

The Orient Expressed

JAPAN'S INFLUENCE ON WESTERN ART 1854-1918



The Mississippi Museum of Art Guide for Educators

*The exhibition is on view February 19-July 17, 2010
For more information or to schedule a visit:*

www.msmuseumart.org



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About THE ORIENT EXPRESSED

After nearly 250 years of isolation, Japan was forced to open its borders to foreign trade in 1854. The period following Japan's years of seclusion—when Japanese cultural and commercial goods flooded the Western market—is one that profoundly influenced the Western world. An obsession for Japanese goods ensued, and, in 1872, the French art critic Phillippe Burty coined the term *Japonisme* (jap-oh-knees-muh) to describe the fascination with Japanese aesthetics and culture that swept into France and beyond, manifesting itself in both the visual and performing arts. *The Orient Expressed*, on view February 19-July 17, 2011, tells the story of Japan's influence on the West. This exhibit visually displays how Japanese aesthetics and cultural goods deeply influenced Western artistic movements, including impressionism, post-impressionism, art nouveau, and, eventually, modernism.

About the GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

This guide is intended to provide teachers of all disciplines with the information and resources necessary to facilitate thoughtful dialogue with their students about *The Orient Expressed*. Our handbook contains cultural and historical information about the phenomenon known as Japonisme; informational wall text from the exhibition; images that highlight major themes from the exhibition; suggestions for ways to encourage closer looks at works of art; activities to reinforce themes and concepts; and suggestions for additional resources to support classroom learning. In addition, a ten-minute audio segment featuring guest curator Gabriel P. Weisberg, Ph.D. is available online for educational use. We hope that this guide will be used in conjunction with a visit to the Museum. If that is not a possibility, it is nonetheless a useful guide for learning in and through the arts in any classroom. As a resource, this guide can be used in its entirety or through the use of individual images.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS at THE MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART

The Mississippi Museum of Art believes that visual art can launch extraordinary thinking among learners of all ages. In a world inundated with visual stimuli, the Museum believes that an essential component of a child's education is to learn to process this imagery in a thoughtful and critical way. The Museum's school programs, which encompass programs at the Museum, in the classroom, and in the greater Mississippi community, seek to encourage rich encounters in the visual arts through active participation, critical thinking, and cross-curricular connections.

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LOOKING AT ART

The following is meant to assist educators with helping students respond thoughtfully and critically to works of art. When looking at works of art, the students' experience is most rewarding if they are encouraged to respond imaginatively and if they understand that there are no wrong answers.

Establish a protocol, or a thinking routine, to provide structure to the dialogue around a work of art. Research shows that thinking routines make students more comfortable to engage in unfamiliar dialogue and encourage active participation among all learners. Creating a “culture of thinking”¹ helps facilitators meet learning objectives and also assists in building students' vocabulary so that they can become more conversant and descriptive with visual prompts. To read more about thinking routines, [click here](#).

If you do not currently use a protocol in your classroom, please use the Museum's, which students encounter when visiting MMA. Use this routine with each work of art before incorporating the various discussion questions and additional activities you find in this guide.

When confronting a new work of art, walk your students through the following:

SEE-CONNECT-THINK-WONDER

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

As students identify what they see, we recommend that you point to what they are noticing in the work. Continue to ask these questions until all possible answers are exhausted.

CONNECT: What do you already know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

This is an opportunity for students to draw from their prior knowledge (other disciplinary content, personal experiences, etc.) and make connections to it. Students can collectively pool information during the “connect” portion.

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does this work make you feel? Why?

This is a chance for students to express an opinion about the image. Here, you might push them to support their claims through the elements of art—[composition, shape, form, color, and texture](#).

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

This encourages students to use their imaginations and to think about other factors that they would like to know about the work. This would also be an appropriate time to introduce other “contextual” factors about the life and work of the artists, historical events that were happening at the time this work was created, etc.

¹ Ritchart Summer 2007



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INTRODUCTION TO *THE ORIENT EXPRESSED*

From the seventeenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, Japan maintained an isolationist policy and was closed to outsiders. Fearing that the influx of foreign traders and missionaries to Japan would eventually result in Western military conquest, the ruling shogun—the warrior class with more power than the emperor—sealed Japan's borders to the West in 1603, forcing all Westerners out of Japan. During the next 250 years, Westerners had very little communication with the Japanese, and the country and its customs were cloaked in mystery.

As Western trade elsewhere in Asia expanded—particularly with China during the 1840s after the First Opium War—and the United States pursued its doctrine of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, opening Japan's borders to trade became a strategic economic and military focus for the United States. In 1853, President Millard Fillmore sent Commodore Matthew C. Perry on an expedition to Japan. Perry's mission was to convince the ruling shogun to open Japan's borders to the United States for trade and travel. President Fillmore directed Perry to present the ruling Tokugawa shoguns with a [letter stating the United States' request for a treaty](#). On July 14, 1853, Commodore Perry went ashore at Gore-hama to make the request, promising to return in one year to receive the shogun's answer².

Commodore Perry returned to Japan in February, 1854, this time with considerably more men and ammunition. Perry threatened that if the Japanese shogun did not sign the treaty, he would respond by using military force. The Japanese did not have a navy and knew that, even if they could resist the pressure from the United States, more European countries with naval power would soon follow and they would eventually have to submit to the pressure of the Western nations. Eventually, they reluctantly [conceded to U.S. pressure in a letter to President Fillmore](#). On March 31, 1854, Japan signed the Treaty of Kanagawa, agreeing to open two of its ports to trade, provide sufficient care for shipwrecked American sailors, and establish an American consulate in Shimoda, Japan. Within five years, several more countries (including France and Great Britain) had signed trade agreements with Japan.

[Accompanying Perry on his journey was a printmaker named William Heine, who visually documented the journey](#). His illustrations were reproduced in magazines, prints, and other publications, making Commodore Perry's journey well known throughout the United States and creating quite the sensation about this mysterious and seemingly exotic place. In fact, Commodore Perry's journey was the most publicized event prior to the Civil War. Heine's images increased interest in Japanese culture, which eventually contributed to the increased demand for Japanese goods.³

The period that would follow is one marked by major change for both Japan and the Western world. Japan set itself on an aggressive path to modernization, focusing on quickly getting up to speed on the latest technological advances as well as building a modern military. As Japan's borders were now open, and [technological advances allowed for quicker and safer maritime travel](#), the mid- to late-nineteenth century brought an unprecedented influx of Japanese artifacts and cultural goods to the West. By the 1880s, Japanese cultural and commercial goods were all the rage. Japanese ukiyo-e (pictures of

² UVA 2009

³ Dower 2010

the floating world) woodblock prints, kimonos, fans, ceramics, and various curios flooded the Western market and became the fashion of the day.

