ANDREW MAERKLE

Unlearning Style: *Rethinking Japan's Art History In a Global Context*

Not long before start of the Japanese school year in April 2018, I was unexpectedly asked to teach a seminar in the recently established 'Global Arts' program at Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai). The brief was vague, other than that classes would be conducted in English. Although I later understood that the program comprised three specialisations—art management, curation and research—initially I was not even sure how it differed from the similarly titled 'Global Art Practice' (geared toward artistic production). What I did know was to expect a broad range of academic backgrounds, from new students embarking on their first focused study in art history and theory to doctoral candidates, and a mix of nationalities—mainly Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, but also others from further afield. How to engage such a diverse assembly of knowledge and experience while addressing such a diffuse topic as 'Global Arts'?

As I thought about where to begin, I found myself gravitating to the coincidence, in 1936-37, of the mounting of two exhibitions that took diametrically opposed stances on the legitimacy of modern art: Alfred Barr Jr.'s *Cubism and Abstract Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1936) and the Nazi-organised *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich (1937). At the same time that modern art was codified into a discourse that could be recuperated in the very institutions it had set out to disrupt, an entire state apparatus was brought to bear in an attempt to eradicate that same art from the societies that had produced it. This contradictory episode is indicative of the historical contingency of modern and contemporary art. What we tend to think of as an inevitable development, as illustrated in Barr's flow chart for the cover of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* catalogue, or his diagrams depicting the MoMA collection as a torpedo shooting toward the future, is rather more like an ad hoc construction that was built up, torn down, built up again, and continues to be altered.

Sharing this contingency with the seminar presented itself to me as an important entryway to the study of modern and contemporary art—not to say global art—from a position outside the Euro-American cultural sphere. In Japan, where essentialist binaries of native-foreign, East-West or traditional-modern have a powerful ideological function in society, the perception of modern and contemporary art as a monolithic entity both reinforces the authority of a phantasmal 'centre' and fosters a misguided antagonism that privileges difference for difference's sake—it is common in Japanese criticism for modern and contemporary art to be referred to pejoratively as an "imported style" or even as a colonially imposed discipline. Invariably not Western while not Japanese either, art in Japan can never be 'contemporary' as such: the result is a history that constantly cuts off its tail so as to start anew again.

We can read this, for example, in the curatorial efforts at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s by the critics Noi Sawaragi and Midori Matsui, and the artist Takashi Murakami, to identify the emergence of an autochthonous "Japanese contemporary art". But it is also apparent in the tendency of institutions to enforce a strict periodic divide between pre- and post-World War II art in Japan. In the discourse of modern and contemporary Japanese art, World War II is often seen as a tabula rasa, and everything that came before it is relegated to prehistoric status—despite the existence of strong academic research on the pre-war period, and the historical importance of figures who bridged the pre- and post-war art scenes, such as Yoshishige Saitō, Shūzō Takiguchi and Jirō Yoshihara (not to mention the carryover, in business and politics, of many of the architects of the inter-war Japanese empire, starting with the Shōwa emperor himself). But it is also true, as Terry Smith noted several decades ago in his analysis of the "provincialism problem", that to practice an international art form does not automatically equate to international

recognition. Success in Japan does not automatically translate to success overseas; competence in international idioms does not guarantee participation in international conversations. Neither does making something quintessentially Japanese guarantee access to the international circuit, as it may be dismissed for being too specific or local—'kitsch'. At the same time, Western artists are free to rummage through the cupboard of Japanese references such as Zen or Shinto, archery, Noh or tea ceremonies. What to do about the fact that one's tradition is another's avant-garde? In the case of the periphery today, which is still maintained vestigially, at least, by market dynamics, expense of travel, pedagogical divides and language barriers among other factors, a more radical historiography, as I have mentioned elsewhere, might be to turn Alfred Barr's 'torpedo' on its head to extend the scope of the contemporary into the past, and establish a delocalised time that would make it possible to step around obscurantist monoliths, and see them in relation to each other and their surroundings.

