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THE ORIENTAL RECHERCHE VISION

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Thesis

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the Faculty of the Department of Art
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by
John H. Kaneko
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The Oriental Recherche' Vision is a study of the art of two Japanese print-makers, Hiroshige and Hokusai, and their influence on Western art.

Definition and limitation of the problem. This study was called "Oriental recherche' vision," because it was based primarily upon the Oriental way of looking at things with the finest care. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary has given as a synonym for "recherche'" the word "exquisite." It was this refinement of visual interpretation and mental reconstruction of the environment that was the essence of the Oriental art.

The art of the two Japanese painters to be studied consists of the prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige. The Western art to be discussed is limited to the paintings of Whistler, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Toulouse Lautrec.

The purpose and the need for the study. Today, after a long, devastating World War II, "East meets West," is a common phrase resting upon the lips of the Western people. Many of these Westerners are touring Japan to examine at first hand the present Oriental culture, but little do they understand Japanese fine art. To most of these Westerners, "Art of Japan," is anything beautiful, magnified in its price, fad, demand, or seeming exoticness. The present art of Japan is being highly commercialized and being given an imitation Western tinge to appeal to the eye of the Westerners. Ceramic pieces, prints,

paintings, and various other forms of supposedly Japanese art look like crippled nomads, and are being imported and displayed in various shops, homes, museums, and art galleries of the Western world. The researcher feels that the true aesthetic value of Japanese fine art needs to be elucidated, and he believes that the best way to do this is to explain the impact of the infectious fascination which the Japanese print had upon the Western artists of the 19th century. This study also aims at making clear some of the inherent qualities of fine art. Today too many accidental and haphazard forms of art are being artificially glorified without any living roots to support them and to give them a vascular life.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Survey of the literature. Although the art of Hokusai and Hiroshige has been dealt with to some extent in literature, their influence on Western art has been described in only a limited and sporadic fashion.

Quotations from literature. The following quotations are a few of the statements mentioning the influence of the Japanese print on Western art:

This people's art gave Western museums many Japanese prints and provided a style adapted in Europe by Whistler, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec.¹

¹ "A Great, Delicate Art," Life Magazine, 31:66-7, December 31, 1951.

....."Manet, Whistler and Degas, and then Lautrec, Gauguin and Van Gogh, all influenced by the Japanese print, were concerned with surface unity--the organization of representational subject--matter in the flat."¹

"In London, from 1863 to 1870, Whistler etched and painted, independent of all current schools, whether French or British, but influenced in painting, by the vogue for Japanese prints."²

"Every dead wall in the land bears witness to its influence, for it has given us what we used to call 'poster art'. In England, as a patent instance, Aubrey Beardsley and his kith and kin happened because of it. And modern France, the first to discover its charm, has fallen under its spell completely. Paris fashions are more influenced by it every year. The German and Austrian secessionists owe it no small debt of gratitude and its influence is still young. The German mind has recently awakened to its significance and with characteristic thoroughness."³

"The influence of the Japanese print on the Impressionists in the proper sense of the term might be summarized in Meier-Graefe's witticism; 'Japan was the prop of Impressionism.'⁴ These slight occasional borrowings of Japanese motives in the early work of Renoir and Monet, or even the employment of some of the Japanese principles of design, make one only the more aware of the distance which separates the art of the West from that of the East. Even in the art of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, where the interest in decorative pattern is much stronger, the main character remains Western."⁴

"Like the great Japanese, Hokusai, who had influenced Degas and Whistler before him, Toulouse-Lautrec drew assiduously from the age of six."⁵

¹ Thomas Craven, Modern Art (New York: Halcyon House, Garden City, 1950), p. 167.

² Sheldon Cheney, The Story of Modern Art (New York: Viking Press, 1947, p. 151.

³ Frederick Gutheim, Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture (New York: Duel, Slown and Peace, 1941), p. 21.

