolors of Japanese landscapes to the American consumer, catering to what Raymond Williams called the “exotic option.”<sup>44</sup> Artists during the 1890s and early 1900s painted *yôga* works to conform to Meiji Bijutsu-kai standards, while also producing *nihonga* watercolors to sell to Americans, who preferred a fusion of East and West.<sup>45</sup> In the United States, Yoshida and his group proved the wisdom of Takahashi’s recommendation to paint watercolors for the American market rather than oil painting. The only *yôga* artist included in the Japanese Pavilion at the 1893 Columbian Exposition was Ioki Bunsai 五百城文哉 (1863-1906). His watercolor of the Yomeimon Gate at the Nikko Toshugu Shrine – a Japanese scene done in watercolor technique that suggested nineteenth-century Victorian England landscapes – proved a huge success at the exhibit.<sup>46</sup>

A network of artists formed through school acquaintances and contacts in Japan also traveled abroad. Before studying with renowned artist, Koyama Shôtârô (1857-1916), and

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<sup>43</sup> Yoshida Hiroshi quoted by H. E. Robinson, “A Complete Artist,” *Yoshida Hiroshi Zenmokuhangashû* (Tokyo: Abe Shuppan, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London, New York: Verso, 1989) p. 43

<sup>45</sup> Americans, too, began to experiment with their own mixing: the painter John La Farge, for example, produced watercolors of Japanese scenes when he visited Japan in 1886. Vivien Greene, “Aestheticism and Japan: The Cult of the Orient,” *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1960* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), p. 62-63. A follower of both Spencer and Hegel, Ernest Fenollosa had predicted such cultural merging between East and West in his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* of 1912.

<sup>46</sup> Watercolor paintings were also common in Yokohama, where English traders and artists like Charles Wirgman (1832-1891) introduced nineteenth-century Western techniques. Wirgman’s son, Ozawa “Charles” Ichirô, became a recognized watercolorist in Yokohama and encouraged the young Yamada Basuke 山田馬介 (1871-1934) to paint in watercolors as well. Although Ioki never visited the United States, he continued to send watercolors of the Nikko area to sell in the American market.

departing for the United States to sell watercolors, Yoshida had begun his art training as a child in Fukuoka. The artist Yoshida Kasaburô 吉田嘉三郎 (1861-1894), adopted him and sponsored his formal art education in Kyoto under Tamura Sôryû 田村宗立 (1846-1918). There, Yoshida met Miyake Kokki, who encouraged him to move to Tokyo. In 1894, Yoshida left Kyoto and moved to Tokyo to join the Koyama's private school, the Fudôsha, to study Western art techniques.

Yoshida was adept at transforming his style and technique depending on his audience. An early example of Yoshida's *yôga* style, "Deep Mountains and Dark Valleys" (*Miyama yûkoku*) (1897), completed before his trip to the United States, showed dark and somber tones favored by his teacher, Koyama. Black craggy rocks overwhelm a small waterfall. The effect is somber and ominous. For "Carp in a Pond" (*Koi no ike*) (1902), Yoshida painted a school of carp rushing towards food in the center of a pond. Rather than focus on the brilliant oranges and gold of Japanese carp, Yoshida highlighted the intense hues of blues and greens of the water and the shore. The carp were mere black shadows, overwhelmed by the dark water.

Just as Takahashi had encouraged him to go abroad, Miyake Kokki encouraged Yoshida to travel to the United States and made introductions on his behalf. Miyake recommended to Yoshida that he avoid the dark tones favored by Koyama's students when selling paintings in the United States.<sup>47</sup> Watercolors, he said, would sell better. Due to his demonstrated success at

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<sup>47</sup> Yasunaga Kôichi, "Yoshida Hiroshi: His Personality and Art," *Yoshida Hiroshi: Zenmokuhangashû* (Tokyo: Abe Publishing, 2008), p. 23. Like Miyake Kokki, Yoshida Hiroshi, Yamada Basuke, and others, Makino Yoshio. 牧野義雄 (1869-1956) also achieved success once he shifted from oil paintings to watercolors. After studying painting in San Francisco at the Mark Hopkins School of Art during the mid-1890s, Makino, (who later changed his name to Markino), traveled to London, where he professed to have an easier time living as a Japanese. While in San Francisco, he was the target of abuse among anti-Japanese groups he encountered. He struggled for several years to sell his works and was forced to take odd jobs to support himself. His watercolors of London, Paris, and later, Rome, were published in a series that brought Markino a degree of success in Europe and later in the U.S. Markino (Makino), Yoshio, [A Japanese Artist in](#)

selling his paintings on the East Coast, Miyake had become an authority on the American market and created a “fever among young Japanese artists to become overseas ‘art entrepreneurs.’”<sup>48</sup> Following Miyake’s advice, Yoshida brought only a selection of light-colored watercolors to Detroit and Boston. (Figure 3)

When Yoshida Hiroshi arrived in Detroit in 1899, he was resolved to do menial labor, “even washing dishes in restaurants” to finance his travels if his paintings did not sell.<sup>49</sup> For a trained artist like Yoshida, the United States was less a cultural outpost, than a place to make money. Unlike many Japanese artists who followed him, Yoshida did not have to wash dishes, because he found a ready market for his picturesque scenes of Buddhist temples and mountain landscapes.

After a brief return to Japan following his successful tour of American cities, Yoshida returned to Boston in 1900 to sell more paintings. Based on Yoshida and Nakagawa’s earlier success, fellow art students from Tokyo joined them on their second selling expedition. Maruyama Banka 丸山晚霞 (1867-1942), Mitsutani Kunishirô 満谷国四郎 (1874-1936), and Kawai Shinzô 河合新蔵 (1867-1936), were also hoping to earn enough to finance a trip to Europe. The Boston Globe marked the return of Yoshida and the others with a full-page article that included photographs of each artist.<sup>50</sup> Although they departed Yokohama wearing bowler hats and overcoats, the newspaper’s portraits showed “intelligent looking” artists in Japanese

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London Illustrations by Yoshio Markino. (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co. Publishers, 1910) My Recollections and Reflections. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1913)

<sup>48</sup> Yasunaga Kôichi, *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Yasunaga Kôichi, *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> “Japanese Art in Boston,” Boston Daily Globe (December 2, 1900)

dress.<sup>51</sup> Symbols familiar to the Bostonian readership of an Oriental aesthetic – swaying lanterns, dragons, and chrysanthemums - decorated the article on the arrival of the artists from the “flowery kingdom,” where there were “more paintable spots than anywhere else in the world.” The elite of Boston would be comfortable mingling with these artists, the article commented, because they, too, were from good families. Yoshida and his coterie of artists represented an authentic Japan, which if exotic, posed no threat to refined American tastes. (Figure 4)

Yoshida traveled back and forth between Japan and the United States for several years. After he married Yoshida Fujio 吉田 富二雄 (1887-1987), his adopted sister who was also a painter, she joined Yoshida on trips to the U.S. to sell her own work. As a female artist, Fujio’s work attracted attention in Boston, Providence, and Chicago. In 1906, the couple traveled through Europe and to Egypt. On their way back from Egypt, they returned via Singapore and Hong Kong. Many of Yoshida’s later woodblock prints were based on drawings and paintings that he made on these trips. Yoshida’s versatility and flexible selling strategies allowed him to purvey an exotic Japan to Americans, and a cultured Paris and exotic Egypt and India to Japanese.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Okakura Kakuzô would also wear only “traditional” garb when visiting Bostonian society to promote Japanese art work and the collection being amassed by Ernest Fenollosa at the Fine Arts Museum. He suggested that his son do the same, but only if his English was up to par. Christine Guth, “Charles Longfellow and Okakura Kakuzo: Cultural Cross-Dressing in the Colonial Context,” *positions*, Vol. 8, No. 3, (2000), p. 623.

<sup>52</sup> By the 1930s, as ultra-nationalism swept Japan, many of the artists who had trained as oil painters and produced watercolors of Japan made the shift from *yôga* to *nihonga*. Known for oil paintings and watercolors earlier in his career, Yoshida Hiroshi became a key figure in the revived woodblock print movement after the 1920s. According to his wife, Yoshida Fujio, Yoshida’s paintings stopped selling as they toured major Western cities during the 1920s. He was forced to explore new techniques. Initial success with prints produced by the house of Watanabe encouraged him to continue. In addition, Fujio wrote that Yoshida observed foreign print-artists, like Bertha Lum (1864-1959), who had her prints on display in Ueno Park, creating a “stir in Japan.” Japanese artists, he said, had to “get busy in the field that was once their own.” Yoshida also began to explore Japan’s empire in Asia. During the 1930s, Yoshida left for China and India and created picturesque landscapes of villagers at the market wearing native dress and selecting goods from a bountiful harvest. No signs of war, poverty, or hunger appeared in his prints of Tokyo scenes, Mukden markets, or the streets of Shanghai even during the height of the war during the late 1930s and 1940s. More discussion of Yoshida’s shift to *hanga* will be discussed in Chapter 5.



Yoshida Hiroshi's versatility ensured a long and influential career. He was the first artist featured in the Japanese art journal, *Bijutsu Shinchô*, in 1908 – even before the powerful Kuroda Seiki who was featured the following year. He maintained a leadership position in the Taiheiyôgakai (Pacific Arts Association) and kept up his friendships with Nakagawa Hachirô and Kawai Shinzô, with whom he had traveled to the U.S. in 1900. Yoshida recalled that his experience in the United States made him feel that his work was unique: “I have never met any artist who is painting works similar to mine. This realization made me persevere and develop my own style of painting.”<sup>53</sup> He did not want to mimic what he saw, he said, like many artists he knew who had returned from overseas. Instead, he wanted to “maintain his own style.” Yoshida Hiroshi's work heralded a new, modern art born from the overlapping space between Japan and the West.<sup>54</sup> Yoshida's extensive art training allowed him to move across borders, attaching himself to a European or Japanese aesthetic depending on the art associations, salons, and buyers that he encountered. For him, national aesthetics became a means of cultural – and commercial – exchange. (Figure 5)

### *Nihonga in the United States: Aoki Toshi and Obata Chiura*

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<sup>53</sup> Yoshida, Hiroshi, Yoshida Hiroshi zen mokuhan gashû (Tokyo: Abe shuppan, 1989)

<sup>54</sup> Other artists traveled to the United States to sell watercolors following Yoshida and Nakagawa's success in 1899. Koyama's Fudôsha students Mitsutani Kunishiro 満谷国四郎 (1874-1936), Kawai Shinzô 河合新蔵 (1876-1936), and Maruyama Banka 丸山晩霞 (1867-1942) traveled to Boston in 1900 for an exhibition. The group titled their show “Japanese Artists Watercolor Exhibition,” in order to capture the same potential buyers who had purchased works from Yoshida and Nakagawa. Like Yoshida and Nakagawa, each artist was a trained oil painter and had established his reputation in Japan before leaving for the United States. After studying with Koyama in the early 1890s, Mitsutani exhibited oil paintings in government-sponsored shows. In 1898, the Imperial Household purchased one of Mitsutani's works. Kawai also studied oil painting with Koyama. Yoshida encouraged his friend, Kawai Shinzô, to stop in Boston to earn money to finance a trip to Paris. Because of his father's silk trade, Maruyama Banka had experience in Yokohama, where he was familiar with goods produced for export to the United States and Europe. He understood what foreigners tended to purchase and brought works with him to cater to their tastes. Yoshida was in Italy when he heard the group had traveled to Boston, and he hurried back to meet them and display his works with theirs. The exhibition drew nearly 20,000 visitors per week. The group sold \$5000 worth of art works and was able to finance their trip to Paris, where they once again studied oil painting.

Where Takahashi turned toward oil painting after his job in the San Francisco department store ended, other artists who had worked in Yokohama and were recruited by American businessmen to work in their stores continued to create “Japanese” works to sell in the United States. Aoki Toshio (1854-1912) sold exclusively to the American market, focusing on selling *nihonteki* (Japanese-style) works. Unlike Yoshida, who sold in both American and Japanese markets, Aoki had no need to produce *yōga* paintings for the Japanese market. Aoki arrived in San Francisco during the 1880s to work as a commercial artist for the Deakin Brothers department store.<sup>55</sup> When sales began to slow in San Francisco, Aoki moved south to Pasadena, where the real estate boom in the Los Angeles area provided a new market for his works. George T. Marsh employed Aoki at his department store in the area.<sup>56</sup>

As a “native artist,” Aoki was sought after as a source of traditional Japanese decoration, during the “Japan craze” of the 1890s and 1900s. Many of his works adorned the interiors of Arts and Crafts houses, whose architecture fused Japanese and Western styles. Insisting on using only materials imported from Japan for his paintings, Aoki nurtured his image as southern California’s resident Japanese artist, which earned him fame and financial success. Aoki gave lectures at various art clubs on the sources of his inspiration, claiming that “I paint a soldier; I

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<sup>55</sup> **Aoki Toshio** 青木年雄 or Aoki Hyōsai 青木瓢齋 (1854-1912) Born in Yokohama and moved to San Francisco during the 1880s. Worked at the Deakins Brothers store creating art works for sale. Moved to Pasadena in 1895 and was affiliated with the G.T. Marsh and Co. store. Also did painted rooms for wealthy society members. Adopted daughter, Tsuru, who married the actor, Sessue Hayakawa.

<sup>56</sup> In 1904, in order to capitalize on the interest in Japan, the businessman, George T. Marsh, built a “Japanese tea garden” in Pasadena, which was based on the one built at the Midwinter International Exposition of 1894 in San Francisco. Marsh’s tea garden was not a commercial success, however, and in 1912, the business magnate, Henry E. Huntington, bought the garden and moved it to its present location at the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens in San Gabriel.

feel very strong. I paint a peony; I feel beautiful,” which spawned articles recommending that other artists follow his way.<sup>57</sup>

United States critics declared Aoki to be a “modest, young genius,” and his decorative subjects of “dragons and butterflies, ancient Mikado tragedies, and modern chrysanthemums” appealed to Californians, who were then becoming interested in *Japonisme*.<sup>58</sup> Working feverishly on interior commissions, Aoki also exhibited paintings in Los Angeles galleries.<sup>59</sup> Journalists claimed that every wall in Pasadena, whether it had a painted mural or one of his framed works, featured a painting by Aoki. In 1907, The Pasadena Daily News printed a two-page story on Aoki that described in detail the murals he painted in the homes of the local elite.<sup>60</sup> No one, the article declared, painted flowers better than the “little brown men of Mikado land” and Aoki’s paintings of wisteria in the living room, lotuses in the bathroom, and poppies in the bedroom were the most skilled and beautiful of all.<sup>61</sup> The article also noted that Aoki traveled annually to the east coast and to Colorado Springs, where for hefty fees he painted the homes of wealthy members of society as well as the occasional parasol, scarf, and fan. Where Takahashi developed his reputation as a fine artist in San Francisco art schools and Yoshida in Tokyo art schools, Aoki created works that were commercial and decorative. (Figure 6)

Aoki hosted lavish Japanese-themed dinners for guests such as J. Pierpont Morgan at his home in Pasadena to promote his artwork. Like Yoshida, who greeted the elite in Boston wearing

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<sup>57</sup> Marie Merrick, “As a Man Thinketh, So Is His Work,” The Etude and Musical World (November 1, 1896)

<sup>58</sup> “Seen by Oriental Eyes: Our Civilization Viewed by a Representative of Another,” The Washington Post (May 6, 1894)

<sup>59</sup> Will South, Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick, and Julia Armstrong-Totten, A Seed of Modernism: The Art Students League of Los Angeles, 1906-1953 (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2008)

<sup>60</sup> Grace Hortense Tower, “Hand Painted Rooms Fad of Society Women,” The Pasadena Daily News (February 9, 1907)

<sup>61</sup> Each flower was picked for its appropriate locale; designations that a Japanese would understand, given his “natural” understanding of a flower’s symbolism.

Japanese dress, Aoki catered to his clientele's desire for authenticity. Pasadena newspapers reported that the dishes served were exclusively Japanese, many of the ingredients imported from Japan.<sup>62</sup> Decorated with cherry blossoms, pink and white lanterns, and place cards decorated with the host's red seal, more than seventy-five guests viewed Aoki's hand-painted table cloths, folding screens, and banners, all available for purchase. The article declared that Aoki, his adopted daughter (the actress Hayakawa Tsuru), and other Japanese were seated "with the (American) guests," while Aoki's wood-carver played flute for the group. Aoki's elaborate events served as showcases for his work, offering a hint of both exoticism and authenticity.

Aoki's prominence among the wealthy and his hosted affairs made him something of a celebrity in Los Angeles. In 1895, the Los Angeles Herald presented an article with drawings by Aoki of southern California society figures as he imagined them dressed in Japanese costume.<sup>63</sup> Asked to illustrate the city's elites "as he saw them," as a Japanese, Aoki drew several Western figures in the costume of samurai, geisha, and Japanese noblemen, transposing Los Angeles elites into their supposed Japanese equivalents. Proclaimed a "once in a lifetime opportunity" for members of society to be pictured in such a way, the article declared that it was a "gift...to be drawn by the master Japanese artist."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> "Cherry Blossom Dinner Tonight: To Be Served a la Japanese," The Pasadena Daily News (March 7, 1903)

<sup>63</sup> "To See Yourselves as Aoki Sees You: Some Pictured Day Dreams of a Famous Japanese Artist," Los Angeles Herald (February 17, 1895)

<sup>64</sup> Because he built "many fine palaces" throughout Los Angeles, Aoki rendered the lumber and banking millionaire, Thomas Douglas Stimson, as a "great landed nobleman in Japan." Some he drew as warriors in *samurai* armor, others as gentlemen in repose, smoking from Japanese pipes. He depicted architect Sumner P. Hunt's wife as a geisha, a skilled "Noh dancer." The newspaper asked Aoki to comment on each drawing and to explain the reason for his choices. In imperfect English, which the newspaper did not edit so as to add to the artist's charm, he presented a somewhat naïve take on the individuals, who he was courting as customers in reality. In the countenance of the widow of banker and founder of University of Southern California, Ozro W. Childs, Aoki discerned that she had not "come quickly into her social place," but was born into elite society. When informed that she was from the South, Aoki remarked that he now understood the source of her charm and pleasant looks.

Aoki's renderings were based on Japanese historical dress as he imagined it. They did not represent the dress of the mid-Meiji era, when Aoki departed Japan, but were a composite of different eras. Presenting Americans in Japanese dress, Aoki's drawings were an example of the transportability of national representation. Aoki suggested with these drawings that national culture could be worn like a costume, transporting his subjects to an exotic place. His paintings, decorated crafts, and entertaining allowed the elite of the American West to travel to another world, bringing a national aesthetic beyond its borders. Yet, the fantasy world that Aoki and others created soon became an unchanging image of Japan.

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Obata Chiura's 小圃千浦 (1885-1975) art education in Japan encompassed various stylistic techniques and media before he left for the United States.<sup>65</sup> When Obata moved to California in 1903, he had already had more than a decade of formal art training in Sendai and Tokyo. Whereas artists like Yoshida of Koyama Shôtarô's Fudôsha school had studied *yôga* either under Italian painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882) or one of his students, Obata's training was entirely rooted in *nihonga* techniques. In addition to *sumi-e* (ink painting), Obata studied the techniques of the Kanô and Tosa schools. He made large-scale paintings of nature, often with brilliant colors as well as with gold leaf. Much like Aoki Toshi in Los Angeles, Obata applied these techniques to decorating jobs in San Francisco as opera set designer, book illustrator, craft maker, and department store decorator. He continued to create fine art paintings while he earned income from commissions for his stylized decoration.

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<sup>65</sup> **Obata Chiura** 小圃千浦 (1885-1975) Born Satô Zôroku in Sendai. Trained as a *nihonga* artist before leaving for the US in 1903. Worked for department stores and did backdrops for the opera, "Madame Butterfly." A trip to Yosemite in 1927 produced a series of works that was turned into a woodblock print book in Japan and eventually led to a teaching position at UC Berkley. Interned at Topaz during the war, Obata continued to teach art to other internees. Became a naturalized citizen in 1954. Led a series of tours to Japan during the 1950s and 1960s. Passed away in Berkeley in 1975.

Like Yoshida, Obata was raised in an artistic family. Obata's older brother, Rokuichi, who adopted Chiura as his son, was an *yōga* artist in Sendai. Obata began a seven-year apprenticeship in *sumi-e* starting at the age of five. According to Obata, he spent two years, after school for two hours, drawing a circle and two straight lines, one line drawn with a downward stroke and the other with a left-to-right stroke in black ink.<sup>66</sup> When Rokuichi submitted one of his *yōga* works to a traveling art exhibit sponsored by the Japan Fine Arts Academy (Nihon Bijutsuin) when it came to Sendai, Obata was inspired to go to the Academy in Tokyo to study *nihonga*. Defying his older brother, who wanted him to enter the military, Obata left for Tokyo in 1899 and entered the Academy when he was fourteen years old. Throughout Obata's long career, his paintings reflected his early training in brushwork in Sendai and at the Japan Fine Arts Academy.

After viewing the paintings of Murata Tanryō 邨田丹陵 (1874-1940) at an exhibition in Ueno, Obata resolved to study under him.<sup>67</sup> Murata at first refused the request of the fifteen-year old Obata, because of his age. When he relented, Obata assisted Murata on several major commissions, including sixty screens for the famed Konpira Shrine in Shikoku.<sup>68</sup> As a student at the Academy, Obata was a leader among his peers, forming the Kenseikai, an art society for young *nihonga* artists, which held exhibitions and published its own journal. Although still young, Obata's professional experience and exhibition record in Tokyo were extensive. More than ten of his paintings were exhibited at annual shows hosted by *nihonga* art societies.

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<sup>66</sup> Obata Chiura, "How Painting Is Taught in Japan," *The Argus* (April, 1928)

<sup>67</sup> Obata Chiura, *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Susan Landauer, "Obata of the Thousand Bays," *Obata's Yosemite: The Arts and Letters of Chiura Obata from His Trip to the High Sierra in 1927* (Yosemite Association, 1993)

Newspapers like the *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* singled out Obata's paintings for praise in their reviews.

Obata was awarded prizes for paintings like "Early Spring" (1902), an example of the *bijin-ga* ("beautiful woman") genre. *Bijin-ga* images were common among *nihonga* artists at the time, and critics praised Obata's careful use of color in the work. Competing with more experienced artists, Obata's painting was awarded a bronze medal.<sup>69</sup> Some critics acknowledged Obata's skill, but criticized the woman's expression. Scholars like Seki Akio have commented that although "Early Spring" seems to be representative of a formal, stylized image of a young girl common at the time, Obata's piece also displayed modern influences.<sup>70</sup> For example, her open-mouthed gaze was unusual for the time.<sup>71</sup> The work appealed to foreign tastes and Mrs. Francis Larkin of Buffalo, New York purchased it and donated it to the local museum. Despite the mixed reviews of Obata's work, his inclusion in exhibitions and acknowledgment in the press were significant achievements at an early stage in his career.

In addition to studying with Murata, Obata studied with a member of the Kanô School, Hashimoto Gahô 橋本雅邦 (1835-1908), who was a close associate of Ernest Fenollosa's and a co-founder of the Japan Fine Arts Academy. Hashimoto fused Edo-period Kanô school ink paintings with the background in Western oil painting he had received from his European instructors. Hashimoto also taught Song and Yuan dynasty traditions of Chinese monochrome

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<sup>69</sup> Tokyo Asahi Shimbun (October 27, 1901)

<sup>70</sup> Seki Akio, "Obata Chiura no tōbei ni kansuru – shiron." Japanese and Japanese American Painters in the United States: A Half Century of Hope and Suffering 1896-1945. Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum. Co-edited by Ayako Ishii. Translated by Kikuko Ogawa. (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan Design Center, 1995)

<sup>71</sup> Seki, *Ibid.*

ink painting.<sup>72</sup> Obata studied the varied techniques of *nihonga* artists such as Yokoyama Taikan, Murata, and Hashimoto, who were formulating a “neo-traditional” genre in the 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>73</sup> Although his style is often referred to as “Japanese,” Obata drew from a variety of techniques and styles from different eras in Japanese history. In later works he used abstraction that could be associated with either traditional Japanese techniques or with the modernist movements he observed in California.

Despite his growing success in Japan, Obata decided to move to California in 1903. Unlike Yoshida Hiroshi and other Fudôsha figures, Obata’s move did not seem motivated by a desire for financial gain. He later claimed that his reason for leaving during a time when he was beginning to make a name for himself in the Tokyo art world was his desire to broaden his horizons. Although still a teenager, Obata felt confined in Tokyo and wanted an adventure in the West while he was still young. Obata recalled that he convinced his brother to give him the money to travel to California by arguing that “the greater the view, the greater the art; the wider the travel, the broader the knowledge.”<sup>74</sup> Another reason for going to the United States may have been to avoid military conscription. In 1903, relations between Japan and Russia were worsening over territorial rights in Manchuria and the outbreak of war seemed imminent.<sup>75</sup> Obata, who had

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<sup>72</sup> Although Obata would use black ink in nearly all of his paintings, it was not until the post World War II era when he started creating monochromatic ink paintings that he had learned from Hashimoto.

<sup>73</sup> John Clark, *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Obata, Chiura, “Chiura Obata,” *California Art Research*, First Series 120-160. (San Francisco: WPA Federal Art Project, 1937). *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata’s Art of the Internment*. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000)

<sup>75</sup> Shimojima, Tetsurô, *Samurai to Kariforunia: Ikyô no Nihon gaka Obata Chiura* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2000)



left Sendai for Tokyo to avoid joining the military, may well have wanted to avoid conscription in the upcoming war.<sup>76</sup>

Obata had no relatives or sponsors in the United States when he arrived in 1903. He had, he said, a single letter of recommendation from a minister at a church in the Ginza area of Tokyo to a bishop at a church in San Francisco.<sup>77</sup> Despite his lack of connections, Obata soon integrated himself into San Francisco's Japanese community. Because only wealthy could afford to move back and forth between Japan and the United States, most Japanese incomers settled in California where they had better prospects than in Japan.<sup>78</sup> Obata was one of those who decided to live in California, where he became an influential figure in the Japanese immigrant community.

Obata's money from his brother soon ran out and he worked at menial jobs to support himself. Since he had come from an elite family and trained at top-level art schools, he faced challenges in adjusting to his low social standing in California. When he worked as a "school boy" (a term used for servant by young Japanese), Obata recalled that on his first day of work he joined his employers at the dinner table and waited to be served.<sup>79</sup> In Kiyama (Henry) Yoshitaka's serialized comic strip about four Japanese living in San Francisco between

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<sup>76</sup> Writer Nagai Kafû 永井 荷風 (1879-1959) left for the United States the same year as Obata. In order to please his father, who did not support Kafû's desire to be a writer, an occupation believed to be inappropriate for an elite member of Japanese society, Kafû studied in the U.S. in the hopes of returning to Japan as a businessman or bureaucrat. Kafû's rendering of the United States was often less than flattering in his *American Stories* (*Amerika monogatari*), published after his return to Japan in 1906. Neither Kafû nor Obata intended to settle in the United States, but to return to Japan as worldly gentlemen. Like Nagai, Obata was neither immigrant nor, as scholar Shimojima Tetsurô writes, was he "abandoning Japan for good." Shimojima, Tetsurô, *Samurai to Karifornia: Ikyô no Nihon gaka Obata Chiura* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2000)

<sup>77</sup> Obata Chiura. Oral history. Interview by Masuji Fujii at the Obata home in Berkeley, 1965. Japanese American History Project The University of California at Los Angeles Special Collections Library and the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

<sup>78</sup> Eiichiro Azuma, *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Obata, Chiura, *Ibid.*

1904 and 1924, all four *shosei* (student workers) worked as houseboys while they pursued their studies, including one character, who studied at the San Francisco Art Institute at night.<sup>80</sup> Kiyama's characters illustrate how humiliating the experience was for many Japanese, who were verbally abused and had no job security.<sup>81</sup>

Every summer between 1909 and 1912, Obata traveled to southern California to work as a grape picker with other Japanese immigrants. Although most emigrants who left for the United States were forced to do menial labor, Obata's training as an artist made him quickly dissatisfied with the low pay and long hours. Since he did not have the connections to galleries and dealers that were available to Yoshida Hiroshi and other Fudôsha students, this kind of work was his only income during his first years in California. He later managed to enter the Mark Hopkins Art School (later the San Francisco Art Institute) to study Western painting, but soon left the school, complaining that the students were not serious enough and spent the class time chatting.<sup>82</sup>

Obata experienced racial hostility, including an episode that turned violent and landed him in jail, during his early years in San Francisco.<sup>83</sup> Once the 1882 federal law passed that

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<sup>80</sup> Yoshitaka (Henry) Kiyama, *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904-1924* Translated by Frederik L. Schodt. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1997)

<sup>81</sup> Others rejected houseboy jobs in San Francisco, because the time requirements distracted them from their painting. For example, Noda Hideo and Terada Takeo refused to work as servants once they entered art school. Noda told Terada that they were "artists in the making," and could not spend their time working at menial jobs. After returning to San Francisco from Japan, where he spent his childhood and teenage years, Noda often painted members of the working classes with whom he empathized with.<sup>81</sup> As a beginning art student, however, he distanced himself from menial labor, because it would take him away from his art. If he were ever to improve his painting skills, Terada recalled, he would have to refuse to spend time "peeling potatoes and carrots for barbarians." Noda and Terada quit their jobs and found an apartment where they shared a bed, "making do," while they devoted themselves to art school. As long as they had rice and soy sauce, Terada remembered, he and Noda managed to survive and create their art. Terada Takeo, "Noda Hideo kun no omoide," *Bijutsu gurafu*. (March, 1976)

<sup>82</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *Chiura Obata's Topaz Moon: Art of the Internment* Introduction by Timothy Anglin Burgard. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000) and Shimojima, Tetsurô, *Ibid*.

<sup>83</sup> A self-described "roughneck," Obata's time in San Francisco was dotted with episodes of racial violence. One episode resulted in a brawl that landed Obata in jail. When a group of workers yelled "Jap!" and spit on him when he was returning from work, Obata felt threatened enough to defend himself with a piece of iron railing. According to Obata, Judge Timothy

barred Chinese immigrants, California labor groups had turned their hostility to the Japanese newcomers. During the first years of the twentieth century, the Hearst media empire, labor unions, and other agitators applied their anti-Chinese rhetoric and violence to the Japanese.<sup>84</sup> When the Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed in 1902 and made permanent, anti-Japanese groups in San Francisco called for a ban on Japanese immigrants as well. They were unsuccessful, but anti-Japanese hostilities persisted. Painter Makino Yoshio said that he fled San Francisco for London in 1897, because it was a “well known fact” that Californians hated Japanese.<sup>85</sup>

One year after the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty concluding the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, anti-Japanese factions in San Francisco proposed a bill to segregate Japanese school children in public schools. When the Japanese government protested to President Theodore Roosevelt, who had negotiated the treaty with Russia, the president rebuked the San Francisco authorities. Finally, the federal government was forced to compromise because of continued anti-Japanese agitation, resulting in the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908. By its terms, the Japanese government would no longer issue passports to migrant laborers, although spouses and children were still allowed to join their husbands already working in the United States. All Asian immigrants were excluded in the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924.

Due to the hostility directed at the Japanese in California during the 1900s, Japanese congregated in communities such as Japantown in San Francisco and Little Tokyo in Los

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Fitzpatrick (1876-1963) ruled that the 135 pound, five feet four inch, painter had to be innocent given that he was fighting with eight large men. Obata, Chiura. *An Oral History*, Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) p. 40

<sup>85</sup> Markino Yoshio *A Japanese Artist in London* (Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs 1910)

Angeles. The writer Nagai Kafû, traveling in America, wrote that he preferred to be in Michigan, where there were not as many Japanese, instead of in the Washington State immigrant community, where he was treated like a “Jap.”<sup>86</sup> Kafû wrote to a literary society in Japan, “The way Japanese people are ostracized in this place is almost unbelievable. It will be enough to tell you that no decent house or apartment will rent to Japanese or Chinese.” He also expressed frustration that Americans could not discern those Japanese who came from the upper classes and those who did not, because they could not understand the hierarchical signals of costume or language. Obata, in contrast, had no experience with English and was only beginning to study at the Japantown Church, so he chose to remain within the Japanese community. Following his time as a school boy, Obata became an illustrator for the *Nichibei Shimbun* (The Japanese American Newspaper), *Shin Sekai* (New World), and for *Japan* magazine. He also worked at hand-coloring photographs at photography studios owned by Americans and Japanese.<sup>87</sup>

Although he became part of the Japanese immigrant community in San Francisco, Obata still had no plan to settle permanently in California. When he married Kohashi Haruko (1892-1989) in 1912 and she became pregnant the following year, the family resolved to stay in California.<sup>88</sup> Haruko later recalled that when he promised to marry her, Obata insisted that they would soon go to Europe for him to study art and then back to Japan. Haruko agreed, but the pair did not leave the U.S. for decades.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Nagai Kafû, *American Stories*. Translated by Mitsuko Iriye. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p. xvii

<sup>87</sup> Obata joined a baseball team, called Fuji-san Club, which became the first Japanese American baseball team.

<sup>88</sup> Although it was unusual for a woman to travel to the United States alone without a promise of marriage after her arrival, Haruko left Japan with the intention of studying how to make Western clothing, intending to start a school to teach Western sewing techniques upon her return.

<sup>89</sup> Shimojima Tetsurô, *Ibid.*

An artist's decision to move between countries was not always dependent on his art career, but was often determined by his personal life. Marriage into the Japanese immigrant community often kept sojourning artists in the United States. Other artists who married in Japan returned to their families or brought them along for temporary stays. Yoshida Hiroshi traveled with his wife throughout the United States, but never immersed himself in a Japanese community with the intention of staying. Photographer Nakayama Iwata invited his girlfriend from Tokyo to join him in New York. The pair returned to Kobe years later and settled there, not wanting their son to grow up "Nisei" (second generation Japanese). Shimizu Toshi left the United States to marry in Japan and brought his wife to New York for a couple of years before they, too, returned home.

Marriages to Western women often failed: painters Ishigaki Eitarô, Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Inukai Kyôhei and others who married American women later divorced them.<sup>90</sup> In the case of Ishigaki and Kuniyoshi, they married other artists, who were forced to divide their time between working as their husbands' assistants and companions and concentrating on their own work. In the case of Obata, Shimizu, Nakayama and other artists who married Japanese, their wives did not have independent art careers. They remained constant companions, mothers of their children, as well as art assistants helping to manage studios and finances. Whereas Ishigaki and Kuniyoshi's relationships were premised on romance and creative affinity, the other marriages were practical partnerships.

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<sup>90</sup> Marriage between Japanese and white women was illegal in California and, although legal, mixed race couples were discriminated against in New York. American women lost their U.S. citizenship if they married a Japanese – a topic that will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. A 1907 law dictated that all women acquired their husband's citizenship upon marriage and the 1922 Cable Act reinstated that American women lost their citizenship if they married aliens ineligible for naturalization, which included all Asian males.

*“Mother Earth” (Haha naru daichi) (1912)*

One of Obata’s most significant works during his early period in San Francisco was “Mother Earth” painted in 1912, nearly ten years after his arrival. Although Obata had exhibited works in Tokyo and was an active member of *nihonga* societies, the necessity of earning a living left little time for his art in the early years. The large scale of “Mother Earth,” (over six feet by five feet,) was a departure for him.<sup>91</sup> Elements of the *moro-tai* style are visible in the painting, which might indicate Obata’s awareness of artistic movements within the *nihonga* group in Japan at the time. *Moro-tai*, a term invented by Japanese art critics after 1900, was characterized by the use of a gradation of colors rather than line.<sup>92</sup> Hishida Shunsô (1874-1911), a student of Okakura’s, developed the technique and Obata might have been exposed to his work at the Japan Fine Arts Academy in Tokyo. The *moro-tai* style was less linear than many schools of Japanese art and made use of Western techniques of modeling and shading. Painted on silk, the effect was not naturalistic: Obata’s palette included a vivid coral for the sky as well as *sumi-e* treatment for the trees in the forest. (Figure 7)

“Mother Earth,” was a portrait of his wife, Haruko, soon after they were married. In the painting, she was pregnant with their first child, Kimio, who was born five months after its completion. The early years of the Obata’s marriage were trying: Obata did not earn much money at his illustration work. Their desire to move to Europe and then back to Japan was thwarted by the arrival of their son. Their landlord asked them to move soon after their marriage, saying that no Japanese were allowed in the building. After finding a new Japantown apartment, Obata set to work in a spare room, which they turned into a studio. Obata’s painting of his

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<sup>91</sup> Seki Akio, *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> John Clark, *Ibid.* p. 78

pregnant wife in a reflective, calm mood surrounded by nature presented her at peace without the trials of their daily life as targets of racism in a crowded city.

Despite her protests, Obata convinced Haruko to allow him to paint her in the nude for his painting; only the length of her hair, which reaches her knees in the image, provides any cover for her figure. Obata had long praised Haruko's hair and had forbidden her to cut it.<sup>93</sup> Throughout his career, Haruko was Obata's assistant, ordering supplies from Japan, cleaning his paints and brushes, and, in this case, modeling for him. According to their granddaughter, Kimi Kodani Hill, Haruko would be awakened at night if her husband decided he wanted to work on his painting.<sup>94</sup> The painting did not sell and Obata did not paint nude figures again, but Haruko remained integral part of Obata's creative and professional process.

Scholars have speculated that "Mother Earth" was produced for a Japanese market, because it exhibits stylistic characteristics of *nihonga* works created in Japan at the time.<sup>95</sup> Seki Akio contends that the use of light *sumi* brushwork, the lack of outline around the figure, and the incorporation of a colorful background for the sunset were *nihonga* components. Others claim that the painting was far too personal in content to be meant for Japanese buyers. Most *nihonga* figures were characters from history or folklore; nudes were still rare in Japan. "Mother Earth" represents Obata beginning to fuse his past techniques and references to *nihonga* style with his observed reality and life in the West. Rather than being emblematic of his Tokyo training in *nihonga*, the work is better seen as an example of Obata's asserting his individual subjectivity and fusing the two genres.

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<sup>93</sup> Shimojima Tetsurô, *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *Ibid.* p. 4

<sup>95</sup> Susan Landauer, *Ibid.* pp. 22-23

In the painting, Haruko is serene and thoughtful as she wanders alone through the woods. No birds or animals are in the painting, only the female figure. Scholars have speculated that the landscape was based on the Sendai area where Obata grew up, while others have identified the trees surrounding the figure as the redwoods of northern California.<sup>96</sup> Shown in profile, her eyes are cast down at the forest floor scattered with small flowers that she walks upon. The soft, flowing hair carefully rendered is contrasted with the whiteness of her nude figure. One of her fingers gestures towards the ground as though to signify her place in the forest setting. Surrounded by inky trees, and the vibrant yellow of the meadow and orange of the sky, the female figure seems vulnerable in her nakedness yet is at peace in the forest. In the years following the painting of Haruko, Obata ventured into national parks seeking a connection to what he called “Great Nature” (*Dai Shizen*), which was the subject of many of his works. As dramatic landscapes became his favored subject, figures rarely appeared.

By the early 1920s, Obata had begun to receive more commissions. He provided interior paintings for the Gump’s department store’s Japanese arts and crafts room. Just as George Turner Marsh sought out Aoki Toshio for Japanese-style illustrations and crafts, he also hired Obata to provide illustrations for his novel, Lords of Dawn (1916), a book featuring stories about Japanese samurai. Obata’s paintings were the basis for sets for the San Francisco Opera’s production of Madame Butterfly in 1924. When a friend took him to a performance and inquired as to its authenticity, Obata insisted that it was riddled with mistakes about Japanese culture. Obata was then asked to do his own version, which was lauded in the media as an “authentic”

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<sup>96</sup> Seki Akio claimed that the trees are Japanese cedars that surrounded Obata’s hometown in Sendai, while Shimojima Testurô sees the trees as distinctly Californian.



production.<sup>97</sup> By the 1920s, Obata seemed to have achieved a balance between Japanese aesthetics and Western sensibilities that appealed to an American audience.<sup>98</sup> A 1928 article on Obata in *The Washington Post* claimed that Obata “interpreted America in the colors and lines of Japan,” thereby creating a fusion between East and West that was popular among American consumers and critics.<sup>99</sup> Whether by decision or the inevitability of influence, the dedicated *nihonga* artist moved forward a blending of Japan and California in his work.

#### *Nakayama Iwata: First-Wave Photographer*

Nakayama Iwata was born in Fukuoka Prefecture in 1895 into a family of Shintô priests. His father was interested in studying chemistry and left the priesthood, moving his family to Tokyo.<sup>100</sup> Nakayama was the first student to graduate from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts with a degree in photography in 1918. His photographs taken during his university years were predominantly portraits, sometimes with himself as the subject. After graduating he received a government scholarship to study abroad in California, but he soon left for New York in 1919 and stayed for the next seven years.

Although he arrived in the United States a decade later, Nakayama’s background and training in the arts parallels first-wave painters. He lived on scholarship funds for the first three years, but elected to stay after they ran out. Nakayama’s technical skills helped him find photography work such as his first job as assistant to Kikuchi Tôyô (1883-1939), rather than

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<sup>97</sup> Obata Chiura. [An Oral History](#) (California Asian American Artists biographical survey information, SC 0929. Stanford University Archives, Stanford, CA)

<sup>98</sup> Despite successes, Obata still contended with anti-Japanese sentiment: he helped to construct a float for an international festival that was then subsequently destroyed by other parade participants. Obata Chiura, *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> “Won’t Sell His Art.” [The Washington Post](#). February 12, 1928.

<sup>100</sup> Tanaka, Masao. “Nakayama Iwata sakuhin: omoide no meisaku arubamu no. 4.” *Camera*. December 1950.

laboring at menial work.<sup>101</sup> Because he had an arts degree recognized by the art world before leaving Japan, he could one day return and find work through old connections. Unlike the first wave, however, Nakayama did not save money while in New York, with the hope of moving to Paris. Nakayama and his wife Masako decided to remain in New York and open his own photography studio and only visited Europe for a short period on their way back to Japan in 1927.<sup>102</sup> (Figure 8)

Based on earnings from summer jobs in Rye Beach, Nakayama bought Kikuchi's Fifth Avenue business and renamed it the Laquan Studio in 1920.<sup>103</sup> Nakayama continued to pursue his art photography, which he never abandoned despite the demands of running his business. In 1922, Nakayama did a portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944), an influential art critic and writer at the time. As a champion of photographers Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand, Hartmann was a key figure in the photography scene in New York and a regular contributor to Stieglitz's journal, *Camera Work*. Nakayama's contact with Hartmann and the Stieglitz group influenced his development as an artist. Nakayama stated that Stieglitz's photography and essays in *Camera Work* taught him about the importance of the photographer expressing his subjectivity in his images.<sup>104</sup> He contributed photographs to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual American Photography salon in 1922 and the London Salon of Photography in 1923. He submitted a photograph to a 1924 annual

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<sup>101</sup> Kikuchi Tôyô 菊地東陽 (1883-1939) Lived in New York City between 1904 and 1919. Owned photography studio, which he sold to Nakayama Iwata. Returned to Japan to found the Oriental Paper Company, a leading supplier of photographic paper.

<sup>102</sup> According to Masako, they spent every cent they earned going to movies, music performances, and dining out. When she felt they could not afford a certain activity, Nakayama insisted they go ahead anyway. Nakayama Masako. *Haikara ni 92 sai - shashinka Nakayama Iwata to ikite*. (Tokyo: Kawadeshoboshinsha. 1987), p. 104.

<sup>103</sup> Kikuchi later became an instructor at the Oriental School of Photography and an innovator in the development of photographic paper.

<sup>104</sup> Nakayama wrote in 1936 that Japanese photographers had been introduced to ideas of the photographer's subjectivity by way of the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* in the 1930s, but said he had learned this from Stieglitz in New York. Nakayama Iwata, "Amachua shashin kôza," *Nihon hôsô shuppan kyôkai-hen dôkyôkaikei* (Tokyo, 1936)

photography salon in Pittsburgh called “Japanese Fantasy” and the American Annual of Photography reproduced one of his still-lives, “Guitar and Fruit,” in its 1926 issue.

In addition to still lifes that emulated paintings, Nakayama photographed New York’s back alleys and park scenes. One image of a swan shows Nakayama’s use of soft focus and muted tones that reflect the pictorialist photographers. These techniques were common in previous decades, but many New York photographers were in the process of rejecting pictorialism for the “New Vision” straight photographs during the 1920s. Nakayama was still using pictorialist techniques he had learned in Tokyo. His images during this period were reminiscent of Fukuhara Shinzô’s *Shashin Geijutsu* group and early Edward Steichen urban scenes.<sup>105</sup> But Nakayama’s work in New York represented a radical shift from his student images in Tokyo, in that he started training his camera on the shadowy back alleys, experimenting not only with tonality, but also with less picturesque and romantic sites. (Figure 9)

One portrait he took in New York foreshadowed his experimental works in later years. Scholars have indicated that the image was representative of American modernist photography in the 1920s.<sup>106</sup> The picture is an extreme portrait of a woman’s face, one of the anonymous dancers that were common subjects of Nakayama’s throughout his career. Although it is a straight portrait, the atmosphere borders on the surreal. Her face is ghostly white, highlighted by her extreme, close-cut black bob. Her dark lipstick and eyeliner add to the dramatic effects of the portrait and provide a stark contrast to her chalk white face and bare shoulders. The dancer looks

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<sup>105</sup> **Fukuhara Shinzô** 福原信三 (1883-1948) Inherited family pharmacology business. Studied at Columbia University in 1908. Traveled in Paris after graduating. Returned to Japan and launched Shiseido Cosmetics. During the early 1920s, he established the *Shashin Geijutsu* (Photographic Arts) photographic society, gallery, and journal. Interested in poetry, in particular *haiku*, Fukuhara traveled to China, seeking out locales where poets used to congregate for a series of photographs. His eyesight failing, his last series of photographs were taken in Hawaii on a vacation with Nojima Yasuzô during the 1930s.

<sup>106</sup> Mitsuda Yuri “Kukkyoku tokiranuki – Nakayama Iwata no sakuin to jidai,” Nakayama Iwata: Modern Photography (Tokyo: Tankosha, 2003), p. 260

off into the distance, with no interest or attention paid to the photographer or viewer. If this was the “new woman” of the 1920s, Nakayama’s portrait suggested that she would be a formidable *femme fatale*. (Figure 10)

Nakayama and Masako were active participants in the Japanese community in New York in the early and mid-1920s.<sup>107</sup> Photographs show them with the painter, Shimizu Toshi and his wife. They often hosted Japanese visiting New York. For students and businessmen who were single and homesick, they held a “Bachelor’s Party” on the weekends. He photographed the dancer Itô Michio 伊藤道郎 (1893-1961) and hosted his younger brother, who was studying music in New York.<sup>108</sup> By the time Nakayama left for Paris in 1927, photographer Ôtsuji Kiyoji declared that he had become the quintessential “*mobo*” (modern boy) in terms of dress, eating habits, and other urban cultural images from the 1920s that arise.<sup>109</sup> His studio became a hub for artist interaction in New York and the same was true later in Kobe.

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<sup>107</sup> Before leaving for Paris in 1926, he exhibited works at the Nippon Club, which had been founded by chemist Takamine Jokichi (1854-1922) in 1905. The Nakayamas were regular members of the Nippon Club, where they came into contact with not only other artists, but also Japanese from many different fields. Masako recalled that they regularly met the bacteriologist, Noguchi Hideo (1876-1928), who was at the Club daily. This was most likely a way to avoid his unhappy marriage to an American, named Mary Dardis, whom he had no children with. Masako recalled Noguchi saying, “Japanese marrying Japanese is the best. In the beginning, there was the rare event of a Japanese marrying a foreigner. It never works out.” Nakayama attended Japanese membership clubs like the Nippon Club, but bristled when it came to questions of class among Japanese. When a group of wives of Japanese businessmen living in New York invited Masako to attend their functions, Nakayama protested. These women, he said, did not have to work for a living and were able to hire help, whereas (the Nakayamas) had to earn their living by their own efforts. Nakayama avoided elite circles when he moved to Paris and upon their return to Japan. Nakayama Masako Haikara ni kyûjûnisai Ibid., pp. 115-116.

<sup>108</sup> Dancers were a life-long subjects of Nakayama’s photographs. His collaborations with them led to some of his more experimental works. Dancers Itô Michio and Ishii Baku 石井漠 (1886-1962) became subjects of Nakayama’s while he was at the Laquan Studio on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Ishii was on tour in the United States during 1925 after performing in Europe for three years. Nakayama also composed portraits of dancers that came to his New York studio. According to Masako’s memoirs, Nakayama also knew the dancer Ito Michio in New York. Ito later would travel to Los Angeles and became the subject of another Japanese photographer, Miyatake Tôyô. One of these dancers was Nyota Inyoka, a dancer from France born to an Indian father and Vendean mother. Inyoka moved to New York in the early 1920s and performed a fusion of “Hindu” and modernist dance. She became a close friend of the Nakayamas and he photographed her often. It was at her urging that inspired Nakayama and his wife to make the move to Paris. Nakayama had been discussing with his wife their next move out of New York and they decided to try Paris before their ultimate return to Japan.

<sup>109</sup> Ôtsuji Kiyoji “Faındaa no banbime: mobo no kansei,” Taiyô (November, 1987), p. 12.

### *Conclusion*

First-wave Japanese artists used skills they learned in Tokyo to sell their paintings in the United States in the 1890s and early 1900s. They arrived on American shores as self-identified artists, whose goal was to earn a living through their art, while saving money to travel to Europe. They viewed the U.S. as a commercial outpost and it attracted artists like Yoshida Hiroshi who made works based on their salability to the general public. Aoki Toshi made his lifestyle as much as his artworks a commodity for his California clientele. He never expressed a desire to return to Japan, most likely because there was no guaranteed that he would achieve the same level of financial success. He sold his version of Japan to Pasadena. Obata, too, spent many years nurturing a clientele that turned to him for “true” representations of Madame Butterfly in Nagasaki and boudoir decorations ala *Japonaise*. These artists were successful, most likely, because they created a fusion of styles, but their customers perceived it as “authentic” Japanese art.

These artists were not only mercenaries painting works of lesser artistic value because of its commerciality. First-wave artists were an outgrowth of the Japanese state’s concerted effort to make its cultural products attractive commodities in the West. Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Kakuzô magnified that effort by dividing art in terms of “Western” and “Eastern,” assigning greater value to the latter. The *yôga* side valued European artists and European-trained artists, leaving Western-trained artists from the United States on the sidelines. First-wave artists were trained in this context of the salability of art in terms of such a polemic. Though *Japonisme* was as popular at the turn of the century on the East Coast as it was on the West, it endured longer in California. New York was exposed to modernists from Europe and turned its attention to Picasso, Cezanne, and Matisse. Japanese artists in New York would not find an audience for watercolors

of waterfalls after 1913. The artists that arrived in the 1910s in New York joined in the forming of an American modern art scene.

## Chapter 2: The Second Wave - Laborers Become Artists

### *Introduction*

Japanese artists of the second wave arrived in the United States during the first years of the twentieth century. Unlike the first wave, the latter group did not depart for the U.S. with the intention of selling or studying art. Nor did they have any formal art training before they left. Coming from the provinces, most had little access to museums, galleries, or expositions. As a youth in Okayama in the 1890s, Kuniyoshi Yasuo could only recall seeing one oil painting of a battle scene.<sup>110</sup> From families of farmers, small business owners, and fishing boat builders, the second wave left villages in Tochigi, Okayama, and Wakayama, to work in California as laborers. Hoping to earn better wages than they could in Japan, they intended to return home with savings to start new businesses. Planning for a successful homecoming (*nishiki o kazaru*) after a period of hard labor abroad, the second wave crossed the Pacific Ocean, but many would not return to Japan for decades.