What is at stake here is not just a better understanding of history, but rather the emancipatory potential of art as an institution. As long as art is never more than a symbol of the power imbalance, real or not, between the West and Japan, as long as art is approached through binary frameworks of foreign and native, it will only ever be about 'catching up' or 'overcoming'—and that means it can be easily co-opted by state power as it was in the Meiji-era drive to modernisation, and during the height of the World War II era militarist regime, when both Japanese-style Nihonga and Western-style Yōga painting were deployed for propaganda purposes. And perhaps as it has been under the current "Cool Japan" policy, by which cultural products such as manga, anime, video games, music, fashion and architecture are promoted as vehicles of 'soft power' abroad and valorised as projections of Japanese achievement for audiences at home.[1] Concurrently, the decision to privatise the management of public museums in the early 2000s means that such institutions are now subject to bottom-line pressures to produce blockbuster exhibitions that can attract more crowds, more sponsors, and more money, leaving less room for experimental or challenging fare in the yearly calendar. Additionally, there have also been worrying incidents of censorship in recent years, with works being removed from exhibitions or altered due to their political content.[2] There is thus a certain urgency to rethinking how to define art in Japan, and it is in this context that two recent exhibitions are of particular relevance. The first was organised in 2017 by the artist Kenjirō Okazaki at the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, *The Insight of Kenjiro Okazaki: Abstract Art as Impact—How Abstract Arts Can Become Concrete Tools*. Working primarily with the Toyota Collection, but also drawing from other sources, Okazaki attempted to reread the process by which abstract art practice was adopted in pre-war Japan—a history, he claims in an introductory text, that was obscured following World War II because of "the misinterpretation that Abstract Art was merely a visual pursuit (as demonstrated by American Abstract Expressionism)… the biased view which sees Abstract Art as a matter of design (as claimed by Taro Okamoto); and… the misuse of the term 'Concrete' (as shown by the Gutai group)."[3] Even where it veered into revisionist rhetoric, Okazaki's polemical curation was an incisive challenge to the aporias of Japanese art. The exhibition opened with a display of toys developed by progressive educators Friedrich Fröbel, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, which were scattered on large tables in the middle of the gallery and surrounded by works by Joseph Beuys, Jirō Takamatsu and Atsuko Tanaka, among others. Noting that Fröbel's ideas were already introduced to Japan in the 1870s, Okazaki argues that their familiarity with the colourful wooden learning aids meant that the Japanese artists who adopted abstraction in the early twentieth century already had the building blocks for developing their own take on formal expression. This point was reinforced by a subsequent room with reproductions of drawings by Hilma af Klint from circa 1906 to 1918 displayed

next to a set of woodblock prints from 1915 by Kōshirō Onchi. According to Okazaki, Onchi's use of the woodblock print process to generate geometric compositions by combining separate layers of colour on the paper's surface is a direct manifestation of Fröbel's concepts about the underlying unity that connects different forms. Yet while both Klint and Onchi arrived at abstraction more or less independently (and in Klint's case, in advance) of the canonical movement, they are excluded from the narrative of abstract art for being too marginal, and can only be included with a caveat.

