

## *Locating and Relocating Cultural Engagements in a Transnational Age*

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### **Abstract**

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

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

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## **Introduction: Art historical context and questions**

Since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Anglophone accounts of the arts of Japan have repeatedly considered Yamato visual culture as an innately formed ‘national art’ (Wölfflin, 1931), framed in constructs of ‘Japanese art history’ or ‘Japanese art’ still current in survey titles today (Stanley-Baker, 2000). In retrospect, this proposition provokes difficult questions: is there a singular and homogeneous entity we can recognize as ‘Japanese art’? What is it about any object of aesthetic or cultural significance that that might allow us to classify it as an ‘artwork of Japan’ and how does one define what a ‘Japanese artist’ might be?

More recent perspectives have situated these arts more discretely. Accounts of *ukiyo-e*, for example, situate the phenomenon securely within Edo period<sup>1</sup> *chōnin* ‘townsman’ communities. Also, since the nineteenth century fashion for ‘Japonisme’, these arts have become relocated from Japan into international settings, especially in Western Europe and North America. The transnational presence and intercultural significance of arts of Japan have become increasingly evident in recent years, as art collections and exhibitions have manifested in more public international settings. The outcomes have been richer intercultural appreciations of Japanese sensibilities, and reciprocally, opportunities for artists from Japan to explore border-crossing and culturally hybrid art projects.

Craig Clunas argued that there can be no monolithic phenomenon of ‘Chinese art’ – one might more reasonably refer to fields of ‘art in China’ (Clunas, 1997). The same might be said for the diverse fields of the arts of Japan. This article challenges the validity of Wölfflin’s paradigm, either for identifying psycho-geographic fields of aesthetic character, or for explaining the projects of artists as different as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1869), Kusama Yayoi (b. 1929), or Teraoka Masami (b. 1936). It argues that however artists and their objects might be associated with Japanese cultural contexts, each individual’s creative pathway operates within fields too complex to define in singular, mono-dimensional terms. It examines three specific questions: in what ways are their art projects located within Japanese contexts? In what ways do they draw on conventions and sensibilities of more diverse origin? And in what ways have their projects become relocated into international settings today? These three case studies suggest that challenges to notions of national homogeneity are embedded in the nature of the creative practice itself.

### **Art object as transnational phenomenon: Katsushika Hokusai’s Fuji pictures**

#### **Images located in place and time: The ‘Great Wave’ as local emblem**

Katsushika Hokusai’s mature work was located within familiar geographic settings and sustained both *ukiyo* ‘floating world’ and precedent *Yamato-e* sensibilities. Simultaneously, however, it drew on traditions beyond Japanese shores and found broad international approval within 40 years of his death. Today, Hokusai’s *Kanagawa-oki nami ura* – Under a wave off Kanagawa – is arguably the world’s

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

best-known example of ‘Japanese art’. For Hokusai’s Edo public, his popular *Fugaku sanjūrokkei* – Thirty-six views of Fuji (c. 1830-1832), to which the Kanagawa composition belongs – were primarily representations of place. Viewers were captivated by the convincing ‘here and nowness’ of each representation of two locations: the striking profile of Mt Fuji, and the geographic locality from which it is viewed. The ‘Great Wave’s’ title tells us we are viewing the mountain from above the waters of the Sagami-nada Sea, looking north toward Kanagawa Prefecture. The Sagami-nada Sea was a busy route and fishing ground, and for Hokusai’s public, a constant reminder of the precarious world of the coast. Hokusai’s public could situate the vista between the well-known towns of Kamakura to the east and Hakone to the south-west. Both places evoked spiritual allusions and nostalgic social or historical associations in the popular Edo imaginary.

These Fuji compositions were *meisho-e* – pictures of famous places. Each composition was geographically fixed, albeit shaped with artistic license. Hokusai’s viewers’ attentions were engaged by the *asobi* ‘play’ of his inventive skills: the curving face of the wave and the stressed hulls of the sea-craft echo the smooth curve of the distant slopes of Fuji, and the snow-capped peak of the mountain is repeated in the smaller wave at foreground left. Hokusai sustained that visual play between mountain and foreground forms in all but two of the forty-six views of the series. His public would have delighted at this lightness of wit and celebrated them as significant emblems for an early nineteenth century Yamato world.