Beyond the novelty, there were also other reasons that these Japanese goods had particular appeal. The Industrial Revolution was by then in full swing, and overwhelming changes were taking place in Europe and the United States. Not only was the economy rapidly changing from agrarian to industrial, but lifestyles were also undergoing major change: a middle class was emerging, bringing with it an increased demand for reasonably priced yet fashionable goods; the role of women was evolving into one where women (especially those in the middle class) began to take part in household decisions (particularly in the décor of the abode); factory production was overshadowing and drastically reducing the demand for handmade objects (like decorative arts); and increases in manufacturing drew many people to cities, ultimately changing urban centers into bustling, grimy, and overcrowded places to live.⁴

It is no wonder, then, with these major changes underway, that the pristine, quiet, simple lifestyles depicted in Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints and hand-crafted objects held particular appeal for many Westerners. Indeed, Japanese wares presented a breath of fresh air to the lives of many Westerners in what seemed to be an increasingly complex and unpredictable modern world.

The sweeping influence of Japanese goods, however, was not simply a fad that would eventually fade away. Beyond women wearing kimonos, carrying fans, and decorating their homes in the Japanese taste, the impact of Japanese aesthetics, or principles of beauty, was profound. Ultimately, the Japanese style would have a lasting influence on Western art and play a large role in Western art movements, including impressionism, post-impressionism, art nouveau, and eventually modernism. *The Orient Expressed* shows how many artists absorbed much of the Japanese aesthetic and ultimately found ways to incorporate particular aspects of it into their own artistic style. Indeed, the influence of Japanese art changed both the arts and the culture of the day, and most argue that the West continues to be influenced by Japan through cultural phenomena such as Manga and Anime.⁵

ADDITIONAL USEFUL RESOURCES ABOUT COMMODORE PERRY AND HIS JOURNEY:

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun, by Rhoda Blumberg

Grades: 4-8

Shipwrecked: The True Adventures of a Japanese Boy, by Rhoda Blumberg

Grades: 4-8

[Black Ships and Samurai: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan \(1853-1854\)](#), by John W. Dower

Grades: 6-12

MIT Visualizing Cultures Project

[150 Years after Commodore Perry: Japanese spirit, western things](#)

Grades: 9-12

Published in July 10, 2003 in [The Economist](#)

⁴ Napier 2007

⁵ Weisberg 2011



William (Wilhelm) Heine (American, born Germany, 1827-1885); Eliphalet M. Brown, Jr. (American, 1816-1886), publisher; Sarony & Company (1853-1857, New York, New York), printer; *Landing of Commodore Perry, Officers and Men of the Squadron to Meet the Imperial Commissioners at Simoda, Japan, June 8, 1854*, 1855. hand-colored lithograph. 35.5 x 25.5 in. Collection of Mystic Seaport Museum, Connecticut, 1963.354.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: PERRY'S JOURNEY & HEINE

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

Take a look at William Heine's illustration, which helps to set the stage for the rest of the exhibition.

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT....

EIMIH

PERRY'S JOURNEY IN CONTEXT: What other events were happening during this period of time? Think about events both in the United States and in Europe. What affect do you suppose these had on Japonisme?

EIMIH

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: How did the Industrial Revolution contribute to the craze for Japanese goods? [Possible ideas to discuss: increased production, burgeoning middle class/growing consumer culture, increased information transfer between cultures, trade expansion, the appeal of exotic cultures to grapple with realities of modernization]

MIH

ROLE OF WOMEN: How was the role of women changing during this time period? What affect might that have had on Japonisme and in fueling the "craze"?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

EIM

In the United States, Commodore Perry's journey was the most publicized event prior to the Civil War. Ask your students to imagine that they are reporters writing for the newspaper. Have them research and write an article about any aspect of Perry's efforts and eventual success in opening Japan to the West.

MIH

Have your students research Japan's rapid modernization and its role on the world stage during the twentieth century. Contrast this with its period of seclusion, which ended in 1854.

EIM

The illustration of William Heine is clearly drawn from the Western perspective. Ask your students to imagine how this initial encounter between Perry's men and the Japanese shogun might look different if drawn from the perspective of the Japanese. Have students draw the encounter from the Japanese perspective.



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DISCOVERING JAPAN: THE WEST MEETS EAST

EXHIBITION WALL TEXT FROM SECTION 1 of *The Orient Expressed*

Japan had been a closed society for centuries when Commodore Matthew Perry negotiated a trade agreement between the United States and Japan in 1854. From the moment that Commodore Perry's American warships sailed into Uraga Bay, the Japanese were increasingly exposed to Western innovations and technology, eventually leading them to modernize to compete with Western nations, while the West quickly became mesmerized by a culture that placed importance on tradition and artistic refinement in the most mundane objects.

Part of this global change was the increasing awareness of Japanese creativity in the visual arts. Attention focused on decorative art objects—*inro*, porcelains, and *netsuke*—but interest soon shifted toward Japanese *Ukiyo-e* prints. The latter, unappreciated by the Japanese themselves, became a sensation in the West as they were sought after by collectors, designers, and artists.

Under the banner of Japonisme—the appreciation of all things Japanese—startling changes in design, color, and the shape of objects began to appear in the visual art of Western countries. French writer Edmond de Goncourt was a leading supporter of Japanese art, as was entrepreneur Siegfried Bing, whose magazine *Le Japon Artistique* (1888–1891) spurred increasing enthusiasm for Japanese art throughout Europe and the United States. By 1900 Japonisme was a worldwide movement whose artistic influence reached people everywhere.



Katsushika Taito (Japanese, active 1810-1853), *Carp Leaping from a Stream*, circa 1840. color woodcut. 14 x 6.5 in. Collection of Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Laurel, Mississippi. Gift of Wallace B. Rogers, 26.157.

Siegfried Bing (French, 1838-1905), publisher, *Le Japon Artistique* (no. 10), 1889. color Gillotage. 13.25 x 9.75 in. Collection of Gabriel and Yvonne Weisberg, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

UKIYO-E PRINTS

Japanese ukiyo-e (translated “pictures of the floating world”) are woodblock prints that were produced en masse during Japan’s period of seclusion. The equivalent of a modern-day poster (though ukiyo-e were handcrafted), the prints were seen in Japan as commercial goods—traded like baseball cards might be traded today—rather than as works of art.⁶ In 1856, however, the French etcher Félix Bracquemond is said to have discovered ukiyo-e prints being used as shipping paper for another Japanese ware, and immediately acknowledged that the ukiyo-e prints he discovered were works of art in their own right.⁷ Bracquemond shared his discovery with some of the other early proponents of Japanese culture, and this ukiyo-e print—from Hokusai’s book of *Manga*—along with others that artists and collectors began to discover, were soon in high demand. Artists, including Paul Gauguin, James McNeill Whistler, and Mary Cassatt, all personally collected ukiyo-e prints and incorporated stylistic elements from the ukiyo-e prints into their work.