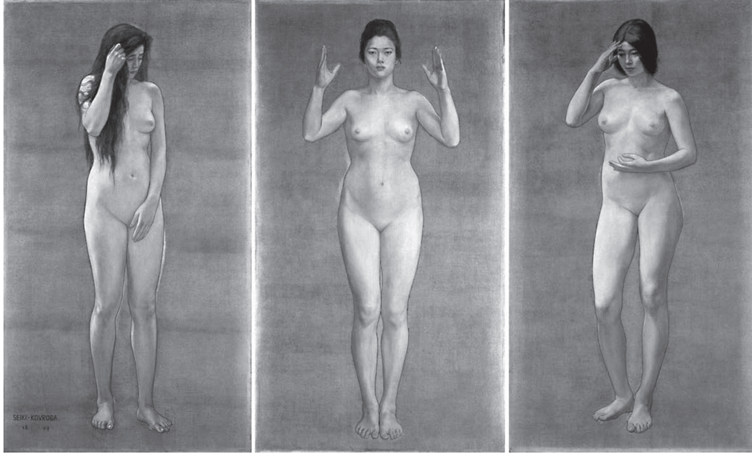
Throughout the exhibition, Okazaki generated new lines of influence through daring juxtapositions, as in a room where he placed a still life of a bottle and cup from 1923 by the Japanese painter Ryūsei Kishida, known for his deformed figuration marrying principles of Western and classical Chinese painting, between a Giorgio Morandi painting from 1925 depicting similar subject matter and Salvador Dali's surrealist *Average French Bread with Two Eggs on a Plate without the Plate, on Horseback, Attempting to Sodomize a Crumb of Portuguese Bread* (1932), as though to suggest that Kishida anticipates Morandi and Dali. Similarly, in the exhibition's final room, post-war works by Lucio Fontana and Francis Bacon were presented next to pre-war paintings by Kishida and David Burliuk, the Russian Futurist who sojourned in Japan from 1920 to 1922 on his way to New York. Broken up into planar fragments by his red, black and white makeup, the face of the Kabuki actor in Kishida's small canvas, *Namazu-bozu* (1922), hints at the gestural hinge between figuration and abstraction that would later be explored by Fontana and Bacon. Another gallery was dedicated to the connections between modern art and industrial design, with several tables of metal electric fans by Peter Behrens (c. 1908) at the entry, and Brancusi's polished bronzes *The Cock* (1924/cast 1972) and *Torso of a Young Man* II (1924/cast 1973) at the exit, bookending a wall with pages from a Japanese compendium of modern architecture edited by the architect Hideto Kishida and others in 1929.

The issue is that, aside from examples like Tomoyoshi Murayama's *Construction* (1925)—a flag-shaped assemblage of found materials that incorporates a collage of black-and-white photographic images taken from international news publications and advertising—few of the artworks could self-evidently express the complex flows of exchange that are central to Okazaki's thesis. Okazaki attempted to counter this limitation through the use of wall texts, labels, and clipboards with supplementary materials that visitors could pick up and read as they viewed the displays, but the exhibition inevitably had a strong, didactic character, and required an expert knowledge of both Western and Japanese art history for full appreciation. Unfortunately, this may have had the effect of reinforcing the authority of the Western canon and the esotericism of abstract art for some visitors, where exactly the reverse was intended. Rather, it is through an accompanying pamphlet, produced in Japanese and English and available for downloading from the exhibition website, that Okazaki brilliantly synthesises different strands of intellectual and art history to produce a new narrative of modern art.[4] Tracing the absorption into Japanese society of intellectual currents such as progressive pedagogy, occultism and Poincarean theory, and repositioning artists such as Klint and Sophie Taeuber-Arp as key figures in the development of European modernism, Okazaki dismantles assumptions—many of them perpetuated by *Japanese* critics—that Japanese artists blindly aped their peers from Europe. Indeed, he notes that Kazuo Sakata, who went to France to study with Fernand Leger in 1921, said that "the reason he could understand the most cutting-edge expressions of Europe… was because he already knew the works of Ryūsei Kishida and others from Japan."[5] Showing how Kishida's essay from 1922, 'Observations on the Absence of Realism' and his concept of *mukei* (formlessness, or, per Okazaki, "the sense of 'hyper-realism' that

is felt as the absence of realism") anticipate Surrealism, Okazaki then proposes that David Burliuk's encounters with artists like Kishida in Japan may have in turn had an influence on the Americans with whom Burliuk associated in New York.[6] The point is not so much to one-up the existing canon as it is to unhinge abstraction from received 'style' and locate it in material social reality, or the 'concrete'. The case of Japan demonstrates that avant-garde art was a far more global phenomenon than is traditionally presumed, and that the conditions for its achievement were as much economic or technological as they were cultural. In other words, as with the coincidence of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* and *Degenerate Art* exhibitions, the case of Japan posits that the narrative of modern art is invariably decentered, and invariably international.