### **The Fuji compositions as intercultural phenomena: Hokusai’s artistic sources**

In the past, psycho-geographic arguments for regionalist causality might have suggested that geographic locations could impact on artists in ways that informed geographically conditioned outcomes. Hokusai’s project is more complex than these determinist explanations suggest. First, he was the most relentlessly independent, versatile, and inventive of artists, and it was his innovative powers that appealed to his public, not his capitulation to geomorphic forces. Second, everything in the ‘Great Wave’ composition, even the actions of the waves, is a construct, from its hovering viewpoint over the sea to the diminution of overlapping forms. Hokusai’s many other representations of water, including ‘great wave’ motifs in his earliest coastal landscapes, confirm that he was acting on a rich knowledge of coastal phenomena.

Hokusai also embraced sources from earlier Japanese traditions. His closely observed genre scenes of ordinary people at work or play drew on late-Heian era *Yamato-e* precedents. His bucolic representations of the Edo hinterlands maintain an air of nostalgia resonating the Imperial collections of verse that were to inspire his final series, the *Hyakunin isshu* – literally, ‘one hundred people, one poem each’ (Bell, 2017a). In doing this, Hokusai was sustaining poetic allusions to sensibilities of *mono no aware* pathos still valued by his educated Edo patrons. These allusions sustained memories of rural life and values that, for many Edokko, were now established in their imaginary, rather than in daily urban experience. They juxtaposed poignant motifs of the fragile transience of life against the imposing fixedness, permanence, and unavoidably locating status of Fuji.

While maintaining timeless themes from Japanese locations, each of Hokusai’s Fuji views also embraced conventions of Chinese or European origin. From respected

Chinese precedents Hokusai adopted transparent tonal veils, corner-directed asymmetries, and stacked spatial tiers interspersed by layers of mist. The atmospheric suggestion of his monochrome compositions was enhanced by his adoption of Western technology in their *Berorin* (Berlin) Prussian Blue pigment. From his study of European landscape prints he also embraced a taste for empirical perspective devices of diminution of scale and linear and aerial perspectives for constructing deep space pictorial projections. Hokusai's viewers enjoyed the playful integrations of conventional devices, atmospheric allusions and representational potentials afforded by his assimilation of devices from other worlds.

### **From local to global icon – the 'Great Wave' today**

Today, Hokusai's ubiquitous wave has become an international phenomenon, its status transformed from 'local to global icon' (Clark, 2011, p. 50). It is recognized by viewers in Paris, France, New York, or the Antipodes. It appears in cartoons and high art images alike, and in contexts as disparate as Fiji currency or Dutch porcelain designs. It is the only fine art work to have attained *emoji* status. The 'Great Wave' was selected by the BBC and the British Museum as one of the 100 most significant objects in two million years of human history (MacGregor, 2010). Its composition has become something of a 'readymade' motif (Guth, 2015, p. 180), the adopted subject of street art murals in Camberwell in London, Newtown in Australia, or Georgetown, Washington DC. The wave's flying foam lacework transforms into a flock of 230 gulls in the TWA Flight 800 tragedy memorial at Stony Point Beach, New York (Guth, 2015 p. 195). It has secured appearances in popular media, towering over Herge's Tintin in a scene from *Les Cigares de Pharaon* for example (1934, Clark, 2011, p. 56), or re-appropriated back into a Japanese art context in Nara Yoshimoto's 1999 *Slash with a Knife* (Clark, 2011, p. 61).