⁴ Ernst Scheyer, "Far Eastern Art and French Impressionism," The Art Quarterly, 6:116-43, Spring 1943, p. 128.

⁵ George Slocombe, Vincent Van Gogh (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 1950), p. 252.

These quotations indicate that numerous artists, besides the ones to be investigated in this study, were influenced directly or indirectly by the Japanese prints.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

Although the technical process or manual method of making a block print in the Japanese style may seem secondary to this study, a finer knowledge and a better appreciation of the prints comes through the actual manipulation of the tools or instruments necessary to produce a work of art; therefore, the researcher experimented with the problem of making a wood block print to learn the limitation or the freedom of expression of that medium. The finished product (Plate I) should be considered as a study or experiment. In relation to art and craftsmanship, Frank Lloyd Wright says, "No subject which there is good reason to believe a composition by Hiroshige is negligible in art. But art and craftsmanship are inseparable in the print. The bane of any attempt to form an idea of the splendid flight and range of his genius is found when the craftsmanship failed the disreputable remanant of cheap, badly printed editions carelessly struck from worn-out blocks, to be had for a dollar or two in curio shops. These inferior prints have cursed and confused their superiors which are alone representative, and especially so as Hiroshige prints of superior editions are as rare as primitives."¹

¹ Frederick Gutheim, Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture (New York: Duel, Slown and Peace, 1941), p. 79.



(Plate I)
John H. Kaneko
"Neighbor's Home," 1955
A wood block print

In making the block print, blocks of cherrywood were used (Plate II). The cherrywood is a very hard wood with a beautiful fine pinkish grain. The grain has an interesting wave which occasionally permeates an impression through the areas of coloration on the print. This permeation of the grain on paper produces an interesting textured area. The first procedure in making a print was to draw a picture on a transparent paper, which was pasted face downward onto the cherrywood. All the spaces which circumscribed the various lines were carved out by means of chisels (Plate II) and the lines were left in relief. This block was called the "key-block." On the lower left corner a right angular strip of wood (L) was left in relief and on about the middle edge of either the bottom side or left side of the block a small strip (V) was also left in relief; these strips were to serve as guides for each print to be printed. From the "key-block" several impressions were made on transparent papers. Each of these transparent papers was pasted face downward on another cherrywood block. Each section which was to be printed in a particular color was cut in relief on separate blocks. But if the colors did not adjoin one another, the same block was used for two or more colors. After the blocks were cut with the grain of the wood, each of the areas was water colored by brush, and using the guides, the rice paper was keyed and pressed on top of the wood block. Water color with a little addition of rice paste was used as the color. In place of the bamboo shield, "baren," which the Japanese used, a table spoon and a scotch-tape



(Plate II)
Photograph of the
researcher's tools
and his wood blocks

can cover about six inches in diameter, was used to rub over the back side of the paper in order that the color would penetrate the paper. By varying the degree of pressure different effects of coloring were produced. Occasionally, a portion of the paper was pulled back to check the coloring and sometimes additional color was reapplied to get the desired effect. Harmonious colors throughout the print, like those of the Japanese are very difficult to acquire.

The accuracy in which each cut must be made cannot be overemphasized; it requires much patience and careful manipulation of the tools. Since any error in the block one can wholly appreciate the skill and the artistry involved. The most difficult task was the cutting of the Japanese characters of the researcher's name on the lower right hand side of the print (Plate I).