Complementing Okazaki's exhibition at Toyota was a short, riotous intervention in Tokyo at the private Watari-um, the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, by the artist Yōichi Umetsu and the members of his Parplume art school, also in 2017. Starting with his graduation project for Tokyo Zokei University in 2005, Umetsu has been carrying out an incisive investigation into the reception of Western art in Japan at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, when academic Beaux-Arts practices were installed as the official curriculum at the Tokyo Fine Arts School (the precursor to Geidai). Although the mannerist compositions from this period, when the nude figure was introduced to Japanese audiences as an artistic subject, are easy to dismiss as decadent or passé from the viewpoint of an avant-garde narrative, Umetsu attacks them directly as the zero point of Japanese art. Idiosyncratically rendering everything in flurries of pointillist colour, he inserts his own body in place of the nude women in works such as Raphaël Collin's *Floréal* (1886), showing a nymph-like figure reclining in a pastoral setting, or Seiki Kuroda's allegorical triptych *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (1897-99), which depicts three women standing in different poses against gold colour fields.[7] Umetsu's approach invites comparisons to the multimedia artist Yasumasa Morimura, but where the latter inserts himself into the Western canon from a position in the margins (perhaps in a gesture roughly equivalent to Okazaki's), Umetsu pushes farther into the margins of the margin to find the point where margin and centre double upon each other.

Umetsu's project is enough to stand on its own (certainly, it has gained him invitations to intervene in museum collection displays), but in addition he also runs an art school out of his apartment-cum-studio on the outskirts of Tokyo, the Parplume art school. Parplume is loosely modelled on the preparatory schools where aspiring artists go to hone their skills for the exacting university entrance exams, which place a heavy emphasis on technical ability and the naturalism practiced by Collin and Kuroda, but it really functions more as an artistic commune that attracts a wide range of types, from potential art school applicants to drop outs and *hikikomori* social recluses. Many of the members, of which there may be four or five at any given time, learn about the school through Umetsu's activity on social media platforms such as Twitter, and come from remote areas to join, finding cheap apartments in the neighborhood and supporting themselves by doing part-time work. (Until recently Umetsu worked as an attendant at an elderly care facility.) Promising little else but the chance to make art in a supportive environment, Parplume can be seen as a response to the highly competitive, elitist system that governs mainstream education and professional advancement in Japan. But it is also an extension of Umetsu's artistic practice, and soon after establishing the school in 2014, he began to include it in exhibitions such as *Parplume University Story* at the commercial gallery ArataniUrano (now known as Urano) in 2015, crammed with works by the Parplume members, art supplies, colorful banners printed with pithy missives taken from Twitter—and the students themselves.


SEIKI-KOVRODA

The exhibition at Watari-um, *Parplume University and Yoichi Umetsu* (the Japanese title including the injunction "Love, Young Maiden!") was in a sense the apotheosis of Umetsu's relationship with Parplume, cementing their interdependency. The exhibition spanned four floors of the museum, with each floor having its own distinct character. It began on the top floor with a solo presentation of recent works by Umetsu, which was a textbook display of contemporary art. Visitors entered through a gate-like wooden partition that was painted in blue, pink and green hues as though to evoke a Monet-*Water Lilies* canvas stretched into three dimensions, while a looped video of Umetsu, naked, climbing up and down a stepladder in a pastoral setting, was projected onto the far wall. Lining the other walls were paintings including *Spirit of the Dead Watching Me* (2016), which reinterpreted Gauguin's *Spirit of the Dead Watching* (1892) from the viewpoint of the titular spirit, replacing the nude female model with Umetsu's own body (read against Gauguin's original, this painting could be seen as a visualisation of crossed desires: between the Western artist's cannibalistic search for an exotic subject, and the Japanese artist's narcissistic search for subjectivity in Western art), as well as smaller studies of line, gesture and colour done in ink, watercolour and acrylic on square panels.

The middle floor had a group presentation of five artists curated by Umetsu, *Parplume no arizuka* (*The Parplume Ant's Nest*), which was described in a wall text as realising a "space where friendship and antagonism coexist in… a monument to Parplume." The works, ranging from a fish-shaped hot water bottle attached to a pulley system that periodically hoisted it up and down in great jerking motions, to potted plants with arrows and other symbols tattooed on their leaves, and a quasi-anthropological collection of plastic detritus (such as detergent caps, toothpicks, clips and the stoppers used to tie up bread bags) neatly laid out on the floor, were all presented in a surrealist-constructivist framework made from wooden bars, painted a vivid orange, that were nailed together at skewed angles, so that it was hard to tell where one work ended and the next began. The next gallery below that was filled from floor to ceiling with works by Parplume members and their affiliates, and included an exhibition within the exhibition, with submissions by artists from across Japan, the *Third Gel Gel Festival*, packed into a small alcove space; another section of the gallery was a designated activity area where the members of Parplume hosted talks and other events during visiting hours, and slept at night for the run of the exhibition. Lastly, a display of works for sale was set up in the museum's basement bookshop area.