Ukiyo-e prints presented Western artists with new forms of subject matter—pictures of the everyday—that countered the conventional artistic wisdom of the time. Familiar subjects were landscapes and figures engaging in rather mundane tasks—different from the portraiture and historical paintings favored by the “Academie” in the Western world. Thus, Western artists initially began incorporating elements of ukiyo-e into their work through inclusion of similar subject matter. As Western artists increasingly absorbed the aesthetic principles of Japanese art, they began to incorporate elements into their work as well. Indeed, the ukiyo-e prints presented new approaches to artistic style: many woodblock prints that the Westerners encountered featured simplified, and often silhouetted forms, displayed decorative motifs, employed two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional space, and often were asymmetrically rendered. These elements, along with many more, began to take root in Western art, and would eventually lay the groundwork for modernism and abstraction.

TAITO and *LE JAPON ARTISTIQUE*

Taito II Katsushika “Taito” was a Japanese printmaker and a student of the famous printmaker Hokusai. This image, *Carp Leaping from a Stream* (1840), is an ukiyo-e woodblock print, and it is novel both in subject and in style to the traditional Western art of the day. The image has as its focal point a carp—a symbol of strength in Japan—leaping out of the water. The water is depicted in highly stylized concentric circles and is decorated with green motifs that appear to be green bushes or trees. There is no depth, or perspective, to this image; everything is portrayed along a two-dimensional, flat plane. Though significant in its own right, this image is particularly important to Japonisme when compared with the cover of *Le Japon Artistique* (1889), a highly influential artistic journal published by Siegfried Bing, a Parisian dealer of Japanese art and objects. Here, Bing has used Taito’s image almost exactly, reproducing it on the front of his magazine. This act, along with other reproductions of artists’ designs, ultimately led to the widespread dissemination of Japanese art and design.⁸

⁶ L. R. Art n.d.

⁷ Weisberg 2011

⁸ *ibid*

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: UKIYO-E

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

E

REPRODUCTION?: Compare the *Carp Leaping from a Stream* by Taito to the similar image from Siegfried Bing's *La Japon Artistique*. Is it an exact reproduction? What are the similarities and what are the differences?

MIH

2-DIMENSIONAL: Prior to the introduction of ukiyo-e prints, Western artists worked very hard to create perspective, that is, the illusion of depth, in their work. Japanese artists producing woodblock prints, on the other hand, created quite the opposite; ukiyo-e prints are distinct in their flat planes and lack of perspectival depth. Look at the Taito image: what does he do to make this image appear “flat”? What could he have done to make the image recede into the background?

EIMIH

INFORMATION TRANSFER: *Le Japon Artistique* was important in giving people information about Japanese art and contributed greatly to the “craze” for all things Japanese. Spend a few moments thinking about how information is conveyed today. How do various things become popular or a fad?

EIM

SYMBOLS: In Japan, the carp is a symbol of strength and courage. Each year in May, Children’s Day is celebrated in Japan and carp streamers are hung outside of the home to wish for the strength and courage of the children of Japan. Have your class spend time discussing what a symbol is and where symbols come from. Then, have your students divide into groups and research symbols of strength from other cultures (such as Native America, various African tribes, South Pacific cultures, or Ancient cultures).



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SEEING THE REAL JAPAN

EXHIBITION WALL TEXT FROM SECTION 2 of *The Orient Expressed*

While many artists and collectors were mesmerized by a fanciful notion of Japan, a movement emerged to send people to Japan so they could “see and experience” the country and its people and then share their experiences with fellow Westerners. Among the earliest to go to Japan in the 1870s was Charles A. Longfellow, who returned to the United States heavily tattooed in the Japanese manner. He also brought back prints, fans, kimonos, and photographs that helped to foster appreciation for the real Japan in Boston.

Western travelers to Japan had a variety of objectives. Siegfried Bing, who went there in 1880–1881, was intrigued by Japanese arts and the possibility of doing business. The photojournalist Felice Beato went to record the country; Hugues Krafft, a wealthy dilettante, traveled for the pleasure of discovery but also photographed hundreds of “real” views of the countryside and the people, which he shared with the burgeoning Japoniste movement.

The painters who went to Japan—such as Robert Blum or Theodore Wores—provided Western audiences with images of famous sites or depictions of the Japanese people. Ultimately, this encouraged a better understanding of a country that had been a mystery to most Westerners.



John La Farge (American, 1835-1910), *The Great Statue of Amida Buddha at Kamakura, Known as the Daibutsu, from the Priest's Garden*, 1887. watercolor and gouache on off-white wove paper. 19.25 x 12.5 in. Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Gift of the Family of Maria L. Hoyt, 1966, 66.143.

JOHN LA FARGE (1835-1910)

John La Farge is an American artist, noted for his paintings, his murals, his writing, and his invention of opalescent glass for use in stained glass windows.⁹ La Farge was one of the first artists to show Japanese influence in his work, not just in subject matter but also in aesthetics.¹⁰

Born in 1835 in New York City, La Farge had the privilege of traveling extensively during his youth. Though he planned to become a lawyer, he enjoyed looking at and even creating his own art in his free time. In fact, much of his training came from time spent studying the Old Masters at the Louvre in Paris, where he was particularly drawn to the etchings of Rembrandt.

In 1859, La Farge abandoned his intention of becoming a lawyer and moved to Newport, Rhode Island to study under the famed American painter William Morris Hunt. It was there that he met and married Margaret Mason Perry, the great-niece of Commodore Matthew Perry, making John La Farge related to Perry by marriage. This connection undoubtedly affected and influenced his work.¹¹

It is likely that La Farge first encountered Japanese ukiyo-e prints during a trip to Paris in 1856. And, though it would be many years before ukiyo-e prints would be widely influential in Europe or the United States, La Farge had access to them much earlier through a Newport summer resident who managed an East Asian import company in New York City. Thus, it was during the early 1860s that Japanese influences begin to emerge in his work, particularly in his adoption of asymmetrical composition and bold, heightened color.

