In the Center of the Periphery: Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Art, Life, and the Japanese Artists' Community During the Interwar Period

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In the Center of the Periphery: Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Art, Life, and the Japanese Artists’ Community During the Interwar Period

Takayuki Yamada

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York

Thesis Advisor: Professor Ellen Handy
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# Table of Contents

## List of Illustrations

## Notes to Readers

## Introduction

### Chapter One

**Integration of Tradition and Modern, West and East: Kuniyoshi’s Artistic Development and the First Critical Success, 1917-1922**

1. Studying Traditional and Modern Western Art
2. Kuniyoshi’s Debut and Critical Success
3. “Exotic Modernism”: Kuniyoshi’s Art and Favorable Orientalist Biases
4. Kuniyoshi and Hamilton Easter Field

**Conclusion**

### Chapter Two

**Art and Identity: Kuniyoshi’s Use of Japanese Objects in Art and the Japanese Artists’ Community of New York City, 1922-1927**

1. Living in Poverty: Kuniyoshi’s Friendship with Toshi Shimizu
3. Kuniyoshi’s Japanese Motifs and Mediums in Art
   a. Unusual Fauna and Flora
   b. Ink Drawings and “Thought of the East”
   c. Babies and the Japanese Community
   d. *The Dream to Bad Dream*: Dark Clouds over the Community
4. The 1927 Group Show: A Monumental Artistic Event
5. Can East and West Meet? Critical Reactions to the 1927 Show

**Conclusion**
Chapter Three
Acceptance and Rejection: Kuniyoshi’s Contradictory Self and Art Between Two Countries, 1927-1941

Introduction 58
1. Kuniyoshi in the American Art World and Yellow Peril 59
2. Portraits of Kuniyoshi: Kuniyoshi’s Friendship with Bumpei Usui and Their Social Life 62
3. Kuniyoshi’s Participation in the 1929 “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” Exhibition at MoMA 67
4. Art and Race: Is Kuniyoshi American? 70
5. Return to Japan, Return to New York: Kuniyoshi’s Contradictions 73
6. The 1935 and 1936 Japanese Group Shows and Anti-Fascism 75
7. Kuniyoshi’s Ambiguous and Complicated Expression in Art 80
Conclusion 83

Conclusion 85

Appendix 1 88
Appendix 2 90
Appendix 3 93
Appendix 4 95
Selected Bibliography 97
Illustrations 108
# List of Illustrations

## Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Image Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Between Two Worlds</em>, 1939.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Crucifixion (Modern Crucifix)</em>, 1917.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Picnic</em>, 1919.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Adam and Eve (Fall of Man)</em>, 1922.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Bather with Cigarette</em>, 1924.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Child Frightened by Water</em>, 1924.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Wild Horses</em>, 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>The Flapper</em>, 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Maud</em>, 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Upstream</em>, 1922.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>Style of Sesshu, <em>Pavilion on Mountain Stream</em>, 17th century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Boy Scared by Snake (Boy Frightened by Snake)</em>, 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Little Joe with Cow</em>, 1923.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Detail of Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Little Joe with Cow</em>, 1923.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Octopus</em>, 1922.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Yasuo Kuniyoshi, <em>Sleeping Beauty</em>, 1924.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Utagawa Kuniyoshi, <em>Ryūgu tamatori himeno zu</em> (Tamatori-hime Stealing the Sacred Jewel from the Dragon Palace), 1853.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Katsushika Hokusai, <em>Tako to ama (The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife)</em>, 1820.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Alexandre Cabanel, <em>The Birth of Venus</em>, 1875.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2.13. Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Kintokiyama no tsuki* (Moon of Kintoki Mountain) from the album *Tsukihyakushi* (The One Hundred Moons), 1855.


2.15. Photograph of Toshi Shimizu and Iwata Nakayama’s Families, May 10, 1924.


2.31. *Rakuchu rakugai zu* (Views In and Around Kyoto), circa 1616-1624.

| 3.1. | *The Yellow Danger*, cover, 1899. | 129 |
| 3.2. | *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World Supremacy*, cover, 1921. | 129 |
| 3.3. | Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Self Portrait as Golf Player*, 1927. | 130 |
| 3.5. | Bumpei Usui, *Furniture Factory (The Carpenter’s Shop)*, 1925. | 131 |
| 3.8. | Bumpei Usui, *14th Street*, 1924. | 132 |
| 3.10. | Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Boy Stealing Fruit*, 1923. | 133 |
Notes to Readers

Generally, the family name comes before the given name in the Japanese writing system. I have applied the Japanese order for names of Japanese old masters, like Utagawa Kuniyoshi and Katsushika Hokusai, who were active only in Japan. However, I have applied the Western order—the given name followed by the family name—for Japanese expatriates in the United States, as well as recent Japanese scholars and artists. Japanese books, magazines, newspapers, and artworks often appear in this thesis. I have used macrons when the Japanese words from these sources, with the exceptions of proper nouns, are pronounced differently in English. All translations from Japanese to English are mine unless otherwise noted. Only when Japanese books do not have English titles, are they accompanied by translations, which are also mine.
Introduction

In the early twentieth century, Japanese expatriate artist Yasuo Kuniyoshi (1889-1953) thrived in both the center of the American art world and its periphery, the Japanese artists’ community of New York. He immigrated to the United States in 1906 to avoid military service, stepping onto the new continent with “a brave, adventurous spirit” and with an expectation to see “wonderful and exotic” things.1 After spending a few years on the West Coast (1906-1910), he came to New York, where he avidly learned various aspects of Western culture—painting, music, and religions—and modernist aesthetics—geometrical forms and unusual compositions—from European artists.2 He integrated them with traditional Eastern perspectives due to his cultural background. His artistic style of cultural hybridity proved to be his successful debut in 1922.3

Kuniyoshi fostered intimate friendships with other Japanese artists of New York. Helping each other in various ways, Kuniyoshi and other young Japanese immigrants were able to face their financial, social, and political hardships in the 1920s and 1930s, when anti-Japanese sentiment rapidly increased. Identifying themselves as modern Japanese artists, they organized group exhibitions, showing their presence in the

1 Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” Magazine of Art 33, February 1940, 72.
2 Kuniyoshi crossed the Pacific in 1906. He landed in Vancouver, Canada, and moved to Seattle and then Los Angeles. In these places, he served as a menial laborer to earn money with varied employments, including working as a bellboy at a hotel, a cleaner in an office building, and a physical laborer at a train station. In 1910, he moved to New York. While also working as a menial laborer, he began studying art at the National Academy and New York School of Art, but he soon quit. He then joined the Independent School, a radical art school, where he also continued to study art between 1914 and 1916. About Kuniyoshi’s life before the Art Students League, see Ibid., 72-74; Lloyd Goodrich, Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Retrospective (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1948), 5-10; Yoshio Ozawa, Hishō to Kaiki: Kuniyoshi Yasuo no seiyō to toyō [Fly and Return: Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s West and East] (Okayama, Japan: Nihon Bunkyo Shuppan, 1996), 23-50.
American art world and publicly expressing their assimilation into the West. When the sense of community increased among the Japanese artists, Kuniyoshi began using familiar motifs and mediums from Japanese culture to express his inner world as a person from the East. Japanese identity, however, brought him inner conflict, as exclusionism escalated throughout the United States after his native country expanded its militarism in Asia. He became a major target of criticism in the American art world, which largely refused to legitimate him as American. As his painting *Between Two Worlds* (1939; fig. 0.1) suggests, he always had to live somewhere between the two countries, the United States and Japan, where not only did his hybrid identity and art develop, but he also suffered inner struggles and ambivalence.

By analyzing Kuniyoshi’s art and life during the interwar period from a socio-historical perspective, this thesis argues that the artist simultaneously thrived in the New York art world and the Japanese artists’ community, while perpetually negotiating his ambivalent, unstable, and even contradictory identity in his life and art. The complicated discourse regarding Kuniyoshi in the New York art world caused an inner tension in him, but he was able to overcome it by sharing it with other Japanese expatriate artists. The period this thesis scrutinizes starts in 1916, when Kuniyoshi started to study art seriously at the Art Students League, and ends in 1941, when he became an active participant in the U.S. war effort. Kuniyoshi’s complicated consciousness of his Japanese identity was reflected most clearly in his art and life during this period. This thesis explores his use of Japanese motifs and techniques in art; the critical climate surrounding him in the American art world; and his sense of community with other Japanese artists, all of which help in understanding the process of his identity formation.
Literature

The first comprehensive research about Kuniyoshi was undertaken in conjunction with his retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1948. The curator, Lloyd Goodrich, wrote a biography working from an interview with the artist.4 Since the 1980s, Tom Wolf, one of the leading Kuniyoshi scholars, has made significant contributions to the scholarship on the artist. For instance, he has researched the artist’s student days; his relationship with patrons and critical supporters; and his subjects and perspectives that shared similarities with traditional Japanese art.5 His other essay about Asian artists in New York sheds light on the unfamiliar Japanese artists and their sense of community in the early twentieth century.6 Wolf’s scholarship culminates in his organizing the comprehensive exhibition of the artist’s career in 2015.7 Other art historians have also focused on Kuniyoshi’s sense of identity, vacillating between the United States and Japan. Gail Levin has analyzed Kuniyoshi’s “autobiographical” art and its cultural hybridity in reference to Japanese folklore and toys.8 Wang ShiPu has spotlighted Kuniyoshi’s involvement with the war effort and the identity crisis apparent in his anti-Japanese propaganda during World War II.9 Unlike the aforementioned scholarship, this thesis discusses Kuniyoshi’s involvement in both American society and

4 Goodrich, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 5-47.
the Japanese artists’ community, exploring how his contradictory self and art developed between the two.

In Japan, Kuniyoshi’s first posthumous exhibition was held in 1954, enabling the public to appreciate his art fully for the first time since the cultural break during World War II. In the 1970s, Kuniyoshi’s paintings began to attract further attention from Japanese art collectors, who started buying his pictures against the backdrop of the economic boom in Japan. Within two decades, two major exhibitions were held in Tokyo as well as in other venues, and scholars began undertaking full-scale research. Yoshio Ozawa published the first critical biography of Kuniyoshi in Japanese, whereas Mutsuko Hoshino has more recently written about Kuniyoshi’s art and political activities.

10 “Kuniyoshi Yasuo isakuten [Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Posthumous Exhibition]” was held at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, between March 20 and April 25, 1954. Before World War II, Kuniyoshi also held two solo exhibitions in Japan. “Kuniyoshi Yasuo yōga koten [Solo Exhibition of Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Western-Style Painting]” at Nihonbashi Mitsukoshi, Tokyo, from November 19 to 23, 1931; and “Yasuo Kuniyoshi shi yōga tenrankai [Exhibition of Mr. Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Western-Style Painting],” on January 17 and 18, 1932. When Kuniyoshi returned to Japan, dozens of Japanese newspapers and art magazines enthusiastically featured his exhibitions with eye-catching headlines, such as “A New Star in the U.S. Art World, Mr. Kuniyoshi Returns Home, with About a Hundred Works” (Kokumin Shimbun, October 15, 1931) and “A Morning Star in the U.S. Art World Returns to Okayama: To his Birthplace after Twenty-Six-Year Absence” (Chugoku Minpo, October 6?, 1939). However, his exhibitions were not successful in terms of sales. Kuniyoshi was able to sell only two pieces. Dai 1-kai Kuniyoshi Ato Foramu Jikko linkai ed., Kuniyoshi Yasuo no kikoku: Botsugu 40-nen, seitanchi kinenhi kansei kinenshi [Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Return to Japan: A Keepsake Compiled in Celebration of the Completion of the Monument Erected to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary After the Death of Kuniyoshi] (Okayama, Japan: Dai 1-kai Kuniyoshi Ato Foramu Jikko linkai, 1993), 3.

11 Yoshio Ozawa, Hishō to kaiki, 15-18; Go Kobayashi, “Shakaiteki riarizumu to chūshōhyōgenshugi wo meguru ‘bunkareisen’ [‘Cultural Cold War’ over Social Realism and Abstract Expressionism],” in Amerikan riarizumu no keifu: Tomasu ekinzuru kara haipā riarizumu made [Genealogy of American Realism: From Thomas Eakins to Hyper Realism] (Osaka: Kansai Daigaku Shuppan, 2014), 196-97. In the 1970s, Japanese art collectors and organizations started buying Kuniyoshi’s works that were then mostly owned and preserved in the United States, bringing them to Japan (since many of the collectors bought Kuniyoshi’s works as investments, their prices rapidly increased). The most well-known collector was Fukutake Shoten, now renamed Benesse Holdings, a publishing company in Okayama. Its collection was loaned to the Okayama prefecture and is now partly open to the public at the Okayama Prefectural Museum.

such as his participation in the American Artists’ Congress in the mid-1930s and his anti-Japan propaganda work with the Office of War Information during World War II. The scholars and recent exhibitions in Japan have tended to explore Kuniyoshi’s success as a Japanese expatriate who succeeded abroad, while regarding his war effort as a result not of his anti-Japan stance, but rather the result of his anti-fascist stance.

**Contribution**

Despite the rich history of scholarship, in-depth analyses of Kuniyoshi’s identity formation in reference to the Japanese artists’ community in New York are limited. This thesis aims to locate Kuniyoshi’s idiosyncratic place in American art history by using primary sources in both English and Japanese. His writings attest to his presence in the United States and the Japanese community both centrally and peripherally. Their contradictory content reflects his ambivalent identity. On the one hand, he confessed to the Japanese public in 1932: “My feelings of being Japanese seem to have enormous significance in my art.” On the other hand, he wrote in the United States that he “no longer belonged” to Japan and was “firmly convinced that my [his] adopted home was my [his] home.” The diary by Toshi Shimizu, one of Kuniyoshi’s closest artist friends, shows how Kuniyoshi and Shimizu supported each other and shared their artistic interests. Also, comparing portraits of Kuniyoshi by his friend Bumpei Usui with Kuniyoshi’s own

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15 Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” 81.
self-portrait will help illuminate both Kuniyoshi’s tension in public and calm in a private meeting with another Japanese expatriate. Above all, *The Japanese Times*, a semi-weekly Japanese language newspaper in New York, which has hardly been discussed in the previous literature, tells of the strong sense of community. It will reveal how important Japanese identity was for the Japanese expatriates, who were then forced to remain outsiders. The analysis of these documents and paintings will contribute to picturing the inside details of the Japanese artists’ community. It will also help bridge the gap between the center and periphery of the New York art communities, while exposing the cultural understanding and misunderstandings between them.

**Chapter Outline**

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on Kuniyoshi’s artistic development in his early career between 1916 and 1922, examining the process of his integration of the Western and Eastern, the traditional and modern. Whereas he painted scenes from the Bible and often represented such religious themes in contemporary contexts, he also learned modernist aesthetics from progressive European artists, like Impressionists, post-Impressionists, and Cubists. A unique aspect of Kuniyoshi’s art is, however, that such techniques and perspectives that he learned from the West are mixed with those of traditional Eastern art. His art of cultural hybridity resulted in his first critical success in 1922.

The second chapter explores Kuniyoshi’s life and art in terms of his involvements in his Japanese artists’ community on the periphery of New York between 1922 and 1927. He made friends with other Japanese artists, such as Toshi Shimizu who helped him
overcome his financial difficulties, and began to use often the motifs common in Japan. These artists gathered to organize a group exhibition in 1922, showing their strong consciousness as Japanese and ambition to increase their presence in the American art world. It was against the backdrop of the escalating anti-Japanese sentiment that their sense of community deepened. It culminated in the 1927 group exhibition, where the Japanese artists’ community voiced their understanding of Western culture and wishes to live harmoniously with American society.

Focusing on the period between 1927 and 1941, the last chapter analyzes Kuniyoshi’s contradictory self between the two countries—United States and Japan. Although he was honorably selected as one of the contributors at the 1929 “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” exhibition at MoMA, his participation caused a racial controversy by conservative American critics, such as Margaret Breuning from *The Evening Post*, who did not acknowledge him as an “American” artist.¹⁶ This criticism reflected the worsening social climate surrounding Kuniyoshi and other Japanese expatriates. They then united to organize public exhibitions, through which they showed their cooperation with Americans under the banner of anti-fascism. Kuniyoshi’s art became more and more gloomy and ambiguous, reflecting his own contradictory self between his home and adopted countries.

Tracing the process of Kuniyoshi’s identity formation in the early part of his artistic career is the goal of the thesis. Negotiating his Japanese identity with Western culture that he learned and digested in the United States, he developed his own style of art, where Eastern (Eastern American) and Western (Euro-American) motifs and

perspectives coexist. His art achieved a critical success in the center of the New York art world, but he himself was not always equated with American artists. Being forced to remain on the periphery of American society, Kuniyoshi and other Japanese expatriates shared and overcame artistic and social hardships. The perspective from within the Japanese society of New York attests to Kuniyoshi’s sense of community, essential to his art and life’s growth.
Chapter 1
Integration of Tradition and Modern, West and East: Kuniyoshi’s Artistic Development and the First Critical Success, 1917-1922

I thought of the many exotic and wonderful things I would see, and when the time came to go I left without sentimentalities or tears and with a brave, adventurous spirit…My dreams of America and actually seeing America were two totally different things. I thought nothing of money, expecting to pick it up practically from the streets. —Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “East to West.”

Introduction

Focusing on the beginning of Kuniyoshi’s career, this chapter explores the artistic development of his hybrid style that integrates traditional and modern, as well as Western and Eastern, techniques. Studying at the Art Students League, he learned about the subjects and perspectives in Western art, which embodied his active assimilation into his new country. He also adopted progressive modernist aesthetics into his art in relation to Asian aesthetics. His Japanese origins helped his art to be easily appreciated in the New York art world, bringing him his first critical success in 1922, as discussed later.

1. Studying Traditional and Modern Western Art

After spending four years on the West Coast, Kuniyoshi moved to New York in 1910 and took an important step as a painter by studying Western art with the American painter Kenneth Hayes Miller at the Art Students League between 1916 and 1920. During his school days, Kuniyoshi attended only Miller’s classes, “Mural Painting and

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1 Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” Magazine of Art 33, February 1940, 72.

Composition” and “Life Drawing and Painting.” Miller taught him not only art techniques but also a conventional Western perspective to express the sense of depth in paintings. Kuniyoshi wrote in his 1940 autobiography “East to West” that:

Kenneth Hayes Miller was very friendly toward me, even though it took me a long time to understand him. It was he who changed my outlook on art and I began to have a direction and motive, whereas before that I had had none. It was then that I began to see and study old masters. I can remember very distinctly his introducing me to Daumier’s drawings. All of the techniques, perspective, and ideas were strange to him because they were different from those in his native country. Yet, his desire to learn new cultural things enabled him to avidly absorb them. He immigrated to the United States in 1906 to avoid entering a military school in Japan, stepping on this new continent with “a brave, adventurous spirit,” expecting to see “wonderful and exotic” things. Kuniyoshi embraced exotic art with enthusiasm.

The liberal environment of the League further facilitated Kuniyoshi’s assimilation into the West, as he wrote:

Up to then I hadn’t made any friends, whether out of shyness or the small feeling of a stranger. At the League my life began to take on a real meaning. Heretofore things came and went aimlessly, from one stage to another, moving from day to day not knowing where the wind would take me next... This was a period of cultural activity in which I made every effort to absorb the life around me. I went to concerts religiously, although I must confess that I never understood the masterpieces I heard and still don’t.

In addition to his influential teacher, Kuniyoshi made friends with helpful schoolmates, such as Alexander Brook, Lloyd Goodrich and Katherine Schmidt, who became

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4 Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” 74.
5 Kuniyoshi’s father approved of his decision, because the military school had no appeal for him. The Russo-Japanese War was then in progress and he would have worried about his son being sent to the battlefield at the cost of his life. Ibid., 72.
6 Ibid., 74.
Kuniyoshi’s first wife in 1919. Finally feeling at home, Kuniyoshi diligently studied American culture and art more than before, starting a brand new life as a painter.