There are three different persons involved, the painter, the engraver, and the printer, ordinarily in the process of making a Japanese print.¹ The painter draws the design, the engraver cuts out the design on the blocks of wood, and the printer completes the process by printing it. It was obvious to the researcher that the designer must have a knowledge of the engraving the printing in order to understand the limitations of the process. Hokusai was known to have an understanding of all

¹ Edward F. Strange, The Colour-Prints of Hiroshige, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, Undated), pp. 2-3.

processes of designing, cutting, and printing.¹

Hokusai (1760-1849) and Hiroshige (1796-1858), who undoubtedly were the most gifted among the "Ukiyo-ye" artists, interpreted as the artists of the floating world, seemed to have fascinated the Westerners more than any other of the Japanese artists. If a study were made on the development of Hokusai and Hiroshige, the roots of their growth would unerringly lead to the Chinese. In reference to Hiroshige's artistic development, Noguchi said, "It seems that he learned the secret from Chinese landscape art how to avoid femininity and confusion; the difference between his art and that of the Chinese artist is that where the one drew a bonseki, or tray-landscape, with sand from memory, the later made a mirage in the sky."² Hokusai who also unquestionably winged his artistic refinement from the Chinese has been discussed by Amsden in the following manner, "He drank at the fountain-head of China, then absorbed the traditions of the 'two great streams of Kano and Tosa, which flowed without mixing to the middle of the eighteenth century.'"³ Although an extensive study may be made on the rudiments of the Ukiyo-ye's art, a short good summary was put forth by Amsden, who said, "Kano yielded to Chinese influence, Tosa combated it, and

¹ Malcolm C. Salaman, Masters of the Colour Print, Hokusai (London: The Studio Ltd., 1930), p. 2.

² Yone Noguchi, The Spirit of Japanese Art (London: John Murray, 1915), p. 40.

³ Dora Amsden, Impressions of Ukiyo-ye (San Francisco and New York: Paul Elder and Company, 1905), p. 48.

strove for a purely national art, Ukiyo-ye bridge the chasm, and became the exponent of both schools, bringing about an expansion in art which could never have been realized by these aristocratic rivals."¹

In comparison to the Westerners, the Ukiyo-ye's art is a flat piece of design with no pretension of depth on the surface. The forms and shapes are arranged in harmonious spatial unity within the limits of the print. The lines are firm and they have the directional movement which flows and integrates the masses into an architectural equilibrium.² The reason for such an emphasis on controlled lines is intrinsically due to their emphasis on fine calligraphy. The expressiveness of the directional pull, the twist, the swing, the pressure applied, and the release of the pressure of the brush, which attempts to captivate the cosmic beauty of the line has made the Japanese very conscious that the line may be a living and everlasting thing. Such a line is necessary in the culmination of the *recherché* vision.

The Japanese artists remake, simplify, reorganize the elements in the environment to acquire a desired orchestrated vision. This reorientation of the outer elements and forces was executed in such a way that the expression of the inner emotion and the creativity of the artist within the basic

¹ Dora Amsden, Impressions of Ukiyo-ye (San Francisco and New York: Paul Elder and Company, 1905), p. 5.

² Yone Noguchi, Hiroshige (New York: Orientalia, 1921), p. 5.

limits of the medium would not be hindered. The Ukiyo-ye artists, freely expressing their inner emotions, used symbols and chose subject matters which were not acceptable to the sophisticated people. These artists soon became ostracized by the people, but they persistently retaliated by drawing what they pleased and by doing it in their own style.

The Ukiyo-ye artists used colors which were flat, opaque, and two-dimensional, usually enclosed by a definite line. Occasionally, there was the subtle overlapping of colors which held the desired surface. Their colors were unique in that they were placed and distributed in regard to the basic design. The colors were chosen and arranged according to a harmonious scheme rather than the reproduction of the colors of nature. This selective use of color which produced a chromatic euphoria cannot be fully appreciated through descriptive words. The combination of colors can be directly appreciated only through the naked eye. Lucidly understanding the art of chromoxylography, the Ukiyo-ye knew that the hand-painted pictures had to be handled differently from the color prints; therefore, their work always showed high respect for their medium.