The exhibition was almost too complex to be addressed as a whole—at best one could simply enumerate the works and materials on display (on the Parplume floor: canvases with flecks of paint built up into abstract compositions; drawings of quotidian scenes inspired by the late nineteenth-century Nabis artists and contemporary manga; a *shōgi* board with its wooden squares replaced by weathered, colored tiles; videos documenting Parplume activities; a timeline of Parplume's history; photographed group portraits of the members that met halfway genuine document and advertising campaign parody; clippings of press coverage and printouts of the Parplume newsletter; a wooden maquette of the Parplume building facilities—there was no actual list of works prepared for visitors, just occasional labels and artist statements pasted on the walls, some of them typed, others handwritten). Starting with Umetsu's solo presentation at the top, the exhibition's inverted pyramid structure suggested a dialectical passage from 'art' to 'non-art', from the singular to the multiple, in which the curatorial or institutional authority of art—its assumed selectivity—is gradually exploded and atomised. Brought into a space like Watari-um, the Parplume community revealed its anarchic potential as a 'form' that enabled all manner of expression and experience (one artist in the *Gel Gel*

Festival contributed dried mango pits wrapped in clear wrap, another was a middle-aged art teacher who makes naïve paintings of trees, while nearby was Umetsu's *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment—A* [2014], which has been shown in galleries and museums[8]) to be recognised as being equally visible. But instead of the multitude of works in the Parplume display triumphantly claiming their place as art as such, by nature of their contingency upon Umetsu's status as an individual artist (more so than Watari-um's status as an institution), they were shown to collectively inhabit an alienated zone between art and non-art. Even when they formally met the conditions of being artworks—the use of paint on canvas, being accompanied by a title and artist's statement, etc.—they could gain entry to a 'legitimate' institution only once they had been turned into readymades by the sanctified artist-curator, which suggests that they were always non-art to begin with. In this way, the exhibition made visible the inherent alienation of all art in Japan since the Meiji period, when the West was established as the criterion for what art is and is not—but one could continue a step further to say that this alienation is a condition shared by all art after modernism, and that this alienation, more than any ideological apparatus, is the source of art's emancipatory potential. It is its inherent alienation that allows art to say and do and be anything, and also what allows the viewer to see in it whatever he or she wants to see—including, of course, non-art, or nothing.

Yet Parplume should not be confused for a democratic or utopian project. Although there is a certain reciprocity between the members and Umetsu, the latter is clearly in control, perhaps in a position analogous to that of the providers of a social media platform. It is noteworthy that the 'pyramid' structure of the Watari-um exhibition also resembled a family tree and, indeed, Umetsu and Parplume can be seen as part of a genealogy of artist groups operating in the margins of Japanese art, from Tomoyoshi Murayama and Mavo, founded in opposition to the mainstream Nika Association in the early 1920s, to the patriarchal Jirō Yoshihara lording it over Gutai in suburban Ashiya starting in the 1950s and the Nagoya-based Yoshihiro Katō leading the performance group Zero Jigen (Zero Dimension) starting from the 1960s, to Takashi Murakami with his Kaikai Kiki management company and failed series of Geisai festivals seeking to tap into *otaku* culture over the past two decades, and even the guerilla group Chim↑Pom, who have leveraged their outsider status into international recognition. If the recurrence of these groups reflects an enduring antagonism between vanguard art and official culture in Japan, what sets Parplume apart is that its members seemingly have no pretensions to beating the system or making history. The majority of Parplume's exhibitions take place at private residences and other 'minor' venues, and the one member who was accepted into an art university—Geidai—dropped out after two years to return to Parplume. Redefining their own centre, they represent a vision of globality in the age of the Internet in which everything is equally marginal to everything else.