In the 1870s and 80s, however, La Farge's work moved away from his "radical" style of the 1860s, with its notable Japanese influence, and he instead concentrated primarily on decorative projects, where he found his skills to be more lucrative. He remained extremely interested in color (he loved the use of color in Japanese prints) and during this time period he invented opalescent glass (patented in 1880) that could be used in stained glass windows. (Opalescent glass is denser than other window glasses, and often looks marbled with subtle variation in its hue.) His work of murals and stained glass became very well-known and in high demand, and his biggest competitor and eventual arch rival was Louis Comfort Tiffany.¹² His style once again looked East, however, when in 1886 La Farge left the United States for Japan, accompanying his friend Henry Adams. La Farge was one of a handful of artists who actually had the opportunity to travel to Japan, as most were only able to venture there in their imaginations. And, like the other artists who traveled to Japan, his renderings of various landmarks in Japan were distributed at home, helping those unable to travel to Japan develop mental visions—whether realistic or not—of the country and its people.¹³

During his trip to Japan, La Farge saw many objects and motifs that would influence his work. As he traveled, he would paint watercolors at the various sites he visited, ultimately producing hundreds of watercolors over the course of the journey. In addition, La Farge used his camera to document the sites he visited and to provide him with photographs that he used as visual aids to produce oil paintings when he arrived home.

La Farge used a watercolor and several photographs from the trip to create *The Great Statue of Amida Buddha at Kamakura, Known as the Daibutsu, from the Priest's Garden*. The painting of the great Buddha is impressionistic, with brushstrokes that are visible. This statue, which you can still see today if you visit Japan, was cast in bronze in the mid-thirteenth century. It was at one time gilded, and you can still see some of the gilding today around the ears. It is over fifty feet tall and sits in the open air surrounded by mountains and lush gardens.¹⁴

⁹ Met 2010

¹⁰ Weisberg 2011

¹¹ Grinnell 2010

¹² La Farge 1987

¹³ Adams 1987

¹⁴ Met 2010

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: LA FARGE

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

SUBJECT: Why do you think the artist chose to depict this subject? What about it do you think he found intriguing or worthy of painting?

EIMIH

PERSPECTIVE: Rather than depicting this image from the front, La Farge chose instead to depict it from an angle. Why do you think he chose to do this? What might be different about the image had he chosen to depict it from the front?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

La Farge painted this image of a well known statue in Japan. If you were to travel to Japan today, you would be able to see this very statue. Prompt your students: Think about people arriving in Mississippi who know very little about our state and want to capture the most important things to carry back with them to share with people in their hometown. What would you tell them to draw? Draw what you choose and write at the bottom why you think it is important to share it with other people.

EIMIH

Take a photograph of a favorite place (possibly of your school). Using paint, have each of your students create a painting from the photograph. Once finished, have your students display their work altogether and discuss why they painted the picture the way that they did. What did they paint “realistically” and what did they paint more imaginatively? If appropriate, ask your students whether photographs are subjective or objective—why or why not?



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POPULARIZATION: ASSIMILATING JAPAN IN FRANCE

EXHIBITION WALL TEXT FROM SECTION 3 of *The Orient Expressed*

Commentary by French art critics on Japanese art (especially Ukiyo-e prints) in newspapers and magazines helped to spread the Japonisme phenomenon among the general public. However, the first group to truly embrace Japonisme was the visual artists, who gradually assimilated motifs and stylistic qualities in their work.

Initially, artists like Félix Bracquemond used Japanese prints as the starting point for their ceramic decorations. Ceramic table services in the Japanesque style became increasingly popular among the upper middle class. As the craze grew, ceramic manufactories expanded their product lines to include more examples of Japanesque wares that had become fashionable in French households.

Artists such as Henry Somm and Henri Guérard created witty images that referenced the overwhelming impact of Japonisme, inventing visual commentaries suggesting that almost every aspect of society—from dress to utilitarian objects—was being overrun by Japanese taste. Gradually, the Japonisme vogue evolved into a serious exploration of aesthetic principles, especially among avant-garde artists, moving beyond simple imitation into a new sense of creative freedom that liberated them from stale conventions.



Leboeuf Milliet et Cie (dates unknown, Creil, France); Félix Bracquemond (French, 1833-1914), designer; François-Eugène Rousseau (French, 1827-1891), modeler; *Cake Platter, Service Rousseau*, circa 1868. earthenware, polychrome enamels. 3.25 x 8.5 x 8.5 in. Collection of Gabriel and Yvonne Weisberg, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

FÉLIX BRACQUEMOND (1833-1914)

Félix Bracquemond, a painter and an etcher, was a prominent figure in artistic and literary circles during the nineteenth century. He played an instrumental role in helping to revive etching as an artistic medium in Europe and played an early role in the craze for Japanese goods and cultural items. In particular, Bracquemond is largely credited with the discovery of the work of famed ukiyo-e artist Hokusai, when he found one of Hokusai's woodblock prints being used as shipping paper wrapped around other Japanese goods for transport to Europe. Like his good friend Philippe Burty, the art critic who coined the term "Japonisme," Bracquemond was an early proponent of reviving the decorative arts, which he believed had become stale and predictable, through the incorporation of Japanese motifs and design. Drawing inspiration from Hokusai's book of *Manga*, Bracquemond created a ceramic table service called the *Service Rousseau*. The *Service Rousseau* (1867), along with subsequent table services and other decorative arts, would contribute a great deal early on to the momentum and interest in Japanese culture that swept across the Western world.¹⁵

Service Rousseau represents the first occasion Japanese motifs were used in the French decorative arts and applied in a random manner.¹⁶ In fact, the table service was wildly popular when it was exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, and spurred other designers to follow in making table services inspired by Japanese motifs. Soon, table services like the *Service Rousseau* were in high demand as they quickly became the latest fashion.

The Japanese motifs used to create these new table services represented a momentous shift for French decorative arts, as the Japanese focused on seemingly insignificant aspects of nature—fish, birds, bugs—that were not deemed worthy of attention without the influence of Japanese goods.¹⁷ Further, these motifs were scattered on the wares, representing a departure from the usual symmetrical depiction of subject matter.

TRANSFER PRINTING PROCESS

Developed in England during the 1750s, transfer printing was a method of decorating porcelain and ceramics. The process refers to the transfer of designs and motifs from copper plates to tissue-thin paper. Once the color pigment from the copper plate has been transferred to the thin paper, the paper is then placed on a ware that has already been bisque-fired. The piece is then glazed and fired at a low temperature in order to fix the pattern onto the object. The tissue paper is lost in the transfer printing process.¹⁸

Developed as an alternative to hand-painted decorative arts, transfer printing greatly reduced the cost of producing beautiful table services and other decorative arts, thus increasing their accessibility among the growing middle class. Amid the increasing fascination with Japanese arts and culture, transfer printing offered a way that many ceramicists and artists in the West could appropriate motifs and designs from Japan.