Kuniyoshi’s cultural assimilation came to fruition for the first time in his paintings of Christian subjects. His Crucifixion, also called Modern Crucifix (1917; fig. 1.1) shows one of the most important scenes from the Bible: Jesus on the cross and the solid, massed figures sobbing and crouching in a barren landscape. Considering that Miller encouraged his students to refer to European and American old masters, Kuniyoshi may have studied the conventional subject from the paintings displayed at the Metropolitan Museum. Also, as art historian Yoshio Ozawa wrote, his knowledge of Christianity could have stemmed from his temporary lodging at a Christian accommodation managed by Japanese in New York. His Japanese friend Shigeru Miyatake wrote:

> Our friendship in New York continued for eight years, from 1917 to the summer of 1925, when I came back to Japan... Kuniyoshi visited my lodging often when he was on his work break... I stayed at a simple Christian accommodation uptown (West 123rd Street), which was built about 50 years ago for working students and laborers. It took about 20 minutes by subway to come to my place from West 8th Street in the Village where Kuniyoshi lived, but he frequently came to see me. He could not bear the loneliness and sadness.

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7 Ibid., 75.
9 Ozawa, Hishō to kaiki, 62-63.
10 Shigeru Miyatake, “Seinenjidai no Yasuo [Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Youth],” Bijutsu Techo, no. 81, May 1954, 74.
Kuniyoshi visited his friend at the Christian accommodation, albeit not Christian. This gave him an opportunity to become familiar with the religion. Learning about Christianity helped him to understand Western culture.

Kuniyoshi laughed off the painting in recollection later, describing it as “a strange thing, in nobody’s manner” in a conversation with Harry Salpeter, a writer from *Esquire*. Unsatisfied with the picture, he thought that this was a mere imitation of earlier works and different from his mature pictorial style. When compared to the figures in his work in the 1920s, where the figures are deformed and had big heads and eyes, Jesus in *Crucifixion* appears naturalistic. Whatever he thought later, Kuniyoshi sent *Crucifixion* to two public exhibitions at that time: one at the National Academy of Design, and the other at the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, both in 1917. By doing so, he publicly stressed his understanding of the techniques and subjects in Western art.

While the subject is conventional, the technique he uses in *Crucifixion* is rather modern. Tom Wolf has observed: “Still he [Kuniyoshi] managed to create a personal scene, a departure from the traditional iconography of the Crucifixion: in his rendering, crouching workers huddle in a vast, barren landscape beneath a diminutive image of Christ.” *Crucifixion* ignores a convention that Jesus, who plays a central role, ought to

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11 Kuniyoshi’s parents were not Christians. They went to a number of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines to pray for babies, before Kuniyoshi was born. Kuniyoshi was their only child. Ozawa, *Hishō to kaiki*, 23-24.

12 Salpeter also agreed with Kuniyoshi, saying: “With all due respect to him, it was probably in the manner of someone not Kuniyoshi.” Harry Salpeter, “Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Artist’s Artist,” *Esquire*, April 1937, 215.


14 Wolf has also observed that Kuniyoshi adopted Miller’s low horizon and rolling hills into *Crucifixion*, while the humble figures reflected Honoré Daumier’s influence. Wolf, “Kuniyoshi in the Early 1920s,” 22.
be painted larger than the other figures. Furthermore, the three figures under Jesus are not naturalistic, appearing to be three unidentifiable masses. These representations can be seen as original to him, but simultaneously reflect his insufficient knowledge of Christian paintings. He may not have been able to wholly understand the importance of Jesus in religious paintings, most likely due to his background as a non-Christian Japanese.

Such personal background, however, seems to lead to his flexible formal experiments independent of the subjects. He became enthusiastic for a formalist aesthetic in modern art, which he first encountered on the occasion of the “International Exhibition of Modern Art,” widely known as the Armory Show of 1913. Though he was not able to visit it because he then worked at a hotel in Syracuse, he remembered being excited together with his schoolmates:

I was lost in the shuffle for a couple of years and then joined the Independent School, where everybody was talking about the Armory Show. Cubism was in the air. The Nude Descending a Staircase was creating a furore [sic]. Reproductions of Van Gogh, Gauguin, and the masters of the late nineteenth century filled with the walls of the school. I was caught up in this excitement without really understanding what it was all about. Even his teacher, Miller, felt a huge impact of the Armory Show. He thought that American art should have become freer as European modern art did. Toshi Shimizu, Kuniyoshi’s Japanese schoolmate at the League, reported about Miller that:

Mr. Miller, Kuniyoshi’s teacher, was J. P. Ryder’s best disciple. Ryder was born in America by mistake and left great, mystical artworks behind. Miller studied Greco in depth before the public became excited by the old master. He considered that Cézanne was great but Renoir was even greater, always admiring them. He was especially strict on compositions… Mr. Kuniyoshi remained seated in Miller’s classes to study art… Mr. Kuniyoshi’s works were influenced by his teacher Miller’s mystical representational

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16 Kuniyoshi, “From East to West,” 74.
forms, and, until 1922 or 1923, he used simplified brushstrokes to express a bit too solid forms. Miller admired the European modernists, encouraging his students to study their paintings. Kuniyoshi’s *Picnic* (1919; fig. 1.2) and *Still Life* (1920; fig. 1.3) reflect his teacher’s enthusiasm for Renoir and Cézanne in terms of subjects, tactile brushstrokes, and vivid colors. In the former, the idyllic scene with relaxing figures against the backdrop of trees, mountains and the sky are represented by bright colors and choppy brushstrokes. In the latter, the flower in a vase and fruits on the table are viewed from multiple perspectives and thinly painted with pale colors.

Kuniyoshi’s interests in experimental forms and Christian themes became intertwined in *Adam and Eve*, also called *Fall of Man* (1922; fig. 1.4). On the right side stands a frowning Eve holding a dark fruit in her right hand and covering her genitals with the other hand. Tempted by the two-headed snake in the center, she hands the fruit to Adam, moored in the dark pond with a fish in his right hand. Their bodies are bulky and angular: whereas Eve has voluminous hips and big eyes, her breasts and head are small in proportion to her body size, like those of muscular Adam. The thrusting rock between them is made of various intersecting planes to further stress angularity.

Kuniyoshi’s paintings of his contemporary figures sometimes implied religious and mythical references. In *Bather with Cigarette* (1924; fig. 1.5), for example, a woman in a red swimsuit stands obliquely to the viewers on a rock at the Ogunquit shore, holding a cigarette in her right hand and smoothing her black hair with her other hand. The

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cigarette proves her to be a woman of Kuniyoshi’s era, but both her theatrical posture and a shell at her feet allude to Venus, like that in Botticelli’s masterpiece The Birth of Venus. Moreover, Wolf has observed that a woman carrying her baby in Child Frightened by Water (1924; fig. 1.6) overlaps Saint Christopher helping the infant Jesus across a river.  

Kuniyoshi related conventional subjects to his secular life. Amalgamations of traditional and progressive techniques, and of religious and personal subjects, these pictures demonstrate a process in his assimilation.

2. Kuniyoshi’s Debut and Critical Success

While Kuniyoshi actively studied techniques and subjects of Western art, contemporary American critics emphasized the exoticism in his work. In mid-January, 1922—two years after he left the League—he held his first solo exhibition, “Paintings and Drawings by Yasuo Kuniyoshi,” at the Daniel Gallery in New York. It only continued for two weeks and displayed no more than ten paintings and several drawings. Yet, at least seven newspapers and magazines featured the show, praising the exoticism in his paintings, especially Wild Horses (1921; fig. 1.7). That work depicts both the dynamics and stillness of horses at play in a pasture—the two in the middle are


19 The paintings exhibited at the show were: The Baby; Maud; Sisters; Boy Fishing; The Poultry Yard; The Flapper; Milking; Wild Horses; Boy Frightened by Snake; and Landscape. The exhibition list is preserved in the Yasuo Kuniyoshi papers in the Archives of American art at the Smithsonian Institution. Yasuo Kuniyoshi papers, 1921-1993, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (hereafter referred as Kuniyoshi Papers, AAA), microfilm reel D176.

joyfully galloping whereas the other two on the right stand still. Henry McBride, an influential art critic, regarded it as one of the best paintings, saying that: “There is a stirring sense of movement and fine lines… The feeling in it is probably inherited from the great Oriental artists of antiquity, who were very fond of the same theme.”21 In a different article, he wrote: “Kuniyoshi, perhaps unconsciously, was thinking of the long succession of Chinese masters who had painted wild horses.”22 Wild Horses seemed to him to stem naturally from the artist’s Asian ancestry.

McBride’s analysis was, however, one-sided in that he overlooked the fact that Wild Horses is an American landscape. A writer from Art News pointed out that Kuniyoshi’s subjects were all “Maine landscapes and Maine people” and “he has put almost everything one would see in rural Maine from a farmhouse to a cemetery.”23 Kuniyoshi’s landscapes and people were based on his life in Ogunquit, where he spent his summers between 1918 and 1924. The Flapper (1921; fig. 1.8)—another painting he completed in the same year—represents a scene in a rural town in Maine. A young American woman under an umbrella held in her right hand is walking in a village, where a cow peeks out from its cowshed next to a church, and two roosters play on the grass behind a typical building with a steeply pitched roof. Maud (1921; fig. 1.9) also shows an ordinary American scene, whose location is obviously not Asia, as the scarecrow behind a cow keeping its body still wears Western clothing. The Flapper, Maud, and Wild Horses, all of which were displayed together in the 1922 show, are all Maine landscapes, but McBride ignored the geographical information. He concentrated instead on the

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21 McBride, “Kuniyoshi’s Debut in the Daniel Gallery.”
exoticism of Asian horses he found in *Wild Horses*. Though Kuniyoshi’s early paintings were not directly influenced by traditional Asian art, that nationality made Field believe that Kuniyoshi naturally inherited the aesthetic of traditional Asian art.

3. “Exotic Modernism”: Kuniyoshi’s Art and Favorable Orientalist Biases

Other art critics observed Kuniyoshi’s influence from Cézanne and the Cubists, but they also linked it with his birthplace, summarizing that the artist harmoniously integrated his natural perspective with the techniques and subjects of the West. An art writer from *World* newspaper wrote: “With true Asiatic subtlety, and at the same time in perfectly frank and guileless sincerity,” Kuniyoshi “applied the dynamics of ‘cubism’ to the flat perspective and synthetic abstractions of Oriental drawings.”\(^\text{24}\) This writer found the distinctive quality of Kuniyoshi’s art in the amalgam of the modern aesthetics and Asian perspective. Another writer from *The New York Times* wrote a similar comment: “Mr. Kuniyoshi is richly endowed with the dexterity of race.”\(^\text{25}\) H.C. Nelson, a writer from *Globe* newspaper, appropriately labeled his art as “exotic modernism” to signal where Kuniyoshi was born.\(^\text{26}\) All of these critics considered that Kuniyoshi’s progressive aesthetic and superb skills were his birthright rather than what he learned from European modernists. Considering Kuniyoshi’s efforts to delve into American society, such criticisms that largely emphasized his Japanese origin may have irritated him, but they


could also have pleased him in that they all indicated interest in the art of an unknown foreign painter.

A rich history of receptiveness to Japanese art in the United States enabled Kuniyoshi’s art to be easily accepted by the American public. In the early twentieth century, Japanese traditional art, especially *ukiyo-e* (Japanese woodblock prints), was becoming popular in the American art world. In 1903, art critic Sadakichi Hartmann published an art book entitled *Japanese Art*, which he called “the first history of Japanese art” for anyone “who would like to become more intimately acquainted with Japanese art.”

It covered centuries of Japanese art history, ranging from religious art in the seventh century to modern art in the latter half of the 19th century. Some American collectors, such as Henry O. Havemeyer and Francis Lathrop, began buying Japanese art in this period; their collections became the foundation of the Japanese collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and thus were also publicly viewed. It was when American interests in Japanese art were growing that Kuniyoshi debuted in New York.

Yet, the discourse of the aforementioned critics, such as H.C. Nelson, specifically used Kuniyoshi’s Japaneseness to differentiate him from other modern Western painters. They shared Orientalist biases, always finding an artistic lineage in Kuniyoshi’s art from traditional Asian art, and mostly ignoring the fact that his paintings were all based on his American experience. Orientalism is, according to Edward W. Said, an ideology reflective of the European desire to establish and maintain its power and identity by

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marking the Orient as its cultural other, effectively creating a hegemonic relationship.\textsuperscript{29} John Kuo Wei Tchen, a scholar of Asian studies, also argued that the American public has shared the same idea to understand Asian immigrants, saying that “Orientalism, that eclectic, centuries-old master discourse still filters visually all that Westerner’s perceive of and act upon Asians, and affects even the most recent Asians.” From the conventional Anglo-American polarized distinctions—between heaven and hell, rational and irrational, male and female—Americans shared a tendency to differentiate Asians as other.\textsuperscript{30}

While Orientalist lenses enabled Kuniyoshi’s contemporary critics to easily access his art, they were often biased. Contrary to the New York art world, Kuniyoshi’s art looked “too European” in the eyes of Japanese. When he returned to Japan in 1931, Kuniyoshi remembered, someone told him that his art lacked “elaborate Japanese formality and etiquette of dealing with people.”\textsuperscript{31} This commentary seemed to come from conventional Japanese criticism. Kuniyoshi observed:

There are two schools of painting in present-day Japan, one which follows the ancient tradition of Japan and one which is derived from the West. The older school has many followers and although they are unable to live up to past excellence in technique and artistic expression they still flourish because the roots of their art are deeply buried in the native taste and fit more perfectly into Japanese life. The Western school derived principally from French Impressionism and its later European manifestations has a vigor and vitality that the older school lacks. So far the achievement of this school has been more in the realm technical adoption than artistic expression. The art that the Japanese have produced by Western means seems to have little connection with their lives. To know the country of Japan is to understand perfectly the interpretation of it by their old masters. It is still to be seen whether the Japanese artists will be able with Western tools,


\textsuperscript{31} “Accumulation of Sadness,” \textit{PM}, November 27, 1944.
a changed outlook and a fast changing scene, to create an art that will express the distinctive native characteristics in a new and particular life.³²

In this thinking, Kuniyoshi’s art belonged to Western-style painting, or yōga, rather than Japanese style painting, or nihonga, which uses the conventional technique—simplified or decorative forms of objects and people—and materials—washi, or traditional Japanese paper and mineral pigment. This is because his techniques and subjects were based on the Western art he studied in New York. Nevertheless, American critiques at that period stressed exoticism in Kuniyoshi’s art.

In 1922, within a year from the solo show, William Murrell published the first art book about Kuniyoshi, where he regarded the essence of Kuniyoshi’s art to be a hybridity of multiple cultures.³³ He favorably wrote that Kuniyoshi did not blindly follow Western techniques, but he consciously digested what he could only absorb, and therefore he could remain Japanese. This analysis was based on his dualistic definition of Western and Eastern art. Western techniques of painting were generally objective and were, therefore “at bottom, not an authentic medium for the Oriental psyche—which is essentially subjective in quality, expressing itself best in symbols and conventionalized forms.”³⁴ However, he also observed that such difference had become ambiguous, and modern Japanese artists were more objective, whereas Western artists were more subjective.³⁵ Murrell found his ideal example in Kuniyoshi’s hybrid art.

³² Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Art and Artists in Japan,” Arts Weekly 1, no. 7, April 23, 1932, 150.
³³ William Murrell, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, in Younger Artists Series Number 4 (Woodstock, NY: William M. Fisher, 1922), unpaginated. Kuniyoshi’s 13 oils and 8 ink drawings were reproduced in black and white, which included eight pictures from the 1922 show.
³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ Ibid. Art critic/historian Lloyd Goodrich summed up the uniqueness of Kuniyoshi’s early paintings, saying: “Kuniyoshi’s early work was a unique blend of Orientalism and modernism... Kuniyoshi, while remaining basically Oriental, was instinctively in accord with modernism.” Lloyd Goodrich, “Yasuo
Kuniyoshi’s art shows a formal similarity with both Japanese and Modernist aesthetics. One example is *Upstream* (1922; fig. 1.10), where the landscape rises in vertical planes, as if seen from a bird’s eye view. A man with a girl in the boat is rowing in the middle of the river full of fishes and waves. While the boat is going afar, it appears to move upward rather than to recede into the center of the painting, as if climbing up a waterfall. Along the river are two buildings juxtaposed lengthwise. The angular brown house under the white one with a girl by its door is nearer to the picture plane than the other. A similar composition is used in *Maine Family* (1922-23; fig. 1.11), where geometrical houses overlapping imply their distance. Three characters—a family of a woman in a white dress with a red hat, a girl in a black dress and a crawling baby—at the bottom of the picture are also nearer to the viewers than the several houses above them. On the one hand, these compositions stem from an aesthetic of the Cubist painters such as Picasso or Braque, who observed and represented landscapes from multiple perspectives in a vertical format. On the other hand, as Goodrich pointed out, they refer to a traditional technique in Chinese and Japanese scrolls, where distant objects are placed above one another, juxtaposed with nearer ones below.  

For instance, a Japanese hanging scroll in the style of Sesshu, a Japanese old master whom Kuniyoshi respected, *Pavilion on Mountain Stream* (17th century; fig. 1.12) depicts the landscape in a vertical format, where a few figures are on the bottom while the distant mountain is above them.  

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36 Goodrich, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi*, 16-17.

Kuniyoshi’s vertical composition, which both traditional Asian and modern Western artists used, embodies an aesthetic crossing of East and West, past and present.

4. Kuniyoshi and Hamilton Easter Field

How did Kuniyoshi, who never formally studied Japanese art, learn traditional Japanese art? He must have developed his hybrid style under the patronage of Hamilton Easter Field (1873-1922), whom he met first at the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. Field liked this emerging artist, who coincidently had the same name as one of his favorite Japanese old masters, Utagawa Kuniyoshi. As a supporter of American artists and avid collector of Japanese art, Field decided to support Kuniyoshi, and continued to do so until his death in 1922. Kuniyoshi wrote that Field offered him and his wife Katherine Schmidt “a place to stay in Ogunquit, Maine, during the summer so that I could work, and an apartment in Brooklyn for the winter.”38 Field’s help freed Kuniyoshi from his various menial labors and allowed him to concentrate on art for the first time in his career.

Field was a versatile painter, writer, collector and teacher, whose multifaceted roles in the New York art world has been scrupulously analyzed by two scholars Doreen Bolger and William Green.39 As a teacher, he founded and taught at his own art schools in Ogunquit and Brooklyn, contributing to the development of American art. He was also the owner of the Ardsley Studio gallery, which opened around 1910 in Brooklyn, and

38 Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” 75.
where he showed his own art collection of past works along with those by living American artists.\textsuperscript{40} He used his art collection of European and Japanese art as a tool for his teaching.\textsuperscript{41}

Kuniyoshi had many chances to appreciate traditional Japanese art, especially \textit{ukiyo-e}, or Japanese woodblock prints, through Field.\textsuperscript{42} He became fascinated with the woodblock prints in Paris during the 1890s and shared such interests with his Parisian friends. His favorite artists were Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige, Toshusai Sharaku, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi.\textsuperscript{43} He said about his taste in Japanese prints that: “I had the strongest liking for the work of certain artists who were not at the time cared for in America, for the so-called primitives, for Sharaku and for Kuniyoshi.”\textsuperscript{44} Field did not like relatively new “spotless” prints that “had been cleaned until the paper had lost its quality,” because they even looked like “fakes” to him.\textsuperscript{45} He preferred the old masters because of their authenticity and antiquity. As an art editor, Field passionately disseminated information about Japanese art through multiple media in the 1910s and 1920s.\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Arts} magazine he launched in 1920 regularly featured Japanese art from its


\textsuperscript{41} Bolger, “Hamilton Easter Field and His Contribution to American Modernism,” 93.

\textsuperscript{42} According to Field’s definition, \textit{ukiyo-e} literally means a mirror of the passing world and represents people’s daily lives. Hamilton Easter Field, Introduction to \textit{Catalogue of An Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings, and Prints by Hokusai Belonging to The Estate of Francis Lathrop} (New York: Berlin Photographic Company, date unknown), 4.

\textsuperscript{43} Bolger, “Hamilton Easter Field and His Contribution to American Modernism,” 83-84.


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Field was an executor of the estate of Francis Lathrop (1849-1909). Lathrop was a \textit{ukiyo-e} collector, whose collection became a major part of the foundation of the Metropolitan Museum collection. Field carried out the preliminary cataloging of Lathrop’s collection. Field, Introduction to \textit{Catalogue of An}
inception. He shared his knowledge with the American public in order to cultivate their better understanding of it. By doing so, he contributed to the development of American art by educating artists and the general public.