Each of these constructions resituates Hokusai's wave into a new pictorial and socio-cultural location. Each manifests sensibilities or culturally conditioned values that lie at the heart of Hokusai's own world, sustaining enduring reminders of the fragility of human achievement in the face of the overwhelming presence of natural forces. In Herge's composition, for example, Tintin's cry of "Nous sommes perdu, Milou!" ('We are Lost, Snowy!') echoes Hokusai's theme, "that man is dwarfed by the elemental power of the sea" (Clark, 2011, p. 50). The sentiment is endorsed in the words of Dominic Sword, resident and painter of the "apocalyptic mural" in Camberwell: the 'Great Wave' is "something very primordial, something very powerful, something that just rises up from nature and wipes everything else away. And yet is just made of water...its here and then its gone" (Clark, 2011, p. 56). Hokusai would have appreciated the subtle irony of Sword's observation.

Today, the wave image is as likely to be seen on gallery walls in New Zealand, Australia, Boston or London as in Tokyo. The 2017 Hokusai blockbuster exhibition at National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne drew daily queues of viewers and enjoyed an extended season. The transnational presence of Hokusai and the wave is sustained in a near constant flow of publications on his work. The 'Great Wave' has found its way to almost every corner of the world; it has become an object of cross-cultural, global, significance.

## **Kusama Yayoi: Artist as transnational identity**

### **Locating Kusama in Japan**

Contemporary artist Kusama Yayoi is generally located as a Japanese artist by birth, by art education, and by early aesthetic inclination. Her initial visual arts engagements emerged during her childhood in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture. She studied *Nihonga* ('Japanese-style painting') at the Kyoto Municipal School of Arts and Crafts in 1948, then immersed herself into explorations of its affordances. Today, she is best known for colourful polka dot and architectural installations that find precedent in Japanese *kazari-e* decoration and Kamakura and Momoyama period ornamented interiors. These 'Japanese-style' qualities are transformed through an auto-ethnographic process of constant artistic reinvention (Bell, 2017b, p. 11).

Kusama's Matsumoto works found early appeal with local collectors (Bell, 2017b, p. 10). They capitalized on the potentials of *asobi* 'play' and disinterested exploration "within the affordances and constraints of the media of painting, sculpture and performance" (Bell, 2017b, p. 13). Her repetitive, self-immersive, working process finds precedent in the meditation practices of Zen Buddhism. Kusama also sustains distinctly local sensibilities of Heian period taste. A repeated theme in her mirror room works is the firefly. The motif finds rich precedent in Yamato pictorial arts and literature – notably in Murasaki Shikibu's (c. 978 – c. 1016) court novel *Genji monogatari* 'The Tale of Genji'. Its brief but glowing existence provided a metaphor for the ephemerality of beauty, pleasure, and life echoing poignant Buddhist sensibilities consistent with Kusama's own detachment (Bell, 2017b, p. 14).

### **Re-locating Kusama in the world**

Kusama has been widely appreciated in international circles. Her departure from Japan in 1957 was marked by her rejection of her Japanese world as "too small, too servile, too feudalistic, too scornful of women" (Frank, 2017). From 1958 she immersed herself in the diverse creative fabric of New York modernism, in Greenberg's preoccupations with the painter's medium, and Rosenbergian theatricality alike. She worked closely with the critic and minimalist artist Donald Judd and the surrealist Joseph Cornell. Modernist tropes accommodated her *Nihonga* practices and obsessive work habits into the self-referential potentials of reductionism, minimalism, increasingly overt feminist themes, and excursions into the surreal, theatrical, and self-promotional. Her works rapidly found a place in the New York, and subsequently European, art markets. Kusama had self-consciously relocated onto the world stage.

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

From 1973, Kusama's locational presence became more ambiguous. Her health and career became increasingly fragile. From 1977 she has resided at Seiwa Hospital for the Mentally Ill in Shinjuku, Tokyo. After an apparent hiatus, Kusama recommitted to her art practice from the 1980s, regaining her transnational 'phenomenon' status. Though her workplace was situated in her Tokyo studio, her work has become most publicly located in the theatre of the international art-world. She maintains management representation in London (Victoria Miro Gallery) and New York (David