This was undoubtedly the case with Félix Bracquemond, who used the transfer printing process to directly appropriate many of the motifs he used from Hokusai's *Manga*.¹⁹ These fresh, innovative designs became popular in Paris and elsewhere, and added fuel to the craze for all things Japanese.

¹⁵ Weisberg 2011

¹⁶ Ibid. 17-75

¹⁷ Wichmann 1981

¹⁸ Services 2008

¹⁹ Weisberg 2011

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: BRACQUEMOND

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

E

DEFINE: Through ukiyo-e prints, Western artists discovered a plethora of new subject matter, particularly because the Japanese woodblock prints tended to focus on small, seemingly insignificant subjects like bugs and other small animals. These “motifs” began to be incorporated into Western art and decorative objects. Ask your students to define “motif”. Can you give an example of a motif?

MIH

SENSE OF BEAUTY: In Japanese art, Westerners were presented with a notion of “beauty” that challenged their own. Japanese aesthetics tended to focus on the natural world and on the simplification of décor, whereas the Western aesthetic was more ornate in nature. What makes something beautiful? What do you find beautiful? Why? Is beauty “objective” or “subjective”?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

Ask your students to look around the room (or take your students outside) and have them find something that seems “insignificant” but that they find worthy of drawing. Give them thirty minutes to sit quietly and draw it. After they are finished, have them share with the class what they drew and why they drew it in the manner that they did. Display the images in your room.

EIMIH

Introduce the concept of decorative art to your class and ask your students to brainstorm examples of decorative arts. In groups, have your students consider an object that has a function or a utility. Ask them to think of how they might redesign that object so that it is both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Using cardboard, wire, paper, colored pencils, and other materials, have your students construct a model of the “decorative art.”



MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM of ART

SPREADING JAPONISME: ENGLAND AND AMERICA

EXHIBITION WALL TEXT FROM SECTION 4 of *The Orient Expressed*

During the 1880s, after Japonisme had become a craze on the continent, American and British artists began to take an ever increasing part in the production of art objects reflective of Japanese design principles.

American expatriate Mary Cassatt completed a sensitive and visually daring series of color etchings during the 1890s that showed a deep awareness of the prints of the Japanese master Utamaro. In several large-scale lithographs, British-born Louis Rhead presented peacocks and swans that prefigured the art nouveau movement with swirling curvilinear shapes. American Arthur Wesley Dow utilized Japanese design principles when he created his poster advertising a New York exhibition of Japanese color prints in 1896.

Similarly, American ceramic manufactories, whether on the east coast or in the Midwest, such as Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati, Ohio, responded to the taste for nature and subtle colors. By 1900, American ceramics were winning international recognition at world's fairs, furniture had absorbed the visual impact of lacquer ware, and glass and silverware were revitalized with a fresh sense of design.



Mary Cassatt (American, 1844-1926), *The Bath* (also called *The Tub*), 1891. drypoint, soft ground etching and aquatint on cream laid paper. 12.31 x 9.81 in. Collection of Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington, North Carolina. Gift of Thérèse Thorne McLane, in honor of Samuel Hudson Hughes and Zelina Comegys Brunschwig, 1984.2.1.

MARY CASSATT (1844-1926)

Mary Cassatt was an American, though she lived the majority of her life in Paris. She was born in 1844 in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, which is now part of Pittsburgh, to a prominent family of great means. She had the privilege of traveling extensively with her family during her youth. From the ages of sixteen to twenty, Cassatt received formal training in the arts from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and, at the age of twenty-two, Cassatt moved to Paris to pursue her studies on her own.

In 1874, Cassatt moved permanently to Paris, and by this time, Japonisme was in full swing. Cassatt was certainly swept into the craze for “all things Japanese,” collecting prints, porcelain decorative arts, and fans among other items, which surely had an influence on her evolving artistic style.

During these years, Cassatt, though determined to make a living on her own, struggled to stir interest in her work among the art salons in Paris. In 1877, however, her friend Edgar Degas asked Cassatt to show her work with the impressionists: the emergent, and seemingly radical, artistic group that stood in stark contrast to the traditional Academy which sponsored the juried Salon shows. The impressionists’ work, though markedly varied, was usually created outdoors and included noticeable brushstrokes. Within a few years of her affiliation with the avant-garde impressionists, Cassatt moved from painting in her studio to a sketchbook where she began working out-of-doors.²⁰

The spring of 1890 marks the point at which Cassatt’s work began to be most visibly influenced by Japanese prints. During this time, the École des Beaux-Arts mounted an exhibition of Japanese woodcut or ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world) prints, and Cassatt is said to have attended the show on multiple occasions. The exhibition “revealed in sheer quantity the quality of the impact of their intense color, tough and simplified line, and ‘other’ ways of treating familiar visits and tea-drinking. What must have enthralled Cassatt was the possibility of reintroducing her passion for color and a densely worked surface into her new-found interest in the simplified line and the reduced setting.”²¹

After her encounter with the show, Cassatt decided to create her own series (on view during *The Orient Expressed*) in the ukiyo-e style. Many credit Cassatt with being the first artist to imitate successfully all aspects of the prints²²: she “combined simplicity of design, Oriental spatial patterns, flat areas of color, and daily-life subject matter to create a Western version of this Eastern art form.”²³ Cassatt, who is often thought of for her work depicting the subject of mother and child, most certainly appropriated this everyday theme from Japanese prints.

The Bath, the first in Cassatt’s series, is a deliberate attempt to imitate the Japanese style. Here you see an everyday scene of mother and child, marked by Japanese aesthetic principles, which include simplified lines, solid blocks of color, a flattening of the visual plane, and a slight diagonal composition. It is evident, however, in her incorporation of Western techniques, that Cassatt studied Western printmaking: the print was done in drypoint, a printmaking technique; aquatint, a process for giving color to etchings; and hand-coloring, rather than in the relief process used in Japanese ukiyo-e prints.²⁴ According to Cassatt, the subsequent works in the series focused more on atmosphere than on pure imitation: “The set of ten plates was done with the intention of attempting imitation of Japanese methods. Of course, I abandoned that somewhat after the first plate and tried more for atmosphere.”²⁵

Of her method, in 1903 Mary Cassatt said, “My method is very simple. I drew an outline in drypoint and transferred this to two other plates, making in all three plates, never more, for each proof. Then I put on aquatint wherever the color was to be printed; the color was painted on the plate as it was to appear in the proof.”²⁶

²⁰ Lambourne 2005

²¹ Pollock 1998, 167

²² Weisberg 2011

²³ Matthews 1987

²⁴ NGA 2010

²⁵ Cassatt 1978, 19

²⁶ Cassatt 1978, 19

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: CASSATT

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

ELEMENTS OF ART: In this image, Mary Cassatt tries to imitate Japanese aesthetic style. What about this image do you find particularly Japonesque?