Despite backbreaking labor and racial prejudice, hundreds of young Japanese men and women entered American art schools at night after work. Untrained in the 1890s elite *yōga* and *nihonga* discourse, Western art methods they learned in California rather than traditional ink painting influenced their early drawing education. The only formal training they had previously received was pencil-drawing classes in elementary school. Most claimed that their Japanese schoolteachers had said that they showed promise as artists.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Yasuo Kuniyoshi. (New York: American Artists Group, Monograph Number 11, 1945), Page 3.

<sup>111</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Ishigaki Eitarō, Shimizu Toshi and others all claimed in personal memoirs that while they were not artists in Japan, teachers had praised their talents in elementary school. Shimizu Toshi, in particular, felt that art was an optional career path when he did not enter the military, because he had been singled out as a young boy for his drawing talents.

Some turned to art while living on the West Coast as a means of expression that did not require English skills. One painter claimed that if he had stayed in Japan, he would not have taken up painting. He believed himself to be a poet, but he could not express himself in English, so he chose visual art after he moved to San Francisco.<sup>112</sup> Painter Makino Yoshio, who arrived in San Francisco in 1896, wanted to study English with the intention of writing poetry, but friends convinced him that the language barrier would be too great and suggested he try art instead.<sup>113</sup> Arriving in the 1900s, the second wave also saw that American consumers valued Japanese art, which might have encouraged them in their studies. Because members of the first wave had attended art schools starting in the 1880s, there was a community of Japanese art students that eased the way for these later groups.

Kuniyoshi Yasuo and Shimizu Toshi represented the experience of the second wave of Japanese artists who arrived as laborers and became artists. After working on the Pacific Coast, they traveled to New York to study art in the 1910s. They attended the Art Students League, associated with New York's artist community, and exhibited in both Japanese and international shows. After studying painting in Seattle while working on railroads and farms, Shimizu Toshi participated in the annual Society of Independent Artists shows starting in 1919. The art of the second wave differed in style, content, technique, and scale from that of their predecessors, as they became associated with American modernism rather than Japanese aesthetics.

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<sup>112</sup> Shimojima Tetsurô, "Hideo Kobashigawa's World: The Biographical Side," *Hideo Kobashigawa: A Retrospective* (Naha: 2000), Page 94.

<sup>113</sup> Makino "Markino" Yoshio. Makino eventually learned English well enough to have several books published in English that recorded his art career in Europe.



*The Struggle: We Work by Day, Art Class by Night*

Kuniyoshi Yasuo claimed that the course before him in 1902 when he was thirteen in Okayama was either going to “America or military school.”<sup>114</sup> The children in his village acted out battles during playtime, and many of his friends were eager to join the military when they came of age.<sup>115</sup> But when Kuniyoshi sought advice from his father as to whether to join the ranks or travel to the United States, his father encouraged him to go abroad to study English.<sup>116</sup> After observing the heavy casualties Japan suffered in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), he did not want to lose his only child to military service.<sup>117</sup> Kuniyoshi expected to live in the U.S. for two or three years, discovering “exotic and wonderful things.” Biographer Ozawa Yoshio wrote that Kuniyoshi took the “bait” and fell into the “trap” of believing that “America was the land of opportunity,” a belief common in Japan in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>118</sup> After learning English well enough to become a translator, Kuniyoshi planned to return “all polished” to Japan. He left Okayama, he claimed, without “sentimentalities or tears.”<sup>119</sup>

Faced with economic and social challenges during the early 1900s, the Japanese government encouraged emigration to its colonies as well as to the United States. Japanese

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<sup>114</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Ibid.*, Page 1.

<sup>115</sup> Yamaguchi Taiji, *Amerika bijutsu to Kuniyoshi Yasuo* (Tokyo: NHK Books, 2004) p. 38

<sup>116</sup> Kuniyoshi’s friend and biographer, Lloyd Goodrich, wrote that he came from a middle-class merchant family in Okayama City. Imaizumi Atsuo wrote in 1954 that Kuniyoshi told him that his father was actually a rickshaw driver. (“Kuniyoshi Yasuo no kyôshû,” *Geijutsu Shinchô* Volume 5, 1954.)

<sup>117</sup> Yamaguchi Taiji, *Ibid.* p. 38

<sup>118</sup> Ozawa Yoshio, *Kuniyoshi Yasuo: genmu to saikan* (Tokyo: Fukutake bunko, 1991) p. 12-14

<sup>119</sup> Lloyd Goodrich, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, The MacMillan Company, 1948), Page 5.

who moved to Taiwan and Korea had an array of opportunities open to them, while most of those who migrated to the U.S. went as migrant laborers – *dekasegi* – and entered the lower strata of American society.<sup>120</sup> Japanese magazines like *Amerika* and *Seikô* (Success), promised success to emigrants to the U.S. In addition to its land and material wealth, the U.S. was declared by popular journals to be more progressive than “un-advanced Japan.”<sup>121</sup> By 1920, the number of Japanese in the U.S. had reached more than one hundred thousand, compared with a couple of thousand during the 1880s. Yet, for Japanese like Kuniyoshi Yasuo, the idealized version of American life soon proved false. He noted upon arrival in Seattle in 1906 that his dreams of America and actually seeing America were two totally different things.<sup>122</sup>

While the Hearst media empire fanned the flames of racial hostility, American labor groups and legislators responded to the Japanese immigrants as they had to the Chinese, with violence, racism, and a series of exclusion laws that made the Japanese into permanent foreigners. Because of their larger numbers, Japanese living on the West Coast, confronted greater racial hostility than those living on the East Coast. Like some members of the first wave, most Japanese remained within insular communities in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where they felt protected and had access to familiar foods and Japanese-language newspapers. But this isolation also aroused accusations of their being

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<sup>120</sup> The second-wave Japanese artists included painters and photographers. Camera clubs became popular in Japanese communities from Seattle south to Los Angeles. Many club members participated in international photography salons. Some earned their livings by managing photography studios, while others pursued fine arts photography as a hobby.

<sup>121</sup> Mitziko Sawada, *Tokyo Life. New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890-1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 118.

<sup>122</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Ibid.*, p 1.

unassimilable in American culture. Writer Okina Kyûin 翁久允 (1888-1973), who lived in the U.S. from 1907 to 1924, wrote: "If there were not any Japanese beside me, nobody would be called Japanese. I am a 'Jap' because I am with them. If I left the Japanese, I would lose my identity as a 'Jap,' and I could find someone who does not see me as a 'Jap.'"<sup>123</sup> Once the second-wave took up the pursuit of art full time, they left the unwelcoming West Coast for New York.

Unlike modernist artists such as Romanian-born Jules Pascin (1914) and Polish-born Max Weber (1909) who arrived in New York, the Japanese second wave was first exposed to California cultural influence: the Western frontier, Mexican and Asian immigrant communities, Native American reservations, and the sense of culmination of America's Manifest Destiny. Many of them maintained connections to California's Japanese communities throughout their careers. In California's art academies, they associated with non-Japanese, unencumbered by English language ability. By the time they moved to New York, they had already decided to pursue art in a committed way. But it was their lives in California that inspired them to become artists, not exposure to the New York art scene or to the European modernists who were beginning to make their way across the Atlantic.

Kuniyoshi Yasuo arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1906 and boarded a train bound for Seattle.<sup>124</sup> Upon his arrival, Kuniyoshi was so confident that he would

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<sup>123</sup> Mitsuko Iriye, "Introduction," *American Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) Iriye is quoting from Okina Kyûin's *Zenshû*, 2, p. 8

<sup>124</sup> San Francisco served as the primary port of entry for Japanese immigrants to the United States. With the establishment of a direct shipping line between Yokohama and Seattle in 1896, Japanese also entered the Pacific Northwest. As anti-Japanese sentiment mounted in San Francisco, Japanese entered Washington State to work after the establishment of a railroad linking the East Coast with Seattle plus the Alaska gold rush. Brian A. Wilson and Bill Hosokawa. *East to America: A History of the Japanese in the United States* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1980) p. 116

succeed in the U.S. that he sent the money his father had given him back to Okayama. He claimed later that if he had known how difficult the following months would be, he would have used it instead to return to Japan.<sup>125</sup> Kuniyoshi worked on railroads outside Seattle, enduring grueling physical labor and sleeping on a bed of hay. This experience, Kuniyoshi later recalled, was the “first blow of America and it left (him) shattered.”<sup>126</sup> After working as a floor cleaner at an office building in Seattle, he began to attend English classes and was able to save enough money to travel to Los Angeles in 1907, attracted by its warmer climate.

Kuniyoshi entered a Los Angeles school in 1908 to learn English while working as a seasonal laborer in Fresno’s vineyards and the Imperial Valley’s melon farms. Although he performed well in English class, Kuniyoshi claimed that no one could understand what he was saying, so he drew illustrations to express himself.<sup>127</sup> On a teacher’s recommendation, he transferred to the Los Angeles School of Art and Design, where he received his first exposure to formal training and the works of other artists.<sup>128</sup> Later, Kuniyoshi claimed he was drawn to art by these experiences in southern California.<sup>129</sup> Deciding that “to be an

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<sup>125</sup> Kuniyoshi, Yasuo, *Ibid.*, Page 2.

<sup>126</sup> Lonely, poor, and unable to speak English, Kuniyoshi sat on Seattle’s docks, eating bags of peanuts for nourishment. Kuniyoshi later insisted that he could never eat peanuts again after that. Kuniyoshi, Yasuo, *Ibid.*, Page 2.

<sup>127</sup> Yamaguchi Taiji. *Ibid.* p. 44

<sup>128</sup> By some accounts, Kuniyoshi was drawing an illustrated map of China, prompting the recommendation. Goodrich, *Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>129</sup> The first-wave established a precedent for Japanese newcomers that eased the second wave’s entrance to the American art schools. Ishigaki entered the California School of Design (now, the San Francisco Art Institute), where Takahashi Katsuzô, Makino Yoshio, and Kobayashi Senkô had attended in earlier years. Before Kuniyoshi entered the National Academy of Design in New York, first wave watercolorists Yanagi Keisuke 柳敬助 (1881-1923) and Shimotori Yukihiro 霜鳥之彦 (1884-1982) had attended night classes there. In almost all cases, second wave artists entered schools where first wave members had studied in earlier years.

artist was a wonderful thing,” Kuniyoshi moved to New York in 1910 to pursue art in a more focused manner.<sup>130</sup>

In contrast to Kuniyoshi, Shimizu Toshi expressed a desire to become an artist before leaving Japan in 1907, but he had little training outside primary school and no connections in the art world. When the Emperor Meiji visited his school in Tochigi Prefecture, the principal presented him with a portrait that Shimizu had drawn of the German statesman, Otto von Bismarck. The emperor was said to be impressed and Shimizu was praised as having artistic ability, instilling confidence in his talent.<sup>131</sup> A middle school art teacher, however, encouraged him to join the military rather than become an artist.<sup>132</sup> Shimizu failed to pass the 1906 draft exam, prompting severe depression. By Shimizu’s account, he left for the United States the year after in order to “lighten (his) father’s burden” after failing the exam. He added that he could not bear the disappointment of staying in Japan, so he resolved to leave.<sup>133</sup> Shimizu spent the year before his departure making portraits of Japanese casualties of the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Kuniyoshi was training to be an airplane pilot at the time, but thought it better to become an artist because it was less dangerous. Kuniyoshi, *ibid.* Page 3.

<sup>131</sup> Yaguchi Kunio. “Shimizu Toshi nenpu,” Shimizu Toshi gashû. (Nichido shuppan, 1975) p. 126

<sup>132</sup> Because his teacher recommended that he join the military, Shimizu, whose uncle was a talented soldier in the Russo-Japanese War, decided to become a military officer. Shimizu Toshi. “Watashi no koto,” Asahi shimbun, (March, 1940)

<sup>133</sup> When he recalled these early years in 1940, Shimizu was working in the imperial military as an artist. Perhaps this is why he conflated his early military and artistic ambitions. Shimizu Toshi. “Aruite kita michi,” Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin, (1978). Partially reprinted in Amerika ni mananda nihon no gakatachi. (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1982) p. 181

<sup>134</sup> Soldiers in uniform or platoons in military formation became a common subject in many of his early paintings done in the U.S. and Europe. Shimizu Toshi, *ibid.*

Shimizu was forced to work at any available job after his arrival in Seattle in 1907. He began as a house cleaner and then worked on a farm in Bellingham, followed by working on a railroad in Butte, Montana in 1908. Shimizu and another Japanese immigrant friend then worked for two and a half years installing irrigation systems on the Wapato reservation in Washington State. In his memoirs, Shimizu wrote, "It is no wonder that Indians have better feelings about the Japanese, whose skin color and hair they resemble, than the Americans who have abused them."<sup>135</sup> In 1912, he began art lessons in Seattle, then left the following summer to work at a fish cannery in Alaska to earn money for tuition.<sup>136</sup>

San Francisco's art academies were more prestigious on the West Coast, but Seattle presented opportunities for Shimizu both to study and exhibit works. The Dutch painter, Fokko Tadama (1871-1937), who had been raised in Indonesia, established a private art school in Seattle, which hosted many Japanese artists. Shimizu Toshi, Tanaka Yasushi 田中保 (1886-1941), and Nomura Kenjirô 野村賢二郎 (1896-1956) studied there for several years. Although Tadama's academic approach eventually proved stifling for these students, the experience provided them with sufficient technical skills to exhibit their work at the Seattle Museum of Art and at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco

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<sup>135</sup> Shimizu had expected to make a sizable income, he said, but since neither he nor his friend had experience with such a project, it took longer than expected, reducing any profits they might have made. Unno Hiroshi, "Shimizu Toshi: shoku modan sutairu saihô," *Aato*, 92. (Autumn, 1980) Unno is quoting from Shimizu Toshi's article, "Aruite kita michi."

<sup>136</sup> Whereas their first wave predecessors had sometimes worked at short-term jobs upon their arrival in the 1890s and early 1900s to pay for school tuition, most members of the second wave had to continue to work while they studied. Kuniyoshi worked in the cloakroom of the Art Students League in New York to help pay for tuition. He missed the seminal 1913 Armory Show in New York because he was upstate working on a farm. Ishigaki Eitarô and photographer Nakayama Iwata also traveled from New York to Rye Beach during the summer to work at carnival games there.

in 1915. The next year, Shimizu, Tanaka, and Nomura organized independent exhibitions for their group in Seattle. According to Shimizu, Fokko Tadama had been a successful landscape painter and lived the “life of a king” in Borneo, while his father was consul there.<sup>137</sup> Dismissing Van Gogh as “insane,” Tadama taught his students techniques that recalled nineteenth-century romanticism.<sup>138</sup> Shimizu’s “Portrait of Mrs. C” (1915) painted at Tadama’s studio, reveals a Dutch influence, a style associated with careful attention to light and the play of shadows from a single light source. When the painting was exhibited in Seattle in 1916, papers like the Town Crier praised the work and the talent that Tadama was nurturing at his school.<sup>139</sup>

Shimizu’s use of light in the portrait present a moody and nuanced female figure largely obscured by shadows with light striking only her face and shoulders. Shimizu captured an emotive quality in his subject’s expression: a bemused, but tentative smile, suggests shyness or timidity. Beyond her rouged cheeks and lips, the woman’s white collar and single white glove are the only beacons in an otherwise dark painting. Like many Dutch artists who explored similar techniques, Shimizu showcased his painterly skills by revealing the textures and tones within the layers of darkness in the figure’s black dress and the background. (Figure 11)

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<sup>137</sup> Asano Toru, “Shimizu Toshi.” Amerika ni mananda Nihon no gakatachi: Kuniyoshi, Shimizu, Ishigaki, Noda to Amerikan shiin kaiga Japanese Artists Who Studied in U.S.A. and the American Scene. (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1982) p. 181

<sup>138</sup> Yui Shôichi. “Shimizu to ano koro no nyû yôku jazu shiin.” Shimizu Toshi ten (Tokyo: Musashino Cultural Center, 1991) p. 19

<sup>139</sup> Iwasaki Yoshikazu, “Amerika ni okeru Shimizu Toshi.” Shimizu Toshi ten. (Tokyo: Musashino Cultural Center, 1991) p. 16

After his move to New York, Shimizu abandoned such impressionistic touches. He no longer attempted to capture the nuances of his subject's moods. The figures that populate his subsequent works showed little expression and were rendered in simple lines. Their costume and the context in which they acted became of greater importance to the artist. Although Shimizu had benefitted from his years of instruction with Tadama, the "Oriental-looking" Dutch painter rejected the "new and growing art" that had begun to interest Shimizu. Shimizu left Seattle for New York and Tanaka left with his wife for Paris because both felt stifled in Tadama's studio.<sup>140</sup>

California's art scene felt stifling for Kuniyoshi Yasuo and Shimizu Toshi prompting their move to New York, the center of America's modern art world. Many Japanese second-wave artists stayed on the West Coast, however. Like Obata Chiura, artists stayed in California if they had established families while Kuniyoshi and Shimizu were single at the time of their move east. California's modern art scene was slower to emerge than New York's. In the 1920s, the arrival of modernist architects Richard Neutra and Rudolf Schindler, photographer Karl Struss, painter Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and others sowed California's modern art scene prior to World War II. When Kuniyoshi left in 1910, however, California art critics debated whether the display of nudes was an affront to public decency. Japanese artists in Little Tokyo were at the forefront of Los Angeles' fore into the modern art world, but conservatism lingered longer there than on the East Coast. Second-wave artists painted either Cezanne inspired or *nihonga* landscapes if they were in California, but

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<sup>140</sup> Tanaka's marriage to the daughter of a prominent judge in Seattle had garnered extensive attention in city newspapers. After several nude portraits were censored by Seattle's Fine Arts Gallery in 1917, he moved his family to Paris.



Kuniyoshi and Shimizu escaped the tethers of academicism as well as Japanese references. European modernists first arrived in New York by way of the 1913 Armory Show and the city's art scene would be forever changed.

*New York 1915-1922: To Be an Artist Is a Wonderful Thing*

“One only has to listen to New York’s devilish music to glimpse that another art is possible.” Joaquin Torres Garcia (1920)

The “American-ness” of the New York art world was of a particular kind. Given the diversity of its population, its Harlem Renaissance, and its Lower East Side born Irish governor, Alfred Smith, many Americans at that time regarded New York as a foreign island on the fringe of the United States. Even as New York set the pace for the acceleration of the multiethnic population in the twentieth century, the rest of the country tended to view the city with both fascination and fear. Thus, the “America” the second wave artists encountered was different from the one they and their predecessors had found in California.

*The Beginnings of American Modernism*

The second wave’s resolve to become full-time artists was often made in tandem with the decision to move from the West Coast to New York. Relocating to the nation’s finance and commercial center with its renowned cultural institutions provided greater access to resources and exposure. In the 1910s, New York was the center of the publishing world as well as of the entertainment industry, which contributed to the vibrant art scene.

The city was also the center for European artists visiting the United States. In addition to the overt racism and restrictive real estate laws in the West Coast, many artists considered the art scene there to be too conservative compared to the dynamic modernist scene in New York. They came to feel that art schools in Seattle and in California were too academic. After years drawing models in studios, painters like Kuniyoshi and Shimizu wanted something new.

New York's modern art scene was still in its early stages compared to that of European cities when the second wave arrived in the 1910s. The 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art at the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory, known as the Armory Show, had a transformative influence on American artists of the time. Although over one thousand exhibited works out of 1,600 were by American artists, European submissions occupied center stage. For the first time, the works of Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Paul Cezanne, Henri Matisse, and others were presented to an American audience. The critical response was negative, but the show's effect on artists was decisive.

Shimizu did not arrive in New York in time for the Armory Show, and Kuniyoshi was working in Syracuse, New York at the time. Nevertheless, the show affected Kuniyoshi's circle of artist friends. Upon returning to the city, he recalled that everyone was talking about the show and that Cubism, in particular, was "in the air," because of the submissions by Picasso and Braque.<sup>141</sup> Kuniyoshi said that although he, too, was "caught up in the excitement," he did not fully understand what the "furor" was about. He adopted some

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<sup>141</sup> Alfred Stieglitz had already exhibited Picasso's works at the 291 Gallery in 1911, but the audience numbers attending the Armory Show was in the tens of thousands, garnering widespread coverage in periodicals.

Cubist techniques in his early paintings but quickly moved on to other modes more removed from any particular “ism” of the time.<sup>142</sup> In “Picnic” (1919), Kuniyoshi applied the color scheme and brush technique associated with Cezanne, who was also popular then.<sup>143</sup> By the 1920s, Kuniyoshi’s trips to New England had inspired a distinctive style that was influenced by the colonial architecture, folk art, and rural culture he observed in Maine. (Figure 12)

American artists during this period strove to create a style separate from that of Europeans and more representative of American culture and landscape. What would later be called the “American Scene” was a 1920s East Coast movement that had its roots in earlier decades. It included both progressive and conservative artists under its banner. Some were interested in depicting the lives of the urban, working class while others presented a romantic image of rural America. Galleries featuring “modern American painters” opened around New York in response to the Armory Show. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founded a studio in 1913 for young artists to exhibit their works, which would later evolve into the Whitney Museum of American Art.<sup>144</sup> Rather than being treated as guest members of a “Western” art movement, the Japanese second wave participated in the

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<sup>142</sup> Kuniyoshi’s works were always representational, though he experimented with abstract techniques. In his 1917 “Woman in Front of a Table,” Cubist techniques are visible. The woman’s face is depicted in hard angles as well as the fruit that sits on the table and the background furniture. Nevertheless, compared to the works of Picasso and Braque at the time, Kuniyoshi’s subject remained identifiable even in these early works. Reprinted in *Bijutsu Techô*, 27, No. 399 (October, 1975)

<sup>143</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s art critics in Los Angeles repeatedly condemned Japanese artists for mimicking Cezanne.

<sup>144</sup> Her studio and later the museum nurtured many Japanese artists in New York during the early stages of their careers, Kuniyoshi chief among them.

formation of a self-consciously *American* art, one defined by both U.S. citizens and immigrants gathered in New York.

The Ashcan school of the early 1900s emerged from a group of artists known as “The Eight,” who were pioneers of the American modern art scene. Their style remained relatively conventional and realistic, but they directed their gaze at urban America. Art historians have characterized their works as realist renderings that revealed worlds characterized by the “beauty and ugliness, conflict and confrontation” that characterized the lived reality of urbanization and industrialization.<sup>145</sup> Ashcan painters turned their attention to working class subjects, formerly ignored by the art academies. Their works were an extension of the early twentieth-century Progressive Movement in the United States that addressed the urban poor and social injustices. Changes wrought in the urban space - immigration, mass media, transformed gender roles, and increasing wealth discrepancies - captured the artists’ attention. Ashcan painters like George Luks (1867-1933) and Robert Henri (1865-1929), as well as newspaper illustrator John French Sloan (1871-1951) played influential roles as instructors, fellow exhibitors, and friends of the Japanese artists in New York.<sup>146</sup> The street scenes, cabarets, and alleys common to Ashcan painters all appeared in the paintings of Kuniyoshi, Shimizu, and others. (Figure 13)

During the Armory Show, art critics warned that the United States was being “invaded by aliens” and that the “alien origin” of modernism threatened the nation.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008)

<sup>146</sup> Whereas many Japanese artists in Los Angeles were critiqued for emulating the works of Cezanne, artists in New York became the progeny of the Ashcan School.

<sup>147</sup> Pohl, *Ibid.*

Immigrant artists, including Kuniyoshi and other Japanese, did indeed infiltrate the group of “New York Realists,” sometimes reinforcing and at other times challenging their point of view. Although Luks, Henri, and Sloan were born in the United States, they often painted immigrant communities, especially on the Lower East Side. In the first decades of the twentieth century, immigrant artists, including Max Weber (1881-1961), Jules Pascin (1885-1930), Ben Shahn (1898-1969), and George Grosz (1893-1959), joined the American painters. Associating with other immigrants – and political radicals - continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

### *Art Students League*

Japanese artists in earlier years had trained at the academically respectable New York Academy of Design, but it was the Art Students League that attracted members of the second wave. The school was a bastion of anti-academicism in New York City. Almost all second-wave artists, including Kuniyoshi, Shimizu, and Ishigaki Eitarô, attended the Art Students League. Taking classes at the league facilitated relationships with members of the Ashcan school and the wider American art scene. Students could study for any number of years with an instructor of their choice; there was no curriculum from which to graduate. An instructor’s pay was based on how many students signed up for the class and students constituted the school’s management.

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The Art Student's League liberal structure appealed to instructors and students who hoped to escape academic art instruction.<sup>148</sup> Kuniyoshi joined the school in 1916 after he rejected the stylistic conservatism of both the National Academy of Design and the Independent School of the Arts.<sup>149</sup> It was at the League that Kuniyoshi said his "life began to take on real meaning."<sup>150</sup> Shimizu entered the National Academy of Design in 1917, but moved to the Art Students League within months. He declared that after giving up the stifling academic training in Seattle, to repeat the experience would be the "equal of a death sentence."<sup>151</sup>

Although Shimizu attended John Sloan's class for a short period, he opted instead to join Kuniyoshi's class with Kenneth Hayes Miller in 1917. Sloan had been working as an illustrator and editor for the leftist publication, The Masses, and was forthright about his political views. Miller's class had the reputation of being intellectually demanding, while each student was encouraged to pursue his individual style. As an instructor, Miller insisted his students understand the works of the old masters, despite the "fervor" for modern art at the time. Although they were both Miller's students, his reputation for nurturing individual styles can be seen in the different color palettes, brush techniques, and subject

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<sup>148</sup> Leftists like Ishigaki Eitarô were drawn to like-minded instructors like John Sloan. A branch of the Art Students League was also established in Los Angeles in 1906. Will South, Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick, and Julia Armstrong-Totten. A Seed of Modernism: The Art Students League of Los Angeles, 1906-1953. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2008) Ishigaki Eitarô. "Nyû yôku no yashi," Chûô Kôron (September, 1952)

<sup>149</sup> When Kuniyoshi moved to New York from Los Angeles in 1910, he had resolved to become an artist. Kawabe Masao 川辺正夫 (1874-1918), a friend of his father's from Okayama, helped Kuniyoshi when he arrived by giving him room and board in exchange for cleaning his studio. Kawabe had graduated from Tokyo School of Fine Arts and Design and gone to St. Louis to work at the Japan exhibition at the 1904 exposition. He then moved to New York, where he established Kawabe Studio, receiving commissions to help local architects create "Japan-style" designs.

<sup>150</sup> Kuniyoshi, *Ibid.* Page 4.

<sup>151</sup> Asano Toru, *Ibid.* p. 182

matter of Shimizu and Kuniyoshi's paintings. Students in Miller's class were also known for their bonds of friendship, visiting museums together and socializing.<sup>152</sup> This interaction among students provided by Miller helped Kuniyoshi with the social group he had lacked during his lonely years on the West Coast.

Shimizu transformed the technique, style, and content of his paintings while he was in New York. His shift from formal portraiture to more stylized city scenes can be observed in "Central Park," (1919), painted one year after his arrival. He later wrote of the philosophy that characterized his work from this point: Complexity will emerge in a painting if one is sure to paint simply.<sup>153</sup> Rather than focusing on a single figure in "Central Park," he identified his subjects socially by clothing and gestures. Middle-class park goers ride horses and walk dogs, while nurses take care of children. Shimizu was no longer interested in the play of light as he was in "Portrait of Mrs. C." Instead, he cast the whole scene in a single sunny tone with bright colors untouched by shadows.<sup>154</sup> Shimizu did not develop the individual expressions of his characters, but let them be actors on a stage set with only vague facial features. Scholar Hijikata Teiichi suggested that a Shimizu painting should be understood as a "short story," each canvas encompassing a narrative.<sup>155</sup> Shimizu's central character was now the city as experienced by the people who inhabited it.

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<sup>152</sup> Oral history interview with Katherine Schmidt, Dec. 8 – Dec. 15, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>153</sup> Yaguchi Kunio, "Tokushû Shimizu Toshi – Shimizu Toshi, sono hyôdenteki shiron." *Sansai*, 315, (March 1974)

<sup>154</sup> A year before "Central Park," Shimizu had started researching the history of how artists handled perspective during the Italian Renaissance, particularly in the works of Piero della Francesca. He began to look at American naïve works – as Kuniyoshi would also do – for inspiration about new handlings of perspective, which can be seen in this canvas, but would become more dramatic later. (Yaguchi Kunio, 1974.)

<sup>155</sup> Hijikata Teiichi, "Shimizu Toshi no hito to sakuhin." *Shimizu gashû*. (Tokyo: Nichidô Shuppan, 1975) p. 113

Because of his participation in shows for both Japanese and non-Japanese artists in Seattle as well as at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915, Shimizu's exhibiting record was more extensive than Kuniyoshi's when they first arrived in New York. In addition, he was employed as an advertising illustrator in 1917. This work provided income for his livelihood and tuition. Shimizu became a leader in the Japanese artist associations in New York as he had in his last years in Seattle. He participated in citywide exhibitions and was a regular member of the Society for Independent Artists, to which he contributed works every year he lived in the city.<sup>156</sup> Because Kuniyoshi was later exhibited in New York museums, taught at the Art Students League, and spent most of his life in the city, he has received most of the scholarly attention as a Japanese member in the art scene there. Shimizu was an integral participant as well as shown in his diary entries about his friendships with the some of the most significant artists of the time.<sup>157</sup> Shimizu, however, is never included in American art histories of the early New York art scene, though he is known in Japan for his being a welcomed participant at the time.

Shimizu attended Kenneth Hayes Miller's class for several months in 1917, when his job kept him from continuing. He returned to Sloan's night classes in 1918 and described the experience of entering Sloan's classroom in an article for a Japanese art journal:

"I was busy all day working in order to save money to go to Europe, so I joined the night classes. By coincidence, it was Sloan who was teaching night classes at that time. I will never forget how hot it is in New York in the summer. But a cool breeze would blow off the Hudson River and I could see the first autumn moon. The first time I visited the school

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<sup>156</sup> While in Paris in 1924 and upon his return to Japan in 1926, Shimizu continued to play leadership roles in establishing art societies and organizing exhibitions.

<sup>157</sup> Shimizu Toshi Ibid.



building I had run crazed up Broadway to 57<sup>th</sup> Street, where I climbed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of this quiet building. Entering the warm room, I saw many students drawing. Some of them were as young as fifteen, while others were older than sixty.”<sup>158</sup>

Studying at the Art Students League liberated Shimizu from formal academicism that bored him in Seattle and sparked a fertile creative period. In 1918, he painted nine oil canvases. The following year, he had a solo exhibition at the Academy Shop, where he displayed nearly thirty oil paintings, and he also submitted works to the Society of Independent Artists. Shimizu then left for Japan in 1920 to marry, and returned to New York with his new wife the following year. Whereas Kuniyoshi, Tanaka Yasushi, and others formed romantic relationships in the United States, Shimizu’s return to Japan suggests the extent to which he was still connected to his birthplace and foreshadowed his permanent return to Japan in the late 1920s.

Kenneth Hayes Miller was also an influential figure in Kuniyoshi’s early development as an artist.<sup>159</sup> At Miller’s suggestion, Kuniyoshi studied Honoré Daumier’s etchings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Miller instructed him to “absorb the life around (him)” in New York by visiting museums, going to cafes, and attending music concerts. The move to the Art Students League presented a turning point, not only in Kuniyoshi’s dedication to art, but also in his interactions with other artists. When Kuniyoshi entered Miller’s class in 1916, he formed an immediate friendship with Lloyd Goodrich (1897-1987), who became an advocate and promoter of Kuniyoshi’s paintings for

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<sup>158</sup> Shimizu Toshi, “Beikoku ecchingu-kai no keni: John Sloan,” *Chûô Bijutsu*. (1928)

<sup>159</sup> Miller’s students such as Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Reginald Marsh (1898-1954), and Peggy Bacon, became more renowned than their teacher.

decades.<sup>160</sup> Kuniyoshi also developed lifelong friendships with artists Alexander Brook (1898-1980), Reginald Marsh (1898-1954), Arnold Blanch (1896-1968), and Katherine Schmidt (1898-1978), who later became his wife.<sup>161</sup> Alexander Brook was a celebrated figurative painter after World War I and later become a member of the Woodstock art colony in upstate New York, which Kuniyoshi helped to found in the 1920s. Kuniyoshi and Brook both participated in the Whitney Studio Club, which championed contemporary American art before World War II. Marsh studied with Kenneth Hayes Miller, George Luks, and John Sloan while at the League.<sup>162</sup>

Shimizu found employment soon after his arrival in New York and soon transferred to the Art Students League, but Kuniyoshi did not find his niche in the New York scene immediately upon his arrival. Kuniyoshi traveled out of the city to look for work and he transferred between schools before arriving at the League. At the League, Kuniyoshi began experimenting with different styles and techniques in addition to oil painting. Shimizu, on the other hand, had more training in Seattle before arriving and had already exhibited works. It took Kuniyoshi almost a decade to settle into his classes at the League as well as find his particular content and style as an artist.

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<sup>160</sup> Goodrich later gave up painting and became influential as an art critic and historian, curator for the Whitney Museum of American Art, and participant in New Deal arts programs.

<sup>161</sup> Kuniyoshi's marriage to Katherine Schmidt challenged the bonds he had with some of his artist friends. Schmidt was a well-respected painter and also a student at the Art Students League when she and Kuniyoshi met and fell in love. By 1919, they married at an artists' colony in Ogonquit, Maine. Schmidt's family opposed her marriage to Kuniyoshi and cut her off financially. Although both were accepted as artists and friends in the League's circles at the time, some friends objected to the marriage on racial grounds. According to friend and classmate Arnold Blanch, some members of their circle were "for (Kuniyoshi) and some against him and it got to be a great controversy amongst the students."

<sup>162</sup> Working as an illustrator for magazines like *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*, Marsh later became committed to social realism, although the more liberal artists of the 1930s associated his work with a distanced rendering of working class sexuality that bordered on voyeurism. Andrew Hemingway, [Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956](#). (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

From 1916 to 1917, Kuniyoshi created forty-four etchings, many of them of female nudes, subjects for which he would later be well known. But he chose a religious work for his debut at the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. New York artists established the Independents' exhibition in an effort to democratize the city's exhibition process by organizing a non-juried show open to any artist who submitted work.<sup>163</sup> Kuniyoshi's submission to the Independents was a work he had created in Miller's class called "Crucifixion" (originally called "Modern Crucifix"), a painting that appears heavily influenced by Daumier. Kuniyoshi included figures of the working poor crouched in front of the cross. The Academy rejected his submission of a painting of war refugees, and he received negligible attention for "Crucifixion." This response impelled Kuniyoshi to move away from allegorical and political works.<sup>164</sup>

Shimizu and Kuniyoshi were not the only Japanese artists at the League before World War II. Approximately thirty Japanese artists studied for different lengths of time at the Art Students League between the world wars. Painters like Usui Bunpei 臼井文平 (1898-1994), Tamotsu Chûzô 多毛津忠蔵 (1888-1975), and Shimizu Toshi's brother, Kiyoshi 清水清 (1900-1969) were regular contributors to New York exhibitions in the 1920s and 1930s. Well known art education theorist and painter Kitagawa Tamiji 北川民次 (1894-1989), attended the school during the 1920s before moving to the Mexican countryside. Kuniyoshi's position in the Society of Independent Artists and the breakaway

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<sup>163</sup> Marcel Duchamp submitted "Fountain," a so-called ready-made piece of a urinal, to the 1917 show under the name R. Mutt. The show organizers famously rejected the piece.

<sup>164</sup> Miller had earlier encouraged Kuniyoshi to submit his painting of war refugees to the National Academy show. The painting was rejected and Kuniyoshi sent it to his father in Okayama to show how committed he was to becoming an artist.

group started by Hamilton Easter Field (1873-1922), Salons of America, enabled many League artists to exhibit their works in New York galleries. The relationships that the second wave made with John Sloan, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and others opened doors for their Japanese friends to thrive at the League and stay abreast of exhibition opportunities. Sloan often curated exhibitions in the city and included Japanese artist friends in for these shows.<sup>165</sup> League connections continued when artists returned to Japan. Shimizu's friendship with Sloan led to his writing about the artist's etchings for a Japanese readership in 1928.<sup>166</sup> One of Sloan's etchings to Shimizu reprinted in the journal was inscribed to Shimizu, as a token of their friendship.

After trips to France and Mexico, Shimizu Toshi and Kitagawa Tamiji returned to Japan and entered the art world there. Usui Bunpei, Tamotsu Chûzô, and Shimizu Kiyoshi stayed in the United States. They exhibited in New York before, during, and after World War II. Tamotsu stayed in New York until 1948 when he left for Santa Fe, New Mexico.<sup>167</sup> For the majority of painters who became immersed in the Art Students League, New York became their home. The school provided a supportive network that enabled artists from abroad to become members of the fabric of New York art society.

### *Japanese Artist Groups in New York*

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<sup>165</sup> For example, in 1927, he included paintings by lesser-known artists Watanabe Torajiro and Shimizu Toshi's brother, Kiyoshi. Both received favorable review in the New York Times.

<sup>166</sup> Shimizu Toshi, "Beikoku etching kai keni. John Sloan." Chûô Bijutsu, 153 (August, 1928)

<sup>167</sup> John Sloan gave his Santa Fe studio to Tamotsu when he died in 1974. Japanese and Japanese American Painters in the United States: A Half Century of Hope and Suffering, 1896-1945 (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, 1995)

In addition to the camaraderie among Japanese artists, American Scene members, and other immigrant artists, the Japanese established nationally bounded groups as well. Rather than style or technique, the artists' nationality was the unifying point. Resident Japanese artists regularly hosted exhibitions to support other Japanese living in New York. Groups like the Young Japanese Artists in New York and the Japanese Artists Society used their Japanese identity as a way to market their work, hoping to capture lingering interest in the art world for Japan or exoticism. The groups also reviewed each other's works in Japanese-language newspapers, helping to build a critical base.<sup>168</sup>

One of the important functions of the Japanese artist groups was to introduce members with no connections in the Japanese art world to *gadan* members. Those artists who began their careers in the United States, but wished to return to Japan someday, relied on the wider network of sojourning artists for connections. Groups hosted events for Japanese artists who stopped in New York on their way to Europe, enabling members to meet their counterparts in Japan. Japanese returning from abroad could then rely on this network for guidance to the exhibition process in Tokyo, which differed from their experience in New York. Although many artists from Japan elected to stay permanently in the United States, there is a sense that many intended to return to Japan and sought out ways to facilitate their reentry.

Japanese-member groups had been more common during the early years of the twentieth century among the first-wave artists, who used the groups to sell "Japanese-style

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<sup>168</sup> This is not to say that Japanese always approved of their countrymen's works: Shimizu was highly critical in his diary of his colleagues. For example, in March 1924, he attended Foujioka Noboru's show at the Japan Club and was quite harsh in his judgment, saying that the works were decorative and not very good. Shimizu Toshi. "Shimizu Toshi nikki, April 19, 1924" Shimizu Toshi ten (Musashino City: Musashino Culutral Center, 1991) p. 103

works.” Ten artists formed the Young Japanese Artists in New York, which exhibited works in 1917. The *Gachôkai*, or Japanese Artists Society, was one of the more durable groups, lasting from 1922 through 1930. In 1922, the *Gachôkai* hosted its first exhibition called “New York City Japanese Painters and Sculptors Exhibition” at the Civic Club on W. 12th Street. Its initial membership was fifteen artists, among them, Shimizu, Kuniyoshi, and Ishigaki Eitarô.<sup>169</sup>

In addition to artistic support, the *Gachôkai* formed along national lines to defend Japanese artists against perceived prejudice in the American art world. Ishigaki Eitarô’s wife Ayako suggested that the inspiration to hold the *Gachôkai*’s inaugural show was based on the rescinding of Shimizu Toshi’s award in Chicago the year before. Shimizu had been awarded a top prize for his painting, “Yokohama Nights,” but the jury denied him the award when they found out that he was a Japanese national. A Japanese subject was acceptable, but not a Japanese artist. As a result, there was a desire to hold an exhibition expressly for Japanese.<sup>170</sup> The stated purpose was to “introduce art works by Japanese to the world,” although they did not identify those artworks as Japanese.<sup>171</sup>

Despite the loss of his award in Chicago, Shimizu exhibited widely in 1922 and 1923. He had a solo show at a New York gallery in 1923, worked at the Woodstock art colony, and

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<sup>169</sup> In addition to the *Gachôkai*, Kuniyoshi’s Woodstock art colony in upstate New York hosted many Japanese artists. When Noda Hideo moved to New York from California, he found the city of Manhattan to be too congested. At Kuniyoshi’s invitation, he traveled to Woodstock, where he painted and then met his future wife, Ruth. Noda lived with other Japanese artists who moved from California, Yamasaki “Jack” Chikamichi 山崎近道 (1904-1985) and Suzuki Sakari 鈴木盛 (1899-1995). Both Yamasaki and Suzuki had followed their fathers to California to work on farms while they were teenagers.

<sup>170</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Umi o watatta ai no gaka: Ishigaki Eitarô no shôgai* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu-shobo, 1988)

<sup>171</sup> Members like Watanabe Torajirô formed spin-off groups after he left for Los Angeles in the last half of the 1920s, so the group had far reaching effects in the Japanese artist community in the United States. Miyagi Yotoku 宮城与徳 (1903-1943) and Ueyama Tokio 上山鳥城男 (1890-1954) participated in the Los Angeles chapter.

exhibited with the *Gachôkai* and the Society of Independent Artists. Unlike Kuniyoshi Yasuo, who became increasingly more immersed in the New York art scene, Shimizu chose to continue on to Paris, where he established contacts with Japanese artists there. Those contacts helped to garner him access to the Japanese art world, although he had no previous ties to the *gadan*.

*Kuniyoshi: We Knew How to Play in Those Days*

Kuniyoshi was a prominent member of the *Gachôkai*, and was active in a wide range of New York art groups. Relationships formed at the Art Students League led him to other art societies. Louis Bouche (1896-1969) introduced fellow League students Alexander Brook and Kuniyoshi to the Penguin Club. Founded in 1917 by painter Walt Kuhn (1877-1949), who had been one of the organizers of the 1913 Armory Show, the Penguin Club on E. 15<sup>th</sup> Street exhibited works and held sketch classes for New York and European artists. Kuniyoshi wrote later that members were considered the “rebels” of their time, who fought conservatism not only with “might,” but also with humor.<sup>172</sup> The Penguin Club was known for hosting masquerade parties and balls: Writing in 1940, Kuniyoshi fondly remembered that people “knew how to play” in those days.

At the Penguin Club, Kuniyoshi met his future patron, Hamilton Easter Field, who would play an instrumental role in his career. Having a patron to support him financially set Kuniyoshi apart from other second-wave artists. In 1917, Field bought some of Kuniyoshi’s work after seeing it displayed at the Society of Independent Artists and was his

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<sup>172</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo, “East to West,” *Magazine of Art* (1940)

patron until he died in 1922. Hamilton Easter Field was an avid art collector, art patron, and artist himself, who used much of his wealth to support struggling artists. Field was an early promoter of Kuniyoshi and provided him with a rent-free apartment in Brooklyn, a residence at his summer art colony in Ogunquit, Maine, and a stipend for him to live on. Artist Jules Pascin (1885-1930) also lived in the Brooklyn home owned by Field where Kuniyoshi lived. Pascin, a Romanian artist who had been something of a celebrity in Paris before moving to New York in 1914, became an influential friend of Kuniyoshi's. According to Kuniyoshi biographer, Ozawa Yoshio, his relationship with Pascin not only provided entree to artist clubs in New York and Paris, but also influenced the subjects and stylistic choices of Kuniyoshi's paintings in the late 1920s.<sup>173</sup> After Kuniyoshi married Schmidt in 1919, Field supported both of them.<sup>174</sup> When Field split from the Society of Independent Artists in 1922 to form the Salons of America, Kuniyoshi became a member there and took over its leadership after Field's death.

After Kuniyoshi stopped attending Art Students League classes in 1920, he spent the next four summers at Field's home in Maine. The art colony in Maine hosted many leading artists and writers of the era: Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Harold Weston (1894-1972), Samuel Halpert (1884-1930), and John Dos Passos (1896-1970) frequented the colony, which continued after Field's death in 1922. Influenced by Field's interest in American folk crafts, Kuniyoshi frequented antique shops in the area to collect early American objects.

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<sup>173</sup> Ozawa Yoshio Hishô to kaiki: Kuniyoshi Yasuo no seiyô to tōyô (Okayama: Nihon bunkyo shuppan, July, 1996) pp. 101-104

<sup>174</sup> Schmidt later said that because Field rescinded on his gift in Maine, she insisted that they become financially independent. Others asserted that because Field had relations with a few male artists that he supported, Schmidt felt threatened by his relationship with Kuniyoshi and sought to distance them. She began working at the League's dining room, while Kuniyoshi sold the occasional drawing and small painting.



Kuniyoshi then used many of the pieces that he purchased in the area as inspiration for his paintings. Whereas Kuniyoshi's contemporaries in France were looking at objects from West Africa and Oceania for inspiration in the Cubist and Fauvist movements, modern artists in the United States often turned to so-called naïve American art for their own "primitive" references.

The paintings Kuniyoshi created in Maine met with curatorial and critical success when he exhibited them in New York. After the horrors of World War I and the disparity between the lifestyles of the rich and poor of the Jazz Age, Kuniyoshi's paintings of rural America seemed nostalgic for another era, but also fresh and almost exotic. In 1921, the Daniel Gallery, one of the few spaces showing contemporary art in New York at the time, exhibited two of Kuniyoshi's paintings. He no longer used the somber tones of "Crucifixion" and he had abandoned his "Cezanne-style" landscapes and Cubist references. Ignoring rules of perspective and realism, Kuniyoshi adopted sharper, geometric angles drawn with a simple, dark line in a flattened space. His Ogunquit surroundings began to dominate his work. The color palette of his landscape changed from mustard yellow, orange, and pink to earthy browns, burgundy, hunter greens, and grays. Based on the success of these early paintings, in 1922, the Daniel Gallery hosted Kuniyoshi's first solo show and continued to represent him through the 1920s. (Figure 15)

A show that Kuniyoshi curated for the Whitney Studio Club in 1924 reveals the sources of inspiration for his paintings and his awareness of American modernist currents in the art world. The show was titled "Portraits and Religious Works," which presented religious pieces by what we would now call outsider artists such as John Mauro, a visionary

painter living in New Jersey. Kuniyoshi had loaned a folk art painting of a train from his extensive personal collection to an earlier Studio Club exhibition and included folk art in this show as well. Together with folk and outsider art, Kuniyoshi included French modernists such as Matisse and friends in his social circle like Reginald Marsh and Joseph Stella.<sup>175</sup> By displaying seemingly disparate works in the same space, Kuniyoshi created a show that exemplified his interest in the juxtaposition between modernity and tradition, sacred and secular, industrial and agrarian culture.

Although Kuniyoshi's themes of New England farm life remained a constant subject in the 1920s, his stylistic influences were varied and diverse. Many different movements blew through the early 1920s art world, catching artists up and carrying them in a number of directions. Artists responded to multiple influences as well as to one another. For example, although he was not associated with Precisionism, Kuniyoshi's renderings of New England architectural structures are in tune with the attention given by Precisionist artists to questions of form and structure in modern buildings.<sup>176</sup> As a regular exhibitor at the Daniel Gallery, Kuniyoshi was a member of a circle of the most avant-garde artists in New York.<sup>177</sup> Frequenting exhibitions, participating in clubs and societies, writing in new art

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<sup>175</sup> His early connections to the Whitney Club served him later as well: In 1930, the club was expanded to become the Whitney Museum of American Art, which regularly featured his works and gave Kuniyoshi a retrospective show in 1948 that would be the museum's first one-person exhibition of a living artist.

<sup>176</sup> The Daniel Gallery represented many Precisionist painters at the time: Charles Sheeler (1883-1965), who created industrial scenes with crisp, hard-edges; renowned Precisionist painter Niles Spencer (1893-1952) also spent time in Ogunquit with Kuniyoshi; Charles Demuth (1883-1935), Demuth painted watercolors of industrial America and was associated with Precisionism.

<sup>177</sup> Man Ray (1890-1975), known primarily for his avant-garde photography while in Paris, had his first solo paintings show at the Daniel Gallery in 1915. Daniel also represented Stuart Davis (1894-1964), William Glackens (1870-1938), Marsden Hartley (1877-1943), and Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890-1973). Davis later became an abstract painter, but during the teens and twenties had been an influential member of the American Scene. Glackens was often allied with the Ashcan School along with John Sloan because of his interest in New York scenes. As a protégé of Alfred Stieglitz, Hartley's

periodicals, attending parties and balls, artists like Kuniyoshi and his colleagues lived in an art milieu that influenced their works as much as the art schools had.

Kuniyoshi's depictions of farm life in some ways anticipated the nativist art movement, or, American Regionalism, of the 1930s.<sup>178</sup> Farm animals, barns, and farmers populated his paintings. Neither his subject matter nor his stylistic techniques were associated with Japanese art at the time. Cows, in particular, figured prominently in his 1920s works. For his solo exhibition at the Daniel Gallery in 1922, Kuniyoshi used one of his cow drawings as the catalog's cover, as if it had become his totem animal. Art critics at the time responded to Kuniyoshi's paintings of cows and children by labeling him a "humorist," though Kuniyoshi said that this was not his intention. He explained the cows in terms of his having been born in the year of the ox based on the Chinese calendar and feeling an affinity with the animal. They were "decorative and ugly" at the same time."<sup>179</sup>

(Figure 1)

Children, painted like pudgy, wooden dolls, were also among Kuniyoshi's favorite subjects. He explained his interest by noting that while most people found babies beautiful, he found them quite ugly.<sup>180</sup> (Kuniyoshi had no children with either of his two wives.)

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painting style had synthesized Cubism as well as Expressionism after a trip to Europe in 1912. Macdonald-Wright had developed Synchronism, a system of chromatic formal organization, while in Paris. When returned to the U.S. in 1916, his work had become more figurative, but he continued to apply chromatic principles to his work. He later moved to California, where he became an instructor and director at the Los Angeles Art Students League.

<sup>178</sup> Given Regionalism's reactionary nativism and national chauvinist point of view, early seeds planted by a Japanese artist are ironic.

<sup>179</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo, *Ibid.* Adam Greenhalgh has suggested that Kuniyoshi was mirroring a combination of "modern and traditional visual strategies that were also being deployed by the dairy industry at the time. Greenhalgh asserts that Kuniyoshi had internalized the image of the cow as representing a wholesome American food culture. Adam Greenhalgh, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Cows in Pasture," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer, 2009), p. 18.

<sup>180</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Chickens and roosters eventually joined his paintings of cows. Similar to the doll-like babies, the fowl appear wooden, whereas the cows were drawn in more angular and geometric shapes. Given Kuniyoshi's interest in collecting New England folk art, it is possible that he used carved wood sculptures as models.

