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POLITICS, ARTS AND POP CULTURE OF JAPAN IN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

MUTUAL IMAGES

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FOUNDED BY

AUORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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POLITICS, ARTS AND POP CULTURE OF JAPAN IN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI & HERB L. FONDEVILLA

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Special section editorial

Eriko TOMIZAWA-KAY & Marco PELLITTERI | University of East Anglia, UK;
Shanghai International Studies University, China

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This issue of *Mutual Images* Journal presents, in this special section, a collection of essays centred around the theme of “Japanese Arts and Politics”. The articles within this section focus on the relations between Japanese art and political themes.

This section of the journal is, in part, the output of a workshop and research project designed by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay—a lecturer at the University of East Anglia (UEA)—and titled *Reflective Transitions of Politics in the Arts: Examining the Atomisation of Japanese Socio-political Milieus through Art*. The workshop was held at UEA, in Norwich, on 24 August 2017, bringing together scholars to investigate how Japanese arts have been shaped by political forces in the “neoliberal” world order, as an analytical dimension to study and comment on the process of atomisation of society as it can be perceived in the arts. The workshop’s papers presented empirical examples of internalised art productions and art currents in Japan, in juxtaposition to, or contrast with, art expressing national or regional politics. The contributors focused on the presence of political notions and messages in Japanese fine arts, popular visual media, visual entertainment forms, and visual arts at large, and on the possible intersections among “western” arts and artistic representations of political themes concerning the Japanese context.

As a collaborative endeavour that expands interdisciplinary research contributing to a growing literature, this project attempts to break new ground in the study of the intersections between art history and politics. It combines a cross-collaborative research agenda among colleagues within the UEA and the fostering of new links with external partners, as well as re-confirming a number of valuable existing links in Japan.

We—Tomizawa-Kay as the main designer and organiser, together with Marco Pellitteri as her main collaborator on the workshop’s scientific design—believe that the workshop achieved its objectives in terms of engagement in a promising new subject area, creating multiple new international connections among both Japanese and UK-

based scholars, and Japanese Studies scholars within multiple institutions in or beyond the United Kingdom. Moreover, both the project and the workshop attracted interest from a wider audience as well as funding from different sources. In fact, the project is currently conducted, and the workshop was organised, thanks to the economic support of the Japan Foundation and the Sainsbury Institute for Japanese Arts and Cultures as well as the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Namely, in the latter's case, support was provided through the London branch. In particular, part of the research and logistics related to the workshop's organisation were financially supported by a "Collaboration Prize" from the JSPS that Pellitteri was granted to fund collaboration in Tomizawa-Kay's project.

The workshop and project are, therefore, particularly significant because they successfully unite a collaborative set of scholarly activities that encourage interdisciplinary research on Japan within and outside of the UK. All the workshop's sessions were very well-attended and progressed into lively open debates, revolving around political notions circulated in Japanese fine arts, popular cultures (such as comics and animated cartoons made in Japan, known as manga and anime respectively) and visual arts more broadly. The day of study in Norwich also covered the relationships between "western" arts, representations of Japanese politics, and the politicisation of art. In so doing, it brought together a diverse selection of academics and practitioners from as far afield as Tōkyō, Okinawa, Kōbe, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom, to identify political processes in the atomisation of society through the study of a variety of art forms. The contexts of the art forms under scrutiny included their relationships with local, national, and international politics; to this end, the workshop was articulated into three panel sessions: "The Politics of Art in Japan: Expressions of Regional, National and International Issues"; "Popular Culture and Political Art in Japan: Expressions of Atomisation and Internalisation"; and "Political Processes in Japanese Art: Expressions of Continuity and Change".

The initial outcomes of the project conducted by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay included this successful workshop event and bringing together the scholars noted above in a new collaborative environment, which we expect to expand into further research and publications. Having invited approximately 50 participants from the UK, Japan, and elsewhere overseas, our final registered attendance (based on the count from our dedicated project website) was a total of 43 attendees, although this was actually

slightly exceeded on the day. Based on almost entirely positive participant feedback, we believe that the immediate impact has been substantial, as confirmed by many more indirect participants (e.g. via our direct networks and university social media links).

Below, we present the programme of the workshop.¹ The programme is followed by summary introductory comments on the section's articles.