Zwirner Gallery) as well as with Ota Fine Arts in Tokyo. She maintains a close supervision of the Kusama identity in the public media and in her exhibitions and publications. The last three decades have seen a procession of international exhibitions from the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Gagosian, Robert Miller, and David Zwirner Galleries in New York, Austria's Kunsthalle Wien, Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Kusama's international exhibitions are complemented by public commissions beyond Japan. Permanent *Infinity Room* installations can be visited at the Mattress Factory, Pennsylvania, Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona, HUMLEBÆK in Denmark, The Broad in Los Angeles, and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, in Rotterdam. Her works feature in permanent collections all over the world, in The Museum of Modern Art (New York), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Walker Art Centre Minneapolis, Tate Modern, Stedelijk Museum, Centre Pompidou, and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts. Kusama's transnational presence has been enhanced even more profoundly by representations of her work in print; at the time of writing, her New York publisher David Zwirner listed 29 separate publications about Kusama and her work (Zwirner, 2018). Like Hokusai's wave, her networks, polka dots, and infinity rooms are recognizable all over the globe.

Kusama's artistic presence is also maintained in Japan itself. She has enjoyed a homecoming in the 2016 exhibition *Yayoi Kusama: The Place for My Soul* at Matsumoto City Museum of Art. In an even more substantial 'repatriation', Kusama's life work, more poetically, her "eternal soul" (Betts, 2017), has found a home in a dedicated museum in Shinjuku, Tokyo, operated by the Yayoi Kusama Foundation. Even these events reflect her transnational currency: the Matsumoto show was curated by Kusama's London dealer Victoria Miro, and media share these events with international audiences to cement her presence in the wider world. Kusama's works are enjoyed by global audiences and evoke sensibilities beyond those of her Japanese heritage. She has made a major transition from the local to the global that challenges any singular classification as 'Japanese art'.

## **Inside Masami-za: Teraoka Masami and the artist as transnational actor**

### **Locating the artist in Japan**

Teraoka Masami's heritage is Japanese. He was born in Onomichi, in Hiroshima Prefecture. At age 9 he witnessed the explosion of the atomic bomb in the skies over Hiroshima (Charisma, 2017), and subsequently experienced the presence of American and New Zealand occupation forces in the south. These experiences informed the themes of his early serial projects, and his conscious locations of their subjects within a Japanese context:

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

For Teraoka, *ukiyo-e* conventions represented a pictorial “format of my national identity” (Teraoka, in Charisma, 2017), firmly locating his compositions in Japanese settings for Japanese and American viewers alike. For Teraoka, the *ukiyo-e* iconographies and devices were local territory. If kimono, *geta*, *shimada* coiffures, *kabuki* poses and *nirami* eye expressions in his *31 Flavours in Japan* and *McDonalds Hamburgers Invading Japan* seem clichéd, these works did deal specifically with issues of concern to Japanese communities: the invasion of Western multi-national commercial institutions and their impact on etiquettes, diets, and traditional ways of life. These were locally significant questions.

By the time Teraoka arrived at his major HIV AIDS series, the issues may have transcended Japanese locations and assumed a more universal significance, but the pictorial locations in Edo convention were even more fixed. Each of his large watercolours assumed the asymmetries, *bokashi* colour-fields, patterns, rhythmic linearity, figure-ground relations, or flowing fields of calligraphy of their woodblock precursors. Each adopted the seals, cartouches, and titles as they appeared in the print medium. His subjects sustained Edo iconographies of languid *yūjo* ‘prostitutes’, *kabuki* actors, or the “vehicles of the supernatural” (Kajiya, 2001, p. 86) of clouds, dreams, *yūrei* ‘faint spirits’, or *obake* ‘ghosts’. Teraoka’s adoptions displayed affinities with the theatrical style of Utagawa Kunisada I (1786-1865). His *bijin-ga* ‘beautiful woman pictures’, *obake*, or *kabuki* actors locked into frozen *mie* poses suggested parallel themes between Edo-period decadence and the apocalyptic narratives of HIV.