Although he insisted that his intent was not to amuse, Kuniyoshi's works have an ironic character reinforced by his irreverent explanations of his choice of subjects. In the painting, "Boy Stealing Fruit," (1923) a wide-eyed, plump child reaches up to a bowl of fruit on a table to take a banana. A charming scene of a young boy reaching for a sweet turns somehow cunning because of the child's self-aware and conniving expression. Reaching for forbidden fruit creates a sexual subtext. Art historian Tom Wolf points to the implicit reference to Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit; though there is no Eve in the canvas, the boy helps himself to the apple in the bowl.<sup>181</sup> (Figure 16)

In a self-portrait as a golfer, Kuniyoshi strikes a formal pose seen in countless classical portraits of the landed gentry. His haughty facial expression is serious with a note of condescension. At the time he did the painting, Kuniyoshi visited Woodstock, where he and his friends sometimes played golf. Nevertheless, given his situation as a struggling, often financially strapped New York artist, his attire and pose would strike viewers who knew him as out of character. He seems to be poking fun at himself for aspiring to a higher social class. But the image is not meant only to be ironic: It challenges notions of class, leisure, and even ethnicity by showing a Japanese bohemian artist clothed in the costume of

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<sup>181</sup> Tom Wolf, "Kuniyoshi in the Early 1920s," *The Shores of a Dream: Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Early Work in America* (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Center Museum, 1996) p. 31

the leisure class. It was the Jazz Age's favorite bourgeois sport, but Kuniyoshi could never confuse himself with the likes of the Great Gatsby. (Figure 17)

Kuniyoshi painted another self-portrait in 1924, which showed him not in costume like the golfing painting, but in his everyday experience. The painting "Self Portrait with Camera" depicts Kuniyoshi as a photographer taking an image of a rural landscape. In this painting, he chose to do a portrait of himself not as a painter – his primary identity as an artist – but as a photographer.<sup>182</sup> Between 1920 and 1925, Kuniyoshi photographed art works of his friends and art galleries to earn money. From the mid-1930s, Kuniyoshi used a Leica to take snapshots of friends and scenes while on vacation.<sup>183</sup> But in 1924, the heavy and awkward camera was used not for pleasure, but for income. (Figure 18)

In the self-portrait, Kuniyoshi is about to take a photograph. His face shows itself from under a photographer's black hood, about to snap the shutter as he holds a curtain out of his way to reveal the image behind. Kuniyoshi painted the subject of the cameraman's lens in black and white, as it would appear as a photograph. The interior – Kuniyoshi, curtain, and camera – were in color. Kuniyoshi often used this device, depicting both interior and exterior through a window, ("Boy Stealing Fruit").<sup>184</sup> He also inserted black and white images into his paintings, most often of newspapers, furniture, and the like. But, this painting shows a defined block of monochrome paint. One scholar suggested that since

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<sup>182</sup> Although known for his avant-garde photographs, Man Ray began photography in 1915 in order to document his paintings as well.

<sup>183</sup> Later, he purchased a Leica that he used to create multiple snapshots of friends, students, and street life in New York. Please refer to Tom Wolfe, "Kuniyoshi as Photographer." Kuniyoshi Yasuo ten. (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994)

<sup>184</sup> Kuraya Mika, "Kuniyoshi Yasuo no geijutsu – uchi naru kokkyô." Kuniyoshi Yasuo ten. Amerika to nihon, futatsu no sekai no aida de. (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 2004)

Kuniyoshi was paid to photograph paintings and practiced on his own canvases, we are seeing Kuniyoshi photographing one of his own paintings.<sup>185</sup> The resulting black and white photograph would not reveal the original painting's colors.

In the portrait, Kuniyoshi emphasized the almond shape of his eyes. Unlike his paintings of babies, Kuniyoshi seems to draw attention to the shape of his eyes so as to identify him as "Asian." The figure does not look through the lens, though he appears to be about to snap the shutter. Ichikawa Masanori wrote in 2004 that the figure's expression is "insolent and (the viewer) feels somewhat offended by its rudeness."<sup>186</sup> Perhaps the photographer does not like being interrupted, or, the insolent expression could be his resentment at having to take photographs for money. Indeed, his expression seems confrontational rather than "insolent." The effect of the layers of fabric being pulled back, the landscape as photographic subject and the self-portrait as painter, and the combination of black and white and color creates a fragmented, self-portrait of artist as subject. Rather than showing himself as wearing the "inscrutable mask of the East," as one critic suggested, Kuniyoshi's self-portraits reveal the multiple points of view that characterized his lived experience.<sup>187</sup> In this canvas, we see him as worker and artist, city dweller and rural voyeur, painter and photographer, Japanese in rural America, exposed rather than unclear.

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<sup>185</sup> Tom Wolf, *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Ichikawa Masanori, "Kuniyoshi Yasuo no geijutsu – uchi naru kokkyō." *Kuniyoshi Yasuo ten. Amerika to nihon, futatsu no sekai no aida de.* (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 2004)

<sup>187</sup> "Some Exhibitions Typical of the Season," *New York Times* (April 10, 1927)

Kuniyoshi's friend and fellow painter, Foujioka Noboru, wrote of the self-portrait for the Japanese art journal, *Chûô Bijutsu*, in 1934, commending the painting's irony.<sup>188</sup> Familiar with the 1920s American art scene that he, too, had participated in, Foujioka informed the readership that Kuniyoshi photographed for income and it was not his chosen art form. The painting's success, Foujioka claimed, was because of the painting's "sarcastic" point of view. In other words, Foujioka interpreted the painting in terms of Kuniyoshi the painter teasing himself about making money as a photographer rather than by selling his canvases. Foujioka understood social commentary conveyed in artists' works: Japanese-language newspapers in California characterized Foujioka's own work as satirical looks at life in the United States for non-whites. One of his more recognized paintings, "American Spirit" (1925), which shows a group of Japanese, whom Time Magazine described as "dejected cretins," playing poker.<sup>189</sup> For immigrants in the United States, Foujioka sardonically suggested that the only way to get ahead was by gambling - not by hard work.

After abandoning his attempts at Cezanne-type landscapes, Kuniyoshi had discovered his own particular style and unique touch among the "isms" that proliferated in the New York art scene. Despite his portraits of rural New England, American folk objects, and blonde babies, art critics in the 1920s sometimes viewed Kuniyoshi's work in terms of his Japanese origins.<sup>190</sup> Hamilton Easter Field, who described Kuniyoshi's work as

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<sup>188</sup> Foujioka exhibited works in San Francisco and New York exhibitions and attended the Art Students League before returning to Japan. Foujioka Noboru, "Kuniyoshi kun no danmen," Chûô Bijutsu (1934)

<sup>189</sup> "Art: Independent Artists," Time Magazine (March 15, 1926)

<sup>190</sup> Contemporary art critics still attempt to place Kuniyoshi "between two worlds." For example, Gail Levin refutes art historian Alexandra Munroe's dismissal of there being any vestiges of a Japanese aesthetic in his works by saying that, in

“expressing the ideal of modern Japan and modern America, (since) he fused them together in his own heart,” actively nurtured this connection.<sup>191</sup> If critics at the time could not understand Kuniyoshi’s references, they explained that the misunderstanding was based on Kuniyoshi’s exoticism. They assumed that it was Kuniyoshi’s “Eastern sense of humor” that resulted in the confusing, yet playful nature of his work. Kuniyoshi’s foreignness, in other words, made his paintings impenetrable and allowed the viewer to give up trying to unravel the puzzle. Unable to locate his references or grasp Kuniyoshi’s meaning, the critics concluded that it “could not come from a Western mind,” otherwise his intent would be clearer to a Western audience.<sup>192</sup>

Despite Kuniyoshi’s training in American art schools, paintings of the American landscape, and membership in American art clubs, art critics referred to Japan if they imagined that they had identified a connection. Art critics identified the flatness of Kuniyoshi’s images and his skewed perspective as Japanese stylistic references.<sup>193</sup> They suggested that the “almond-shaped” eyes of his figures were an (perhaps unintentional) application of his own racial characteristics to American subjects. The children’s faces, Kuniyoshi said, were reminiscent of early American colonial paintings and dolls that he saw – with no connection to Japan.

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fact, Kuniyoshi had a foot in both ponds. See “Between Two Worlds: Folk Culture, Identity, and the American Art of Yasuo Kuniyoshi.” [Archives of American Art Journal](#). Volume 43, Number 34. Smithsonian Institute, (2003), p. 2

<sup>191</sup> Gail Levin, “Between Two Worlds: Folk Culture, Identity, and the American Art of Yasuo Kuniyoshi.” [Archives of American Art Journal](#). Volume 43, Number 34. Smithsonian Institute, (2003), p. 2

<sup>192</sup> Myers and Wolf, *Ibid.* p. 30

<sup>193</sup> Artists such as Joan Miro (“Donkey and Vegetable Garden” 1918) applied flatness and skewed perspective to their images of the countryside; the techniques were not the sole purview of the Japanese by the twentieth century.



One exhibition review stated that Kuniyoshi, "with true Asiatic subtlety, and at the same time in perfectly frank and guileless sincerity, has applied the dynamics of 'cubism' to the flat perspective and synthetic abstractions of Oriental drawing."<sup>194</sup> Given Kuniyoshi's fondness for the works of Marc Chagall, his use of flatness and ignoring rules of perspective were hardly unusual or restricted to Japanese at this time.<sup>195</sup> When discussing "Boy Stealing Fruit," with an art scholar, he claimed that he was trying to "imitate" the colors he saw in early American paintings. Art critics viewing his work explained that his "artistically expressive race" allowed him to communicate various emotions, such as fright, in his subjects.<sup>196</sup> But other critics found his work "aloof," which they claimed were characteristic of East Asian art, which they said tended to be more decorative than expressive. Although one critic declared in 1926 that, "Kuniyoshi is himself in everything he does," being neither touched by the "East" nor "Cezanne," this was an unusual view of Kuniyoshi's work in this period.<sup>197</sup>

Other critics tired of questioning Kuniyoshi's humorous intent and stylistic references and instead addressed his technique. In a 1924 edition of American Art News, one critic proclaimed that while Kuniyoshi was often described as a humorist, "there were

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<sup>194</sup> Myers and Wolf, *Ibid.* p. 28

<sup>195</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo ten: Amerika to nihon, futatsu no sekai no aida de (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 2004)

<sup>196</sup> Indeed, the subjects are wide-eyed, but they are otherwise emotionless in his early works. His later portraits of women could certainly be understood in a variety of emotional states.

<sup>197</sup> "Events in the City's Art Circles." New York Times (March 14, 1926)

far more important aspects of his paintings.”<sup>198</sup> It is difficult, however, to determine whether the writer praised Kuniyoshi’s “naïve view” on the basis of his being “Oriental,” or because of his individual approach to his subject. The critic suggested that attention should turn away from Kuniyoshi’s oil paintings, and be directed at his black ink paintings. In these pieces, Kuniyoshi’s brushwork revealed “grace, refinement, and fluency.” The critic maintained that such brushwork was his “birthright” as a Japanese. (Figure 19)

It might have helped Kuniyoshi’s career for art critics to be convinced that they identified “Oriental” elements in his work. For a Japanese artist establishing himself in the art world, there was no worse condemnation from a critic than being accused of “swallowing Western art whole.” The true winners in critics’ eyes were those who created a *fusion* between the two, as the *New York Times* commented in 1926. This idea of being between two worlds was attractive to critics then, as it has been in later decades. Praising an artist’s ability to fuse the two worlds – neither abandoning his aesthetic “heritage” nor wholly consuming the West’s – remains characteristic of the critical responses to Japanese artists in the West.

Some artists were savvy in their strategies to combine these elements consciously, and Kuniyoshi might well have been one of them. In Paris, Foujita Tsuguharu’s claimed that he found success because he produced a perfect combination between East and West.<sup>199</sup> Foujita outlined his pale white nudes with black ink with imported Japanese brushes.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> “Yasuo Kuniyoshi.” *American Art News* (January 12, 1924)

<sup>199</sup> Phyllis Birnbaum, *Glory in a Line: A Life of Foujita, the Artist Caught Between East & West* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006) p. 145

<sup>200</sup> Birnbaum, *Ibid.* p. 97

When he visited Japan from France in 1929, he reminded his audience “When we Japanese express our individuality, we must not forget our nationality. A Japanese will not suddenly be able to become a Westerner even if he tries.”<sup>201</sup> In other words, a Japanese artist’s value was not based on his individual expression, but his ability to draw upon national aesthetic influences.

In 1925, critic Henry McBride concluded that the “strangeness” he found in Kuniyoshi’s works was a result of this “unique fusion” between Japanese and American art. McBride had commended Kuniyoshi after his 1922 solo exhibition at the Daniel Gallery for not painting after the style of Cézanne as “all the Japanese” did.<sup>202</sup> Two years later, McBride pronounced in another review of a Kuniyoshi exhibition that he was “still a Japanese” and saw things much as a visitor from Mars might. These reviews did not necessarily hurt Kuniyoshi, nor did he publicly refute Japanese influences.<sup>203</sup>

Locating the artists between two worlds ignores the *multiple* locations that an artist might occupy. Kitagawa Tamiji, for example created art works in the 1920s and 1930s based on his experiences at the Art Student League of New York, years in rural Mexico, and then as an art teacher and writer in Tokyo. Kitagawa’s painting style resembled Mexican folk art: heavy black outlines, rich color, and rounded forms. He applied these techniques to his paintings after he returned to Japan. Ishigaki Eitarô had been introduced to Mexican

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<sup>201</sup> Birnbaum, *Ibid.* p. 145

<sup>202</sup> Henry McBride, *The New York Herald* (January 8, 1922)

<sup>203</sup> Henry McBride, *The New York Herald* (January 13, 1924)

culture as a young restaurant worker in California. Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco influenced Ishigaki's work in the 1930s. Brazilian painter, Anita Malfatti (1889-1964), who studied in Germany, was in Maine with Kuniyoshi.<sup>204</sup> Like Kuniyoshi, Malfatti painted the lighthouses that dotted the coastline near the colony, but she used a warmer color palette and softer brush strokes. Uruguayan Joaquin Torres Garcia (1874-1949) made illustrations of the Society of Independents Artists Ball in 1921.

Kuniyoshi's close friendship with Jules Pascin is another example of the mix of national spaces occupied by artists in New York. Kuniyoshi lived with Pascin in Brooklyn, where they critiqued each other's paintings, curated exhibitions, and discussed art movements in Paris. After Pascin committed suicide in 1930, Kuniyoshi adopted his friend's portraits of melancholic women as his own. Placing Kuniyoshi and Japanese other artists between two worlds misses these influences on their work and reduces each "world" into monolithic, homogeneous spaces called "Japan" and "America." A young man from Okayama – married first to a Jewish-American and then a Mexican-American - who had lived in Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, Paris, and Maine, could not be described as occupying a space between two national worlds. Kuniyoshi's triangular cows, Kitagawa's blocky Mexican farmers, Malfatti's gentle Maine landscapes, and Torres-Garcia's color-block abstract paintings of New York's harbors invite viewers to cross borders and witness an individual expression of how that artist responded to the myriad influences that modern life made possible.

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<sup>204</sup> Deborah Cullen, Nexus New York: Latin/American artists in the modern metropolis (New York: Museo del Barrio, 2009)

Kuniyoshi and Schmidt continued to struggle financially in New York during the early 1920s, but when they left for Paris for the first time in 1925 it was as leading artists within the American scene.<sup>205</sup> Kuniyoshi might have decided to move to Paris, in search of new creative inspiration. Commenting in his journal after visiting a Kuniyoshi exhibition in 1924, his friend, Shimizu, wrote that Kuniyoshi's work had not "progressed" in style, or in content, perhaps signaling that Kuniyoshi was beginning to rely on tried formulas.<sup>206</sup> In Paris, Kuniyoshi's work took another dramatic shift in style and content. He began to paint more expressionistic portraits and to paint from live models rather than from his memories of Ogunquit scenes.

Although he enjoyed his time in Paris, he decided to return to New York rather than staying there as most Japanese artists who came through the U.S. decided to do. According to painter Raphael Soyer, Kuniyoshi claimed that he returned to the U.S. because, "France (was) so rich in art and artists, and America so poor."<sup>207</sup> His chances of advancing in the art world were better where there was less competition and where he had already established a reputation. He had become entrenched in the American scene.

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<sup>205</sup> Racial hostilities targeting Japanese did not end when the artists arrived in New York from the West Coast. One of the impetuses for Kuniyoshi and Schmidt to move to Paris in 1925 was to escape racism that they were subjected to. In a 1969 interview, Schmidt told a disbelieving Paul Cummings how difficult it was for both of them during the 1920s despite their prominence in the art world. She provided the example of attending a wedding ceremony in the country for a friend of theirs. When the lights in the ceremony hall inexplicably went out, the grandmother of the bride could be heard to say, "It's that Chink in the house!" In the United States, she explained, her husband and others were considered "inferior." Considering Foujita Tsuguharu's success as an artist in Paris and the anti-Japanese feeling that was prevalent in the U.S. at the time, they believed that living in Paris would be easier. (Katherine Schmidt, Oral Interview, December 8 - 15, 1969, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.)

<sup>206</sup> Shimizu Toshi, "Shimizu Toshi nikki." (January, 1924) *Shimizu Toshi-ten* (Tochigi: Tochigi Prefectural Museum, 1991)

<sup>207</sup> Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, *The Golden Door: Artist-Immigrants of America, 1876-1976*. (Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 1976)

In 1926, Kuniyoshi and Schmidt returned to New York, where he participated in many group shows, but the couple returned to Paris in 1928.<sup>208</sup> During his second sojourn in Paris, Kuniyoshi concentrated on a series of lithographs. According to Ishigaki, this was a shrewd business strategy: for those who could not afford his oil paintings, Kuniyoshi's etchings were more accessible and proved a steady stream of income.<sup>209</sup> While in Paris, he spent most of his time with Jules Pascin, who tried to convince him to stay permanently. By the time Kuniyoshi returned to New York later that year, the shift in his painting style was complete: a greater realism and a darker, more melancholic mood replaced the playful colonial, folk art references of the 1920s.

Kuniyoshi was among the artists to be included in the Museum of Modern Art show called "Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans," which opened in early 1930. The show was scheduled only months after the stock market collapse when the country was on the brink of the Great Depression. The exhibition did not include Kuniyoshi's more recent work, but showed the paintings done in Maine, including "Boy Stealing Fruit." The New York art establishment had not yet affirmed his style transformation from Paris. Other MOMA show artists included his old Art Students League teacher, Kenneth Hayes Miller, as well as John Sloan, Jules Pascin, Max Weber, Edward Hopper, Walter Kuhn, and others. Because Kuniyoshi, Pascin, and Weber were not born in the United States, their inclusion in the show was criticized. In many ways, the "19 Americans" show was more representative of New York than America. It was art as envisaged by artists who were residents of a

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<sup>208</sup> Kuniyoshi and Schmidt's marriage became troubled and she returned to the U.S. in six months, whereas he stayed until 1929.

<sup>209</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô. "Zaibei no nihonjin gaka no seikatsu-hô." Geijutsu Shincho. (1952)

cosmopolitan island at the eastern edge of the continent, where immigrants arrived in numbers, socialist movements were thriving, even as financial collapse heralded coming catastrophe.

Kuniyoshi's success in New York made him an established member of the American modern art world before World War II. His paintings began to spread beyond New York, as collectors in Missouri and Philadelphia added his canvases to their collections. He had tried Paris, learned new techniques there, but returned to New York, where he already made a name for himself. Especially significant about this era in Kuniyoshi's work is his focus on succeeding in the American art world. Critics sometimes referred to his "Oriental" style and he participated in Japanese organized exhibitions, but he seems finally to have succeeded in becoming unbound to Japan as his national identifier. Like Yoshida Hiroshi, Kuniyoshi painted in a variety of styles, from folk art references to expressionist figure studies. Unlike Yoshida, Kuniyoshi steered away from *national* signifiers in his work. Kuniyoshi may have toyed with national categories, but was able to evade their restrictive aspects. By discovering the arts in Los Angeles rather than in Tokyo's *gadan* and by being nurtured in the New York modern art scene, Kuniyoshi was not obliged to sell his works as Japanese art, or himself as a Japanese artist.

### *Conclusion*

Second-wave artists differed from the first-wave artists, who were the progeny of Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Tenshin's East and West discourse. Where Yoshida Hiroshi and Obata Chiura were artists who moved to America to sell their artwork,

Kuniyoshi and Shimizu were sojourners who moved to American to sell their labor. They entered the art world, because teachers encouraged them and they enjoyed it more than working on railroads and picking peaches, which were some of the only options to non-English speaking Japanese on the Pacific Coast.

The artwork they created, the circles they moved in, and the schools that they selected were completely different from the Japanese artists who arrived only a few years before them. Their American teachers influenced their painting technique and subject matter. Since Obata's technique was formed before leaving for the United States, it is possible that even if he had left California for New York, he would have continued to paint *nihonga*-influenced works rather than pursuing the Art Students League. But the second-wave had no such background, except for drawing lessons in studios.

The second-wave participated in international art groups that gathered in New York at the time. They maintained solidarity among Japanese nationals who arrived in the city, but they reached outside the Japanese community as well. Their artwork, thus, would reflect multiple influences. By the time Shimizu Toshi and Kuniyoshi Yasuo arrived in the 1910s, New York had become a city of immigrants, its streets accustomed to the sound of foreign languages.

Although the second-wave fell into an international milieu of artists, who embraced urban life (and the summer countryside retreat), Kuniyoshi, Shimizu, and others all intended to return to Japan one day. They were members of a nascent modern American art scene, but they were immigrant artists. They observed American society and depicting what they saw in their artworks. But aside from Kuniyoshi who played with his own image



in his self-portraits, Shimizu, Ishigaki Eitarô and others presented snapshots of another society that was removed from them. Where first-wave artists can be thought of as art peddlers, the second-wave were art sojourners.

Yet, the experience of the second-wave in the United States was not a unique experience to the Japanese. A mixing of backgrounds, talents, and techniques inspired the painters in New York's modern art world, creating an art movement that would later be called the American Scene, although its participants were not limited to Americans, nor could it accurately be called anything but a New York Scene.

## Chapter 3: Japanese Artists in the American Metropolis

### *Introduction*

“(Art) movements are the products, at the first historical level, of changes in public media. These media, the technological investment which mobilized them, and the cultural forms which both directed investment and expressed its preoccupations, arose in the new metropolitan cities, the centers of the also new imperialism, which offered themselves as transnational capitals of an art without frontiers.”  
Raymond Williams (*Politics of Modernism*)

Urban experience shaped the lives and artworks of Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Shimizu Toshi, and Ishigaki Eitarô. The second-wave artists were creations of “transnational capitals,” such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Tokyo, and Kobe, rather than of nations. American cities attracted immigrants and provided the capital to support modern artists: exhibition spaces, media outlets, and wealthy collectors and patrons.

The modern city has long been the site for cultural innovation, where artists and art institutions have competed for the available resources concentrated there. As David Harvey has argued, cities needed artists as much as artists needed cities. Cities advertised themselves as what Raymond Williams calls the “transnational capitals of an art without frontiers.”<sup>210</sup> Paris, London, Berlin, and New York were multicultural magnets, where artists from around the world gathered in order to have their work seen (and purchased). The centers of cosmopolitanism were the metropolitan centers of empires that attracted capital, labor, and cultural ambassadors from around the globe.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Raymond Williams, “When Was Modernism?” excerpt from *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (New York: Verso, 1989), edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 1087-1088

<sup>211</sup> David Harvey. *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 47-48

Considered the “center of the American art world,” modern artists searched New York for subjects that reflected the social changes brought by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Italians, Russian Jews, and other immigrant groups changed the color of New York society and then fanned out to repaint the United States. New Yorkers heard Jazz, African American blues and Golden Age ragtime in Harlem and Times Square, which suited the discordance and tempo of the age. Nine million immigrants arrived in New York in the 1910s. Because of size and population density New York bestowed the “gift of privacy” by normalizing difference, making the artists’ Japanese-ness relatively less remarkable.<sup>212</sup>

*New York: The Center of Art Activity*

“When you hear the clang of the fire engines, shuffle through the subways, rush by heaps of automobile wrecks, push your way through the crowds – all these things temper and shape the American, no matter where the individual first came from.” Kuniyoshi Yasuo<sup>213</sup>

As the center of the American modern art scene, New York possessed schools, galleries, and art societies that admitted Japanese artists as they did members of the working classes and new immigrants. Because it had a smaller Japanese population than Los Angeles or San Francisco, Japanese living in New York were not threatened by labor groups or confined to one neighborhood. They could participate in international exhibitions as well as find camaraderie in their own community. They moved freely, living

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<sup>212</sup> E.B. White, Excerpt from Here Is New York reprinted in “The City,” Lapham’s Quarterly Volume III, Number 4, Fall 2010, p. 116.

<sup>213</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

in neighborhoods with other artists, writers, and political activists. They came to understand the streets as a democratic space that mixed peoples, classes, genders, and ages, if transiently.

For many artists of the second-wave, New York was their first metropolitan experience in any country. Their images of urban experience were shaped by 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem and E. 14<sup>th</sup> Street, where colors and classes mixed. Like their American Scene teachers at the Art Students League, the second wave turned to the city streets for the subjects of their paintings.

Artists active in the American Scene and regulars at the Art Students League such as John Sloan, Reginald Marsh, and Ben Shahn (1898-1969) were working in this vernacular when the second wave arrived. While Kuniyoshi created the largest number of his early works in the late teens and 1920s while staying in Maine, Shimizu and Ishigaki chose New York as their primary subject. Neither Shimizu nor Ishigaki painted classic, posed portraits in New York. Instead, it was the people and the details of the city that fascinated them: architectural details, movie theaters, ice cream stands, and the clothing of passersby. Their subjects' emotional state was no longer of interest; it was their activities and their status in the urban landscape that they captured. (Figure 20)

E.B. White wrote that New York gave the "gift of loneliness" in exchange for the anonymity it provided. The experience of "visual and linguistic strangeness," was shadowed by solitude. Isolated by not knowing the language, illegible English media became a form of visual culture for the artists, who often included advertisements, newspapers, and marquee signs in their paintings. Kuniyoshi recalled in a 1944 interview:

“Everywhere were brick buildings and English writing on the walls of these buildings advertising all kinds of products. I was very enthusiastic seeing an altogether new kind of scene.”<sup>214</sup> Kuniyoshi also expressed hopelessness in the face of such newness. Japanese scholars looking at the lives of Japanese artists in the United States often characterized their experience in terms of *kodoku* (loneliness) and *sogai* (alienation).

Such characterizations notwithstanding, the accounts of Japanese artists in New York at this time reveal an active social life. Events, parties, art class field trips, studio visits, dinners out, attendance at concerts with friends figure largely in their daily life. Usui Bunpei, a friend of Kuniyoshi, Ishigaki, and Shimizu, painted “Party on the Roof” (1926), which depicted the social revelry among Japanese in New York in the mid-1920s. On a hot night, friends gather to drink wine, listen to music, and canoodle. Usui’s painting portrays the romantic nature of such events, as couples lounge against each other and gaze at the city nightscape. (Figure 21)

The art scene was also itself a social venue. For example, John Sloan hosted a costume ball as part of the Society of Independent Artists exhibition held in March of 1924.<sup>215</sup> Shimizu Toshi, who contributed two paintings to the exhibition, wrote that he could not see any of the paintings at the show because it had been too crowded with people. He noted that many of the attendees were friends. Shimizu mingled with his “fellow countrymen” and introduced his wife and son to Sloan and Walter Pach (1883-1980), an

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<sup>214</sup> Susan Lubowsky, "From Naivete to Maturity: 1906-1939," *Yasuo Kuniyoshi: tanjō 100nen kinen – nyū yōku no yūshū* (Tokyo: Teien Art Museum, December, 1989), p. 22

<sup>215</sup> Sloan continued to serve as a mentor to Shimizu even after he left his ASL classes. Several days prior to the show’s opening, Shimizu asked for his teacher’s opinion on his two paintings: one of a child and the other of an apartment building. Sloan claimed to have liked the painting of the child better.

artist, journalist, critic, and art historian. Based on Shimizu's diary, there were far fewer days spent at home with his family than in dining out, visiting galleries and museums, going to movies and the like. In one typical day, he toured three galleries with his brother, Kiyoshi, saw works by Matisse and El Greco, as well as stopping in on Nakayama Iwata's photography studio to see his solo exhibit, where he met painter Katô Kentarô and others who had just returned from Japan. These social activities contributed to the fellowship among artists of different backgrounds.

*Ishigaki Eitarô's "City Street"*

"The city is a fact in nature, like a cave, a run of mackerel or an ant heap. But it is also a conscious work of art, and it holds within its communal framework many simpler and more personal forms of art. Mind takes form in the city, and in turn, urban forms condition the mind." Lewis Mumford (1938)

In the 1920s, downtown New York became Ishigaki Eitarô's home and a source of inspiration for his paintings. Ishigaki wrote about 14th Street, where he often took walks and where he and many of his artist friends had studios. Writing years later for a Japanese audience about his New York experiences, he described the 14th Street area with a nostalgic fondness that indicates the role the city played in his life. 14th Street was a street without many changes, he wrote. Writing as though he were taking his readers on a walking tour, Ishigaki described each block from memory.

Running from the Hudson to the East River, Ishigaki could see ships carrying tons of cargo with black smoke rising from their stacks. There was a Catholic Church, attended by Italian and Latin American immigrants. The street was lined with department stores, ten-

cent shops, and movie theaters, which Ishigaki wrote was similar to Asakusa in Tokyo. Young men lined up for “strip tease” joints and penny arcades, bars, and restaurants. At Union Square, laborers gathered daily to listen to and debate the speeches made by anarchists and IWW members. Ishigaki also observed what he called “country hicks” (*onoborisan*) and foreigners hanging about, while pickpocket artists and loan sharks trolled the street.

Ishigaki went on to explain why he had become immersed in the street as a major theme in his works: “Born and raised among common people, I felt at home in 14<sup>th</sup> Street’s working- class atmosphere. I liked the feeling of comfort it gave me.”<sup>216</sup> He made no reference to feelings of alienation or loneliness as a Japanese. Ishigaki did not mention differences between the New York working class and rural Taiji’s laborers, but focused instead on a common social bond.

In Ishigaki’s 1925 painting, “City Street,” New York’s downtown characters appear like actors on a stage. The painting depicts an egalitarian slice of the city’s inhabitants: a beggar with hat in hand leaning on a crutch, a young girl selling newspapers, a mother with child in tow, a policeman talking to a young woman, a political activist yelling into a bullhorn, and two nuns casting stern glances at a short-haired flapper in a fur coat. The large scale of the painting, (three by eight feet), renders the characters lifelike, as though the viewer was a participant.<sup>217</sup> When the painting was exhibited at the Tenth Annual

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<sup>216</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô. *Ai nit suite kokuhaku – otoko to shite, onna to shite*. (Osaka: Heiwa Shobo, 1971) pp. 125-130

<sup>217</sup> In 1929, in a fit of rage about the love triangle he was in with his first wife Heather and Ayako, who would become his wife, Ishigaki cut the painting into two pieces. Ayako noted, however, that Ishigaki had considered splitting the canvas into two pieces before the incident. The left panel featuring the nuns and the flapper are at the Wakayama Museum of Modern Art and the right panel that depicts the policeman and activist with bullhorn are in Kamakura’s Museum of

Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1926, a critic for the New York Times commented on Ishigaki's keen ability to portray the variety of city life with his depictions of young women in torn stockings, nuns, and beggars.<sup>218</sup>

Ishigaki's cast of characters seems random, but his selection is not without meaning or social comment. The "beggar" on crutches was most likely wounded in World War I and is now neglected by passersby. A Salvation Army volunteer rings a bell appealing for donations, evoking the social upheaval of the era that left many in need while others celebrated the Roaring 20s. The chastising gaze of nuns and the envious glance of a mother directed at the young flapper suggested mixed reactions to the "new woman." This young woman, with luxurious coat, green hat, and red lips demands attention as she walks unaccompanied through the street. She is independent and attractive, despite the condemnation and curiosity from those around her. (Figure 22)

In his 1925 painting, Ishigaki presented the overlapping stories of want and need, unrest and shifting dimensions that he observed in New York. Though the street was crowded with people, they moved through the city space without connecting to one another. Women cast disapproving glances and a young girl tries to sell newspapers, but the city dwellers continue along their path untouched by those around them. Ishigaki highlighted this disconnect with the figure of the beggar, who, hat in hand, was ignored by passersby.

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Modern Art. *Amerika no naka no Nihon: Ishigaki Eitarô senzen no tobei gakatachi*. Wakayama, Museum of Modern Art, 1997.

<sup>218</sup> "Shows Vitality of Modernism." New York Times. March 21, 1926. Time Magazine discussed another painting of Ishigaki's from the show, no longer extant, which seems to have been more critical of the city experience. The critic described the picture as a "phantom on the point of being crushed by a thousand elevated trains and run over by a horde of cockroach taxicabs." "Art: Independent Artists, Time Magazine, March 15, 1926."



In “City,” Ishigaki painted varying social classes jumbled together on the urban street. Urban life forced them to co-exist, but it could not erase the barriers between them. As a socialist, Ishigaki spent his career attempting to overcome class distinctions that presented social barriers. He observed people undivided not by national or ethnic heritage but by social class. Unlike his social realist paintings from the 1930s, which showed labor protests, revolutionary figures, and instances of racial and social injustice, Ishigaki’s paintings of this era presented snapshots of his immediate environment. They document his surroundings without the urgency that his later works depicted. The stock market crash in 1929 incited Ishigaki to send a political message to his viewer.

*Shimizu Toshi: “Chinatown”*

New York’s cosmopolitanism did not mean a collapse of national rivalries that continued after World War I. When the second-wave traveled from the West Coast to New York in the 1910s, Japan was competing with other imperial powers for access to China. On the bottom of the American racial hierarchy since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants in the United States faced constant racial hostility. For Americans, metropolitan Chinatowns represented scenes of fantasy and degeneracy, cheap food and vice. Chinatown had attracted artists – most notably photographer Arnold Genthe - for its exotic scenery, people, clothing, and food since the nineteenth century. In 1929, Edward Hopper painted two white American women sitting at a second-story Chinese restaurant, called “Chop Suey.”<sup>219</sup> The New York Tribune in 1915 declared that police had eradicated Chinatown’s

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<sup>219</sup> The only indication of Chinatown, however, is the sign outside the window, condiments on their table, and the dragons etched into the window.

“grotesque splendor” where the “lowest sediment of New York vice” could be found. The public, however, was unconvinced and the image of Chinatown as a den of sin persisted.

The political chaos in China after the revolution of 1911 was also felt in New York’s Chinatown through the teens and twenties. The Tribune newspaper declared that the “Far East’s plots” had shaken the local Chinese community. Part of the anxiety felt among Chinese in New York was transformed into hostility toward the Japanese, who were blamed for the upheaval in China. Some residents who were interviewed in the article felt that the new Chinese flag resembled Japan’s too closely.<sup>220</sup> At the close of World War I, thousands of New York Chinese signed a cable sent to Paris protesting the proposed cession of the Shantung peninsula to the Japanese and tens of thousands gathered to protest on Mott Street in August 1919. While Japan eventually conceded its claim to the peninsula, it maintained economic rights formerly held by the Germans. It was in this geopolitical context that Shimizu, whose uncle had been a soldier in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, painted Chinatown.

New York’s downtown area hosted many nationalities: Italians, Ukrainians, Poles, Greeks, Armenians, Russians and others lived in closely packed tenements on the Lower East Side, which was next to Chinatown. The newcomers were foreigners and outsiders, sources of cheap labor and expendable given the boatloads of thousands arriving daily. Although it was a meeting place of nationalities, global hierarchies played out in the neighborhoods. Although Shimizu, as a Japanese national, could never be a naturalized U.S.

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<sup>220</sup> “Far East Plots Grip Chinatown.” New York Tribune. (December 15, 1915)

citizen, he could still condescend to the Chinese who were on a lower rung of the ethnic ladder than the Japanese.

Where Ishigaki illustrated the social and class dimensions of the cityscape, Shimizu's painting of Chinatown shows the limitations of cosmopolitanism: immigrant groups isolated and clustered among themselves. Winifred Ward advised in a 1919 article that when seeing the "real" New York one should not go to Chinatown with a group of sightseers and police escorts; instead, in order to see the Chinese as "normal human beings," one should go alone on Sundays when shops were closed. One had to catch them in the wild, as it were. Shimizu's painting of Chinatown illustrates that voyeuristic experience: a tour guide at the center of his canvas leads a foray into an exotic locale in New York.<sup>221</sup>

Shimizu's painting of Chinatown showed one corner of the red-light district, where the Japanese writer, Nagai Kafû, had headed when he was in the mood for "frightful vice or degradation" only a few years earlier.<sup>222</sup> Nagai's short story, "Chronicle of Chinatown," is

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<sup>221</sup> Shimizu's painting of Chinatown reflects a two-pronged relationship between Japanese and Chinese communities living in the United States: On the one hand, both groups were targets of racial discrimination that did not differentiate between the two, lumping them together as "Oriental." For working-class Americans, Chop Suey joints, kimonos, gambling dens, and actress Anna May Wong represented the Asian community. Both groups were discriminated against legally and by the insistence that "you could not tell them apart." Following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese immigrants who flowed into the United States attempted to distance themselves from the Chinese so as to avoid similar racial exclusion laws directed at them. They often adopted and reinforced the rhetoric of race targeted at the Chinese by many white Americans. Japanese diplomats, community leaders, and journalists negotiated on behalf of Japanese nationals living in the U.S. to convince local labor and political leaders that the Japanese differed from Chinese. Groups like the Japanese Patriotic League of San Francisco stated that whereas the Chinese in America represented the lower classes, the Japanese in America were from the better classes. According to the League newspaper, the Chinese were "backward and stupid," but the Japanese were "progressive and competent." The group's periodicals reinforced racist rhetoric that emphasized Chinese degeneracy as gamblers, prostitutes, and heathens, while proclaiming that they were representatives of civilization. In time, however, American media and many of its political leaders would lump Japanese and Chinese together as the same, undifferentiated racial group of "Orientals" and as part of the same "Yellow Peril" despite the efforts of the Japanese to separate themselves. Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 35-40. Not all Japanese espoused an anti-Chinese position in the United States; many Japanese who stayed in New York during the 1930s artists – like Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki – were vocal opponents to Japanese military aggression and were sympathetic to the Chinese victims.

<sup>222</sup> Nagai Kafû, "Chronicles of Chinatown," *American Stories* Translated by Mitsuko Iriye. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p. 195

the literary version of Shimizu's painting. Both painting and story are populated by similar characters, who live in the shadows of the Chinatown enclave. Just as Nagai's character visits Chinatown to "separate (himself) from daily life," Shimizu takes a bird's eye view of the street, looking down on the action playing out below him.

Nagai and Shimizu's depictions of Chinatown share many details: shadowy, dirty tenement buildings are flanked by architectural details painted Chinese red. Nagai compared the red details to the color of a "woman's eyes swollen from crying." Shimizu's painting is dark, like the Chinatown Nagai sought out "without stars and without moon."<sup>223</sup> Shimizu and Nagai's Chinatowns contained poverty and immorality: beggars lay in the street or against narrow staircases flanked by naked gaslights and red doors. We also see in Shimizu's painting what Nagai described as "half-naked women [who thrust] their bodies outside the completely open windows." In the painting, a prostitute on an open balcony comforts her lover. (Figure 23)

Shimizu later spoke of his painting, in words similar to those of Nagai in his story. Where American streets smell of butter and Japanese streets smell of soy sauce, Chinatown smell like pork, Shimizu reported. Even the legs and breath of Chinese women had the same smell. Nagai, too, described the smell of pork as well as of incense and opium.<sup>224</sup> Although he avoided Nagai's vicious descriptions of the Chinese "screeching like monkeys," Shimizu described what he called a "typical" Chinatown scene as a place of alcohol, women,

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<sup>223</sup> A few years later, Shimizu painted a daytime version of the same painting.

<sup>224</sup> Unno Hiroshi, "Modan sutairu saihô: Shimizu Toshi," *Aato*. (Autumn 1980)

gamblers, immorality, corruption, sickness, and was thus, “death’s showroom” (*shi no tenrankaijô*).

Although Shimizu endeavored to distance himself from such scenes, his description takes a turn when he states, “On my way to art classes, when I was as exhausted in mind and body as a cabin boy on a ship, I worried about falling into the dark abyss of corruption and degradation. It was a time when I thought that mysteries, ugliness, and depravity were more beautiful than poetry and flowers. I pushed open the doors of businesses marked ‘Open Day and Night.’”<sup>225</sup> Shimizu had worked as a cabin boy on ships in Seattle while he attended Fokko Tadama’s private art classes in Seattle. He eventually quit in order to paint, but his cabin boy tenure had come at the end of five years of toil and hardship in Washington State.

Reflecting upon his painting, Shimizu wrote that Chinatown’s “depths” had enthralled him. There was almost a tone of empathy, even longing, for the scene he had depicted. His 1922 painting of New York’s Chinatown was a portrait of a world he knew, feared, and loathed, but also had been seduced by. By 1922 he had a wife and a son and his baser needs were but a nostalgic memory projected on a place and people. Shimizu concluded his comments on the painting, “I dream of Chinatown.”

*California: San Francisco and Los Angeles 1910-1931:*

New York was not the only city that hosted Japanese artists in the United States. Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle were the standard ports of entry for Japanese artists.

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<sup>225</sup> Unno Hiroshi, *Ibid.*

Yet, most Japanese artists on the West Coast worked within the confines of ghettos like Japantown in San Francisco or Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Although their paintings in the 1920s tended towards landscapes that sometimes retained elements of Japanese style, Japanese photographers on the West Coast were among the vanguard of modernist photography.<sup>226</sup> In the mid-1920s photographers gathered in meeting spaces at 1<sup>st</sup> Street and San Pedro to read international journals that featured Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray. Some Japanese photographers created images of Los Angeles that anticipated what *film noir* produced decades later. As the center for “utopia and dystopia for advanced capitalism,” Los Angeles inspired Japanese photographers to produce what represented an alternative urban experience to that of New York.<sup>227</sup>

More Japanese lived in California, primarily in Los Angeles, during the first decades of the twentieth century than anywhere else in the country. Between 1910 and 1920, the Japanese population in Los Angeles more than doubled from 8,500 to just below 20,000.<sup>228</sup> Larger numbers posed a greater threat to labor groups who feared that they could not compete with the lower wages of the Japanese.

Los Angeles’ race-based covenant laws led to the neighborhood of Little Tokyo, where most Japanese lived. As described by Carey McWilliams, Japanese lived on “an island

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<sup>226</sup> Michael Dawson, “South of Point Lobos,” LA’s Early Moderns: Art/Architecture/Photography (Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 2003) pp. 225-226

<sup>227</sup> Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (London: Verso Books, 1990) p. 18

<sup>228</sup> United States Census figures.

within a (Los Angeles) island” of the American West.<sup>229</sup> Los Angeles’ civic center, the Los Angeles Times offices, and the financial district were all visible from First Street and San Pedro, the heart of Little Tokyo. Despite the proximity to centers of power in Los Angeles, Japanese had almost no legal rights or political influence. They were forced to form self-reliant commerce and media networks and work with their own community.

Insular communities prevented Japanese artists from significant interaction with other artists.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, they established Japanese groups that exhibited, supported, and promoted artists in their community. They did reach out to non-Japanese artists by inviting them to participate in exhibitions in Japanese neighborhoods. Despite these efforts, there was far less spontaneous mingling than in New York’s art schools, galleries, and artistic networks.

In San Francisco, artists like Obata Chiura and Kôtoku Shiyei 幸徳死影(1890-1933) formed the East West Society, a club that aspired to exchange between Asian and Western artists. In the years 1921 and 1922, the East West group of artists, which included Japanese, European, American, and Chinese members, displayed artworks and sponsored musical events, including Beethoven sonatas and Puccini’s “Madame Butterfly,” to celebrate the intersections between Eastern and Western art. The exhibitions were jury-free and open to

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<sup>229</sup> Carey McWilliams, Southern California: An Island on the Land (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1946, 1973) p. 321

<sup>230</sup> Many Japanese artists found in New York an active scene in which they exhibited their work and formed relationships with artists outside the Japanese community. Ishigaki lived in Greenwich Village among other contemporary artists; Kuniyoshi lived next to Jules Pascin in Brooklyn. Japanese in Los Angeles, however, were primarily confined to a regulated area. To go beyond these invisible, but recognized, boundaries was to invite violence. When illustrator Takehisa Yumeji visited California, traveling from San Francisco to Los Angeles to sell his works, he noted in his diary that he was relieved to arrive in Little Tokyo, where he felt more comfortable and safe. Tsurutani Hisashi, Yumeji no mita Amerika (Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu orai-sha, 1997)

all who wished to participate. The San Francisco Museum of Art sponsored an event that featured nearly fifty different painters and musicians.

In the 1922 exhibition catalog, the group's manifesto declared that the participants were seeking the "highest Idealism" in which the East united with the West across all media: poets, musicians, painters, and dramatists were welcome to join. The selection of "Madame Butterfly," however, suggests that the East West Art Society focused on the culture of Japan, not the broader "East." Furthermore, the opera was written in the West and thus exemplified Western fantasies of exotic Japan. Artist groups in New York presented themselves as representatives of Japan, rather than the broader "Oriental" category. Unlike Shimizu and Ishigaki's paintings of urban life, the East West Society exhibited paintings of landscapes and still-lives, works that appealed to a more conservative California audience. Instead of Kuniyoshi's geometric renderings of rural Maine, impressionistic renderings of the northern California coastline were displayed. The West Coast's tastes in painting remained more conservative than the experimental East Coast that was influenced by European modernism and a broad mix of immigrant cultures.

During the 1920s in Los Angeles, Japanese established art groups in Little Tokyo that became influential. One of the more active was the Shakudosha arts association established in 1923. It was unusual in including members from a wide range of media: artists, photographers, writers, and intellectuals. They served as a support and discussion group for those interested in modern art and aesthetics. They also followed developments in the art world outside their community. Members of the East West Art Society traveled from San Francisco to participate in Shakudosha exhibitions and vice versa. Similarly, the



Shakudosha held joint shows with Japanese artist groups in San Francisco, like the Sangenshoku Ga-kai (Three Primary Colors Art Group).<sup>231</sup>

The 1923 Shakudosha exhibition catalog quoted Jean-Francois Millet to state the group's philosophy of art:

“Art is not a diversion (pastime, recreation)...I am not a philosopher. I do not wish to erase my pain, nor do I want to produce a formula that is without feeling. For an artist, the thing that has the most power is the expression of that pain.”<sup>232</sup>

The group's position on the function of art as a means of confronting hardship and struggle was clear; for them, art was not to be taken lightly, or as a diverting hobby. It was a means of relating the challenges of the human experience to a wide audience. The social function of art was as relevant to Japanese artists in California as it was for politically engaged artists in New York. Art was not a means of escape, but a way to engage. The inclusion of photographers, writers, and intellectuals expanded the means by which art could involve those with creative impulses around them. The group also hosted gatherings for Japanese artists and intellectuals visiting from Japan, thus maintaining close ties between Little Tokyo and Japan.

Photographers were some of the more active members of the Shakudosha group. In addition to exhibitions of their photographs, they hosted shows devoted to the work of non-members, which were well attended by Little Tokyo residents. In 1925, photographer Edward Weston (1886-1958) credited the Shakudosha's exhibition of his images for saving

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<sup>231</sup> Hikoyama Teikichi, Miyagi Yotoku, and Suzuki Sakari participated in a 1927 joint exhibition.

<sup>232</sup> Shaku-do-sha Art Exhibition Catalog. 赤銅社展覧会 June 15 – June 28 1923, Japanese Union Church 120 N. San Pedro Street, Los Angeles.

him financially after he returned from Mexico.<sup>233</sup> Weston noted in his journal that members from across Little Tokyo came to the show and purchased more works than at any of his other shows. He marveled at laundrymen and grocers attending the exhibition and buying his photographs.<sup>234</sup> Despite the insularity of the community and the difficulty of moving outside Little Tokyo borders, Japanese reached out to other artists to invite them into their circle.

Los Angeles art critics often criticized Japanese artists who they felt mimicked Western art without reference to Japanese tradition. At the close of the 1920s, the first annual exhibition of Japanese Artists of Los Angeles exhibited works featuring Miyagi Yotoku 宮城与徳 (1903-1943), Ueyama Tokio 上山鳥城男(1890-1954), and Watanabe Torajirô 渡辺寅次郎 (1886-1975), who had left New York for California. An art critic reviewing the 1927 show warned the Japanese artists not to “readily accept an occidental fashion” in their painting. In 1929, Los Angeles Times art critic, Arthur Millier, claimed to be tired of painters that emulated Cezanne and other French influence that he identified in their works.

As in Paris and New York, Los Angeles’ critics encouraged a fusion of styles among the Japanese artists. Millier praised an internationalism that he observed in exhibitions

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<sup>233</sup> It is likely that Weston met painter Ueyama Tokio while they were both in Mexico in 1924. Ueyama became a founding member of the Shakudôsha, which hosted one of Weston’s first shows. The group hosted two more Weston shows in 1927 and the last one held in 1931 also featured the works by his sons, Brett and Chandler.

<sup>234</sup> Dennis Reed Japanese Photography in America 1920-1940 (Los Angeles: Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, (1985) p. 35. Quoting from Nancy Newhall, Editor. The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Volume I. California (Phoenix: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1981) pp. 121-122

held in the late 1920s.<sup>235</sup> He marveled at the exchange of ideas that crossed national boundaries among artists and their works. Stating that, “While our painters turn to Africa and the Orient for new stimulus, the Japanese look entirely to the western world,” Millier credited the “phenomenon of an international exchange” for the artists’ ability to transcend national borders in their work.<sup>236</sup> Rather than seeking out “glimmers of Hokusai,” which the critic in 1927 had looked for, Millier responded to other qualities. He recommended the works of Miyagi Yotoku, whose originality he felt was noteworthy.<sup>237</sup> Millier commended Miyagi’s life as a laborer in Alaska and California as a demonstration of his work ethic, which was rare since critics rarely mentioned the artists’ labor experience. Millier’s celebration of an international flux of influences among a socially diverse group of artists was unusual at the time.

Though to a lesser extent than in New York, art schools in California were the places where Japanese artists met other members of the art community. One of the more influential art teachers in the Los Angeles area was Stanton MacDonald-Wright (1890-1973). After a successful career in Paris and New York, he moved to Los Angeles and began teaching at the Chouinard Art Institute and the Los Angeles Arts Student League, where he became director in 1923. Unlike Kenneth Hayes Miller and John Sloan in New York,

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<sup>235</sup> “California Art Club Exhibition Reviewed.” *Los Angeles Times* (November 27, 1927)

<sup>236</sup> Arthur Millier, “City’s Japanese Show Art.” *Los Angeles Times* (December 29, 1929)

<sup>237</sup> **Miyagi Yōtoku** 宮城与徳 (1903-1943) Born in Okinawa. Moved to California with his family in 1919. Settled in San Francisco and attended the San Francisco School of Design between 1920 and 1923. Moved to southern California and attended the Art Students League, studying with Stanton Macdonald-Wright in 1926. Joined the American Communist Party and was sent by the Comintern to Japan in 1933. Became implicated with Richard Sorge and Ozaki Hotsumi in a spy ring. Imprisoned at Sugamo in 1941, where he died in 1943.

Macdonald-Wright had an eager interest in Chinese and Japanese art, and his students' works showed the mark of that interest in content and style.

Date Hideo (1907-2005), who studied with Macdonald-Wright in Los Angeles, traveled in the late 1920s to Tokyo to study *nihonga* techniques at the Kawabata Arts School. When he returned in 1930, he entered Macdonald-Wright's class at the League. Macdonald-Wright encouraged Date to incorporate *nihonga* techniques into his painting. Combined with his instructor's attraction to vivid colors and his lectures on European and New York modernism, Date created works that were boldly colored drawings of fantastical figures. His paintings featured women sitting on lotus flowers and Buddhist mandalas. Macdonald-Wright's students began to earn their own reputation in Los Angeles art circles as distinct from artists who arrived from New York and from Shakudosha members.