Besides the focused perspective with the vanishing points behind the picture plane, the Ukiyo-ye used the reverse perspective, which sometimes is called the Ukiyo-ye perspective. This perspective is scientifically as accurate as the focused perspective. The reverse perspective has its converging points in front of the picture plane; the focused perspective has its

vanishing points in back of the picture plane. The Orientals used the reverse perspective to reinforce the aerial perspective which gives objects a vertical position on the ground plane of the picture. This variation of perspective has added variety to their compositional design and it also has given objects a gravitational stability.

Directed simplification and arrangement was the epitome of the Oriental art. For example, objects in the background were neatly placed in relation with the foreground objects and middleground objects to capture an integrated expression. Objects were arranged in a rhythmic movement or pattern throughout the limits of the print. This eutythmy produced a sempiternal symphonic message. The Japanese put objects or parts of objects in the foreground to frame a portion of the picture or to define the picture plane. These objects were sometimes the controlling force which directed or guided the viewer's eye into the picture. This arrangement gave the viewer an impression of looking and moving into and about a controlled area of unity rather than merely looking at an area. Sometimes the subtle interjection of parts of objects near the edges of the picture has a teasing effect if one were to attempt to consciously relate the object or objects in the prints to his environment, because they may not be definitely recognizable as specific objects.

With these general remarks concerning the characteristics of the Ukiyo-ye prints, an individual study of the prints of Hokusai (Plate IV) and Hiroshige (Plate V) will be undertaken.

(Plate III)
The Perspective Analysis
(Let Plate IV project through the
transparent paper for the analysis)



Red indicates reverse perspective
Blue indicates aerial perspective
Green indicates focused perspective



(Plate V)
"Yui-Oyasherasu"
Ichiryusai Hiroshige

In "Ono Waterfall" from the series "Famous Waterfalls throughout Japan," by Katsushika Hokusai (Plate III), there are strong directional vertical lines in the waterfall. This is accomplished by two colors. The verticality of the direction is broken by pulsating dots and the fancifully moving waves. As the water flows past the bridge in the lower part of the picture, there is a beautiful texturing of the water current, which flows in a rumbling symphonic harmony. This rumbling symphonic harmony is dynamically penetrated by the clear, sharp tone of a different instrumentation, which is visually recognized by the hats of the travelers arranged in a horizontal movement. In the center of the print there is a subtle reverse perspective of the roof and the right side of the wall of the building. The left side of the wall of the same building has the regular focused perspective with its vanishing points projecting far beyond the waterfall. Behind this building, there is a fog or mist which gives an impression of mystery. From this mist rises a magnificent object, the cliff, with its variety of shapes, lineation, color, and texturing. The name-plate on the upper right hand corner holds the picture plane in focus. The shape of the name plate repeats the shape of the waterfall in a softer resonance. In this way the upper right hand side is related to the left hand side of the picture. This cliff is drawn in aerial and reverse perspective, and it tends to offset the forces of the other movements, for example, the reverse perspective of the building located in the center of the picture. The reverse perspective being used with the aerial perspective (Plate III), gives the cliff a

vertical position on the ground plane of the print. This study used a mechanical diagramming (Plate III) to facilitate the explanation of the perspective, but the reader should not be lead to believe that the Orientals secured their design in that manner. It is unlikely that a fluent design can be obtained in so mechanical a way. In back of the cliff, the sky with its subtly shaded color gives a moody impression. On the left side of the print, a ragged cliff was drawn to offset the vertical direction of the waterfall. This ragged cliff seems powerful and elegant and it holds its position well in the design. One wonders as to the purpose of the dark area in the upper left and corner of the print. Is it supposed to be a cave, a breakage in the cliff, a symbol or something else? This is the teasing quality mentioned previously, when objects are related to environment. The roof of the building on the lower left hand corner has more detailed cutting than the roof of the building located in the center. With this analysis, objects in the foreground tend to be in more detail than the objects in the background. In summarizing Hokusai's print, simplification and orchestration of forms was the universal language of his *recherche* vision.