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

### **Relocating the artist in liminal territories**

Alison Bing describes the sensibilities of these vehicles in *kabuki* theatre terms, as *Masami-za*, the narrative art-theatre of Teraoka Masami (Bing, 2006, p. 22). Yet even in his student years, Teraoka’s sensibilities had embraced Western conceptual frameworks. His education at Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya had focused on Western art history and Christianity. He lived in Los Angeles from 1961, studying for his BA and MFA degrees at the Otis Art Institute between 1964 and 1968. From 1980 he has worked in Oahu in Hawai’i. Today he defines himself as ‘Japanese-American’; more specifically, “Japanese by birth, a US citizen by decision, and international by inclination” (Bing, 2006, p. 25). This liminal status reflects in recurrent themes of outsider or alien status in his works. His preoccupations with outsider figures of the floating world – prostitutes, actors, *rōnin* ‘masterless samurai’, or voyeurs – and self-representations of the artist as a displaced person echo themes of alienation in the modern world (Bell, 2014, p. 12). These themes reflect the his own status in the interstices: “like the *ronin*, or masterless samurai, of post-feudal

Japan, Teraoka seems to be out of sync with his place and time. One cannot imagine a more disparate juxtaposition of cultures than that presented by Japan and Los Angeles” (Kadvany, 1980, p. 26).

Teraoka employs the Edo device of *mitate* – loosely, ‘parody’, or ‘thought-provoking metaphor’ – to re-situate earlier Japanese motifs against contemporary, transnational, phenomena. Despite their *ukiyo-e* guise, his themes are globally situated rather than uniquely Japanese. Today, his observations on the ‘invasion’ of McDonalds on Japan evoke broader themes, of 150 years of Western incursions into Japanese affairs, and of a reciprocal impact of Japan on the West, evident in the Californian craze for sushi as a representative flavour of Japanese taste. His early critiques have transnational significance, underpinned by universal themes: timeless issues of the consequences and rewards of freedom and desire, of responsibility and consequence (Bell, 2014, p. 12). Through the 1990s, Teraoka’s pictorial encounters between Caucasian and Japanese phenomena have become more densely layered, embracing emergent themes like the intrusions of digital technology into intercultural encounters. His work of the 1990s embraces the sensibilities of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Picassos *Guernica*, or Goya’s *Caprichos*, melded into a subversive “grim pageantry of the Inquisition” (Heartney, 2006, p. 157). In extending from *ukiyo-e* formats to Italian quattrocento formats, Teraoka has embraced a densely packed synthesis of multi-cultural themes in the construction of “dichronistic palimpsests” of the extremes of Christian and Buddhist hells revealed in layered motifs of war in the Middle East, burqa, Teraoka’s “virtual inquisition” (Heartney, 2006, p. 181), the Buddhist ‘Chicken Torture’, or political corruption, in paintings conceived as “mirrors to society – and to ourselves” (Clark, 2006, p. 9). Motifs of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky offer apposite counterpoints to the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve and construct of original sin (Bing, 2006, p. 146). Dante’s purgatory is an appropriate setting for motifs of the “perversion of faith” of clerical abuse, human cloning, or pharmaceutical dependencies of the modern world (Bing, 2006, p. 150). Teraoka’s art is firmly in the present: his compositions serve to filter “a contemporary image stream through various past styles and approaches” as socially corrosive media of “astute satire” (Miles, 2008, p. 470). His discomfiting phenomena sustain “the unconscious collective memories” (Assmann, 2011, p. 220) of metaphors, sensibilities and values of the Japanese cultural consciousness for new and globally situated viewers today.

The contrived realism of the *kabuki* popular stage has provided Teraoka with appropriate settings for his pictorial parodies, poignant reflections on appetite, desire, hedonism and the essential sorrow of the world, questions of intercultural understanding, moral degeneration, or *mono no aware* reflections on impermanence and transience. The anxieties of his ‘actors’ reflect Teraoka’s own sense of the “anxiety of enjoining the global and the local, the dilemma of projecting an international space on the trace of a decentred, fragmented subject, cultural globality is situated in the *in-between* spaces of double frames” (Bhabha, 2004, p. 309). Perhaps the most remarkable quality emerging through Teraoka’s project is the self-consciousness of his engagements with art historical traditions and their implications for the way viewers appreciate questions of cultural identity. A risk-taking élan fires his curiosities and informs the freedoms he brings to melding threads of otherwise discordant art histories and cultural traditions into new, provocative, and “enticing historic aesthetic vocabularies” (Hughes, 2015). Those vocabularies inform the ways he has addressed new ways of recognizing, not a singular national phenomenon of