Although Los Angeles was still emerging from an agriculture-based economy, some photographers portrayed it as a site of American urbanism much like their counterparts in New York. Real estate and railroad boosters had advertised California's verdant landscape to promote Mid-western migration since the late nineteenth century. By the 1920s, images of California's growth potential, economic prosperity, and industrialization replaced these portrayals of the state as the Garden of Eden. Artists in Los Angeles began to paint the city as a metropolis. Art critic Antony Anderson commended Kôtoku Shiyei's "unique point of view" in his painting of the "backyards and alleys" of Los Angeles, rather than more common picturesque sites of its coastlines.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Antony Anderson, "Of Art and Artists," Los Angeles Times (December 16, 1923)

*Kira Hiromu's "The Thinker"*

Japanese camera clubs were a large and important part of California's art world during the 1920s. Photographers were interested in both the industrial (tunnels, dams, and bridges) and the bucolic (sheep herds, lily ponds, and coastline) parts of Los Angeles. Photography scholars have claimed that Los Angeles photographers, Japanese camera clubs in particular, were faster than painters to approach modern subjects in their images.<sup>239</sup> The hard concrete and steel forms that were built overnight in the fast-growing city loom large in Japanese photographers' work. Their images of Los Angeles in the late 1920s captured the city's utopian idealism and dystopian urbanism: their subjects ranged from ocean waves to oil ditches, water lilies to dark tunnels eerily lit by car headlights.

Some images illustrated how industry overwhelmed man, rendering him useless and vulnerable as in Kira Hiromu's "The Thinker," (1930) shot on the edge of the Hollywood Dam. Almost abstract in its form, a single figure sits on the side of concrete slabs. Los Angeles' future growth was dependent on the technical expertise of engineers like William Mulholland in harnessing water. Kira photographed "The Thinker" one year after Mulholland resigned as head of the Los Angeles Water and Power for the failing of the St. Francis Dam that killed 450 people. The image captured the fragile relationship between man and the industry he had promoted. Kira also composed "The Thinker" with an eye for abstract, geometric forms that many European modernist photographers were experimenting with at the time. (Figure 24)

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<sup>239</sup> Mike Dawson, *ibid.*

From their Little Tokyo photo studios, the photographers echoed much of what their counterparts in Japan were publishing in the pages of avant-garde photography magazines. Their works paralleled those of Europeans like Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and American Karl Struss, whose photographs were exhibited next to theirs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's international photography salons. Unlike many photographers at the time, the Japanese camera club members in Los Angeles did not have commercial photography jobs to support their arts images. While painters in California continued to create images of an idealized and romanticized West, photographers in Little Tokyo revealed the industrial expansion of Los Angeles decades before the postwar L.A. modern scene seized on the subject.

Miyatake Tôyô was a commercial and fine arts photographer, who, with Kira Hiromu, was one of the leaders of this group. Because he was moving to Chicago and could no longer be Miyatake's photography teacher, Harry Shigeta introduced him to Edward Weston for further study. Miyatake and other photographers started visiting Weston's studio in Glendale for lessons. Weston and his assistant, Margarethe Mather (1886-1952), had collections of Japanese woodblock prints and other Japanese arts and crafts. As a result of this aesthetic affinity, they reached out to artist groups in Little Tokyo. Miyatake later said that he had never seen an *ukiyo-e* print before Weston showed him one.<sup>240</sup>

After studying with Shigeta and Weston, Miyatake Tôyô opened a portrait studio in Little Tokyo. Miyatake shot portraits of writer Thomas Mann, and the film star, Sessue Hayakawa. In his free time, he created abstract compositions that were some of the more

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<sup>240</sup> Dennis Reed, Japanese Photography in America, 1920-1940, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, 1985) p. 35

avant-garde experiments in photography anywhere at that time. Often his prints were plays of light and shadow, lines and angles. When the dancer Itô Michio (1892-1961) arrived in 1929, he became Miyatake's premier subject. Itô had lived in London, Paris, and New York as a celebrated dancer, who collaborated with Ezra Pound and other modernists on theatrical productions. Miyatake and Itô worked together to capture images of movement and light on film.

### *Conclusion*

In the 1920s, first-wave artists like Yoshida Hiroshi and Obata Chiura continued to paint nature scenes. But painters in New York did not care about pretty landscapes, choosing instead the city's cast of characters and the urban landscape. In the 1920s, even Kuniyoshi Yasuo stopped painting the Maine landscape and began doing portraits of working-class women who lived in the city. Sojourning artists seemed to take an interest in their immediate surroundings, documenting what was in front of them without romanticizing the subject.

Japanese painters living in California in the 1920s painted landscapes of rolling hills and still life's of flower vases. They did not paint Main Street in downtown Los Angeles, or Market Street in San Francisco like Shimizu and Ishigaki. It was the Japanese photography clubs that captured metropolitan California like New York's painters, though they, too, photographed waves, flower ponds, and kimono-clad women playing *samisen*. Yet, for those photographers who were no longer interested in pictorialist works, photography seemed to invite images urban settings on the West Coast.

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In 1929, the stock market crash ushered the depression that scattered its debris throughout the globe. Tents in Central Park and breadlines became emblematic of hard-hit cities after the crash. In New York, the Daniel Gallery ceased hosting one man shows for Kuniyoshi. Ishigaki struggled to support himself and his wife at a time when few had the income to purchase art. Anticipating Raymond Chandler's detective novels, Japanese photographers in Los Angeles created darker images of solitary individuals in stark and shadowy city streets. Despite the economic hardships, however, Japanese artists in the United States continued to forge ahead with their works during the 1930s, many of them fueled by political beliefs. Images with political messages replaced snapshots of the urban experience.

Kuniyoshi left New York for Japan in 1931 to visit his ailing father. This was to be his first and last trip back to Japan since his initial departure. He left at a portentous time: on September 18, 1931 the Japanese military staged an explosion of a part of the Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway. The so-called Manchurian Incident, which began what would become the fifteen-year war with China, dominated newspaper headlines when Kuniyoshi arrived in Tokyo. The writer and painter Arishima Ikuma (1882-1974) compared Kuniyoshi to the hero of the folk legend, Urashima Tarô, who had left for a magical world and returned to find everything changed at home. The *Mainichi Shinbun* sponsored exhibitions at Mitsukoshi department stores in Tokyo and Osaka, where Japanese could see twenty-nine of his works for the first time. That same year, Kuniyoshi was the first Japanese artist to be awarded the top prize at the Carnegie Institute



International Exhibit of Modern Painting – the year before it had been awarded to Pablo Picasso. Kuniyoshi returned to New York in 1932 and weathered the Depression there as his fame grew. Ishigaki, for his part, rallied artists and writers alike to paint for political purposes shared by left-wing American artists of the 1930s.

## Chapter 4: Leftist Politics and Art in the 1930s

### *Introduction*

“We call upon all honest intellectuals, all honest writers and artists, to abandon decisively the treacherous illusion that art can exist for art’s sake, or that the artist can remain remote from the historic conflicts in which all men must take sides. We call upon them to break with bourgeois ideas, which seek to conceal the violence and fraud, the corruption and decay of a capitalist society. We call upon them to align themselves with the working class in its struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation, against unemployment and terror, against fascism and war. We urge them to join with the literary and artistic movement of the working class in forging a new art that shall be a weapon in the battle for a new and superior world.”

John Reed Club of New York: Draft Manifesto, 1932<sup>241</sup>

No artwork is ever completely removed from politics, whether the artist created a work with political intent or not. Some eras, however, seem to invite or even demand an overt expression of an artist’s political position. The political, economic, and social crises of the 1930s compelled artists in many places to form a cultural front with a political message at the center of their art. To the Left, capitalism seemed to have been “stripped naked...revealing a system of robbery and fraud, unemployment and terror, starvation and war.”<sup>242</sup>

Many of the artists who engaged in socially relevant art in the United States were immigrants. The migration of newcomers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century challenged earlier notions of what America “looked like.” Japanese, Russians, Ukrainians, Italians, Chinese, Mexicans and others created artworks with an overt political purpose. For many of them, experience at the lower ends of the social hierarchy in American cities disposed them to empathize with the plight

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<sup>241</sup> John Reed Club of New York, “Draft Manifesto,” The New Masses, (June, 1932)

<sup>242</sup> “Draft Manifesto.” Ibid.

of the urban poor. Their collective goal was not only to document, but also to improve the human condition.

Questioning whether they had been merely satisfying bourgeois desires for culture, politicized artists redefined their purpose in the 1930s. Some of their works treated the devastation of poverty, while others attempted to inspire the masses to revolution. Some celebrated an indelible “American spirit,” while others revealed the hypocrisies at the heart of capitalism that rendered such mythologies empty. As these artists responded to the Depression by mobilizing into groups to tackle problems of inequity, they supported each other during the lean times, and created a unified voice of protest.

Some Japanese artists in the United States played prominent roles in this leftist cultural front. Ishigaki Eitarô had been involved in socialist movements since his youth and became a member of Katayama Sen’s socialist study groups both in San Francisco and New York. During the 1930s, Ishigaki was a leader in the John Reed Club, which supported Leftist artists and writers. He moved away from painting flappers on city streets, to depicting revolution in Cuba and lynchings in the American South. Also a member of the John Reed Club, Noda Hideo portrayed the bleak existence of the working poor and injustices experienced by African Americans. Both Noda and his lifelong friend, Terada Takeo, worked on Works Progress Administration (WPA) sponsored art projects and assisted Mexican muralist Diego Rivera in his politically charged – and often controversial - murals in San Francisco and in New York. Political activism invited international cooperation among artists to confront economic crisis and the looming threat of another war.

*Politicization of Ishigaki Eitarô*

As a young boy, Ishigaki Eitarô visited the Taiji shoreline in Wakayama Prefecture each morning and watched the laborers build coastal whaling boats. The smell of the carved cedar was a strong childhood memory. He claimed that he used to spend the day drawing the newly constructed boats, the coastline, and the birds.<sup>243</sup> The Taiji local economy was decimated during Ishigaki's youth because it was unable to compete with the new foreign whaling and shipbuilding industries, prompting Ishigaki's father to move to Seattle. Some scholars have argued that these early drawings of the local boat builders combined with an awareness of their plight drove both his artistic skill and his social awareness.<sup>244</sup>

Ishigaki Eitarô's father left for the United States in 1901 when his son was seven years old, and Ishigaki joined him in Seattle in 1910.<sup>245</sup> They soon moved to Bakersfield in California's Central Valley, because they had heard that the wages there were higher. Bakersfield had been growing since the 1880s when gold was discovered in the nearby Kern River and still had the feeling of a "frontier town." Ishigaki described it as a "hot jungle," not only in terms of its climate, but its culture of lawlessness. Recounting his time there for *Chûô kôron* readers in 1952, he described it as an "open town." "Violence," he recalled, "occurred there with a degree of calm."<sup>246</sup> Laborers had flocked to Bakersfield, "like bees to honey," due to

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<sup>243</sup> Yasugi Masahiro, "Ishigaki Eitarô no Amerika – aru tobei gaka no shôgai," Amerika no naka no Nihon – Ishigaki Eitarô to senzen no tobei gakatachi. (Wakayama: The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama, 1997) p. 8

<sup>244</sup> Yasugi Masahiro, *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> **Ishigaki Eitarô** 石垣栄太郎 (1893-1958) Born in Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture. Followed his father to the United States in 1909. Met poet Kano Isen and sculptress Gertrude Boyle after moving to San Francisco to study art in 1912. Also met Katayama Sen, who introduced him to socialism. Moved to New York in 1915 and studied with John Sloan at the Art Students League, where he also met Kuniyoshi. His WPA commission to paint Harlem courthouse murals was rescinded in 1937, because he was a Japanese national. Following the war, he was arrested by the FBI due to his activities in the communist party and was sent back to Japan in 1952.

<sup>246</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, Ai ni tsuite no kokuhaku: otoko to shite, onna to shite (Osaka: Heiwa Shobo. 1971) p. 23

the promise of higher wages, but the town also attracted gamblers and speculators. Despite the fighting, rampant gambling, and even shootings, the police never showed up.

Ishigaki's description of Bakersfield as an outpost of the "Wild West" was framed in terms of social class and race. After years of reading Christian socialists, Ishigaki saw the town's lawlessness as a sign of social inequality.<sup>247</sup> On his way to work, he passed in front of a brothel, where prostitutes of different ages and ethnicities worked, serving their own ethnic or racial group.<sup>248</sup> The town's law enforcement, he explained, was controlled by the wealthy, white upper classes, while the non-white and immigrant lower classes were confined to the filthiest jobs. When he arrived in the early 1900s, Japanese and Chinese immigrants were at the bottom of the social hierarchy in California.<sup>249</sup>

Rather than saving money to open a small business back in Taiji and marry a "good person" as his father advised, Ishigaki was reading the Christian leader and writer, Uchimura Kanzô 内村 鑑三 (1861-1930) at night in Bakersfield.<sup>250</sup> Although he characterized himself as a "romantic" (*romanchikku*), Ishigaki saw his father as a "simple" man, who did not have grand dreams for his son. Ishigaki had "big dreams," though he was not sure what form they might

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<sup>247</sup> A voracious reader since his childhood in Taiji in Wakayama, Ishigaki recalled that he spent more time at the local Methodist Mission reading works by Japanese scholars than studying English. Uchimura's writings on Christianity, particularly in *How I Became a Christian* (1895), interested him less than the "revolutionary potential" Ishigaki found in his books. From these readings, he considered the person of Jesus Christ a "revolutionary figure," but did not believe in divine conception and other "unnatural tales" that he read in the Bible. In addition to Uchimura, he also read the Christian socialist writer Kinoshita Naoe 木下尚江 (1869-1937), who then spurned Ishigaki's investigation of socialist readings. Ishigaki Eitarô. *Chûo Kôron*, (June, 1952)

<sup>248</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô *Ibid.* p. 24

<sup>249</sup> Ishigaki explained to Japanese readers in the 1950s, however, that second and third generation Japanese in the United States were solidifying their positions and occupying more professions. He also stated that the state of Hawaii had a Japanese as a member of the Senate. Ishigaki Eitarô *Ibid.* pp. 26-30

<sup>250</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Umi o watatta ai no gaka*. (Tokyo: Ochanomizu-shobo, 1988) p. 24

take.<sup>251</sup> Ishigaki's first job was as a dishwasher in a Mexican restaurant, where he learned some Spanish. Ishigaki later recalled that his "first friendships" upon arrival in the U.S. were with Mexicans in Bakersfield. Reflecting on these relationships years later in New York, he claimed that these early experiences prepared him to work in international groups. He said that his friendships with the Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco, reminded him of his time in Bakersfield.<sup>252</sup> The restaurant's crowd was rough, however, and, still a teenager, he moved to work as a cleaner for the town's hotel.

In 1912, a commemoration of the late Emperor Meiji's birthday took place in Bakersfield, in a ceremony that Ishigaki claimed to be "no different from what occurred throughout the Japanese countryside."<sup>253</sup> The event was held at the Bakersfield Buddhist Hall, which had been used as a gathering place for ceremonies and festivals sponsored by the Japanese America Association (JAA). The hall hosted *naniwabushi* performances, movies, and musical recitals. Following the Great Treason Incident of the previous year, Ishigaki recalled that the celebration of the Emperor Meiji's birthday had taken on greater significance among Japanese in California.<sup>254</sup> He saw the celebration as an extension of Japanese state ideology encouraged by

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<sup>251</sup> Ishigaki, Eitarô, "Amerika hôrô yonjûnen," Chûô kôron, (1954)

<sup>252</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, Amerika no naka no nihon: Ishigaki Eitarô to senzen no tobei gakatachi, Japan in America: Eitaro Ishigaki and Other Japanese Artists in the Pre-World War II United States (Wakayama City: Wakayama Museum of Modern Art, 1997) p. 120

<sup>253</sup> Ishigaki noted in his memoirs that the year was 1912, but according to Yuji Ichioka's scholarship the ceremony took place in November of 1911, a year before the emperor's death.

<sup>254</sup> The Great Treason Incident of 1910-1911 resulted in the execution of several Japanese socialists and anarchists, including Kôtoku Shûsui 幸徳秋水(1871-1911), accused of plotting against the Emperor Meiji. One of the founding members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Japan was Kôtoku, who had left for California in 1905 after his release from Sugamo prison. During the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, California was a hub of socialist activity. Kôtoku left California in 1906, leaving behind his nephew, Kôtoku Yukie 幸徳幸衛 (1890-1933), who became a prominent painter in California through the 1920s. Kôtoku's activities in socialist groups in California led to the surveillance of the Japanese immigrant population by Japanese state authorities.

the JAA cultural centers.<sup>255</sup> He felt that the expansive hall was too ostentatious for the three hundred Japanese living in Bakersfield. He also opposed the use of Japanese textbooks at JAA centers to teach second-generation children in the U.S. because it prevented their assimilation into American culture.<sup>256</sup> Ishigaki acknowledged anti-Japanese racial prejudice in California as the primary factor in isolating the Japanese community, but argued that the Japanese state's influence over emigrants abroad contributed to the insularity that heightened tensions with Euro-Americans and other immigrant groups who were better assimilated.<sup>257</sup>

These circumstances set the stage for the incident involving Takeda Shojiro. Ishigaki recalled that a member of the Bakersfield Japanese Methodist Mission, Takeda refused to bow in front of the portrait of Emperor Meiji in the hall during the ceremony. At a meeting at the church two days later, he accused other Japanese members of the Mission who did bow in front of the Emperor's image of "idolatry." Newspaper reports in San Francisco, following the lead of the JAA, cast Takeda as a traitor to the Japanese state. Following on the heels of the execution of Kôtoku Shûsui in 1911, the alleged leader of the Great Treason Incident who had once spent time in California, a dark cloud passed over the uneasy Japanese community.

Because Ishigaki had frequented the local church and had associated with Takeda and others involved in this so-called *lèse majesté* incident, his father recommended that he move to San Francisco to distance himself from scrutiny.<sup>258</sup> Japanese living in the United States could not,

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<sup>255</sup> Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Yuji Ichioka's *The Issei: the First Generation of Japanese immigrants, 1885 – 1924*, (New York: Free Press London, 1988)

<sup>256</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, *Ibid.* pp. 36-40

<sup>257</sup> Writing after the war, Ishigaki argued that this alienation led to the internment of Japanese in California.

<sup>258</sup> Although Ishigaki made no mention of it in his memoirs, he was further connected to the Great Treason Incident beyond the shadow it cast on his life as a Japanese in California. He and Ôishi Seinosuke 大石誠之助(1867-1911), came from the same

according to Ishigaki, “cast off their homeland,” and he felt forced to flee. He claimed later that the affair “stank of nationalism.” In San Francisco, Ishigaki took on odd jobs and pursued his art studies. His reading in Bakersfield combined with the incident there directed him and his art toward the socialist movement, the politics of protest, and attacks on social injustice.

When he moved to San Francisco in 1912, Ishigaki entered art school and worked at his aunt’s store in Japantown. He continued his intellectual pursuits, reading the Japanese feminist publication, Blue Stocking and the literary journal, *Shirakaba-ha* (The White Birch Society). Often the Japanese journals led him back to Western sources. For example, an essay by Yanagi Sôetsu 柳宗悦, (1889-1961) introduced Ishigaki to the writings of William Blake.<sup>259</sup> The artists and writers of the White Birch Society were opposed to the Japanese naturalists who had dominated the literary world in the first years of the twentieth century. The *Shirakaba-ha* espoused individualism and personal cultivation and rejected what they saw as the naturalists’ retreat from social issues. The *Shirakaba-ha* also advocated a positive approach to improving one’s lot rather than a preoccupation with the dark side of human experience.<sup>260</sup> This position came to characterize Ishigaki’s art: he depicted social inequities and injustice and professed a belief that wrongs could be righted if light was cast upon them.

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hometown in Wakayama Prefecture. Ôishi studied medicine during the 1890s in the United States and then returned to Wakayama to set up his practice. His home became the gathering place for socialist study groups. During the Great Treason Incident, he became implicated along with Kôtoku. As a valued member of the community, the people of Wakayama protested Ôishi’s inclusion in the plot against the emperor and his subsequent execution. It is likely that news of Ôishi’s involvement reached Ishigaki and his father while they were in California, given their connections to Wakayama immigrants. Yasugi Masahiro, “Ishigaki Eitarô no Amerika – aru tobei gaka no shôgai,” Amerika no naka no Nihon – Ishigaki Eitarô to senzen no tobei gakatachi (Wakayama: The Museum of Modern Art, 1997) p. 8

<sup>259</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, “Ishigaki Eitarô, 40 Years’ Wandering in America,” Ai ni tsuite no kokuhaku: otoko to shite onna to shite. (Tokyo: Heiwa shobo, 1971) p. 37

<sup>260</sup> Weisenfeld, Jennifer. Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde 1905-1931. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) p. 20



In 1913, Ishigaki met the poet Kanno Issen at a lecture he gave on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.<sup>261</sup> Kanno remembered that at the time of their meeting, Ishigaki was more concerned with politics than with poetry. Kanno introduced Ishigaki to his wife, the sculptress Gertrude Boyle (1878-1937), and their circle of painters, sculptors, and writers. They invited him to join a group at the Oakland hills home of the poet Joaquin Miller (1839-1913), where Japanese writers like Noguchi Yonejiro had also visited.<sup>262</sup> This group was dedicated to artistic expression and to living outside societal norms. Ishigaki began to interact with non-Japanese outside the church. Unlike his aunt, who called him a “fool” (*baka*) for wanting to be an artist and live a life of poverty, Kanno and Boyle fed Ishigaki’s creativity with exposure to other artists, musicians, and poets.<sup>263</sup> Ishigaki’s participation in an international coterie of writers and musicians in the Oakland hills took him outside the racial tensions that had continued to mount in California despite the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1908. While Ishigaki sketched in an Oakland cabin and took walks with Boyle, the state senate passed the Alien Land Law of 1913, which prohibited Japanese from owning land.

Gertrude Boyle was a known portrait sculptor in the San Francisco area at the time.<sup>264</sup> Fourteen years his senior, Boyle trained Ishigaki’s artistic eye, encouraging him to work with artists and see as many exhibitions as he could. Boyle arranged for Ishigaki to study privately with landscape painter Arthur William Best (1859-1935) and later to attend classes at the

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<sup>261</sup> Ishigaki, *Ibid.* Page 47.

<sup>262</sup> Ishigaki did not meet Noguchi, father of sculptor Noguchi Isamu, until the poet visited him in his New York studio following World War I.

<sup>263</sup> There, Ishigaki became acquainted with the composer, Henry Cowell (1897-1965), whom he continued to see when the two lived in New York City in later years. Ishigaki also met the poet Edwin Markham (1852-1940) there. Ishigaki Eitarō, *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> Boyle created busts of such luminaries as the naturalist John Muir and the agricultural scientist Luther Burbank.

California School of Arts where other Japanese students had attended. According to Ishigaki, he had an “eye that could not see art,” until Boyle taught him how. Boyle’s example also led him to see that the divide between artists and intellectuals was not as stark as Ishigaki had imagined. He began to explore how his political beliefs could be served by his art.

When Ishigaki and Boyle’s relationship developed into a romantic affair, the scandal covered in newspapers and her family’s opposition forced the couple to leave San Francisco. A friend and journalist assured the pair that they would live among other artists and writers if they moved to New York and that no one would interfere in their affairs.<sup>265</sup> After a month working in fruit orchards in Los Angeles and a brief stop to bid farewell to his father in Bakersfield, Ishigaki and Boyle headed to New York in 1915. Boyle encouraged Ishigaki to enter the Art Students League to continue with his painting. Between a part-time job at a curios shop owned by a Japanese and summer work at a concession at Rye Beach, Ishigaki and Boyle settled in New York, never returning to San Francisco.

Once in New York, Ishigaki and Boyle’s circle of political activist friends grew. Five years after Emma Goldman sent a letter to American newspapers protesting the execution of Kôtoku Shusui in the Great Treason Incident, she helped Ishigaki Eitarô and Gertrude Boyle to settle in New York. As an advocate of “free love,” she had written to Boyle in San Francisco after reading about the affair in the newspapers to lend her support to the sculptress and her lover.<sup>266</sup> Emma Goldman provided entrée into leftist circles in New York that connected the

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<sup>265</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, *Ibid.* p. 94

<sup>266</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.*

couple to activists and writers like Margaret Sanger and Agnes Smedley. Both became close friends of Ishigaki and later of his second wife, Ayako.<sup>267</sup>

*Ishigaki Eitarô and Katayama Sen – Socialist Study Group in New York*

Ishigaki's artistic pursuits ran parallel to his political activism throughout his lifetime. One of the most influential figures in terms of shaping Ishigaki's politics was the socialist thinker and activist, Katayama Sen 片山潜 (1859-1933). Ishigaki met Katayama in San Francisco before his move to New York. In addition to his art training under Best and Boyle, Ishigaki had become the head of the literature department in a Japantown church. Because this section of the church regularly held lectures, Ishigaki became responsible for inviting guests to give talks. After reading in the Japanese-language newspaper that Katayama was traveling south from Seattle to the Bay Area, Ishigaki decided to invite him to give a lecture. Katayama had lived off and on in the United States from the 1890s, when he went to school to study theology, later he was a rice farmer in Texas, and had returned to California in 1914 after he was arrested during a labor strike in Tokyo.

Ishigaki went to the outskirts of Sacramento to meet Katayama. Finding him in the Japanese laborer's rest area, Ishigaki described Katayama as sitting by an orange crate that he

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<sup>267</sup> Ishigaki never married Gertrude Boyle, but they remained in a close relationship while he was married to his first wife, Heather. The marriage was tempestuous, but Boyle and Heather continued to have relations with Ishigaki even after Ayako, who he married after divorcing Heather. Margaret Sanger, the leader in family planning rights, met Ishigaki and Boyle through their Harlem neighbors. Through Sanger, they were introduced to Agnes Smedley, who was an activist in support of the Indian independence movement and later in China. Ishigaki's relationship with feminist activists such as Sanger and Smedley facilitated Sanger's extending her message on women's reproductive rights to Japan. Later, as an occasional writer for the leading progressive journal, *Kaizô*, Ishigaki helped Sanger to publish an article there. The publisher then invited Sanger to visit Japan in 1922. In the early 1920s, the Ishigaki's befriended Ishimoto Shizue (later Kato Shizue) when she visited New York with her husband. Her husband, Baron Ishimoto Keikichi was also interested in socialism. When Sanger visited Japan, Ishigaki asked Ishimoto Shizue to act as Sanger's guide. Later, Ishimoto Shizue became one of the leading figures advocating for female reproductive rights in Japan and became a politician during the postwar period Sakamoto Hiroko, "The Cult of 'Love and Eugenics' in May Fourth Movement Discourse." positions (Fall 2004)

was using as a desk with books surrounding him, including the three volumes of Karl Marx's Capital.<sup>268</sup> After speaking to Katayama for some time, Ishigaki was struck by his "simple and kind nature." Although twenty years separated them in age, he felt that he was speaking with an equal. When told that Ishigaki was an artist, Katayama brought from under his bed a woodblock by Tobar Kogan (1882-1927) to show him. Katayama agreed to accompany Ishigaki to San Francisco and give a lecture entitled "The Japanese Constitution and Socialism." After Ishigaki and Boyle moved to New York, Katayama followed them in 1917. They collaborated on publishing and organizing activities.<sup>269</sup> Their friendship continued until Katayama's death in 1933.<sup>270</sup>

In addition to painting, Ishigaki was also writing poetry in New York, most likely influenced by his experience at Joaquin Miller's commune. In 1917, Ishigaki participated in the

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<sup>268</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, *Ibid.* p. 69

<sup>269</sup> Ishigaki's memoirs state that Katayama left for New York, because Ishigaki had moved there. Biographers of Katayama have noted that he left for New York because Dutch Marxist journalist and theorist, Sebold Justin Rogers, invited him. Many members of Katayama and Ishigaki's circle returned to Japan during the 1920s and became founders of the Japanese Communist Party in 1922. While in New York, they formed a study and reading group that concentrated on Lenin's writings. One of the members was Inomata Tsunao 猪俣津南雄 (1889-1942), who was studying at Columbia University in New York at the time. He returned to Japan in 1921 and became a professor at Waseda University. Inomata then became one of the founding members of the Japan Communist Party in 1922, but was arrested the following year and dismissed from his post at Waseda for his political activities. Inomata became a leader in what would be called the *Rônô-ha* (Labor-Farm faction) school of Japanese Marxism when he published the journal *Rônô* in 1927. It was by way of Inomata's that Ishigaki met his second wife, Ayako, who would become his partner in social activism in the U.S. and in Japan. Other members of Katayama's study group in New York included Taguchi Unzô 田口運蔵 (1892-1933), Maniwa Suekichi 間庭末吉 (1898-1938), Watanabe Haruo 渡辺春男, Takahashi Kamekichi 高橋亀吉 (1894-1977), and Suzuki Mosaburo 鈴木茂三郎 (1893-1970). Taguchi Unzô later attended the Third Congress of the Comintern when he left New York for Moscow. Maniwa had been a former sailor, but jumped ship to become a cowboy in the western U.S. After he became disillusioned with the life of the cowboy, he left for New York where he became involved with socialist activities. After his tenure in New York as a member of the study group, Watanabe became an engineer and industrialist in Japan. Suzuki worked as a journalist and would later become a left-wing socialist leader and member of the *Rônô-ha* (Farm Labor Faction) along with Inomata.

<sup>270</sup> In addition to Katayama, Ishigaki maintained a regular correspondence with Maniwa Suekichi, sailor and former cowboy. He had left Katayama's socialist study group in New York for Vladivostok, Russia. He returned to Japan and was arrested in the April 16 Incident of 1929 when the police rounded up and imprisoned hundreds of suspected communists. In a letter to Ishigaki from prison in Ichigaya, Maniwa sardonically announced that he had arrived at his "villa." Letters from Maniwa continued to arrive, though written in tiny writing on scraps of paper. Since his name had been stricken from the communist party's list, his communication with a former comrade like Ishigaki was unique. Correspondence from Maniwa and others must have contributed to Ishigaki's decision to stay in the United States rather than return to Japan, where many of his former comrades were now in prison.

publishing of a small magazine, called *Kyôson* (“Coexistence”) that featured New York Japanese writers, poets, and journalists. Ishigaki provided the illustrations. Proletarian writer, Maedakô Koichirô 前田河 広一郎 (1888-1957), who had moved to New York from Chicago, published his short stories in the small, literary journal.<sup>271</sup> Ishigaki’s poetry, particularly “Night Before Release,” (*Shutsugoku no zenya*), struck a dark tone about life and death. In the poem, Ishigaki compares death to the release from a prison cell where “his tears freeze under the stars’ shadows.”<sup>272</sup> The dramatic and rather overwrought poem reveals a sort of juvenile emotionality, but also illustrates the strain and anxiety he felt in his new environment, responsible as he was for the livelihood of himself and Boyle.

Rather than seek out an international contingent in New York, Katayama stayed focused on fomenting revolution in Japan from abroad. In a letter to a friend in Los Angeles, Katayama wrote that they should “make America our school of Communism and send out our graduates to Japan to preach the gospel of Communism.”<sup>273</sup> He left New York, maintaining the hope that his activities in Mexico, and later in Moscow, would instigate the formation of a significant leftist party in Japan.<sup>274</sup> Ishigaki remained in New York – not to return to Japan until after the Second World War. Where Katayama and the members of his study group were committed to making Japan a socialist state, Ishigaki’s political leanings were international in scope and were not

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<sup>271</sup> Maedakô moved to the United States in 1907 and stayed in Chicago until 1915 when he moved to New York. He and several other writers and translators established the journal in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution.

<sup>272</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, “Shutsugoku no zenya,” *Kyôson* (1917)

<sup>273</sup> According to Ishigaki’s wife, Ayako, the study group meetings were not only rigorous and disciplined affairs, but took on a party atmosphere. The artists and activists had weekly gatherings in which they came together to debate and discuss readings, followed by dancing, singing, and poetry readings. Ayako said that Katayama would often bring cakes he had made, because he was fond of baking. Ishigaki Ayako, *Umi o watatta ai no gaka* p. 70

<sup>274</sup> Katayama continued to write letters, postcards from the Hermitage museum, and issues of the magazine *Pravda* to Ishigaki. For his part, Ishigaki sent magazines, newspapers, canned foods, and medicine to Katayama. While he was living in the Soviet Union, Ishigaki was Katayama’s source for periodicals from Japan.

focused on Japan's revolution. While maintaining sympathies with communism, Ishigaki was careful to identify himself as a socialist rather than communist in a 1922 American newspaper interview.<sup>275</sup> By joining international socialist groups in later years, Ishigaki promoted socialism that transcended national borders.

As the only member of the Socialist Study Group to remain in New York, Ishigaki collected material and sent them to activists and publishers in Japan.<sup>276</sup> For example, he sent issues of *Soviet Russia* published by the Soviet Friendship Society to Yamakawa Hitoshi 山川均 (1880-1958), one of the founders of the communist *Rônô-ha* faction along with Inomata Tsunao 猪俣津南雄 (1889-1942). Ishigaki had written articles as a North American correspondent for Yamakawa and Sakai Toshihiko's 堺利彦(1871-1933) publication of *Shakaishugi* (Socialism), most likely on the recommendation of Katayama. Japanese authorities censored most of these articles before publication.<sup>277</sup> Murofuse Kôshin 室伏高信 (1892-1970) encouraged Ishigaki to submit manuscripts by American academics and writers. Through Sanger's connections, he attained translation rights to H.G. Wells' Men of Gods, which was then translated by Sakai for *Kaizô* in 1923. According to a report prepared by the Ministry of the Interior on "Conditions of the Social Movement," the government was aware of Ishigaki's ties to Katayama as well as his supplying materials for members of the socialist movement.

Although Ishigaki and Kuniyoshi Yasuo became acquaintances as early as 1916, there is no indication that Kuniyoshi participated in Katayama's socialist study groups. Although he

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<sup>275</sup> "Young Japanese Artist Finds Strange Contrasts in American Men and Women," Evening Telegram New York (November 4, 1922)

<sup>276</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.* p. 78

<sup>277</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.* p. 79

would join artist groups with leftist leanings during the 1930s, Kuniyoshi's focus in the 1910s and 1920s was on the art world. Ishigaki was friendly with Shimizu Toshi via the League, but Shimizu also did not participate in political activities in New York. During the teens and early 1920s, Ishigaki seems to have kept his study group activities separate from his associations at the Art Students League with other Japanese painters. He had looked to the leadership of Katayama and Maedakô before their return to Japan, but he began to broaden his social and political milieus in the mid 1920s. Commenting on his submission, "Arm," (a painting of a muscular arm holding a hammer), to the 13<sup>th</sup> Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1929, Ishigaki stated that, "Generally, Japanese artists' works do not have enough ideological substance." Perhaps as the sole painter within his Japanese socialist group, he felt alienated and misunderstood. Ishigaki found his voice, in any case, in the New York art world.

### *Painting the Class Struggle*

Upon entrance into the school, Ishigaki joined John Sloan's art class at the Art Students League. Sloan was a pioneer proletarian artist in the New York scene, working as an art editor at the leftist publication, The Masses.<sup>278</sup> Although Sloan left the publication as well as its subsequent version, the New Masses, which he worked on with artist Stuart Davis, his political stance endured. Ishigaki most likely felt a political kinship with Sloan.<sup>279</sup> Boyle continued to make sculpture after their move to New York, but despite her exhibitions at art shops near

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<sup>278</sup> Although his work is known for its ideology, Sloan's early work tended to the more decorative. John Sloan had been acquainted with Japanese artists from the late nineteenth century: he befriended Kubota Beisen (1852-1906), a newspaper illustrator for the *Kokumin Shinbun*, at the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition in 1893. Scholars have observed that Sloan, too, had been caught up in the *Japonisme* fervor at the time. Although associated with social realism, early works of Sloan's from this period reflect some of the commonly used *Japonisme* stylistic devices. Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Japonisme: The Commercialization of an Opportunity." *Japonisme Comes to America: The Japanese Impact on Graphic Arts: 1876-1925* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990) pp. 91-92. In some of his paintings of women done in 1912 and 1913, he depicted them wearing kimono, lounging in bed and even hanging laundry while smoking cigarettes. The white woman who is wearing kimono was a common *Japonisme* motif that connected the exotic with the erotic.

Washington Square, she was not able to sell her work as she had in San Francisco. To support them, Ishigaki took on jobs under a penname as illustrator for Japanese newspapers in New York, the *Nyû Yôku shinpo* and *Nichibei shûhō*.

Two portraits that Ishigaki painted in 1917 reveal the strain that he and Boyle were under. One was a self-portrait done in 1917, the other a portrait Boyle of 1916, soon after his entrance into the League. They are small, intimate, and, like Shimizu's "Portrait of Ms. C," have an emotional quality. In Ishigaki's portrait of his lover and mentor: her small, geometric mouth is dark and firmly set; an angular line that cuts into her cheek, reveals bones protruding from want or strain. Ishigaki renders her less as a beauty than as a determined woman, whose look reveals a level of tension and even anxiety. (Figure 25)

By the 1910s, artists in many places were creating self-portraits that expressed interiority.<sup>280</sup> In other words, artists were expected to evoke their emotional life in a sincere, honest, or real expression. These renderings of the self became a primary subject in the wake of Freud's works. Ishigaki's early self-portrait shows no less strain than his portrait of Boyle. Dark circles rim his eyes. His hair flops haphazardly to one side; it is unkempt, revealing his impoverished position and youth. His mouth remains soft with a glimmer of self-conscious bemusement and even modesty. Unlike Boyle, whose gaze is not at the viewer while she seems absorbed by her own strain, Ishigaki looks out of the canvas with a spark in his eyes suggesting some hopefulness despite his bedraggled state. (Figure 26)

Ishigaki's works that follow were of social allegories or people he observed on city streets. Women continued to be present in his works, but they are less personal than his portrait

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<sup>280</sup> This movement for self-expression in art played a significant role in the Japanese modern art world at the same time. Self-portraits by late Meiji and early Taisho artists abound.



of Boyle. Ayako figured in some of his later canvases, but without the sense of her emotional state at the time of the painting. Only these two early portraits present Ishigaki's consciousness of the visible costs of his choices as activist and artist for himself and for his lover.

As a student at the Art Students League and member of the Japanese artists and intellectual community in New York, Ishigaki's first exhibitions were with the Japanese Artists Society. In November of 1922, the Society hosted an exhibition at the Civic Club in New York City for member artists. To publicize the event, the Evening Telegram newspaper published an extensive interview with Ishigaki in conjunction with his participation in the exhibit. While Ishigaki denied his communist leanings, he commented about social inequities, saying that there were "too many people who are not working and too many who are working too hard." Ishigaki noted differences between men and women in the United States and Japan. American women, he stated, knew "far more" than American men. They also knew more than European and Japanese women. Where women were "adept at conversation" and the arts, the American man's college education did not serve him well, nor did the business world teach him about outside his office. Reading Blue Stocking as a youth and surrounded by female activists such as Gertrude Boyle, Emma Goldman, Agnes Smedley, and Margaret Sanger, Ishigaki saw the potential role of women in the socialist revolution.<sup>281</sup>

In the interview, Ishigaki continued to compare Japan and the United States. Japan's appreciation of the arts, according to Ishigaki, was more developed than in the United States. Art

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<sup>281</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô's second wife, Ayako, whom he met in 1927, was Japanese, however. The daughter of a college professor, Ayako attended Jiyû Gakuen in Tokyo, where she became interested in debates on social issues. (Ayako Ishigaki, Restless Wave, 1940) Intending to stay for one year, she left for the United States in 1926 and lived with relatives who were working in Washington D.C. She started to work at the embassy there and attend classes at George Washington University, but she found the environment too stifling and resolved to move on her own to New York City. Former New York Socialist Study Group member, Inomata Tsunao, whom Ayako had met when he was a professor at Waseda University, suggested that she introduce herself to Ishigaki. Leaving behind his relationship with Boyle, (and his first brief marriage to a woman named, Heather), he formed a union with Ayako that presented not only on romance, but also a common interest in social activism

criticism, which he followed in Japanese journals, was more advanced. He attributed this to the small circle of artists to which American critics paid attention, versus the large number of artists commented on by Japanese critics. American art critics, he stated, had become “too biased by commercialism.” To gain recognition, artists and writers had to go abroad before they received attention in the U.S. This was often true in Japan, too, of course, but in 1922 Ishigaki had had no experience with the Japanese art world. He had not been to Europe either, a move, he thought that benefited an artist’s commercial success rather than his creative gifts. The interviewer had asked Ishigaki how Japan and the United States differed, but though Ishigaki had no direct experience of the art world, as a Japanese, he was expected to answer, and so he did.

By the mid 1920s, Ishigaki’s paintings began to reflect his political viewpoint. Although the paintings Ishigaki submitted to the Japanese Artists’ show at the Civic Club are no longer extant, there are two paintings he submitted to the 1925 Ninth Annual Society of Independent Artists exhibition. “Boxing Match” and “Whipping,” are highly stylized, almost abstract in their approach. Ishigaki’s painting of two boxers, one black and the other white, is reminiscent of George Bellows’ (1882-1925) 1909 painting called “Both Members of This Club,” which also depicted black and white figures in the ring. Bellows’ painting, created when the legality of boxing was still in question, highlighted the brutality and masculinity of the fighters. (Figure 27) Ishigaki’s painting, in contrast, showed two figures abstracted to the point of being machine-like.<sup>282</sup> Ishigaki rimmed the audience members’ faces in red creating an ominous effect. Some look like skulls chomping on cigars cheering on the violence in the ring. (Figure 28)

The conflict in the ring reflected the racial tension in the U.S. at the time. During the mid-1920s, the KKK reached its peak membership, and while the Jazz Era blew its horns, a nativist

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<sup>282</sup> Ishigaki frequently went to boxing matches, where he enjoyed the fight and the excitement of the packed crowds.

reactionary movement sounded alarms. Ishigaki's painting of white on black was an extension of the racial tension Bellows expressed in the white fear of potential black victory in the ring. Although Ishigaki often depicted racial tension in the U.S. in his paintings, it was almost always a conflict between whites and blacks, never the anti-Japanese racism of the time.

In much of the scholarship on Ishigaki, his integration of art and politics in a critique of capitalism is linked to his introduction to Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco. "Whipping," however, predated his exposure to their works.<sup>283</sup> By 1925, some United States newspapers had already labeled Ishigaki as a "Japanese communist artist."<sup>284</sup> Using a penname, Ishigaki described "Whipping" for the *Japan Times* as an illustration of Marx's class struggle.<sup>285</sup> Like his painting of boxers, Ishigaki's "Whipping" employed geometric, abstract, cubist forms. Ishigaki rendered the central figure, a faceless capitalist overlord, riding a horse and brandishing a curling snake-like whip. The monstrous figure is anonymous and his dark muscularity overtakes the crowds below him. On display in the "revolutionary" gallery of a 1925 exhibition, a reviewer called Ishigaki's man and horse "weird," noting the masses of workers that marched in front of shadowy factories. A half decade before the stock market crash of 1929, Ishigaki's political activism already permeated his art works. (Figure 29)

Ishigaki chose a similar subject nearly a decade later with his portrait of a Cuban plantation owner on a horse striking a slave with his whip. Revealing Diego Rivera's artistic influence on Ishigaki, the later painting was more representational, had a warmer color palette,

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<sup>283</sup> Another painting that indicates the early political nature of Ishigaki's painting is called "Delirium of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment." In the painting, (no longer extant except in photographs), a straitjacketed man is forcibly administered an injection. Ishigaki was pointing out the hypocrisy of prohibition while doctors were prescribing narcotics. *Time Magazine* art critics identified the painting at the 1925 show as a "Japanese jibe." Art: Independent Artists," *Time Magazine* (March 21, 1927)

<sup>284</sup> "Makes Ethiopians of Adam and Eve." *New York Times*. (March 5, 1925)

<sup>285</sup> "Iro-toridori na bijutsu-ten: hōjin shuppinsha jūroku nin hatsuratsu na seiki tsuyoi shikisai no shigeki to kosei o daitan ni jiyū ni hōsha shite." Review of the 9<sup>th</sup> Independent Artists' Association Exhibition, *Japanese Times*, March 11, 1925.

and detailed in its depiction of the slave owner and slave. Unlike the naked shadow monster in “Whipping,” the plantation foreman wears a white uniform, while the brown-skinned slave is shirtless and wears only a straw sun hat. (Figures 30 and 31) In “Whipping,” the dark landscape is highlighted by blue skies that are nearly masked by billowing smoke from factories. The scene Ishigaki presented in 1925 was a universal nightmare; his later works depicted specific scenes like a slave revolt in Cuba, lynchings in the southern United States, and protest marches in Washington.

“Whipping” made a strong impression on art critics at the time and garnered Ishigaki significant media coverage.<sup>286</sup> It marked Ishigaki’s debut in the larger New York art world; many of the newspapers that covered the Society of Independent show singled the painting out for praise. None of them commented on Ishigaki’s nationality, nor did they identify any “Japanese” elements in the painting. Ishigaki regularly exhibited the work in subsequent years. An art critic for *The Independent* responded to other critics’ comments that the painting “caught an ‘American rhythm.’” It was too early, this critic said, to declare what the “American rhythm” might be, but he did not question whether a Japanese immigrant could represent American modern art. But he, too, lauded the painting’s energy, movement, and “fiery animation.” Like Kuniyoshi’s paintings, critics located Ishigaki’s work in the American modern art scene. With “Whipping,” Ishigaki was able to combine creative stylistic devices to convey social tensions by way of visual images. Though he would reject abstraction soon after, the painting’s success lays in its composition, geometrical shapes, and dark shadows.

*The Art of Protest: Painting the Global Crisis 1929-1939*

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<sup>286</sup> “American Rhythm,” New York Times (March 15, 1925)

During the mid-1930s, Frankfurt School philosophers Georg Lukacs and Ernst Bloch engaged in a debate on aesthetics and the relevance of art in society and politics. Where Bloch defended an artist's subjective response to his circumstances through expressionism, Lukacs argued that the task of the artist was to relay the history of the masses. The time and place for subjective solipsism had passed, according to Lukacs. "Ordinary people" could not understand the avant-garde, much less translate what they saw into something they could relate to in their own experience.<sup>287</sup> The crash of 1929, the Depression, the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, and Japan's aggression in East Asia, seemed to render modernist abstractions and subjective expression irrelevant in the face of international crisis.<sup>288</sup> What the scholar Michael Denning calls a "cultural front" formed among leftist intellectuals and artists to use their art to exert political influence.<sup>289</sup> Proletarian writers and artists formed dozens of literary societies, theater troupes, camera clubs, and painters' associations in order to serve a socialist cause.

Ishigaki's socialist activities started to accelerate again, perhaps due to the influence of his new wife, Ayako, who had been involved with socialist groups in Tokyo. He and Ayako had participated in the demonstrations against the Sacco-Vanzetti verdict in Union Square in August 1927, during which Dorothy Parker and Edna St. Vincent Millay were arrested. The Ishigakis became friends with New Masses magazine's writer and editor, Michael Gold (1893-1967), the son of Jewish immigrants.<sup>290</sup> Gold was a young and passionate supporter of communism, which appealed to Ishigaki and they regularly met for meals to discuss how to implement social

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<sup>287</sup> Georg Lukacs, "Realism in the Balance," Aesthetics and Politics, (London and New York: Verso, 1977) pp. 28-59

<sup>288</sup> Lukacs particularly attacked German expressionists such as Franz Marc for being irrelevant to the time.

<sup>289</sup> Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (London and New York: Verso, 1998)

<sup>290</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, Umi o watatta ai no gaka: Ishigaki Eitarô no shôgai (Tokyo: Ochanomizu-shobo, 1988), pp 116-118

revolution and art.<sup>291</sup> Gold began to publish a few of Ishigaki's works and his relationship with Gold and the New Masses marked a new phase of his political activity and art.

Turning again to racial conflict, Ishigaki did a series of paintings to illustrate the violence being visited on African Americans. Ishigaki painted a dark and haunting image of a night lynching in the south. A larger painting from this period featured a muscular African American male figure holding up the body of an unconscious white man. The image is striking in terms of the racial landscape of the United States; both men are shirtless, touching skin to skin. An image of a black man rescuing and carrying a wounded white man contradicted ideas of African Americans as both threatening and powerless. The White House is in the background signifying institutions of power and oppression. The title was "Bonus March," (1932), the protest of World War I veterans that ended in brutal suppression by federal troops. Several years later, Ishigaki painted another canvas of the K.K.K. in the South.

The 1929 stock market crash had immediate effects on artists' lives. Ishigaki had just sold one of his paintings, but the gallery canceled the sale after the crash. Ishigaki lost his job working at the curio shop and could no longer sell illustrations to periodicals.<sup>292</sup> The couple left for summer beach resorts, where once again Ishigaki oversaw games that awarded a Japanese tea set as a prize.<sup>293</sup> The Ishigaki's friendship with Jack Shirai ジャック白井(1900-1937), a member of the Japanese Laborers Club in New York, helped to sustain them.<sup>294</sup> Shirai regularly

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<sup>291</sup> At the time, they were living uptown (to distance themselves from Ishigaki's first wife, Heather) and Gold commented that he had never been past 14<sup>th</sup> Street before.

<sup>292</sup> Ayako posed for sketching classes held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The idea of working there had occurred to her while she pounded the pavement attempting to sell Ishigaki's drawings; she returned home to fetch her red kimono and offered to pose in it. She was hired right away.

<sup>293</sup> When Ishigaki first arrived in New York, he and Gertrude Boyle also went to Rye Beach to earn money.

<sup>294</sup> The Japanese population in New York at the time was numbered two thousand and the club's membership never exceeded forty. Club members were active in anti-war movements as well as socialist activities.

visited the Ishigakis, bringing food with him from the restaurant where he worked. According to Ayako, her income was so low at the time that they often did not have food to eat and they appreciated Shirai's offerings.<sup>295</sup> When the Proletarian Art Museum in Moscow purchased two of Ishigaki's paintings in 1932, the couple was able to support themselves for a couple of months. Like artists elsewhere, they were unable to rely on sales and sponsored exhibitions, so they formed artist groups to create mutual support.

*International Left: The John Reed Club, The ACA Gallery, and the American Artists' Congress*

Artists and writers established clubs, galleries, and networks that served as platforms for works that featured political subjects. Ishigaki Eitarô was one of the founding members of the New York chapter of the John Reed Club and submitted paintings to every one of its exhibitions. Chapters of the club that included both painters and writers were among the most influential and active leftist groups during the Depression.<sup>296</sup> They allied themselves with the program set by the International Union of Writers and Artists conference held in the Soviet Union in 1930. In its "Draft Manifesto," which was submitted to its 1932 conference and printed in the New Masses, the John Reed Club of New York targeted a "bourgeois culture" specific to American writers, artists, and intellectuals. Capitalism, the manifesto stated, had rendered culture in the United States sterile, infantile, and "writh(ing) in a blind alley."<sup>297</sup> Its writers expressed the hope that the stock market crash had altered the American intelligentsia and galvanized them. The crisis

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<sup>295</sup> Jack Shirai joined the Lincoln Brigade in Spain, where he died fighting the Nationalists in 1937.

<sup>296</sup> The groups' name was chosen in honor of the American journalist, John Reed, who had written *Ten Days that Shook the World*, an account of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

<sup>297</sup> "John Reed Club of New York: 'Draft Manifesto'." Originally published in New Masses in June, 1932. Reprinted in Art in Theory: 1900-2000. Edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. (Blackwell Publishing, 2003)

forced American artists to steer their attention away from its own “decadent shores.” In addition to promising to defend the Soviet Union and to fight fascism, the group also paid heed to the racial discrimination at the heart of much social injustice. While African Americans were the primary target of discrimination and persecution, the manifesto also included persecution against the “foreign-born” in its protest. The Club was committed to an international purpose that trumped the national origins of its members.