The study on Hiroshige's print (Plate V) will dwell mainly on his harmonious use of color. On the upper right side of the print, there is the subtle jagged red which bends in with the opaque yellow in the sky of this print. This reddish color is place functioning in space with the other colors of the print, and it is not blocked in by line. There

is the vertical signature plate of the same reddish color on the lower left side of the print which gives a different directional movement and which directs the frontal picture plane. On the side of the cliff next to the ocean wave at the lower center of the print, the reddish color has been printed subtly over the dark green. The jagged edge of the bottom of the cliff made by the ocean wave is very similar to the jagged edge of the red in the sky. This type of edge or line produces an rhythmic movement in the print. The blending of darker blue in the front and in the back of the ocean plane adds vitality and movement to that plane. The colors of objects farther away from the picture plane, such as, the farthest green mountain of the print (Plate V) are simplified in that there is no outlining or texturing. The second man on the upper left side of the print and the patch of white about the center of the print and the sails of the boats form a cyclical dynamic movement. In summarizing, Hiroshige used subtle opaque colors, and he synthesized these colors into a harmonious statement of enchantment.

Attempts have been made to compare the two artists as to which is the greater, but no justifiable decision has been reached. James A. Michener in his book, The Floating World, says, "Hokusai was also incomparably the better designer, using emphasis, subordination, exaggeration and counterpoise in ways

quite beyond Hiroshige;.....In suggesting atmosphere Hiroshige is so far superior to Hokusai as to be beyond comparison; only in plein-air rendering of suspended atmosphere at great heights can Hokusai even challenge him."¹ Edward F. Strange, a well known writer on Japanese prints, states, "Yet within the stringent limits thus created, and by the use of the simple almost elementary conventions, Hiroshige was able to express distance, atmosphere-- indeed, the whole gamut of Nature's music--in such a way that has never been surpassed by any other practitioner of any of the graphic arts."² Westerners seem to have taken more from the prints of Hiroshige than from those of Hokusai. Edward F. Strange says, "No Japanese artist has exercised so direct an influence on the modern art of Europe and American as Hiroshige. Hokusai evokes the warm admiration of our painters; but none has tried to tread in his footsteps."³

The crossing of Oriental *recherché* vision into Western art occurred when Braquemond⁴ discovered a small volume of Hokusai's prints in a curio shop in Paris. This volume of Hokusai's prints was used as the packing material for porcelain ware. He was so intrigued by the prints that he traded his highly treasured book of Papillon on wood-engravers for it. He carried the volume of prints for the rest of his life showing it to his

¹ James A. Michener, The Floating World (New York: Random House, Inc., 1954), p. 221.

² Edward F. Strange, Colour-Prints of Hiroshige (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, Publishers, Undated), p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴ Ernst Scheyer, "Far Eastern Art and French Impressionism," The Art Quarterly, 6:116-43, Spring 1943.

friends and other artists.¹ Neglecting to accept the statements of Braquemond's discovery of Hokusai's print, critics may debate that the Japanese could have been influenced by Westerner art rather than vice versa. This is quite impossible, because Japan had its doors closed to the Western world during Hokusai's time (1760-1849) and most of Hiroshige's time (1796-1858) and for many years before their time. Hiroshige died four years after Japan had opened its doors in 1854.² When Francis L. Hawks wrote on the expedition to open Japan's doors to the Western world, he was probably the first Westerner to see and write on Japan's art. He said, "Whatever the Japanese may lack as regards art, in a perception of its true principles, the style, grace, and even a certain mannered dexterity which their drawings exhibit, show that they are possessed of an unexpected readiness and precision of touch,....."³ Probably if Hawks or any of the other crew members had more knowledge of art, the Japanese influence on the Westerners would have begun earlier. Strange further substantiated the Japanese influence by stating, "There is no definite trace of European influence in Hiroshige's work. His cloud-form is derived from Nature and is free, on the one hand, from the old conventions, used by some of his fellows to

¹ Hesketh Pearson, The Man Whistler, (New York: Harper and Brother Publishers, 1952), pp. 38-39.

