Modernity and Modernism in Japan: Japanese Art and Expressions/Representations of Modern Identity

**Working Outline for Art History Unit for “Modern Art History: Art Since 1945”**

Note: If the course (with a Western focus) is taught in the traditional chronological way, the unit could be infused throughout the chronology of the curriculum during the term, or it could be condensed into a focused unit.

**Specific Themes of Unit**
- Modern, modern art, modernity, and modernism
- Modern and Contemporary Japanese art
- Japanese artists' eccentricity and the Western notion of individuality
- Japanese identity

**Four lecture components**

- First Lecture: “Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park: a travelogue and introduction” – introduces notions of memory, memorial, and monument; begins with an overview of monument and memorials with a focus on Hiroshima; from an art historical perspective, “tours” the different areas of the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park as a response to World War II and the atomic bomb.
  
  Student reading:

- Second Lecture: “The Gutai Group: a focus on materials and process” – an overview of the Gutai movement in the 1950s and 1960s; introduce the notion of eccentricity in the history of Japanese art and consider intersections or divergences from the notion of uniqueness/originality in Modern Western art.
  
  Students read selections from

- Third Lecture: “Contemporary Japanese Art as it relates to the Historical” – looks at historical ceramics, architecture, sculpture, and tea ceremony to address visual elements like symmetry/asymmetry and Buddhism and Shintoism; then explores the work of contemporary artist Masami Teraoka and ties to the historical. This lecture could be revised and reworked with other artists and other themes.

  Artists and artist groups to explore in lecture or by students (individually or through group projects)
  - 1950s and 1960s: Gutai Group
  - 1960s: Yomiura Indépendant Groups, Obsessional Art (ex: Yayoi Kusama), Tokyo Fluxus (ex: Yoko Ono, Shigeko Kubota)
• 1970s: Conceptual Art (ex: On Kawara), Mono-ha (School of Things) movement
• 1980s: post-Mono-ha (School of Things) movement
• Contemporary Japanese Painting across the decades
• 1990s: Postmodernism (ex: Yasumasa Morimura - includes himself in his art and responds to his encounters with the West, Takashi Murakami, Masami Teraoka, Mariko Mori)
• Japanese Art after 1945 (Munroe) has an excellent glossary of movements (and related topics) in Japanese art since 1945, pp. 393-398. The bibliography is also useful.

Fourth Lecture: “Manga and Popular Culture” – an overview of Manga and popular culture in Japan; could consider influences on American culture (and understandings and misunderstandings of Japan); begin lecture with Peter Nosco’s photo of a photographer taking a picture of a cosplay youth.

Possible readings for students (tying popular culture and art):

Unit activities

Lectures and readings introduce themes with concrete examples of art work, artist technique, and artist philosophies to students who are studying Art Since 1945 (traditionally with a Western focus).

Class discussion and written responses

Students will be asked to consider the themes in the readings, and address one or more in a brief response paper – focusing on a specific work of art addressed and the intersections with the themes. Students should address visual elements, process/technique, and conceptual aspects of the works in their responses. These papers can be shared and used to initiate class discussion.

Themes to consider
• Modern, modern art, modernity, and modernism
• Modern and Contemporary Japanese art
• Japanese artists’ eccentricity and the Western notion of individuality
• Japanese identity

Research and presentation and/or papers

Once students have grounding in the art and understand nuances of the themes, they can be assigned or chose Japanese artists to
• Students could use this lecture and discussion as a point of reference for exploring some of the key themes of this unit.

Readings for Students (See bibliography for annotations and other sources.)

From the issue themed “Sculpture in Postwar Europe and America, 1945-59", this is a thought-provoking article that addresses the nuances of post-war Japan-U.S. relations through the rejection of a Hiroshima memorial designed by Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi. This would be a good article to use to inspire debate in class.


Outcomes related to course -- Modern Art History: Art Since 1945

- view works of art "dynamically," that is, to appreciate simultaneously the uniqueness of a work, its origins and precedent, its potential as an inspiration and influence on later art, and its relationship to a particular cultural moment
- generalize course content to other art not covered in the course so that he/she can understand and value art and architecture in all-encompassing ways, in this country and abroad

Competencies and skills covered (related to course -- Modern Art History: Art Since 1945)

- work creatively with art historical data, using it to develop principles of art history
- recognize and appraise patterns in historical phenomena
- assess the ways in which an art object is affected by our own vantage point
- recognize and discriminate among various styles of art
- trace the development of art from one period to another
- analyze formally works of art and appreciate the interrelationship of its elements
- determine symbolism in art
- express the relationship of art to society and culture to style
- analyze the “meaning” of art objects through understanding of historical, social, and political context
- use specific terminology to describe works of art

Assessment possibilities (related to course -- Modern Art History: Art Since 1945)

- comprehend, apply, analyze and evaluate reading assignments
- identify artwork and architecture, and relate facts and ideas about these works of art in exam format
- research, plan, compose, edit and revise short papers
Modernity and Modernism in Japan: Japanese Art and Expressions/Representations of Modern Identity

Working Annotated Bibliography for Art History Unit for “Modern Art History: Art Since 1945”

On Art and Design in Japan:


Koyama-Richard, Brigitte. One Thousand Years of Manga. Paris: Flammarion, 2007. Print. This is a history of manga; also looks at its connection to anime.


Print. Volume 1, Introduction discusses concepts: communal, individual, dissent, and artists’ eccentricity. Instructor can use this as background to introduce these themes.


**Artist Monographs**


**On Japanese Identity and Modernity:**