An advocate of modernism, Field believed in the importance of individuality and originality in art, advising his students to focus on individual self-expression, as the Cubists and Futurists did. However, he did not merely encourage his students, as well as the American public, to blindly follow these European modernists. Rather, he believed American art would advance based on American traditions, for he thought that the roots of American modernism were in folk art and colonial art. Kuniyoshi agreed with Field’s ideas and adopted these techniques in his own art. Bolger observed that *Two Babies* (1923; fig. 1.13) showed the influence of American folk art—unusual perspective, and the primitive, simplified forms of babies with wide-eyes staring straight ahead, all of which were related to folk art styles. In order to explore his own self-expression, Kuniyoshi seemed to focus on the art of his native country by using Field’s Japanese art collection. Field’s evaluation of Kuniyoshi’s art as a fusion of Western and Eastern art attests to this. In his review of Kuniyoshi’s solo show in 1922, Field wrote:

> Yasuo Kuniyoshi has done a wonderful thing… He has expressed the ideal of modern Japan and of modern America as he has read them fused together in his own heart… He is, so far as I know, the first modern Japanese who in art has given us a message which, for us Occidentals, has unity, truth and intensity.

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*Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings, and Prints by Hokusai Belonging to The Estate of Francis Lathrop, 3-12.*


48 Bolger, “Hamilton Easter Field and His Contribution to American Modernism,” 93.

49 Ibid., 96.

Field regarded Kuniyoshi as an ideal modern Japanese artist, despite the fact that the artist was away from his native country for more than a decade. He thought that Kuniyoshi managed to never lose his Japanese identity and to negotiate it with his other identity as an American, resulting in his creative style, where both Western and Eastern elements coexist.

**Conclusion**

Kuniyoshi studied the techniques of both traditional and modern Western art— mediums, subjects, and perspectives—at the Art Students League. At the same time, he also learned more about Japanese art under the patronage of Hamilton Easter Field. There was an undertow of mixed aesthetics of Japanese and modern Western art in his early paintings, appearing mainly in forms and compositions. Contemporary American critics appreciated his art as an amalgamation of modern Western and traditional Asian art. By relating Kuniyoshi’s odd perspectives, as well as the exotic atmosphere in his paintings, to the artist’s origin of birth, they favorably accepted his art, but later on in his career his Japanese identity prompted different opinions.
Chapter 2

Art and Identity: Kuniyoshi’s Use of Japanese Objects in Art and the Japanese Artists’ Community of New York City, 1922-1927

We did not know what would happen the next day. Our lives were like those of pitiful vagabonds, who had to live with only water for the time being. In the great New York City, in a melting pot, we—Kuniyoshi and I—suffered loneliness and hunger, but we managed to survive. Typical youth, we were nonchalant and brazen. We had a sort of shameless, rebellious sprit, believing that another sun shines tomorrow—it was around 1917-1920, when both of us were 25 or 26 years old. —Shigeru Miyatake, “Seinenjidai no Kuniyoshi Yasuo.”

Introduction

While achieving a critical success in the American art world and socializing with influential Americans, Kuniyoshi’s art and identity developed in parallel with his commitment to his Japanese artists’ community. On one hand, he made every effort to conform to his new life in American society, learning Western culture and manners to pursue his career. On the other hand, he fostered intimate friendships with other Japanese artists in New York, with whom he shared both artistic interests and social hardships both in their private meetings and collective activities. Unlike the previous scholarly literature, which largely analyzed Kuniyoshi’s art and life in view of his presence in the mainstream of the contemporary American art world, this chapter recontextualizes Kuniyoshi’s use of unfamiliar motifs and mediums common in Japan, in relation to his sense of the Japanese artists’ community and knowledge of Japanese cultural objects. It also looks at social, political issues in the era of cultural nationalism and rising anti-Japanese sentiment. It

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1 Shigeru Miyatake, “Seinenjidai no Kuniyoshi Yasuo [Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Youth],” Bijutsu Techo, no. 81, May 1954, 74.
traces Kuniyoshi’s biography between 1922 and 1927 by mainly focusing on his friendship with Toshi Shimizu (1887-1945) and his involvement with the two significant Japanese group exhibitions of 1922 and 1927. This chapter simultaneously aims to picture the inside detail of the community, exploring its intimacy, artistic interests, and political concerns, all of which the Japanese shared.

1. Living in Poverty: Kuniyoshi’s Friendship with Toshi Shimizu

In the early twentieth century, a majority of New York-based Japanese students were so poor that they had to work to earn money while studying at school. When asked about such students’ lives, Kuniyoshi answered:

The Japanese in New York? Twenty-four or five are studying, but all of them are self-supporting students. I mean that self-supporting students are those who study for a half year and work for the other half, serving as a so-called school boy for domestic services, or as an agriculture worker helping grow cabbage or pick walnuts. Therefore, it takes much time for them to finish studying, but they can thus gain artistic training fundamentally... I can make a living by painting now, but I earned money by physical labors until five or six years ago. I think good Japanese artists would hereafter appear in the United States. The great cosmopolitan artists, along with the good Japanese ones, would also appear in the United States in the future.²

Before becoming the most established Japanese painter in New York, Kuniyoshi had to earn money by performing a variety of menial labors. Eitaro Ishigaki, a Japanese schoolmate at the Art Students League, remembered that:

When I first met Kuniyoshi, he served as a cleaner in a dining room in the Harvard University Club. Four or five Japanese art students woke up early in the morning to clean the spacious dining room. Afterward, Kuniyoshi served as an attendant at an art school, watching students’ hats, coats, and umbrellas.  

In addition to the service in the cloakroom in exchange for scholarship at the League, Kuniyoshi’s Japanese friend, Shigeru Miyatake, wrote that Kuniyoshi worked at producing glass bottles and flasks in Nyack, New Jersey, and even drew “vulgar” posters and served as a bartender at “shady” cabarets and nightclubs in the “poor, seedy” east side of New York. Both Kuniyoshi and Miyatake were “hungry” and “lonely” due to their poverty in the last few years of the 1910s, when Kuniyoshi was forced to take any job, no matter how disagreeable and hard it was. He may have even felt ashamed of these circumstances, as he tried to keep his ways of earning a living secret. However, his youth and ambition enabled him to pursue art, despite these hardships.

Commercial art provided a source of employment for the poor Japanese artists. According to Ishigaki, the Japanese artists did not need to wash dishes or to become waiters for money in the 1910s; they were able to use their skills for commercial art, furniture design and decoration, which provided them with decent money for food, clothing and housing. Kuniyoshi was no exception. When he had difficulty making a

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4 Miyatake, “Seinenjidai no Kuniyoshi Yasu [Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Youth],” 73.

5 Miyatake wrote that Kuniyoshi kept a tide lid on his work in factory work in Nyack, New Jersey, as well as his laboring at the cabarets and nightclubs in the city. Ibid.

living, his Japanese artist friend Toshi Shimizu helped him by offering him a job designing baskets. They met each other at the Art Students League around September 1920, when they studied with American teachers—Shimizu with John Sloan and Kuniyoshi with Kenneth Hayes Miller. Shimizu remembered that Kuniyoshi then worked so hard that he hurt himself:

No one inside Japan can imagine how painstakingly the Japanese students study in the United States. Like us, even Mr. Kuniyoshi had every sort of laboring experiences. For a certain period, we worked together on very uncomfortable things in the same room. Mr. Kuniyoshi was then unhealthy, continuing working while huffing and puffing.

Shimizu himself was able to earn a decent living in commercial design and to feed his Japanese wife and newly born son. However, it stole from him the time needed to focus on his art. In contrast, Kuniyoshi tried to avoid the long-term commercial art business as much as possible at the cost of a stable life. He instead held a variety of short-term jobs in order to concentrate on his art, which Ishigaki later considered a smart choice. Yet, such laboring made him often face financial problems and even made him sick. It was against this backdrop that Shimizu helped Kuniyoshi overcome his financial difficulties.

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8 Shimizu studied with American painters George Bellows and John Sloan. Both of these instructors were not only kind to this foreign student, but they also respected his art. They collected Shimizu’s works of art by purchasing or exchanging their works with Shimizu’s. About Shimizu’s biography, see Toshi Shimizu Registration Records 1917-1919, The Art Students League, New York; Oka and Kobiki eds., Shimizu Toshi, 26-27; Hiroya Sugimura ed., Shimizu Toshi: Retrospective Exhibition (Tochigi, Japan: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, 1996), 141-48; Hiroya Sugimura ed., Shimizu Toshi: Works from the Collection of Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts (Tochigi, Japan: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 88-91.


On the evening of March 19, 1921, Kuniyoshi and Shimizu visited Ishigaki’s atelier on 14th Street, participating in a meeting to discuss the inaugural group exhibition by the New York based Japanese artists. The participants were those who founded nihonjin gaka, chōkokuka no kai (gachōkai), also known as the Japanese Artists’ Society (JAS). JAS was an embodiment of the increasing sense of community among the young Japanese artists, who were anxious to show their art publicly.

A history of exhibitions by the group of Japanese artists already began before JAS. One of the earliest dates back to 1917, when the Yamanaka Gallery organized the “Young Japanese Artists in New York” exhibition, displaying 75 artworks by 11 artists. The Gallery was originally founded in Japan in 1884 and its New York branch was opened in the following years. While mainly selling Japanese antiques and original furniture, it simultaneously provided emerging Japanese artists with opportunities to show their art in public. In 1918, a dozen Japanese from the so-called “Japanese Art Association” held another group show at the MacDowell Club, New York. It included Kuniyoshi and T.K. Gado, both of whom later became founding members of JAS.

12 The society consisted of fifteen artists: Eitarto Ishigaki; Kunie Ando; Makoto Hara S; Shotaro Inaba; T.K. Gado; Ryokichi Miki; Michio Misaki; Toshi Shimizu; Testusen Tera; Bumpei Usui; Torajiro Watanabe; Masaji Hiramoto; Gozo Kawamura; Yo Okabe; and Yasuo Kuniyoshi. Gado, Shimizu, and Ishigaki were selected to be directors. Shimizu Diary, March 19, 1921, reprinted in Ibid.
14 The participants were: K. Ashiwar; T.K. Gado; S. Hamachi; I.E. Hori; K. Kimoto; Y. Kuniyoshi; G. Sakaguchi; G. Shimotori; George Tera; M.T. Tsuchiya; and M. Uwagawa. Ibid., 86, 106.
Although poorly documented, these exhibitions pioneered significant Japanese artists’ collective activities in the following years.

The JAS created a hand-written prospectus in Japanese on October 1, 1922.\(^{15}\) It officially stated its foundation and its upcoming inaugural exhibition:

Last year, we, Japanese painters and sculptors, who seek to live in the art world, gathered to found the association named *gachōkai* [Japanese Artists’ Society] and decided to hold its inaugural exhibition that shows works of art of the members at the Civic Club on 42nd Street and Fourth Avenue for three weeks from November 3. Art can rarely develop without social care by its nature. It can be in full bloom by social patronage, and artists’ ability can flower well with support from authority and the rich… Always keeping in mind that “we are Japanese” and addressing that “*gachōkai* is an association of Japanese painters and sculptors,” we thought we could ask for financial support from the Japanese community. We would like your kind help “in order to introduce Japanese art to the world.”\(^{16}\)

Not only did it announce the purpose of this society, but it also called for financial help from the Japanese community. It was based on the belief that art cannot develop without help from society, but it simultaneously demonstrated the artists’ financial hardships. In November 1922, the inaugural “Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by the Japanese Artists Society of New York City” opened at the Civic Club (November 1 to 21, 1922).

All but Okabe from the founding members participated and showed 53 works in total (see Appendix 1), including Kuniyoshi’s *Boy Scared by Snake*, also called *Boy Frightened by Snake* (1921; fig. 2.1) and *Frog and Hospital*.

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\(^{15}\) This manuscript used to be owned by one of the founding members, Eitaro Ishigaki and his wife Ayako. It is cited in the following exhibition catalogue. Masahiro Yasuki, “Shiryō ni miru senzen no tobei gakatachi: Sono katsudō no kiseki [Japanese Artists in Pre-World War II United States in View of the Relevant Documents: The Trajectory of Their Activities],” in *Japan in America: Eitaro Ishigaki and Other Japanese Artists in the Pre-World War II United States*, ed. The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama (Wakayama, Japan: The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama, 1997), 58.

Seemingly, it did not attract much public attention and only two publications featured it briefly. *The Japanese Times*, a semi-weekly Japanese language newspaper in New York, published an exhibition review by one of the participants, Ishigaki, who urged its readers to appreciate this exhibition, for he thought that some artworks would be respected as masterpieces in history.\(^{17}\) A writer from *American Art News* pointed out that most of the participants adopted the technique not of traditional Japanese, but modern Western art, saying: “All of these artists are devotees of Western art, only one painting and one sculpture being concerned with Oriental life.”\(^{18}\) One example is T.K. Gado’s *Traffic* (circa 1920; fig. 2.2), which this writer called “Cubistic to a degree.” Also shown at the 1921 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, the picture depicts the dynamics of traffic in New York as a futuristic city, where myriads of people perpetually come and go against the geometric skyscrapers and the El train. The modern “Japanese art” at the Japanese group show was a product of the artists’ encounters with the West.

Masahiro Yasuki—the scholarly curator who organized the exhibition focusing on Japanese artists in America in 1997—stated that both the details of the Japanese artists of New York and whereabouts of their artworks are now mostly unknown.\(^{19}\) However, the registration records of the Art Students League show that at least ten out of the 15 JAS members studied at the League, where Japanese had been one of the largest ethnicities (see Appendix 1). Ishigaki, who began to attend in 1916, introduced the history and

\(^{17}\) Eitaro Ishigaki, “*Gyokuseki dōka* (jou) [Mixture of Wheat and Chaff (First Half)],” *The Japanese Times*, November 11, 1922. In the second half of his review, he made brief remarks on all participants. Eitaro Ishigaki, “*Gyokuseki dōka* (ge) [Mixture of Wheat and Chaff (Second Half)],” *The Japanese Times*, November 15, 1922.


uniqueness of this institution to the Japanese public, that the league was “a free school” where students could choose any teacher and study as much as possible because the league had no graduation.20 This system, along with scholarships, attracted many of the poor but ambitious Japanese expatriates. Many of the JAS artists were also active participants in non-juried exhibitions of the Society of Independent Artists (SIA) and the Salons of America (SA) in the 1920s (see Appendix 2). Having neither juries nor prizes, both SIA and SA accepted all artists and artworks, treating them equally regardless of their nationality, which enabled the Japanese to participate easily.21 The 1922 JAS group show embodied the ambition of the fledging Japanese artists, who were then eager to increase their presence in the art world though their participations in SIA and SA. However, they were poor and still just anonymous painters. In this foreign country, what they could rely on most was their national bonding and the power of community.

3. Kuniyoshi’s Japanese Motifs and Mediums in Art

a. Unusual Fauna and Flora

When the Japanese artists’ community became active in the early 1920s, Kuniyoshi painted fauna and flora related to the Japanese landscape. These motifs looked


21 SIA declared that “[t]he Society of Independent Artists has been incorporated under the laws of New York for the purpose of holding exhibitions in which all artists may participate independently of the decisions of juries.” The Society of Independent Artists, Forward to Catalogue of the Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists (New York: The Society, 1917), unpaginated. SA was founded between 1919 and 1920 by Hamilton Easter Field, who was then a director and member of SIA. He considered that SIA no longer maintained a policy of equal opportunity for all their members. Disapproving of the amount of publicity given to older, more established artists, he called for organizational reform. In 1922, however, Field and Sloan—the president of SIA—clashed, resulting in Field’s resignation and the birth of the Salons of America as a new art society. Kuniyoshi served as a director at SA from its inception to its demise (1922-1936). Clark S. Marlor, The Salons of America 1922-1936 (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1991), 7-17.
unrecognizable to contemporary American critics, such as Henry McBride, who, as discussed in the previous chapter, stressed the exoticism of Kuniyoshi’s paintings in *Wild Horses*. However, Kuniyoshi’s Japanese fellow artists found these motifs to be important in relation to their cultural background. Seeing Kuniyoshi’s first solo exhibition at the Daniel Gallery on January 14, 1922, Shimizu commented that many of Kuniyoshi’s “motifs such as frogs and snakes cannot be understood by anyone but Japanese.”22 Such unfamiliar motifs to the American public often appear in Kuniyoshi’s paintings in this period. In *Boy Scared by Snake* (1921; fig. 2.1), for instance, a snake scared the boy climbing up the curvilinear tree. In *Adam and Eve* (1922; fig. 1.4), a frog extending its limbs floats next to Adam in a pond, and a grasshopper, as well as a cow, stands around Eve. These motifs were difficult for American viewers to fully understand, because they were often tiny and not necessarily related to the subject. However, they were easy to appreciate for Shimizu, who had the same cultural background as Kuniyoshi.

Ishigaki got a similar impression from Kuniyoshi’s 1922 show. In his exhibition review, he called Kuniyoshi “a radical artist, who tried to get away from the outer shells in the past and to create a new art of life.”23 Ishigaki emphasized that “he [Kuniyoshi] does not paint objects as they appear in the eyes, but tries to express his own feeling

22 Shimizu became very familiar with Kuniyoshi’s art by visiting his studio in Brooklyn, where they had Japanese meals and appreciated both Kuniyoshi’s and his wife Katherine Schmidt’s paintings together. (Shimizu Diary, October 31, 1921). In the following years, Shimizu kept visiting Kuniyoshi’s regular exhibitions at the Daniel Gallery, before he left for Paris in May 1924. (Shimizu Diary, January 13, 1923 and January 12, 1924). All reprinted in Oka and Kobiki eds., *Shimizu Toshi*, 30, 31,

toward them,” and he favorably regarded such feeling as “completely Japanese.”

Ishigaki observed that Kuniyoshi relied on his sensibility as Japanese in painting, ignoring conventional composition, perspective, and colors in Western art. Ishigaki thought that Kuniyoshi’s art, therefore, “may look like children’s paintings,” but “could evoke enigmatic intimacy.” Though Kuniyoshi’s study with Kenneth Hayes Miller included conventional Western perspective to convey the sense of depth in paintings, Kuniyoshi’s paintings in this period largely followed not one point but multiple perspectives. This was based on his interests in formalist aesthetics, which he learned from European modernists like Cézanne and the Cubists. However, this was also similar to the technique used in traditional Japanese art—screens, scrolls, and prints—that did not rigidly follow the traditional Western manner. Kuniyoshi’s paintings may have looked childish to those who were familiar with more naturalistic depiction of traditional Western art, but they could make Japanese viewers feel connected to them.

Cows—another of Kuniyoshi’s favorite motifs, appearing in around sixty paintings, drawings, and prints—also have their roots in Japan. He said:

I was painting cows and cows at that time because somehow I felt very near to the cow. Besides I thought I understood the animal. You see I was born, judging by the Japanese calendar, in a “cow year.” According to legend I believed my fate to be guided, more or less, by the bovine kingdom. Also I was interested in the cow because I thought it decorative as well as ugly and so I painted cows constantly until I was exhausted.

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24 “ことの眼に映る像を描かずして、それに対する感じを表現しようと努めて居る（中略）どこ迄も日本人の感覚である。” Ibid.

25 “子供の描いた像にも見られるが（中略）不思議な親しみを感じるのです。” Ibid.

26 Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” 75, 77.
Born in a cow year in the traditional zodiac calendar, he believed that painting the animal would bring him good fortune. An early example is *Maud* (1921; fig. 1.9), where a cow kneeling down dominates the foreground. A scarecrow in Western clothing stands in the back, implying that the bucolic landscapes were based on those in Ogunquit, where he spent his summers in this period. Likewise, *Little Joe with Cow* (1923; fig. 2.3)—his largest and last painting of cows—is centered on a large cow behind a standing boy. As if satisfying the aesthetics he learned from European modernists, the cow’s body is triangular, unlike the naturalistic one in *Maud*. Its geometrical shape echoes the cow’s head and hindquarters.

*Little Joe with Cow* depicts another motif that also implies its relationship to Japanese culture. It is *equisetum arvense*, perennial plants better known as horsetails. Three horsetails stand upright just above his signature and under the tree of two large seedpods behind the cow’s hindquarters (fig. 2.4). A familiar spring plant in Japan, it has often been used as a word of seasonal reference in *haiku*, or a traditional Japanese poetry. Masaoka Shiki, a famous Japanese poet, composed dozens of poems by using the plant sprouting on roads or along brooks. The horsetails in *Little Joe with Cow* signify the advent of spring in the bucolic landscape. Also, its original title “Little Joe and Cow with Calf,” as well as the cow’s big belly behind the boy, suggest that the cow is pregnant and

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28 About Masaoka’s *haiku* and the seasonal words, used to represent spring, see Matsuyama City Memorial Museum of Shiki Masaoka. http://sikihaku.lesp.co.jp/community/search/site01.php?_key1=%E5%9C%9F%E7%AD%86&_key2=&_key3=&_key4=&_key5=&_key6=%E5%80%80%E6%A4%9C%E7%B4%A2%E5%AE%9F%E8%A1%8C (accessed April 28, 2015).
about to give birth to a calf.\textsuperscript{29} The unborn calf, along with horsetails, symbolizes fertility of spring.