² Francis L. Hawks, Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to China Seas and Japan, (Washington: Beverley Tucker, Senate Printer, 1856), p. 393.

³ Ibid., p. 393.

eke out their design; and, on the other, from the curly cumuli of Hokkei and other pupils of Hokusai."¹

The overall qualities of the art of the Westerners, which this study was able to recognize, were the plastic orchestration of the dynamic elements, such as, colors, rhythms, forces, volumes, lines, planes, shapes, and space. Each of these artists differed from each other in the mood of expression, in the technique of applying paint to canvas, and in the varied degree of emphasizing the dynamic elements of plastic integration. In dealing with the direct or indirect influences of the Japanese prints on Western art, it is necessary to speak in terms of probabilities rather than absolutes. The artists selected for discussion, Whistler, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Toulouse Lautrec, like others of their period (e.g. Manet, Cezanne, Renoir, Seurat, Cassatt, Degas, and Matisse)² struggled for the cosmic beauty of their art through abstraction, distortion, readjustment, or simplification of the elements in their environment or in the creation of new non-representative forms. They found these principles or concepts lying latent in the Japanese print. These Westerners, who painted primarily with oils, were able to phenomenally advance and germinate the embryonic stage of the Oriental *recherche* vision into the stupendous art of the cosmo. Such an immaculate interpretation of the chaotic world will always be an eternal universal

¹ Edward F. Strange, The Colour-Prints of Hiroshige, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, Undated), p. 40.

² Stella B. Winnia, Brocade Pictures of Japan (Nagoya, Japan: Koeki Printing Company, 1949), p. 9.

language. Although the Westerners had learned much from the Japanese, credit must not wholly be given to the Orientals, because these Westerners had also learned from each other, the primitives, and the other Westerners before their time.

Whistler was one of the forerunners of the Westerners who became fascinated by the Oriental *recherche* vision.¹ In the painting, "Portrait of the Author's Mother," (Plate VI) by James M. Whistler, there is a conscious arranging of the draperies in relationship to the wall space and to the other objects in the painting. The placement of the pictures or any other objects on the back wall cannot be moved or removed without losing the plastic synthesis within the picture limits. This plastic synthesis undoubtedly was achieved by his diligent study of the harmonious arrangement found in the Japanese prints. The very shallow relief handling of forms, such as, the draperies, the woman's head, and her dress, is found in this painting, but most of the other objects are painted flat like the flat forms of the Japanese.² The flat colors of this painting are subdued to achieve the harmonious tone as it was achieved by the Orientals. However, it cannot be said that Whistler got everything from the Japanese prints, because Whistler did attempt to use shadow in his paintings, whereas the Japanese used practically no shadows in their prints. In his "Portrait of the Author's Mother" (Plate VI), shadowing is used beneath the draperies and the lower

¹ Arthur J. Eddy, Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler (Philadelphia & London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1904), p. 55.

² James Laver, Whistler (London: Faber and Faber, Undated), p. 97.



(Plate VI)
"Portrait of the author's mother"
By James M. Whistler

part of the back wall. The lines on the floor are interesting because they tend to give a linear movement from the front of the picture plane to the back vertical wall plane. There is a dynamic horizontal parallelism of the bottom edge of the frame of the painting located about the upper center of the picture as to the bottom edge of the painting shown on the extreme upper right corner of the painting. There is also a linear parallelism of the lower edge of the draperies and the edge of shadow of the wall. This parallelism of lines, edges, planes, and forms to the picture frame edge contributed to the polished expression of a design of simplicity similar to the doctrine of simplicity preached by the Japanese. In his other paintings, Whistler emphasized the decorativeness, the high horizon, and the localization of the front picture plane as executed by the Orientals.¹ Emphasizing the localization of the front picture plane, he used such objects as, butterfly, spray of foliage, and even the oblong signature panel of the Japanese to establish the front picture plane of his painting. This fixation of the front picture plane was for the purpose of acquiring a plastic rhythmic movement front to back or back to front and around and about the picture plane. Having investigated many of Whistler's works, this study concludes that arrangement of forms by the Japanese was the uppermost quality which seemed to have impressed him.