The John Reed Club provided a meeting place for international activists to collaborate in the same way the art schools had. While they wrote letters of protest, art display among the working poor was an important activity of the group.<sup>298</sup> Many of the Club’s members were from working-class, immigrant backgrounds. In addition to Ishigaki, artists such as Polish-born Jacob Burck (1907-1982) and William Gropper (1897-1977), who was born on New York’s Lower East Side to Jewish Romanian immigrants, exhibited their paintings.<sup>299</sup> Nor was Ishigaki the only Japanese member of the group: Tamotsu Chûzô and Noda Hideo joined later.<sup>300</sup>

In addition to the John Reed Club, Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Herman Baron (1909-1978), Stuart Davis, and Adolf Dehn (1895-1965) founded the ACA Gallery in New York in 1932. Kuniyoshi had remained in the background of political movements through the 1920s, choosing to focus on his art career, but became active in the 1930s. His friendship with Ishigaki had become closer as

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<sup>298</sup> The first of their exhibitions was held at the United Workers’ Co-Operative Apartments in December of 1929.

<sup>299</sup> Like Ishigaki, Gropper later painted murals for federal buildings as part of the WPA projects and maintained a focused social commentary in paintings and drawings done for magazines.

<sup>300</sup> **Tamotsu Chûzô** 多毛津忠藏 (1888-1975) Born in Kagoshima. Moved to Tokyo to study economics and politics, but began taking private painting lessons. Left Japan in 1914 to study art abroad. Through 1920, he traveled throughout Korea, China, Borneo, India, France, Netherlands, and Belgium. Settled in New York in 1920. Submitted paintings to the Society of Independent Artists in 1924. Exhibited at the Art Institute in Chicago in 1931 and had a solo exhibition at the ACA Gallery in New York in 1932. Continued to exhibit throughout the early 1930s, including Whitney exhibition of American artists. Hired as part of the WPA program, but released because he was Japanese. Worked as an OSS artist during World War II for the US army. Served in the American Arts Association in 1947 following Kuniyoshi’s departure. Moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico during the 1950s. Returned to Japan in 1967 for the first time since leaving in 1914.



the two weathered failed marriages and the ups and downs of the art market. With so many colleagues now participating in political artist groups, perhaps Kuniyoshi felt impelled to join them.

The ACA Gallery showed many of the John Reed Club's exhibitions and hosted solo exhibitions for leftist artists. Like the Art Students League and John Reed Club, the ACA Gallery showed work by women, African-Americans, Japanese, Jews, Chinese, Latin American, and Russian artists on a regular basis. Many artists in the John Reed Club and ACA Gallery milieu became close friends and colleagues. In 1936, Ishigaki had his first solo exhibition of his paintings at the ACA Gallery.<sup>301</sup> William Gropper wrote the introduction to Ishigaki's exhibition catalog, making no reference to his friend's Japanese heritage. He highlighted the painter's background as a student and as a worker during his early years in California and claimed Ishigaki as a member of the "American Scene."

In addition to these activities, Japanese artists continued to participate in nation-identified exhibitions. The ACA Gallery hosted an exhibition for "Japanese Artists Living in New York" in 1935 and 1936 that featured works by Ishigaki, Kuniyoshi, Shimizu Kiyoshi, and Usui Bunpei, all by now veterans of the city's art scene. The show also included newcomers such as Noda Hideo, Yamasaki "Jack" Chikamichi 山崎近道, and Suzuki Sakari 鈴木盛, who had arrived together from San Francisco and were staying in Woodstock at Kuniyoshi's invitation. Lesser-known artists such as Thomas Nagai トーマス永井 (1886-1966) and Miyamoto Kaname 宮本要 (1891-1950) exhibited works and were active in New York. In 1938, the Japanese Artists in New York held an exhibition at the Municipal Art Galleries. The *New York Times* art critic stated

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<sup>301</sup> Fellow John Reed Club member, ACA Gallery exhibiter, and ASL student, William Gropper, wrote the introduction for Ishigaki's exhibition catalog. Many Japanese had protested Gropper's caricature of Emperor Hirohito in *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1935 Andrew Hemingway, *Ibid*.

that the nine Japanese-born artists displayed little to no Japanese aesthetic references in their paintings. Painter Nakamizo Fuji explained, “he painted New York scenes in the American manner, because Japanese pictures did not sell.”<sup>302</sup> Although they banded together for “Japanese” artist exhibitions, traces of Japan were absent in their work. They were not, however, criticized for being “mimetic” of Western art traditions or abandoning their artistic heritage as they would have been in previous years.

The ACA Gallery also hosted meetings for the American Artists’ Congress (AAC), which came together in 1936 to protest the rise of fascism. Kuniyoshi Yasuo, the Congress’ first head, and Ishigaki were instrumental in the founding of the AAC, whose membership included Stuart Davis, Ben Shahn, Noguchi Isamu and 360 other participants.<sup>303</sup> The Congress held twenty-two exhibitions in a range of cause-oriented shows, such as “War and Fascism” (1936), as well as mounting annual shows for its members. The American Artists’ Congress’ first show in 1937 was a sensation and was reviewed throughout the country. The group stated that it wanted to form new relationships, receive new audiences, seek out new exhibition sites and oppose censorship of any kind. Held at Rockefeller Center, the show featured works that depicted labor strife, industrial accidents, the threat and horror of war, and with the inclusion of Ishigaki’s piece on the K.K.K, racial violence in the U.S.

Moving the radical artworks of the John Reed Club into galleries and out of temporary sites in lower income neighborhoods led to art critics’ reviewing the shows.<sup>304</sup> Howard Devree,

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<sup>302</sup> “Japanese Artists Have City Exhibit,” New York Times (June 23, 1938)

<sup>303</sup> Communist party member, Henry Glintenkamp (1887-1946), who was known for his anti-war illustrations followed Kuniyoshi as head of the Congress.

<sup>304</sup> Howard Devree, "A Score of Art Shows: Sculpture, Oils, Watercolors, and Work in Black-and-White in Current Openings," New York Times (March 15, 1936)

critic for the *New York Times* wrote that to classify Ishigaki as a “socialist artist,” was to do him a disservice, because Ishigaki was no “mere cartoon propagandist.” The more damning critique of the day was that an artist created works of “propaganda” rather than art. Indeed, the twenty-six paintings on display in 1936 included depictions of the un-employed, images of war, street scenes, and muscular arms pounding metal.<sup>305</sup> Yet Devree praised Ishigaki for conveying his political message while maintaining a “full sense of aesthetic design.” In another review of the Congress’ annual exhibition in 1938 held at Carnegie Hall, Edward Alden Jewell lauded the artists on display for their earnestness, but raised questions about propaganda and art.<sup>306</sup> He singled out Ishigaki’s submission, “Victims of War,” as a “good example” of the marriage of art and propaganda. This, Jewell said, could be classed as “burning conviction cradled in the creative impulse” that he found praiseworthy. (Figure 32)

Contemporary art historian Andrew Hemingway has questioned the inclusion of Kuniyoshi and Alexander Brook in the 1937 show, claiming that neither had any “connections with social art in any form.” In contrast, he identified Ishigaki’s painting, “Ku Klux Klan,” as a declaration to viewers that fascism was an American problem, too. For Congress members, however, whether an artist’s work was too propagandistic, or not committed enough to the Left was not important. What was required was that member artists had distinguished themselves in the art world and were “committed to the causes” of the Congress. Members were to defend art from “destructive threats,” by opposing fascism and war, while seeking freedom of spirit, democracy, and social organization. They were also to encourage creativity and the arts. In this spirit, artists like Kuniyoshi would certainly qualify regardless of the content of his work.

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<sup>305</sup> As the tide turned away from leftist politics, Ishigaki included portraits of flowers and landscapes in his solo exhibition four years later, but these were absent here.

<sup>306</sup> Edward Alden Jewell, “Art Under a Democracy,” *New York Times* (May 8, 1938)

Beginning in the 1920s, through the 1930s and into the war years, Kuniyoshi's primary subjects were portraits of women. Unlike his robust female figures of the 1920s, which stood confidently on rocks in the ocean, smoking cigarettes their hair cascading down over large, white thighs, Kuniyoshi's later portraits convey a more anxious and melancholy mood. Without overt references to the sort found in Ishigaki's paintings, Kuniyoshi's work revealed the strain and tension among the lower classes in New York. Women, eyes downcast, elbows propping up their chins, reading newspapers and smoking cigarettes seemed to be portraits of psychic depression that matched the economic one. Kuniyoshi later commented on these images: "The portraits of women that I create are women who are thinking about what they have lost and of their loneliness. These women are tired of being alone, thinking about what they can do in today's society."<sup>307</sup> Unno Hiroshi described Kuniyoshi's subjects as the women who worked in cafeterias, factories, and who walked the streets. Kuniyoshi sought to understand them and empathize with their plight. Unlike his full-figured, lively women of the 1920s, the women of the 1930s were gaunt and sickly. Though neither paintings of strong arms hammering steel or of capitalist overlords, Kuniyoshi's women are equally emblematic of the age. (Figure 33)

*Noda Hideo – "Kiro" (The Way Home)*

The mural renaissance in Mexico of the 1920s and 1930s had a profound effect on artists in the United States. One of the first Japanese artists to be connected to the Mexican muralist movement was Noda Hideo.<sup>308</sup> As a student at the California School of Fine Arts, Noda assisted

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<sup>307</sup> Unno Hiroshi, "Kuniyoshi Yasuo: shoku modan stairu saihô." *Aato* Vol. 93 (Winter, 1980)

<sup>308</sup> **Noda Hideo.** 野田英夫 (1908-1939) Born in Santa Clara, California. Returned to Japan for his education in 1911 and graduated from Kumamoto Middle School in 1926. Born to a farm family, Noda was a "kibei nisei," (second generation Japanese

Diego Rivera in 1930 on a mural on the school's library. The fresco techniques he learned from Rivera initiated a career-long interest in mural painting.<sup>309</sup> Many painters, sculptors, and photographers visited Mexico during this period.<sup>310</sup> When Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Siqueiros visited the U.S. their works sparked controversy and influenced the artists that they met while they were there.<sup>311</sup> The muralists' political activism also underlined the revolutionary potential of art. John Dos Passos wrote that the muralists' works were a "challenge shouted in the face of the rest of the world."<sup>312</sup>

Arnold Blanch, who had been a teacher of Noda's while in San Francisco, invited him to come to New York in 1931.<sup>313</sup> Noda attended the Art Students League, where he met John Sloan and George Grosz. While on the east coast, Noda's content and style changed dramatically from his California works. Noda started using line drawings, and his palette and texture softened. His touch resembled that of Isabel Bishop's, whose work portrayed an urban landscape populated by

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to come back to America) a term used to describe Japanese born in the United States, educated in Japan, who then returned to the U.S. Returned to United States so as not to lose citizenship. Graduated from Piedmont High School in 1929 and Academy of Arts in San Francisco. Assisted Diego Rivera on mural projects when the muralist visited the Bay Area and later at Rockefeller Center in New York. Submitted works to the San Francisco Japan Arts Association. Moved to New York and entered the Art Students League in 1931. Also lived at the Woodstock Artists Colony. Joined Leftist activist groups and returned to Japan in 1935. Submitted to the Nika-ten exhibit and did murals with friend, Terada Takeo who also went back to Japan. Returned to CA to do a mural at Piedmont High School, but again returned to Japan in 1937. He died in 1939 of a cerebral tumor.

<sup>309</sup> Scholar Motoe Kunio suggested that it was from Rivera's technique of merging different scenes inspired Noda to create montages in his paintings so as to simultaneously frame multiple scenes. Motoe Kunio, "Hideo Noda or the Unfinished 'Bridge,'" Japanese Artists who Studied in the USA and the American Scene (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1982) p. 188

<sup>310</sup> Kitagawa Tamiji, who had entered John Sloan's night classes at the Art Students League in 1919, was part of Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki's network in New York. He had left Waseda University in 1914 to travel to the United States. The city did not appeal to Kitagawa, however, and he traveled to the rural South and Cuba. When he arrived in Mexico in 1922, the revolutionary spirit that he observed at art school in Mexico City inspired him.

<sup>311</sup> Andrew Hemingway, *Ibid.* pp. 27-28

<sup>312</sup> Andrew Hemingway, *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> Fellow California School of Fine Arts students, Yamasaki Chikamichi and Suzuki Sakari, also joined Noda in New York. Like Noda, Suzuki worked on WPA murals as well, creating a work for the Willard Parker Hospital in 1936, called "Preventative Medicine."

the working classes. Her delicate lines and muted tones created a warm effect, similar in manner to Noda's. Like Bishop, some of his figures were abstract, only outlines, while others were rendered more fully and with greater realism in the same canvas.<sup>314</sup> The ghostly figures sought to mirror city dwellers' quick glances at other passersby as they walked through the streets.

A generation younger than Ishigaki and Kuniyoshi, Noda arrived in New York in 1931 as the shift toward political content in paintings was accelerating. At Ishigaki's request, Noda attended John Reed Club meetings. After Noda moved to New York, he again assisted Rivera, (who also attended John Reed Club meetings), in his controversial mural project at the Rockefeller Center.<sup>315</sup> Completed in 1934, the mural was subsequently destroyed because of the inclusion of an image of Lenin. Although his obituary in the *New York Times* compared Noda's later works to the surrealism of Paul Klee and Juan Miro, Noda's works were committed to reflecting his observations of social classes.<sup>316</sup> Even when Noda's works became more surrealistic and dream-like during the early 1930s, they remained representational and concerned with social commentary. He was outspoken about his distaste for abstraction, criticizing Mondrian and his followers for being "against everything that has any meaning." How could "black and white lines," Noda asked, "satisfy anyone intellectually?"<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Motoe Kunio, "Noda Hideo arui ha mikan no hashi." Amerika ni mananda nihon no gakatachi. Kuniyoshi, Shimizu, Ishigaki, Noda to amerikan shiin kaiga (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1982) p. 188

<sup>315</sup> Rivera's assistants for this mural were American Arthur Niendorff and Mexican Andrés Sánchez Flores. Noda was one of five students: a Bulgarian painter named Dimitroff, Ben Shahn, and Lou and Lucien Bloch.

<sup>316</sup> "Hideo Noda, Painter, Dies in Tokyo at 30," New York Times (January 14, 1939)

<sup>317</sup> Motoe Kunio. *Ibid.* p. 187

Some scholars have suggested that Noda's observations of society were determined by his social status. He could only look at it as an outsider.<sup>318</sup> Because he was Japanese, born in America and educated in Japan - a status known as *kibei* - they suggest that he "suffered an inner anxiety and fundamental split in his self-consciousness" that resulted in fragmented images.<sup>319</sup> To what extent Noda felt "alienated" from both American and Japanese society remains speculative. Indeed, counter evidence demonstrates that Noda was a well-integrated member of the New York, San Francisco, and Tokyo art worlds. As a resident artist at the Woodstock art colony established by Kuniyoshi, Noda was part of a close group of fellow artists.<sup>320</sup> The presence of others does not necessarily prevent loneliness and alienation, but given his engagement and ambitions in the art world, he was not marginalized in any professional way.

Indeed, paintings like "Way Home" (1935) suggest a melancholic and dark interiority of the central figure. Its title can also suggest Noda's alienation from his farming family in Santa Clara, his extended family in Kyûshû, and his traversing between New York, San Francisco, and Tokyo in search of his place. The painting's background – a blond woman, field flowers, an iron gate – do not immediately suggest a conflict between his Eastern and Western identities, however. The references might signal his separation from his wife, Ruth, who was also the source of much relationship angst. (Figure 34)

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<sup>318</sup> Ichikawa Masanori, "Kuniyoshi Yasuo o tôte mita amerika-ha no mondai ten," Amerika ni mananda nihon no gakatachi. Kuniyoshi, Shimizu, Ishigaki, Noda to amerikan shiin kaiga (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1982) p. 176

<sup>319</sup> Noda, however, responded to inquiries as to why he had chosen to live in Japan after 1937, by saying that he had Japanese blood and wanted to know Japan as only a Japanese could. In Noda's terms, he was a Japanese and not straddling an identity fence.

<sup>320</sup> While in New York, Noda befriended photographer Walker Evans, who noted in his journal that he routinely dined at the Noda's 16<sup>th</sup> Street residence. According to Evans, he turned to Noda during this period because they were both struggling to make a living. Noda sometimes invited photographer Leo Hurwitz to dinners along with Evans. Ruth had had an affair with Hurwitz and was pursuing Evans at the time. While Ruth's actions undoubtedly troubled Noda, his social interactions suggest the extent of his participation in the New York art scene. James R. Mellow, Walker Evans (New York: Basic Books, 1999) p. 196

Noda often used montages of images in a single frame to convey overlapping contexts and experiences of working class life. Although he would on occasion create a straight portrait, he often constructed his paintings as though they were mosaics. By showing fragments, he was able to weave together different places and time. The effect resulted in a portrait of class rather than of an individual. In “City” (1934), Noda illustrated the interior and exterior of a city scene: a mother nurses her baby in a rocking chair in a spare apartment, while on the other end of the canvas, a burly construction worker bends over his work. A clothing line with wash left to dry links these two scenes, along with a blur of life, buildings, smoke, and other city activity. Where Ishigaki Eitarô and Shimizu Toshi presented snapshots of city life, Noda’s compositions depicted the multiple layers of urban social life in a single canvas. (Figure 35)

Noda’s watercolor, “Scottsboro Boys” (1933) became one of his most well-known and effective paintings of American social strife of the early 1930s.<sup>321</sup> The work represented a trial of nine young African American men accused of rape in Alabama. Tried by an all-white jury, eight of the nine were sentenced to death by electrocution in 1931. The American Communist Party came to the defense of the young men and arranged for two International Labor Defense lawyers to take their cases. Communists and sympathizers led protests from New York to Spain and Moscow in defense of the nine young men. Hayward Patterson, the subject of Noda’s painting, was eighteen at the time of the trial. Waiting on death row with the other eight young men, Patterson was convicted three times after the court repeatedly overturned earlier convictions. Noda selected this single figure to occupy the center stage of his work to draw the viewer’s attention to the plight of a lonely and forsaken man.

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<sup>321</sup> Ishigaki also did a painting that protested the Scottsboro Boys case.



Noda illustrated the small town context in which the trial played out. Resembling a stage set, he painted a barbershop on a street corner in a seemingly desolate and empty town. Figures of pedestrians, including a Catholic nun all outlined in white, parade through like ghosts. Homeless men sleep against the barbershop wall, using newspapers for a bed. Under a smoky grayish-brown sky, no trees, flowers, or birds appear in the streets. The room above the barbershop is for rent. Only abandoned buildings leave shadows on the sidewalk, but the passing figures leave no trace. Against this barren setting, stands the figure of an African American man in prison uniform, with the name “Patterson” and his prisoner’s number marking his shirt. His furrowed brow and clenched eyes reveal tremendous sadness and tension, while his posture suggests dejection and subjugation. The nun walks by, her eyes cast down at the street so as not to see the figure. The pedestrians do not notice his presence. (Figure 36)

Noda left New York for San Francisco in 1934, stopping to convince his friend, Terada Takeo, to return to Japan with him.<sup>322</sup> Prior to his arrival, Noda had already gained recognition in Japanese art circles. Established exhibitions in Tokyo such as the Nika-kai, a society established in 1914 for artists wanting to exhibit their paintings outside government-sponsored shows, featured Noda’s works. He submitted two paintings, (“*Kiro*” “Homeward Bound” and “Dream”) to the twelfth annual exhibition. Art journals such as *Atelier* reproduced some of his paintings to mark the exhibition. Noda and Terada created murals for bars and cafés in popular shopping and nightlife areas such as Ginza and Akasaka.<sup>323</sup> In 1935, a gallery in Ginza hosted a solo exhibition

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<sup>322</sup> Forced to share a single bed as students, Noda and Terada often ate no more than rice with *shoyu* (soy sauce). During their summers, Noda and Terada worked together in California fruit orchards to earn extra money. Terada Takeo, “Noda Hideo kun no omoide,” *Bijutsu Gurafu*

<sup>323</sup> Terada Takeo became a muralist in California. Selected as the only Japanese artist to work on the WPA mural at Coit Tower, Terada was one of twenty-six artists to work on the project. Most of the other artists were immigrants from Eastern Europe. Diego Rivera’s two main California mural commissions of 1931 served as the models for the Bay Area artists who worked on the Coit Tower murals. However, labor strikes in San Francisco convinced the Public Works of Art Project committee to encourage

for Noda. Unlike Ishigaki and Kuniyoshi, Noda's reputation in Japan was established during his lifetime.

Noda returned to the U.S. again in 1935 to submit drawings to the Federal Art Project for proposed murals in the dining hall at Ellis Island. Immigration Commissioner Rudolph Reimer did not approve Noda's drawings, however. According to Time Magazine, he replaced Noda, because his drawings were inaccurate:

“No sooner was Muralist Hideo Noda's cartoon submitted to him than Commissioner Reimer blossomed out as a stickler for artistic detail. The Noda mural was promptly rejected because Negro cotton pickers were shown wearing turtlenecked sweaters and creased trousers and because the creature pulling a poor blackamoor's farm cart seemed to be a full-blooded Percheron stallion. Artist Noda threw up his hands and his job, and went back to California.” *Time*, September 16, 1935.

American artist Edward Laning (1906-1981) received the commission instead. Commissioner Reiner also criticized Laning's drawings – soldier uniforms, railway width – and insisted on changes for accuracy. His mural featured the building of the Central Pacific railroad and Chinese and Irish men laying the track. Like Noda, Laning was John Sloan's student at the Art Student League. It is unclear today what Noda's complete plan was, but perhaps it was his inclusion of African Americans as “immigrants” that challenged conventional definitions. Like Ishigaki, Noda focused on the African American experience in his paintings of race relations in the United States. The Japanese immigrant experience never surfaced in their paintings. Indeed, Japanese figures were rarely seen in any of the American Scene painters from Japan.

After his initial return to Japan in 1935, it seems that Noda's political interests began to fade. Noda once again returned to California in 1937 to create murals for his former high school

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subjects like landscapes, agriculture, and other generic scenes. The Coit Tower mural project was monitored for any signs of “Communist propaganda.” Terada's responsibility was to execute a section called “Sports.” The murals portrayed scenes of California life, images of a productive state supported by urban centers, industry, and agriculture.

in Piedmont. Although the high school had a diverse ethnic student body, muscular, blond-haired, blue-eyed students populated Noda's mural. So striking are the "Aryan" types in the mural that one might confuse it for a contemporary Nazi portrait of the German folk. Noda's interest in ethnic identity started to eclipse his sympathies with social classes. Whereas his New York paintings showed laborers, his paintings in Tokyo showed the daily lives of the middle classes. Women wore *kimono* and smart dresses rather than shabby rags. Men wore fedoras and overcoats instead of denim overalls. The strain and hardship he illustrated on the faces of his American subjects was absent in the figures riding Tokyo trains. His works were also less abstract and he no longer used photomontage effects. The Japanese Left had been routed by the time Noda returned permanently. Since he pursued exhibiting his paintings in government-sponsored art exhibitions, Noda seems to have steered clear of subjects that might be interpreted as having a leftist point of view or communicated a pessimistic tone. (Figure 37)

When Noda returned to Japan in 1938, he intended to stay permanently.<sup>324</sup> In a 1938 interview with *Atorie*, Noda stated that he returned to Japan, because he wanted to "know the real Japan and absorb its culture," since it was "Japanese blood" that flowed through him.<sup>325</sup> He emphasized that though he was born in California, he had been raised in the Japanese school system. Living in the United States was easier, Noda stated, but its art was canned (*kanzume*). Japanese art, according to Noda, had a spiritual depth that he wanted to know better. Noda argued that he could understand the "true Japan," because of his ethnic heritage and his

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<sup>324</sup> He joined the newly formed *Shinseisaku-ha* (New Production Movement Association) at the request of his friends Inokuma Genichirō 猪熊弦一郎 (1902-1993) and Uchida Iwao 内田巖 (1900-1953). After the war, Inokuma moved to New York, where he became a fixture in the abstract expressionist scene.

<sup>325</sup> Reprinted in Kuboshima Seiichirō *Noda Hideo Sukecchu bukku: Amerika de mutuketa nijū no shohin ni miru Nikkei gaka no shōzō* (Tokyo: Shohan, 1985) pp. 48-59

schooling. Whereas Kuniyoshi insisted that his work should be categorized as “American,” since he had studied and lived there, Noda did not acknowledge the role that American art schools and artists had played in his works. Instead, he tried to wrap himself in the cloak of Japanese culture and its art world, while severing ties with the United States both physically and artistically. Noda Hideo’s return to Japan represents what is known as *Nihongaeri*, the spiritual, cultural, and ideological “return to Japan.”

### *Ishigaki and the Harlem Courthouse*

Ishigaki was hired in 1935 to create a mural for the WPA Federal Art Project. For a weekly salary of thirty-seven dollars, he was to paint a mural at a courthouse on 121<sup>st</sup> Street in Harlem. Ishigaki separated his work into two parts that focused on aspects of United States history: “The Independence of America” and “The Emancipation of the Slaves.” Sketches in preparation for the mural reveal that his mural was an ode to masculinity: Presidents Washington and Lincoln hovered over muscular, shirtless workers. Praising the mural as “patriotic,” the *New York Times* publicized the “Human Rights in the United States” section of his work as it was in the process of being created.<sup>326</sup>

After working on the piece for almost three years, Ishigaki was removed from the project only days before its conclusion. The stated reason for his removal was his Japanese citizenship. The WPA had been fielding complaints that its federal funding was not serving “Americans.” As a result, the organization removed many non-citizens from similar projects. Ishigaki’s murals themselves were also controversial, because some viewers objected to how he depicted

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<sup>326</sup> New York Times (February 17, 1937)

Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Within twenty-four hours of their unveiling, visitors' protests forced committee members to remove them.

Since newspapers like the *New York Times* had reproduced sections of the murals without public protest, Ishigaki was not prepared for such censure. In an interview with Louise Mitchell for the *Daily Worker* in 1938 in response to the controversy, Ishigaki interpreted the criticism as "slander against the WPA" by opponents of the Roosevelt administration.<sup>327</sup> He also surmised that it was his Japanese heritage that was the real reason for the criticism. Articles reported that some protestors believed his portrait of George Washington wore a "cruel" expression. Ishigaki countered that the president was "serious-looking, not like politicians who wear sugar-coated smiles for babies and old ladies." It was not his intent to make the first president look "unsympathetic," but to make him appear "thoughtful," given the difficult times in which he led the country.

Another criticism levied at Ishigaki's mural was that he depicted Abraham Lincoln as "looking too dark," even, "Negro." When Harry Webber reported on the murals for the newspaper, *Afro-American*, in April of 1938 in response to the controversy, the murals had already been removed. Members of the crowd that he interviewed claimed, "Lincoln seemed to have the heavy lips, dark skin and features generally ascribed to colored persons."<sup>328</sup> Ishigaki defended his portrait of Lincoln to the *Daily Worker* saying that the darker palette used in the painting was to reflect a "somber tone." Ishigaki went on to accuse those who attacked the mural

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<sup>327</sup> Louise Mitchell, "Eitaro Ishigaki, Well Known Anti-Fascist Japanese Artist, Answers Slurs Against Murals in Harlem Court." *Daily Worker*, (April 5, 1938) Reproduced in *Amerika no naka no nihon Ishigaki Eitarô senzen no tobei gakatachi. Japan in America: Eitaro Ishigaki and Other Japanese Artists in the Pre-World War II United States*. (Wakayama: The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama, 1997) p. 117

<sup>328</sup> Harry Webber, "Protests Oust Lincoln Mural." *Afro-America* (April 9, 1938)

by saying that Lincoln was painted to look like an African-American were “also attacking the Negro People.”

### *Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945*

Chinese and Japanese artists hosted joint exhibitions in New York of their artworks as a protest against the formal outbreak of war between China and Japan following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on July 7, 1937. The show held in September of 1937 was a plea for solidarity between the two nations in the face of war. The art critic for the *New York Times* condescendingly characterized the event as “exotic” in his review, but did not fail to mention the exhibition’s intent, which he claimed to be to “rise above the difficulties of Eastern politics.” The American Artists’ Congress, the Citizens Committee for the Support of the WPA, and the Artists Union co-sponsored the event.

Japanese artists in New York were the majority represented in the show with only a few Chinese artists, Chu H. C. W. Wong, and Don Gook Wu, who were not widely known. Not all Japanese artists in New York supported the exhibition. Critic Emily Genauer wrote that many Japanese artists had refused to include their paintings in the 1937 joint show with Chinese out of loyalty to Japan, but she did not name them.<sup>329</sup> Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Ishigaki Eitarô, Shimizu Kiyoshi, Usui Bunpei, Tamotsu Chûzô, and eighteen other artists were among those represented. Shimizu Kiyoshi’s participation in an exhibition of protest against the Second Sino-Japanese War ran counter to the views of his brother, Toshi, who was at that time working as an illustrator for Japanese imperial army. Genauer criticized the Japanese artists’ paintings, (excluding

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<sup>329</sup> Tom Wolf, “The Tip of the Iceberg: Early Asian American Artists in New York,” *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970* Editors Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Paul J. Karlstrom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) p. 94

Kuniyoshi), for their “homogeneity” compared to the Chinese artists on display, though she characterized their works as “much more academic.” Part of the show’s agenda was to protest the removal of Asian artists like Ishigaki from WPA arts projects.

Many Japanese artists in the United States participated in efforts to protest Japan’s war in China.<sup>330</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô and his wife, Ayako, were outspoken anti-war activists. Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki both attended a 1937 ball in New York with proceeds going to a relief effort for China.<sup>331</sup> Ishigaki contributed a work to the annual exhibition of the American Artists Congress in December of 1937, called “An Exhibition in Defense of World Democracy, Dedicated to the Peoples of Spain and China.” He submitted a painting called “Escape” (1937), featuring a Chinese family running away from burning buildings. For a show featuring Japanese artists at the Municipal Art Galleries in 1938, Ishigaki displayed two paintings that portrayed the effects of the war on the civilian population. The *New York Times* identified Ishigaki as sympathetic to the Chinese.<sup>332</sup> Ray King praised Ishigaki’s “internationalism” for the *Daily Worker* in 1940, claiming that he brought an “Oriental sense of rhythm and color with a Western feeling for realism...that showed the shattered streets of Shanghai and the hills of Bilbao.”<sup>333</sup> Referring to Ishigaki’s “Oriental sense of rhythm” was unusual in regard to Ishigaki’s paintings, and

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<sup>330</sup> Tamotsu Chûzô, Thomas Nagai, and Suzuki Sakari were the painters that most frequently exhibited with Ishigaki in New York in the late 1930s. Cooperation among Japanese and Chinese artists was not limited to New York. Japanese and Chinese art associations in California had been joining group exhibitions since the mid-1930s. The Foundation of Western Art in Los Angeles held exhibitions between 1934 and 1937 called “Contemporary Oriental Artists” that included Terada Takeo, Ueyama Tokio, and Chinese painters Tyrus Wong and Wing Kwong Tse. Unlike the New York shows, the California shows were not explicitly political in their message: they were not dedicated Chinese suffering in the face of Japanese military aggression.

<sup>331</sup> Leonard Lyons, “The Post’s New Yorker,” Washington Post (October 18, 1937)

<sup>332</sup> “Japanese Artists Have City Exhibit,” New York Times (June 23, 1938)

<sup>333</sup> Ray King, “Japanese Painter Ishigaki Portrays Chinese Struggle,” The Daily Worker (May 16, 1940)

particularly in leftist papers like the *Daily Worker*. The writer might have intended a reference to Ishigaki's ethnic heritage in accordance with the show's theme.

By the late 1930s, Ishigaki's style had changed from his earlier paintings in the 1920s such as "Whipping." Prior to the Marco Polo Incident, Ishigaki had painted scenes of revolution in Cuba as well as anti-Nazi works ("Down with the Swastika" 1936). After 1937, his works either featured Chinese civilian victims ("Victims of War" 1938) or robust female figures overcoming soldiers in uniform ("Amazons" 1937 and "Resistance" 1937). He presented social realist depictions of revolutionaries called to the ready. Unlike the abstraction and movement of "Whipping" or the diverse characters in "City," his figures were stiff representatives of Revolution. King praised Ishigaki's humanism and "earnestness," but felt his figures would benefit from less "heroic posturing." Others, like Melville Upton, believed that Ishigaki's paintings of "tangled, terror stricken masses" were effective.<sup>334</sup> Indeed, by the mid-1930s, stylistic techniques were no longer as important as his desire to present humanity as capable of resistance and self-defense. (Figure 38)

*Photography - "Great Weapon for Ideology Formation"*

Given the events of the 1930s, photographers, like other artists, began to challenge the notion of "art-for-art's sake" as the motivation for their work. Challenges to the relevance of art photography during a time of crisis arose in Germany, the United States, Japan, and elsewhere. The desire to capture those instances to reveal an objective truth led to the development of photojournalism that teetered between fine art and documentary categories.

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<sup>334</sup> Melville Upton "Fighting War and Nazis," New York Sun (March 12, 1936)



Photography had also become a favored topic for philosophical and social critique. Two years after Nakayama Iwata's return from Paris in 1928, Kyoto School philosopher, Nakai Masakazu 中井正一 (1900-1952) wrote about the "freedom and richness" that would accelerate pictorial representation at an unprecedented rate.<sup>335</sup> This would not only change our way of seeing, according to Nakai, but the "standardization" of the image would be the means for a *collective* experience. Film could serve the larger social memory by recording it.<sup>336</sup>

Both Nakai Masakazu and Walter Benjamin in Germany identified the potential for a mass response to the photographic image that could act as a politicizing force. Benjamin wrote of photography's potential to rally the masses by way of the accessibility of images. Close-ups, Benjamin wrote in 1935, allowed space to expand and movement to be extended. Photography did not make clear what had been barely visible, but "revealed (an) entirely new structural formation of the subject." Even images of familiar objects and metropolitan streets that were commonplace in daily life allowed for the uncovering of those hidden spaces that had been locked away from notice.<sup>337</sup> Such clarity could lend itself to a revolution in consciousness. In other words, photographs could bring to the surface what was in the shadows: the factories, slums, and ruins. Though Benjamin expressed a balanced optimism about photography's potential to reveal inequity, he also understood this capacity could also serve the Right as propaganda. Japanese photography critic and writer Ina Nobuo 伊奈信男 (1898-1978) echoed

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<sup>335</sup> Aaron Stephen Moore, "Para-existential Forces of Invention: Nakai Masakazu's Theory of Technology and Critique of Capitalism." *positions: East Asia Culture Critique*, Volume 17, Number 1, (Spring 2009). Nakai Masakazu, "Kikaibi no kôzô" ("The Structure of Mechanical Art"), from the *Nakai Masazaku Zenshû*.

<sup>336</sup> More on Nakai Masakazu's philosophy as it related to photography will be addressed in Chapter 4, where the magazine *Kôga* is addressed. Nakai was a contributing essayist to the magazine.

<sup>337</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1958) p. 236

Benjamin's misgivings about photography as a propaganda device that same year in Japan. Ina claimed that since photojournalism (*hōdō shashin*) had enabled greater mass communication, it created one of the "greatest weapons of ideology formation."<sup>338</sup>

*Natori Yōnosuke's America (1937)*

Photojournalist and commercial designer, Natori Yōnosuke 名取 洋之助 (1910-1962), traveled across the United States in 1937, photographing "America from a Japanese perspective."<sup>339</sup> *Life* had published Natori's photos from the 1936 Berlin Olympics, making him the first Japanese whose images appeared in the magazine. For the "America" series, *Life* wanted images that showed the American worker as the backbone of industry and commerce, rather than as members of the unemployed. Based on his photos taken in Germany, *Life* offered Natori the opportunity to seek out images of American society that would reflect this more optimistic view. But when he returned to their offices with photographs of the slums of the Lower East Side, *Life* editors dismissed him. When he was rehired by another magazine, friends advised Natori not to shoot the American gutter, but to capture its hope for progress.<sup>340</sup> Writing about the experience later, Natori claimed that since the pictures he had taken for himself in his own style had been

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<sup>338</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Touring Japan-as-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperial Travelogues." *positions* Volume 8, Number 3. (Winter, 2000) p. 752

<sup>339</sup> Natori Yōnosuke had studied in Germany during the 1920s and worked for a German publisher. Natori was forced to return to Japan from an assignment in China in 1933, due to Hitler's restraints on immigrant travel into Germany. Upon his return, he established a design group *Nihon Kōbō* (Japan Studio), which launched the publication of a journal, called *NIPPON*. Founded with photographers Kimura Ihei 木村伊兵衛 (1901-1974), Hara Hiromu 原弘 (1903-1986), Okada Sōzō 岡田桑三 (1903-1983), and Ina Nobuo, the English language journal advertised Japanese culture to a Western audience.

<sup>340</sup> Aoki Fukiko, "Natori Yōnosuke to 'Raifu' no jidai," *Amerika 1937: Natori Yōnosuke shashin-shū* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1992) p. 87

rejected, he tried to copy (*mane shite miru*) the American style of photography. In the end, however, the photographs were described by the publication as “Japanese style.”<sup>341</sup>

Natori succeeded in producing images that depicted a hard working people. Driving from New York to Los Angeles in fifty days, Natori’s images were mostly of the countryside – where the “real” America could be found. He drove to Detroit to see car-manufacturing plants, Chicago to see the agriculture and livestock areas, and to Oklahoma to see its oilrigs.<sup>342</sup> The message seemed to be that men could build their way out of the Depression by hard work and industry. Country folk with wrinkles caked with the dirt of toil had earnest expressions or the occasional smile of satisfaction for what they had accomplished. Natori did not present Steinbeck’s “Okies” or Dorothea Lange’s migrant workers, whose loss of land in the Dust Bowl drove them from their homes to be exploited as cheap labor in California. (Figure 39)

Natori’s series did not only present glorified images of the tough and resolute United States. Mixed within these images are both sardonic and critical images of American society. When he wrote about photography during the 1960s, he said that he had always thought that photographs should not merely be documentation. The photographer’s point of view should be manifested in his photographs like the writing of a novel or a poem.<sup>343</sup> Rather than generic shots of a romanticized America, Natori revealed a few of its shadows as well. The same photographer who lost a job because he photographed New York’s slums delicately interspersed his optimistic and “hopeful” photos with ones that raised questions about America’s shades of grey.

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<sup>341</sup> Natori Yōnosuke from “Shashin no yomikata,” 1963. Quoted in Aoki Fukiko’s essay.

<sup>342</sup> Matsumoto Norihiko, “Natori Yōnosuke no shigoto: sono shashin shuhō to shōgai,” *Amerika 1937: Natori Yōnosuke shashin-shū* (Tokyo: Kodansha 1992) pp. 90-93

<sup>343</sup> Natori Yōnosuke from *Shashin no yomikata*, 1963. Quoted in Aoki Fukiko’s essay. P. 87

Natori mixed his images of family picnics with photographs of an animal carcass left to hang on chain link fence. The American frontier was still, apparently, a savage place. Some images are ironic looks at American “polite society”: a woman with her legs crossed, strikes a match to light a cigarette, while her date daintily sips tea from a cup and saucer. In another, a young African American boy holds out a handful of cotton. He stands proud, looking down at the photographer, from a confident height. It is a beautiful portrait of a sharecropper that runs counter to other images taken during the Depression of poor southern blacks. This boy was not like Howard Patterson in Noda Hideo’s portrait of the Scottsboro defendant. Nor was he leading marches on the capitol as in Ishigaki’s paintings. Having returned from Hitler’s Germany where the supreme Aryan race was expected to be victorious in the Olympic Games, only to have its thunder stolen by Jesse Owens, Natori’s portrait presented strength and dignity in the lowest rung of America’s social ladder. (Figure 40)

### *Conclusion*

Ishigaki Eitarô was emblematic of an era when national identification and national aesthetics were no longer the bases for critics, artists, and the art market to evaluate art. Leftist political ideology created an international solidarity among different groups. The 1930s context presented a landscape where ethnic differences between artists dissolved. Japanese, Mexican, or French aesthetics mattered less than an artist’s political position. But as nations came together, their art became similar in terms of style and subject matter. Art that did not have an explicit political message became suspect to leftist art critics, but art critics in other media outlets felt pressed to distinguish art from propaganda. Leftist Japanese artists were not obligated to paint in a Japanese style, but they had a new formula that they had to follow: social realism.

Natori Yônosuke was hired to photograph a resilient Depression-era America, but was not instructed to interpret it in terms of Japanese national aesthetics. His task was to depict American economic and social resilience. Magazine editors seemed to believe that an outside view might find a remaining spark, where someone on the inside might only see things in bleak terms. In his photography, there was a reversal: Natori Yônosuke captured nation, but it was not Japan. This suggests that artists are not beholden to present the culture, which they come originally come from.

The cultural front did not last, nor did it have universal appeal. In Japan, where Leftists had been suppressed since the early 1930s, Noda Hideo painted the Japanese middle class rather than the urban poor. World War II reinstated national lines and once again artists were cast in terms of which side they were on.

## Chapter 5: Sojourning Artists Return to Japan

### *Introduction*

Artists returned to Japan in the late 1920s and early 1930s after living abroad for years. The most common trigger for their return was concern for family members who were elderly or ill, but all used the occasion to enter the Japanese art world. Artists that returned to Japan can be understood in terms of what motivated their return, when they returned, and how successful they were after their arrival. Six artists – Yoshida Hiroshi, Obata Chiura, Nakayama Iwata, Kuniyoshi Yasuo, and Shimizu Toshi – returned to Japan at the same time, but had different experiences and levels of success there. Those artists who had connections before leaving Japan had the easiest reentry. Artists that nurtured contacts while away seized upon those connections once in Japan. Yet, success in New York, Paris, or San Francisco did not ensure success in the Japanese market. Some changed their style accordingly, but others decided not to stay. In the 1920s and 1930s, Japanese collectors and critics were enjoying their own modern art scene, and were not necessarily convinced that sojourning artists had anything of value to offer.

### *Yoshida Hiroshi and the Japanese Market for Woodblocks*

First-wave artist Yoshida Hiroshi built his career by producing works that catered to consumer demand and adjusted his base of operations and style accordingly. Yoshida sold all the paintings he brought with him to the United States in 1899 and subsequent selling escapades there. When he returned in 1924 to the East Coast after the Great Kantô Earthquake, Yoshida could not sell of any his paintings at New York and Boston salons. Americans did buy a few of

his woodblocks, however, and he went back to Japan the following year to create prints for the Japanese market that was also experiencing a revival of interest in woodblock prints. His images of Kyoto gardens, the Taj Majal, and Yosemite National Park were a commercial success and he no longer went to the United States to sell his work. Yoshida made watercolors for Americans in the early 1900s and woodblock prints for Japanese from the mid 1920s through World War II.

After decades spent devoted to oil painting and watercolors, Yoshida transformed his career and art legacy by embracing the 1920s revival in woodblock printing. He had built his reputation as an artist by fusing Western and Japanese elements in his works, making them commercially successful. Trained as an *yōga* artist during his early years, many of his paintings featured Japanese scenes done in a Western manner. During the 1920s, he created landscapes from his global travels in India, Egypt, China, and the United States. This time, however, he redrew foreign subject matter using Japanese woodblock techniques.

In addition to the loss of many of his artworks in the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, Yoshida's painting sales in Japan had begun to slow prompting his selling trip in 1924 to the United States. Tastes had changed, however, since the early 1900s. The *Christian Science Monitor* advertised a 1924 exhibition in New York hosted by Yoshida to benefit Japanese artists and art schools affected by the earthquake.<sup>344</sup> While in New York, the Japanese Artists Association lead by Shimizu Toshi, also hosted a show, but Shimizu noted in his diary that Yoshida's work did not sell, because they were too out of fashion.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> "Modern Japanese Art at the New York Art Center," *The Christian Science Monitor* (February 4, 1924)

<sup>345</sup> Okabe Masayuki, "Gakatachi no shin-sekai – Nichibei bijutsu kyōryū-shi," *Amerika ni ikita Nikkeijin gakatachi: kibō to kunō no hanseki 1896-1945, Japanese and Japanese American Painters in the United States: A Half Century of Hope and Suffering, 1896-1945* (Tokyo: Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, 1995) p. 162

One of the *Christian Science Monitor*'s reporters reviewed a show of what Yoshida called "modern Japanese paintings" exhibited in Boston a few weeks later. Yoshida promoted the paintings on display as modern art, but the critic felt that "Japanese art of the past was superior." He noted that Yoshida defended the "Occidental-looking" landscapes on display as examples of the "unconscious assimilation of new modes" created by Japanese who had traveled abroad and incorporated new art forms. The classical Japanese mode, Yoshida stated, had reached its peak; to continue down the road of Japanese tradition would be to stifle creativity and to deny exposure to the arts outside of Japan's borders. Yoshida expressed confidence to the critic that someday the Japanese would take the new ideas from abroad and develop a "new style" that was "neither imitative nor eclectic." The critic remained skeptical, but noted that the woodblocks Yoshida had brought with him exhibited sophisticated handling of colors and displayed "interesting" graphics. In the end, it was Yoshida's woodblock prints that garnered praise despite his defense of his earlier work.

Yoshida had started working with woodblocks in 1920 when Watanabe Shôzaburô 渡辺庄三郎 (1885-1962) published his first print, "Sacred Garden in Meiji Shrine," in 1920.<sup>346</sup> Matsuki Kihachirô 松木喜八郎, one of the Matsuki brothers who dealt in Japanese art in Boston and assisted Yoshida when he first arrived in 1899, had provided Yoshida's introduction to the master printer, Watanabe. Yoshida created eight images for Watanabe between 1920 and 1923, all of them of Japanese landscapes. Foreign woodblock printmakers like Bertha Lum were becoming popular in Japan in the early 1920s when Yoshida began making prints. Feeling that

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<sup>346</sup> Watanabe is thought to have coined the term "shin-hanga" to create a distinction between woodblock prints of the late nineteenth century that had become mass-produced and, thus, declined in value. The print was commissioned by the Meiji Shrine Support Association.



the Japanese art forms were being taken over by foreigners, Yoshida Fujio, Yoshida's artist wife, stated that her husband hoped to reclaim woodblocks for the Japanese.<sup>347</sup>

When Yoshida returned to Japan in 1925 with oil paintings and watercolors of landscapes of his travels, he began to turn the images into woodblock prints. In an interview with Oliver Statler after World War II, Yoshida Fujio described their attempt to sell paintings by Japanese artists in the U.S. following the Kantô earthquake. They were unsuccessful, selling “discouragingly few pictures.” The prints published by Watanabe received a “good deal more interest” in all the major cities they toured. She stated:

“The fine reception given these prints, plus the fact that several foreign print-artists had recently created a stir in Japan, made my husband think that they Japanese had better get busy in the field that was once their own, and he started concentrating on prints as soon as we returned.”<sup>348</sup>

Where Yoshida failed to sell his paintings in 1924, Kuniyoshi and other artists from Japan living in New York were exhibiting their works and receiving favorable critical reviews. They painted works that were in tune with the New York art world's interests, but Yoshida and his selection of “modern Japanese artists” were out of step with the time.

Before returning to Japan, Yoshida stopped at national parks like Niagara Falls, Yosemite and Arizona's Grand Canyon, which he later depicted in woodblock prints.<sup>349</sup> While still traveling in the United States, Yoshida sent woodblocks, “Mount Rainier” and “The Grand Canyon,” to the government sponsored 1924 Teiten exhibition and to the Taiheyô Gakai exhibition the following year, where they were well received. Compared to exhibitions like the

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<sup>347</sup> Oliver Statler, Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn (Vermont and Tokyo: Charles A. Tuttle, 1956) Page 171.

<sup>348</sup> Oliver Statler, Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1961) p. 171

<sup>349</sup> Ogura Tadao, “The United States Series,” Yoshida Hiroshi: Zenmoku hanga-shû (Tokyo: Abe Publishing, Ltd. 2008) pp. 8-9

Nikakai that Shimizu Toshi and Noda Hideo would submit works to in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Teiten exhibitions were more conservative and rewarded artists who painted landscapes, still lifes, and other subjects that were more decorative and less abstract or included social commentary. His success in the Teiten exhibition prompted Yoshida to play a closer role in the creation of the prints by supervising the carving and printing of his woodblock series. For the next two decades, Yoshida focused exclusively on his printmaking.

Yoshida's woodblock prints were more like travel mementoes, much like postcards, rather than the fine art painting that had consumed him in the past. He chose to return to *ukiyo-e* practices in his printing process and in his handling of subjects.<sup>350</sup> His pictures were "traditional," he said, and not part of the so-called *shin hanga* (new woodblock) movement, which included artists that were creating "new" works using old woodblock techniques. In addition to the scenes from his global travels, Yoshida created images from his travels within Japan. The Inland Sea area, the Japanese Alps, and Kyoto temple gardens advertised some of Japan's more scenic locations. Indeed, many of the images were turned into postcards for travel souvenirs. Yoshida presented a world in soft colors, with pretty scenes sometimes populated by local peoples. His images of the exotic Orient, done in a Japanese style, seem to be what historian Kim Brandt calls an "Oriental orientalism."<sup>351</sup>

Although an exhibition of his *yôga* works were displayed in Osaka in 1936, almost all of his shows during the 1930s were of his prints.<sup>352</sup> In 1937, Yoshida entered works in "Western

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<sup>350</sup> Oliver Statler, *Ibid.* Page 168.

<sup>351</sup> Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007) p. 3

<sup>352</sup> Also in 1936, the Toledo Museum of Art exhibited a series of Yoshida's prints.

Paintings Exhibition for Raising National Defense Funds.” But after 1937, Yoshida began focusing his landscapes exclusively on Japan as well as its colonial territories in Korea and Manchuria. Starting in 1938, Yoshida and his son, Sasaki, also a woodblock artist, traveled to China as war painters with the Japanese army. In the following year, father and son had an exhibition, “Two War Painters for the Army.” Yoshida continued to travel to China to paint for the next few years.<sup>353</sup>

Yoshida’s images of Chinese streets in 1940 such as “Xingzi” show no evidence of war or the hardships and violence experienced by the Chinese. Although Ishigaki Eitarô had never visited China, he created images of violence directed at Chinese civilians. Yet, first-hand witnesses like Yoshida presented daily life continuing uninterrupted by battle or famine. In other images, fishing ports such as Shizhongshan and Suzhou show fishermen selling their catch, with temples and weeping willows picturesquely framing the background. As an illustrator for the army, Yoshida depicted an unchanging, lovely scene and he made no illustrations of battles or Japanese soldiers. Yoshida’s renderings of China in 1937 were travel sketches, no different than the shrines and carp ponds he drew in Japan at the time. By 1941, however, his illustrations of China were devoid of people and presented scenic attractions such as a park in Guangzhou.<sup>354</sup> (Figure 42)

Yoshida Hiroshi was an example of an artist who chose his subject matter and style based on what he could sell. He embraced tradition and shunned anything modern. For Yoshida, “modern” meant art and artists working outside of the government-approved exhibitions like

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<sup>353</sup> Before his death in 1950, he continued to make prints based on sketching trips throughout Japan and exhibited his works in Taiheiyô Gakai exhibitions.

<sup>354</sup> Other notable *shin hanga* artists like Onchi Kôshirô 恩地孝四郎 (1891-1955) abandoned their abstract works done in the 1920s to create picturesque landscapes of the Chinese countryside. Munakata Shiko, however, was an exception and continued to do abstract works throughout the 1930s.

Teiten. He painted pretty scenes rather than what he witnessed on the city streets or battlefields in front of him. But Yoshida found a mass market for picturesque landscapes and had no need for either the Japanese or American art worlds that were seeking to challenge society in their art. His reliance on the Japanese market after 1924 was based on his ability to sell there.

### *Obata Chiura and the Yosemite Series*

Obata Chiura returned to Japan in 1928 with his family when his brother fell ill in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture. He had just completed a series of watercolors in Yosemite National Park that he then collaborated with a woodblock printing shop to turn into a series of woodblock prints. The series was successful in Japan, but it also garnered him a position at University of California, Berkeley as an art professor. Obata left Japan in 1930 and stayed permanently in California, because the teaching position promised to provide a steady income. In Obata's case, opportunity in the United States, where he had lived for nearly two decades, was the more attractive option.