Though Kuniyoshi’s \textit{Little Joe and Cow}, as well as \textit{Adam and Eve} and \textit{Maud}, were based on American landscapes, some motifs in these paintings are familiar among Japanese. They may have appeared to be trivial to the eyes of contemporary Americans, yet they evoked a familiar feeling among the Japanese expatriates, while also reflecting Kuniyoshi’s own Japanese identity.

\textbf{b. Ink Drawings and “Thought of the East”}

In the early 1920s, Kuniyoshi became more conscious of his national bonding in art, taking up ink drawings with a pen and a brush as “an independent creation” of his “intimate expression.”\textsuperscript{30} As curator / scholar Jane Myers has argued, this medium had obvious relevance to \textit{suibokuga}, or Japanese and Chinese traditional ink drawings.\textsuperscript{31} With monochrome lines and colors, Kuniyoshi represented various subjects—landscapes, village scenes, interiors, and still life, all of which had something in common with his oils. His drawings expressed his thoughts and experiences as an Asian, as he said: “I have wished to express the thought of the East, my race, using the tradition of expressing inner thoughts through the full realization of the matter of my experience.”\textsuperscript{32} He learned oil

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Little Joe with Cow} was displayed as \textit{Little Joe and Cow and Calf} at the 1923 Spring Salon of the Salons of America (May 21 to June 9, 1923). Salons of America, \textit{Spring Salon} (New York: Salons of America, 1923), unpaginated.


painting, a traditional medium in Western art history. Yet, while these befit a photographic depiction of objects, he thought that they were not appropriate to express his inner world. In contrast, Asian art had its own representational world that focused more on expressing artists’ inner, rather than outer, life. Identifying himself to be a person within this Eastern art tradition, he began to use indigenous mediums, as well as motifs, commonly used in Japan, by which he expressed his inner world most effectively.

Kuniyoshi’s Octopus (1922; fig. 2.5), where an octopus is floating in the depths of the rich sea with fauna, mostly referred to Japanese traditional art in view not only of its medium but also its motif. Such marine life was popular among ukyo-e (Japanese woodblock prints) artists like Utagawa Kuniyoshi. As Wolf has observed, this Octopus is similar to Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s Water Creatures: Octopus Clutching a Rock (1837-42; fig. 2.6), in that both pictures depict the octopus in a vertical format.  

Kuniyoshi combined marine life with a nude in another drawing, Sleeping Beauty (1924; fig. 2.7). The nude is sleeping on the sea with her arms open, while an octopus reaches its tentacles out toward her breasts. This unusual combination related to a scene from an ancient folktale, Taishokan (The Great Woven Cap), where a diving woman retrieved a priceless gem from the Dragon King of the Sea at the cost of her life. This folktale was popular among the Japanese in the Edo period (1603-1868), when Japanese woodblock artists, such as Okumura Masanobu and Utagawa Kuniyoshi, illustrated and often parodied it in their prints. Among its episodes, the most popular one was Tamatori

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(February 1940): 17. Following the quote, Zigrosser summarized the artist that: “In other words, Kuniyoshi is an artist of innate talent, with a point of view conditioned by his early Oriental background, who uses the technique and mode of expression of the Western World.” Ibid.


monogatari (Tale of the Taking of the Jewel) of the woman diver being chased by the Dragon King and his marine servants. Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s Ryūgū tamatori hime no zu (Tamatori-hime Stealing the Sacred Jewel from the Dragon Palace; 1853; fig. 2.8) depicts this episode: a half-naked woman on the left is fighting against a dragon and a variety of marine creatures.

The composition in Sleeping Beauty—a naked woman sleeping near an octopus—also has a visual similarity with the extreme erotic parody of Tamatori monogatari by Katsushika Hokusai: Tako to ama (The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife; 1820; fig. 2.9).35 A sleeping female diver has a pleasurable dream, in which two octopi wrap their tentacles around her naked body and insert their funnels respectively into her mouth and vagina.36 It is unknown whether Kuniyoshi knew this sexually explicit print, yet Kuniyoshi’s patron, Hamilton Easter Field, could have known it because of its popularity in the fin-de-siècle Parisian artistic circles to which he belonged.37 This pornographic image could have been shared by the two—Field, an American ukiyo-e enthusiast, and Kuniyoshi, an artist from their culture. Moreover, Japanese painter Makoto Aida has observed that such perverted eroticism, reflected in ukiyo-e woodblock prints, has been one of “the most honest and original forms of expression for Japanese,” transmitted from generation to

35 Wolf has also observed the relevance of these two pictures. In addition, he points out that Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s Ama Dressing Her Hair on the Sea Shore would be another potential reference to Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Sleeping Beauty. Wolf, The Artistic Journey of Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 34.
37 Aesthete Joris Karl Huysmans and japoniste Edmond Goncourt, for instance, highly admired the erotic print in their writings. Ibid., 25.
Kuniyoshi’s *Sleeping Beauty* may have implicitly reflected sexual desire as commonly expressed in Japanese culture.

The uniqueness of *Sleeping Beauty*, however, lies in the use of Eastern symbols combined with Western sensibility and techniques used in a different way from Hokusai. In contrast with the realistic and obviously erotic octopi by this Japanese old master, Kuniyoshi’s one is more like a suggestion of eroticism, for it barely touches the sleeping nude. In other words, while *Sleeping Beauty* could have been based on a reference from the Japanese folktale, its erotic connotation is actually closer to a traditional representation of Venus in Western art. In Alexandre Cabanel’s *The Birth of Venus* (1875; fig. 2.10), which Kuniyoshi would have seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Venus sleeps on the sea under angels, showing her breasts to the viewers. Her posture and voluptuous body is sensuous and seductive. Kuniyoshi’s nude, who is also sleeping under angels, creates a similar atmosphere in the painting, because the octopus reaching her enhances the delicate eroticism. He used his knowledge of Western and Eastern art in his own way to depict *Sleeping Beauty*, which reinforced Kuniyoshi’s hybrid identity nurtured in both cultures.

c. Babies and the Japanese Community

Babies, which Kuniyoshi frequently painted in the early 1920s, also suggest the relevance of Japan. On the one hand, he had strong interests in babies’ strange forms, as he said: “People think that babies are beautiful, but I thought otherwise and so I painted  

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38 Aida parodied Hokusai’s *Tako to ama* in his painting *Member Fuji Versus King Gidora* (1993), where a girl, in the same uniform as that of a character on Japanese TV drama, *Ultraman*, a popular Sci-Fi show, is sexually and violently attacked by a dragon-like monster, King Gidora, from the series of *Godzilla* movies. Makoto Aida, comment on *Member Fuji Versus King Gidora*, in *Kodoku na wakusei* [Lonely Planet] (Tokyo: Danbo, 1999), unpaginated.
babies and babies.”

His ink drawing, *Baby and Cow* (1921; fig. 2.11), one of the earliest paintings about babies, shows a baby with an awkwardly large head crawling toward a toy cow. Such unbalanced proportions of head and body attracted the artist’s interests. On the other hand, Kuniyoshi indicated a specific ethnicity in the picture. Between the baby and cow lies a *den den daiko*, a traditional Japanese toy drum with a *yin-yang* (negative and positive) symbol, implying the baby is Japanese. *The Baby* (1921; fig. 2.12) depicts a male baby clearly having Asian-looking features—black bobbed hair, a full forehead, small eyes, nose, and mouth. In a white rhombic bib with wavy stripes, he sits on a black cushion, and a ribboned portable cradle is seen in the distance. This type of bib was common in Japan, where parents put it on male babies. It was widely known as the typical uniform of *Kintaro* (golden boy), the protagonist in a famous Japanese folktale of the same name. Kintaro, who was born strong and grew up in the mountains with wild animals, wears the bib in childhood, as *ukyo-e* (Japanese woodblock prints) painter Tsukioka Yoshitoshi depicted in *Kintokiyama no tsuki* (Moon of Kintoki’s Mountain; 1890, fig 2.13). There, *Kintaro* wears a black and white checked bib in front of a monkey and rabbit playing *sumo*. Unlike these two pictures, *Two Babies* (1923; fig. 1.13) are not clearly Asian. Its primitive representation of babies rather suggests his interests in the techniques of American folk art. Nevertheless, the elder one holds a stick, on top of which sits a Japanese toy bird. Kuniyoshi’s interests in Japanese cultural objects are reflected in this picture, too.

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39 Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” 77.
41 Levin’s interview with Kuniyoshi’s wife Sara Mazo revealed that Kuniyoshi often enjoyed visiting a Japanese toy store on East 59th Street. Levin, “Between Two Worlds,” 10.
Kuniyoshi’s babies seemed to have something to do with his Japanese circle. Although he never had a child, his Japanese friends began to have babies in the early 1920s, when he started using the motif. On February 22, 1921, Shimizu’s Japanese wife Sumiko gave birth to their first male child, whom the father named “Ikuo (育夫)” after his birthplace, New York (紐育). Since then, Shimizu wrote, “Ikuo has become the center in my [Shimizu’s] family.” Shimizu was a family man who loved his wife and child (1924; fig. 2.14). He painted family portraits such as The Family and Sumiko and Ikuo—portrait of his wife and son—displaying them in his solo exhibition “Paintings by Toshi Shimizu” at the Joseph Brummer Gallery in New York (from October 22 to November 10, 1923). Unfortunately, the whereabouts of these family portraits are currently unknown. They demonstrated that at least babies were common motifs used by both Kuniyoshi and Shimizu. Furthermore, Shimizu’s Japanese friend Iwata Nakayama had a baby during the same period. A photographic portrait (1924; fig. 2.15) recorded the families of Shimizu and Nakayama, showing their growing children. Kuniyoshi’s use of Japanese babies as a motif began when his Japanese circle began having babies.

d. The Dream to Bad Dream: Dark Clouds over the Community

In 1922, Kuniyoshi drew The Dream (1922; fig. 2.16), full of strange fauna and flora appearing irregularly in a vertical format; a toy-like girl is flying next to a small bird under the sky covered by clouds; the head of a cow is near the big pointed leaves in the middle; and the cobra twists around a tree trunk, whereas a tiny two-headed snake is on a

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42 New York was written as “紐育” in Japanese during this period. The first Chinese letter of Ikuo [育夫] derived from the second Chinese letter of New York [紐育],” while it also means “growth.” The second letter of Ikuo [育夫] means “man.” Thus, Ikuo literally means “healthy man” or “man of New York.”

43 Shimizu Diary, January 1, 1923, reprinted in Oka and Kobiki eds., Shimizu Toshi, 30.
low tree limb, just above the large fern fronds. Based on this surreal scene, Kuniyoshi completed Bad Dream (1924; fig. 2.17) two years later, somehow turning the scene into a horrifying one. Also known as Hell at that time, this drawing represents an infernal scene, where naked women are about to be abducted by devils from a garden filled with plants and animals. It is also full of such bizarre living things as a double-headed snake, which Kuniyoshi previously drew in Adam and Eve (1922; fig. 1.4); an ungulate merged with cow; a fish with wings flying in the sky; a small rooster on the woman’s right palm; and a Japanese deity, raijin, or the thunder god with a circle of drums, flying out of the dark clouds.

The Japanese deity, who does not appear in a similar sky in Dream, was historically paired with fujin (fukaku), or the wind god. He had long been depicted by Japanese artists, among whom the most famous were two Japanese old masters, Tawaraya Sotatsu and Ogata Korin, whom Kuniyoshi admired. Kuniyoshi would very likely have known Korin’s thunder god, because the Japanese writer/poet Yone Noguchi wrote an article about Korin in The Arts magazine in 1922. In the same year, Noguchi published a book about Korin, where Korin’s thunder god was reproduced in color as the front piece (18th century; fig. 2.18).

These two deities became popular motifs passed from generation to generation, as painters copied their predecessors. Korin copied Sotatsu, and Hoitsu copied Korin in multiple ways, including folded screens and the illustrated book Korin Hyakuzu (One

44 This picture was reproduced in a unidentified article as “Hell.” Kuniyoshi Papers, AAA, microfilm reel D176.
45 Kuniyoshi said: “My preferences among artists have been: Seshu [sic], Korin, Chinese sculptures, Courbet, Signorelli, Daumier, and Delacroix.” Quoted from Kootz, Modern American Painters, 43.
47 Yone Noguchi, Korin (London: Elkin Mathews, 1922), unpagedinated.
Hundred Paintings by Korin; 1815; fig. 2.19). The deity was familiar in the Japanese artists’ community. Kuniyoshi’s fellow Japanese, Soichi Sunami painted *Thunder* (circa 1925; fig. 2.20), where the deity with widely opened eyes is in the midst of creating thunder. Like Korin and Kuniyoshi’s thunder gods, he appears to be more like a horrifying devil. Kuniyoshi’s thunder god belongs in this rich genealogy of Japanese art history.

Traditionally, thunder has been feared in Japan. As the well-known jocular aphorism “earthquake, thunder, fire, and father” says, it is one of the four most powerful natural forces. Kuniyoshi’s *Boy Frightened by Lightening* (1921; fig. 2.21) vividly expresses how terrifying this natural force is, especially for children. The boy, scared by the thunder, is sitting still with his eyes and ears firmly shut, waiting for the thunder to pass. The thunder god in *Bad Dream* embodies a fearful natural force, intensifying the horrifying atmosphere. While Kuniyoshi’s thunder god in the form of a devil in *Bad Dream* continued precedents in Japanese art history, it also expresses its horrifying nature.

Why did Kuniyoshi, then, depict the macabre scene with a frightening Japanese god and Western devils in *Bad Dream*, whose atmosphere is totally different from his earlier drawing, *The Dream*? One answer could stem from the unsettling atmosphere, which covered the Japanese community between the completion of these two ink

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48 Born in Okayama, Japan, Sunami immigrated to the United States in 1907. Before coming to New York, he studied art with Dutch immigrant artist Fokko Tadama in Seattle, where Sunami became close friends with Shimizu. In New York, Sunami kept his friendship with Shimizu and his younger brother Kiyoshi. Sunami is currently known as a photographer, whose works included the portraits of famous American artists, like Edward Hopper; the photographs he produced in collaboration with dancer Martha Graham; and the photographs of MoMA’s art collection for its archive. See David F. Martin and Nicolette Bromberg, *Shadows of a Fleeting World: Pictorial Photography and the Seattle Camera Club* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, in association with University of Washington Libraries and The Henry Art Gallery, 2011), 166-76.

drawings. Around noon on September 1, 1923, the most disastrous earthquake in Japanese history hit Tokyo and other parts of the Kanto area. Causing a large fire and savage human violence in the confusion, the natural calamity killed over one hundred thousand people and turned Tokyo into a devastating inferno. The shocking news immediately traveled to New York. *The New York Times* covered this stunning event every day for the next few days with conspicuous titles, such as “Great Earthquake and Fire Ravage Tokio and Yokohama” (September 2, 1923); “100,000 Dead in Japanese Earthquake” (September 3, 1923); and “250,000 Japanese Dead; Terror Spreads in New Earthquakes, Fires and Famine” (September 4, 1923).  

The news rapidly spread throughout the Japanese artists’ community. *The Japanese Times* published the initial report of the earthquake on September 5, 1923, describing it as “the unprecedented catastrophe.” The newspaper kept the latest conditions in Japan updated in every issue for months. While reporting the worsening conditions and the presumed number of dead, it also started reproducing extremely poignant pictures of disastrous Yokohama City and even a stack of corpses (figs. 2.22, 23). The pictures, taken from the ground level, were more graphic than any text, vividly showing how terrible the catastrophe was and evoking painful emotion among the expatriate Japanese in New York.

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51 “Tokyo yokohama nagoyashi wo hajime tokaido shoshi songai zetudai [Immeasurable Damage on Tokaido Area, such as Tokyo, Yokohama, and Nagoya],” *The Japanese Times*, September 5, 1923.

52 “Nyū-yōku e hajime tashita hisaichi kara no tegami [The First Letter Reaches New York from the Disaster Area],” *The Japanese Times*, October 6, 1923; “Shinsai gaho sono go [Pictorial report no. 5],” *The Japanese Times*, October 24, 1923. Along with the pictorial reports in newspapers, the motion pictures that show the devastated state of Tokyo opened on September 26 at Rivoli and other theaters in New York. “Katsuga wo tōshite mita nihondaishinsai no sanjō [The Dismal State of Japan After the Great Earthquake as Seen Through Motion Pictures],” *The Japanese Times*, September 29, 1923.
The devastated state of Japan drew various responses from the Japanese artists in New York. In the midst of a welter of uncertain information, Shimizu poured out his great concern in his diary:

The number of dead turned from 350000 into 500000. Every time we heard detailed reports, our sorrows just increased. If only 40,000 out of 640,000 Yokohama citizens survive now, our twenty or thirty relatives, with whom we are tied by blood, must all be dead.  

Torajiro Watanabe, another member of JAS, painted and displayed *Earthquake* (1923-1924; fig. 2.24) at the annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists the following year. Its futuristic forms of the shaking city represent the calamity, where both victims and destroyed buildings are engulfed in the destructive earthquake. T.K. Gado’s *Fukkō no ki ugoku* (Atmosphere of Recovery Moves; 1923; fig. 2.25) used futuristic forms as well, representing the dynamism of the city under reconstruction. It was reproduced in an article in *The Japanese Times* on December 29, 1923, which set 1924 as the inaugural year for Japan’s recovery.

Kuniyoshi’s hometown was so far from the epicenter that it was not damaged by the earthquake, nor did he seem to have any relatives there. However, he felt distressed by the incident, sharing sorrow with other Japanese. Soon after the disaster Japanese expatriates in New York united and started donation activities. Kuniyoshi and his wife, along with other Japanese artists, joined in by donating money despite their humble

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circumstance. Although *Bad Dream* was not a literal depiction of the horrible earthquake, it appears to echo the devastated state of his home country, which greatly affected the Japanese expatriates. His ink drawing, the medium which he used to express his inner world, seemed to reflect his, as well as other Japanese, mental devastation by the disaster. As the devils savagely attack women under the terrifying Japanese deity in the picture, the earthquake killed more than 100,000 citizens. The thunder god in *Bad Dream* suggests the relationship between *Bad Dream* and Japan, where the deity originates.

*Bad Dream* was also drawn in the year of the notorious Immigration Act, widely known as Johnson-Reed Act. A result of anti-Asian exclusionism escalating over the United States in the 1920s, it was enacted in May 15, 1924. Although it barred all Asians and restricted Southern and Eastern Europeans from immigrating to the United States, its central target was the Japanese according to *The New York Times.*56 Contemporary writer C.G. Fenwick also reported that the Act “is the first formal exclusion act adopted by the United States in respect to Japanese immigrants.”57 The Act signaled the successful end of the anti-Japanese nativists, who attempted to exclude the Japanese from the United States.
This issue became a major concern in the Japanese community. The Japanese Times featured the news, “President Signed the Immigration Act” on May 28, 1924. The immigration issue had already been serious at the occasion of the so-called “naturalization case of Ozawa” in 1922. Takao Ozawa was a Japanese citizen but married a woman educated in the United States and had children who had a full American education. A frequent English speaker, he was a model Japanese immigrant who successfully assimilated into American society. However, the Supreme Court rejected his claim of the right of U.S. citizenship in 1922 by upholding the decision of a lower court that he was not eligible because he was not white. This case publicly announced that the one who was “of Japanese race and born in Japan” was an “alien ineligible to citizenship.” The decision increased the anti-Japanese sentiment and greatly unsettled the Japanese who wished to live harmoniously in American society. On January 20, 1923, The Japanese Times published “hainichi no mirai (Future of Japanophobia),” where its author feared that the contemporary social atmosphere would exclude Japanese in the United States, especially on the West Coast. The social environment surrounding the Japanese was rapidly worsening.

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59 “Ippan imin wo riyū ni daiōryō haisekihō chōin [President Signed the Immigration Act About the General Public],” The Japanese Times, May 28, 1924.