EIMIH

DETAILS: One Japanese element she tries to emulate is the simplified form. How would this image change if Cassatt had chosen to include more details of the mother and child's surroundings?

EIMIH

MOOD: How does this image make you feel? What about it makes you feel that way?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

Show your class a “busy,” very detailed image—one from a magazine, a book, or a website—and ask them to simplify it. Have your students think about Mary Cassatt’s use of line, motif, and solid color. Ask your students to share their image with each other in small clusters, and then to compare their work with their classmates’. Have them share with the entire class the differences they find in the way they drew the forms and simplified their images.

EIMIH

Ask your students to imagine themselves inside the work. Have them write a story from the perspective of the mother.



James McNeill Whistler (American, 1834-1903), *A Freshening Breeze*, 1883. oil on panel. 9.25 x 5.38 in. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Illinois. Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.152.

JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834-1903)

James McNeill Whistler was an American painter, though he lived in Europe the majority of his adult life. Whistler worked in a number of mediums, including oil painting, watercolor, etching, and interior design, paying particular attention to tone and color.

Whistler was born in 1834 in Lowell, Massachusetts, but he spent much of his childhood in St. Petersburg, Russia, where his father worked as a railroad engineer. Returning to the United States for school, Whistler attended West Point Academy, although it is generally acknowledged that he had little success as a soldier or as an engineer and eventually left before finishing. Whistler did a brief stint at the United States Geodetic and Coast Survey offices, and became immersed in his occupation when he began working for the etching department. It was here that he produced his first etching, a medium that would gain him recognition as an artist. In 1855, Whistler decided to go to Paris to pursue a career as an artist.

Whistler was a vivacious and controversial character whose work is marked by bold experimentation. He adopted a bohemian lifestyle, choosing at times to live in ways that were disapproved by friends and family. In this lifestyle, however, he found rich visual stimuli, which ultimately inspired some of his most extraordinary work.

His work drew a parallel between music and his visual art, and Whistler named many of his pieces “Nocturnes” and “Symphonies”: “With music, the listener responds to the relationship of sounds which, except in occasional instances, have no representational content. Whistler wanted to create in his art an experience as disinterested and pure as that offered by music.”²⁷

Whistler likely encountered Japanese prints while studying art in Paris. An artist friend introduced Whistler to Félix Bracquemond, an etcher and an early promoter of Japonisme. Over his lifetime, Whistler would collect all types of Japanese goods; he had a particular affinity for blue and white porcelain.

The influence of Japanese goods became most visible in Whistler’s inclusion of various objects in his work in the 1860s, though the composition is of a distinctly Western style. Over time his work changed in composition and begins to reflect Japanese stylistic influences—in addition to Japanese subject matter—which included the diagonal layout, silhouetted form, flat planes of color, and vertical composition.

Whistler believed that form and color were subjects in their own right, and he painstakingly focused on them in his work. During the 1880s, he traveled around England and focused on small oil paintings of seascapes that he would produce while positioned in front of the location. These works, which he could produce quickly and sell easily, challenged the conventional notion of what types of works are worthy of exhibition.²⁸

Water and ships were always favored subjects of Whistler. Painted in 1883, *A Freshening Breeze* depicts a coastal scene using a series of quick, thin brushstrokes that produce a certain fluidity and harmony in the work. Looking closely you can discern the water, sea, and beach depicted in Whistler’s distinctive monochromatic style. A red hue is discernible beneath the monochromatic scene, forcing up the blues and suggesting darkness behind.²⁹ Noticeable, yet not dominant, are a few figures: the small canoe-like boats, the figure walking down the shore, and the ships at sea. The composition is vertical—a characteristic Whistler appropriated from Japanese prints—and is off-set by the horizontal sewage pipes and pier running into the water. The high horizon line also adds perspective to an otherwise two-dimensional picture.

²⁷ Spa79119

²⁸ Spalding 1979

²⁹ T. F. Art n.d.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: WHISTLER

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

NIGHT AND DAY: Whistler loved to paint at night and created a series called “Nocturnes,” a word that generally refers to music that conjures images of the night. Look outside the nearest window and imagine what the scene might look like at night. How would it look different? Do you think it would be harder or easier to capture the night sky on paper?

EIMIH

PAINTING HARMONY: Whistler loved harmony in music. What is harmony? In his art, he was more concerned with harmony than with his subject. Do you think this work is harmonious? Why or why not?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

Write song lyrics to accompany this painting—have your students think about descriptive words. Have them think about how they might describe the tone, mood, and colors of the work through a song. Alternatively, have your students find a tune that they feel will accompany this image well.

EIMIH

Imagine you are traveling through the painting. Have your students use their senses and start by describing what they hear, what they see, what they smell, what they taste, and what they touch. Have them write a journal entry where they describe their experience of moving through the painting. Encourage them to be imaginative with who they are, the period of time in which they are writing, and who they encounter along the way.



MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM of ART

LA FEMME: WOMEN, FASHION, AND JAPONISME

EXHIBITION WALL TEXT FROM SECTION 5 of *The Orient Expressed*

Taking their inspiration from Japanese prints, Western women began to dress in clothes that resembled Japanese robes or kimonos. As gender roles slowly evolved in the late nineteenth century, painters realized that women's new interest in fashion and home improvement represented a primary market for the Japonisme craze; many artists cast women as eternal tastemakers who were supportive of all that was beautiful, new, and chic.

Responding to this trend, Gari Melchers painted a young mother clad in a Japanese kimono taking care of her infant. In a work by French painter Marie-François Firmin-Girard, geishas tend to a young woman, creating an iconic image that stressed a sense of luxury and sensuality that Western women associated with the mystique of Japanese life.

While the kimono may be most popularly associated with women, it also became accepted apparel among men in the West. Charles Sprague Pearce not only wore kimonos himself, but also depicted male models attired in this fashion.