Obata Chiura spent 1927 in Yosemite National Park camping with fellow artists and friends, Worth Ryder (1884-1960) and Robert Boardman Howard (1896-1983). He made countless sketches and watercolors from the dramatic landscape. Bringing the Yosemite series and other works with him, Obata returned to Japan for the first time in 1928 with his wife and two children after having been away for twenty-five years.<sup>355</sup> Obata claimed that he had always intended to return permanently to Japan one day, but did not leave California for twenty-five years when his brother became ill. It is unclear whether the Obatas planned to stay in Japan at that time, but their leaving as a family indicates that they intended to stay for an extended period.

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<sup>355</sup> His eldest son later returned to San Francisco, but his daughter stayed behind to live with her grandmother.

By the time he returned to Japan in 1928, the contest between *yōga* and *nihonga* for a dominant position within the art establishment had subsided and both groups were represented at government-sponsored exhibitions. Obata had never strayed far from his *nihonga* roots while in California. *Nihonga* paintings remained popular in Japan while Obata was away, so he enjoyed a positive response to his work. While Yoshida Hiroshi became a *nihonga* artist, because he found a lucrative market for his woodblock prints, Obata had continued to utilize techniques that he had learned in Sendai and Tokyo. Newspaper articles praised Obata's paintings of California landscapes, noting that the public clamored to purchase the works.<sup>356</sup> While some voiced astonishment at his painting a nude of his wife ("Mother Earth"), his Yosemite watercolors were in demand.<sup>357</sup>

Based on the positive response, Obata approached the Takamizawa woodblock company to inquire about producing a series of Yosemite woodblocks.<sup>358</sup> It is unclear whether Obata had any prior experience working with woodblock printing while he was studying at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts as a youth. But when Obata returned, Japan was in the midst of the revival of interest in woodblocks led by artists like Yoshida. Like Yoshida, Obata believed Japan to be the proper place for making woodblock prints. Explaining why Japanese colleagues convinced him

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<sup>356</sup> Shimojima Tetsurō, *Samurai to Kariforunia: Ikyō no Nihon gaka Obata Chiura* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2000) p. 185

<sup>357</sup> Shimojima Tetsurō, *Ibid.* p. 185

<sup>358</sup> A family member of the Takamizawa company, Takamizawa Tadao 高見沢忠雄, visited San Francisco in 1927 to attend an exhibition of his personal collection of *ukiyo-e* prints. It is likely that Obata formed the connection with Tadao upon this visit to San Francisco. Obata pursued the Takamizawa family to produce his woodblocks, however, the publishing house's reputation was mixed. Accused of refurbishing older prints, the Takamizawa seal became associated with forgery. The discovery was made when a forged print was discovered in Frank Lloyd Wright's collection. Janice T. Driesbach "Obata's Vision of Yosemite," *Obata's Yosemite: The Art and Letters of Chiura Obata from His Trip to the High Sierra in 1927* (Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 1993) p. 51

to turn his sketches into prints, Obata said his reason for making the series while in Japan was, “the country that has the most advanced woodblock print art is Japan.”<sup>359</sup>

The Yosemite woodblocks received praise and awards in Japan when they were completed in 1930. Obata was an ascending *nihonga* artist when he left Japan and had established himself as a painter in California, but it was this series of thirty-five woodblocks made from his watercolors that would solidify his reputation.<sup>360</sup> Obata’s use of *sumi* ink to outline the forms of his painting created a dramatic effect. By keeping his color palette soft and muted against black outlines, the paintings have a striking high contrast. He insisted that the printer make multiple changes to the colors. His ideas were particular and it took the printer many attempts to capture his vision.<sup>361</sup> When creating the series based on the watercolors and oil paintings, he insisted that the woodblock carvers stay true to the touch and tone of his original images.

For many of the images, Obata wrote accompanying *haiku* poems, which further linked the prints to Japan. In addition, Obata always signed his name in English as well as by *inkan* (character seal). Obata admired the Zen monk-painter, Sesshu, but insisted that he did not follow any particular school. He painted “nature as he saw its loveliness,” rather than as a classical, Cubist, or Impressionist painter. Despite his belief in Japanese woodblocks and his *nihonga* background, he insisted on representing California landscapes. He rejected the first round of

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<sup>359</sup> “Chiura Obata: An Oral History,” Interview by Masuji Fujii with Obata, 1965. Japanese American Historical Project, The University of California at Los Angeles Special Collections Library, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

<sup>360</sup> The investment had been a gamble for the Obatas. They spent their entire savings on making the prints and had to borrow money to return to San Francisco.

<sup>361</sup> Janice T. Driesbach Ibid. p. 53-54

carvings for the woodblock series, because he felt that the colors “looked like some place in Japan, not the High Sierras.” He wanted a High Sierra pine tree, not a Japanese pine, he said. Even though a famous carver, Kataoka, who had carved paintings of Hokusai, came to participate in the series, Obata felt that the “High Sierra had gone on a trip to Japan.” (Figure 43)

After the series was awarded a prize at an exhibition in Tokyo in 1930, Obata returned with his wife to California, where the series of prints was exhibited widely. It is unclear why Obata decided to go back to California given the series’ success in Japan, but he might have guessed that the series would have a successful reception in California as well.

Exhibitions of the series in California proved to be as positive as the reviews in Japan. The *Los Angeles Times* praised the painstaking process required to make them.<sup>362</sup> The paper also noted that together with landscapes from the Sierra Nevada, the exhibition featured city scenes like “Foggy Morning, Van Ness Avenue.” Obata painted from his immediate environment in the Bay Area, but without human figures. In general, he looked to what he called “Great Nature” for his subject, using *sumi* brushwork and watercolors.

Based on the success of the exhibition of prints, his friend Worth Ryder secured him a position in 1932 as an art instructor at the University of California, Berkeley. Though his works were successful in Japan, the prospect of a steady income might have been attractive to the Obatas, leading to their decision to stay in California. Where Yoshida found his market for woodblocks in Japan, Obata found his in California. Remarking on his teaching style, Obata claimed that he always taught his students “beauty.” No one, he said, should pass through four years of college without being given the knowledge of beauty and “the eyes with which to see

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<sup>362</sup> “Three Exhibits Reviewed.” *Los Angeles Times*. May 4, 1931.

it."<sup>363</sup> Rather than painting in a social realist vein as many artists did at the time, Obata continued to do paintings of scenic landscapes using various techniques learned while he was a student in Japan. As a member of the first-wave, Obata could choose which art world to work in. It might have been family matters that prompted their return to California, but it was Obata's positive reviews and his finding a place in the American art market that made them stay.

### *Nakayama Iwata and the Avant-Garde*

Commercial success was not the only factor determining whether an artist stayed or returned to the West. In the case of Nakayama Iwata, his New York and Parisian photographs were part of the late 1920s Western avant-garde photography scene that was becoming popular in Japan. Nakayama left Paris in 1927 after living there less than a year, but he had worked in a well-known avant-garde milieu, which lent his work credibility in Japanese photography circles. His photographs were different from anything seen in Japan at the time and attracted the attention of leading Japanese photographers. Embraced by like-minded artists and able to open a successful portrait studio that provided income in Kobe, Nakayama elected to stay in Japan. But while Nakayama stayed on the cutting edge of the photography world's interests, he did not have to base his decisions to stay in a particular country based on success in the market. He was a leader in an *international* movement that operated across nations.

Nakayama insisted that he wanted to make "beautiful pictures," but he looked for beauty in ugly things. He participated in non-government-sponsored exhibitions, earned money from his portrait studio to support his artistic works, and published his own photography journal featuring little known artists. Nakayama was able to work outside of more conservative art world circles,

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<sup>363</sup> Obata Chiura, Topaz Moon: Art of the Internment (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000) p. 7



because he participated in Japanese photography movements that were interested in Western avant-garde photography. Nakayama acted as an ambassador of the Parisian avant-garde scene, much like Murayama Tomoyoshi 村山知義(1901-1977) did when he returned from Berlin in 1923.

New York had been where the Nakayamas established a livelihood, but Paris proved to be a temporary, creative sojourn for them. Photography critic Tanaka Masao conceded that Nakayama's creative period flourished while in Paris, because he was no longer chained to managing the portrait studio.<sup>364</sup> Although they stayed less than a year, the experience left a stylistic mark on his work. He befriended Fujita Tsuguharu, who became an active supporter of his new techniques.<sup>365</sup> Nakayama's circle of Japanese artist friends grew while he was in Paris. Painters Nakamura Kenichi 中村 研一 (1895-1967), Ebihara Kinosuke 海老原喜之助 (1904-1970), Kôno Misao 高野康 (1900-1979), and Shimizu Toshi were all in Paris at the time Nakayama was there.<sup>366</sup>

A dancer friend from New York introduced Nakayama to Italian Futurist artist, Enrico Prampolini (1894-1956), who was staging a 1927 theatrical production of *Théâtre de la*

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<sup>364</sup> When he arrived in Paris, he had the time and skills to pursue new photography avenues. Tanaka points out as well that Nakayama's gaze was also fixed on the New Photography Movement that was then happening in Germany, and was not only transfixed by the Paris scene. Tanaka, Masao. "Nakayama Iwata Sakuhin." *Kamera*. 1950.

<sup>365</sup> Nakayama Masako Haikara ni kyûjûni-sai: shashinka Nakayama Iwata to ikite (Tokyo: Kawadeshoboshinsha, 1987) p. 170

<sup>366</sup> While in Paris, the painter Foujita Tsuguharu became a mentor for Nakayama. Fujita introduced Nakayama to Ebihara, who had trained with influential painter and art critic, Arishima Ikuma, in Tokyo and then with Fujita in Paris. Ebihara would also participate in the Independent Arts Association (*Dokuritsu Bijutsu Kyôkai*) with Shimizu upon his return to Japan. Hazama Inosuke 裕伊之助 (1895-1977) and his wife, Adelia, were also friends with the Nakayamas. Hazama was starting to experiment with woodblock prints as well, but featuring the French landscape where they lived. Nakayama featured Adelia in some of his portrait photography of the time, since she and Masako became close friends through French and English language exchange. Sculptor Noguchi Isamu lived in the same building as the Nakayamas and the three shared regular meals together. Nakayama Masako, Haikara ni kyûjûni-sai: shashinka Nakayama Iwata to ikite (Tokyo: Kawadeshoboshinsha, 1987) pp. 160, 179-180 Tanaka Masao, "Nakayama Iwata Sakuhin," Kamera (1950)

*Pantomime Futuriste*.<sup>367</sup> Prampolini hired Nakayama to photograph the production and its stage sets. The experience working with the Futurist artist perhaps influenced Nakayama to create more abstract compositions. Soon after, his works became more experimental, utilizing new image taking and printing techniques. Masako claimed that his 1927 photogram, “Pipe and Match” (*Paipu to macchi*) was the beginning of a new creative period. The technique, often associated with Man Ray who was in Paris at the same time as Nakayama, creates a photographic image without the use of a camera by placing objects on photosensitive paper and then exposing the image to light. It was a technique that Nakayama would continue to use in Japan as well.<sup>368</sup>

Nakayama returned to Japan in 1927 after living abroad for eight years, because Masako’s family pressured her to take care of her aging mother. At first they resettled in Tokyo, the center of many avant-garde art movements at the time, but in 1928 the Nakayamas moved to Kobe. The international port town environment proved to be a fertile and open site for Nakayama’s artistic sensibilities that craved new sights and sounds. Kobe served as Japan’s point of entry for travelers from Shanghai, Hong Kong, Japan’s colonial possessions in Korea, and Southeast Asian ports such as Singapore. The look of the city during the 1920s and 1930s in terms of its architecture, restaurants, jazz clubs, and shopping was streamlined, *moderne*, and influenced by a cosmopolitan mix of sources. Perhaps Nakayama hoped to retain his place as an “outsider” by living in Kobe, where he had few connections, rather than stay in Tokyo, which

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<sup>367</sup> In addition to working as a painter and sculptor, Prampolini produced theater works that involved avant-garde modernist dance and abstract stage design and costumes.

<sup>368</sup> Nakayama, Masako, “Kaisô – Nakayama Iwata,” *Pilotis* No. 56 (Hyôgo: Hyôgo kenritsu kindai bijutsukan nyûsu, July, 1985)

was more familiar.<sup>369</sup> Along with several other photographers, Nakayama established the Ashiya Camera Club in 1930, which included professional and amateur photographers.<sup>370</sup>

Members of the Japanese *gadan* welcomed some artists like Nakayama who returned from working and living abroad as successful cosmopolitans. In Pascale Casanova's terms, an artist acted like a "foreign exchange broker" in that he added value to his works by crossing into new territories. Nakayama had first-hand knowledge of modernist trends abroad. His exposure to Man Ray, Futurism, and Surrealist literature, combined with his own response to Japan's *ero-guro-nansensu* (erotic-grotesque-nonsense) culture, produced a vision of modernity projected from New York, Paris, and Kobe.<sup>371</sup> Nakayama's version of Japan – bars, department stores, and cabarets – showed a very different place than Yoshida's woodblocks.

Nakayama's images reflected a tumultuous era that was shared by all the cities that he lived in, whether in the United States, Europe, or Japan. Like other avant-garde photographers, he experimented with different printing techniques, composition, and uses of light. He photographed ordinary objects in extraordinary ways, like naked mannequins set against a black sky. Constantly changing his style and experimenting with technique, Nakayama represents an artist who traveled between Japan, the United States, and Europe, picking up influences and exchanging ideas wherever he went. Often an outsider, and always a modern cosmopolitanite, Nakayama represents the avant-garde of twentieth-century art rather than nation or "ism."

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<sup>369</sup> Masuda Rei, "Nakayama Iwata to Kobe ni tsuite," *Art Ramble Quarterly Report* Vol. 2, (March 20, 2004)

<sup>370</sup> Nakayama established the club with Hanaya Kanbei ハナヤ勘兵衛 (1903-1991).

<sup>371</sup> See Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic, Grotesque, Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)

Nakayama continued to experiment with his photographic technique and style in Kobe. He wrote about this shift in style for the magazine, *Asahi Kamera*, soon after his return to Japan.<sup>372</sup> Art photography in Paris was moving into more abstract and conceptual works. He had seen German Bauhaus photography, the works of Man Ray, and El Lissitzky, which had had an effect on his work. Nakayama observed a second strain of photography that was emerging, which was characterized by straightforward, pure photographs (*tanteki junshashin*). These latter works caused him anxiety, he claimed, because he was not sure whether there was a place for him in this new movement since his works tended towards abstraction. Back in Japan, Nakayama found that there was a place for both styles.

A few years after Nakayama's founding of the Ashiya Camera Club, he and some colleagues established the short-lived, but hugely influential photography journal, *Kôga*. It was only published between May 1932 and December 1933, but according to scholar of Japanese photography, Iizawa Kôtarô, *Kôga's* effect on the Japanese photography world lasted for decades.<sup>373</sup> Featuring photographers, writers, philosophers, and cinematographers, the journal's participants were passionately devoted to modernism. In some of his *Kôga* essays, Nakayama espoused learning techniques from old masters in addition to pushing the creative bounds of photography advocated by *Kôga*. Whereas *Kôga* participants stressed the preeminence of an individual photographer's singular response to his subject as a new way of seeing, Nakayama reminded readers that the old techniques that he had learned early in his career were also valid.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Nakayama Iwata, "Nakayama Iwata chojutsu shô," Reprinted in Hikari no modanizumu: Nakayama Iwata shashinshû (Tokyo: Heibôsha, 1987)

<sup>373</sup> See Iizawa Kôtarô, Shashin ni kaere – Kôga – no jidai (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1988)

<sup>374</sup> *Kôga* attempted to not only expand its readership's knowledge about modernist photography in Japan, but to raise questions about aesthetics as well. The journal included essays written by Yanagi Muneyoshi, philosopher Nakai Masakazu 中井正一

*Kôga* members' primary interest was in the modern age. Its first publication occurred the year following the Manchurian Incident in 1931, when the Japanese state and military accelerated its war of aggression in East Asia. Images of crowds, machines, women, and objects found in daily life represented the contradictions of the time. Unlike Fukuhara Shinzo's *Shashin Geijutsu* (Photographic Arts) featuring pictorialist photographers, Nakayama's *Kôga* and Ashiya members did not soften their images or seek out pretty landscapes to create an aesthetic appeal. Often criticized for making their images too "pretty," – even those taken following the Great Kantô Earthquake of 1923 – *Shashin Geijutsu* photographers remained true to soft, tonal pictorialist images. Like Fukuhara, Nakayama was also an admirer of Alvin Langdon Coburn, who was a member of Stieglitz's 291 Gallery artists, but Nakayama was more interested in depicting the harshness of modern life. *Kôga* photographs consisted of either Nakayama's fantastical surrealist dreamscapes or straight documentation of the urban poor. The selection of images reflected the social turmoil, chaotic tempo, and disorientation characteristic of the early 1930s. Photography, Nakayama and other *Kôga* contributors wrote, could capture the new age in spontaneous and honest images.<sup>375</sup>

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(1900-1952), and social critic, Hasegawa Nyozeikan 長谷川 如是閑 (1875-1969). It also included articles and works by non-Japanese photographers as well. Translations of essays on photography by preeminent European and American photographers like Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Franz Roh, Eugene Atget, and Germaine Krull were also published in *Kôga*'s pages. Nor was *Kôga*'s attention exclusively on photography in Europe: For its fourth publication, film scholar Shimizu Hikaru wrote an essay on Edward Steichen.

<sup>375</sup> Nakayama and other *Kôga* contributors grappled with questions on how to make poetry, images, or any art form come alive in a column that he called "Zakki," or, miscellaneous notes. Not an essay, Nakayama's "Zakki" were a stream of consciousness question and answer session with himself about where to find vitality in art. In a place where news items appear in a flash, how could an artist seeking out the spontaneous compete? Where could the poet, Nakayama asked, whose purpose was the assembling of words, be able to create? Nakayama believed that "straight" photography was an impossible goal on the part of the photographer. Photography, like every art, was subjective despite the supposed pretenses at the camera's capacity to document the truth, he said. Whereas the painter interpreted what he saw, many argued that the photographer could provide unadulterated images of what once was. Nakayama grappled with ideas of the photographer's subjectivity decades before theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jeff Berger, and Susan Sontag revealed to what extent the photographer, viewer, and text conspired to affect how we look at photographs. As a member of the avant-garde, he also recommended to photographers that they steer clear of following certain "isms." Instead, an artist's individual commitment to self-expression was the most important aspect of photography. Nakayama Iwata. "Zakki." ("Miscellaneous Notes") *Kôga*, Vol. 1, No 4 (1932)

Nakayama's photographs in the early 1930s reveal the debilitating effects of city nightlife. He shot several self-portraits that showed him in bars, smoking, drinking, and ogling cabaret dancers. In one image taken in 1933, Nakayama is slumped over a bar, clinging to his glass of whisky and a cigarette. He sits alone, engaged in conversation with an absent friend. The image includes ghost-like figures, which seem to be in the bar with Nakayama, but they are mere apparitions of his alcohol-laden imagination and loneliness. Nakayama's nighttime scenes captured not only the alienation of the café world, but also its tempo and the elusiveness of the pleasure it sold. (Figure 44)

The photomontage effect Nakayama used lends his photographs a cinematic quality. Masako recalled one of their favorite pastimes was going to the movies in New York, where Nakayama's trained photographic eye was no doubt affected. A single image could contain different characters, a story line, and drama. In "Pipe, Glass and Stage," (1932) Nakayama used lace doilies to create a curtain effect to stage his subjects. The image is a collection of Western objects: a wine glass, foreign money, a French ashtray, and a Caucasian woman who hovers over the scene. There is no obvious indication that Nakayama took the photograph in Japan. Nakayama's "floating world" is located in a nation-less, modern urban nightlife. (Figure 45)

By 1935, Nakayama produced images almost entirely in his Ashiya photography studio. Most of them were abstract forms that had no representational elements. Just as he had supported his family in New York, Nakayama earned his income from his Ashiya portrait studio and advertising jobs. Performers gathered at Nakayama's Ashiya studio, where they would have their photographs taken while dancing and listening to American jazz recordings.<sup>376</sup> On one of these evenings, a Russian dancer, a former member of the Bolshoi Ballet Company, came to

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<sup>376</sup> Nakayama Masako, *Haikara ni, kyūjūnisai: shashinka Nakayama Iwata to ikite* (Tokyo: Kawadeshoboshinsha, 1987) p. 207

Nakayama's studio. It was this woman in the portrait taken in 1936 called "Woman from Shanghai" (*Shanghai kara onna*). (Figure 46)

Fleeing the Russian Revolution, Nakayama's dancer escaped to the international settlement in China and then to fascist Japan. The photo is a visual representation of the character of Olga from Yokomitsu Ryūichi's 1926 novel, Shanghai, which described the political and social turmoil in the international settlement. In the photo, the woman is still beautiful, but life seems to have caught up with her. Frowning and tense, she appears to be a hardened survivor. Her eyes betray her weariness. A cigarette dangles out of her mouth. She is nearly obscured by the collar of her dark cloak and the circling cigarette smoke, as though she had wished to keep hidden. Compared to his fantastical image of the New York flapper a decade earlier, Nakayama showed the reality of the 1930s visible in the woman's face. Still stylized, Nakayama's portrait is nevertheless a conscious take on the tension that marked the era and its travelers.

Nakayama not only depicted a universal perspective of the modern condition, but also made specific references to Japan. He photographed Japanese women in kimono. He took to Kobe's streets starting in the early 1930s to capture how tradition (festivals) and modernity (department stores) coexisted. But he did not create *Nihon-teki* works like Fukuhara, nor was he part of the American Scene that so many New York-based Japanese artists participated in. He worked in a space that was part of the Japanese, American, and international photography art worlds, without ever becoming beholden to or identified with any particular one. It was also very personal. In his Ashiya studio, he was able to create dreamlike fantasy images that had no clear national identification. Where many Japanese artists who traveled abroad aligned and realigned themselves with one dominant national art world or the other, Nakayama seems to have been able to operate as a cosmopolitan wherever he was.

*Kuniyoshi Yasuo's Trip to a "Foreign Land"*

By 1931, Kuniyoshi Yasuo had received numerous accolades from the New York art world. His works were included in major collections and he was celebrated as an important "American" painter. Despite the Depression, he continued to support himself as an artist. When his father in Okayama became ill, however, he returned to Japan and used the opportunity to exhibit his paintings. His paintings did not sell, however, and Kuniyoshi boarded a ship back to New York after six months. Just as he decided against staying in Paris, where the competition among artists was intense, Kuniyoshi left Japan because he would have to struggle to earn the same success he enjoyed in New York.

First-wave artists – Yoshida Hiroshi, Obata Chiura, and Nakayama Iwata – had successful reentries to the Japanese art world. Triggered by his desire to see his ailing father after being away for twenty-five years, Kuniyoshi returned in 1931 to Japan. Unlike Obata, Kuniyoshi was a second-wave artist who had no history in the arts before his departure for the United States in 1906, so the 1931 trip was his maiden voyage to the Japanese art world (*gadan*). According to his biographer, Kuniyoshi had up to that point expressed little concern in selling work in Japan or being appreciated by members of the Japanese art world.<sup>377</sup> However, the Depression had had a dramatic effect on his income, and he began to struggle financially for the first time in a decade. His marriage to Katherine Schmidt was faltering. The year before, his close friend and colleague, Jules Pascin, committed suicide. The loss was a heavy blow to Kuniyoshi, who had also lost his patron, Hamilton Easter Field prematurely. Affording the trip to Japan and the shipping of his

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<sup>377</sup> Kuniyoshi biographers such as Ozawa Yoshio and Ogura Tadao suggest that there is no evidence that Kuniyoshi ever painted with the intention of selling his work in the Japanese market.



paintings would require him to borrow money from friends, but there was at least a chance of financial gain there.

Kuniyoshi's exhibition record in the United States and his network of friends in Paris had built his reputation in Japan. Tokyo and Osaka newspapers hosted solo exhibitions for him when he arrived. The event received wide media attention: Journalists interviewed him for newspapers and old friends like Shimizu Toshi wrote profiles on him for art journals. The articles outlined Kuniyoshi's unusual history as an adventurer in California transformed into a New York artist, whose work was represented in major American museums. Little attention was paid to the work itself; journalists were more interested in his personal story.

Kuniyoshi's return to Japan coincided with the Manchurian Incident on September 18, 1931. In the same newspapers that featured interviews with him about his life in the United States and the works he brought to exhibit, front-page headlines celebrated Japan's mission in Manchuria. Absent from Japan since 1906, everyday life had become so transformed as to be virtually unrecognizable to Kuniyoshi. No wonder writers compared Kuniyoshi to the legend of Urashima Tarô – Japan's version of Rip van Winkle. For an essay in the art journal, *Atorie*, Kuniyoshi stated his feelings about his return:

“I crossed the Pacific Ocean in order to return to my birthplace, but it feels like I am taking a trip to a foreign land. I feel this way even though I am Japanese, probably because I have been in America for such a long time. I felt nothing at all in terms of expectations, anticipations, whether I'd like it or dislike it. I was able to approach Japan like a blank piece of a paper. I think it's a good thing to be able to have a fresh impression of the place. When I arrived in my hometown of Okayama and wandered around Korakuen, I remembered my childhood interest in *sumo* while looking at the scenery. I clearly understood then that I am a Japanese. No matter how deeply a Japanese penetrates a foreign country, he never ultimately becomes a local. It is a difficult question to ask whether art should be national or international. However, I think that this feeling that I am a

Japanese will have meaning in my work from this point on.” (*Atorie*, January 1932).<sup>378</sup>

Kuniyoshi felt as if he entered an unknown world – a Japan very different from his childhood memories – but this did not undermine his identity as a Japanese, however steeped it was in past associations.

In a 1931 article on Kuniyoshi, art critic Kaneko Yoshio praised the painter’s art “treasures” that he had brought to Japan to exhibit. Kaneko explained that Kuniyoshi’s inclusion in the 1929 MOMA exhibition, “Nineteen Living American Artists,” showed that Kuniyoshi “transcended citizenship and race.”<sup>379</sup> The writer also asserted that Kuniyoshi’s work could not be categorized in one single “ism.” Kuniyoshi, Kaneko claimed, was his own “ism” (*kuniyoshi-izumu*). Critic and artist Yanagi Ryōsuke highlighted Kuniyoshi’s relationship with Pascin in *Atorie*.<sup>380</sup> Comparing the Parisian neighborhood of Montparnasse to New York’s Greenwich Village, Yanagi wrote about the activities of the Penguin Club, various un-juried exhibitions, and the democratic management of the student-run Art Students League. In this way, Kuniyoshi became an ambassador informing the Japanese public about the American modern art world.

Despite the media coverage and praise, Kuniyoshi’s trip to Japan was a failure in terms of sales. Sending twenty-nine paintings and sixty lithographs across the United States and then to Japan must have cost Kuniyoshi a considerable sum. In addition to the five-day exhibition held by the *Tokyo nichu-nichi* in Tokyo, Kuniyoshi had a five-day exhibition in Osaka and a show of

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<sup>378</sup> Unno Hiroshi, “Kuniyoshi Yasuo: shoku modan stairu saiho,” *Aato* Vol. 93, (Winter, 1980) p. 24

<sup>379</sup> Pascin, one of the nineteen artists selected by MOMA, was born in Bulgaria and was not French as Kaneko identified him. Nor was Feininger German. Lyonel Feininger was born to German parents, grew up in Brooklyn, New York, but did receive art training in Germany. Max Weber, who was also included in the show, but not mentioned by Kaneko, was born in Poland and emigrated to the U.S. at the age of ten.

<sup>380</sup> Yanagi Ryōsuke “Kuniyoshi” *Atorie* (December, 1931)

his lithographs in his hometown in Okayama. He sold only two of his paintings during his trip to Japan. According to biographer, Yamaguchi Taiji, the Japanese public was only interested in Kuniyoshi as a curiosity as a Japanese living in the U.S.<sup>381</sup>

Kuniyoshi reflected on his lack of sales by comparing the Japanese art world to the American one after his departure from Japan.<sup>382</sup> Japanese art institutions operated differently, he claimed. Whereas American artists tried to have as many solo exhibitions as possible, these mattered less to the Japanese artist. Solo exhibitions in Japan were meant to sell lesser important works for small amounts of money. Group shows – particularly those in the spring and fall with visitors in the tens of thousands – were more important. Kuniyoshi had small, solo exhibitions in Japan and did not participate in group shows.<sup>383</sup> An artist also needed to become a member of a Japanese art association. Kuniyoshi may have tried to adjust to the Japanese *gadan* structure when he applied for membership in the Nikakai before he left Japan. He committed to submitting a painting to the fall Nikakai show, but he never sent the piece and seems to have given up on the Japanese *gadan* altogether after he returned to New York.<sup>384</sup>

Furthermore, Kuniyoshi observed that *nihonga* in the early 1930s was more successful than *yōga* in terms of its “appropriateness for the Japanese lifestyle.” In other words, Kuniyoshi believed that *nihonga* suited the Japanese, whereas Western art was merely understood in terms

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<sup>381</sup> Yamaguchi Taiji, *Amerika bijutsu to Kuniyoshi Yasuo* (Tokyo: Nippon hōsoku shuppan kyōkai, 2003) p. 96. It was not until the postwar period that Japanese collectors became interested in Kuniyoshi’s paintings, where the majority of his works are now held.

<sup>382</sup> Ozawa Yoshio quoting Kuniyoshi Yasuo, “Nihon hōmon,” *Kuniyoshi Yasuo: genmu to saikan* (Tokyo: Fukutake bunko, 1991) pp. 139-141

<sup>383</sup> Shimizu Toshi, on the other hand, submitted pieces to group shows and participated in art associations upon his return to Japan in 1928. Hence, he had greater success than Kuniyoshi.

<sup>384</sup> Kuniyoshi applied to become a member of the Nikakai and planned to submit “Circus Woman” (1929) to the autumn 1932 exhibition, but never sent the painting. Ozawa Yoshio, *Kuniyoshi Yasuo: Genmu to saikan* (Tokyo: Fukutake bunko, 1991) p. 142

of technique, and had not taken root in Japan. As an *yōga* artist, Kuniyoshi might have been cynical about its comparative prospects in Japan. The same year Kuniyoshi traveled to Japan he was awarded Carnegie Foundation's top prize, won by Picasso the year before. Given his success in the United States, he abandoned any desire to enter the Japanese art world after seeing how different it was from what he was accustomed to. Kuniyoshi's theory that *nihonga* was more favored in Japan seems to have been proven by the success of Obata's Yosemite series rendered in *nihonga* style. But Obata had also entered group shows, where he was awarded prizes, rather than holding a series of solo exhibitions. His previous experience working and showing in Japan had perhaps taught him how to navigate the *gadan* and its institutions, experiences that Kuniyoshi did not have.

In addition to his skepticism about being successful in Japan, the political environment troubled Kuniyoshi. Newspaper headlines trumpeted the expansion of the war in China and Kuniyoshi was disturbed by what he saw as a more dictatorial regime in Japan. As a youth during the Meiji era, Kuniyoshi had been indoctrinated by emperor ideology, but upon his return, he said that he witnessed state oppression. Artist Fujita Tsuguharu visited him in New York prior to Kuniyoshi's departure for the United States. Well known in the Japanese art world, Fujita wrote letters of introduction to the media on Kuniyoshi's behalf. Fujita also recommended that Kuniyoshi pay homage to the imperial palace, but Kuniyoshi ignored the suggestion. Kuniyoshi later said that he felt viewed like a "foreigner" and no longer considered Japan to be "home."<sup>385</sup> When he received word on his way back across the Pacific Ocean that his father had died, Kuniyoshi claimed to have decided at that moment never to return to Japan.

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<sup>385</sup> Unno Hiroshi, "Kuniyoshi Yasuo: Modan sutairu saihô," *Aato* (Winter, 1980) p. 24

The *New Yorker* magazine's "Talk of the Town" section commented on Kuniyoshi's return to Japan to show the "homefolks some pictures."<sup>386</sup> Remarking that this was Kuniyoshi's first visit to Japan in twenty-four years, the column mentioned correspondence between the artist and his friends in New York. Although he claimed to have received acclaim in Osaka and Tokyo, where his paintings were exhibited, he had faced a "little trouble." Since many of Kuniyoshi's canvases were of nudes, local priests protested the paintings based on their pre-show viewings. Although they had not banned the paintings, they insisted that offending portions of them be covered. The tone of the *New Yorker* column made light of Kuniyoshi's exhibition in Japan, while suggesting to an American audience that it was more sophisticated in its handling of nude portraits than parochial Japan. It also confirmed American's ideas of the pervasive spiritual component of Japanese art encounters by electing Buddhist priests as the show's judges. No mention of this anecdote was recorded in Japanese accounts of the show.

The Japanese art world continued to discuss Kuniyoshi after he left. His person made an impact if his paintings had not. After he returned to the United States, influential artist and art critic, Arishima Ikuma, wrote about Kuniyoshi for the art journal *Chûô Bijutsu* in 1934.<sup>387</sup> Fujita Tsuguharu had recommended that Arishima meet Kuniyoshi. Arishima found Kuniyoshi's works simple, good-natured, and humorous – as indeed had many of the American art critics. He thought Kuniyoshi's character affable, which he credited to his coming from the United States. Arishima acknowledged that Kuniyoshi was Japanese, but that he had been influenced by his life in the U.S. In fact, Arishima stated that by meeting Kuniyoshi, he felt that he "learned what was good about America for the first time." This was a "good" country where "good" people lived as

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<sup>386</sup> "Talk of the Town: Honorable Pictures," *The New Yorker* (January 23, 1932)

<sup>387</sup> Arima Ikuma, "Hajimete Kuniyoshi-kun ni atte. Zaibei nihon sakka no shôkai: Kuniyoshi Yasuo," *Chûô Bijutsu* (1934)

evidenced by Kuniyoshi's geniality. However, Arishima suggested that his good humor might also have been a result of his coming from the countryside in Okayama – a place nearly as foreign and exotic to some Tokyoites as the United States.

Shimizu Toshi also wrote about Kuniyoshi for the 1934 edition of *Chûô Bijutsu*, seeking to convince the Japanese readership that his friend was an artist of substance. Before describing how he met Kuniyoshi at the Art Students League, Shimizu wrote of his own history in the United States before he came to New York.<sup>388</sup> Shimizu informed the readership that an art student's hardships in the United States were unimaginable to the Japanese. Kuniyoshi had followed his patron, Hamilton Easter Field, to join a splinter group, Salons of America. Shimizu had opposed this move, but insisted that Kuniyoshi's joining the other art society did not affect their relationship. In Shimizu's diary from this period, he described being very affected by Kuniyoshi's choice. He had earnestly tried to talk him out of it, but failed. Shimizu also wrote in the article of Kuniyoshi's personal life and his marriage to Katherine Schmidt, openly questioning whether the relationship could stand the test of time. By 1934, Kuniyoshi and Schmidt had divorced, confirming Shimizu's skepticism. He explained that Kuniyoshi was on the one hand sentimental, and on the other hand calm and composed. He was, however, naïve about love, a true *mobo*, modern boy.<sup>389</sup>

Painter Foujioka Noboru also wrote an essay on Kuniyoshi. After years spent living in the United States and Paris, exhibiting in New York and the West Coast, Foujioka returned to

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<sup>388</sup> Other than stating that his Seattle classes were "too academic," Shimizu omitted any mention of the years he spent in the Pacific Northwest as a laborer.

<sup>389</sup> Shimizu Toshi, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi-kun," *Mizue* 322, (1931) "Kuniyoshi Yasuo-kun o kataru." Zaigai nihon sakka no shôkai. Chûô Bijutsu Fukkô (June 1, 1934)

Japan in 1934.<sup>390</sup> Foujioka's account of his relationship with Kuniyoshi concerned their experience as students together at the Art Students League. The League's system of management, non-degree curriculum, and free environment was exceptional among American art schools, but had no counterpart at all in Japan. To explain Kuniyoshi, Foujioka wrote, one also had to explain the League.

Few Japanese articles written about Kuniyoshi in the 1930s considered what impact his return had on his future paintings. It was not until the 1980s when Unno Hiroshi mused about Kuniyoshi's paintings of women did he see them as distinctly American and unlike the young women he had seen wandering in Shinjuku.<sup>391</sup> Why, Unno asked, did Kuniyoshi not draw Japanese women when he returned to New York in 1932? When Kuniyoshi toured the American Southwest in the 1940s, the dry and dramatic landscape figured in his paintings. However, he did not paint Okayama, Osaka, or Tokyo after his visits there. Shimizu Toshi returned to Japan and took the style he had adopted in the United States and applied it to Japanese figures and landscape. Noda Hideo also returned and drew Ueno Station instead of Grand Central. For Unno, Kuniyoshi's "return to Japan" experience – his detachment from his place of origin – can be understood by his decision not to sketch or paint what he encountered.

After testing the Japanese art world waters and finding them lukewarm at best, Kuniyoshi retreated to New York, where he had built a successful career as an artist. Unlike Nakayama, he did not find a peer group that he related to in Tokyo. Nor was he inspired to apply Japanese techniques to American content as Obata did. Nakayama and Obata had ties to the Japanese art

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<sup>390</sup> Although there is little record of his activities once he returned, the Los Angeles newspaper *Rafu Shinpo* reported in 1936 that the well-known painter had married a Japanese heiress. "Foujioka Former Resident of L.A.," *Rafu Shinpo* (December 24, 1936)

<sup>391</sup> Unno Hiroshi, "Kuniyoshi Yasuo: shoku modan stairu saihô," *Aato* Vol. 93 (Winter, 1980) p. 28

world and had been trained there before leaving for the United States. Kuniyoshi had no such ties to Japan, but had trained and participated in the American art world. Second-wave artists, who were successful in the American art world and had not secured a place in Japan, did not return there.

### *Shimizu Toshi in Tochigi Prefecture*

Shimizu Toshi's departure from Paris to Tokyo in 1927 can be understood as an example of *nihon-gaeri*: a spiritual, cultural, and ideological return to Japan. He painted farmers in rural Tochigi Prefecture to celebrate what he believed to be authentic Japanese culture found in the countryside. He referred to his time abroad in New York and Paris as a "phase," that, now complete, could be remembered in nostalgic terms. Shimizu was home again, a place that he romanticized in his paintings and writing. Despite his renewed passion for his homeland, Shimizu traveled constantly starting in 1932 with the Japanese imperial army as an army illustrator, painting scenes of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Shimizu's return to Japan was as much a state of mind as it was a physical relocation and entrance into its art world.

Shimizu Toshi was a second-wave artist, but he returned in 1926 to Japan after twenty-one years abroad and embraced Japanese culture, his countryside roots, and nationalist ideology that permeated the early Showa era (1926-1989) political environment. He secured his place in the Japanese art world while living abroad, which allowed him to enter the *gadan* upon his return. But Shimizu's identifying with a "Japanese spirit" and evoking a family lineage of warriors were in step with a nationalist fervor that was beginning to gain momentum. Shimizu never expressed an anti-Western position in his artworks or writing, but he regularly highlighted how difficult it was to live as a Japanese in the United States in his essays and interviews.



Before he returned to Japan in 1926, Shimizu lived in Paris and visited the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain. Shimizu later stated that he had “intended to study in France seventeen years earlier, but instead settled for New York.”<sup>392</sup> He visited museums throughout Europe, seeking out the old masters he had wanted to see in person. Artists he met there like Miyake Kokki anticipated that Shimizu would become one of the most revered Japanese painters in Paris in the vein of Fujita Tsuguharu and Tanaka Yasushi.<sup>393</sup> Shimizu was prolific while in Europe, but did not stay long enough to become enveloped in the art world there. He painted many canvases of café and street scenes in Paris and Madrid, paying close attention to detail in fashion, café signs, and newspaper headlines that underscored the European setting. After working, living and painting abroad for nearly two decades, Shimizu returned to Japan (*kikoku*) in 1926 after being in Europe for less than two years.<sup>394</sup> He had painted numerous works while in Paris and Madrid and had developed sufficient connections among *gadan* members sojourning in Europe that would help him to exhibit his paintings in Tokyo. Shimizu had always intended to return to Japan after painting in Europe and after nineteen years away, he felt ready to go back.

Like photographer Nakayama Iwata, one of the reasons Shimizu elected to stay in Japan permanently was because he was able to integrate in to the art world. He held his first solo exhibition in 1927 in Tochigi, signifying Shimizu’s “glorious homecoming,” (*kokyô ni shiki o*

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<sup>392</sup> Shimizu Toshi quoted in Iwasaki Yoshikazu. "Amerika ni okeru Shimizu Toshi," Shimizu Toshi ten (Tokyo: Musashino Cultural Center, 1991) p. 15

<sup>393</sup> Yaguchi Kunio, "Tokushû Shimizu Toshi – Shimizu Toshi, sono hyôdenteki shiron," Sansai Vol. 315 (March 1974) p. 36

<sup>394</sup> One of Shimizu’s younger brothers who lived in Shanghai at the time facilitated a solo exhibition of his European works at a stopover on his way back to Tokyo. That Japan Club in Shanghai would host another solo exhibition of Shimizu’s works a couple of years later. Shimizu made many more trips throughout the Japanese empire exhibiting his work.

*kazaru*) which so many Japanese who went abroad hoped for.<sup>395</sup> Rather than focusing on solo exhibitions like Kuniyoshi, Shimizu entered the group exhibitions such as the Nikakai and joined art associations. For the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Nikakai exhibition in 1927, he contributed five paintings that he made in Paris along with another solo exhibition at the Tokyo Maru Biru. His participation in the Nikakai exhibitions and winning medals there garnered him attention in art journals and newspapers. In the following year, Shimizu exhibited works at the group exhibitions sponsored by the *Chûô* art journal and another at the Shiseido Gallery in Ginza.<sup>396</sup> Scholar Oka Yoshiaki indicates, however, that Shimizu was dissatisfied with his success. Shimizu wrote in his diary in 1930 that receiving the Nikakai's Chogyû prize was "pathetic."<sup>397</sup> Though better received than Kuniyoshi proved to be, Shimizu expected greater financial and critical acclaim in Japan.

At the time of Shimizu's return to Japan, artists recently returned from France were influenced by the painterly quality and strong colors of the Fauves. Shimizu's paintings were different. His figures revealed no emotional interiority and were not expressionistic, like those of Henri Matisse, who was popular among Japanese painters at the time. Although Shimizu expressed frustration with his reception, art critics commended Shimizu's individual style in their reviews. They enjoyed the vivid colors in his paintings, writing that Shimizu's works were bright and lively.<sup>398</sup> Art critic and painter Miyasaku Masaru wrote about his 1927 submissions to

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<sup>395</sup> Oka Yoshiaki, "Niki ni miru. Shimizu Toshi. Taiô soshite kikoku ato no kiseki," Okawa Museum.

<sup>396</sup> Shimizu's diary after his return, however, reveals signs of depression. He started writing about "life and death matters," most likely concerned about his children's illness upon arrival. Oka Yoshiaki. *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> Oka Yoshiaki. *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> That same reviewer criticized Kuniyoshi's palette as being too brown and dull. Inoue Chôzaburô, "Minshû no ga – Shimizu Toshi," *Bijutsu Gurafu* 2 (August, 1983, Originally printed in 1970)

the Nikakai, saying, “Shimizu Toshi is a person working at a high level in this exhibition. I admire how he skillfully and liberally uses color. Those who appreciate a little more idealized shape and duller colors will be disappointed.”<sup>399</sup> Art critic Hijikata Teiichi recalled seeing Shimizu’s paintings in 1928 at the Maru Biru in Tokyo and being captivated by Shimizu’s unusual use of perspective. He found his breaking the rules of perspective to be “refreshing.”<sup>400</sup> In 1933, Suzuki Yasunori wrote that Shimizu endeavored to capture “Americanism” like the visual form of a short story in his canvases. The paintings were about a people, time, and a place.<sup>401</sup> Others commented that he was a “people’s artist,” because he presented characters that were vibrant and strong and not merely worn down by circumstances.<sup>402</sup> Critics were also drawn to how he painted his figures in a simple, “primitive” manner.<sup>403</sup>

Shimizu continued to mark the location of his paintings after his return to Japan as he had in New York, Paris, and Madrid. When he painted a Japanese woman in kimono having her teeth attended to by a dentist, he included a Japanese flag with the distinctive *hinomaru* flying from the opposite building. The idea for the 1928 dentist painting germinated during his time in the United States, Shimizu said, although it was completed after his return to Japan. Commenting on the image, Shimizu explained that a close friend who was a dentist in New York inspired the

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<sup>399</sup> Miyasaka Masaru, “Nika-kai. (Shimizu Toshi).” *Mizue* (October, 1927)

<sup>400</sup> Hijikata Teiichi, “Shimizu Toshi no hito to sakuhin,” *Shimizu gashû*, (Nichidô shuppan, 1975) pp. 113-114

<sup>401</sup> Suzuki Yasunori writing in *Dokuritsu Bijutsu*, 1933. Reprinted in *Shimizu Toshi ten*. (Musashino City: Musashino shimin bunka kaikan. 1991) pp. 90-91

<sup>402</sup> Many related this quality to Kitagawa Tamiji’s paintings as well. Inoue Chôzaburô, *Ibid*.

<sup>403</sup> Yaguchi Kunio, “Tokushû Shimizu Toshi – Shimizu Toshi, sono hyôdenteki shiron,” *Sansai* 315, (March 1974) p. 33

painting.<sup>404</sup> Shimizu found his friend's probing a beautiful woman's mouth with his tools to be amusing. He saw it as emblematic of the new "machine age" that he lived in. The author Tanizaki Junichirô also wrote of modern dentistry in his 1933 work, In Praise of Shadows. The Japanese, Tanizaki explained, "hate(d) to go to the dentist" because of the "scream of (the) drill" as well as the "excessive glitter of glass and metal (that was) equally intimidating."<sup>405</sup> Thinking of the many *geisha* living in the Shinbashi area of Tokyo, Shimizu captured the scene of a dentist using his cold tools to beautify a woman in traditional Japanese garb as a visual interpretation of the paradoxes characteristic of the modern era. (Figure 47)

Inspired by the Society of Independent Artists in New York, Shimizu became a founder in 1930 of a similar organization in Tokyo called the Independent Arts Association. In 1931, the *Dokuritsu-ten* had its first exhibition, for which he also submitted works.<sup>406</sup> Despite his efforts, Shimizu struggled to find buyers for his paintings. Friends recommended that he find a patron for financial support in exchange for small portraits and landscapes. Shimizu conceded and did the small pieces "only for food."<sup>407</sup> He traveled throughout Japan, meeting with various provincial leaders, doctors, and wealthy individuals who might have an interest in the arts, while hosting solo exhibitions in Kobe, Osaka, and in Manchuria and Korea. In an attempt to legitimate his influences, he wrote essays on the "American Scene" painters like John Sloan and did illustrations for art journals as well.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Shimizu Toshi. "Watashi no sakuhin: kansô," Shimizu Toshi-ten (Musashino City: Musashino Cultural Center, 1991) p. 93

<sup>405</sup> Tanizaki Junichirô, In Praise of Shadows (Leete's Island Books, 1977) p. 12

<sup>406</sup> Shimizu had been a leader among Japanese artist associations both in Seattle and in New York.

<sup>407</sup> Oka Yoshiaki, "Niki ni miru. Shimizu Toshi. Taiô soshite kikoku ato no kiseki," Okawa Museum.

<sup>408</sup> Shimizu Toshi "Beikoku etching kai keni. John Sloan," Chûô Bijutsu Vol. 153, (August, 1928)

*“Resting on the Land” – Shimizu’s Retreat to the Countryside*

By the 1930s, many Japanese were overcome with a sense of nostalgia for a place and time that they imagined had existed before the onslaught of modernity. It was, as Andreas Huyssen describes, one of modernity’s “permanent laments,” this loss of a better past where culture seemed rooted to a particular place, unscathed by the passage of time.<sup>409</sup> Writers, intellectuals, and artists in Japan and elsewhere questioned whether the past was being lost in the tidal wave of the present. The urban landscape represented the center of change that seemed to occur overnight. The city was home to the machine, the factory, and the department store. For many intellectuals, modern society was conceived in terms of the West. Finding Japanese culture before the advent of Western influence became a primary concern. Where was Japan’s “golden age of stability”?<sup>410</sup> Yanagi Sôetsu, among others, found “old Japan” in the countryside among the folk.<sup>411</sup> There, farmers maintained age-old customs to ensure their nation’s harvest. Their simple clothes and hearty lifestyle remained uncorrupted by the West. Commenting on the phenomenon of this mythologizing of the countryside, German philosopher Ernst Bloch described it as a “mythical *enchantment by the soil.*” (Bloch’s italics)<sup>412</sup> He observed that the growing response in Germany to a hatred of rationalization and modernization was a retreat to the country, where in the mythical soil, the disenfranchisement of town could be escaped to.

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<sup>409</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia,” Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) p. 24

<sup>410</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Ibid.* p. 24

<sup>411</sup> See Kim Brandt, Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007)

<sup>412</sup> Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Times (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) p. 49

While Bloch observed that the German countryside held a “seething container of the past,” Japan’s countryside was touted as a receptacle of purity.

Painting scenes of rural life and commenting on those works in terms of a nostalgic past, Shimizu Toshi became complicit with the fascist ideology surrounding the Japanese version of the agrarian mystique, observable in Italy and Germany. The tendency could also be seen in American Regionalist painting, where artists found in the American countryside a similar source of material for a chauvinist and nativist point of view. In fascist regimes, art held the potential for perpetrating and constructing identity. Or, as scholar Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi asserts, art could “respiritualize politics in a time that lacked spiritualism.”<sup>413</sup>

Shimizu Toshi commuted between Tokyo and Tochigi Prefecture after his return to Japan in 1926, but began to spend more time in his hometown in the early 1930s. “I am a country person again,” he announced in the 1933 volume of the journal produced by the Independent Arts Association. Given his family’s holdings and status in the Utsunomiya area of Tochigi, Shimizu might have felt less alienated and more entitled to his place. Suzuki Yasunori commented in 1933 that perhaps after seeing the great cities of New York and Paris, Tokyo tired Shimizu out, and he sought rest in the countryside.<sup>414</sup> Shimizu’s daughter, Tomiko, speculated that since her father’s adult life was spent in foreign countries and cities, he embraced his rural origins more than most.<sup>415</sup> No longer an outsider, a dishwasher, or a shunned foreign national,

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<sup>413</sup> Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, “Politics, Aesthetics and Fascism in the World of Malaparte,” *Malaparte: A House Like Me*. (Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1999) p. 45

<sup>414</sup> Suzuki Yasunori, “Shimizu kun no geijutsu,” *Shimizu Toshi ten* (Musashino City: Musashino shimin bunka kaikan. 1991) p. 91

<sup>415</sup> Nakano Tomiko, “Chichi no omoide,” *Shimizu Toshi ten* (Musashino City: Musashino Cultural Center, 1991), p. 89

Shimizu believed to find in Tochigi his true identity.<sup>416</sup> Shimizu's newfound nationalist fervor was building during this period as well, suggesting that he found the "real Japan" in Tochigi rather than in Tokyo.