As Wolf has argued, the lack of citizenship marginalized the Japanese artists in the American art world.\textsuperscript{63} When Toshi Shimizu sent his picture \textit{Yokohama Night}, also called \textit{Yokohama Impression} (1921; fig. 2.26)—a bustling night scene full of people from different countries in Yokohama, an exotic port town opened to the world in 1859 after three centuries of Japan’s national isolation—to the 34th annual exhibition of “American Paintings and Sculpture” at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1921, he was awarded the Mr. and Mrs. Augustus S. Peabody prize of $200.\textsuperscript{64} However, according to the article entitled “Chicago Overrules Jury and Bars Jap” in \textit{American Art News}, the prize was revoked and given to another artist because of Shimizu’s nationality.\textsuperscript{65} The following year, another Japanese artist, Kyohei Inukai, was not permitted to participate in an exhibition at the same museum, because he was a foreigner. Inukai was so indignant that he sent a publicly-released letter to the juries. \textit{The Japanese Times} compared the Inukai incident with the “naturalization case of Ozawa.”\textsuperscript{66}

It was in this social context that \textit{The Dream} turned into \textit{Bad Dream}. Even thousands of miles away, the Japanese in New York deeply suffered the traumatic natural disaster in their native country, albeit differently. In addition, the anti-Japanese sentiment all over the United States foreboded imminent hardships for Kuniyoshi and other Japanese expatriates.

\textsuperscript{63} Wolf, “The Tip of the Iceberg.” 90.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Yokohama Night} was based on his sketches during his temporary return to Japan between October 1922 and June 1923. Yokohama is the port town where Shimizu arrived from and left for the United States. Oka and Kobiki eds., \textit{Shimizu Toshi}, 27.
\textsuperscript{65} “Chicago Overrules Jury and Bars Jap,” \textit{American Art News} 20, no. 5, November 12, 1921, 4
\textsuperscript{66} “Geijutsu no hainichi ni Inukai kun fungai [Mr. Inukai’s Indignation About Japanophobia in Art],” \textit{The Japanese Times}, November 15, 1922.
4. The 1927 Group Show: A Monumental Artistic Event

When the social climate surrounding the Japanese was becoming increasingly tense, the Japanese artists united again to hold a memorial exhibition from February 16 to March 5 in 1927, “The First Annual Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by Japanese Artists in New York” at the Art Center. 25 artists displayed 55 artworks in total, including Kuniyoshi’s *Little Joe and Cow with Calf*, currently known as *Little Joe with Cow* (1923; fig. 2.3) and *A White Cow* (see Appendix 3). Art critic Margaret Breuning called the show “the direct offshoot of the independent exhibitions where their work attracted much favorable comment each year.” The show opened just before the annual exhibitions of SIA and SA, so that it could effectively respond to the American art world.

Unlike the 1922 show, whose funding was collected mostly from the participants, the one in 1927 was sponsored by The Japanese Times. On the November 17 of the previous year, the newspaper publicly announced a “group exhibition of pure Japanese,” followed by its advertisement in the next issue (fig. 2.27). This group exhibition replaced the aforementioned JAS show in 1922. The new exhibit included ten out of fifteen JAS members, such as Kuniyoshi, Ishigaki and Shimizu (see Appendix 3). On New Year’s Day, 1927, the newspaper began its active promotion of the show, featuring such participants as Bumpei Usui, Yukiko Murata, and Noboru Foujioka, along with illustrations of their artworks. The newspaper continued to cover the show in almost

69 “[No title],” *The Japanese Times*, January 1, 1927.
every issue over the duration of the exhibition. Such sponsorship attests to the increasing sense of community among the Japanese, who then faced social and political exclusion.

Significantly, the purpose of the exhibition was to stress not only the Japanese presence in New York, but also their assimilation into Western culture. An article in *The Japanese Times* stated:

As announced before, this exhibition’s goal is, first of all, to introduce to a wide audience the effort and works of the Japanese expatriate artists. Not only are they forced to have a handicap as foreigners in this cold metropolis of New York, but also they always face hardships of life. Nevertheless, they live for art... On this occasion, moreover, we want people in this country to fairly criticize the artists, who are born in Japan with Japanese blood, but assimilate into Western thought by their creative efforts.70

While displaying the contemporary Japanese art, the exhibition aimed to “foster cultural intimacy between Japan and the United States” and emphasized how well the Japanese artists understood Western thought.71 They had to demonstrate their assimilation in order to live in American society as Japanese in this era of exclusionism.

From the early planning stages, therefore, the newspaper asked three American painters to be its advisors: John Sloan (Ishigaki and Shimizu’s teacher at the Art Students League) Walter Pach, and Rockwell Kent, who expressed an understanding and evaluation of Japanese artists in New York.72 Sloan, Kent and about fifty other Americans, which included such influential critics as Royal Cortissoz and Elizabeth

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70 ＃この計画は、当時も発想した如く、一は以てこの世知辛いニューヨークの大都会にありて、外国人としてのハンディキャップを課せられるのみならず、常に生活苦に直面しながら尚は且藝術界に生きつゝあるれ等邦人類家の大力と、その力作を発表に世に紹介（中略）するにある。更に我々は、これを機会として日本に生れ、日本の血を受けた此等美術家が、いかに暴風の思潮に同調し、そこに創造的暴力を試みつつあるかを、この国の人々の鋭い批判に求めんと欲するのである。」 "Hōjin bijutsuten [Japanese Artists’ Exhibition],” *The Japanese Times*, February 12, 1927.

71 Ibid.

Cary, attended the opening night.\textsuperscript{73} The Japanese émigré community tried not to be provincial, and insisted on their legitimacy as members of American society.

Already having achieved a success in the American art world, Kuniyoshi was regarded as a leading figure in the community. \textit{The Japanese Times} published a list of the participants and their artworks along with their brief introductions, where Kuniyoshi was called “one of the first class Modernist artists in the American art world, and an authoritative figure, along with Mr. Watanabe, in the Japanese artists’ community.”\textsuperscript{74} As Wolf pointed out, a memorial photograph of eleven participants (fig. 2.28), produced at the exhibition, attests to Kuniyoshi’s prominence in the group.\textsuperscript{75} He sits in the center of the first row of the photograph, indicating his central role in the show.

5. Can East and West Meet? Critical Reactions to the 1927 Show

Contrary to the Japanese intention of conforming to American society, contemporary American critics’ reactions were not always favorable and rather complicated. They tended to welcome the paintings in a traditional style of Japanese art, whereas they disdained Western styles, as if rejecting the Japanese assimilation and thereby keeping them on the periphery. Elisabeth L. Cary from \textit{The New York Times} wrote:

\begin{quote}
These artists for the most part have emptied their consciousness of the attributes most prized by their gifted ancestors and are working with Western methods from what they doubtless feel is a Western point of view. Of course, the point of view cannot be that, and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} 「米国画壇では近代派の第一流仲間に君たる人、邦人美術界では渡辺君と共に元老格である。」Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Wolf, “Tip of Iceberg,” 87.
through the confusion of artistic idiom the American public hardly can fall to shrink somewhat from an imitation that suggests mockery. 76

Believing that the artists’ race determined artistic development, she recommended Japanese practice, not Western techniques or perspectives. This reflected her honest respect for Japanese old masters, which ironically forced her to think that even contemporary Japanese artists in New York should follow their tradition. In view of her prejudice, any Western-style art by Japanese artists appeared to be nothing but mimicking, based on incorrect ways of regarding Western art.

Breuning reacted similarly: “It does not seem a tragedy that the East and West should ‘never meet,’ for they are more interesting when speaking in their own idioms.” 77

The art of Japanese expatriates would be best, she believed, when it was expressed in Japanese techniques, regardless of how deeply they understood Western culture. She thus considered “the paintings that retain Oriental in some degree have great charm and effectiveness.” Like Cary, Breuning’s favorable appreciation for traditional Japanese art was linked with Orientalist thinking, which would help Japanese masterpieces to be well accepted in the New York art world, including Hamilton Easter Field and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Therefore, she disliked the use of American subjects by the Japanese participants:

In many ways, the studies of American life by these Japanese artists form a tremendous indictment of our Western civilization. “Charleston,” or “American Spirit” by Noboru Foujioka; “The Carpenter’s Shop,” by Bumpei Usui; “Fourteenth Street,” by Kiyoshi Shimizu, reflect the frenzy of living which characterizes us evidently in the eyes of


outside peoples. It is hardly a pleasing reflection from a mirror held up to a display of frantic and rather unreasoning activity.\textsuperscript{78}

Seemingly related to the anti-Japanese immigration laws in this period, her Orientalist prejudice, which clearly separated Japanese from Westerners, was racist, preventing contemporary Japanese artists from westernizing and integrating American society. They were, she blindly thought, just outliers, whose observations were full of their abhorrence toward anything related to a different culture, or Western ways of living.

The Japanese depictions of American life, however, appear not to be as critical as Breuning thought. Rather, both Foujioka’s \textit{American Spirit}, also known as \textit{The Poker Game} (1925; fig. 2.29) and Kiyoshi Shimizu’s \textit{14th Street} (circa 1926; fig. 2.30) were the product of observation of their own vigorous lives in New York.\textsuperscript{79} The former shows a scene of gambling in a room where a group of people around the table devote themselves in the game in different ways: shuffling cards, clutching their heads in their hands, or drinking. Considering that it was the era of Prohibition, Foujioka’s caricature-like scene may have appeared to American conservatives to be the artist’s indictment because it depicts not only the gamblers’ thrill but also their painful faces, which foreshadowed their losses and eventual bankruptcy. However, unlike Foujioka’s social realist style, Kiyoshi Shimizu’s \textit{14th Street} does not apparently criticize New York but depicts the nightlife of people in Union Square. Nighthawks are on the sidewalk of 14th Street seen against the well-lit entertainment building with multiple billboards like “FADA.” Between the buildings is the public sculpture of a figure on a horse. Its cubist like

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

cityscape, albeit down-to-earth like his teacher John Sloan’s urban scene, stresses the glittering atmosphere of the Roaring Twenties.

What American critics preferred, however, were the artworks that followed a traditional style of Japanese art. A writer from the Herald Tribune wrote that, “it is clear enough that the contemporary Japanese has talent” and some paintings showed “excellent demonstration of ethical skill,” whose “truest source… appears to be Japanese spring.”

This writer believed that skills appear only in the paintings which followed Japanese tradition, calling the aforementioned Yokohama Night (1921; fig. 2.26) by Toshi Shimizu the best example of such “ethical skill.” The picture represents a bustling night in Yokohama, whose panoramic view shows the Oriental town. Japanese live their ordinary lives while foreigners enjoyed exotic encounters with local people and objects. This type of cityscape has a historical reference to traditional Japanese screens of a similar subject. Rakuchu rakugai zu (Views In and Around Kyoto; circa 1616-1624; fig. 2.31), for instance, offers a bird’s-eye view of Kyoto, depicting various urban activities and bustling atmosphere during the Gion festival. It is likely that “ethical skill” was meant to be the subject and perspective in the genealogy of conventional Japanese art. In addition, such skill may have referred to a style depicting various peoples’ lives in Japanese art.

When Yokohama Night was displayed at the 1922 JAS show, Ishigaki called the picture his “most favorite” one at the show, likening it to Hokusai Manga (1814)—Hokusai’s drawings of diverse poses and life-styles of people in Edo (Tokyo). The energetic and graceful lives of every person in Yokohama Night reminded Ishigaki of their great

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81 Ishigaki, “Gyōkuseki dōka (jō) [Mixture of Wheat and Chaff (First Half)].”
ancest
or.

Yukiko Murata was a painter of more traditional Japanese style than Shimizu. Her *A Spring Evening* (circa 1926; fig. 2.32) shows a stylized decoration of windows in Oriental walls behind a slender woman. American critics welcomed these exotic works. Most participants, however, used Western techniques and subjects, and their adaptation was seen as futile, as a writer from *The New Yorker* magazine wrote: “the West has corrupted their natural bent.”

This critical environment implied that American society did not accept Japanese Westernization. Japanese expatriates had to face the American double standard, which accepted Japanese art while rejecting Japanese entry to society.

**Conclusion**

Kuniyoshi’s art and life between 1922 and 1927 thrived along with the Japanese artists’ community, where the expatriates helped each other in a variety of ways with a strong consciousness of their national identity. His fellow Japanese not only helped him financially, but also appreciated his art in a different way from contemporary Americans. It was when he fostered these intimate friendships that he began using unfamiliar motifs and mediums common in Japanese culture. The sense of community among the Japanese expatriates culminated in the 1922 and 1927 group shows. Against the backdrop of anti-Japanese immigration feelings all over the United States, the Japanese artists publicly

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82 Wolf has analyzed Shimizu’s *Yokohama Night*, as well as his 1922 painting *New York, Chinatown at Night*, and has concluded that it owes an artistic debt to “the ideals of the Ashcan school artists, who believed in painting realistic scenes of everyday life in the city.” Shimizu studied with two of the Ashcan school artists, John Sloan and George Bellows, at the Art Students League, and absorbed great influence from them in terms of his urban subjects and their vivid, dynamic depiction. In this respect, *Yokohama Night* harmoniously integrates both Eastern and Western perspectives and techniques, as Kuniyoshi’s paintings do. Wolf, “The Tip of the Iceberg.” 90.

sought to demonstrate their assimilation to the West through their exhibitions.

Kuniyoshi’s identity formation developed along with these collective activities.
Chapter 3

Acceptance and Rejection:
Kuniyoshi’s Contradictory Self and Art Between Two Countries, 1927-1941

The attempt that some Japanese make to appear in our costume is often most ludicrous. I saw a fellow the other day in a dress-coat almost big enough to go round him twice, a tall hat which came down to his eyes, with a wad of paper crammed in to hold it on, and white cotton gloves many sizes too large. His appearance was like a Fourth of July burlesque. —Edward Sylvester Morse, Japan Day by Day (1917).  

Introduction

While Kuniyoshi’s relationship with the Japanese artists’ community deepened, he succeeded in the American art world through exhibitions, including his regular solo ones at the Daniel Gallery between 1922 and 1930; regular participation in the Salons of America; and a solo show at the Chicago Arts Club in 1927. Becoming one of the leading American painters, he was even selected as one of the nineteen artists in the “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” exhibition curated by Alfred Barr Jr. at the newly established Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA). However, it was an era when the social and political environment surrounding the Japanese expatriates was rapidly worsening, with the American art world becoming xenophobic and even racist. This resulted in a controversy over whether foreign painters could be American; Kuniyoshi was one of the major targets of criticism. His Japanese identity, which had brought him his first critical success in 1922, then became a reason not to accept him. His art, as well as his writings, was becoming ambivalent and even contradictory, reflecting his inner struggle between the two countries, neither of which he could firmly belong to.

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1. Kuniyoshi in the American Art World and Yellow Peril

As the anti-Asian sentiment increased in the 1920s, Kuniyoshi’s presence in the center of the New York art world frustrated conservative critics. At the occasion of his exhibition at the Daniel Gallery in 1926, a writer at *The New Yorker* magazine mentioned the racist atmosphere that could threaten Kuniyoshi, saying:

> Hush, we have to confess a secret: we have discovered we are several decades behind art as it is ennobled by Kuniyoshi. We could urge you to visit Daniels [sic] Gallery with a splurge about the young man and what we saw in him, but we would be lying between our false teeth. So until the light strikes us from heaven we can only report what we do see: a great strength, a great facility and a bitterness against the Occident that would make the Hearst press art for an immediate Japanese invasion. Of course he can paint. A couple of years from now, when we have had our aesthetic memory cut out, we will doubtless rave over Kuniyoshi.²

While respecting Kuniyoshi’s art, the reviewer likened the Asian’s prominence in New York to the rise of Japanese political and military power in the world after winning the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05). He or she saw something that could be used as an excuse for racist media like the Hearst press to criticize Kuniyoshi, albeit not exactly clarifying what it was. Considering Kuniyoshi’s passionate devotion to learn and understand Western culture, his art seemed not to intend to criticize Western society, nor did his paintings focus on social or political scenes in this period. However, his motifs could have drawn negative reactions, because they included such vulgar subjects as American, as well as European, corpulent female circus performers and prostitutes.³ Conservative critics might simply have disliked these depictions of Western figures by outsiders. As

discussed in the previous chapter, Margaret Breuning expressed a prejudice that the West painted by outsiders could be offensive and critical.  

As art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki opined, that review was tied to “Yellow Peril” prejudice among Americans in the early 20th century. Originally, this term was used to describe Chinese immigrants, but was later applied to other Asians as well, including the Japanese, who began to immigrate to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1898, British Caribbean writer Matthew Phipps Shiel published a fictional vengeance novel, *The Yellow Danger* (fig. 3.1) in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War, in which an educated doctor of Chinese and Japanese descent is scorned by a white woman and therefore avenges the yellow race, successfully conquering the world for Asians. This novel embodied paranoiac fears by Westerns that Asians would destroy the White race and create a new world for them. In 1904, in the middle of the Russo-Japanese War, Jack London, a correspondent for William Randolph Hearst’s *San Francisco Examiner*, wrote the article “Yellow Peril,” which anticipated a potential menace to the Western world of “four hundred millions of yellow men” in the near future. In 1921, historian Lothrop Stoddard published *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World Supremacy* (fig. 3.2) in New York. Regarding the Japanese

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victory over Russia as a symbol of the ebb of white supremacy, he urged preventing Asian immigrations to other areas.⁹

Seen through such racist filters, Asian immigrants were believed to be “inassimilable aliens who brought economic competition, disease, and immorality.”¹⁰ On the Pacific Coast violent racial riots occurred against Japanese, Chinese and South Asian immigrants.¹¹ Japanese expatriate artist Kyohei Inukai recorded such tempestuous anti-Asian sentiment and violent attacks. He observed that people of his race were excluded from the white supremacist society, not because of their vice, but because of their virtue to work on sacrificially and humbly what was given to them.¹² Asian immigrants were persecuted and became a target of violent attacks as well as verbal abuses, their only “sin” being that they were born with yellow or brown skin, he wrote.¹³ The Japanese community in New York keenly felt the climate. In the first month of 1924, The Japanese Times began a series of special articles expressing apprehension about the Yellow Peril: “Next Wave of Yellow Peril Wind.” Its first article said that “absolute exclusion of Japanese immigrants, displacement plan of Japanese and deprivation of citizenships from Japanese children born in the United States… many oppressive laws that concerned us

¹¹ Many of the Japanese restaurants and bathhouses in San Francisco were violently attacked by the riots in May 1907. Ibid., 551-52.
¹³ Ibid., 89.
[Japanese]” had become a major issue between Japan and the United States.14
Kuniyoshi’s artistic career could not help being affected by this Yellow Peril wind, blowing hard over American society.

2. Portraits of Kuniyoshi: Kuniyoshi’s Friendship with Bumpei Usui and Their Social Life

Kuniyoshi kept adopting Western ways of life during this period; his Self Portrait as Golf Player (1927; fig. 3.3) expresses his confidence as a member of American society, who can adopt American customs and manners. Dressed in a fashionable golfer’s outfit with a golf club in his left hand and his other hand on his waist, he stands upright and looks straight at the viewer.15 Its frontality and dignified gestures reflect the Japanese artist’s concerns about whether he could play an American sport in an appropriate way.16 Self Portrait as Golf Player, however, illuminates the increasing social tensions surrounding him. His audacious and exaggerated pose, as well as expressionless face, look more awkward than natural. This seems to stem from the contemporary social discourse, which characterizes Asians in Western clothing as bizarre. American zoologist Edward Morse laughed at his Japanese friend in Western costumes and called him “a Fourth of July burlesque.”17 From Orientalist perspectives, “[t]he attempt that some

16 Art historian Wang ShiPu has analyzed that this self-portrait is Kuniyoshi’s conscious representation of his identity. Wang ShiPu, Becoming American?: The Art and Identity Crisis of Yasuo Kuniyoshi (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011), 26-29.
17 Morse, Japan Day By Day, 276.
Japanese make to appear in our costume is often most ludicrous. "18 The Japanese living in Western society always attracted public attentions in good and bad ways, due to their appearance.