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

## Conclusion

Each of these artists has lived in Japanese locations, learning the traditions of *Yamato-e*, *Nihonga*, Buddhism, *kazari-e*, or *ukiyo-e*. For all three, however, internationally located resources of Chinese, Dutch, New York, or Italian Renaissance origin inform their projects consistently to generate new, multi-dimensional, hybrid projects. For each, this synthesis of local and global means has generated aesthetic engagements that find meaningful purchase in communities across the globe. Their eclectic pathways have important implications for thinking about the perspectives of art history. Most clearly, the distinct differences between each artist’s projects and the coherence of their syntheses of diverse conventions challenge Wölfflin’s assertion of an innate national aesthetic character. Indeed, their diversities challenge the essentialist assumptions informing any notion of a singular, mono-dimensional, or homogeneous field that might be conceived or categorized as ‘Japanese art’. Beyond acknowledging a broader notion of ‘*Yamato art*’ (an established category *within* the diverse arts practices of Japan) they challenge any notion that artists and their activities might be defined or confined by some kind of psycho-geographic force. Rather, they recognise the transnational currency of artistic phenomena, the temporal and geographic border-crossing mobility of culturally significant media, and the ways both art works and their artists can exist in wider worlds than those of their birth.

These studies also have implications for thinking about questions of creative practice. First, each artist works through independently forged iterative processes of extended regenerative pathways. Within those pathways, each artist’s individual moments of resolution and departure reflect the changing fabric of broad journeys, and a synthesis of ideas, motifs, themes, narratives, values and sensibilities from the past and present. Each artist has sustained culturally rich tropes from Yamato traditions. Hokusai’s *mono no aware* sobriety and bucolic nostalgia, Kusama’s *kazari-e* or *kijin* eccentricity, or Teraoka’s Buddhist hells manifest culturally significant artifacts of cultural memory (Shirane, 1998, p. 2). Their culturally charged iconographic, sensible, technical, or thematic “media of memory” (Assmann, 2011, p. 137) informed the developments of artworks that could mediate between aesthetic memory, cultural identity and taste and new times and settings (Assmann, 2011, p. 119). In synthesizing conventional Yamato media with more diverse resources they empowered their own inventive capacities, translating transcultural conventions into new, hybrid, outcomes for new audiences.

The unique outcomes of these artist’s projects confirm that each is the product of the inventive disposition of an individual. Each has learned their trade, and *acted* on their experiences, drawing from them, selecting, adopting, adapting, combining, reconnecting, rearranging, recontextualising, reconstructing or deploying them, to meld them into their own, individually conceived and fashioned, aesthetic enquiries. Each has exercised what Baxandall described as the *agency* of artists as active learners and independent constructors of pictorial projects *acting on* their culturally conditioned cognitive stock and sensibilities (1985, p. 59). That sense of *agency* explains how artists can forge inventive pathways that reach farther beyond their own

traditions into new domains. It also challenges assumptions of cultural or psycho-geographic causality. For the viewers who engage with these works, in Japanese or international settings, understanding this sense of creative agency may offer insights into the ways any artist's temperamental, intellectual, neurological, psychological aesthetic dispositions inform and condition their artistic engagements.

Today, viewers in any location can thus readily appreciate how a composition like Hokusai's 'Great Wave' is a product, not just of its geographic, social or temporal worlds but of the active realization of Hokusai's own feelings, responses to, perceptions of, and interpretations of these worlds, and the intellectual, literary, and artistic phenomena he encountered within them. For transnational publics, understanding the significance of these insights, and of intercultural exchange itself, can enhance new and more divergent nuances of response and appreciation of previously localized aesthetic phenomena of distant settings.

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