Writing about his painting, "At Rest on the Land," (*Chi ni ikou*, 1930), Shimizu professed that his capacity to "appreciate the earth" was hereditary as a farmer's son. Because of this connection, he could authentically relay *inaka* (countryside) culture and landscape. When he thought of the land's "blessings," Shimizu wrote, he became inspired to paint farmers and the terrain they lived on. Although Shimizu wanted his painting to depict something "quiet at its center," he also wanted the image to express strength.<sup>417</sup> In the painting, a father and mother relax after toiling in the fields, while their son stands with a teakettle ready to serve. The father prepares a pipe as his wife extends a helping hand. A patriarchal hierarchy preserved the family unit and, thus, social harmony. In the distance, the hills are cleared and ready to be planted, while a large farmhouse can also be seen. The land in Shimizu's painting promises bounty rather than the uncertainty of annual crop yields. Shimizu not only relished his return to country life, but also saw himself as an active participant in it. With the same exertion of fortitude and diligence,

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<sup>416</sup> Another painter who had been active in New York also rejected Tokyo upon his return to Japan. In 1924, Kodato Gadô 古田士雅堂 (1880-1954) returned after living in New York City for many years. Kodato had also exhibited with Shimizu, Ishigaki Eitarô and Kuniyoshi Yasuo for the "First Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by the Japanese Artists Society of New York City," which took place at the Civic Club. As art historian Tom Wolf has indicated, Gadô created some of the more memorable modernist paintings of New York in the 1920s. Wolf compared his painting, "Subway" (1923) to urban landscape works by Max Weber done in the previous decade.<sup>416</sup> In "Subway," people swarm like bees as they board and disembark the subway. The painting of chaotic, swirling masses, making their way between subway cars in a cave of concrete and steel, was an effective portrait of crowded and frenetic New York. This crush of people might have prompted Gadô to return to the Japanese countryside, despite his early successes in the New York art world. When Gadô returned to his hometown, Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture, in the year after the Great Kantô Earthquake, he imported materials from the United States to build a fabricated home.<sup>416</sup> Kodato's reason for importing the home to the area remains unclear, but there is speculation that he feared a scarcity of building materials following the Kantô earthquake the previous year. There are only a few of Gadô paintings still extant and it is thought he did not do much painting after his return to Tochigi. Retreating from crowds, subways, concrete and steel, Gadô returned to rice fields and wooded hills of Tochigi – to live in an American house.

<sup>417</sup> Shimizu Toshi, Notes on his paintings published by the Dokuritsu Bijutsu in 1933. Reprinted in Shimizu Toshi ten (Musashino City: Musashino shimin bunka kaikan, 1991) p. 93

he considered himself to be a producer of paintings alongside the farmers, who were the producers of the nation's harvest.<sup>418</sup> (Figure 48)

Shimizu's portrait of the countryside as an oasis of tradition was an idealized vision. Tanizaki Junichirô commented on how many older Japanese retreated from cities to the countryside. Writing in 1933, Tanizaki lamented that while Japanese longed for a traditional past and searched for it in the countryside, the country towns were "not much cause for hope either."<sup>419</sup> Whereas Shimizu felt that he had found an idyllic *inaka*, Tanizaki felt that it, too, had been corrupted. There was nowhere one could escape from modernity, he believed. The countryside was becoming more and more like Kyoto, he said, "their streets strung with bright lights."

Unlike Nakayama, who embraced the city's neon signs, Shimizu's paintings of rural Japan had no bright lights or other corrupting elements. Nor were the economic hardships and droughts that plagued the Japanese countryside throughout the 1930s visible in Shimizu's work. Like Yoshida Hiroshi's woodblocks, Shimizu selected views that glorified the landscape. Shimizu, however, showed the "simple" folk, who lived in the *inaka*, toiling on their farms. Whereas Yoshida showed kimono-clad maidens in temple gardens, Shimizu painted families planting rice and chopping wood.

Shimizu Toshi's countryside paintings presented a rejection of the city scenes that he had spent the last two decades painting. His images of rural life were based on those he remembered from his childhood. For a Tokyo inhabitant to view these photos in a Nikakai exhibition in the

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<sup>418</sup> Ernst Bloch also compared the efforts of peasants to painters: "Like the peasants, the painters did their day's work...the soil sprouted, its various fruits were sold in town."

<sup>419</sup> Tanizaki Junichirô, *ibid.* p. 41



1930s, his paintings' subjects might appear to be as distant and foreign as Shimizu's renderings of an American suburb or Parisian café. A Tokyoite might believe that he was observing in Shimizu's paintings the authentic Japan that served and supported the cities. City dwellers rewarded Shimizu's vision by awarding prizes to paintings such as these on exhibition at the 1930 Nikakai. In contrast, second-wave painter Kuniyoshi had not found inspiration in his Okayama hometown and he continued to paint in the same manner as he had before 1931.

During the mid-1930s, Shimizu began to experiment again with stylistic techniques and his rural scenes became more expressionistic and even abstract. However, he had a sense of conservatism not only in subject matter, but also in his formal compositions and touch. Shimizu's artistic career continued to waver between this urge towards innovation and the tether of conservative restraint. In 1974, the art critic Yaguchi Kunio wrote about Shimizu's paintings after he returned to Japan: "Shimizu's person is in his paintings. Shimizu was not merely painting figures of the working masses. In his paintings of common people, there was neither the United States, nor Europe, nor Japan. What became the next journey for Shimizu, the artist, was to understand himself in order to paint 'Japan' in the methodology that he had learned abroad."<sup>420</sup> Yaguchi accepted Shimizu's assertion that the key to understanding him could only be found in Japan, though he spent less than half his adult life there before his death in 1945.

In 1933 the Independent Art Association published a collection of Shimizu's reflections and commentary on his paintings. The paintings he chose to speak about were his more recent creations. Shimizu discussed the works in connection with his personal memories, primarily his youth. For example, when commenting on "Resting on the Land," he began by describing his

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<sup>420</sup> Yanagi Kunio, "Tokushû Shimizu Toshi – Shimizu Toshi, sono hyôdenteki shiron," *Sansai* 315, (March 1974) p. 37

family.<sup>421</sup> He described his mother as *haikara*, or stylish in the Western sense. His grandmother, however, was a large-built woman who probably inspired the female figure in “At Rest on the Land.” She had taken her young grandson to the fields with her. During rest periods, she would cradle Shimizu while he drank milk. The smell of the earth, mowed bean sprouts, and milk invoked this past for Shimizu, he commented. Hence, Shimizu’s personal mythology of being born and raised from the soil became mixed with primal memories of the distant past.

With the Depression, money became scarce and life difficult for the Shimizu family. Writing in May of 1930, Shimizu had become tired of hearing about the depression wherever he went. “Today is the fourth day of continuing discomfort,” he wrote in August of 1930. “I cannot continue to produce works easily in a day...I well know that all the money coming in is to ward off our hunger. I must muddle through and endure the unpleasantness until the end of this month.” Furthermore, despite the hardship and depravation, Shimizu disliked the commission work he was required to do for money. Soon thereafter, the imperial army dispatched Shimizu to China as an illustrator of its military campaigns. While traveling with the military, Shimizu replaced the Japanese farmer with Chinese, Mongolian, and South Pacific islander peasants. As a promoter of Japan’s Greater Co-Prosperity Sphere, he painted the continent’s countryside and farmers who were becoming new subjects of the Japanese empire. Shimizu’s *nihon-gaeri* in terms of support for the Japanese military did not falter, but he found in Mongolia and the South Pacific traditional cultures that supplemented the Tochigi countryside in his romanticized renditions of authentic peasant life.

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<sup>421</sup> Shimizu, Toshi, “Watashi no sakuhin – kansô,” *Dokuritsu bijutusu*. Volume 9, *Dokuritsu kyôkai*. 1933, (Reprinted in *Shimizu Toshi-ten* (Musashino City: Musashino Cultural Center, 1991) p. 93-94

*Conclusion*

All of the artists in this study intended to return one day to Japan. None of them left Japan to start families and establish families in the U.S. Instead, the first-wave hoped to sell their artworks and the second-wave wanted to save enough money to return to Japan. They believed whatever money they could collect would bring better opportunities, which meant that none of them completely severed the ties with Japan. Regardless of families, homes, livelihoods established in the U.S., they would at one point try out living in Japan again. Even Kuniyoshi Yasuo might have spent more time there if he had been successful: the U.S. was mired in Depression, his marriage was ending, and he returned with a curiosity to discover what role Japan still had in his life. Their image of the U.S. was one of financial opportunity, but none believed it to be their final home.

As a result of this openness to return and the portability of their profession, almost all the artists went back to Japan at some point. Their reception as artists was the most significant factor in deciding whether to stay permanently. Ishigaki Eitarô was the outlier. He did not return to Japan until after World War II, but not because he was settled in New York. Rather, Ishigaki feared the political environment in Japan and its aggressive wars in East Asia. Leftist friends wrote to him from prison cells informing him of the conditions socialists faced. The significance of the artists continued ties to Japan – whether physically or in their imagination – is that they did not have a particular esteem for the United States either. We cannot surmise that the artists worked in the U.S. because it was a better, freer place for artists. It was simply a better option than anywhere else, a place that artists were successful in and a site for international camaraderie.

## Chapter 6: World War II

### *Introduction*

On December 8, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan following the attack on Pearl Harbor. By 1941, Shimizu Toshi had been working as an illustrator for the war effort in China for ten years. He traveled through Mongolia, Manchuria, and the South Pacific islands as well as Korea and Taiwan until 1944. Relying on commissioned work for income, the photographer Nakayama Iwata remained in Kobe throughout the war photographing its urban cosmopolitanism. Neither a supporter nor a dissenter, Nakayama inhabited the fantastical worlds he created in his studio.

Kuniyoshi Yasuo and Ishigaki Eitarô remained in New York during the war years. Although identified as enemy aliens and subjected to surveillance, they continued to work, paint, and lead anti-fascist art organizations. Both participated in numerous group shows and solo exhibitions. Kuniyoshi served the Allied war effort by creating posters of Japanese military brutality for the Office of War Information. Privately, he continued to paint portraits of women, distraught about the war that raged around them. Instead of making government posters, Ishigaki created images focused on civilian suffering. Both Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki illustrated a war fought thousands of miles away, but one that had entered the artists' emotional lives. The war became the central subject of their paintings, but did not halt their productivity.

Japanese artists on the West Coast were not as fortunate. By Executive Order 9066, they were forced to relocate to internment camps beginning in February 1942. Obata Chiura continued to paint and teach art inside the camps, but like other internee artists was isolated from the wider art world. He painted majestic landscapes of the desert surrounding the Topaz camp in

Wyoming. Retaining his *nihonga* style, Obata also created a visual diary of camp life, where the majority of internees were U.S. born citizens. Another internee, Miyatake Tôyô, photographed daily life in the camps, but abandoned his abstract modernist compositions to focus on the generational divides among internees as well as their attempt to recreate a normal life inside barbed wire. Their work became absorbed by their immediate reality rather than by battles waged far away.

### ***World War II in Japan: Shimizu Toshi and Nakayama Iwata***

#### ***1. Shimizu Toshi***

Shimizu Toshi joined the Japanese imperial army as an illustrator in China in 1932, perhaps because of the military aspirations he had in his youth.<sup>422</sup> The Japanese military had sent artists to sketch battlefields during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), but the scale of the fifteen years war (1931-1945) with China expanded to include more than 400 artists to create “war paintings” (*sensôga*).<sup>423</sup> Shimizu volunteered to join the war effort in its early stages. The military assigned him to Shanghai in January, one of the first direct military engagements between China and Japan after the Manchurian Incident of 1931. Shimizu spent four months touring battle sites in the Shanghai area including Suzhou. He returned to Shanghai in 1937 after the war began between China and Japan, staying for several months until he returned to Tokyo in 1938 to attend an exhibition of his war sketches. In October

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<sup>422</sup> Shimizu Toshi's younger brother, Kiyoshi (1900-1969), who was also a painter and moved to New York at his brother's invitation, participated in China relief exhibitions and leftist artist shows throughout the 1930s and war years. Kiyoshi remained in New York until his death and never saw Toshi after the day he set sail to Paris. There is no indication that Kiyoshi had the same military ambitions or admiration that his older brother had.

<sup>423</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment: Japanese Painting During the Fifteen-Year War,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Summer 1997) p. 146

of 1938, Shimizu left for China again to cover the battle in Wuhan and the invasion of Hankou.<sup>424</sup>

Artists participating in Japan's war effort maintained a "busy schedule."<sup>425</sup> Several exhibitions of Shimizu's sketches of the conflict opened in various Japanese cities: Takashimaya Department Store in Nihonbashi hosted a show followed by the Sumitomo Club in Osaka. Given how many department stores and culture halls held exhibitions of "Holy War" paintings, Shimizu enjoyed as much exposure during the war as at any point in his career. After struggling through the Depression, the war provided secure income for him and his family. Given his early desire to join the military, participation in multiple campaigns, and writing extolling the army's virtues, economic considerations were probably not the only factor in his decision to join.

Although Shimizu toured battle sites to sketch the military, he often drew the local civilian population as well. His portrayals of their lives showed them functioning as "normal" without signs of the nearby battles depicted in his illustrations. While in Borneo, he drew pictures of local women making food, weaving baskets, and tending to small children, while men chopped down trees. These scenes were reminiscent of the country people Shimizu illustrated around his home in Tochigi. Social harmony in the family was maintained by hard, physical labor in the countryside. His scenes of exotic locales could have been tourist sketches. In a painting from his first dispatch to Shanghai in 1932, Shimizu painted a group of Japanese nursery school children accompanied by their teachers wearing kimono. The group waits at a

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<sup>424</sup> Accompanied by twenty other artists, one of Shimizu's commissions was to visit a military hospital in the outskirts of Nanking to create portraits of decorated soldiers there.

<sup>425</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Ibid.* p. 145

street corner, while members of the Japanese military protect them as they cross. The scene is placid and mundane in its everydayness.

Although painters were expected to “document” what they saw in the field, Shimizu’s early war paintings did not show battles. Most of his military figures appear to be preparing for some future skirmish, as in “Military Encampment (1932),” or are looking at maps and planning strategy. In his 1932 series, Shimizu’s only painting of the costs of war is of an ambulance with nurses and doctors taking care of and bandaging wounded Chinese civilians. In paintings of Nanjing in 1937, he showed men posing on bridges, their backs to the viewer. Shimizu paid close attention to the details of the bridge structure at the center of the work; soldiers are seen at a distance and there is no sign of Chinese civilians. Shimizu’s early depictions of the war possessed the same stylistic components seen in his Tochigi countryside paintings of the 1930s, undulating green hills, expressionless and stiff figures, and geometric forms rendered in an *yōga* style. (Figure 49)

During 1935 and 1936 while in north China, Shimizu did a series of paintings of a nomadic Mongolian family. Their faces are ochre and outlined in thick black. His brushstrokes had become broader and coarser; the cheerful blues, reds and pinks of his New York and Parisian paintings are gone. Where the Tochigi landscape was green, the northern Chinese plains were harsh and dry. The barren landscape seemed to inspire Shimizu to paint in a more expressive manner, concentrating on texture and form, rather than color. (Figure 50)

Shimizu’s works became more abstract as the war went on: he illustrated debris from battlefields in the manner of Cubist still-lives reminiscent of Braque and Picasso. Sometimes the backgrounds seem almost like an Indonesian batik, which he might have seen during his journeys to Southeast Asia during the war. For over twenty years, Shimizu had made figurative

paintings with simple lines and bright colors. He had been concerned with architectural details and fashion. Now, Shimizu became more interested in abstract, geometric forms and the mere suggestion of his subjects.

Beginning in 1942, Shimizu again transformed his technique to a photo-realist style. He painted several canvases of robust and muscular Japanese soldiers building a bridge in Malaysia, protecting an oil field, as well as an army advancing over a hill. When viewed with his more abstract works, Shimizu's paintings during this period seem to be pulling at opposite ends of the stylistic pole. While he painted the most abstract and experimental works of his career, he also painted idealized hyper-realistic scenes of battles. Most likely, military officers insisted upon this "documentary" quality.<sup>426</sup> Paintings of Japanese soldiers as well-supplied, robust and capable figures boosted morale for gallery viewers in Tokyo. Skills learned in drawing the human figure that he gained with Fokko Tadama in Seattle reemerged in his figures of Japanese soldiers, the harsh tropical light, and the general fluidity of the action. (Figure 51)

Although he wrote in his diary about seeing a plane explode in one campaign in the south of China, Shimizu said little about the event and made almost no mention of battle scenes he may have witnessed. Scholar Oka Yoshiaki explained Shimizu's detachment from the violence of the battlefield as a result of his physical separation from the troops and action. While on these military tours, he stayed in hotels, traveled to scenic areas, and sampled local cuisine.<sup>427</sup> Tours became like social events for artists like Nakamura Kenichi and Fujita Tsuguharu, who traveled

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<sup>426</sup> Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Ibid.* p. 154

<sup>427</sup> Oka Yoshiaki, "Nikki ni miru: Shimizu Toshi taiô soshite kikoku ato no kisei," Okawa Museum.



to the occupied territories with Shimizu.<sup>428</sup> By 1944, however, the government began rationing art supplies even for military illustrators.

Shimizu's active participation and support for the Japanese war effort has been difficult for some scholars to reconcile given his devotion to his family, international coterie of friends, and paintings that express a humanist point of view.<sup>429</sup> Matsume Shôkô criticized Shimizu biographers like Hijikata Teiichi for emphasizing the image of Shimizu as a cosmopolitan, loving father, and humanist, rather than considering his war record.<sup>430</sup> Matsume compared Shimizu to Kuniyoshi Yasuo, asking why two artists who shared many of the same influences and experiences in the West could have had such a different reaction to the war.<sup>431</sup>

In a meeting among war illustrators discussing their experiences in the battlefield with journalists, painter Kobayakawa Atsushirô 小早川篤四郎(1893-1959) praised Shimizu's bravery. Shimizu responded to Kobayakawa's praise, saying, "Everyone - soldiers too - is the same. When you hear a loud blast go off, somehow you become brave," suggesting that the artist identified himself with the soldiers. Hijikata explained Shimizu's war record as a result of his being overcome by the "dark shadow of fascism." Given his youthful desire to enter the army,

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<sup>428</sup> Nanpô gakushin. Daitôa sensô (Rikugun bijutsu kyôkai: September, 1942) Fujita was one of the more active members of this effort, participating in multiple trips overseas, exhibiting works, and holding conferences to discuss ways artists could contribute to the war effort.

<sup>429</sup> For example, as scholar Yaguchi Kunio has pointed out, Shimizu's diary written during his New York and Europe periods expressed little information about his emotional life, much less his ideas about painting. It was more of a day-to-day record of expenses, meetings, and errands. Yaguchi indicated that what was clear, however, was his devotion to his wife and son, Ikuo. He created many portraits of Noriko and his son throughout the New York and Paris periods. In addition, Shimizu wrote many entries describing his day's adventures with Ikuo. He often took him to see art exhibitions as well as errands and play dates in parks and zoos. His diary revealed how Ikuo - and then his daughter, Fumiko, born in Japan - were treasured parts of Shimizu's life. Yaguchi has suggested that his relationships with his family reveal that Shimizu was, in fact, a family-oriented, but introverted individual. Sansai Vol. 3, No. 315 (March, 1974) p. 39

<sup>430</sup> Matsume Shôkô, "Kaette kita Urashima Tarô: Gaka - Shimizu Toshi," Kôzô Vol. 8, (1989) pp. 24-33

<sup>431</sup> Matsume does not mention, however, that Shimizu had expressed a desire to join the military from an early age while Kuniyoshi left for the United States to avoid conscription following the Russo-Japanese War. Matsume Shôkô Kôzô (1989) p. 30

his early signing on as a military illustrator, and his encouragement of his young son to join the military in its final throes, Shimizu seemed to have been a willing participant and supporter, not a passive victim.

In 1944, his son Ikuo departed for the front as a member of the navy. He died in battle at sea that year, but Shimizu was not informed of his death until 1945. Shimizu wrote after hearing of his son's death:

“Ikuo, who never dreamed of being a soldier, died for Greater East Asia and for the emperor, as a splendid navy soldier. However, I am still alive – the one who had wanted to be in the military since I was a young boy, failed the exam, and stumbled about as an artist. It is ironic. The prestige of the house of Shimizu that has ancestors who were retainers of Toyotomi during the Tenshō era, will shine brighter with Ikuo.”<sup>432</sup>

Soon after writing this, Shimizu composed a short biography of his son's life as well as drew portraits of Ikuo with what scraps of paper he found after the surrender. Shimizu's daughter remembered that her father tried to remain bright and lively in front of his family, but would visit her brother's grave for hours before returning home at night.<sup>433</sup> Six months after Japan surrendered to the Allies, Shimizu Toshi died on December 7 at his family home in Tochigi.

### *Nakayama Iwata*

After Nakayama Iwata moved to Ashiya in 1930, he established a photography studio that Masuda Rei has referred to as “Nakayama's own small world.” In his studio, Nakayama photographed shells and butterflies that were taken out of their natural setting. Nakayama wrote

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<sup>432</sup> Ueno Kenji, "Shimizu Toshi-ten," *Bijutsu Techō* No. 467, (July 1980)

<sup>433</sup> Nakano Tomiko, "Chichi no omoide," *Shimizu Toshi ten* (Musashino Cultural Center, 1991). Although his remains had not been recovered, his grave held a fingernail and piece of hair that he left prior to going to war. P. 89

about his photographs, saying, “I like beautiful things. If I am unlucky and there is nothing really beautiful around to photograph, I make something ugly be beautiful.”<sup>434</sup> Photographed with a spare background in his studio, his subjects were removed from their context like objects in his still lifes.<sup>435</sup> By the early 1940s, his images were abstractions, such as “Adam” and “Eve” (1940), and were non-representational. (Figure 52)

When Nakayama first took to the streets of Kobe in 1933 with his camera, he ventured outside his isolated studio world. In addition to capturing its international character, Nakayama’s early 1930s images of Kobe showed it as a city where tradition mixed with modern industry and commerce. His images presented the intersection of modern and traditional life in the Japanese urban experience. Many of Nakayama’s Kobe images were montages of summer festivals superimposed onto department stores. His photomontages suggest how modernity and tradition literally overlap and merge into the other without distinctive borders. The Kobe photographs capture a particular Japanese experience rather than his experimental, abstract images (for example, the photograms) that can be interpreted as modernist works with no national identification. (Figure 53)

Nakayama’s abstract works were similar to photographs taken in Paris, Berlin, London, and Los Angeles during the 1920s and 1930s. His earlier cabaret scenes also took a universal view of the modern experience: his compositions might include a blonde cabaret dancer or a Japanese one, French hotel matchbooks were tossed on bars next to shots of whisky. His photographs of café nightlife could be found in any city from Shanghai to Chicago. As the 1930s continued, Nakayama’s images of Kobe have a less abstract and dreamlike quality; they show a

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<sup>434</sup> Masuda Rei, “Nakayama Iwata to Kobe ni tsuite,” *Art Ramble* Quarterly Report, Volume 2, (2004) p. 4

<sup>435</sup> Masuda Rei, *Ibid.* p. 4

city that is an unthreatening combination of tradition (waterfalls on the city's perimeter) and brick buildings (Western and modern) at its center. Whereas he had overlapped these two ideas in 1933 and thus collapsed their categories, Nakayama's photographs of Kobe in 1939 showed how the two worlds lived together – but separately – in the Japanese metropolis. His Kobe photographs show Nakayama contemplating Japan's experience with modernity and how it shaped the tempo and appearance of its metropolitan centers.

Nakayama had been living and working in Kobe for ten years after his return from Europe when the municipal government hired him to take photos of the city to promote tourism in 1939.<sup>436</sup> Unlike his earlier Kobe images, the commissioned series were straight images of municipal buildings, shopping districts, and the harbor. He did not use any type of artistic device such as photomontage techniques to comment on the subject matter. Where his studio images like "Eve" became more abstract, his commissioned Kobe series was flat. When the series traveled to Tokyo, it was not well reviewed by critics, perhaps because they were used to Nakayama's more experimental techniques. (Figure 54)

In a 1940 essay about the Kobe series, Nakayama described the city as a "cosmopolitan" (*kosumoporitan*) center. In addition to his being a non-Kobe native, Nakayama's experience living abroad had endeared him to the Kobe tourism bureau, which believed he could capture the city's international atmosphere to promote domestic travel. When he took to Kobe's streets, Nakayama approached them from a tourist's point of view. Whereas Shimizu approached Tochigi's landscape as an insider, a person "born of its earth", Nakayama adopted the position of

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<sup>436</sup> The Kobe series traveled throughout Japan's major cities and received mixed reviews from critics in Tokyo. After air raids during the war flattened the city and it was once again devastated during the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake, the photographs have received greater attention by scholars and curators as documents of a vanished past. During the 1980s, writers returned to "Nakayama's Kobe" as a site of a unique blending of art deco architecture, Continental European interiors design, and modernist qualities that had been previously overlooked.

outsider. Kobe's morning fog, Nakayama wrote, had the "quiet of an Arabian mosque."<sup>437</sup> Nakayama compared Kobe to Paris; some of its streets had the old-style streetlights, Mozart's music coming from store windows, and "brunettes and blondes" walking the streets. Masuda Rei wrote that Nakayama found aspects of the city that locals might not have consider as photo-worthy, buildings that residents did not regard as special, but might seem unusual to most Japanese.<sup>438</sup>

During the war years in the 1940s, Nakayama retreated again to the confines of his studio where he created abstract works and commissioned portraits. He continued to photograph shells and butterflies, but his images appear more plastic, and less dreamlike compared to earlier images. Headless female torsos with sea objects seem almost like department store displays, rather than experimental compositions. After Japan's surrender, Nakayama revealed how the impact of the war on the landscape in which he lived. Void of people, Nakayama shot broken buildings, debris, and the ashes of war. These works have a documentary quality as if Nakayama wanted to record the devastation without his normal aesthetic comment.

While many Japanese photographers during the 1930s were drawn to "straight," or documentary, images, Nakayama's position as a modernist, abstract photographer was still tenable due to his innovative techniques. After the war, however, surrealist works fell out of fashion and depicting "reality" was more pressing. Nakayama's work lost favor with critics and he was able to maintain his studio only by creating commissioned portraits.

World War II did not halt Shimizu and Nakayama's productivity. In fact, it aided Shimizu's, because he earned a steady income for his participation in military expeditions. But as

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<sup>437</sup> Nakayama Iwata, "Kosumoporitan Kobe," (1940). Reprinted in *Hikari no dandiizumu*. (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987) p. 93

<sup>438</sup> Masuda Rei, *Ibid.* p. 5

Japan's defeat drew near and its cities were subjected to regular aerial bombs and suffered from lack of resources, Shimizu and Nakayama shared in Japan's loss to the Allies. The toll the war took on Shimizu and Nakayama brought an abrupt end to their art and their lives.

### ***World War II in New York: Kuniyoshi Yasuo and Ishigaki Eitarô***

#### *Kuniyoshi*

In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kuniyoshi was forced to live under house arrest in New York until he was cleared of suspicion and released by the F.B.I. Friends and colleagues stepped forward to write letters to the U.S. government on his behalf testifying to his abhorrence of the Japanese attack and his allegiance to the Allied cause.<sup>439</sup> Kuniyoshi also wrote a series of letters to government officials professing his loyalty to the United States as well as his opposition to Japanese aggression. Although his house arrest was eventually suspended, his assets were seized and his movements monitored. He was afraid to leave his home unescorted and did not ride subways alone, fearing anti-Japanese violence.<sup>440</sup>

Kuniyoshi stated that the attack on Pearl Harbor had “woken him from a dream” and he had to face the crises of the global situation.<sup>441</sup> The shift in his portraits of women and their emotional state reflected his own awakening to the crisis. One of Kuniyoshi's wartime paintings,

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<sup>439</sup> Ogura Tadao, *Ibid.* p. 9

<sup>440</sup> Alexandra, Munroe, “The War Years and Their Aftermath: 1940-1953,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi: tanjô 100nen kinen – nyû yôku no yûshû (Tokyo Teien Art Museum, December, 1989) p. 38

<sup>441</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Some scholars have suggested that Kuniyoshi's paintings of women were actually self-portraits; Kuniyoshi could reveal his interior world by way of the female figure. In a painting called “Alone,” (1938), a woman sits, legs sprawled, smoking a cigarette while reading *Atelier* magazine. *Atelier* was a popular Japanese art journal published in the 1930s that Kuniyoshi read to stay informed about the Japanese art world. In another painting of a female figure, but in this case a mannequin, lay horizontal on a chair. The painting, “Lay Figure,” (1938) shows the doll posed with a newspaper with the upside down markings “1906,” the year Kuniyoshi migrated to the United States.

“Season Ended,” (1940-1945) shows a woman wearing a t-shirt and tights, leaning up against a chair, reading a newspaper. Kuniyoshi used a color palette of browns and grays, heightening the somber mood. Her eyes closed, a newspaper with a headline reading “Nazis,” dangles from her hand as though she cannot bear to read it anymore. Although Kuniyoshi had been active in anti-fascist activities in the New York art world, it was not until the bombing of Pearl Harbor that he felt personally implicated in global affairs.

Turning again to the female model to express his “internal feelings,” his paintings after 1941 display melancholy, tension, and anxiety.<sup>442</sup> The women whom Kuniyoshi painted in the 1930s were female refugees driven to the big city by poverty in rural areas.<sup>443</sup> During the war he shifted from portrayals of women living through the Great Depression who looked downcast and forlorn to women overcome by sadness and uncertainty about the future. Kuniyoshi’s palette darkened and the brushstrokes were rougher. He painted more facial close-ups to emphasize an emotional state, rather than their whole figure dressed in slips and stockings. As Alexandra Munroe has noted, Kuniyoshi’s women of the 1930s exuded eroticism despite their malaise; the women painted during the war years express ennui, anguish, and sorrow.<sup>444</sup> Sex was no longer at the forefront of Kuniyoshi’s mind. (Figure 55)

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<sup>442</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Writings: Artist Statements, 1944,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>443</sup> Ichikawa Masanori “Kuniyoshi Yasuo no geijutsu – uchi naru kokkyô,” Kuniyoshi Yasuo ten. Amerika to nihon. futatsu no sekai no aida de (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 2004) p. 17

<sup>444</sup> Alexandra Munroe, *Ibid.* p. 39

Writing in 1987 about Kuniyoshi's career, Ogura Tadao described the war years as the most trying period of the artist's life.<sup>445</sup> Ogura claimed that Kuniyoshi was troubled by having to choose sides between his ancestral homeland and the home of his art. An immediate and outspoken supporter of Allied efforts, Kuniyoshi did not appear conflicted about which side he supported in the war, despite Ogura's claim that he was torn between the two countries. A few days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Kuniyoshi wrote a letter to friend and artist George Biddle (1885-1973), saying,

“As you probably realize, the world condition as it is today, has in my particular case, produced a very awkward and trying situation. A few short days has (sic) changed my status in this country, although I myself have not changed at all.”<sup>446</sup>

As a member of the Committee of Japanese Artists Living in New York City, Kuniyoshi signed his name to a “declaration of loyalty” letter, stating that he supported the national defense of the U.S. as an “artist and as a man,” whether that meant utilizing his artistic skills for the war effort or “taking up arms.”<sup>447</sup> He believed that to support the Allied effort against Japan was to support the Japanese people, who he felt were victims of Japanese militarists. As chairman of the Arts Council of Japanese Americans for Democracy, Kuniyoshi made a public denunciation of the “brutal and depraved behavior of Japanese Fascists” against both Americans prisoners of war

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<sup>445</sup> Ogura Tadao, “Kuniyoshi Yasuo no hito to geijutsu – Amerika to Nihon,” Kuniyoshi Yasuo: tokubetsu-ten. (Fukutake Collection, Shibuya kuritsu shôtô bijutsukan, 1987) p. 9

<sup>446</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi “Draft letter to artist George Biddle, 11 December 1941, regarding his status in the United States four days after the attack on Pearl Harbor,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>447</sup> “Declaration of Loyalty: Committee of Japanese Artists Resident in New York City, 1941,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Chûzo Tamotsu, Suzuki Sakari, and four others signed the letter. Kuniyoshi also wrote individual “declaration of loyalty” letters to New York Mayor Fiorillo La Guardia and U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle.



and the Japanese public alike.<sup>448</sup> He went on to decry domestic groups promoting peace with Japan, stating that the Arts Council supported only “unconditional surrender” and that anything less would preserve fascism.

In spring of 1942, Kuniyoshi wrote about unity among Chinese, Russians, British, and Americans to fight against the forces of “tyranny and oppression.”<sup>449</sup> In his statement, he recalled his return to Japan in 1931, when he felt “strange and unnatural,” with the understanding that he “no longer belonged” there. He went on to claim that Japanese in the United States all felt like this, whether they had been born in Japan or not. They had grown accustomed to the American “democratic way of living,” and condemned the “Japanese militarists in their bloody plunge for imperialistic power.” Although he also wrote of his early associations with Japan as a “beautiful country with flowers and pines,” and as a place of “custom, tradition and culture,” he believed this country to be threatened by its military. Where Kuniyoshi had determined during his visit to Japan that he was, in fact, a Japanese, it was during the war years that he began to articulate feelings of alienation from Japan so explicitly. Whether Kuniyoshi believed that after the war was over and the militarists routed, he could return to his “old” Japan or not, is unknown. But it was during the war years and the years following that he – and other Japanese artists – started labeling themselves “Japanese Americans.”

As an extension of its project to better understand the Japanese so as to more effectively combat them, the Office of War Information (OWI) recruited Kuniyoshi Yasuo to record radio broadcasts to be played in Japan to persuade the people to rebel against their government. The

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<sup>448</sup> “Japanese Here in Protest: Arts Council Decries Atrocities Against Captive Americans,” New York Times (February 14, 1944)

<sup>449</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Arts Council of Japanese Americans for Democracy, 1942-1944,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

project was called “Japan Against Japan,” with Kuniyoshi representing one of the Japan sides. His address targeted the art and intelligentsia community in Japan.<sup>450</sup> Writing his statement in English, which was then translated into Japanese for the broadcast, he created an idealized picture of an egalitarian society in the United States. He also refuted the idea that he had heard while visiting Japan that the “world’s races” had gathered in the U.S. because of “money madness,” rather than to take advantage of the freedom Kuniyoshi believed it offered.

Mentioning artists like Max Ernst and Marc Chagall who fled Europe for the United States, where they could work freely, he suggested to his listeners that they, too, should not blindly follow their leaders, but reject them. Kuniyoshi most likely evoked European artists to catch the attention of his listeners, who cared more about the European art world than they did about the American. He attempted to convince his listeners that they belonged to a world community of artists, rather than to a national one within Japanese borders. Kuniyoshi also pointed out that the Committee of Japanese Artists resident in New York had pledged loyalty to the United States in a letter to President Roosevelt and that they believed the Japanese militarist clique to represent a “dire threat to all mankind.” Kuniyoshi’s appeal to the artist community in Japan reflected his own experience of success in a country where he had begun as a menial laborer and became a renowned artist.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Radio Broadcast, Japan Against Japan, 1942,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>451</sup> For propagandistic purposes, however, he refrained from expressing his feelings of uncertainty about censorship and artistic chauvinism that he was then facing in the United States.

In addition to the radio broadcasts, Kuniyoshi worked as a war poster illustrator for the OWI.<sup>452</sup> The director of the OWI, Archibald MacLeish, instructed Kuniyoshi to create images that would “describe the enemy more fully.”<sup>453</sup> Although he denied any unique knowledge of Japan claiming, “I read the same newspapers as you do,” he attempted to illustrate its military. One of his drawings for a prospective poster showed a warrior wearing samurai armor from Japan’s middle ages. Kuniyoshi’s drawing suggested that Japanese culture had a long military history and culture, which had a led to the present conflict.

The OWI wanted a more “journalistic” feel that would document the current situation, however, and they rejected this early submission. The OWI selected two of Kuniyoshi’s other posters: one featured a man seen from the back with his wrists bound with rope and another of a woman who had been stabbed with a bayonet while a child sat by her side. ShiPu Wang has suggested that Kuniyoshi made an effort not to identify the villains or victims in terms of racial characteristics. Instead, they became illustrations of humanity’s capacity for evil, rather than a specific national version – a reversal from his earlier drawings of the samurai. In “Torture,” the victim’s national or ethnic identity is unclear: he could be an Australian, American, or Chinese prisoner of war. (Figure 56)

In 1942, *The New Yorker* magazine proclaimed Kuniyoshi as a Japanese who was doing his “damnedest” to help the United States in its war against Japan.<sup>454</sup> Identifying him as a long time “anti-Japanese man” ever since Japan started its invasion of China in the previous decade,

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<sup>452</sup> ShiPu Wang’s article, “Japan against Japan: U.S. Propaganda and Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Identity Crisis,” for *American Art* journal (2008) pp. 38 – 51 covers Kuniyoshi’s efforts for the Office for War Information in depth. I will not handle in detail the material that he covered here.

<sup>453</sup> Alexandra Munroe, *Ibid.* p. 39

<sup>454</sup> Wang, *ibid.* “Talk of the Town: Telling Tokio,” *The New Yorker* (March 28, 1942)

the article lauded the painter for helping the war effort. The article quoted one of Kuniyoshi's broadcasts to the Japanese public:

“I wish to tell you about the life and beliefs of an artist of your own race who lives in a much brighter place in every way than your own land. My eyes are opened on broader horizons in the United States than are the eyes of those who sit on one little island, seeing only one little sky.”

Kuniyoshi's short stature betrayed his Japanese heritage, the writer noted, but he also pointed out that his speech and clothing were “purely American.” A photograph attached in Time magazine in 1942 showed artists George Grosz, Jon Corbino, and Kuniyoshi posing in front of a large mural of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito, which they had prepared for the Art Students League United Nations Ball.<sup>455</sup> The article is typical of the *New Yorker* editor's playful writing style, but it was also a sardonic portrayal of artists of Axis ethnic origins demeaning their home culture.

At the close of the war, there was a large influx of students to the Art Students League, thanks in part to the G.I. Bill, and the number of students in Kuniyoshi's classes doubled, helping his financial situation.<sup>456</sup> According to Ishigaki, Kuniyoshi enjoyed an easy lifestyle with an apartment in the city, a country home in Woodstock, a car, and a steady salary.<sup>457</sup> Nevertheless, a feeling of anxiety persisted in Kuniyoshi's work at the end of the war and into the late 1940s. Critics and other artists believed that his work had changed, though Kuniyoshi claimed it was unintentional. At the time, Kuniyoshi responded that his work might have become sadder,

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<sup>455</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>456</sup> Kuniyoshi claimed in 1953 that he did not like teaching, despite his popularity as a teacher. According to his pupil, Mary Meixner, Kuniyoshi reportedly claimed in 1953 that he “only teach(es) to earn money. I am a painter. I don't like to teach.” He compared the art teaching profession to cooking lessons: “Some hire a thirty dollar cook; they can't afford me. Some hire a five hundred dollar cook, a fancy cook. It is the same in art. Some want a thirty-dollar, cut-and-dried lesson.” If a student did not heed his comments on the opening day and made a “technical error,” Meixner claimed that he would “glare” at them and say, “I told you (how to do) that the first day.”

<sup>457</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, “Zaibei Nihonjin gaka no seikatsu-hô,” Geijutsu Shincho 3, No. 5 (May, 1952)

because of his experience in the war years. In his memoir, however, he recorded that his explanation was not completely truthful, but that he felt compelled to offer some kind of explanation for the shift others commented on.<sup>458</sup> In the past, Kuniyoshi stated, people accused him of being a “cynic.” He did not agree at the time, but in 1944 he was beginning to accept that he might be cynical about the state of the world. In fact, he believed that he was becoming “morbid,” stemming from “frustration” and seeing only the “darker side of life.”

### *Ishigaki Eitarô*

Following the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Japanese artists who were living in Europe started to arrive in New York on their way back to Japan. Ishigaki and Kuniyoshi regularly went to the New York docks to greet and help them while they were in New York. Painters Miyamoto Saburô 宮本 三郎(1905-1974), Kawabata Minoru 川端実(1911-2001), Oka Shikanosuke 岡鹿之助 (1898-1978), and thirty other Japanese artists left the European battlegrounds for the United States.<sup>459</sup> Although Ishigaki had never visited Paris and Kuniyoshi had not traveled there for many years, their willingness to help indicates the bonds among Japanese artists living abroad. The community relied on one another in the twenties and thirties when there were financial difficulties and they continued to do so during the war.

At the recommendation of Pearl Buck, Ishigaki’s wife Ayako conducted a series of anti-war lectures throughout the United States in the late 1930s. She gave talks on Japanese art and

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<sup>458</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Preliminary Notes for Autobiography, 1944,” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>459</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, Umi o wattata ai no gakka: Ishigaki Eitarô no shôgai (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobo, 1988) pp. 173-174

religion to promote a more positive image of Japan, while condemning the war in China.<sup>460</sup> She also wrote a memoir under the penname Haru Matsui, called Restless Wave, published in 1940, about her life as a young Japanese woman. Ishigaki Eitarô provided illustrations of Japanese lanterns, waves, and kimono, for title pages of the chapters. Ayako claimed that he used woodblock artist Hokusai's Tokugawa era print of a wave as a model for a wave image for the cover of the book. The decorative style and Japanese motifs Ishigaki used differed from his paintings. Ayako stated that his illustrations provided the right "simple Japanese style" appropriate to the book, promoting Japan's image as decorative and unthreatening rather than as the military aggressor in China seen in American newspapers. (Figure 57)

The first book published in English by a Japanese woman, Restless Wave, proved to be a commercial success and royalties from its sales helped the Ishigakis financially during the war.<sup>461</sup>

Ayako was traveling with a Chinese woman to Massachusetts to do another anti-war lecture when she heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor on the radio.<sup>462</sup> The lecture continued as scheduled, but Ayako was not permitted to give her talk. Like Kuniyoshi and other Japanese in New York, the Ishigakis came under FBI surveillance. When FBI agents appeared at their apartment to interrogate them, Ishigaki readily renounced the Japanese emperor as a god at their

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<sup>460</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.* pp 176-179

<sup>461</sup> She concluded the book before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but the threat of conflict with Japan loomed Ayako ended her memoir with a description of her activities and experiences as a journalist in the Little Tokyo area of Los Angeles. Compared to the relative freedom that she and Ishigaki enjoyed in New York, Ayako commented on the treatment of Japanese in California as an "inferior race," who were kept on a "lone island cut off from American society." (Restless Wave) pp. 230-231

<sup>462</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, Ishigaki Ayako nikki (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996) p. 10

insistence.<sup>463</sup> Over the years, Ishigaki had gathered many letters, postcards, and clippings from Katayama Sen and other friends active in socialist groups. Unwilling to turn the letters over to the FBI, who were collecting correspondence between Japanese, and not knowing where to hide the materials, Ishigaki burned them all in their fireplace.<sup>464</sup> Government agents offered to return the Ishigakis on one of the “exchange ships” between the two countries, but Ayako stated that neither she nor her husband wanted to return to “fascist” Japan.<sup>465</sup>

Ishigaki painted many scenes of the war’s toll on civilians. Although several of these works focused on Chinese civilians suffering at the hands of the Japanese, Ishigaki also painted scenes that portrayed a wide swath of humanity – featuring multiple races, ethnicities, genders, and ages - suffering from war’s effects, such as in “Fear” (1941). An invisible perpetrator set fire to a landscape that consumed blond women and African American men, all tangled trying to escape the inferno. War, for Ishigaki, was not a contest between nations, but a disaster inflicted upon humanity. (Figure 59)

WPA-supported artists like Ishigaki had to fend for themselves when the outbreak of World War II brought about the dissolution of the arts program. In 1944, thousands of WPA commissioned paintings went up for auction at four cents a pound. Many were unloaded at the Roberts Book Company in lower Manhattan on Canal Street, where they were sold for three, four, or five dollars each. An April 1944 edition of *Life* magazine published an article called, “End of WPA Art: Canvases which cost government \$35,000,000 are sold for junk.” The article had accompanying photographs of the inside of the Canal Street store: piles of canvases, pottery,

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<sup>463</sup> Ishigaki Ayako. *Umi o watatta ai no gaka*, Ibid. p. 180

<sup>464</sup> Ishigaki, Ayako. *Umi o wattata ai no gaka* Ibid. pp. 1790-180

<sup>465</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ishikai Ayako nikki ue* Ibid. p. 12

record albums, and a wooden carving of a Buddhist deity were on display. In the photograph, Ishigaki Eitarô's canvas of Abraham Lincoln that he created as a preparation study for his Harlem mural can be seen hanging on the store's wall.

During the war years when Kuniyoshi Yasuo was making anti-war broadcasts to be played in Japan, he invited Ayako to contribute as well. In 1942, she began doing broadcasts as well as translation work for the OWI. In 1943, the antique studio where Ishigaki had worked until the Depression, rehired him to repair antiques. Although relieved that they were allowed to move about the city freely, the Ishigakis experienced the same emotional strain that Kuniyoshi did. According to Ayako, she had never once seen Ishigaki sick, but during the war, the stress left him physically frail and he was often bedridden. He began to speak of his hometown, Taiji in Wakayama, and his family more frequently. His sympathies had been with the Chinese for years, but he began to be concerned about the effects of the bombings on the Japanese countryside as the war continued.<sup>466</sup> In July of 1945, Ishigaki began to write a series of essays for a memoir:

“Since the beginning of World War II, I must have permission from the American Department of Justice to take walks around New York, because I am an alien from an enemy nation. Every Sunday, Ayako and I walk to Washington Square Park. New York's parks always have a playground for children. Mothers carry babies in carriages, while some small children waddle about and others run. There are some children who play baseball, while little girls jump rope. All of the children are innocent and cute. Since Ayako and I do not have a child, we enjoy watching children play in the park.<sup>467</sup> America's children and Taiji's children all play in the same way. Whenever I watch children play, I always think of my younger days when I also played.”<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, Umi o watatta ai no gaka Ibid. pp 186-188

<sup>467</sup> Ayako suffered two miscarriages during the 1930s. Their first baby lived ten days before he died. She discusses the emotional heartbreak of the experience in some detail in Restless Wave. Pp. 217-224

<sup>468</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, Umi o watatta ai no gaka, Ibid. pp. 186-188



Ishigaki devoted much of his memoir to his childhood in Taiji, its boat builders, and his early years in Bakersfield with his father. He recounted so much detail, Ayako said, that he stopped writing his account up to his early adulthood.<sup>469</sup> Once the war began to turn against Japan and struck its civilian population, Ishigaki empathized with the place of his birth and family rather than a general concern for civilian death in general.

For artists living in New York, World War II brought very little change to their artistic lives. The war had an emotional impact that was reflected in their work, but their productivity did not halt. Despite living under surveillance, they were able to go to jobs, attend exhibitions, and mostly live as they had before the war. Kuniyoshi's acclaim continued to grow during the war years and in the immediate postwar era. Ishigaki's situation, however, changed dramatically in the years *after* the war when the Federal Bureau of Investigators targeted him for his participation in leftist movements.

### ***West Coast Internment***

The December 7, 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbor confirmed American prejudices about uncivilized and inscrutable Japanese. In February of 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that required Japanese, whether U.S. citizens or otherwise, to relocate to concentration camps. All ethnic Japanese – 70,000 American-born Japanese and 40,000 Japanese nationals - living on the West Coast were interned in camps in the California, Utah, Wyoming, and Arizona deserts. Obata Chiura, Miyatake Tôyô, and other Japanese artists and photographers were confined in these camps for the duration of the war. Unlike their

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<sup>469</sup> It later became serialized in the journal *Chûô Kôron* in 1952.

counterparts in New York, they were artists imprisoned behind barbed wire, removed from the art world and identified only as Japanese.

*The Camps: Obata Chiura, Hibi Matsusaburô, and Miyatake Tôyô*

Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Obata Chiura had struggled with the escalating tensions between Japan and the United States. His friend, Wilder Bentley, a poet, calligrapher, and colleague at UC Berkeley remembered that they translated a poem together by eighteenth century writer and philosopher, Tanso Hirose:

Open the rustic bamboo gate at dawn.  
 All around us lies the frost, white as snow,  
 Until 'tis thawed by ten thousand summer suns.  
 'Tis bitter cold this morning.  
 Thus you and I had better learn to love one another.  
 You'd better fetch some water at the stream.  
 Whilst I gather kindling wood.

Bentley interpreted the poem as an expression of the need to reconcile former friends who had become political enemies. He believed that Obata shared the writing with him to express his sense of foreboding, and the poem became a kind of aesthetic and ethical pact between the two men as tensions grew.<sup>470</sup> As a *nihonga* “Japanese style” artist, Obata identified himself more as Japanese in his artwork than second wave artists who worked on the east coast.<sup>471</sup> Although he had lived in California for almost all his adult life, Obata presented himself in society as a Japanese national.

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<sup>470</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *Topaz Moon. Chiura Obata's Topaz Moon: Art of the Internment*, Introduction by Timothy Anglin Burgard. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000) pp. 10-11

<sup>471</sup> Like Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Obata's work was also included in exhibitions of “American” artists such as a watercolor show held in 1940 at the Pennsylvania Museum of Fine Arts.

Obata first heard of the proposal to “evacuate” Japanese during a meeting of the Berkeley faculty before the bombing of Pearl Harbor.<sup>472</sup> Disturbed by the term “evacuate,” Obata voiced his disagreement and an argument ensued. After December 7, Obata understood that the plan to remove Japanese might be carried out. Friends had sought to make a home for the Obata family outside the western exclusion zone, but were unsuccessful. Obata himself decided that he should “stay with the Japanese community.”<sup>473</sup> His granddaughter recalled later that her mother had said that he painted constantly in the time before internment and she was left to handle the preparations on her own.<sup>474</sup> A colleague stored Obata’s paintings on the Berkeley campus for the duration of the war. Many other Japanese artists who were forced into the camps did not have access to such storage facilities or sufficient notice to plan for safeguarding their works, which were lost together with their other possessions.<sup>475</sup>

At the Tanforan relocation center before his transfer to the Topaz camp in Utah, Obata sketched the people waiting in the cramped enclosure. At its peak, Tanforan held 7,000 internees waiting for several months to be moved to their assigned camps. Obata led art classes that became popular outlets for hundreds of the camp internees. He organized sixteen other instructors in the teaching of over twenty art classes.<sup>476</sup> At Topaz, he continued to keep a visual

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<sup>472</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *Ibid.* p. 15

<sup>473</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *Ibid.* p. 15

<sup>474</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *Ibid.* p. 15

<sup>475</sup> Many of the photographs taken by Japanese camera club members in Los Angeles were lost during the move to the camps; images were often confiscated and internees were not allowed to bring more than one suitcase with them. Dennis Reed, *Japanese Photography in America, 1920-1940* Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, (Los Angeles, CA: JANM, 1985)

<sup>476</sup> Kimi Kodani Hill, *ibid.* pp. 35-53

record of the dust storms, funerals, meals, and makeshift classrooms and other aspects of daily life. (Figure 60)

Cameras were forbidden to the Japanese during the war years, so Obata's drawings provide documentation from a camp inhabitant's point of view. For example, one of these drawings depicted the shooting of internee Wakasa Hatsuki, who had been walking his dog near the fenced perimeter. He did not hear the sentry's verbal warning and was shot. Obata's image shows Wakasa buckling over with the impact of the bullet while his dog jumps in front of him. (Figure 61)

In addition to his brush and ink illustrations of daily life, Obata produced a series of beautiful landscapes and sky scenes of the desert around the camp. Reminiscent of his series of watercolors of Yosemite National Park, the series depicted an uninhabited landscape remote from war and civilization. His efforts to show the beauty of the desert landscape ran counter to the more common images of camp surroundings as barren, bleak, and dusty.<sup>477</sup> On occasion, he included the barracks with mountains and moonscape behind, yet the shacks could be mistaken as vacation cabins in a majestic wilderness landscape. One of Obata's oft-repeated themes was what he called, "Great Nature," a love that supported him while interned in the Topaz desert. (Figure 62)

Back in Berkeley after their early 1943 release thanks to friends' advocacy, Obata Chiura and his wife, Haruko, tried to improve relations between Japan and the United States by "cultural

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<sup>477</sup> Artist Kobashigawa Hideo claimed that Manzanar was a "paradise" compared to his life during the Depression. At Manzanar he did not have to work – only to paint. Shimojima Tetsurô "Hideo Kobashigawa's World: A Biographical History," *Hideo Kobashigawa Retrospective* (Naha: 2000)

exchange.”<sup>478</sup> After the war, they served as cultural ambassadors, conducting tours of Japan for American tourists. They guided Americans to exhibitions of antique Japanese arts and crafts, gardens, and architectural landmarks that had survived the wartime bombings. Obata hoped to “create a better understanding” through these trips that would render future war obsolete. Japanese culture was paraded to the outside to create an image of enduring traditions.