Kuniyoshi’s tension, reflected in *Self Portrait as Golf Player*, becomes clearer when compared to *Portrait of Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (1930; fig. 3.4) by his intimate Japanese friend Bumpei Usui. In a diagonal composition, the model in casual Western clothing—white shirt and sweater, red tie, orange trousers, and brown leather boots—looks very relaxed without concern about anything. Sinking into a typical chair in a summer cottage with his legs crossed, he holds a pipe between his teeth and leans a little out of the chair toward the bottle of “MUNRO” scotch between two empty glasses. The other room behind the curtain is his atelier, where a cane on the desk, the palette, and the painting identify the subject as an artist. Usui said about his friendship with Kuniyoshi that:

Companionable as transplanted Japanese seeking our way in a western [sic] world, Kuniyoshi and I were friends for many years… We loved to paint and shared what we learned with each other—though I was self-taught and he had studied at the Art Students’ [sic] League. We painted without thought of posterity or financial gain but used the finest and most beautiful and enduring materials: linen canvas, rag paper and imported colors. I spent many happy summers with the Kuniyoshis in Woodstock. We painted, gardened, and gave and went to parties. It was only natural that I paint my friend.19

The portrait shows the relaxed atmosphere that Kuniyoshi felt with his intimate Japanese friend in his own private space, away from American society.

Usui came to New York in 1921. His original plan was to return to Japan after a short stay, but he decided to live here permanently because he loved the bohemian life.20

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18 Ibid.
He soon began working as a furniture designer, setting up a lacquering line.21 His Furniture Factory, also called The Carpenter’s Shop (1925; fig. 3.5), is based on this experience, vividly representing a scene of workers concentrating on their tasks.22 The cubist-like multiple perspectives, without a center in the composition, enable the viewer to focus on every kind of worker, all of whom engage in each part of manufacture: a drawing a design, cutting wood, planing boards, and setting up furniture. Usui’s finesse in painting the beautiful decoration of the chair in Portrait of Yasuo Kuniyoshi also demonstrates his interest in furniture.

Usui and Kuniyoshi began their unique friendship in the mid-1920s. Usui remembered about Kuniyoshi that:

Our first encounter was at a regular exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists around 1926. A tall, lean Japanese man with glasses came to me and asked: “Is this your artwork?” I think this is the beginning of our friendship. “You are not still good at using paint. If you want, I can teach you. You may start coming to my studio tomorrow,” he said. He was friendly and had a sense of humor. His English was broken, but he was popular among young American artists. For the next ten years, we two kept our art making ardently in New York during winter while in Kuniyoshi’s atelier in Woodstock during summer.23

Kuniyoshi was an artistic mentor for Usui, who did not attend any art school in New York, while Usui helped Kuniyoshi by making picture frames for him. Usui started making picture frames in 1929, when Kuniyoshi asked him to do it for him; he became a

22 Furniture Factory was displayed as “The Carpenter’s Shop” at “The First Annual Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by Japanese Artists in New York” in 1927. See Appendix 3.
23 『国吉を知ったのは確か1926年頃で、独立展の会場で、背の高いやせてメガネをかけた一人の日本人が私の近づいて来て、『これがオマエの作品か？』と聞いたことが二人の交際の始まりだったと思う。『君はまだ絵具の使い方が良くなれない。もしごから私が教えて上げよう。明日からでも私のアトリエに来なさい』と云ったのだった。彼は人なつっこく、ユーモアのセンスがあり、英語はブロケンだったにしても若いアメリカ人作家の間ではなかなかの人気者だった。以後10年間もニューヨークで、夏はウッドストックに在る国吉のアトリエで二人は熱心に製作を続けた。』 Bumpei Usui, “Talk,” in Exhibition of Bumpei Usui: American Scene 1920’s-40’s, ed. Fuji Television Gallery (Tokyo: Fuji Television Gallery, 1983), unpaginated. Although Usui said that their close friendship began around 1926, they could have known each other as early as 1921, for both of them were founding members of the 1922 Japanese Artists’ Society.
successful framer. On January 5, 1935, *The New Yorker* magazine featured him in its article, describing him as "one of the busiest pictureframers [sic] in the city now, being especially patronized by the very rich and the very poor, both of whom seem to appreciate cheapness about equally." His clients included not only Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, but also young, poor Japanese and American artists.

Both Japanese and American artists often gathered around Kuniyoshi and Usui. Usui’s studio in Union Square became a center of sociability in the 1920s and 1930s.

Kuniyoshi was an influential artist who served as an instructor at the Art Students League from 1933 until his death in 1953, whereas Usui was a successful designer of furniture and picture frames, which enabled him to live a financially comfortable life. Usui remembered about those days that:

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Setting up my own atelier near those of artists such as Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Reginald Marsh, and John Sloan around 14th Street, I went to the Village to sketch, and sometimes to discuss Cubism, Fauve, and harmony of lines and colors with my friends at a bar around makkusu rōri till late at night.
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At Usui’s place, Japanese artists enjoyed chatting and creating Japanese poems rather than discussing art. *Portrait of Bumpei Usui* (circa 1930; fig. 3.6) by Kiyoshi Shimizu

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26 Usui set up his atelier near Union Square (9 West, 14th Street) as early as 1924, while Kuniyoshi moved from Brooklyn to Manhattan (30 East, 14th Street) in 1931.


28 Usui even provided the poor Japanese with food. Ozawa, “Kuniyoshi Yasuwo meguru nihonjin—Usui Bumpei hoka [Yasuo Kuniyoshi and His Japanese Circle—Bumpei Usui and Others],” 146.
was a product of such active and intimate association. Usui in a red sweater and pale blue trousers stands with his right hand on the chair next to him and holds a pipe between his teeth in his private room. He appears to think seriously about the drawing of a head on the table, but there seems to be no tension around him. Next to the drawing lies a cylindrical Oriental ceramic, revealing another aspect of the artist as an art collector.29

These Japanese artists were, however, not provincial but a part of the mainstream in the American art world, by having a common artistic interest in painting the megalopolis. Like the contemporary artist Louis Lozowick, who painted spectacular skyscrapers in New York (1925; fig. 3.7), Usui depicted a New York skyline in a modernist way in his 14th Street (1924; fig. 3.8).30 The tall buildings, spired towers, and water tanks stress their geometrical nature, like those in Cubist paintings, while showing almost no human presence. Usui’s geometrical skyscrapers share a similarity with those in Torajiro Watanabe’s L Train (circa 1925; fig. 3.9). Above the elevated trains threading through the compact city, rectangular buildings and a water tank made of cylindrical and triangular forms stand as if looking down at invisible people on the ground. In contrast with these paintings, Kiyoshi Shimizu’s 14th Street (circa 1926; fig. 2.30) is more down to earth, representing the active nightlife of Union Square. These artists were considered “outsiders” in this foreign country, as contemporary American critic Margaret Breuning said.31 Yet, they tried to be a part of the American art world and society. Usui’s studio

29 Usui was a collector of Asian antiques, including Japanese swords. Ibid., 148.
was not only a center of the Japanese artists’ gatherings but also their connection point to the New York art scene.

3. Kuniyoshi’s Participation in the 1929 “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” Exhibition at MoMA

In 1929, Kuniyoshi was selected as one of the artists included in the “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” show at MoMA (from December 13, 1929 to January 12, 1930). After lists of over a hundred widely known American painters were distributed among the trustees, each of them chose fifteen (the trustees were also asked to add the names not on the lists, if necessary). Then the executive committee carefully studied the results, drawing up the final list of nineteen. Alfred Barr Jr., the director, mentioned that “[n]o particular school or manner is intentionally favored” in the selection, and all artists were “fairly representative of the principal tendencies in contemporary American painting.” He stressed the selection’s melting pot-like diverseness. Five artists—Bernard Karfiol, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Jules Pascin, Maurice Sterne and Max Weber—were born abroad. Three artists—Jules Pascin, Lyonel Feininger, and Maurice Sterne—had spent most of their mature lives abroad. Participation in the show was significant for both Kuniyoshi’s career and identity. An authoritative American organization legitimatized him as a leading “American” artist in the New York art world, where he had previously been forced to remain “Oriental.”

Kuniyoshi displayed five paintings: *Self Portrait as Golf Player* (1927; fig. 3.3), *Boy Stealing Fruit* (1923; fig. 3.10), *Landscape, Maine* (1925), *Reclining Nude*, displayed as *Nude* (1929; fig. 3.11), and *Still Life* (1929). These paintings mirror his

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artistic development in relation to his assimilation into the West. *Boy Stealing Fruit* shows his pride of understanding, knowledge and skills in both traditional and modern Western art. The boy with a banana in his right hand is about to steal another fruit, a peach, on a shell-like white plate on the table. Although he painted an ordinary contemporary interior scene, it refers to the Biblical scene in which Eve takes the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Also, his technique reflects his strong interests in geometry and multiple perspectives that he shared with the Cubists. The table inclines almost ninety degrees, showing its surface to the viewers in contrast with the boy standing frontally, and the two buildings outside show their different sides and roofs at one time.

In contrast, a stylistic change in Kuniyoshi’s art appears in *Reclining Nude*. In a horizontally extended format, a bohemian, voluptuous woman with bare breasts is lying on the couch, where a piece of newspaper with an illegible headline and unclear illustration, cigarette case, and matchbox are scattered around her head. Her cramped legs, sprawling torso, and lack of facial expression imply her melancholia. The juxtaposition of the still life and an organic woman with a soft body shows formal contrasts, which suggests verisimilitude in his representational world. This lyrical but naturalistic depiction of woman, based on a model, signals his farewell to his earlier Cubist-like pictorial forms. Unlike the mask-like face and awkward posture of the boy in *Boy Stealing Fruit*, the woman looks more plastic and naturalistic. As Wolf opined, his new interests in such subjects and forms were mainly due to the influence of Bulgaria-born American painter Jules Pascin.33 Pascin was a central figure in the Penguin Club—a

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group of anti-academic young artists in New York—to which Kuniyoshi belonged. Pascin’s paintings of women, such as the one in *Reclining Model* (circa 1925; fig. 3.12), have similarities to Kuniyoshi’s *Reclining Nude* in terms of subject, form, and even composition. Kuniyoshi’s trips to Paris in 1925-1926 and 1928 were also important for his artistic development. Not only did he directly observe modern European art, but also he began concentrating on the paintings of women based on models.

*Reclining Nude* attracted the most favorable reactions among Kuniyoshi’s paintings at the show. Henry McBride called it the “most ambitious picture” Kuniyoshi had yet undertaken and praised it, despite the fact that, unlike his previous critiques, he did not find anything exotic. McBride seemed to change his critical stance in reaction to the patriotic atmosphere in the art scene. The aforementioned scholar Tamaki wrote that McBride, a cosmopolitan critic who was a devotee of Modernism, considered the influence of European modern art important for the development of American art at a time when the United States was becoming more provincial and patriotic. Kuniyoshi’s *Reclining Nude* appeared to McBride to be an ideal example to embody his idea, which was then shared by Forbes Watson, editor and critic of *The Arts* magazine. Watson found

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34 Kuniyoshi called the Penguin Club “a group of young artists who were anti-academism.” Pascin was a leader and “a father of contemporary American art world” for Kuniyoshi and other members in this group. According to Kuniyoshi, Pascin’s art greatly influenced young artists in New York. He was very kind to Kuniyoshi and other Japanese artists. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Kokoku wo tazunete [Visiting Home Country],” *Atorie*, January 1932, reprinted in *Kuniyoshi Yasuo no kikoku: Botsugo 40-nen, seitanchi kinenhi kansei kinenshi* [Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Return to Japan: A Keepsake Compiled in Celebration of the Completion of the Monument Erected to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary After the Death of Kuniyoshi], ed. Dai 1-kai Kuniyoshi Ato Foramu Jikko Iinkai (Okayama, Japan: Dai 1-kai Kuniyoshi Ato Foramu Jikko Iinkai, 1993), 24.


in the picture “vigorous contemporaneousness” that would tell “the observer pretty
clearly what Mr. Kuniyoshi, a former pupil of Kenneth Hayes Miller, now thinks of
Derain, of Segonzac, and in general of the liberalities of modern occidental painting
effort.”

Both McBride and Watson liked Kuniyoshi’s ardent influence from European
modern art, hoping it countered cultural nationalism.

4. Art and Race: Is Kuniyoshi American?

While receiving favorable reviews, Kuniyoshi received biting criticism regarding
his inclusion in the 19 Americans. It was so controversial that The Art Digest magazine
featured the critical ferment in its article “Museum of Modern Art Makes Gymnasts of
New York.”

The author wrote that “[n]obody, apparently, was satisfied with the
‘nineteen’—not even the museum itself,” quoting one of the most acrimonious articles by
Margaret Breuning from The Evening Post: “Why in this ‘cross section’ of American art,
consisting of nineteen contributors, should the work of three foreigners be included? We
are not so short of material as that.”

Breuning questioned the admission of the three
foreign painters—German-born Lyonel Feininger and Bulgarian-born Jules Pascin (both
of whom were then active abroad) and Kuniyoshi—in place of such American painters as
George Luks. She specifically said about Kuniyoshi that: “Here is an Oriental
endowment and psychology, with no appreciable relation to Occidental art, except in

Conger Goodyear Scrapbooks 3. The Museum Modern Art Archives, NY.
39 Quoted from ibid. The original article was preserved in the Kuniyoshi Papers. Margaret Breuning,
“Museum of Modern Art,” The Evening Post, December 14, 1929. Kuniyoshi Papers, AAA, microfilm reel
D176.
subject matter.” Concentrating on his nationality rather than art, she believed that Kuniyoshi could not become free from his “Oriental” heritage, that she considered deeply inscribed in him, and thus concluded that he was not “American.”

This controversy was closely tied to both cultural nationalism and xenophobia among the public. An avalanche of letters flooded *The Arts*, demanding the magazine clarify its own evaluations of MoMA’s selection. Its editor, Watson, thought that the readers’ reactions stemmed not from their aesthetics but from racism, saying that “someone wanted to start a race war” by throwing “bombs…through the windows” of *The Arts*.41 As a critical supporter, he attempted to protect Kuniyoshi by urging viewers to appreciate and evaluate the qualities of art without considering the artist’s race. He wrote that Kuniyoshi “seems to know a considerable amount about their (most daring and fashionable occidental painters’) methods of expressing their mental troubles.”42 Comparing Kuniyoshi to contemporary Occidental artists, he questioned the readers: “If we add Japanese birth to American training, does the total equal one American artist?”43 Although Watson implied the answer should be positive, he assumed that a majority of answers from the letter writers would be negative.44

*The Arts* then announced a competition to identify the most ideal list of American artists selected by the public; the winner would be offered $100 as a prize. One of the two

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40 Ibid.
42 Ibid.  
43 Ibid.
44 Watson wrote: “In the minds of letter writers a conclusion seems to be much easier to reach when the artist’s first birthday was celebrated in the orient than when it was celebrated in Europe.” He assumed that, if Kuniyoshi had been born not in Japan but in Europe, Americans could have considered him American more easily. Ibid.
winning lists awarded by the three juries—William Milliken, Eugene Speicher, and Homer Sr. Gaudens—included Kuniyoshi’s name.45 However, it did not necessarily mean the majority of the participants agreed with Kuniyoshi’s selection: according to Watson, the names that most wrote were, after all, American-born painters like Charles Burchfield and Edward Hopper.46 Such arguments regarding his legitimacy as an American painter “exceedingly” irritated Kuniyoshi.47

Kuniyoshi felt both honored and pained by his participation. In 1932, when asked in Japan what the contemporary American art world was like, he talked about the 1929 MoMA show and the racist controversy it entailed, with a slightly pessimistic tone:

Episodes about the American art world? Well, the Museum of Modern Art displayed Cézannes and Renoirs at its first exhibition in 1929, and then planned to select ten American artists for the second exhibition. However, the museum eventually collected the artworks from 19 painters, and opened “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans.” That it included foreign painters—Pascin, Feininger, a Futurist who is in Germany, and I—caused a controversy that the exhibition should not have included foreigners. It means the artworks themselves were good but their creators were not. Since the selection of the 19 painters was considered unequal, The Arts magazine had a public election. I was included.48

Proud of being included in the monumental show, he was clear about his celebrated artistic position in the United States. Yet, that he dared to mention the racist controversy in the closed American art world reflected his disappointment at the same time. He may

45 “Winners of the Arts’ All American Nineteen,” The Arts 16, no. 8, April 1930, 518.
47 Watson, “All American Nineteen,” 305.
48 "アメリカ画壇のエピソードですか？そうですね、一九二九年にニューヨークの現代美術館で第一回の展覧会としてセザンヌとルノアールの作品を展覧し、第二回目にはアメリカ系画家十人を選んで展覧会をするという話で、それが進んで結局十九人の画家の作品を集めて、現代美術十九名展覧会を開催されましたが、この中に外国人はパスキンと費やにいる未来派のフアン・ペンと私でしたしたが、これに外国人を入れるのはいけないという議論が出たのですが、これは作品はいい人が悪いというのは、その時もアートという道では十九名の選び方が不公平だというもので、一般から選挙を募ったことがありますが、その時も私は入っていました。" Kuniyoshi, “Kokoku wo tazunete [Visiting Home Country].”
have expected that the Japanese would have understood his pain of acceptance and rejection.

5. Return to Japan, Return to New York: Kuniyoshi’s Contradictions

The 1930s was an era of social difficulty for Kuniyoshi and all other Japanese expatriates, for lack of American citizenship and Asian appearance alienated them from American society. Kuniyoshi temporarily returned to his home country in 1931, recognizing his unstable social status, which the 1929 MoMA show brought to light. 49

His hometown reinforced his national identity even after a long absence:

My life there [in the United States] has totally become American. My fellow painters in New York treated me as a complete American citizen. Even during that time, however, I heard that someone said “he [Kuniyoshi] has a citizenship in Japan,” and I was not always equal to American citizens during the selections at official exhibitions. Like an interlude in a play, such experiences reminded me of my consciousness as Japanese, though such consciousness was not strong. It just felt like I was a half foreigner, or so-called half-caste. Then, I returned to Japan after so long. It was when I walk to dredge up my childhood that the feeling that I am Japanese has come back to me… This feeling is important for my art. When going back to the United States, I will bring it as an important souvenir that, I believe, can cultivate my individuality more than before. 50

He had tried to fit in with American society by diligently learning Western culture and manners, but the society always regarded him as a foreigner. Such experiences put him in

49 Kuniyoshi stayed in Japan for four months between 1931 and 1932. He visited his dying father in his hometown, Okayama, and held two solo exhibitions in Tokyo and Osaka. “Kuniyoshi yasuo yōga koten [Solo Exhibition of Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Western Style-Painting]” at Nihonbashī Mitsukoshi, Tokyo, from November 19 to 23, 1931; and “Yasuo Kuniyoshi shi yōga tenrankai [Exhibition of Mr. Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Western Style-Painting],” on January 17 and 18, 1932.

50 「むこうでの生活は、すっかりアメリカ風になりきっていて、ニューヨークの絵描き仲間でも、完全なアメリカ市民としてのつきあいであった。が、しかし、その間にも、たとえばある会合で『彼は日本に国籍をもっている』とかある官設的な展覧会ではアメリカと同等に選ばれなかったというように、芝居の幕あいみたいに日本人としての意識を呼び起こされることはあったが、そもそも強い意識ではなくて、半分は外国人であるという、謂わば余者のような感じであった。それが久しぶりで日本へ帰って、子供のころの記憶を呼び起こしながらテクテクあるいはているうちに、日本人としての気持ちははっきり帰ってきたのであった。」(1930年12月19日)。この気持ちは自分の絵の仕事の上でも大切なことで、今度アメリカへ帰る時には以前よりもはっきりとした個性を追い求めようと思うとしていくことが出来るであろうと思っている。」

a pessimistic mood, but his pessimism ironically helped him consider his Japanese
identity positively.

As soon as I arrived in Japan, I went back to Okayama, my hometown. While walking
around in Kōrakuen garden, I experienced pure Japanese things and remembered playing
sumo in my childhood. Then, I clearly recognized that I am Japanese. After all, Japanese
cannot become the people of another country, no matter how deeply they go into it.
Whether art should be national or cosmopolitan is a difficult issue, but that I feel I am
Japanese would have enormous significance in my art from now on. My life is all
nurtured in American soil, but having nothing to do with Japan, despite being Japanese, is sad.  

Reluctantly acknowledging the brutal truth that he could not become a true member of
American society, he embraced his Japanese identity. Yet, he had already spent half of
his life in the United States and even married an American. He went back to his life in
New York, with a positive belief that his Japanese identity would be beneficial to his art.