¹ E.R. and J. Pennell, The Life of James Mc Neill Whistler (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1919), p. 112.

Another of the Westerners who was influenced by the Japanese was Gauguin (1848-1908) who painted in flat forms with penetrating phosphorescent colors. Gauguin's primitive decorative flatness is very similar to the flat decorative forms of the Japanese print, but Gauguin's rich vivid colors are far superior to those opaque colors of the Japanese. His painting, "The Seine at Paris," (Plate VII) was an interesting discovery, because it differs so much from the use of his vivid colors. Although the painting of the sky seems to be too spacious an area in relation to rest of the elements, the painting has that subtle oriental arrangement in certain areas, such as pattern of the boats which is reminiscent of the oriental arrangement. Because this painting is lacking in the use of rich pure colors, it could have been one of his earlier ones. In his painting, "Good morning, Mr. Gauguin," (Plate VIII) the vertical angular flat shapes of the trees and the fence produce a rhythmic pattern in the painting. The shapes of the man and woman are simplified, flat, and distorted, and he does not use any shading of the forms. The coloring in the sky seems to generate a thunderous movement and the far distant field has that rich vibrant color. In areas such as the trunk of the trees, there is a subtle mixture of sectionalized color, but the unity of that plane is not destroyed. Gauguin's concept of using flat forms, distortion, simplification, linear movement, and plastic arrangement of forms in his painting probably came from his studying the Oriental prints, but Gauguin's superior plastic colors were his own creation.



(Plate VII)
"The Seine at Paris"
By Paul Gauguin



(Plate VIII)
"Good morning. Mr. Gauguin"
By Paul Gauguin

"He had already come upon the modern Japanese wood block prints in 1885 in Antwerps where he had mounted them on his walls. This art enchanted and haunted him all through his stay in Paris; he was perhaps the only painter of that time to copy the Japanese prints, transposing the thin substance of works by Hiroshige and Hokusai on to canvas in the denser medium of oil."¹

This man was Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) whose work is now priceless. His painting, "Bridge under Rain," (Plate IX) is a sample of his copied work. From copying such prints of the Orientals he undoubtedly had learned to control the eye movement within the picture frame. Moving from the front plane of this painting to the back, there is the bridge, which temporarily brings the eye to a rest. This rest is sometimes called the focal point. Moving from the focal point to the horizon line, a man and a boat alters the directional movement. The boat has a definite parallelism to the edge of the picture frame. Moving from this altered directional movement, the movement fades in the distant background of trees, but the movement seems to revitalize and to ricochet towards the front plane through the sky plane. Besides the controlled eye movement he probably learned about the use of a high horizon line and recessive plane, which he employed in his own creative work. The Japanese characters on the border of the picture are imperfect, but it shows the hard effort exerted by Van Gogh in attempting to master the exact likeness. Van Gogh also tried to depict the Oriental rainy atmosphere, which was so enchantingly mastered by Hiroshige. The copying of the Japanese print

¹ Meyer Schapiro, Vincent Van Gogh (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 1950), p. 15.

did not limit Van Gogh's work, instead, through his incessant energy to create, he advanced his work far beyond the Orientals. Although Van Gogh studied the Oriental color scheme,¹ he eventually progressed to a higher level of color sensitivity. His painting (Plate X) showed that he was a lover of sun light. In this painting, "Still Life with Onions," Van Gogh painted objects flat like the Japanese, but he used such brilliant colors that the objects tend to give a thermonous effect. He developed a new form by the creation of comma-like strokes, which may be seen in his painting, and forms fused into an organic order of plastic vitality (Plate X). His crude way of living is projected in his forms and is exaggerated, but his forms have a remarkable firmness. His free creative expression shows a release or catharsis which probably was the greatest impetus to the grandeur of his painting.