When Obata and his family were unexpectedly allowed to leave the camp, friend and fellow art teacher Hibi (George) Matsusaburô continued to teach the classes at the Topaz Art School in Obata’s stead. As an instructor at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco during the 1930s, Hibi Matsusaburô also had extensive training in art instruction.<sup>479</sup> Unlike Obata, however, Hibi was an *yôga* artist throughout his career. He was a well-known member of the Japanese community as a Japanese language teacher for *Nisei* children and a leader in cultural events within the community. (Figure 63)

Hibi’s paintings of camp life have a haunting quality: coyotes stalk the barracks in the moonlight and lonely figures trudge through the deep Utah snow. Whereas Obata sought out the natural beauty of the desert landscape, Hibi highlighted the camp’s vulnerability to its environment. The summers were blistering hot and the winters bitterly cold. Dust storms blew sand into houses, lungs, and food. Hibi’s work was expressionistic and steeped in an emotional reaction to his captivity. (Figure 64)

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<sup>478</sup> According to his granddaughter and biographer, Kimi Kodani Hill, Obata chose to speak in Japanese exclusively in his later years.

<sup>479</sup> Hibi had entered the California School of Fine Arts, first as a student in 1919 and then later worked as an instructor. He modeled his art school at Topaz after the curriculum at the California School of Fine Arts. Hibi’s work and life revolved around art school: in addition to working as a teaching assistant, he also worked at the school as a gardener, custodian, and store clerk. He also met his wife, Hisako, who attended the school between 1926 and 1929.<sup>479</sup> Continuing his teaching position at the camp was crucial for Hibi’s ability to survive the experience.

On the day before Japan's surrender, August 14, 1945, Hibi painted a watercolor to commemorate the event. In the painting, the silhouette of a figure faces the sunset. On the back of the painting, Hibi wrote, his "heart was heavy," with the knowledge that the Japanese empire had "collapsed." Hibi lamented the loss of the empire's "perfect record" for its mythical 2600-year history. Hibi continued:

"In spite of their exclamations of 'Death, if not victory!' our compatriots in Japan were unable to prevail against the might of the atomic bomb and have unconditionally surrendered in obedience to the Imperial Command. This very day, the setting sun in the clear western sky reflects the sorrowful downfall of the Empire of Japan. There is nothing left for us but to face the skies of our fatherland and weep."<sup>480</sup>

Although he had lived in California for more than three decades, Hibi was deeply affected by Japan's defeat and empathized with the loss. As captive enemy aliens, artists like Hibi did not voice a hope for the fall of fascist Japan as Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki did. The sun setting in his painting over the Topaz camp was a reflection of the "sorrowful downfall" that was experienced in Japan. Hibi's art reviews and correspondence in previous decades noted no particular allegiance to the Japanese nation, but locked in Japanese desert ghettos, his connection to Japan seemed to have deepened.<sup>481</sup> (Figure 65)

While Obata and Hibi documented life in the camp and its immediate environment, some artists imagined the distant battlefields. Before the war, Okubo Benji had painted surreal and fantastic scenes in which genie-like characters were rendered in brilliant blue.<sup>482</sup> As an internee,

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<sup>480</sup> Hibi Hisako, *Peaceful Painter: Memoirs of an Issei Woman Artist*. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2004) p. 57

<sup>481</sup> Hibi died soon after his release from Topaz and his wife, Hisako, another artist trained in San Francisco, moved their family to New York. There, she became an accomplished abstract artist after abandoning the representational work she had done under her husband's tutelage. Away from the West Coast, Hisako seems to have been liberated from not only the memories of imprisonment, but the more rigid lifestyle that she experienced married to Matsusaburô.

<sup>482</sup> The internment of Japanese artists had another effect on the art community in Los Angeles. Although the Federal Arts Project provided relief for artists struggling during the Great Depression, it diverted activities away from the art school

he imagined the violence of the war as Ishigaki was doing in New York.<sup>483</sup> In “Untitled,” he painted a corpse, stabbed through the heart with a bayonet. Whereas Shimizu painted bloodless battlefield landscapes for the imperial army, Okubo imagined corpses dying in agony. (Figure 66)

Photographer Miyatake Tôyô was also interned during the war. Although a successful portraitist and member of modernist photography clubs in Los Angeles prior to the war, today he is best remembered for photographs he took in the camp at Manzanar. Not allowed to bring a camera inside the camps, Miyatake sneaked in a lens and constructed a makeshift camera. At Edward Weston’s urging, Miyatake received permission from camp director Roger Merritt to take photographs. Although Merritt allowed Miyatake to set up the shots, Caucasian camp employees were required to snap the shutter.<sup>484</sup> He then opened a portrait studio at Manzanar and photographed families and young men who were about to join military regiments to fight in Europe.

Miyatake’s were the only photographs taken by an internee in any of the camps. Some of his shots expressed an optimistic point of view. He showed cheerleaders practicing routines and portraits of the men’s basketball team. They portray the effort to construct a normal life in the difficult camp conditions. Miyatake often focused on the camp’s teenagers, who had been born

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hubs. The Art Students League chapters in New York and Los Angeles lost students and instructors to the government-sponsored projects. The schools were further weakened by recruitment of artists into the armed services. Many Japanese Art Students League students in Los Angeles were interned during the war. By continuing to teach, paint in the camps, and exhibit, Date Hideo and Okubo Benji attempted to continue Los Angeles Chapter Art Students League activities while they were interned. In the face of war and imprisonment, however, the vitality of the school was inevitably diminished. The last LA League exhibition was held in Block 28-26 at Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

<sup>483</sup> **Okubo Benji.** (1904-1975) Born in Riverside, CA. Katô Kentarô, was Okubo’s uncle and painter Okubo Mine was his sister. Studied at the Los Angeles Art Students League with Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Pre World War II works had vivid colors and surrealist content. Worked as a landscape architect in Los Angeles after the war.

<sup>484</sup> Eventually, this condition was removed and Miyatake could photograph freely.

and raised in the United States and were citizens. Other photographs showed elderly Japanese maintaining gardens they had carefully created in the desert. Unlike photographs of Manzanar by outsiders like Ansel Adams, who emphasized the internees' Americanness, and by Dorothea Lange, who focused on their tragic circumstances, Miyatake attempted to illustrate both the highs and lows of camp life. (Figure 67)

After his release from Manzanar in 1945, Tôyô and his son, Archie, returned to Little Tokyo and reopened the Miyatake portrait studio. He became a leading figure in the Little Tokyo community, serving as Grand Marshal in the annual Nisei parade, photographing visiting Japanese actors and politicians for the *Rafu Shinpo*, and meeting members of the Japanese imperial family when they visited Los Angeles. Although he had participated in international photography groups before the war, Miyatake's activities became locked in the Japanese community, where he served as an ambassador of sorts for visiting Japanese. Although released from the barbed wire surrounding the Japanese community in 1945, Miyatake Tôyô did not step far away from its boundaries after 1945.

Perhaps World War II's most dramatic disruption in the lives of the artists was inflicted on those who were abruptly rounded up and imprisoned in 1942 in concentration camps. They continued to paint, photograph, and even exhibit works in the camps, but their works and lives would forever be defined by the camp experience. Though he continued to live in California and teach at U.C. Berkeley, Obata Chiura became a cultural ambassador for Japan and eventually stopped speaking English. Like Obata, other artists left the camps and returned to the insularity and relative safety of Japanese communities in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Miyatake Tôyô, for example, photographed portraits in his studio and worked as a photojournalist for Japanese-language newspapers, but retreated from his interactions with Los



Angeles' modernist community. While many second generation (*Nisei*) Japanese Americans came out of the camps to assimilate into American society, first generation artists revived their cultural identification with Japan.

### *Conclusion*

World War II changed the lives, artworks, and careers of the artists, because they found themselves on opposing sides in an all out war. For most, the war disrupted their lives and they were forced to adjust to living as prisoners or living with scarce resources. Their artworks handled the subject of war: civilian deaths, military victories, barren camp landscapes, and other scenes that were particular to the wartime experience.

But in the event of a war between nations, *nationality* did not play a significant role in their artworks. Nakayama and Shimizu left no evidence of resentment of their former home or its culture; Shimizu did not incorporate anti-Western rhetoric into his writings. Kuniyoshi experimented with representations of the Japanese military in samurai dress, but the idea was rejected in favor of a more general depiction of wartime brutality. Likewise, Ishigaki's paintings did not highlight nation as much as they portrayed the violence and suffering inflicted upon the innocent during the war. Artists interned in Western camps made art that documented their lives there, as though to record the moment for posterity. Imprisoned with American citizens, on American soil, and fighting on the American side must have been difficult to reconcile with Japanese nationality and ethnic categories. But these artists had always incorporated Japanese treatments in their work: the war did not halt nor accelerate their creative leanings.

Despite the dramatic contest between nations in World War II, nationality in art reappeared in the artists' work *after* the war more than during. Rather than returning to the

prewar international unity that deemphasized national aesthetics, the postwar era brought about a return of Japanese art by Japanese artists – as well as Japanese art by American artists.

## Conclusion

### *Postwar Legacies*

Many well-known artists did not receive recognition until after their death. Most of the artists in this study, however, experienced success during their lifetimes. While in the United States, they sold and exhibited artworks, and were featured in major art journals and critical discourse in the American art world. Some enjoyed some success in Japan when they returned. Nakayama Iwata and Shimizu Toshi aside, most of these artists were better known in the United States than they were in Japan in the decades before the Second World War.

But where they are remembered and celebrated today has shifted immeasurably. The Japanese art world, which remained largely uninterested in sojourning artists in the 1920s and 1930s, has produced large-scale exhibitions in major museums with features in national art journals dedicated to Kuniyoshi Yasuo, Ishigaki Eitarô, Obata Chiura, Shimizu Toshi, and others. The exhibitions have been comprehensive and backed by extensive research and scholarship. In the United States, in contrast, the general art-going or art-knowing public is familiar with none of the artists other than Kuniyoshi and, perhaps, Obata.<sup>485</sup> Although the cause of this shift is worthy of a study of its own, I will at least suggest some possible explanations for such a dramatic change.

One cause was the change in the postwar balance of power after the end of World War II. The ascent of New York as the international center of postwar modern art and the decline of the

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<sup>485</sup> A comprehensive book dedicated to Asian American Art History published by Stanford in 2009 has tried to bridge this gap. Chang, Gordon H., Mark Dean Johnson, and Paul J. Karlstrom, editors. *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008.

centrality of Paris in part reflected a Cold War power dynamic.<sup>486</sup> New geopolitical alliances emerged shortly after the war ended. After defeating the fascists abroad, the United States government turned again to targeting the Left at home, and many Japanese artists had participated in leftist movements before the war. Anti-communist trends in the late 1940s gained momentum, and a politically positioned art made artists vulnerable to government censure and loss of funding.

A different cause of the shift in attention was the rise of abstract expressionism among the postwar American avant-garde. Figurative painting – particularly social realist art – was not only tainted with political ideology but seemed to belong to an earlier expressive world. In the 1950s, many artists in New York and elsewhere seized upon Japanese Buddhist philosophy as an inspiration for a “free” art disconnected from a political realm. Philosophers like Suzuki Daisetsu, who had espoused nationalism during the war, reinvented his ideology in cultural terms and promoted Zen Buddhism as a philosophy rooted in free-form expression. His writings and lectures in the 1950s as well as those of American interpreters of Buddhism like Alan Watts presented a philosophical base for abstract expressionists who were interested neither in figurative painting nor in the subjects of race and revolution.

And so a different version of a Japanese aesthetic emerged in the national and international art scene – not *geisha* and gardens, but Zen and pottery. The transformation of Japan’s image from militant aggressor to “cultural nation” was effected by both Japanese seeking to recreate themselves as a peaceable nation and by Americans drawn to the Zen aesthetic. This cultural move affected Japanese residents in the U.S. as well. The Little Tokyo community in

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<sup>486</sup> See Serge Guilbault, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War Translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Los Angeles once again became a site of exotic culture within American borders. The idea that Japanese possessed in their heritage and traditions a natural propensity for art reappeared as a conventional trope startlingly soon.<sup>487</sup> But Japanese artists in the United States did not necessarily share the postwar American surge of interest in Japanese art. A Japanese artist would not succeed without a calligraphic touch or a reference to the aesthetic of *wabi* and *sabi*, even if he were to wear kimono to his gallery opening. It might have helped sales had he done so, but for artists like Kuniyoshi, Ishigaki, and others, they had no interest in playing the part of “Japanese” artists in the U.S.<sup>488</sup>

Before the Japanese art-buying public discovered them during the economic high-growth era of the 1960s, the artists, who had been in America and survived the war, struggled after 1945. Several died soon after. Others never made art again.

*Postwar: Kuniyoshi Yasuo and Ishigaki Eitarô*

Despite Kuniyoshi’s claims to the contrary, the paintings he created at the end of the war reveal a dark, emotional interiority. He made several paintings of a headless horse figure that hinted at his pessimism about the future.<sup>489</sup> In “Headless Horse Who Wants to Jump,” (1945) the image is nightmarish: a decapitated horse hopelessly claws at the air as it rears up on its rear

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<sup>487</sup> This cultural stereotype appeared in Samuel Fuller’s 1959 film, “The Crimson Kimono.” Set in Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo, the film tells the story of two detectives, one Caucasian and one Japanese American, who became friends during the Korean War. Art is one of the major themes in the movie: its opening credits show an artist’s studio and the sketch of a kimono-clad woman, which transforms into a painting. The two white female love interests in the movie are artists, who struggle at their craft. The Japanese Detective Kojaku was not an artist, but he is depicted as having “natural” artistic talents, which bewilders the women.

<sup>488</sup> The key work on Japanese artists in the United States after World War II is Bert Winther Tamaki’s Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

<sup>489</sup> Kuniyoshi used a carousel horse that had its head removed and placed it in the desert setting that had become the prominent background of most of his paintings from this time.

haunches. Painted in 1945, newspapers with headlines declaring “We Fight” were now history, but the horse’s persistence suggests that war was not over. Collected in the litter at the feet of the horse was Kuniyoshi’s OWI “Torture” poster, discarded in the detritus. Japan had surrendered by the time Kuniyoshi finished “Headless Horse,” but his painting was not celebratory, nor did it signal an optimistic or peaceful future. (Figure 68)

Part of this pessimistic outlook stemmed from Kuniyoshi’s skepticism that fascism had been defeated. In 1945, Kuniyoshi wrote:

“In spite of our great victory, our enemies' destructive ideology has not been conquered and as long as its evils persist we must be on guard. Today, those of us who paint and who have prospered through the encouragement and recognition accorded us by museums, schools, organizations, and individuals, have a two-fold responsibility. First, we must be prepared to defend our own freedom as artists. Second, and most important of all, in spite of the grave threats looming all over the world, we must hold firmly with all those who believe in and encourage freedom of expression and democratic principles, so that – for them and with them – we may continue to create a great American art.”<sup>490</sup>

Kuniyoshi declared that the “destructive ideology” of fascism persisted despite the Allied victory – and he identified similar threats among the Allies as well. Stating that artists had a particular responsibility to be watchful against censorship, he believed that the world was plagued by “looming threats” and the inevitability of future wars.<sup>491</sup> Kuniyoshi applauded the “awakening” of the institutional support for postwar American art as a change from the fixation on Europe. Nevertheless, he did not approve of the chauvinism at the heart of American regionalism, which had become popular since the mid-1930s. “People say they want a purely American art,”

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<sup>490</sup> [Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993](#) Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>491</sup> [Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993](#) Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Kuniyoshi stated, “but what I want to know is what is *un-American art?*”<sup>492</sup> (Kuniyoshi’s emphasis) All art works are “colored by (their) immediate environment,” where they are created, regardless of the artist’s nationality.

The “democratic freedoms” that Kuniyoshi had broadcast to the Japanese literati during the war had its limits. The 1946 U.S. State Department-sponsored exhibition at New York’s Metropolitan Museum, called “Advancing American Art,” featured works by Kuniyoshi. Originally planned to tour Europe and Latin America, the show was criticized by conservative politicians, who argued that federal money should not be spent on abstract works that countered the traditions of American painting. The Hearst papers also denounced the participating artists as leftist radicals.<sup>493</sup> Many editorials dismissed the paintings as “ugly or absurd” and created by a “lunatic fringe.”<sup>494</sup> Suspicious of federal money for the arts, conservative Republican congressmen led by Senator Joseph McCarthy attacked the project as un-American and invaded by “foreign” interests.<sup>495</sup> President Harry Truman entered the debate, specifically reacting to Kuniyoshi’s “Circus Girl Resting” saying, “If that is art, then I’m a Hottentot.”<sup>496</sup> According to scholar David Sokol, Kuniyoshi was one of the most vilified artists in the immediate postwar years because of his increasingly non-representational and dream-like works. Under fire, the

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<sup>492</sup> Elsie Mclroy, “Yasuo Kuniyoshi – The Fist and the Shadow of the Fist (1948? date unknown),” Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

<sup>493</sup> David Sokol, “The Founding of Artists Equity Association after World War II,” Archives of American Art Journal Vol. 39, (1999)

<sup>494</sup> Taylor D. Littleton and Maltby Sykes, Advancing American Art: Painting, Politics, and Cultural Confrontation at Mid-Century (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1989) p. 27

<sup>495</sup> David Sokol, *Ibid.* Page 20

<sup>496</sup> Taylor D. Littleton *Ibid.* p. 55

exhibition was cut short and the War Assets Association sold the works in 1948 at public auction.<sup>497</sup>

In 1947, nine New York-based artists came together to form the Artists Equity Association (AEA) and elected Kuniyoshi their first president. Following the Advancing American Art exhibition debacle, artists felt they needed an organization to represent them as well as to promote the sales of their paintings. Artists who gathered at the Woodstock art colony where Kuniyoshi had a summer home founded the organization to provide economic support for American artists after the war. Kuniyoshi served two consecutive terms as president and oversaw its expanding membership. The AEA expressed an early commitment to avoid politics and it took no public stands on issues in the way that The John Reed Club and the American Artists Congress had done before the war.<sup>498</sup>

Divorcing the AEA membership and activities from political activism became one of the group's central tenets. Artist Equity member Henry Schnakenberg (1892-1970) met with various museum and gallery individuals who voiced concern that the group would be used to "further a (political) cause" to convince them that the AEA did not have a political platform. He wrote to Kuniyoshi in 1948 stating that in order to combat the conservative political attacks on the AEA, they would have to present themselves as an a-political group. Kuniyoshi responded by saying that he understood how "ruthless" artist groups with ideological causes could be, but he expected

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<sup>497</sup> The Soviets didn't care for Kuniyoshi's work either. Ten years after his death, Kuniyoshi's paintings were on display in Moscow as part of a contemporary American art exhibition held there. Whereas American artists are "permitted their eccentricities" and society's welcoming of their "violating conventions," journalist John Canaday commented that the Soviet artist had to conform to party mandates on socialist realist art. (New York Times, 1964) A photograph attached to the article showed Nikita Krushchev laughing as he viewed one of Kuniyoshi's abstract works from the early 1950s featuring a clown wearing a mask. Calling Krushchev the Soviet Union's "most important art critic," Canaday reported that he said that "monkeys" could do the abstract works that he saw on view.

<sup>498</sup> David Sokol, *Ibid.*



that by ensuring members' economic welfare they would "be careful and not dare use Equity as a front organization" for political activities.<sup>499</sup> As a result, leftist artists retreated from the AEA. Although he had been proud of his political involvement during the 1930s and admonished artists to be tireless in their fight against censorship, Kuniyoshi distanced himself from political movements during the postwar years.

Even as conservative politicians targeted him, Kuniyoshi's exhibition record accelerated after the war as he established the AEA's position in the New York art world. The Whitney Museum of American Art selected Kuniyoshi for its first solo exhibition in 1948, prompting many interviews in newspapers and art journals. Kuniyoshi benefited from his long relationship with the Whitney Studio Club and the museum's curator, Lloyd Goodrich, promoted the idea of a solo exhibition for his longtime friend.<sup>500</sup> In 1952, Kuniyoshi was selected as one of the artists to represent the United States in the Venice Biennale, along with his old colleagues and friends, Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, and Edward Hopper.

Kuniyoshi submitted "Koi Nobori," a painting of large flying carp seen on Boy's Day in Japan, to the Metropolitan Museum in 1949. The painting was one of the few direct references to Japan in Kuniyoshi's portfolio. And, yet, the painting is also a paradox: whereas Boy's Day in Japan is March 3, Kuniyoshi drew "July 4," the date of American Independence. The figures in the painting show more exuberant movement than in his earlier paintings. By connecting Japanese and American traditions with an ebullient mood heightened by vibrant colors, the painting suggests that perhaps Kuniyoshi's confidence had returned. (Figure 69)

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<sup>499</sup> David Sokol, *Ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> Alexandra Munroe, *Ibid.* p. 41

During the last phase of his artistic career, Kuniyoshi rejected the brown-and-gray palette of the Depression and war years for the vibrant reds, oranges, and pinks seen in “Koi Nobori.” His compositions became more abstract. His postwar circus performers were lighter and painted with vivid colors, quite different from the solid and bulky figures of the trapeze artists of the 1920s. According to Alexandra Munroe, Kuniyoshi was keenly aware of the shift in the American art world from realism and socialist art works to abstract and surrealist works after the war. These later paintings may have reflected his context and possibly also his will to find a place in the postwar New York art world.<sup>501</sup>

In 1952, the law barring Japanese from becoming United States citizens was abolished. Kuniyoshi immediately applied for citizenship, but died in 1953 before his paperwork could be processed. According to his wife, he had hoped to have a retrospective of his work at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo before he died. Working to continue with the planned exhibition in Tokyo, Sara Mazo Kuniyoshi helped to arrange for the show to be held in March and April of 1954, a year after Kuniyoshi died.

Although a star of the American art world from the late 1920s through the early 1950s, Kuniyoshi is far less known than his Art Student League peers. In 1965, the Downtown Gallery exhibited a joint show of Kuniyoshi and Charles Sheeler that a *New York Times* critic described as the “least clamorous” exhibition in New York.<sup>502</sup> He noted that “in retrospect Kuniyoshi...seemed more deeply American than the determined Americanists,” the “American

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<sup>501</sup> Alexandra Munroe, “The War Years and Their Aftermath, 1940-1953,” *Yasuo Kuniyoshi: tanjô 100nen kinen – nyû yôku no yûshû*. (Tokyo: Tokyo Teien Art Museum, December 1989)

<sup>502</sup> John Canaday, “Art of Americans,” *New York Times* (January 10, 1965) At the time, there was an exhibit of Marcel Duchamp at a gallery and Max Beckmann at MOMA.

firsters” like Grant Wood and Thomas Benton whom Kuniyoshi had rejected for their nationalism.

In subsequent decades, Kuniyoshi’s work was exhibited far more regularly in Japanese museums than in the United States, and now Japanese museums and collectors possess the vast majority of his paintings. From the 1970s through the 2000s, Japanese art journals and art book publishers focused on Kuniyoshi’s career with reproductions of paintings from his early period to the postwar era. It was as if the Japanese art world was claiming Kuniyoshi as one of its own, despite his life and career spent in the United States. Often his work is considered in the context of his Japanese peers who were active in the U.S. at the same time – Ishigaki Eitarô, Shimizu Toshi, and Noda Hideo. Kuniyoshi and these artists are never identified in Japanese publications as “Japanese American” (*Nikkei*). Rather Kuniyoshi is highlighted as the most successful Japanese artist in the American art world, part of a group that is treated as a set: Japanese artists who lived in the United States.

Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki’s friendship and collaboration lasted through the decades they spent together in New York. When Kuniyoshi died in 1953, Ishigaki had returned to Japan the year before. He wrote the following about his friend for a Japanese art journal:

“Since Kuniyoshi Yasuo studied in America, worked in America, and painted images with the American life as his subject, there is no doubt that he was an American artist. Although he was someone who had come to live in America for nearly half a century, he probably still had something Japanese about him. He was a Japanese, so it was necessary for him to make more of an effort. He had deeper hardships and worries and he was forced to struggle more.”<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Ishigaki Eitarô, “Kuniyoshi no gyôseki,” *Geijutsu Shinchô* (July, 1953)

Ishigaki's understanding of Kuniyoshi's position in the global art world pointed to the existential condition of his friend: Kuniyoshi was an American artist who faced the hardships and struggles of a Japanese living in the United States.

Identifying Kuniyoshi and his art as being either Japanese or American, was central to the discourse about his work. Most commented on how this identity was a struggle for Kuniyoshi. Kuniyoshi, too, wrote on the subject regularly, stating in the beginnings of an autobiography: "Being a stranger in a strange country is very difficult and hard to get along. All through my life I never expected anything without giving, but I felt much more so in this country. Whether I was born to fight to get it. I never thought anything could be had easily and therefore my attitude has always been to fight to get it."<sup>504</sup>

He recalled being on a subway with someone from out of town who was unsure about which direction the subway was headed. The man asked another subway rider, but he did not know either. Kuniyoshi said that he stood there, knowing how to direct the man. Finally, he volunteered the information and the man was "flabbergasted" that Kuniyoshi should speak to him in English. The experience, Kuniyoshi said, made him feel proud, but also very sad. As his friend Ishigaki observed, Kuniyoshi felt that despite the success he enjoyed, his quest to find his place remained a struggle.

Although Kuniyoshi's success during his lifetime has been lauded, critics and scholars do not seem to have entertained the possibility that his multiple identifications might have *contributed* to his success. Despite the hardships that resulted from being a Japanese in the

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<sup>504</sup> Yasuo Kuniyoshi, "Preliminary Notes for an Autobiography, 1944," Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers: 1921-1993 Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

United States before and during World War II, Kuniyoshi's fluid identity perhaps allowed for his ability to respond to the artistic and political context of his time.

That Kuniyoshi was heralded as an American artist during his lifetime, but was claimed by the Japanese art world from the 1980s, suggests at the least that an artist's national identity is neither fixed nor determined by the artist's self-identification.

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According to Ayako, the Ishigakis' reactions to Japan's surrender on August 15 were mixed. Relieved that the war was over, they were also overcome by the momentousness of the loss of their "homeland" (*sokoku*). They immediately began inquiring into the fate of their family members in Japan. Ishigaki's younger brother had died of illness in February of 1945. His wife, Ishigaki's sister-in-law, and their three children lived with his parents in Nagano Prefecture, where they escaped the bombing. However, his sister-in-law was delivering X-ray equipment to Tokyo when the March air raids occurred and her body was never found. The three children returned with their grandparents to Taiji, but Ishigaki's father died of a heart attack five days after the surrender, leaving his mother to raise the three grandchildren on her own. Ayako's family, who lived in the Waseda area of Tokyo, all survived. But they had read in a Japanese newspaper during the war that Ishigaki Eitarô and his wife had been killed in California as enemy aliens and did not learn that they were alive until after the war.<sup>505</sup>

Ishigaki and Ayako spent the first months after the surrender organizing care packages of clothes, bedding, and food to send to their families in Japan. In one painting that depicted the aftermath of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Ishigaki rendered the loose skin dangling from victims' hands in much the same way as survivors would in their own illustrations of the

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<sup>505</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.* pp. 189-191

bomb's aftermath. He also continued to paint scenes of civilian suffering in war. His last war paintings, however, show Japanese civilian casualties. (Figure 70)

By 1947, the American political landscape was changing. Friends of the Ishigakis in the government warned them that new conservative incomers to state bureaucracies and the United States Congress were targeting leftists. Artists who had been members of the John Reed Club and who had participated in exhibitions like the Chinese Emergency Relief exhibition were labeled "Red." Ayako recalled that Ishigaki was overjoyed when Jackie Robinson joined his favorite baseball team, the Brooklyn Dodgers, but that the concerts of Paul Robeson, a singer whose politics Ishigaki admired, were canceled. Political attacks on leftist sympathizers permeated all corners of the American culture industry.

In 1947, Ishigaki participated in an exhibition held at the Riverside Museum in New York for "Japanese American Artists," the first time the group used this designation instead of "Japanese." Although he had distanced himself from the leftist artist groups he had associated with in the 1930s, Ishigaki participated with his old coterie of Japanese artists. The show included Isamu Noguchi and Usui Bunpei and twenty-one others. Ishigaki had been painting at the Yaddo artists' colony in Sarasota Springs and contributed some of his new works to the show.<sup>506</sup> He included a painting critical of the K.K.K, which had adopted the "Red Purge" ideology to target leftists.

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<sup>506</sup> F.B.I agents entered the Yaddo colony seeking out communist members; Ishigaki's friend, Agnes Smedley, who had been sympathetic towards the Chinese Communist Party, was the first to be arrested and accused of espionage. Smedley had spent the years 1938 through 1941 as a war correspondent, visiting both the CCP and Guomindang forces in the war zone. Smedley also had romantic affairs with Richard Sorge. Ozaki Hotsumi translated her book, *Daughter of the Earth*, into Japanese. The Yaddo colony had become a regular meeting place for many artists and the Ishigakis spent time there regularly in 1947 and 1948. There, Smedley introduced the Ishigakis to journalist Edgar Snow, whose earlier sympathies for Mao Zedong made him an F.B.I target.

Beginning in 1949, the F.B.I. summoned Ishigaki and Ayako for questioning about their involvement in socialist movements. For the next two years, agents tracked their activities in New York, appeared at their home unannounced, and regularly brought them in for questioning. They were asked to identify names of suspect *nisei*, (second-generation Japanese), but neither Ishigaki nor Ayako could identify any of the names they were asked about. When questioned whether they had contact with Agnes Smedley while she was in England, they said they had not heard from her since she left New York. The F.B.I. also inquired about their involvement in the Friends of China Association, Smedley's East and West Association, and the John Reed Club. Agents asked how the couple felt about the Prime Minister of Japan, Yoshida Shigeru, but they claimed not to have any opinion about him. Ishigaki continued to commute to work, although he was often intercepted en route for more questioning. When they learned that agents had tracked articles Ishigaki had written during the 1920s appealing for famine relief for the Soviet Union, the couple became concerned for their future.<sup>507</sup>

Although their involvement in political groups had declined since the war, they considered returning to Japan when they realized that their earlier involvement was under scrutiny and might result in arrest. When Senator Joseph McCarthy rose in power in 1950, Ishigaki claimed that he no longer felt he had a place in New York or its art world. Old friends

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<sup>507</sup> Ishigaki later discovered that they had become implicated with the Richard Sorge spy circle in Tokyo during the war. Agnes Smedley's association with the communist group, and love affair with Richard Sorge, might have aroused suspicions that the Ishigakis were also implicated. The Japanese authorities, which had rooted out the communist spy circle, now informed the U.S. government on potential spies in the United States. In 1951, Major General Charles A. Willoughby and one of the Japanese prosecutors and investigators of the Sorge group testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities on the spy ring's origins and connections to the United States. Miyagi Yōtoku's interviews conducted while in Sugamo prison were used as evidence. In one of the statements read aloud before the group, Miyagi identified a member of his Los Angeles-based Social Problems Study Group (Shakai Mondai Kenkyūkai) as being a "close friend and associate of Katayama Sen's." Because Miyagi was a painter, the investigators might have made a link with Ishigaki, who they knew to be connected with Katayama. "Hearings on American Aspects of the Richard Sorge Spy Case, Based on Testimony of Mitsuda Yoshikawa and Major General Charles A. Willoughby," Hearings Before the Committee of Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress (August 9, 22, 23, of 1951) Harvard College Library, Gift of the Government of the United States.

were distancing themselves from the couple, fearing that they, too, would be implicated and targeted by the F.B.I. Ishigaki saw abstraction replacing 1930s social realism in critical favor. Unlike Kuniyoshi who adapted his style to find a place in the postwar art world, Ishigaki felt alienated and detached from the art community. He continued to do figurative works in the postwar era, but he depicted scenes of his daily life with Ayako rather than political protest.

The F.B.I. investigation blocked the couple's proposed departure for Japan, but after they hired a lawyer to represent them, they were permitted to leave based on their status as "illegal aliens." Forced to depart within three weeks, Ishigaki worked night and day packaging his canvases and saying farewell to friends, leaving all other possessions behind. On the day of their departure, F.B.I. agents appeared once again for more questions about Katayama Sen, Taguchi Unzô, and other members of the Japan Socialist Club in New York in previous decades. Their experiences of their last year in New York left Ishigaki bitter. When he arrived in Yokohama in July of 1951, Ishigaki Eitarô had been away from Japan for forty-two years.<sup>508</sup>

Once Ishigaki returned to Japan, he stopped painting altogether. He and Ayako lived in the same neighborhood as the artist, Yanase Masamu's family. One of the founders of the avant-garde artist group, MAVO, Yanase had been killed in an air raid in May of 1945. His family gave Yanase's easel to Ishigaki, and he did some small works on it, but never again did a full-size painting.<sup>509</sup> He wrote essays for art journals about his colleagues in New York as well as

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<sup>508</sup> The Ishigakis stayed with his aunt in San Francisco for a couple of days. On board ship, they befriended Tsunoda Ryūsaku (1877-1964), who was responsible for assembling the Japanese literature collection at Columbia University.

<sup>509</sup> Ishigaki's health worsened soon after his arrival in Japan and he pursued art exhibitions less. In 1955, Okamoto Toki 岡本唐貴 (1903-1986) invited him to show some of his works with other Tokyo artists. He suggested forming a group called the Ten Ten-kai that centered on the figure of Ishigaki. Although he participated in their exhibitions, he did not create any new works to display and the group dissolved shortly after his death. Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.* pp. 221-228



some reviews of Japanese art shows that he visited. Writing about his impressions of the Nikakai exhibition he viewed in 1953:

“Since this was my first time to see a Japanese art exhibition, I was deeply interested and waited for the fall art season to begin...I especially wanted to see the Nikakai, which (I thought) had held on to old traditions. Japanese artists in America spoke of their dealings with the Nikakai exhibition, so I went on September 1 when it opened. I wandered around the show once and saw each art group that was assembled. It was not all that monotonous and there were paintings of interest, but I felt like I was seeing an American exhibition. I was extremely disappointed. It was because I did not expect an American art exhibition, or a French art exhibition. I was thinking that I wanted paintings that had Japan as the subject by Japanese living in Japan.”<sup>510</sup>

After forty-two years in the United States, with little exposure to the Japanese modern art world, even Ishigaki expected to see something of “traditional Japan.” He wanted something exotic, something that represented Japan as he had envisioned it as a youth. Judging from his disappointed reaction to modern Japanese art, Ishigaki’s idea of Japanese aesthetics seems to have been frozen in the early 1900s when he left for the United States. How he conceived of a Japanese aesthetic was formed in dialogue with American ideas of Japanese art.

Ishigaki’s participation in Japanese politics was tepid. Although he had not been politically active for more than a decade, Ishigaki joined in the Tokyo May Day protests in 1952 soon after his return. “Bloody May Day” as it would be called due to the state’s suppression of the communist-led protest, was exciting for Ishigaki.<sup>511</sup> Later that year, Margaret Sanger, his friend from his early days in New York, arrived in Japan to lecture on birth control as a guest of the *Mainichi* newspaper. Although they had not seen each other for thirty years, Ayako reported

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<sup>510</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.* p. 221

<sup>511</sup> Only a few days after Japan’s independence from Occupation was restored, many of the May Day protestors targeted American personnel and jeeps, holding banners saying “Yankee Go Home.” Anti-riot police killed two protestors and wounded more than 400 in the protest that marched from the Meiji Jingu Shrine to the Imperial Palace grounds.

that they were both pleased to meet again in Tokyo. Outside these infrequent contacts with activism and U.S.-based circle of friends, Ishigaki largely distanced himself from the political sphere in Japan.

Kuniyoshi's death in New York in 1953 was a blow to Ishigaki. He wrote many articles on his friend and colleague to inform the Japanese public of Kuniyoshi's career and art philosophy. Ishigaki declared, "Japan must research, care for, and respect (Kuniyoshi's) paintings. For the Japanese, knowing an international artist born in Japan is more important than knowing Picasso or Matisse."<sup>512</sup> Ishigaki often declared his tremendous respect and regard for Kuniyoshi, whom he referred to as a "genius," both as an artist and a person. Ishigaki, in other words, became an early advocate of Japanese art circles' claiming Kuniyoshi as one of their own, rather than leaving him to the Americans.

Yet his disappointment that Kuniyoshi was virtually unknown in Japan may have mirrored a disappointment in his own lack of recognition. Unlike Kuniyoshi, who many consider to be an "American artist," Ishigaki has been categorized as a "Japanese artist raised in the United States."<sup>513</sup> Though his paintings were steeped in U.S. history and the social realism common among American artists of his time, his persistent identification as a Japanese artist might derive from the fact that Ishigaki's work never received the recognition in the United States museums and media that Kuniyoshi's did.

Where an artist died had some impact on which nation seized his legacy. Ishigaki died in 1958 at the age of sixty-four. Whether it was his distress over the loss of family members in the war, alienation from the New York postwar art world, or being forced out of his home of over

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<sup>512</sup> Ishigaki Ayako, *Ibid.*

<sup>513</sup> "Amerikan doriimu ni moketa Nihonjin gakatachi," *Geijutsu shinchô* (October, 1995)

forty years, Ishigaki's artistic life had ended years before his death. Ayako spent the following decades working in Japan as a writer and journalist. She crusaded to ensure that her husband's career and legacy were not lost to a Japanese public. Whereas Sara Kuniyoshi promoted her husband's work in Japan and the U.S., Ayako focused exclusively on Japan.

Like Shimizu Toshi, Ishigaki was virtually unknown in American art circles after the late 1940s. Neither did Ishigaki contend with questions about whether his work was Japanese or not. The critics who wrote about his paintings were largely from leftist journals like the New Masses. These art writers were less concerned with Ishigaki's nationality than his political position. Ishigaki joined New York-based Japanese artist group exhibitions and associated with Japanese based in the U.S., but these activities do not seem to have affected the critical appraisal of his work.

The postwar Japanese *gadan* treated Ishigaki, like Shimizu Toshi, as a Japanese artist who lived and worked in the United States. The prewar art group in New York is lauded for its early struggles in a strange land as well as their liberal and international creative associations with the Art Students League, the John Reed Club, and other groups. Ishigaki and others are understood as Japanese representatives of a cosmopolitan artistic coterie.

Ishigaki's star was later eclipsed by his wife's fame as a writer and journalist. Ayako wrote often about her husband's life and work, conducting interviews with NHK, writing memoirs, and opening a museum in Taiji, Wakayama, dedicated to Ishigaki's works. Interest in Kuniyoshi's life and career generated some interest in Ishigaki's as a kind of residual effect. But only Japanese leftists paid consistent attention to Ishigaki's legacy and artworks in the years after his death.

In an essay written in the mid 1960s, Kimura Shigeo reflected on Ishigaki's influence on the course of modern Japanese art.<sup>514</sup> He had first seen Ishigaki's paintings in the 1930s and again in a little-known art club that had formed around Ishigaki when he returned to Tokyo in the 1950s called the Ten-ten-kai. Kimura concluded that Ishigaki's work said less about the Japanese art world, than it did about modern American art. What Kimura found significant was that a Japanese artist was able to reveal the contradictions in American society and the "inequities in its capitalist system." He surmised that only an outsider could reveal America's darkest moments. Many Japanese artists were still going to Europe and the United States in the decades after the war, but many of them did not return to Japan as previous generations had done. It was artists like Ishigaki, Kimura wrote, who first provided a point of view, expression, and technique that revealed the realities of American life. Kimura explained that Japan's "complex" (*konpurekkusu*) about American art meant that it would favor the European art world. However, artists like Ishigaki, Kuniyoshi, and Noda provided a window from which to see and understand the United States.

Kimura's statement that Ishigaki had special insight into American injustice was accurate, but it was not only because he was a Japanese "outsider." Ishigaki's point of view was grounded in humanism and his lifelong interest in international socialism. Because of his past working as a laborer and struggling financially, Ishigaki had experience that extended beyond art circles. One of his primary aims had been to link those two social worlds. He was less tied to Japan than to a global struggle for equality and peace: his paintings of Cuban slave revolts and killings of Chinese civilians were of a piece with his paintings of a lynching in the South or the scene on

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<sup>514</sup> Kimura Shigeo, "Ishigaki Eitarô," *Bijutsu Gurafu* Vol. 14 No. 6, (Originally published August, 1965; reprinted version 1983)

New York's 14th Street. Nevertheless, Kimura's assessment of Ishigaki's success as an artist in terms of his "outsider" status does recognize the way in which being unfettered by national identity can serve an artist's work. In the case of Ishigaki, his life and politics were powered by international cooperation with a base of operation in the United States. After his death, his legacy belongs only to a handful of Japanese who are invested in preserving his memory.

*Defeated Japan: Shimizu Toshi and Nakayama Iwata*

During the first decades after the war, Shimizu seems to have fallen into obscurity. Since the 1980s, however, his paintings have been featured in numerous shows in modern Japanese art museums. The Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Modern Art in Utsunomiya houses the largest collection of Shimizu's paintings and exhibits them regularly. He has been featured in art journal articles like *Mizue*, *Bijutsu techô*, and others. The writers invariably highlight Shimizu's life in the United States as a laborer in Seattle, as a friend of Kuniyoshi Yasuo while at the Art Students League, and his travels to Paris and Spain. They also discuss his leadership of independent art associations in Tokyo. He is presented as a passionate, focused artist whose life was dedicated to his career. Scholars underplay his enthusiastic participation as a war painter, and they pay less attention to his later expressionistic works. The focus is almost exclusively on Shimizu as a worldly artist who produced paintings that mirrored the cosmopolitan world that he inhabited.

Despite almost twenty years in the United States, where his work was featured in renowned shows such as the Society of Independent Artists and won awards, Shimizu is virtually unknown and never exhibited in the U.S. Shimizu left New York in the mid-1920s. Perhaps if he had stayed longer, he might have achieved a level of recognition similar to that of Kuniyoshi, since they were on the same gallery circuit and both enjoyed favorable reviews. Because

Shimizu avoided political groups, he is not remembered as a member of the leftist artist vanguard like Ishigaki. One of the contributing factors to his obscurity in the United States may be his *yôga* style. Kuniyoshi's early folk-art references and surrealist compositions endeared him to American modernists, and Ishigaki's politics associated him with social realists. Shimizu, too, showed no Japanese affect in his paintings. But from the beginning he remained focused on reaching Paris and then returning to Japan. Where Kuniyoshi and Ishigaki settled into their lives in New York, Shimizu left in 1926 when his career was just beginning to flourish. As a result, he is barely remembered in the United States and his legacy lives only in Japan.

World War II did not halt Nakayama's productivity, but it stalled his creative imagination. Although he had stayed ahead of trends in the years before the war, he lost momentum after 1945. Postwar Japan had no use for his sort of fantasy or daydreams. Acute alcoholism, which began in the 1930s, led to his death in 1949. Photography journals memorialized Nakayama as an innovator, but he, too, was largely forgotten in the following decades. Rediscovered in the 1980s, Nakayama is now heralded as a pioneer modernist in Japanese photography. By the 1980s, the Japanese were enjoying the fruits of high-speed economic growth and became more interested in the modern cultural roots of earlier decades. Nakayama represented a cosmopolitan, cultured modernist, whose images captured Japan's urban sophistication. Nakayama's images projected a prewar sophistication and worldliness, while his person embodied the *mobo* (modern boy) character of interwar film and literature.

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In the 1970s Japan's economic growth prompted a massive art buying spree and museum building. Works by Kuniyoshi, Ishigaki, and other artists were part of this domestic collection building, as though the Japanese art world was trying to reclaim its modern artists. When

scholars and critics praised the liberal environments like the Art Students League where Kuniyoshi and others worked, it seemed as though they were trying to cite evidence of a cosmopolitan, leftist population that lived outside of Japan's "dark valley" of the 1930s. Kuniyoshi and others perhaps helped them to believe that Japanese of the interwar period had been taken prisoner by a handful of militants. Those who had escaped the state's fascist clutches were able to live abroad in ways most Japanese would like to believe that would have in similar circumstances.

Since the late 1970s, Japanese museums regularly exhibit artists whom they categorize as Japanese painters who worked in the United States, focusing on the lives and works of Kuniyoshi, Ishigaki, Noda Hideo, and Shimizu Toshi.<sup>515</sup> Almost all of their works are in Japanese collections, except for a few of Kuniyoshi's paintings that are still in American museums. Nakayama Iwata is regularly exhibited in Japan as well, including a large retrospective show in 2009 at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

During the "bubble era" of the 1980s, many Japanese museums were built in cities and remote locations in the countryside. The artists' hometowns all have museums founded in the 1980s and dedicated to their artwork: Okayama City, Taiji and Wakayama City in Wakayama, and Utsunomiya in Tochigi have large collections of the paintings of Kuniyoshi, Ishigaki, and Shimizu. Nakayama's studio in Ashiya is open to the public and his works are almost constantly on display in Kobe. Many of these towns rely on the stature of these artists as the foundation for their larger modern art collections.

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<sup>515</sup> Kitagawa Tamiji is often included in this mix, but not as a rule. One of the more comprehensive shows, "Japanese and Japanese-American Painters in the United States: Hope and Suffering," was organized in 1995 by the Teien Art Museum and traveled throughout Japan.

In addition to the art-buying spree in the 1970s and 1980s, part of this renewed interest in the artists can be attributed to the efforts of the artists' widows. Masako helped museums to identify Nakayama's images.<sup>516</sup> The story she most often told described their lives as the quintessential modern couple [*moga* and *mobo*] living in cosmopolitan art circles. It does not appear that either Ayako or Masako reached out to the American art world to reclaim attention for their husbands.<sup>517</sup>

Sara Kuniyoshi tried to preserve her husband's legacy in both the U.S. and Japan by promoting American exhibitions and coordinating with the Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo to host Kuniyoshi's first solo show there in 1954. Kuniyoshi has a place in U.S. art history, perhaps because of his position at the Art Students League and his leadership in the Artists Equity. Yet, given his high stature at the time of his death, he has not been exhibited as often as his contemporaries like Edward Hopper, Walt Kuhn, Ben Shahn and others.

Since the 1990s, scholars of Asian American studies have breathed new life into the stories of California-based artists such as Obata Chiura, Benji Okubo, Miyatake Tôyô, and others. The Japanese market seems less interested in these West-coast artists in comparison to those based in New York, perhaps because of the centrality of the New York art world. Scholars of Asian American painters, in contrast, focus on artists who were active in California. Their scholarship focuses largely on the artists as immigrants in California, but usually without addressing their connections to the Japanese art world or their lives in Japan. Because the

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<sup>516</sup> Controversy erupted in the 1960s when another Japanese photographer claimed that he was Mr. Lacquan and was responsible for Nakayama's New York photographs. Masako was called in to identify which images could be credited to Nakayama.

<sup>517</sup> Shimizu's children also participated in promoting their father's work in Japanese art circles, but made no effort to reintroduce his paintings to Americans.



internment camp experience has a rightfully dominant place in Japanese American studies, those artists who were interned during the war and the art that emerged from the camp experience receives the most attention from scholars of Asian American history. Artists who left California for Japan before the war seem almost completely forgotten, and finding information about them is difficult. Attention paid to those artists who were interned leaves many stories out of the history of Japanese artists in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.

In recent years, scholars, curators, and critics have made explicit their criteria for determining an artist's national identification. The editors of *Asian American Art: A History* imposed a ten-year residence criterion on artists they included in the collection. The editors did not discuss which aspects of the artworks were Japanese, American, or Asian American, a term that editor Mark Dean Johnson claimed was codified by scholar Yuji Ichioka in 1968.<sup>518</sup> Instead, the scholars traced the lineage of an "Asian American" art by addressing the nationality of the artists. The art presented in the book covers a range of styles, subject matter, and techniques, but how that artwork itself contributed to the defining of an Asian American art is not explained.

If there is a national art, at what point does it become a hybrid or even a complete conversion to another national art form? If it were a linear process, an artist might first make Japanese art, followed by Japanese-American art, ending his career making American art. But such a pattern, though evident in some cases, is not the rule at all. Artists like Yoshida Hiroshi painted French landscapes first, then watercolors of Japanese gardens, and concluded with woodblock prints of Japanese gardens. The editors of *Asian American Art: A History* do not suggest this was an established pattern, but if national identity alone becomes the basis for

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<sup>518</sup> Japanese artists in New York exhibited works in shows in the years immediately after World War II that they titled "Art by Japanese Americans in New York."

analysis, it is difficult to avoid analyzing the artists in such a linear fashion. Location, training, market demand, era, politics, and many other factors outlined contributed to the artist's work and his stylistic influences and decision.

In 2007, the Japan Society hosted an exhibition called, "Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York." Curator Eric Shiner eliminated "border crossers," which he explained were artists who worked in Japan, but sometimes came to New York.<sup>519</sup> He did not include Japanese Americans either, suggesting that he included only authentic Japanese artists, not those who were somehow hybrids. Some of the artists in his show had lived in the United States for decades, so it is difficult to determine when the curator decided an artist sheds an unadulterated Japanese identity.<sup>520</sup> Perhaps, as was the case with many artists in the present study it is up to the artist himself to characterize the relation between his nationality and his art.

In the catalogue for the Japan Society show, the artists were asked whether they considered themselves to be a Japanese artist, an American artist, an international artist, or a hybrid of all three. More than eighty percent of the artists insisted upon their unchanged Japanese identities, despite many years living outside Japan. One artist dismissed the question as "dated," but answered that she was a Japanese artist. Given that the show was at the Japan Society, and criteria for inclusion, perhaps it was unlikely that any of the artists would claim otherwise. The artists all lived and worked in New York, suggesting as well that they were in a position to benefit from the world's largest art market. In this regard, being Japanese was a marketing strategy if one is trying to sell Japanese art.

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<sup>519</sup> Reiko Tomii, "Border-Crossings: A Preface to the Exhibition," *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York* (New York: Japan Society, 2007)

<sup>520</sup> For example, Shinohara Ushio has lived in New York since 1969.

In one respect the art in “Making a Home” harked back to the 1890s when Japanese artists donned kimono and sold their art to consumers besotted with *Japonaiserie*. In 2007 Ôtsuka Hiroki exhibited *manga*-style ink drawings, used on the catalogue cover, of glassy-eyed girls in kimono floating in sexual ooze above the New York cityscape. Kaihatsu Yoshiaki juxtaposed the modern form – Styrofoam trash – with the Japanese traditional structure, a teahouse.

Shinohara Ushio recreated the iconic “boxing painting” that he did in Tokyo in the 1960s when he was a member of the Japanese avant-garde. His newer paintings, however, did not stem from his anger in the context of mass protest movements in Tokyo at that time. Those paintings were protests in the form of art performance, whereas Shinohara’s hip-hop-influenced paintings at the Japan Society came out of his Brooklyn studio and were painted on a folding screen.

The artists’ rendered Japan and the West, traditional and modern as an ironic fusion: *manga* geisha, Styrofoam teahouses, and graffiti-splattered folding screens – in New York. Invariably, the artists in the exhibition highlighted the Japanese components in their work, leaving Western audiences without any doubt that a Japanese made the artwork they were seeing. Unlike critics who searched Kuniyoshi’s paintings and Miyatake Tôyô’s photographs for remnants of Japan, those interested in some (but certainly not all) contemporary Japanese artists no longer have to work so hard to find Japan.

Questions about an artist’s nationality and about national art are not limited to the case of Japan and the United States. But their case represents an opportunity to explore the role of national culture in the exchange between Japan, which has largely defined itself and been defined in cultural terms, and the United States, which has been understood as a “melting pot,” where individual cultures melt away due to assimilation, with both Japan and the U.S. ending in

nationalist assertions of identity. The result is an understanding that while culture is not always tied to nation, nation does not easily melt away.

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