Contrary to his expectation, Japanese identity turned out to be a problematic issue
for the Japanese expatriates in the 1930s, when prejudice toward the Japanese was getting
worse. The political tensions between the two countries escalated, after Imperial Japan’s
Kanto army invaded and conquered Manchuria, declaring its independence from China
(Republic of China) in 1932. Kuniyoshi was able to recognize the frantic militarism and
nationalism in Japan, probably because he had become an outsider in his home country.  

In the tense climate in American society, Kuniyoshi himself publicly voiced his identity
as American, while stressing his irritation about being classified as Japanese or Japanese-
American. Henry Salpeter, a writer from Esquire, quoted an interview with Kuniyoshi in

51 Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “Kokoku wo tazunete [Visiting Home Country].”
1937: “I [Kuniyoshi] can’t be very much Oriental,” because “I have spent most of my life here. I have been educated here and I have suffered here. I am as much of an individual as anyone—except that I have Oriental blood in my veins.” Kuniyoshi’s autobiographical essay also stated:

I enjoyed coming back to Japan but found it difficult to adjust myself after being away for so long. I felt strange and unnatural. I no longer belonged. I sailed back in February 1932 firmly convinced that my adopted home was my home... Just a few days out, before reaching Hawaii, I received a radio message telling me of his [father’s] death. A year later mother also died. The deepest tie with my native land had been broken.

These writings in 1937 and 1940 were contradictory to those that he did in Japan less than a decade ago. He had confessed that Japan was his home in Japan, whereas he insisted that the United States was his home in the United States. These inconsistent statements mirrored his contradictory self, vacillating allegiance between the two countries.

6. The 1935 and 1936 Japanese Group Shows and Anti-Fascism

The ambivalence that Kuniyoshi, as well as other Japanese expatriate artists, felt about their home country was related to the social milieu at that time. The Japanese artists showed their conforming behavior in American society and accused their native country in their art. Three Japanese became deeply involved in the John Reed Club—a Communist Party-affiliated organization, which was established by the American Communist Party in 1929 and named after John Reed, a founding member of the Party and the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919). Ishigaki was a founding member of the Club, and Hideo Noda, as well as Chuzo Tamotsu, also became

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54 Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” 81.
involved. The club encouraged its artists to be engaged in society as activists and to fight for progressive social change against bourgeois society.

Kuniyoshi was not communist, but felt sympathetic toward leftist activities. Along with American painters, Stuart Davis and Adolf Dehn, Kuniyoshi became a co-founder artist of the A.C.A. Gallery (the American Contemporary Art Gallery), which was established in 1932 by the immigrant American dealer Herman Baron. From its inception, Baron was “in search of an art that would have greater appeal and human significance,” while representing contemporary American artists. He knew the John Reed Club and the gallery “was soon to embark on an adventurous path and for a decade was to be a storm center.” It pioneered social, or propaganda, art in the United States in its opening show on November 7, 1932. It organized Tamotsu’s first solo show in the same year and Ishigaki’s solo ones as well in 1936 and 1940. Their socialist art expressed

55 Noda was born in San Jose, California in 1908, but grew up in Japan (1911-1926). After he came back to the United States, he studied art at the California School of Arts and then moved to the East Coast. He continued his art practice at Woodstock, New York, where he met Kuniyoshi. He was an active communist, and his paintings often focused on social and political injustice, including poverty and racism in New York during the Great Depression. He returned to Japan in 1934, where he worked for the Communist underground while also holding a solo exhibition and joining group exhibitions. About Noda’s biography, see The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, *Posthumous Exhibition of Four Artists: Koichiro Kondo, Kazuo Sakata, Hideo Noda, and Yuzo Fujikawa* (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1962), 7-8, 18-20; Seichiro Kuboshima, *Hyōhaku, nikkeigaka Noda Hideo no shōgai* [Vagabond: Life of American-Japanese Painter Hideo Noda] (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1990); Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 62-63. Tamotsu was born in Japan in 1907, and came to New York in 1920 after traveling in Asia and Europe. He studied at the Art Students League (1921-22, 1925-26, 1930-31), while actively participating in the regular exhibitions of the Society of Independent Artists and the Salons of America. Kuniyoshi was both his intimate friend and artistic mentor. About Tamotsu’s biography, see, Aiko Izumisawa, *Nani mo iranai, aruki tsuzuketa gaka Tamotsu Chuzo no kiseki* (I Need Nothing: Footprint of Painter Chuzo Tamotsu; Kagoshima, Japan: Taki Shobo, 1996).


58 Ibid., 5
the Club’s manifesto, including “fight against imperialist war” and “fight against fascism.”

Tamotsu’s Teared Map of China (1933; fig. 3.13) has as its political subject Imperial Japan’s expansionism. In front of a map of China, two Japanese general officers, along with one Western looking officer and one Chinese officer, discuss how to divide China, while ignoring the people in Manchuria. Behind the meeting, a number of battleships are reaching the land where the Great Wall, a symbol of China, spreads. China is about to be exploited by the savage imperialists. Likewise, Ishigaki’s unfinished Soldiers of People’s Front (circa 1937; fig. 3.14) depicts the then ongoing fascist Spanish Civil War. Various types and classes of people in Spain—students, famers, laborers, sailors, and even women—hold up arms, bravely fighting as soldiers against the army of the dictator Francisco Franco and supported by fascist Germany and Italy. Both Tamotsu and Ishigaki denounced fascism and supported the people threatened by it, showing their critical stance against fascist countries, including Japan.

The connection of these leftist Japanese artists with the A.C.A. Gallery led to the following two group shows: “Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Japanese Artists in New York” of 1935 and 1936 (See Appendix 4). These shows were successors to the 1922 and 1927 group shows. While welcoming the new participants, they also included founding members of the JAS: Ishigaki, Usui, and Kuniyoshi. Kuniyoshi was undoubtedly a central figure in the shows, due to his celebrated place in the American art


world. Edward Alden Jewell of *The New York Times* stated that he was a well-known artist, “who has made a very substantial place for himself in this country.” He served as chairman at a lecture on Japanese art by American artist William Zorach and Japanese professor R. Tsunoda on February 15, 1935. Its content is unknown, but Kuniyoshi actively played a leading role to promote better understanding of their art by the American public. He contributed to bridging the American art world and its periphery—the Japanese artists’ community.

These shows were mutually beneficial for the A.C.A. Gallery and the Japanese community. It was a bonus for the gallery that the art was from a country moving toward fascism. The community could also show the public their support for the leftist program, although not all the Japanese were communists. It voiced their strong wish to become members of American society, helping them to parry anti-Japanese sentiment and to share a sense of belonging. Such a collective gesture with a clear theme drew a favorable review from Margaret Breuning, the aforementioned critic from *New York Post*:

> Oriental feeling for design is evidenced throughout the showing as well as Occidental, forthright realism. The most interesting works are those in which both East and West meet, a piquant touch of traditional flavor modifying the character of our contemporary modernism.

Welcoming the amalgamation of traditional Eastern and Modern Western qualities in the Japanese artworks, she mentioned that Aoki’s *Hamilton Street* showed “calligraphic character in its linear pattern,” and Nakamizo’s *Boy Calling* had “something of the

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vividness and eloquence of Oriental gesture.\textsuperscript{64} These critical comments were totally different from her earlier negative criticism about the Japanese artists’ group exhibition in 1927. She had written that “East and West should ‘never meet,’” suggesting that the Japanese use their traditional technique and sensibility in art.\textsuperscript{65} She was also a ringleader of the controversy over the 1929 “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” at MoMA, questioning the inclusion of Kuniyoshi and other foreign artists in the show.\textsuperscript{66} At the 1935 show, however, she expressed an opposite opinion piece that finally accepted the Japanese artists in Western society along with their ethnic heritage. She regarded them as members of American society, because she could understand the seriousness of the Japanese toward anti-fascism, which would also be her political stance. The Japanese community could be connected with American society by sharing this common goal.

As a leader of the community, Kuniyoshi agreed with his fellow leftist Japanese and their anti-fascism. He was not a member of the John Reed Club, but he joined the American Artists’ Congress, a successor group of the club that discussed how art could be used for a political purpose. Kuniyoshi sympathized with the congress’ idea to protest fascism and war, and became not only a member of the executive committee but also the head of the Congress’s exhibition committee, organizing a sequence of annual membership exhibitions as well as more politically engaged shows such as those about wars, fascism, and democracy.\textsuperscript{67} Kuniyoshi and other Japanese participants could also share with the Congress their standpoint on the relationship of race and art. At the “First

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Breuning, “Museum of Modern Art.”
\textsuperscript{67} Hemingway, \textit{Artists on the Left}, 125.
American Artists’ Congress against War and Fascism” held in February 1936, Lynd Ward delivered the lecture, “Race, Nationality and Art,” during which he asked the audience whether art could be determined by the blood in artists. 68 Quoting anthropologists’ common opinion that no race is superior to any other, he insisted that neither biological nor racial differences determined an artist’s art. He thought that the specific cultural and social situations, in which artists live and study, would determine artistic development. Ward did not refer to Asians, but his theory potentially justified the assimilation of Kuniyoshi and other Japanese artists in American society and their acceptance as Americans.

7. Kuniyoshi’s Ambiguous and Complicated Expression in Art

Politically sympathetic with the leftist movement, Kuniyoshi obviously agreed with anti-fascism. However, his paintings were completely different from his involvement in socialist activities. They did not take any social art form that could serve political ends, unlike the aforementioned paintings by Tamotsu and Ishigaki. By joining the collective activities, he seemed to support the Japanese community, which he had committed to as early as 1922. Yet, his art became more melancholic and introverted, expressing his own feeling toward the reality of his life.

A woman paired with newspapers, which evoked his social concern, became his favorite motif in the 1930s. 69 One of its earliest examples is the aforementioned Reclining Nude (1929; fig. 3.11), but it did not yet mirror any anxiety in the model. In contrast,

69 Wolf has observed that these women serve as Kuniyoshi’s alter ego, which attests to the artist’s political concerns. Wolf, The Artistic Journey of Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 55-56.
when the increasing social tension, the newspaper itself became more prominent and the 
woman became more gloomy. In Kuniyoshi’s *Daily News* (1938; fig. 3.15), a woman 
with a bare breast and a white scarf around her neck sits on a round stool. She stares 
melancholically somewhere, while holding a cigarette in her right hand and a folded 
newspaper in the other hand. The newspaper has its title “Daily News” on its cover page 
along with the illustration of a woman. The sensuous brushstrokes on the dark blue wall 
evoke the model’s disturbed response to the news.

*I’m Tired* (1938; fig. 3.16) depicts a more melancholic scene, where a woman 
with a scarf around her neck might be reading the newspaper while leaning on her elbow 
with her right hand on her cheek. Such posture, in addition to a shadow on her face and 
Kuniyoshi’s soft brushstrokes, makes her look somber. She may be tired of reading the 
newspaper, which keeps updating the worsening global situation and threat of war that 
was about to reach the United States. *Waiting* (1938; fig. 3.17) also shows the model’s 
reaction to society, but it is more disquieting. The woman with a red scarf on her head 
may be tired of reading the newspaper, sitting instead with her left elbow resting on the 
folded one on the table and with a cigarette in the hand. She awkwardly shifts her weight 
against the table, and her posture makes her look cramped rather than comfortable. A 
glass of wine sits next to her right hand on the table, but she is not enjoying drinking, let 
alone smoking. She has a dark expression on her face with shadowed downcast eyes, as if 
showing the stress she feels. What is she waiting for? She may be hopelessly waiting for 
someone she knows, or the news of the war from Europe and Asia. Kuniyoshi’s whirling 
brushstrokes in the background, painted in thick dark olive green, are stronger than those 
in *I’m Tired*, reflecting the model’s, as well as Kuniyoshi’s, increasing inner turmoil.
Kuniyoshi used a similar dark olive green to represent the barren, poison-like ground in *Between Two Worlds* (1939; fig. 0.1). Three women in the front are walking toward the outside of the picture, while a brown, menacing factory quietly stands in the distance. Between them there is deserted ground, where a leafless tree stands and wooden rubble (seemingly debris of a wooden house) are scattered. Japanese writer Taiji Yamaguchi argued that the two worlds symbolize Europe and Asia, which fascist forces turned into battlefields; the United States represented by the women was located between the two continents and was about to be engulfed by the wars.\(^7^0\) The ominous clouds over the factory—the motif used to create the frightening atmosphere in *Bad Dream* (1924; fig. 2.17)—are represented in thick paint with tactile strokes to evoke an impending storm, which may foretell the imminent outbreak of military conflict between the United States and the fascist empires. They appear to reflect the social climate that the Japanese expatriate must have felt at that time. In the summer of 1941, when he was in Maine, the villagers reported to the police that a suspicious Oriental sketched on the hill while overlooking the sea.\(^7^1\) The police immediately suspected that he was a spy, though this suspicion was soon dispelled. Kuniyoshi’s art responded to the social climate.

Considering Kuniyoshi’s ambiguous social status and artistic identity, discussed throughout this thesis, the two worlds seem to also symbolize Japan and the United States. Throughout the interwar period, he always faced the issue of belonging and ambivalent feeling between the two countries. It is true that his Japanese identity, which he shared with other Japanese immigrants, helped his life and art thrive in a foreign


country in the era of ant-Japanese exclusionism. However, his nationality could also become a factor for American society not to accept him as an American. *Between Two Worlds*, as well as his paintings of pensive women, focused entirely on expressing his inner suffering due to his ambivalence about his social, as well as artistic, identity. Like Kuniyoshi himself, the lone leafless tree on the barren ground in *Between Two Worlds*—his leitmotif, which suggests his tall and lean appearance—helplessly stands between the two worlds—Japan represented by an ominous factory and the United States represented by three Western female figures. The ground, filled with rubble, also expresses his devastated inner self.

**Conclusion**

Gradually cementing his celebrated status in the American art world, Kuniyoshi was selected one of the representative “American” painters at MoMA’s memorial show in 1929. However, the social tension surrounding Kuniyoshi and any other Japanese expatriate was becoming more racist, threatening Kuniyoshi’s presence there. Japanese identity, lack of citizenship, and Asian appearance were all good excuses to marginalize him, regardless of whatever efforts he made to assimilate. Facing such xenophobia, Kuniyoshi and other Japanese artists united again under the banner of anti-fascism and anti-war, stressing their cooperation not with their native country but with American society. In the center of the periphery, Kuniyoshi helped bridge the Japanese community and American society by joining group shows and political activities. However, his art focused not on politics but rather on his contradictory self, caught between the United States and Japan. He kept expressing his inner disturbance in the form of his models’ social concern, depression, and ambiguous attitude toward the reality of his life. His
rough, swirling brushstrokes stressed the depressing and even foreboding atmosphere, where the models were silently waiting for World War II, which was imminent.
Conclusion

Kuniyoshi’s biography during the interwar period reflects the process of continuous adjustment of his Japanese identity in the center of American society and its periphery, the Japanese artists’ community. While enthusiastically learning Western culture and ways of living as an immigrant in the New World, he was also conscious of his national identity, shared with other Japanese expatriate artists in New York. His Japanese origin fostered his artistic development and helped his successful debut in the New York art world. However, as anti-Japanese sentiment escalated in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, it brought him social hardships. During this period, he experienced inner struggles and ambivalence in his feelings about Japan and the United States. His art kept responding to the changing artistic and social environment, while expressing not only his bonding with Japan but also his inner disturbance caused by his unstable identity in the United States.

Kuniyoshi’s paintings in and during the aftermath of his student days embody a unique process of learning Western art. Under the guidance of Kenneth Hayes Miller, Kuniyoshi studied conventional Western subjects, perspectives, and techniques, all of which were unfamiliar in the East. At the same time, he had strong interests in European progressive art, absorbing modernist aesthetics from Renoir, Cezanne, the Cubists, and other leading European artists. His background of cultural hybridity helped him integrate them with those of traditional Japanese art, which he could learn more about under the patronage of Hamilton Easter Field. From the beginning of his artistic career, the American art world appreciated his art, where both Western and Eastern, traditional and modern aesthetics coexist.
In the 1920s, Kuniyoshi was strongly conscious of his Japanese identity and had a sense of community with other Japanese artists. His intimate friend Toshi Shimizu helped Kuniyoshi to survive his poverty. Shimizu became familiar with Kuniyoshi’s art and appropriately saw the connection between Kuniyoshi’s motifs and Japanese culture. Kuniyoshi’s artistic interests were nurtured in this context. He began using unusual motifs and mediums common in Japan to express his experiences and inner world as a person from the East. His Asian-looking babies, along with traditional Japanese toys and bibs, responded to the Japanese artists’ community, which were then welcoming newborns. He drew a thunder god—a Japanese deity—to represent a horrifying scene in his ink drawing Bad Dream, when the community faced two traumatic incidents: the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and the Immigration Act of 1924. These motifs and mediums in art were often mixed with contemporary American scenes and cultural objects, mirroring his multiple cultural backgrounds. Conscious of being Japanese in New York, Kuniyoshi and other Japanese artists organized two group exhibitions in 1922 and 1927. Against the backdrop of increasing anti-Japanese sentiment and exclusionism in the United States, not only did they aim to show their presence in the art world, but also they publicly voiced their understanding of Western culture to live harmoniously in American society. Kuniyoshi’s art was a product of his experience as a member of the Japanese community on the periphery of New York, where he shared artistic, as well as social, interests and pains.

The social climate surrounding the Japanese continued to worsen and became even racist all over the United States between the late 1920s and 1941. Such social tension is reflected in the facial expression and posture of his 1927 self-portrait as a
golfer. This is in contrast to another portrait of Kuniyoshi, sitting relaxed in his own private space, by his intimate friend Bumpei Usui. Moreover, Kuniyoshi’s celebrated status in the New York art world ironically led him to be a major target of racist criticism that protested the presence of non-Americans. At MoMA’s 1929 “Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans” show, conservative American critics questioned his legitimacy as an “American” artist. When anti Japanese-sentiment escalated because of the expansionism of Imperial Japan in Asia, the Japanese artists’ community became more coherent, pledging to fight against fascism through art in cooperation with American leftists. Such a political stance seemed to help them parry the biting racism.

While Kuniyoshi appeared to join these political activities actively, his art did not reflect them. It became more gloomy and introverted, representing his depression. Without taking any political subject, his paintings kept depicting pensive women, who helplessly showed their social concerns by holding newspapers. His brushstrokes used on the wall or ground became thicker and whirling, and his color became darker and even poisonous. Both kept reflecting the women’s, as well as his own, inner disturbance at being between the two worlds.