- ✎ Keynote speaker: Atsushi Miura (Professor, The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tōkyō). *The Politics of Contemporary Japanese Paintings: From the History Paintings of Former "Number 1 High School" to the War Paintings of Tsuguharu Fujita.*
- ✎ Session 1: *Politics of Art in Japan: Expressions of Regional, National and International Issues.* This panel examined empirical case studies of how wartime art in Japan has been integral to the expression of political ideas related to national identity, regional struggle, and reflective othering. The aim was to explore linkages and disconnects between these issues and their socio-political framings.
 - Minjong Shin (University of Tōkyō). *The Politics of Colonial Painting: The Travels of Japanese Painters in Korea.*
 - Eriko Tomizawa-Kay (University of East Anglia). *The Dynamics of the Concept of Modern Regional Japanese Art: The Message of Okinawan Arts in Regional Struggle and Politics.*
 - Marie Yasunaga (University of Tōkyō / University of Amsterdam). *Politics and Identity in the (Re)presentation of Japanese Art in Modern and Contemporary Museums.*
- ✎ Session 2: *Popular Culture and Political Art in Japan: Expressions of Atomisation and Internalisation.* This panel discussed how contemporary Japanese arts have been interpreted in East Asian and European contexts. It focused on how Japanese art has been shaped by political forces in the contemporary "neoliberal" world order, the resulting processes of atomisation in society, and the internalisation of political issues through Japanese art forms.

¹ The academic affiliations of the participants reported in the workshop's programme are based on the affiliations held at the time of the workshop in late August 2017. There may have been changes in the academic position of some of the participants since then.

- Marco Pellitteri (Kōbe University / Ca' Foscari University of Venice). *Hints of Politics from Animated Giant Robots in the 1970s: Reading "UFO Robo Grendizer" in the Japanese and Italian Contexts.*
- Rayna Denison (University of East Anglia). *Nationalism in a Superflat World: Anime, Art and the National Representations in Mamoru Hosoda's "Summer Wars".*
- Manuel Hernández-Pérez (University of Hull). *American Politics as a Transnational Popular Narrative: Narratological Structures of Shōnen Manga and Their Cross-Cultural Readings in Kaiji Kawaguchi's "Eagle" (1997-2001).*

☞ Session 3: *Political Processes in Japanese Art: Expressions of Continuity and Change.* This panel reflected on the processes underlying the changing currents of contemporary art in Japan's diverse social milieus: from early 20th century Modernism, pre-war nationalism and post-war Keynesianism, to neoliberal and neo-nationalist turns. It traced a diverse range of literature and artworks that intersect political and personal lives, examining the shifting messages emerging from a broad range of Japanese art forms, including their regional significance, the role of art in Japan's international relations, and the political expression of Japanese art through various media forms.

- Speakers: Ra Mason (UEA). *Political Art in Contemporary Japan: A Cursory Glance into Internalisation, Neoliberalisation, and Atomisation.*
- Yoshimasa Kamiya (Formerly of Itoman City Office). *Peace Promotion through Art in Itoman City.*
- Zhiyuan Pan (University of Cambridge). *Tintin in the Advent of the Sino-Japanese War: The Story of "The Blue Lotus" and Zhang Chongren.*

This section of this issue is given shape and substance by the articles by Rayna Denison, Hope B. Steiner, Eriko Tomizawa-Kay, and Ewa Machotka.

Of these articles, two are products of the original workshop, those by Denison and Tomizawa-Kay; the other participants, due to a variety of constraints, were unable to submit an article for this issue. As such, we have added two more essays that were submitted to the journal through the CFP for the workshop, and were therefore specially chosen for this section due to their focus on the workshop's themes.

As a last remark, there are—understandably—some changes in the structure or wording of the articles' titles compared to those of the original papers presented at the workshop: the articles published here are re-elaborations of workshop talks and have evolved from drafts for an oral presentation into fully-fledged papers for this issue.

Eriko Tomizawa-Kay's article focuses on a very peculiar topic in the history of contemporary Japan and contemporary Japanese art: The Battle of Okinawa during the Pacific War, and its artistic representations. After a thorough literature review and the explanation of how the historic battle was depicted in several art forms and contexts, the author mainly focuses on Okinawa-born artist Gima Hiroshi (1923-2017), a particularly revealing and special case, because the artist portrayed the event through a variety of art forms and techniques, adopting an approach that the article's author suggests to be transmedial. The essay is very rich in that it puts Gima's work in the wider context of the general artistic production in Japan on this particular episode, and also studies the artistic production of other relevant artists such as Maruki Toshi and Maruki Iri, taking care not to neglect forms of popular entertainment such as manga, along with more "canonical" art forms, such as oil painting on canvas or woodblock prints. In this sense, the study expands to other relevant creators, such as a manga artist of the current generation, Kyō Machiko (b. 1980). The article therefore offers a new perspective on how war, its political reasons, and its social impact are depicted in Japanese art; a perspective, in other words, that goes beyond the numerous analyses that recently have, perhaps too often and perhaps somewhat ineffectually, focused on the same—however important and relevant—cases of the manga *Hadashi no Gen* by the late Nakazawa Keiji or the war manga semi-biographies by the late Mizuki Shigeru.