Amid a resurgence in nationalist rhetoric around the world, the challenge of living in global times is perhaps to recognise the universality in one's exceptionality, as might be possible via Article 9 of Japan's post-war Constitution, which renounces war and the maintenance of military forces. Rather than seeing Article 9 as a "castration" as rightwing nationalists like to claim, and as was echoed by Takashi Murakami in the catalogue of his *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* exhibition (2005), one could appreciate it as an exemplar to which other people may aspire, but which does not rely upon external validation for its significance. That the current Liberal Democratic Party regime is seeking to revise Article 9 is testimony to the tenacity of nationalist realpolitik. It is just part of an expanding climate of authoritarianism: the LDP also has plans to rewrite the Constitution's section on individual rights in culturally specific rather than universal terms, while in 2015 the

Education Minister ordered national universities to eliminate or downsize their humanities and social sciences departments. There has also been a creeping rehabilitation of imperial-era rhetoric in mainstream discourse, as when Prime Minister Shinzō Abe called for the mobilisation of the people to spur the economy, or when the artist Hiroshi Sugimoto, in a statement issued in October 2017 upon his being named a Person of Cultural Merit, advocated the pursuit of culture for the sake of *koku'i hatsuyō* (the promotion of national prestige)—a sentiment he reiterated in an article for the January 2018 edition of the journal *Shincho Monthly* by invoking the pre-war interpretation of the emperor as the *kokutai* or embodiment of the nation. This is precisely where culture, politics and history intersect. To the extent that it was 'imported' art in Japan has an accidental quality. It was intended to be part of a great nation-building project, and not a means to develop civil society as such. We could say then that the idea of art as a colonially imposed discipline is half-right, insofar as it displaces the power exercised by the Japanese state onto an external Other. But as Okazaki and Umetsu show in different ways, Japanese artists have repeatedly recognised themselves in the promise of the international avant-garde, and actively chosen to pursue it, even when they had no social support for their work. Understanding that agency outside of strict national constructs is a key to understanding the future possibilities for contemporary art, and global art, in Japan.

In the meantime, although I am only an adjunct lecturer at Geidai, paid by the lesson on what may be a one-off gig, I am also aware of my implication in a genealogy of foreign educators in Japan, and the need to tread carefully along the fault-lines between promoting national prestige, propagating 'universal' cultural norms, and trying to build new, transnational networks of subjectivity. On the first day of class, I brought the seminar to the Seiki Kuroda Memorial Hall, around the corner from the university on the edge of Tokyo's Meiji-era cultural campus, Ueno Park, where Seiki Kuroda's *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* is displayed only at certain times each year, and asked them to talk about what they see in the painting and its current situation.

Notes

[1] The position of Minister for the 'Cool Japan' Strategy was established in 2012 under the current Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe, and a quasi-public Cool Japan Fund to invest in the development of Japanese cultural production was launched in 2013. A document outlining the Cool Japan mission can be found on the government's Cabinet Office website. It includes the self-aware observation of the need to come up with a new slogan, as "Cool Japan" tends to be "perceived as not cool for calling ourselves 'cool'." At the very least, this is an indication of the paternalistic stance of the policy, which has as its primary objective the promotion of domestic growth. See Cool Japan Movement Promotion Council, 'Cool Japan Proposal', 26 August, 2014; http://www.cao.go.jp/cool_japan/english/pdf/published_document3.pdf

[2] See Reuben Keehan, 'Out of site: Japanese art after censorship', *di'van | A Journal of Accounts* No. 3, 2017, pp. 40-51