Seen through the eyes of Kuniyoshi, who lived in the American and Japanese communities—the center and periphery—it can become clear how artistic, social, and political difficulties of the moment influenced the lives and thoughts of Japanese expatriates. Kuniyoshi became a leading “American” painter during the interwar period. However, he still had a strong sense of community with other Japanese artists, as well as of an ambivalence between the two countries, to which he could not deeply belong.
## Appendix 1

**“Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by the Japanese Artists Society of New York City” at the Civic Club (November 1 and 21, 1922)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Family, First)</th>
<th>Paintings</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ando, Kunie</strong>&lt;br&gt;(安藤邦衛)</td>
<td>1. Music Room (音楽室)&lt;br&gt;2. Snow in Village (雪の村)&lt;br&gt;3. Before the Storm (嵐の前ぶれ)&lt;br&gt;4. The Mountain (山)</td>
<td>AL, 1914-1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hara, Makoto S</strong>&lt;br&gt;(原誠 S)</td>
<td>5. Afternoon at the Suburb (午後の郊外)&lt;br&gt;6. Armand (アルマンド)</td>
<td>AL, 1923-1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuniyoshi, Yasuo</strong>&lt;br&gt;(国吉康雄)</td>
<td>21. Boy Scared by Snake (蛇に怯える少年)&lt;br&gt;22. Frog and Hospital (蛙と病院)</td>
<td>AL, 1916-1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misaki, Michio</strong>&lt;br&gt;(三崎道夫)</td>
<td>28. Still Life (静物)&lt;br&gt;29. Self-Portrait (自画像)</td>
<td>AL, 1917-1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shimizu, Toshi</strong>&lt;br&gt;(清水登之)</td>
<td>30. The Road (道)&lt;br&gt;31. Children (子供たち)&lt;br&gt;32. Yokohama Night (ヨコハマナイト)&lt;br&gt;33. Landscape (風景)</td>
<td>AL, 1914-1917, 1928-1930</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tera, Tetsuen</strong>&lt;br&gt;(寺徹円)</td>
<td>34. Portrait (肖像)</td>
<td>AL as George Tera, 1911-1912, 1914-1917, 1928-1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usui, Bumpei</strong>&lt;br&gt;(臼井文平)</td>
<td>35. Hanging Rock (聳える岸壁)&lt;br&gt;36. Evening (夜)&lt;br&gt;37. Still-Life (静物)&lt;br&gt;38. Landscape (風景)</td>
<td>AL, 1914-1917, 1928-1930</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watanabe, Torajiro</td>
<td>39. Endless Wall (果てしなき壁) 40. Morning Glory (朝の賛美) 41. Moonlight After Rain (雨上がりの月明かり) 42. Old Mill (古い水車小屋) 43. Flowers (花) 44. Sketch (スケッチ)</td>
<td>ASL as Thomas Watanabe, Summer 1920</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Okabe, Yo</td>
<td>*No Participation</td>
<td>ASL, 1920-1923</td>
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Source:
## Appendix 2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of Participations / Catalogue Number / Title of Work [Illustrated]</th>
<th>Years of Participations / Catalogue Number / Title of Work [Illustrated]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ando, Kunie</td>
<td>1918 / #20 / Woman in the Balcony</td>
<td>No participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gado, T.K</td>
<td>1919 / #208 / Rush Hour in Subway [ill.]</td>
<td>1922 / #75 / An Infant [ill.]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1920 / #267 / After the Bath [ill.]</td>
<td>1923 / #281 / Ambulance [ill.]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#268 / The Spirit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1921 / #328 / The Traffic [ill.]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#329 / Nude</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1922 / #226 / The Ball [ill.]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#227 / In the Park Sunday Afternoon</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1923 / #210 / Block Party [ill.]</td>
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<td>1924 / #324 / Communication in the Under Surface [ill.]</td>
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<td>Hara, Makoto S</td>
<td>1924 / #393 / They Coryphee</td>
<td>1930 / #176 / The Letter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#394 / From the Balcony</td>
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<td>1926 / #377 / Edith in Apron [ill.]</td>
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<td>#378 / Harlem River</td>
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<td>Hiramoto, Seiji</td>
<td>1920 / #346 / Man of the Stone Age [ill.]</td>
<td>1926 / #140 / Musician [ill.]</td>
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<td>#347 / Roosevelt</td>
<td>#141 / Man of Stone Age</td>
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<td>1921 / #422 / Dai Butsu [ill. as Buddha]</td>
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<td>#316 / Rodin [ill.]</td>
<td>#143 / Dancer</td>
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<td>#318 / Joffre</td>
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<td>1923 / #293 / Youth</td>
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<td>#426 / Prof, Arthur W. Dow</td>
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<td>1925 / #460 / Musician [s. ill.]</td>
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<td>#461 / Poet</td>
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<td>#385 / Junior Aviator</td>
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<td>Inaba, Shotaro</td>
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<td>1925 / #498 / The Man with a Whip [ill.]</td>
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<td>1926 / #533 / Processional &quot;1925&quot; [ill.]</td>
<td>A1925 / #131 / Nuns and Flappers</td>
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<td>1927 / #454 / Delirium of Eighteenth Amendment [ill.]</td>
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<td>#489 / The Traffic Problem [sold Stanley Rauh]</td>
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<td>1933 / #305 / Imperialism and Rebellion</td>
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<td>1934 / #531 / I Will Not Speak</td>
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<td>Watanabe, Torajiro</td>
<td>1922/816a</td>
<td>Water Fall</td>
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<td>1923/653</td>
<td>Monstrosity in the World of Thought</td>
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<td>#654 / Symbol of Righteousness, screen [ill.]</td>
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<td>1924/1007</td>
<td>#1007 / Earthquake [ill.]</td>
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<td>1925/1127</td>
<td>“L” Train, N.Y. [ill.]</td>
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<td>1926/1053</td>
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<td>#1054 / Colo. Canyon</td>
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<td>#1055 / Mother and Child (coal carving)</td>
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<td>#1056 / Love (coal carving)</td>
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<td>#1057 / Tulip, wd c</td>
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<td>1927/1036a</td>
<td>Mob and Persecution [ill.]</td>
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Source:
## Appendix 3

“The First Annual Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by Japanese Artists in New York” at the Art Center (February 26-March 5, 1927)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Family, First)</th>
<th>Works (Catalogue number, Title)</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foujioka, Noboru (藤岡昇)</td>
<td>1. Strap Hangers (地下線の午後)</td>
<td>*ASL: Art Students League</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Charleston. Courtesy of Tessha Kanaya Esq. (チア ルストン。テッシャ・カナヤ氏の好意により)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fujii, Kikue (藤井キクエ)</td>
<td>4. Horton Point (ホロトン崩)</td>
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<td>5. Bather (浴みをする子供)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamachi, Seimatsu (浜地清松)</td>
<td>6. Landscape (風景)</td>
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<td>7. Landscape (風景)</td>
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<td>8. Nude (裸体画)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiramoto, Masaji (平本正次)</td>
<td>9. Dancer (Sculpture) (踊女、 彫刻)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Madame Butterfly (Sculpture) (蝶蝶夫人、彫刻)</td>
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<td>11. The Musician (Sculpture) (楽人、彫刻)</td>
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<td>Inakai, Kyohi (犬飼恭平)</td>
<td>12. Reflection (反映)</td>
<td>Art Institute of Chicago, 1906-1910</td>
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<td>13. Landscape (風景)</td>
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<td>Ishigaki, Eitaro (石垣栄太郎)</td>
<td>14. Nuns and Flappers (尼僧と少女)</td>
<td>ASL, 1919-1920</td>
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<td>15. A Traffic Problem (交通難題)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
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<td>16. S.P.C.A. (動物保護協会)</td>
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<td>(漁村)</td>
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<td>イワモト・キンイチ博士の好意により</td>
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<td>19. Peggy (Sculpture) (ペギィ、 彫刻)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
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<td>20. Spring (Sculpture) (春、 彫刻)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitamori, Seioh (北森清風)</td>
<td>21. Nude (裸体画)</td>
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<td>22. Winter (冬)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuniyoshi, Yasuo (国吉良雄)</td>
<td>23. Little Joe and Cow and Calf *currently known as Little Joe with Cow (子供と牝牛と子牛)</td>
<td>ASL, 1916-1920</td>
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<td>24. A White Cow (白き牛)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
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<td>Miki, Ryokichi (三鬼良吉)</td>
<td>25. Cathedral from Morningside Park (礼拝堂)</td>
<td>ASL, 1915-16</td>
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<td>26. My Daughter (吾が娘)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misaki, Michio (三崎道夫)</td>
<td>27. Still Life (静物)</td>
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<td>28. A Woman (ある女)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murata, MRS. YUKIKO (村田雪子夫人)</td>
<td>29. A Spring Evening (春宵)</td>
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<td>30. Rouge (口紅)</td>
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<td>31. Kimono (キモノ)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saito, Ryuko (斉藤麗江)</td>
<td>32. Interior (迎客有情)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shimizu, Kiyoshi (清水清)</td>
<td>33. Fourteenth Street (第十四街)</td>
<td>ASL, 1922-1923, 1924-1925</td>
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<td>34. Along the Harlem River (ハアレム河畔)</td>
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<td>35. Landscape (風景画)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shimizu, Toshi</td>
<td>36. Yokohama Night. Courtesy of Mrs. George Bellows (横浜の夜)</td>
<td>ASL, 1917-1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37. Portrait of My Mother (吾が母)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38. Nude (裸体画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39. Still Life (静物)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunami, Soichi</td>
<td>40. Landscape (風景)</td>
<td>ASL, 1924-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41. Portrait (肖像)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42. Landscape (風景)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamotsu, Chuzo</td>
<td>43. Young Girl (少女)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tera, Tetsuen</td>
<td>44. Self-Portrait (自画像)</td>
<td>ASL as George Tera, 1911-1912, 1914-1917, 1928-1930, 1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(George Tera)</td>
<td>45. Landscape (風景)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsuzuki, Takashi</td>
<td>46. The Carpenter’s Shop (工場)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47. Portrait of a Girl (小娘)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48. Landscape (風景)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usui, Bumpei</td>
<td>49. Self-Portrait (自画像)</td>
<td>ASL, summer 1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(臼井文平)</td>
<td>50. Roofs (屋根)</td>
<td>1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51. Mother and Child (Coal carving) (母と子, 木炭彫刻)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watanabe, Torajiro</td>
<td>52. East River (イースト河)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(渡辺虎次郎)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoshida, Sekido</td>
<td>53. Torso (トルソー)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(吉田石堂)</td>
<td>54. Portrait in Terracotta (影刻)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>55. Hudson River (ハドソン河)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yokouchi, Kiyoharu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(横内キヨハル)</td>
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</table>

Source:
“[No Title],” *The Japanese Times*, January 1, 1927.
## Appendix 4

**4. “Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Japanese Artists in New York” at the A.C.A. Gallery**

(February 10 to March 2, 1935 / April 20 to May 2, 1936)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Family, First)</th>
<th>Works at the 1935 Show</th>
<th>Works at the 1936 Show</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amamiya, Yoscei (雨宮ヨウセイ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Still Life（静物）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aoki, Minoru (青木ミノル)</td>
<td>Hamilton Street</td>
<td>Country Skyscraper（田舎の摩天楼）</td>
<td>Phantas Magoria（幻想）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doi, Isami (土井勇)</td>
<td>Woman by Woman</td>
<td>Hawaii Mountain（ハワイの山）</td>
<td>American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hara, Makoto (原誠)</td>
<td>*Displayed works unknown</td>
<td>*No Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun, Paul (ヒュンポール)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Man with Flute（フルートを吹く男）</td>
<td>Torso-Male（トルソ - 男性）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inouye, T. (井上)</td>
<td>* Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting（絵画）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inouye, MME. (井上夫人)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting（絵画）</td>
<td>The 1922 JAS Founding Member John Reed Club American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishigaki, Eitaro (石垣栄太郎)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting（絵画）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwaseki, Kenji (岩崎ケンジ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Girl with Blue Eyes（青い目の少女）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadowaki, Roy (ロイ門脇)</td>
<td>Fantan Game</td>
<td>Landscape（風景）</td>
<td>Still Life（静物）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kato, Rinnosuke (加藤憐之助)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Card Players（カード遊びをする人々）</td>
<td>Old German Town（ドイツの古い町）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komuro, David (デヴィッド小室)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Portrait of Aileen（アイリーンの肖像）</td>
<td>Portrait of Ohodo（オードュの肖像）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuniyoshi, Yasuo (国吉康雄)</td>
<td>Still Life</td>
<td>Painting（絵画）</td>
<td>The 1922 JAS Founding Member American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kusanobu, Murray (クサノブムレイ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Head（頭部）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miyamoto, Kaname (宮本要)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting（絵画）</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagai, Thomas (トーマス長井)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Landscape with Figure（人物のいる風景）</td>
<td>American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Artwork</td>
<td>Exhibition Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nakagawa, Kikuta (中川キクタ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Little Girl in Red (赤い服の幼い少女) Still Life (静物)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nakayama, Mitsu (中山ミツ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Jin (ジム) A Girl in Blue Hat (青い帽子の少女)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakamizo, Fuji (中溝不二)</td>
<td>Boy Calling</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakano, M. Kenneth (ケネス・中野)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Queensborough Bridge (クイーンズボロ橋)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noji, K. Oliver (オリバー・K ノジ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Fishing Crafts (釣舟) After Shower (雨上がり)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Soda, Hideo (野田英夫)</td>
<td>Milk Wagon</td>
<td>*No Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noguchi, Isamu (野口勇)</td>
<td>*Displayed works unknown</td>
<td>*No Participation</td>
<td>American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomura, H. (H.野村)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawada, MME. (沢田夫人)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shimizu, Kiyoshi (清水清)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunami, Soichi (角南壮一)</td>
<td>*Displayed works unknown</td>
<td>*No Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzuki, Sakari (鈴木雅 assessed)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Remembrance (追憶) Fashion Model (ファッション・モデル)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suzuki, Yashichi (鈴木ヤシチ)</td>
<td>*Displayed works unknown</td>
<td>*No Participation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tagawa, Bunji (田川ブンジ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Market (市場)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamotsu, Chuzo (多毛津忠蔵)</td>
<td>Apple Blossoms Peach Valley</td>
<td>On the Table (テーブルの上)</td>
<td>John Reed Club American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usui, Bumpei (臼井文平)</td>
<td>Interior</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td>The 1922 JAS Founding Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watari, Takeo (亘理健夫)</td>
<td>Still Life</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamazaki, Chikamichi (山崎近道)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Spring (春) Negro Children (黒人の子供たち) Head (頭部)</td>
<td>American Artists’ Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yajima, Tokusuke (ヤジマトクスケ)</td>
<td>*Participation unknown</td>
<td>Painting (絵画)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:
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*Immigration, Anti-Japanese Sentiment, and Yellow Peril*


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**Hamilton Easter Field and Japanese Art Collection in New York**


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**Orientalism and Japoisme in New York**


**Ukiyo-e**


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**Organizations in American Art World**


*Others*


Figure 0.1
Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
*Between Two Worlds*, 1939,
oil on canvas, 61 x 101.6 cm.
Collection of Gallery Nii, Osaka, Japan.
Figure 1.1
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Crucifixion (Modern Crucifix)*
1917, oil on canvas, 48.3 x 61 cm.
Collection of Mr. Masatoshi Nakatani, courtesy of FM Gallery, Tokyo.
Figure 1.2
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Picnic*, 1919, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 91.5 cm. Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

Figure 1.3
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Still Life*, 1920, oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm. Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.
Figure 1.4
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Adam and Eve (The Fall of Man)*, 1922, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 76.2 cm. Private collection.

Figure 1.5
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Bather with Cigarette*, 1924, oil on canvas, 106.7 x 63.5 cm. Dallas Museum of Art.

Figure 1.6
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Child Frightened by Water*, 1924, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 60.9 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Figure 1.7
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Wild Horses*, 1921, oil on canvas, 51 x 76.3 cm, Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

Figure 1.8

Figure 1.9
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Maud*, 1921, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 50.8 cm, location unknown. Reproduced in Fukutake Shoten, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Path of the Neo American Artist*, comments by Yoshio Ozawa (Okayama, Japan: Fukutake Shoten, 1991), 68.
Figure 1.10  
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Upstream*, 1922, oil on canvas, 76.7 x 60.8 cm. Denver Art Museum.

Figure 1.11  
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Maine Family*, circa 1922-1923, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 60.9 cm. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Figure 1.12  
*Pavilion on Mountain Stream*  
in the Style of Sesshu Toyo (1420-1506), Edo Period, 17th Century, ink on paper, 84.5 x 29.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Figure 1.13
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Two Babies*, 1923,
oil on canvas, 76.2 × 61 cm.
Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.
Figure 2.1
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Boy Scared by Snake (Boy Frightened by Snake)*, 1921, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, location unknown.

Figure 2.2
Figure 2.3
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Little Joe with Cow*, 1923,
oil on canvas, 71.1 x 106.7 cm.
Crystal Bridge Museum of Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.

Figure 2.4
Detail of Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
*Little Joe with Cow*. 
Figure 2.5
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Octopus*, 1922, pen and ink, brush and ink on paper, 50.8 x 30.5 cm, photograph courtesy of Sara Kuniyoshi.

Figure 2.6
Figure 2.7
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1924,
pen and ink, brush and ink, and graphite pencil on paper, 35.6 x 50.2 cm.

Figure 2.8
Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Ryūgū tamatori hime no zu* [Tamatorihime Stealing the Sacred Jewel from the Dragon Palace]. 1853,
Figure 2.9
Katsushika Hokusai, *Tako to ama* [Diving Woman and Octopi] from *Kinoe no komatsu* [Pine Seedlings on the First Rat Day (or Old True Sophisticates of the Club of Delightful Skills)], circa 1820, woodblock print, 18.9 x 26.6cm. The British Museum, London.

Figure 2.10
Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1875, oil on canvas, 106 x 182.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Figure 2.11
Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
*Baby and Cow Toy*, 1921,
pen and ink, brush and ink on paper,
30.8 x 23.8 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Figure 2.12
Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
*The Baby*, 1921,
oil on canvas, 61.0 x 50.8 cm.
Sanyo Broadcasting Co. Ltd.

Figure 2.13
Tsukioka Yoshitoshi,
*Kintoki-ya, Kintoki’s Mountatin*,
from *Tsukiyakushi* [A Hundred Moons], 1890,
print on paper.
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.
Figure 2.14
Photograph of Sumiko and Ikuo Shimizu, February 10, 1924.

Figure 2.15
Photograph of Toshi Shimizu and Iwata Nakayama’s Families, May 10, 1924.
Figure 2.16
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *The Dream*, 1922,
ink and ink wash on paper, 56.8 x 39.1 cm.
Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas.
Figure 2.17
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Bad Dream*, 1924, ink on paper, 61 x 76.2 cm.
Collection Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Maine.
Figure 2.18

Figure 2.19
Sakai Hoitsu, *Raijin* [The Thunder God], from *Korin Hyakuzu* [One Hundred Paintings by Korin], after 1826, woodblock printed book, 26 x 17.9 cm. Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

Figure 2.20
Figure 2.21
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Boy Frightened by Lightening*, 1921,
pen and ink, brush and ink on paper,
50.8 x 40.6 cm, location unknown.
Reproduced in William Murrell, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi*, in Younger Artists Series
Figure 2.22
Photograph of the 1923 Kanto Earthquake.
The Japanese Times, October 10, 1923

Figure 2.23
Photograph of the 1923 Kanto Earthquake.
The Japanese Times, October 24, 1923

Figure 2.24
Torajiro Watanabe Earthquake, 1923-1924, location unknown.

Figure 2.25
T.K. Gado, Fukkō no ki ugoku [Atmosphere of Recovery Moves], 1923, location unknown.
Reproduced in The Japanese Times, December 1, 1923
Figure 2.26
Toshi Shimizu, *Yokohama Night (Yokohama Impression)*, 1921, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 97.0 cm. Yokohama Museum of Art.

Figure 2.27
Advertisement of “The First Annual Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by Japanese Artists in New York.”
The Japanese Times, November 20, 1926.

Figure 2.28
Figure 2.29
Noboru Foujioka,
*American Spirit (The Poker Game)*, 1925,
oil on canvas,
91.4 x 101.6 cm.
Courtesy Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Herbert Fleishhacker, 1927.

Figure 2.30
Kiyoshi Shimizu,
*14th Street*,
circa 1926,
location unknown.
Figure 2.31
*Rakuchu rakugai zu (Views In and Around Kyoto)*, circa 1616-1624,
ingk, color and gold leaf on paper, 174.3 x 330.2 x 30.5 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Figure 2.32
Yukiko Murata,
*A Spring Evening*, circa 1926,
location unknown.
Reproduced in *The Japanese Times*, January 1, 1926.
Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2
Figure 3.3

Figure 3.4
Bumpei Usui, *Portrait of Yasuo Kuniyoshi*, 1930, oil on canvas, 91.2 x 121.9 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum.
Figure 3.5
Bumpei Usui, *Furniture Factory (The Carpenter’s Shop)*, 1925, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 109.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 3.6  Kiyoshi Shimizu, *Portrait of Bumpei Usui*, circa 1930, oil on canvas, 47 x 34.3 cm. Conner-Rosenkranz Fine Art, New York.
Figure 3.7  Louis Lozowick, *New York*, 1925, lithograph, 29.4 x 22.9 cm. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Figure 3.8  Bumpei Usui, *14th Street*, 1924, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 61 cm. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

Figure 3.10
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Boy Stealing Fruit*, 1923,
oil on canvas, 50.8 x 76.2 cm.
Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio.
Figure 3.11
Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Reclining Nude (Nude)*, 1929, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 203.2 cm.
Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Japan.

Figure 3.12
Jules Pascin, *Reclining Model*, circa 1925, oil on canvas, 73 x 92.1 cm.
Figure 3.13
Chuzo Tamotsu, *Teared Map of China*, 1933, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 75.7 cm. Shinano Drawing Museum, Nagano, Japan.

Figure 3.14  Eitaro Ishigaki, *Soldiers of People’s Front*, circa 1937, oil on canvas, 147.7 x 206 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama, Japan.
Figure 3.15
Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
_Daily News_, 1938,
oil on canvas, 127 x 84.3 cm.
Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio.

Figure 3.16
Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
_I’m Tired_, 1938,
oil on canvas, 102.2 x 78.7 cm.
Figure 3.17
Yasuo Kuniyoshi,
*Waiting*, 1938,
oil on canvas, 101.6 x 78.7 cm.
Collection of Gallery Nii, Osaka, Japan.