Hope B. Steiner's essay is an in-depth monograph on the wartime works of Matsumoto Shunsuke (1912-1948); that is, his works of art produced during the Fifteen-Year War (1931-45). Steiner frames Matsumoto's art production as "quiet resistance" to the officially approved and encouraged form of art during wartime, the *sensō-ga* or war paintings, and proves how this artist's production overtly, but peacefully, defied such military pressure or imposition. In fact, Matsumoto produced in those years a variety of landscape paintings, in sharp contrast with the spirit of that time. Steiner reconstructs Matsumoto's career and artistic spirit, contextualising his marginal position in Japanese wartime society due to his physical handicap (deafness). The essay is a useful and detailed study of a subject that is less analysed in art criticism

and Japanese studies than it should be, and also in this case—as well as in the article by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay—*Mutual Images* Journal is happy to display a number of pictures that illustrate Matsumoto’s work, not only from the point of view of its cultural importance in a period of turmoil and pain for Japan, but also from that of a stylistic and aesthetic analysis of his artwork, which draws from several art traditions, including the theme of urban-industrial landscapes that in those same years were a *tòpos* and a political-stylistic trend in European and American painting. In his own way, Matsumoto, the author argues, “waged a quiet battle of his own [...] through his art. Though he died young, it was Matsumoto who emerged victorious in the end”.

Ewa Machotka’s essay virtuously blends academic scholarship on fine arts and propaedeutic explanations on its very subject. It delves into the geopolitics of “ecological art”, developing an analysis on examples of art works from Japan and South Korea. It is a study on how art can be and in many instances is a carrier of ecological meanings in its making and in its final messages. The author explains the concept of *ecoaesthetics* through a comprehensive review of recent art produced under the inspiration of eco-friendly, political-cultural purposes of sensibilisation both of the public and of the system of the arts at large: visual arts, art installations, architecture, landscape art and “nature art”. *Mutual Images* Journal is particularly proud to host this article, which incorporates a wealth of photography on ecological artworks.

Rayna Denison’s article is an original contribution, examining how recent Japanese animation displays notions of Japan in a direction that could be at least partially framed as “nationalistic”, as the author argues using a case study of one of the films by Hosoda Mamoru, the award-winning *Summer Wars* (2009). Hosoda is considered in Japan and by many film critics a new Hayao Miyazaki of sorts, together with other directors of the new generation such as Makoto Shinkai; therefore, an analysis of his work is particularly cogent in that area where film studies and area studies converge. It could be argued, in general, that every Japanese animation director show, directly or indirectly, some degree of presentation of Japanese society and culture; although whether such presentation can be labelled as “nationalism” is subject to debate. Denison’s essay especially focuses on the way Hosoda, in particular, arguably presents and emphasises in *Summer Wars* several aspects of Japanese society under a positive light and in contrast to alternative models of social organisation and national culture. Before tackling the specific case of this beautiful movie (which has probably inspired, directly or indirectly, at least two

Hollywood blockbusters: *Inception* by C. Nolan, 2010 and *Ready Player One* by S. Spielberg, 2018), Denison offers a well-articulated explanation of the meaning of “nationalism in Japanese animation” within the proposed framework.

The topic of “nationalism” in Japanese animation is also discussed in the book review presented in this same issue of *Mutual Images*.

To avoid any conflict of interest, *Mutual Image*' main editor Marco Pellitteri has not published his workshop paper in this issue. (His written contributions to this journal include editorials, book reviews and, in forthcoming issues, research materials. More on these “research materials” in the editorial of the next issue of *Mutual Images*). As a curious anecdote and a final light remark, Pellitteri's was not able to participate physically in the Norwich workshop, as originally planned, but rather virtually via video conference. In fact, his flights were delayed due to severe adverse weather conditions, and his entire trip to England had to be cancelled! In the end, he gave his presentation from a hotel room in Hong Kong, where he had been forced to stopover for three days (due to a level-10 typhoon!) before flying back to his original departure airport in Ōsaka. Just some of the unexpected events that may happen when attempting intercontinental trips to international workshops!

Have a pleasant read of this special section of *Mutual Images*.

Eriko TOMIZAWA-KAY, *Guest Editor*

Marco PELLITTERI, *Main Editor*