William Merritt Chase (American, 1849-1916), *The Japanese Woodblock Print*, circa 1888. oil on canvas. 20.16 x 24.25 in. Collection of Neue Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemaltesammlungen, Munich, Germany. Inv. 8401.

WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE (1849-1916)

William Merritt Chase considered himself to be a realist whose work depicted exactly what he saw. Born in Williamsburg, Indiana, he was encouraged by his father to follow his family's trade of being a harness-maker, shoe repairman, and entrepreneur. Instead, Chase's interests were in the arts, and, at the age of 20, he went to New York to pursue formal training as an artist. In 1872 he went to Germany and enrolled at the Royal Academy in Munich. After five years of study in Europe, Chase returned to New York City and took a post at the Art Students League.³⁰

As an artist, Chase was most immediately recognized for his portraits, for which he received a number of lucrative commissions. Compared with American realists like Thomas Eakins, his work presented patrons with a fresh, new style that was highly sought after. Like Whistler, William Merritt Chase believed in the "art for art's sake" mantra of the aesthetic movement, which maintains that art exists separate from the practical realities of everyday life, and that color and form are objects in and of themselves. Indeed, any meaning behind the painting was secondary in Chase's view.

Though unintentional, Chase's work gives a glimpse at the leisurely lifestyle of the upper-middle class that was emerging as a result of the Industrial Revolution. In particular, Chase frequently depicted women, and his "portraits of women, like many of the portraits of the nineteenth century, were beautiful and sensitive and depicted the American woman as regal, delicate, and insulated from the real and often dirty world around them."³¹

As a man with sophisticated taste, there is no question that William Merritt Chase was familiar with the Japanese goods that were flowing into both Europe and the United States. Indeed, this is evident in Chase's famed portraits, which depict numerous Japanese goods, including kimonos, fans, and Japanese prints. He was undoubtedly drawn to the new motifs, patterns, colors, and Japanese aesthetics that were consuming the art world at the time. And, though he did not entirely identify or agree with the impressionists' approach to art, his work began to reflect the impressionists' style in the late 1880s. This was particularly visible through Chase's use of quick, visible brushstrokes, his color palette, and the cropping of images that provided the effect of immediacy.

The Japanese Woodblock Print (circa 1888), is a Japonese painting both in subject and in style. It is painted in an impressionistic manner, depicting a Western woman reclining softly, donning a Japanese kimono. She stares intently at the Japanese woodblock print she is holding, which depicts two geishas—a subject that intrigued many Westerners who were drawn to the geisha's exotic nature—though the expression on her face is hard to decipher. Compositionally, Chase uses the cut-off form, or cropping, that is used frequently in Japanese woodblock prints (and was adopted by the impressionists) to show immediacy and to also lead the viewer's eye off the canvas, envisioning what else surrounds the woman. Further, rather than centering the woman in the middle of the page, her body runs at a diagonal, a style that was also appropriated from Japanese ukiyo-e prints.³²

Chase was successful as a teacher as well. He founded two schools: the Shinnecock School in Long Island and the Chase School, which would become the New York School of Art. Additionally, he taught at the Art Students League, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, and at a variety of venues throughout Europe. Among his students were Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Sheeler, and Joseph Stella, many of whom would eventually reject his teachings as too traditional and adopt a more modernist style. Though he disapproved of the emerging modernist movement, Chase will always be remembered for an early innovative style that contributed considerably to American art.

³⁰ Longwell 1992

³¹ Arts 1986, 4

³² Sik 2011

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: CHASE

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

NAME THAT WORK: Pretend the artist has asked you to name the work. What would you name it?

Why did you choose your title?

MIH

MIDDLE CLASS: This painting has been described as showing the upper middle class that was emerging at the time Chase painted this. Why was a middle class emerging? Why do you think some people think this image reveals this new lifestyle?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

In groups or as a class, think of as many words as you can to describe this image. Urge your students to be as specific and as descriptive as possible. Have them take the words you have thought of and use them to write a story about this painting. Encourage your class to use their imaginations!

EIMIH

Ask your students to compare and contrast Chase's *The Japanese Woodblock Print* and Thomas Cantwell Healy's *Portrait of a Woman* from the Museum's collection.



Thomas Cantwell Healy (American, 1820-1889), *Portrait of a Woman*, 1874. oil on canvas. 30 x 25.5 in. Collection of Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson. Gift of Mrs. Phyllis Herman. 1986.076.

The above image from the Museum's Permanent Collection is for comparison only and will not be presented in *The Orient Expressed*.



Louis Rhead (English-born American, 1857-1926), *Woman with Peacocks* (published in *L'Estampe Moderne*), 1897. lithograph. 8.86 x 13.39 in. (image). Private Collection.

LOUIS RHEAD (1857-1926)

Louis Rhead is an English-born American graphic designer, printmaker, and illustrator, and an important figure in the art nouveau movement. Born in England into a family of ceramicists, Louis was surrounded by artists from an early age and grew up attending his father's ceramics lessons. He trained at London's National Art Training School.

In 1883, at the age of 24, Louis Rhead immigrated to the United States, where he settled in New York City. He became a graphic designer and, during the unprecedented popularity of posters during the 1890s, he became a highly regarded poster artist.³³ Rhead's work was regularly seen in popular publications, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and the *Sun*.

Rhead was clearly influenced by the stylized Japanese woodcuts that were in abundance by the height of his career. His motifs, including women and peacocks as well as swans, were common motifs in both the British aesthetic movement—art for art's sake—and in the art nouveau movement. He quite possibly appropriated these design motifs from Japanese works he encountered. Yet in *Woman with Peacocks*, a chromolithograph, Rhead takes his image one step further, introducing a symbolic element by depicting the peacock and woman in a similar fashion. He thus suggests a likeness between the female and the peacock. Reflecting the changing role of the female in the late nineteenth century, Rhead's comparison between the "preening peacock" and the woman is very suggestive of the new, fashionable, leisurely woman.³⁴

Many stylistic choices Rhead made also suggest the influence of Japanese prints. The use of simplified abstracted forms, the flatness of the image, the repeated motifs in the leaves and the peacocks' feathers, and the curving path that leads the eye beyond the edge of the print are all elements learned from Japanese prints.

Towards the end of the 1890s, the popularity of posters began to decline, and Rhead turned to children's illustrations, which would remain his focus for the rest of his life. He illustrated many popular children's books, including *Robin Hood*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, and *Robinson Crusoe*.

³³ Kiehl 1987

³⁴ Weisberg 2011

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: RHEAD

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

OFF THE PAGE: If your eye were to lead you down the path and off of the page, where would it take you? Why do you say that?