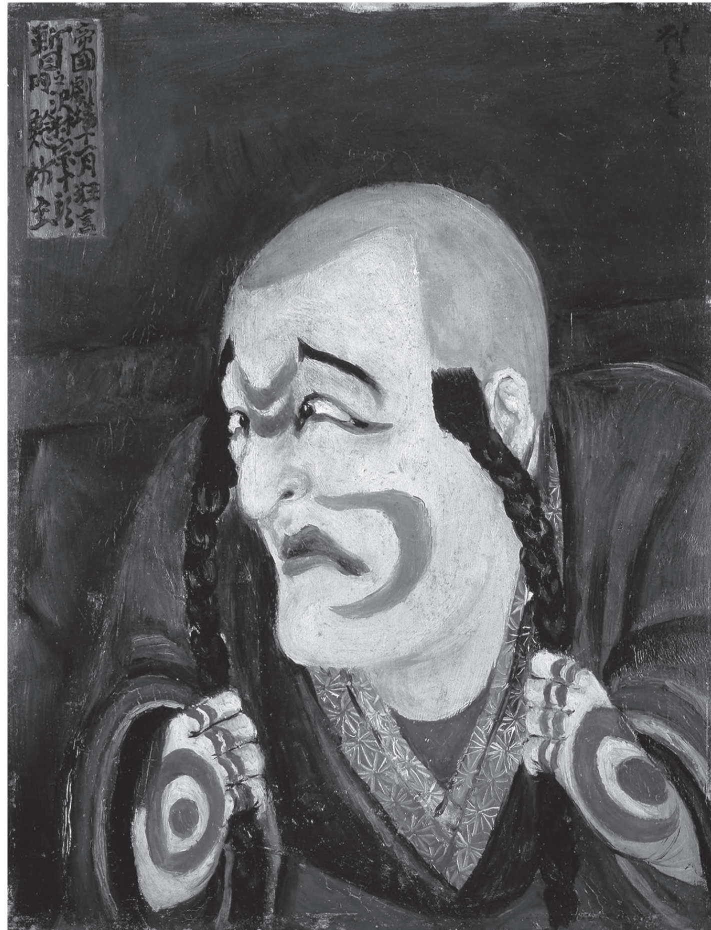
[3] The text was printed in Japanese and English on the exhibition flyer and can also be found online on the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art website; https://www.museum.toyota.aichi.jp/exhibition/2017/special/Kenjiro_Okazaki/?t=2017; accessed 10 May, 2018

[4] Kenjiro Okazaki, *Abstract Art as Impact: The Concrete Genealogy of Abstract Art*, You Nakai trans., Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, 2017; http://abstract-art-as-impact.org/abstract_art_as_impact_en.pdf

[5] ibid., p. 27

[6] ibid., pp. 28-31

[7] Kuroda (1866-1924), who studied painting with Collin in Paris, established the department of Western painting at Tokyo Fine Arts School in 1898. After his return to Japan in 1893, Kuroda encountered controversy when he attempted to exhibit his paintings of nude figures in mainstream exhibitions, as was the case when he submitted the work *Morning Toilette* (1893) to the 'Fourth Domestic Exhibition to Promote Industry' in 1895. *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* was first presented at an exhibition of the independent artists group Hakubakai in 1897, and later received a silver medal when it was shown at the 1900 World Exposition in Paris under the title *Etude de Femme*. Combining Western naturalistic modelling with bold, illustrative outlines and gold backgrounds that recall the use of gold leaf in Japanese screen paintings, the triptych synthesises elements from different traditions to arrive at a new mode of expression (slightly larger than life size, the female figures



themselves seem to have both "Western" and "Eastern" features), and in this sense is highly modern. At the same time, it is notable for explicitly not depicting the pubic hair or genitalia of the figures—a limit of representation for both male and female nudes that remains more or less in place in Japan today

[8] As indicated by the title, this is Umetsu's take on Kuroda's masterpiece. Where Kuroda demurred from depicting the genitalia of the female figures in his original, Umetsu deliberately shows his own genitals in his version—albeit through a 'soft focus' effect achieved by the use of pointillist technique (not unlike the mosaic effect used to blur genitalia in Japanese pornographic videos). As is characteristic of Umetsu's practice, the artist also departs from the original in a number of other ways, replacing the gold colour field with a blue-tinted ground, and turning the triptych into a freestanding structure that includes a fourth panel on the reverse side featuring an additional nude figure. Incidentally, Takashi Murakami also made an interpretation of Kuroda's work, *An Homage to Seiki Kuroda 'Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment'* which was included in an exhibition at Gagosian Gallery in London in 2011. Whereas Umetsu critically engages with Kuroda's work through what might be termed a queer sensibility, the three manga-style illustrators Murakami commissioned to make new versions of the original each exaggerated the sexual desirability of the female figures. Taken together, both Murakami's and Umetsu's appropriations reveal the phallic projection of the male gaze, which sees its own reflection in the objectified female figure