A Western artist who put tremendous emphasis on linear drawing was Toulouse Lautrec. He seemed to have economized his strokes to the optimum efficiency in his visual expression which is also very typical of the Orientals, and his linear drawing has a dynamic symphonic rhythm. In his drawing (Plate XI) it is possible to find silhouetting as for example, the rider and the horse in the background of the drawing. This drawing is an excellent example of his ability to handle line plastically. The lady and the dog is so well placed that if anything in the picture were moved, it would destroy the picture's vitality.

¹ W. Uhdle, Vincent Van Gogh in Full Colour (London: Phaidon Press Ltd. 1951), Unpaged.



(Plate X)
"Still Life With Onions"
By Vincent Van Gogh



(Plate XI)
"In the Bois de Boulogne"
By Toulouse Lautrec

Toulouse Lautrec's painting of "Cha-U-Kao Seated," (Plate XII) shows that he was not interested in chiaroscuro. His colors tend to be flat like the Oriental's color. His drawing of forms and the placement of forms is immaculate, and he stresses the simplicity of forms. There seems to be a twirling movement throughout the picture, such as, the foreground curve, the outstretched legs of Cha-U-Kao, the orange blouse of Cha-U-Kao, the tip of her hair which is bowtied, and the linear circular drawings on the upper left corner of the picture. Toulouse Lautrec exaggerated his forms ostentatiously and ridiculed the expression of human beings. His drawing of "Cha-U-Kao" is a typical example of his exaggeration. The outstanding feature which Toulouse Lautrec got from the Oriental was the dynamic puissance of the line.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The researcher had made a block print in the Japanese style. This process enabled him to get a better understanding of the limitations of the medium. In the process, the researcher found that detail-cutting was very difficult to do. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the Oriental kept his designs simple.

The characteristics of the prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige were studied with a view to isolate the particular qualities which seemed to have exerted an influence on Western art.



(Plate XII)
"Cha-U-Kao Seated"
By Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec

Then the work of four Western artists was selected--Whistler, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Toulouse Lautrec--and examined for similar characteristics. From the study it was found that Whistler had learned many things from the Japanese prints, and outstanding among them was his conscious arrangement of objects in harmonious pattern. Gauguin, it was found had learned to use his color in decorative flat areas like those of the Japanese, but he went beyond them with his use of rich and vivid colors. A work by Van Gogh was discovered which was a copy of one of Hiroshige's prints. However, it was difficult to conclude exactly what specific features of the prints had influenced him the most; undoubtedly, simplicity, exaggeration, and condensation of forms were some those features. The Oriental characteristic of art dominantly found in Toulouse Lautrec's work was his dynamic use of the line.

Although the study has brought out that these Western artists were undoubtedly influenced in various different ways by the Japanese prints, the degree and directness of influence could not absolutely be determined. For example, it might have been that Gauguin learned from Van Gogh some of the elements of design which seemed peculiarly Oriental in his work. Other Western artists besides the four under consideration fell under the spell of Oriental art (e.g. Manet, Cezanne, Renoir, Seurat, Cassatt, Degas, and Matisse), and their works showed this influence to a greater or lesser degree. When Perry opened the doors of the East, Japanese artists wished to visit the strange new Western world perhaps to learn of new art forms. Before Hiroshige died, he expressed a longingly:

"In the East I leave my brush
and I go on a journey
To see the famous sights
In the holy land of the West."¹

He never physically made that trip, but his soul embodied in his art made that trip opening the eyes of the West to the Oriental recherche vision.

¹ Jiro Harada, Masters of the Colour Print, VI Hiroshige (London, W.C. "The Studio" Ltd., 1929), p. 1.

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