EIMIH

SYMBOLISM: What, if anything, do you think the significance of the peacocks is?

EIMIH

DESCRIBE: If you were trying to describe this image to someone who had never seen it before, what would you say? You might start this activity by brainstorming descriptive adjectives and then having your students incorporate these adjectives into their descriptions.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

Have your students look at the images of women as portrayed in Louis Rhead's *Woman with Peacocks*, Mary Cassatt's *The Bath*, and William Merritt Chase's *The Japanese Woodblock Print*. Ask them to imagine that they are judges who are deciding which of these works a museum will accept into its collection. Have the class divide into groups based on their preference. In groups, have the students come up with a persuasive argument to defend their position and convince the museum's director why their preferred work should be included in the collection.

MIH

After spending time discussing the work with your class, have the students write an imaginative story using the woman, the peacocks, or both as the protagonists. Instruct them to include the image as a "scene" in their story, whether it falls at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. Have a few students share their stories at the end of the exercise.



MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM of ART

OWNING JAPONISME: THE STILL LIFE

EXHIBITION WALL TEXT FROM SECTION 6 of *The Orient Expressed*

Regardless of their national origin, Westerners were eager to acquire objects that represented the new taste for Japanese goods. Some artists, like Paul Gauguin, included actual Japanese art objects within his simple tabletop still lifes as reminders of how strongly he valued the innovations of Japanese prints. Belgian painter James Ensor revealed in *Still Life with Chinoiserie* how easily Westerners could confuse Japanese and Chinese objects, or mistake genuine Japanese objects for those made strictly for European consumption.

Artists often employed various objects, both those from Japan and those made in the Japanese taste, as symbols of wealth. To own elegant examples of the newest Japonese objects, and to place them in pleasing arrangements, spoke of good taste during the Gilded Age of the 1890s and beyond.



Paul Gauguin (French, 1848-1903), *Still Life with Onions, Beetroots and a Japanese Print*, 1889. oil on canvas. 16 x 20.5 in. Collection of Judy and Michael Steinhardt, New York, New York, M1997.07.

PAUL GAUGUIN (1848-1903)

Born in Paris, France on June 7, 1848, Paul Gauguin spent the first seven years of his life in Peru, before returning to Orléans, France where he spent the majority of his childhood. Gauguin loved art from an early age, and he would spend much of his free time painting. In 1871, after three years of military service, Paul Gauguin began his professional career as a stockbroker. He was successful in this newfound profession, and as such, he began to purchase works of art. Gauguin bought works by emerging artists—the impressionists—which inspired him to study as a painter. He gained experience under the instruction of Camille Pissarro, who contributed a great deal to impressionism and post-impressionism.³⁵ In 1882, the stock market crashed and Europe fell into a recession, leaving Gauguin broke. Deciding to change the direction of his career, he moved to Paris to become a full-time artist. With the help of Pissarro, his teacher, and Edgar Degas, his friend, Gauguin showed his work in two impressionist exhibits. He ultimately became frustrated with impressionism, however, finding it too traditional and lacking depth. Over time, he was drawn to the arts of South America, Africa, and Asia, which captured his attention because of their mystic, symbolic qualities.³⁶

The Japanese ukiyo-e prints—pictures of the floating world—were particularly influential to Gauguin, who collected them passionately.³⁷ Ukiyo-e, many of which are characterized by their abstracted, silhouetted forms and use of flat color, profoundly influenced his work as he moved away from impressionism and towards what has since been called a post-impressionist style. The post-impressionists, artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, incorporated elements from the impressionists (including visible brushstrokes and painting of everyday scenes) but extended their repertoire to include colors they found expressive rather than natural and the use of geometric, abstract forms in a less realistic manner. Further, the “pure” impressionists tended not to use black in their works, but rather achieved shadow and deeper tones by mixing complementary colors. Gauguin, on the other hand, became known for his expressive use of color, which he would outline with a distinctively black line.

Still Life with Onions, Beetroots, and a Japanese Print was created in 1889. At the time, still life was a subject undergoing a resurgence in popularity, especially as still lifes presented an affordable option and would sell with ease. *Still Life with Onions, Beetroots, and a Japanese Print* represents a collection of items that Gauguin had in his studio, painted in vivid color with visible brushstrokes. In this asymmetrical composition, Gauguin opted for bold colors, less realistically rendered and seemingly intended to capture the essence of the vegetables. In the corner, Gauguin incorporated a Japanese print that humorously looks down upon the table of produce, speaking to the importance of the Japanese print in Gauguin’s life and artistic approach.³⁸

Paul Gauguin’s work would evolve as he traveled extensively and was drawn to remote corners of the earth. There, he began to turn against the European lifestyle in favor of one simpler and seemingly “primitive.” During these journeys, Gauguin spent an enormous amount of time in the South Pacific, particularly in Tahiti, where he drew inspiration from the native population and where he would spend the rest of life. His work from the late nineteenth century is considered part of the primitivist movement, which is characterized by the borrowing of motifs and patterns found in the folk and native art of indigenous cultures. Gauguin’s late style evolved into using elongated figures, bold, geometric shapes and color, and spiritual symbolism.

³⁵ Paul Gauguin Biography n.d.

³⁶ Stuckey 1988

³⁷ Lambourne 2005

³⁸ Weisberg 2011

TEACHING ACTIVITIES: GAUGUIN

E=Elementary M=Middle H=High

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK...

SEE: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice?

CONNECT: What do you know about this image? What does this image bring to mind?

THINK: What do you think about this image? What makes you say that? How does it make you feel?

WONDER: About what does this image make you wonder? What more do you wish to know about it?

THINK ABOUT...

EIMIH

STILL LIFE: What is a still life? What do you think the appeal of creating a still life might be? As a class, develop a working definition for this genre of painting; you might find other examples of still lifes online to show your students.

EIMIH

WHAT IF: With your hand, cover up the Japanese print depicted on the right side of the painting. How would the painting be different without it?

EIMIH

REALISTIC?: Gauguin was particularly concerned with the expressive qualities of color in his work. Spend time looking at the colors Gauguin chose to use. Ask your students: Did Gauguin choose colors that accurately portray beetroots and onions? If not, why do you think he chose the colors that he did? How would this image be different had he chosen a different color palette?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES...

EIMIH

These are objects from Gauguin's studio. Have your students list some of their own objects that they would use if they were to paint a still life and explain why they chose those objects. Then, as a class, create a display of objects that are representative of your class. Think about where you place your objects and what those objects represent.

EIMIH

Have your students pretend Gauguin asked you to give this work a title. What would they name it and why?

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